

Transcript of GFDD's fourth Global Roundtable with Her Excellency Josephine Ojiambo, Ambassador of Kenya to the United Nations.

Natasha Despotovic: (GFDD Executive Director)

Question #1

We know that Kenya has played a great role in brokering the peace in the situation in Sudan, at the same time it seems to some 250, 000 refugees from neighboring countries. Could you tell us how Kenya envisages its role both in Africa and the world?

Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo: (Kenya)

Response #1

Kenya continues to be a hub for those who require solace and peace and not just for Sudan and Somalia. Kenya has also extended this solace to Uganda and Ethiopia at particular times. Kenya has also been a safe place when there were problems in Rwanda and Burundi for their nationals. Indeed we continue to have a concern for Sudan, we have had Sudanese nationals live with us for almost 20 years and we do have a great refugee population. We have camps on the northern borders of Kenya which have both Sudanese and also Somalis. For us, we are happy to extend our territories when needed, but we have also been supportive of government arrangements that give stability. We are concerned that Somalia moves forward to stability and that the young people of that country have a place in its economic development.

For Sudan we continue to dialogue with the governments of south Sudan and north Sudan, so that institutions of lasting peace can be created for both parts. We have a friendly relationship with Uganda, Rwanda and other countries in the Region.

Margaret Hayward: (Communications and Outreach Manager)

Question #2

I would like to touch on the role of economics and the role that Kenya plays in general. It is one of the most powerful economic forces in Africa and is largely reliant on production of primary goods. What efforts are presently being taken by the government to diversify the economy?

Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo: (Kenya)

Response #2

We have several measures the government is undertaking but mostly to remove our reliance on primary goods into services. Kenya is right now focusing on becoming an Information Communications Technology (ICT) hub and indeed in this regard we have landed undersea cables -- and for the general region, Kenya is supplying a lot of the connectivity.

We are also moving forward into tourism but this has been a legacy for Kenya. We are improving our touristic attractions and reaching out to new markets on the issue of tourism and we have come up with a plan that has segmented our target audience and is providing different packages for different targets and with tourism of course comes hospitality and those are the major areas in which we are moving forward.

Beyond that, we are also looking into the financial services and we are growing our stock market so within the region we have an active hub for stock exchange. I think those are the primary areas where we have seen new growth. But that would not exist without the environment and structure for the new growth. This environment is being supported by laws and licensing that makes it easy for investment and support from the government for reduced taxes for those who are investing, and for an investment climate that is supportive in the early years before breaking even.

Beyond that there has been a lot of infrastructure into the investment of the country so that services that are required can be easily accessed by better communication, better road infrastructure and this now all exists in the country. This works together to produce a better environment for investment. We are also looking at new forms of energy, so that we can bring down the cost of business by making sure there is energy to power industry.

Again this is something we are working very hard at. We are looking at it as part of our national economic strategy and Vision for 2030. Vision 2030 has put in place by the National and Economic Social Council in Kenya and this Council has an agenda for increasing Kenya's visibility for foreign direct investment. I think you are aware during the last month here in NY we had a very frontal engagement with the business community of the African Eastern Board and the Pan African Investment Forum, actually hosted by Kenya, and investors to our country and our Prime Minister was the chief guest. So we are looking at encouraging external investors so it will improve our FDI. These again are part of our initiatives in terms of economic growth in to the country.

Emy Rodriguez: (Environmental Projects Coordinator)

Question #3

We know that Kenya, like countries around the world, is dealing with the negative effects of climate change, in particular land degradation, deforestation and desertification. What actions are being taken to reverse these trends?

Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo: (Kenya)

Response #3

Climate change is one of the major issues both internationally and locally in Kenya, and we have a strategy at local level which is mitigating the effects of climate change. We are happy to report that the national leadership has in the past 2 years addressed squarely the restoration of our water towers. Because of land degradation, we were about to lose our major water towers but because of a series of concerted public information campaigns -- part of our strategy for restoring the environment -- the 5 water towers that have been restored. On the other hand we continue to speak through agriculture about right land use and we continue to encourage our farmers in the way they manage their land. Our programs include forestation and reforestation and we are very particular about the quality of forests that we grow. Beyond that, we are looking at the issue of human settlement and when we have to move people out of their normal settlement ensure that they are given alternative places to live and that their welfare and livelihoods are taken care of.

