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UNDP urges SADC to use domestic resources to fund SDGs

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Windhoek - The global community on December 25, 2015, adopted a set of 17 goals, known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in a bid to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030.

The SDGs build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the eight anti-poverty targets that the world adopted in 2000 and had committed to achieve by 2015. SDGs are a universal set of goals, targets and indicators that UN member states are expected to use to frame their national development plans and policies over the next 15 years.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the SDGs and the broader sustainability agenda go much further than the MDGs in addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that works for all people.

For countries in Southern Africa like Namibia to make headway in the implementation period until 2030, they need to prioritise allocation of domestic resources in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, says Kiki Gbeho, UNDP Resident Representative to Namibia.

In an interview with *The Southern Times*, Gbeho said the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are achievable and that funding should not be an issue since resources abound in the world including Africa, which if utilised sensibly can end poverty and drive sustainable development.

"Even though funds will never be enough, countries need to make use of natural resources that have not been fully exploited as well as to prioritise on the national budget by making sure that critical issues that block the successful implementation of other programmes are addressed," she said.

Gbeho said, "Funds will never be enough but the governments need to prioritise on the national budgets and to make sure issues such as education, poverty and health are addressed."

Namibia is one country that other countries could learn from when it comes to budget spending, she said, whereby every year the largest portion of the national budget goes to the ministries of education, health and social services as well as that of poverty eradication.

"This means that for the country to achieve other development goals, those areas need to be addressed first. People



> Kiki Gbeho, UNDP Resident representative to Namibia.

need to be educated, they need to be healthy and free from hunger in order to move to other development areas," she said.

Namibian President Hage Geingob speaking at the UN High Level Thematic Debate on achieving the SDGs that ended on April 21, lamented the lack of resources as one of the major barriers to the successful implementation of the sustainable development agenda.

Gbeho stressed that there is need for a holistic and multi-stakeholder approach to financing that recognizes the roles of all actors, including the domestic public and private sector, transnational corporate actors and development banks.

She urged countries to take ownership of the development agenda and to facilitate its implementation rather than relying on development partners to do it for them.

"This is not a UN agenda, this is an agenda that governments signed – it is the agenda of the people, our role is to support it," she said, adding that the UN is ready to assist countries with technical expertise to implement the development agenda.

"For Namibia, we are clear on what to do as development partners. The government has given them direction on how to tackle poverty.

"The President has given us focus through the war on poverty initiatives. Plus the issue is also part of the Hara[m]

bee Prosperity Plan, while the Ministry of Poverty Eradication is also expected to come up with a blueprint on how to tackle the issue," she said.

Gbeho, who is also the UN Resident Coordinator in Namibia who replaced Musinga Bandora in 2014, said UNDP will work closely with the development partners not only to help countries mobilise their resources but to link them to the global financial pots in order to access money for the implementation of SDGs targets.

"Over the years our biggest portfolio was on environment, whereby we helped the government of Namibia access about R70 million from World Bank to invest in environment management and now that the government has declared war on poverty, we decided to restructure our plans in order to accommodate poverty. Which means our main focus in Namibia will be environment and poverty," Gbeho said.

She further said, "We haven't had big programmes on poverty yet, so we will look at how we can restructure this office to work into two pillars, which is poverty and environment," she said.

Apart from that, Gbeho said since half of the people in Namibia are women and they are the ones mainly affected by poverty and hunger, the UNDP would address all the areas from the gender perspective.

"We want make sure women and girls are the priority for the government, we want to make sure we engender all our

programmes and we support gender equality and gender parity," she said.

"UNDP will continue assisting Namibia and other countries on suggesting ways of implementing, coordinating, financing and monitoring new commitment and propose strategies for planning, taking into account national realities and respect for national policies and priorities," she added.

While applauding Namibia for doing well in some of the MDGs targets, Gbeho said more work still needs to be done in order to free the country from poverty and hunger.

"With regards to MDG target on poverty, Namibia did well as most of the people are now free from extreme poverty. Namibia's achievements are not just attributed to the formation of Millennium Development Goals.

"If you looks back from independence to where the country currently stands, one can concur that a lot has been done in this regard. At independence seven out of 10 people were living in extreme poverty but today three out of 10 are living in poverty.

Apart from that Gbeho said the country has done extremely well in the provision of universal free primary education and enrolment of children in schools. Adding that statistically Namibia is at number three in the region when it comes to enrolment and it is almost at 99 percent in terms of enrolment, Gbeho said.

Other areas that Namibia did well include combating HIV and AIDS as well as "full access" to clean, drinkable water, while in terms of environmental sustainability, the proportion of protected areas has increased.

Gbeho said while so many strides have been made, the country still needs to do more. "Although Namibia did so well in those areas, but more still need to be done, especially when it comes to eradicating poverty, unequal distribution of resources as well as maternal mortality.

"If we were to talk to the people about these statistics, three out of 10 won't agree with us that the majority have been in fact lifted out of poverty because they are still affected.

So, our idea is to uplift everyone and start talking zero percent of people living in poverty," she said.

She further said although Namibia is one of the countries that are rich in natural resources, it is among countries with the most unequal distribution of wealth in the world.

"Statistics show that the country is doing well but when you unpack the statistics and start looking at individual areas one will see that more still needs to be done," she said.