

Address by Hon. Dullas Alahapperuma, Minister of Youth Affairs and Skills Development of Sri Lanka at the GloCha Conference 2014 on "Sustainable Development, Multi-stakeholder Action and Innovation" on 5th June 2014 in Klagenfurt, Austria

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen, Good afternoon!

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be in this beautiful city of Klagenfurth for the GloCha 2014 Conference and to address this gathering of distinguished delegates. I wish to thank the organizers for the excellent arrangements made for this conference and for selecting a multifaceted theme that is of vital importance to all countries, both in the developed and developing world. Even though this conference is small in number of heads, people who are in this table are going to create a historical moment. The influence, creativity and commitment of this small team will realize the future of young people in ICT sector. Actually, we all have a shared commitment towards achieving sustainable development to ensure the future we want.

Today, the world faces its greatest challenge, of managing humanity's growing demands for water, food and energy, on a planet of finite resources. Scientists and governments alike have understood that sustainable development is the key towards addressing this dilemma, of meeting today's needs while ensuring that the needs of the future generations are met tomorrow.

Dear Friends,

The evolvement of education and communication has fascinated me over time.

In the 1930's my father wrote on a sandboard , he used his fingers to form letters and numbers. In the 60's I used blackboard to write using a chalk as a child. In previous decade, my son used pencil and papers from early childhood.

So ladies and gentlemen, could you even imagine what my grandson will use someday to write? Im sure his means of communication will evolve much beyond laptops and tabs.

The ever expanding global population and consumption patterns have led to many new global challenges such as climate change, food security issues and depleting energy resources. It is a situation that no single stakeholder could address alone. Governments, the private sector and other stakeholders

have understood that collaboration and co-operation is vital to mitigate these threats and ensure a secure world for our children.

Partnerships of diverse stake holders are considered to be one of the most effective and participatory means of implementing sustainable development initiatives. Such partnerships serve to strengthen and facilitate Government initiatives and make a valuable contribution towards achieving sustainable development.

Stakeholders have also realized that in this changing world, traditional approaches towards mitigating global challenges no longer suffice. They have realized that new and innovative initiatives are essential in securing a sustainable world for tomorrow. An integral part of sustainable and inclusive development initiatives are based on science, technology and innovation. It assists in improving living conditions, eradicating poverty and increasing productivity. Innovation driven development models are no longer the prerogative of the developed countries but are key features of development initiatives in developing countries.

One of the most important stakeholders of sustainable development initiatives are young people, for they are the foundation of our planet's future. They are already asking questions, getting involved and making contributions to Sustainable Development initiatives. Young people are engaged in public, private and non-governmental efforts as well as in their capacity as academics, students and scientists.

Many of our youth possess the inherent abilities that can be developed and supplemented with skills and capital, enabling them to become innovators and drivers who are capable of persevering through the challenges to ensure a sustainable world. It is important that we create sufficient supply of platforms for our youth to transform from formal education to innovative thinkers. Let us provide them with stimuli to venture out on their own amidst competition and drawbacks to find solutions for the problems we face today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is one of the main reasons why Sri Lanka proudly hosted the World Conference on Youth. It was the first time that young people from around the world sat together with policy makers, discussing their problems and finding solutions together. They were not just consulted for their views. They were equal partners in negotiations.

I am thankful for the opportunity afforded to me to speak at this Conference, as it enables me to highlight some of the important recommendations of the Colombo Declaration on Youth. One of the key recommendations in the Declaration is the use of Information and Communication Technology in education and the establishment of inter- and intra-regional youth innovation and technology centres, as a means of disseminating knowledge, skills development, innovation and connectivity. These recommendations are very much in line with the objectives of this conference.

Youth are also engaged in innovative ventures involving modern tools and communication strategies that enhance networking and serve to bring communities together. Internet based social media such as Twitter and Facebook have not only served to expand learning opportunities for youth but also enabled them to voice their opinions and influence policy makers on crucial matters such as sustainable development. Social media has greatly reduced the structural barriers that exist between policymakers and young people. It has enabled young people to reach their policymakers from their home, workplace or car. They can ask us questions, give inputs to national policies and even openly criticize our actions they feel are not appropriate.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I started my early career as a journalist, so obviously I have a bias towards printed newspapers and text based communication rather than many social media forms of communications to date.

But, social media communication at world conference on youth shook me up. We sponsored 20 social media fellows came from all around world. They were capable of communicating in 16 different languages. On the first day itself , 35000 tweets went out quoting the conference hashtag. If we count the number of facebook posts, instagram images and videos uploaded by young people, the world conference on youth in sri lanka was the most digitally engaged youth conference ever in history.

Ultimately, his Excellency the president of sri lanka also hosted a live twitter discussion to answer questions from more than 2000 young people who came from around the world.

I am proof of the influence young people and innovative technologies have on policy makers and governments. I am happy to announce that my interactions with young people at the World Youth Conference has encouraged me open my own Twitter Account and I will do that soon!

Throughout the years, ICTs has not had a more robust and loyal champion than the youth. Youth have effectively fostered ICT to generate youth entrepreneurship and innovation. ICT has given young people the opportunity of becoming job creators and innovators. Employers, education providers and young people must communicate with each other and start thinking of out of the box solutions to provide an education that will boost the innovative skills of our youth.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While science, technology and innovation is key to economic development, all these fields of activity come into play in one single arena of particular importance for developing countries. That is industrial development. Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development (ISID) adopted by Rio+20 in June 2012 has the potential for innovation through skills development and investment in entrepreneurship.

ISID and innovation should be approached in an interlinked manner, noting the importance of both for developing economies and particularly for the globalizing world, where job creation has become a policy challenge for many governments. Innovation should be promoted in a sustainable and focused manner,

putting youth at the centre of policy planning and implementation. This calls for, as the World Youth Conference has reiterated, not just for the participation of youth but their active voice to be heard.

It is in this context, even in a multi stakeholder approach to sustainable development initiatives, that it would be appropriate to address the importance of all actors rallying around the central player in the current century, which is youth.

One way of achieving this is through investing in youth entrepreneurship, including through Youth Innovation Awards. As emphasized by Sri Lanka and endorsed by the World Youth Conference 2014, the call for a dedicated UN Day for Skills Development becomes more relevant and pertinent in this context.

I hope that all of you will take the Colombo Declaration on Youth to your respective countries and your organizations and use it as a basis and as input for your initiatives.

I thank the International Association for the Advancement of Innovative Approaches to Global Challenges for extending the invitation to address you all here today and the city of Klagenfurth for being such a hospitable and beautiful venue for this Conference.

When you think of social networking and its power one man always comes to mind. He changed the world with his genius mind and his ultra-user friendly creation. Steve Jobs always wanted to put a dent on the universe and this guy eventually did. He is Mark Zuckerberg. The boy was a genius. Let me conclude my speech by quoting him:

By giving people the power to share, we are making the world more transparent. And I believe that in a transparent world, corruption and other misconducts tend to vanish. Let's take advantage of that. Live in a better world.

Thank you!