

FROM MDGS TO SDGS

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which had been established following the UN Millennium Declaration in 2000, reached their due date in December 2015. With the MDGs, eight goals and 21 targets were set for reducing poverty in the developing countries, and various efforts were made on development cooperation with concrete numerical targets. It achieved some positive results; the number of people in extreme poverty decreased by half, from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015. On the other hand, it was pointed out that some people, such as those living in conflict zones and women, were left behind from the benefit of development.

In such context, a new initiative called the “Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” was launched with its implementation period of 15 years up to 2030. While taking over MDGs’ underachievement, the SDGs added the new goals that affects the whole world, including the developed countries, and those intending to deepen the cooperative relationship between the developed and developing countries.

“The ‘development’ is an issue which concerns not only the developing countries, but also the whole world, including the developed countries,” points out Hideyuki Mori, Director of the Institute

for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES). “Since these international goals apply to all the countries universally, it is important that the developed countries such as the G7 members also take actions for attaining the goals in an aggressive manner.” As G7 leaders state in the G7 Ise-Shima Leaders’ Declaration that they “commit to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, domestically and internationally, in a people-centered and planet-sensitive manner”, the Japanese government launched the SDGs Promotion Headquarters in May 2016.

From the environmental point of view, the SDGs are in fact a continuation of the Agenda 21, the plan of action adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Agenda 21 emphasized the need to shift our economic activities to something that allows to conserve environmental resources necessary for the social development and to ensure economic growth at the same time. Poverty reduction was considered a part of the efforts. When considering this history, it is not hard to understand that the SDGs cover wider fields than the MDGs.

Another reason why the SDGs objectives diversified is that the MDGs attained a certain degree of success. Led by the UN Headquarters, the MDGs focused on a small number of important issues

which were crucial to the developing countries. The issues such as poverty draw global attention, which brought about some unexpected outcomes such as establishment of funds for achieving the set goals. This prompted actions of those international organizations which had not been participating in the MDGs.

In March 2016, 230 indicators to assess success towards the 17 goals and 169 targets under the new sustainable development agenda were adopted. Setting numerical goals and deadlines while forming partnerships with diverse stakeholders such as national governments, private sectors and individuals has become a familiar scheme in the world through the MDGs’ efforts. The SDGs take it over.

NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

“It’s important that each and every citizen takes a look at the contents of the SDGs and think for whom these goals and targets are made and how they relate to him/herself,” Mori emphasizes. Especially with certain issues such as the environment, it is difficult to establish numerical goals that are common to all, because situations differ between urban and rural areas. In such cases, it is particularly important that individuals, companies or municipalities, set their own goals which are suitable to them.

There are two ways to establish objectives, according to Mori. One is to set them according to the situation within organizations, and the changes will be progressive. The other is directly take in the goals the society sets. The objective-setting from within is a realistic approach; its example would be to improve the energy efficiency of households and companies, by changing the actual situation little by little. On the other hand, poverty elimination is considered typical example of “from outside” objective setting. For either way, what matters is to achieve the goals surely, and it is indispensable to regularly monitor the progress.

The SDGs spirit is to extend a helping hand to everybody in poverty, conflict and all the other harsh conditions and to eliminate all sorts of discrimination. In order to realize this, we must be aware that the SDGs matter to each and every one of us. Each of us take actions on the goals which are relevant to us, get connected with each other, and share the experience with the world. In this way, a new future would unfold no matter how gradually it may be. In July 2016, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the first review meeting after the adoption of SDGs, is held in New York. Its theme is “Ensuring that no one is left behind.” The world is paying attention as to how the participating countries and stakeholders are going to tackle these important agendas.

SDGs

Towards Our Future