Kenya is indeed a home for UN Habitat and United Nations Environment (UNEP), and as a result, we are very aware about the green economy and right now we are promoting growth in terms of employment opportunities that are green, plus the opening of these two UN headquarters to improve our engagement with the green economy.

Natasha Despotovic: (GFDD Executive Director)

Question #4

The unemployment rate is at 40% so could you talk a bit about that and what policies are being put in place?

Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo: (Kenya)

Response #4

It's a important question, particularly, as you made reference to Kenya being a very young population with a median age of 18, coupled with the fact that we have a short life expectancy.

We are focusing on the informal sector and we have a program in place called "Work for the Young" and the government is providing a program where young people go out and work to improve the environment and the infrastructure and work in order to contribute back to their society, but that work is being remunerated. This is good for young people, as it gives them a sense of patriotism and nationhood, but with an added sense of being appreciated.

At the same time the government has put aside funding for the 'Woman's Enterprise Development Fund'. This Fund gives women some start up money for small scale business enterprise. It gives to individuals and women in groups and at incremental amounts. And as you know, when you have money at the domestic level and in the hands of women, then the family's welfare is improved. And this has been a tremendous gain for our government.

And there has also been a program of economic stimulus given to many sectors of our economy and this stimulus has gone into education and agriculture and into the servicing and manufacturing parts of our economy, and when you give this stimulus you increase the growth of these sectors. These are ways the government is tackling unemployment.

Through our social programs we do have some support for the elderly because at some point it's not possible to compete on the job market so they are given a package to take home so they don't remain destitute or without any means to at some point help themselves and they are therefore not necessarily a burden on the younger population.

Kerry Stefancyk: (Representative to the UN and Fellows Program Manager)

Question #5

We know that combating HIV/AIDS is an enormous challenge. In 2009 alone, over 80, 000 people died of the disease in Kenya. How can more be done to scale-up efforts, on behalf of the national and international community and public, private and non-sector sectors alike?

Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo: (Kenya)

Response #5

HIV is a major scourge on the developing world, and because we live together on one globe, continues to be a threat to the developed world. So it's a concern for all of us. When it comes to the international community, there is a need to continue to give resources to programs on health and on HIV and AIDS. And that should be done by continued advocacy such as here at the UN, or indeed in high level meetings, like the one we are soon going to have on the issue of HIV and AIDS. The money should go to Behavior Change Communication (BCC), particularly targeting the most vulnerable who really need education. It is therefore important that we be vocal in our message and ensure that it goes to the right target audience.

We also need to talk about providing treatment and care as the most effective part of our strategy, as well as the need to get Anti-Retro Viral drugs (ARVs). It's important that the multi-national drug companies give access to care for those who need it. And with the ARV's we also need care given for the other infections that these people suffer, because those living with HIV/AIDS are open to TB, Malaria and other diseases including fungal diseases.

And so for those of us living in the developing world we need to improve access to drugs through improved licensing and the ability to manufacture at local level. I think those are the key strategies for the outside, but for ourselves it is important to focus on the most vulnerable, that we have in place a Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) center, and that we reduce stigma. Kenya has done a lot as we have a law on stigma against HIV and AIDS to increase the people living with AIDS ability to integrate into the job market and with the community, because indeed with care, those people can live and continue to be productive. These are the areas I think, of major concern.

Yamile Eusebio: (Director, GFDD, New York Office)

Question #6

The action on behalf of the Kenyan government in 2003 to universalize access to free primary education led to approximately a 70% increase in primary school enrollment. Are efforts in the works to provide access to universal free secondary education as well?

Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo: (Kenya)

Response #6

Yes. That was the part of the President's rallying call during the election. He spoke about his achievements and that of the government for primary education and then secondary education and now there is a move towards providing university education. So the government of Kenya is paying for all students to go to secondary education, so it does exist. But more than that, in every county we have 2 national schools at secondary level, which are schools that have a certified standard that is national and have a national curriculum, and give secondary education. So, in 47 counties we have 2 schools, one for girls and one for boys. We also have centers of excellence in every county so we will

have by 2012, 47 centers of excellence and will have assured 2 schools in every one of the 47 counties.

But we are also making efforts that with the schools, we also have the teachers and we are trying to have equity so that every region of our country has the same standard of education. We are bridging the student teacher ratio, so that every where you go, you come up with one standard form of education and one type of quality student. We believe in education as a mainstay, and not forgetting there is also the informal education sector, and education for the elderly.

Natasha Despotovic: (GFDD Executive Director)

Question #7

You also preside as President of the High level Committee on South South Cooperation, and since we are very interested in the work of the United Nations, could you tell us about your work, South South Cooperation and its challenges and successes?

Ambassador Josephine Ojiambo: (Kenya)

Response #7

The High Level Committee on South South Cooperation reports directly to the General Assembly. The GA, as you know, is the highest and most important decision making organ of the UN so we have a direct line reporting relation to it.

The High Level Committee consists of Kenya as President, but also has Vice President's from the regions of the Global South . This committee is supported by the work of the South South Unit, housed in UNDP and within the Unit there is a secretariat and a bureau. There have been a number of achievements, and I would like to state that one of our greatest achievements has been the setting up of South South News. South South News has been able to broadcast a lot of the achievements of South South Cooperation.

Now what are the achievements? They pertain to the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). And South South Cooperation has been able to document, disseminate, and share so that countries can replicate the best practices in the attainment of the MDGs. This would not be possible without a tool such as South South News which is able to bridge the digital divide and bring information about this practice across the Global South so that we are able to replicate what we have learnt to be successes.

There have been lots of successes in health, education, agriculture and infrastructure. Successes in democratization of the Global South too. Beyond that, we have been able to build a team of UN Ambassadors for South South Cooperation, and South South News has made it possible for UN Ambassadors to tour countries of the Global South and speak about issues relevant to the South.

I do recall a visit to China, Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong, and we were able to set up an office of South South Cooperation in that region. This office continues to provide lessons and learning across the region. But more than that, we visited the Expo. in Shanghai, where the Ambassadors launched the UN part of the expo and we spoke about "creating creative cities". And what was interesting was not only capturing the creative spirit of the city but providing services that go on into the next century that are sensitive to the issues of the green economy, but also provide basic services for all the social sectors.

We were happy to be joined there by mayors from the provinces of China who were able to tell us how they are interacting with other countries of the Global South. It was a great learning but it has not stopped there, we continue to tour the globe and the Global South with the Ambassadors.

I would also like to speak about a meeting we held in Geneva on behalf of South South Cooperation, where we talked about providing safe employment for those people coming from the Global South. Again this is important, as employment opportunities are a problem for the Global South. As we move forward we want to focus on connectivity and how to utilize it for health so telecommunication will

continue to be a mainstay of our discussion. We are looking forward to bringing training skills to practitioners of the Global South and across the south so we can teleport this training and improve the management of health.

We have a number of things we are going to do here at the UN with the upcoming Youth Assembly, and we have spoken about the need to focus on youth, education and ICTs. Not only here at the Youth Assembly, but into the future we will be having a meeting, again in China, to look at these issues.

I could state more, and we are going to do a lot more on the issue of women, and women as they participate in business enterprise and again South South News is going to take a leadership in this very soon.

None of this would be possible without the charisma of those involved in the projects and in particular we would like to thank South South News and Ambassador Lorenzo for continuing to bring us together and I would like to thank GFDD for the opportunities to engage on issues, not only of democratization, but the issues of tourism and national resources.