



Statement
by
Honourable Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi , Prime Minister of Samoa
at side-event on
“Green Growth and Least Developed Countries”
organized by
The U.N. Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability
10 May 2011, Istanbul, Turkey.

Mr Moderator,
Distinguished members of the Panel on Global Sustainability,
Fellow Speakers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have been invited to share my views on what green growth means for Samoa, and to do so in an honest and candid manner.

Green growth and green economy are used interchangeably. As an emerging global concept, it is one of the most talked about, yet least understood. Not surprisingly, it lacks an agreed definition of what it entails and what its limits are. In recent years, it has been promoted quite aggressively by some as the panacea for poverty eradication and sustainable development for developing countries.

Green economy I believe, encompasses both opportunities and challenges. The real test is to achieve a delicate balance amongst the environmental, economic and social dimensions to ensure the attainment of one aspect, will not be detrimental to the others. For instance, achieving sustainable development should not result in environmental degradation or forced unemployment, and vice versa.

Green economy is premised on the need to usher in transformational development for countries less able to do so under present economic paradigms. It assumes a level-playing field where none really exists. Because in the real world, developed and emerging economies with the requisite resources, i.e. power, finance, human, technology and natural assets, are often best placed to benefit disproportionately from any new strategy, no matter the brand name or the motive for the initiative.

In the push for green growth, we must ensure that owners of natural capital, mainly from the South, are neither short-changed nor find themselves dispossessed of their resources and assets in their desperation to achieve some leverage on the economic front.

Against this backdrop, let me contextualize my comments on green growth from Samoa's perspective.

Samoa is a small island developing state. It is ocean-locked, has an agriculture-based economy and has no known mineral resources. It is relatively isolated from the rest of the world, and its small size discourages economies of scale. Climate change with its many impacts continues to undermine some of its development gains. Significantly, Samoa will graduate from the LDC group early 2014.

Working within these constraints, my government's responsibility is to ensure that our economy grows to provide employment opportunities and an "improved quality of life" for our growing population. Now whether this goal is achieved through a green growth pathway or something else, is not really an issue. To insist otherwise ignores the reality of our island's inherent vulnerabilities and unique features. Our approach to development should closely mirror our challenges, strengths and opportunities as well as the aspirations of our people. If our goals will be achieved through a combination of green, blue and brown economies co-existing side by side in a workable arrangement, so be it. Our focus should be on the outcomes of our policies, and whether they improve the lives of our people, rather than on the name of a strategy.

Turning now to some of our challenges.

Our isolation.

We view our isolation as a geographical feature that can be changed, metaphorically speaking. Our focus therefore is to substantially reduce our isolation in order to enhance our resilience to the challenges we face.

For example,

Our maritime and aviation infrastructure directly underpins our major development sectors, i.e. tourism, fisheries, agriculture etc.

Tourism has been our largest foreign exchange earner, albeit highly vulnerable to climate change. The development of a Sustainable Tourism Adaptation Programme is a response to this vulnerability. Proposals flagged in the climate talks for imposing a tax on air and maritime transport to reduce emissions is of concern to Samoa given the potential impacts such a decision, if taken, will have on our tourism industry which depends heavily on

transport. Encouraging eco-tourism and family-based and operated beach cottages in addition to the conventional hotels allows for tourism resources to be shared more widely amongst our people and gives a range of options for the tourists and our own local populations to choose from.

Digital divide.

The digital divide is increasing, not lessening. The start-up costs of accessing and connecting to the ICT can be prohibitive. If we accept the status quo, and do nothing, we effectively rob our country of the opportunity to derive substantive benefits from ICT. We can reduce our isolation from our region and the rest of the world by investing in efficient connectivity. This will unlock the development potential that can be realized through connectivity so that we can have ready and affordable access to quality education, markets, health care, advisory services to name a few.

My government believes that the long term benefits of efficient connectivity outweighs the high investment costs - hence why we had embarked with some of our development partners and private sector interests to implement solutions so that our isolation is only a physical reality and no longer a major impediment.

