

**ORAL STATEMENT TO BE MADE AT THE 79TH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION
ESCAP, Bangkok
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Shorter version

I am Dr Theresa Devasahayam, speaking on behalf of Soroptimist International. Thank you for this opportunity to make this statement.

Development, encompassing modernization, urbanization and technological changes, which has led to increases in natural resource consumption; involves a delicate balance when raising standards of living. Since this is the only planet we have: we are against a ticking clock to ensure a future in which our children and grandchildren can thrive.

Advocating sustainable development while enabling and empowering local communities and respecting the rights of individuals is a must. Thus, social inclusion becomes central to the global sustainable development agenda.

Soroptimist International works at the ground level in 122 countries through hundreds of projects worldwide. Some have focused on empowering local communities through efforts to preserve the environment.

We have projects focusing on empowering women and educating young girls about the hazards of plastic pollution. While starting off as a plastic recycling project, a microfinance enterprise in Southern India resulted when underprivileged poor women were given subsidies to purchase plastic shredders to turn plastic bags into plastic chips, which were then converted into materials to construct roads. Soon this project reached schools and female students became involved in collecting plastic bags.

Social inclusion must be a priority in all our efforts in climate action. Only then can we speak about a development agenda that is truly collaborative and rights-based; and empowers every person, local community and country to participate in a sustainable world.

Thank you so much.

(247 words)

Longer version

I am Dr Theresa Devasahayam, speaking on behalf of Soroptimist International. Thank you for this opportunity to make this statement.

Development continues to sweep across the Asia Pacific region hand in hand with modernization, urbanization and technological changes. With development comes increasing consumption of natural resources. While it is important to raise standards of living through development processes, a delicate balance needs to be achieved. Humanity is sitting at an inflection point: we are against a ticking clock to ensure a planet upon which our children and grandchildren can thrive. To this end, attention must be paid to the preservation of the environment.

Hence, development processes adopted by governments must be sustainable. They must consider different consumption options and, at the same time, create jobs, promote local culture, identities and products. These development processes should embrace a bottom up approach – one that enables and empowers local communities and respects the rights of individuals. In that sense, social inclusion becomes central to the global sustainable development agenda. When sustainable development is inclusive to that extent, only then will we enhance the livelihoods of local communities and we can speak of empowering global citizens.

Soroptimist International works at the ground level through its hundreds of projects worldwide, some of which have focused on empowering local communities through efforts to preserve the environment. As much as we talk about sustainable development and the depletion of natural resources resulting from changing consumption habits, it is important that we consider how we might eradicate plastic pollution.

One of our projects in Southern India focuses on transforming plastic bags into roads. While starting off as a plastic recycling project, a microfinance project resulted when underprivileged poor women were given subsidies to purchase plastic shredders to turn plastic bags into plastic chips which were then converted into materials to construct roads. Soon this project reached schools and female students became involved in collecting plastic bags. The outcome of this sole project therefore has crosscutting advantages – not only does the project help to tackle plastic pollution, but it also empowers girls and women, and creates sustainable infrastructure.

So what then should the role of Asia Pacific governments be in our quest for Agenda 2030? As we work with local communities, it cannot be denied that social inclusion must be a priority as we move forward. Only then can we not only speak about sustainable development but a development agenda that is truly collaborative and meaningful as local communities are

empowered in an effort to carve out their own future. And only then can we speak of realising the rights of local communities to participate in a sustainable world that belongs to every person, community, country and this world.

Thank you so much.

(454 words)

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