

Remarks by GEF CEO Naoko Ishii at #AGGF2018 High Level Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy Policy Dialogue

Good morning everyone.

I would like to begin with congratulating the Government of Rwanda, and Minister Vincent Biruta, for organizing AGGF at this very critical juncture. I am particularly pleased to be a part of the launch of NDC partnership plan for Rwanda, which sends another strong signal of the commitment by Rwanda.

Rwanda is very well recognized for its leadership in bringing green growth concept to the center of development strategy at a very early stage. The GGCRS (Green growth and climate resilient strategy) was formulated in 2011, much before Paris Agreement and SDGs. The strategy has set environmental sustainability and natural capital at its core and emphasized the needs for systems transformation. Rwanda is much ahead of the game in the global community in this movement.

But what amazing with Rwanda is that the country is not stopping there. The ambition behind this conference (AGGF) is, if I understand correctly, based on the recognition that the world has been rapidly changing since 2011 when the strategy was born and Paris agreement in 2015. The country leadership is very keen in stocktaking the implementation of green growth strategy, identifying gaps and where they can push more, and to learn a new concept such as circular economy.

The time is ripe. Over summer time scientists are alerting us that we are getting into a hothouse earth situation which is characterized with higher temperature and sea level rise.

IPCC 1.5 Degree report states it requires unprecedented systems change in all aspect of our society and that we only have a decade or so to make this transition.

Newly disclosed Biodiversity index shows that we are losing biodiversity by 60% since 1970, mostly due to human activities such as agriculture, human settlements and infrastructure development.

All those messages emphasized that the fundamental problem we are facing rises from human's relationship with the earth systems. We human have become a dominant force on the earth and put a lot of pressure on the earth systems, almost to their breaking points. Now is the time for human to change our behavior if we are to pursue sustainable development.

Indeed, the world is on a threshold of a new economic era—an era that is full of opportunities with unprecedented technological change, with massive investments in sustainable infrastructure, and with potential of vastly increased resource productivity with an emphasis on preserving natural capital. This is the growth story of the 21st Century.

The 21st Century growth story recognizes that economic growth and development, and actions to safeguard the global commons—including actions to fight climate change—are not in contradiction to each other, rather they are highly interrelated and complementary.

The good news is that the economic opportunities that comes from this new growth agenda are even greater today than just a few years ago. Technological progress and falling costs have made investment in renewable energy more cost competitive than traditional fossil fuel-based technologies.

The co-benefits of investing in sustainable infrastructure are also becoming increasingly clear: Sustainable cities are not only low-carbon and resilient, but are cities where citizens can move, breathe and be much more productive; low-carbon and resilient power and water systems and housing can better withstand extreme weather events that are becoming increasingly frequent; and well-managed ecosystems are more productive, robust, and resilient. It is becoming increasingly evident that such a growth path can avoid the huge costs of having to take corrective measures later on.

The economic winners of the 21st Century will be those who take the most advantage of these rapidly emerging opportunities. And Rwanda is definitely one of them.

Today we are here at a launch of NDC partnership. This is another opportunity to enhance implementation of Rwanda's green growth strategy.

Many international institutions and global actors want to support Rwanda's ambition as Rwanda shows the way to make this transition.

We in the GEF too are fully committed to support the Rwandan Government in its endeavor.

My conversation with Minister Vincent Biruta and Ministers of finance and infrastructure already identified two areas as priority for the GEF's engagement in Rwanda.

The first area is sustainable cities.

Low carbon sustainable urban system has been identified as one of top priorities in GGCRS. Since then many sectoral initiatives are ongoing but they recognize it is time to integrate those sectoral initiatives into one comprehensive plan and to roll out to secondary cities.

Four years ago, the GEF in collaboration with C40, ICLEI and WRI, launched the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities to facilitate knowledge sharing among cities. I would be excited to see Rwanda be part of this global movement to support cities in transforming urban systems.

The second area is the circular economy.

We must fundamentally transform our economic system from take-make-waste to circular.

I see more and more countries and business shows interest in this topic. And Rwanda is again leading the way. Rwanda has been leading the set-up of the African Circular Economy Alliance, and signing ceremony will take place sometime soon.

These two areas are powerful entry points to further advance the implementation of low carbon and resilient growth for Rwanda.

Going forward, I would like to emphasize that we need to mobilize a broad coalition of stakeholders to be successful. The very presence of the private sector here in this forum confirms the view that we all need to move together. Private sector players are consistently seeing a strong business case for low carbon development. Concerted action supported by the public sector is needed to shift the market.

And in my view, Rwanda has a high chance to transform the entire economic systems.

It is my hope that partnership among all actors gathering here can bring this joint dream to reality.

Thank you.