Energy

Transport and electricity accounted for 70% and 20% respectively of our petroleum consumption. We have been involved recently in efforts to reduce our dependence on fossil fuel. A Power Sector Expansion project is being implemented to provide reliable and sustainability electricity services at cost effective prices and to promote environmentally sustainable and renewable power projects and community involvement. Main diesel generators will be replaced to make them more efficient including the supply and installation of pre-payment meters for all consumers by 2012. We have an abundant supply of solar energy and government is leaning more towards biomass gasification because it would provide a boost to the agricultural sector and provides jobs.

In response to the global call for emission reductions, Samoa is on record to be carbon neutral by 2020. The Carbon War Room is offering its expertise and networks to help map out a pathway to achieve this goal.

Climate Change.

As much as climate change is the product of man's actions, technologies, and lifestyles, one hopes that these same challenges will bring forth innovative solutions to help mitigate against climate change impacts.

Being small, isolated and an LDC don't have to be disadvantages. We are undertaking scientific researches in to low carbon plans so that we can implement where feasible climate friendly technologies and prove that they are viable. Even if on a small scale, if we can demonstrate that they can succeed, it breeds confidence about their deployment, their replication on a larger scale, and we can show that harnessing nature, through renewable energy technology, is both possible and economically sound.

We need practical examples to demonstrate that green development builds resilience of communities and takes into account future adaptation needs achieved through working closely with our development partners. We are aiming for a carbon neutral economy by 2020 promoted through an extensive tree planting campaign.

While adaptation will continue to be our priority, mitigation initiatives like renewable energy can transform our diesel-reliant economies.

Cooperation on achieving resilient and carbon neutral development can change our economies in a way that will not just strengthen the moral argument about climate change, but also the economy and technological one.

Technology transfer for mitigation and adaptation should be on an equal footing and should benefit all countries, not a monopoly for only those with big private sectors. Importantly, technology should be appropriate to the local situation and circumstances, be affordable and tested for reliability and durability. Gifted technology under whatever arrangements should not use recipient countries to test or to trial out unproven technology.

As negligible GHG emitters, some island countries feel that only major emitters should implement mitigation projects. Rather than viewing this purely as a North/South issue with its inherent implications, the focus should instead be on the economic benefits to the people through reduced electricity and transport costs and a resultant cleaner environment.

Realistically, the high start-up costs of technology transfer coupled with the difficulty of attracting any sizeable direct foreign investments no matter how many financial reforms we undertake or attractive packages of incentives offered, only strengthens the argument for "public finance" or "grant monies" to be the primary source of climate funding for the foreseeable future. It also

makes the case for Samoa to work out hybrid arrangements as funding options should additional ODAs not be forthcoming.

Oceans and the Blue economy.

Samoa, like its island neighbors, is surrounded by the oceans and is dependent on its resources for its livelihood, food security and economies. Yet the marine ecosystems are under serious threats from human actions and unregulated over-fishing and from the impacts of climate change. Combined, they threaten the sustainability of our islands' Blue Economy. Hence why we must work strategically with our partners and like-minded countries to ensure that the Blue economy gets the priority and prominence it deserves in the RIO+20 agenda next year to guarantee that it remains a viable economic option for us. Equally important, Pacific countries should be entitled to an equitable share of the marine and ocean resources, a goal that remains elusive up to now.

To underscore the importance of the RIO+20 process and the Pacific's push for a permanent place for the Blue economy in the sustainable development architecture, Samoa will be hosting with ESCAP and some of our regional organisations in July the sub-regional preparatory meeting for the Pacific where green growth options and other low-carbon initiatives will be assessed in terms of their suitability as growth models for the Pacific.

Agriculture and food security.

Food security is critical hence why government has decided to reinvest in agriculture and to focus on small farms. Organic farming is gaining acceptance and popularity because of its exportable potentials for overseas markets and our growing tourism industry. However we still need to contend with the issue of increased productive capacities and supply constraints which can only be supported by available technologies.

Thus all told, our government is keenly aware of its responsibility to provide for the needs of our people within the confines of our meager resources and in doing so we are mindful of our obligation to future generations to ensure that we leave the environment healthier than the one we inherited.

Thank you.