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Speakers Stress Need to Address Africa's Resources, Urging Paradigm Shift, as Economic and Social Council Concludes Segment

Continent Bleeding, Nigeria's System Rigged by Multinationals

Speakers from myriad sectors in Africa shared perspectives on why the continent, despite being resource rich, remained home to the planet's poorest people, as the Economic and Social Council concluded its integration segment today.

In its third and final day of discussions on the theme "making eradication of poverty an integral objective of all policies: what will it take?", the Council held a panel this morning on "eradicating poverty in Africa", during which speakers urged the need for a radical paradigm shift, some emphasizing that the system had been designed to keep the continent in a state of poverty.

Irene Ovonji-Odida, Chairperson of the International Board of ActionAid International, said many of the continent's citizens believed that the system was not broken, but rather built that way. "With an abundance of minerals, natural resources, land and water, she questioned as to why Africa remained at the bottom of the economic heap. Urging a conversation on exploitation and exploitative relations, she noted the actions of multinational companies who she said armed warlords to gain control over resources.

Emphasizing the role of data in development, South Africa Statistician-General Pali Lehohla said that, while the number of people living in poverty had reduced, the intensity of poverty had remained steady. He urged the need to address unemployment, education gaps and stimulate trade. Welcoming his country's greater weight on the role of statisticians in

policies all had an impact on poverty and inequality. Noting that the United Nations was in a unique position to strengthen all mechanisms for inter-agency collaboration, he underscored the need to enhance governance and streamline the fight against poverty by aligning practices globally and nationally.

Nabeel Munir (Pakistan), Vice-President, Economic and Social Council, said the 2017 integration segment reinforced the need to empower women, educate youth and protect smallholder farmers. He called on the United Nations to intensify efforts to promote multilateralism, underscoring the role of Regional Commissions in supporting policy integration. He touched on highlights from various discussions from yesterday's deliberations on national experiences to today's panel on poverty and development in Africa. A paradigm shift was indeed needed to mobilize resources for African development, he added.

Also speaking today were representatives of South Africa, Norway, Ireland, Algeria and Switzerland.

Panel Discussion I

The Economic and Social Council held a panel discussion this morning on "eradicating poverty in Africa", moderated by David Mehdi Hamam, Director of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa. Panelists on the discussion included Pali Lehohla, Statistician-General of South Africa; Irene Ovonji-Odida, Chairperson, International Board of ActionAid International; Zeinab Bashir el Bakri, Member, High-level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa, and Member, Inspection Panel of the World Bank; and Donald Mmari, Member, Southern Voice and former Executive Director, Policy Research for Development.

Mr. LEHOHLA, presenting a statistician's perspective, shared several success stories in the area of provision of water and electricity in South Africa. While the number of people living in poverty had reduced, the intensity of poverty had remained steady. Unemployment and education gaps had been most difficult to address and remained a key challenge to development. Trade must be stimulated and drive the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, he said, emphasizing that data and statistics were vital in analysing and planning related policy. He welcomed South Africa putting more weight on the role of statisticians in shaping and modelling policy, which "could only be successful if we have credible and accurate data". Concerning illicit financial flows, he said statisticians were instrumental in providing information on what products and resources were being exploited and traded in informal markets.

Ms. OVONJI-ODIDA said that, while the solution to Africa's situation would have to come mainly from the continent, many of its citizens believed that the system was not broken, but rather built that way. "The system is delivering what it was meant to deliver," she added. Africa was a resource-rich continent, and yet, remained home to the planet's poorest people. With an abundance of minerals, natural resources, land and water, why was it that Africa remained at the bottom of the economic heap? Urging a transition from a narrative of wealth and po

In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Cameroon, speaking on behalf of the African Group, said the continent had not managed to halve poverty by 2015 as it had committed to do with the Millennium Development Goals. Half of the 800 million people living in poverty worldwide were in Africa. Having committed to the 2030 Agenda, the goal now was to eliminate and not just reduce poverty. The task was becoming harder; however, as the continent faced challenges presented by economic inequality, climate change and illicit financial flows.

Africa's Agenda 2063 aimed to ensure that every child, woman and man could reach their potential, he continued. Emphasizing that energy development in Africa had not kept pace with rising demand, he called for a well-integrated and coherent regional approach. By 2050, Africa would have the largest and most youthful workforce. It was important to start now to improve science and math education and boost literacy rates. The effects of climate change, namely drought and desertification, derailed development prospects and reversed progress achieved, he added.

The representative of Liberia called for a new narrative. The contribution of trade on development had reduced, he said, adding that African countries had to devise a new programme that would support its development. It required sound international relations and cooperation. Agriculture transformation and industrialization were difficult to achieve and required support from the global community. We have to be fair to ourselves and intelligent enough to follow and adapt to

Mr. HARRIS noted that poverty was a multidimensional phenomenon that manifested itself in many ways, from income levels and lack of opportunity to standard education and health care, as well as vulnerability to economic and physical shocks that could reverse precarious gains which poor people might have made on the path to prosperity. From the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals, much of the focus had been on the symptoms of poverty rather than the root cause. Poverty reduction efforts so far had centred on income, with the idea that if incomes rose, everything else would follow. While the 2030 Agenda made it possible to better understand the interlinking aspects of poverty, policy integration was not an easy matter, he said.

