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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN)

TANZANIA: Interview with John Hendra, UNDP Resident Representative

DAR ES SALAAM, 14 October (IRIN) - John Hendra is the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in Tanzania. In this interview, he talks to IRIN about developments in the political and economic situation in the country.

QUESTION: Why was Tanzania chosen to host the upcoming symposium on deepening democracy in Africa?

ANSWER: The reason that Tanzania was chosen is its low ranking, in terms of income per capita and the human development index, is it is clear that there are a number of achievements that the country has made in terms of moving forward in democratic governance. A few of them are the transition to the multiparty system during the last decade, the implementation of a number of government reforms, liberalisation of the media, efforts being made in the anti-corruption strategy and the homegrown Muafaka Accord. That being said, like any country, there are a number of steps that still need to be taken, but it is in recognition of the achievements and efforts that have been made.

Q: Are there any particular lessons that other countries can learn from?

A: One of the very important lessons is that democracy is not just a multiparty election and democratic governance. It's really about helping people to participate better in decisions that affect their lives and be able to input into policy dialogue. I think that over the last few years, one lesson to learn is from the effort Tanzania has made to facilitate civil society in broader public discussion. The recent poverty policy week is an example, as it generated a lot of interest and discussion, as well some controversy.

Q: While the recent appointments for the Zanzibar Electoral Commission is a significant development in the implementation of the Muafaka, yet nearly a year since the agreement was signed, the opposition still complains that implementation is happening too slowly. What is UNDP's view on this?

A: The presidential nomination for the ZEC [Zanzibar Electoral Commission] was a very important step. The Muafaka is a homegrown agreement, it is extremely important and it is clearly quite sensitive. UNDP is one of the donor partners supporting the implementation of the Muafaka. Also I think that the work that was done in the broad framework for the Zanzibar Poverty Reduction programme is a clear recognition that a lot of capacity development needs to be done in these areas, and UNDP hopes to be working with our partners on this.

Q: It is also nearly a year since Tanzania qualified for HIPC [Heavily Indebted Poor Countries] debt relief, yet there are complaints that not enough of the real benefits are trickling down to the people.

A: Yes, but I think the important thing about the poverty policy week is that there is now a comprehensive poverty monitoring system that is starting to accurate information through the Household Budget Survey (HBS), the Poverty and Human Development Report and the Labour Force Survey. There is now analytical work to better inform this discussion.

A few of the highlights are that the HBS shows that overall income poverty has declined. It clearly shows that urban poverty - particularly in [the commercial capital] Dar es Salaam - has declined from 28 percent to 18 percent. And I think that some of the indicators on primary education have been extremely positive. One element of the poverty reduction strategy is the lifting of the school fees, and primary enrolment has increased the last few years more than it has in recent decades.

However, rural poverty is still a big challenge, firstly from a human development point of view, enlarging people's opportunities, but also in pro-poor economic growth. In the broader UN point of view, and in terms of the Millennium Development Goals, Tanzania is on track to achieve universal enrolment in primary education and gender equality in education, but in the other goals, we really need to see some strong results.

Q: In this year's budget there was a large increase for agriculture, but is enough attention being paid to this sector?

A: There has been a realisation from some of the work such as the draft poverty and human development report [which] clearly outlines the importance of the agriculture sector. I think during the next few months, the consultant group and other mechanisms will be able to give a good view of the progress that has been made and where it needs to be accelerated.

Q: There is often a lot of criticism of the lack of donor coordination. Do you think this is a gap that UNDP can fill?

A: I think several years ago this was a big issue with the government and the donors. There's a significant amount of work that has been done since then. My own view is that this is a story that has not been told enough.

I think Tanzania really is a model in this sense for other countries. There is a sense of national ownership, there is a very strong overall poverty reduction strategy, there is a very strong series of government-led processes, and there is the overall framework - the Tanzanian assistance strategy, which dictates the overall aid coordination.

Effective aid coordination has to be owned by the government. And I think there's a number of actions under way to strengthen the financial management system, facilitate as many resources as possible going to the exchequer and, finally, there is also the independent monitoring group, which is an independent group monitoring the behaviour of the donors. This is quite innovative in that it is monitoring reports on the behaviour of the overall donor community, the government and their relationship.

In terms of UNDP, we have three roles: working with the government to strengthen their own capacity and improve management of their systems; UNDP funds and manages the resident coordinator system and, to help this, we have developed the United Nations Development Assistance Framework; and finally there is the role we play in the local Development Assistance Committee group. We have an important role to play, but it's very much a role that we do in participation with other donors, the other UN partners and the government.

[ENDS]

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