Noting that the panellists represented the Council's most important functional bodies, he asked them to discuss how their respective entities had addressed its overall theme for 2017, "eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions through promoting sustainable development, expanding opportunities and addressing related challenges", and what conclusions had been drawn from their deliberations. He also asked them to discuss how they addressed the question of how to make poverty eradication an integral objective of all policies. What would it take, and what lessons could be learned with integrating their conclusions and forwarding them to the high-level segment and the High-Level Political Forum?

Mr. DONOGHUE said that women's empowerment in the changing world of work had been the theme of this year's session of the Commission on the Status of Women. That provided an impetus to consider the impact of such topics as innovation, technology, mobility and the informality of work, among others. One issue that came up was the persistence of the feminization of poverty, a challenge that had been addressed in the Beijing Platform for Action. If poverty was to be eradicated, then gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls must be accelerated, he said, adding that policies must be targeted in order to reach all women who faced poverty and marginalization. He went on to summarize the Commission's conclusions, which included the vital need for women's participation and leadership in order to achieve sustainable development and end poverty.

Mr. CHARWATH said the Commission on Social Development's mandate — considering general questions regarding youth, disabled persons, older persons and families — had been rendered more relevant by the 2030 Agenda's goal of leaving no one behind. Poverty eradication strategies for sustainable development were the theme of the Commission's latest two-year cycle, whereas the Economic and Social Council chose a different theme every year. He also explained that the Commission had not negotiated outcome documents, but rather Chair's summaries of its deliberations. A key theme was that economic growth was not enough. Key points included the importance of disaggregated data, decent employment, vocational training and measures to address youth unemployment. The Commission noted the importance of strong institutions, Government capabilities, the need for political will and a wide societal consensus to invest in social protection.

Ms. POPESCU said the Commission on Population and Development this year had addressed changing population age structures in the context of sustainable development. Taking such changes as part of development planning was essential for achieving the Goals, she said. On a global scale, a gradual shift was under way whereby older persons would be as numerous, or even outnumber, children and youth. Lower birth rates would result in a concentration of people of working age, creating a window of opportunity for rapid development driven by per capita income growth. However, progress would depend on a number of enabling factors, she said, noting that during the Commission's recent session, delegations highlighted the importance of investment in education and health, promoting women's empowerment and gender equality, jobs for young people and addressing the needs of older persons.

Mr. OCAMPO said the Council's great value lay in the fact that it was a system which comprised the Council itself, its commissions and its expert bodies. Making that system work well was essential. This year, he said, the Committee for Policy Development considered the reasons why some least developed countries had been able to graduate to middle-income status. Some countries that were rich in natural resources had seen rapid income growth, but insufficient human asset accumulation. Others had undergone successful structural transformation, but remained vulnerable due to a lack of economic diversity. In addition, there were countries that had shifted towards manufacturing and services, but where the agricultural sector remained important. He went on to emphasize the importance of coordinated ODA, as well as the need to maintain trading preferences for some time for those countries that graduated from "least developed" status.

In the ensuing discussion, Switzerland's delegate asked about ways to ensure that the functional commissions' contributions were truly taken into account by the High-Level Political Forum. Her counterpart from South Af

Mr. CHARWATH said he agreed on that point. With regard to Switzerland's question, he said the functional commissions had broad mandates that exceeded the Sustainable Development Goals. He said he personally favoured one-year cycles for the Commission on Social Development, but others did not.

Mr. OCAMPO emphasized the analytical nature of his Committee's documents, which addressed major issues before the Council. He added that, in his view, the High-Level Political Forum must focus on specific issues in order to send out a strong message. Some selectivity on its part would be essential to guarantee success.

Ms. POPESCU said she, too, agreed on the importance of outcome documents. This year, she added, the Commission on Population and Development held informal consultations on a draft resolution, but Member States failed to agree on some issues such as reproductive rights and sexual education. She added, however, that the lack of such a resolution did not limit the Commission's ability to contribute to the work of the Council and the High-Level Political Forum.

Panel Discussion III

The afternoon's second panel on "a multistakeholder approach: roles, responsibilities and results", was moderated by Andrea Ordóñez, Research and Partnership Coordinator, Southern Voice. It featured presentations by Huguette Labelle, Chair, Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments, former Secretary of State, Canada and former President, Canadian International Development Agency; Shira Kilcoyne, Director, Government Affairs International, GlaxoSmithKline; and Manuel F. Montes, Senior Advisor, South Centre.

Ms. LABELLE underscored the need to build ownership of decisions and greater trust among institutions and Government. Respect for diversity and "the other" and among civil society, Governments, labour and academics was instrumental. Local networks helped bring together the business sector and non-governmental organizations. She underscored the role of strong, sustained Government leadership in advancing the development agenda. Providing grants and capacity-building helped build momentum and develop policy. As countries began to distribute resources to local governments, it often became clear that corruption could easily spread. With Governments handing out contracts to different sectors, such as construction, transparency was even more crucial.

Ms. KILCOYNE, as a member of the private sector, said businesses had a critical role in multistakeholder partnerships. Describing several ways GlaxoSmithKline had engaged in such partnerships, she said most of those collaborations focused

on partnerships that were mutually beneficial to all parties involved. She said that such partnerships were essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.