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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: CAN SOUTH AFRICA DO IT?

By Terrance M. Booysen

The impacts of the widely broadcasted activities that South African citizens witnessed regarding the 'Nenegate blunder' will be felt hardest amongst the poor, and for many years to come. And this is with no thanks to President Jacob Zuma. President Zuma singularly decided to remove Minister Nene as South Africa's Finance Minister in December 2015 -- seemingly with no proper reason -- and following this move, half a trillion Rand was wiped off the value of South African stocks and bonds in just two days.

The significance of this disastrous decision resulted in not only South Africa's biggest financial crisis since our democracy, it has also dealt a massive blow -- perhaps crippling -- to the impoverished citizens of our country.

South Africa has been mired with poor leadership over the last number of years. Moreover, government and its leadership has been entangled with countless allegations of corruption, not least also being accused of a limp National Development Plan ('NDP') which has not inspired confidence amongst the country's stakeholders, neither its intended beneficiaries. As these events continue to unfold, our beleaguered country will inevitably continue with its downward socio-economic spiral.

As far as the country's optimism is concerned, it is unsurprising to see the growing despair amongst the escalating eight million unemployed citizens of South Africa. Many of these destitute, unemployed people hardly need any reminding of the increasing chasm that separates them from a life which has been promised to them through our Constitution; one which is hailed as the best in the world.

Whilst the government is primarily responsible to establish the necessary programmes to improve the overall sustainability of the country and its citizens; there is undoubtedly an increased financial demand being placed upon businesses to assist the government in these efforts. Considering the extent of South Africa's estimated *R675bn state procurement corruption bill since 1994 -- representing approximately R25-30bn each year -- as well as matters such as the recent Nene blunder, it's no surprise that businesses in South Africa are increasingly called upon to assist government through various corporate social initiatives. This is certainly not any example of good governance on the part of government, neither does it inspire confidence for a nation so desperate to see the economy moving upwardly of a paltry one-percent annual growth rate. Adding to these massive socio-economic challenges, is the looming down-grade which is becoming more inevitable as South Africa is stripped naked in the local and international media for its inefficiencies and growing risks, amongst other matters.

"Ours is the last generation which can head off the worst effects of climate change and the first generation with the wealth and knowledge to eradicate poverty. For this, fearless leadership from us all is needed. If the global community collectively is prepared to step up to the challenge of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, then there's a chance of achieving sustainable development -- and with it better prospects for people and our planet."

**Helen Clark (Administrator:
United Nations Development
Programme)
29 September 2015**

For the country to become truly sustainable, the collective interests of all its citizens must be trumped over the few politically connected, shady individuals who have not fulfilled their oath of office. South Africa and our hard-won Constitution must be placed at the core of all our discussions; and any deviation from this critical agenda will simply result in yet further mayhem within our institutions and civil society.

The sustainability of a country -- which includes its law and order systems and processes -- is critical for the security of its people and the natural resources for which they depend upon. It is therefore paramount that governments across the world ensure they implement the necessary parameters to ensure that the consumers of these resources understand and exercise sustainable practices. Failing to do this does not only mean that the impoverished and weak will suffer further, it also directly threatens world peace.

Being a Member State of the United Nations and signatory to the Sustainable Development Goals ('SDGs'), South Africa has a lot to achieve in respect of fulfilling its obligations toward the country's sustainable development. In order to achieve the new goals -- which are more specific as compared to its predecessor being the Millennium Development Goals ('MDGs') -- three critical ingredients will be required; these being decisive leadership, strong public-private partnerships and of course a healthy supply of money. Regrettably, in the case of South Africa, all three of these ingredients are currently in short supply and this will have severe socio-economic implications for our country, not least also being able to achieve these goals by 2030.

The SDGs are a set of seventeen universal sustainable development goals; they were adopted by the Member States of the United Nations in September 2015. These goals are underpinned by 169 targets which address three dimensions of sustainable development, namely: (i) social development; (ii) economic development; and (iii) environmental sustainability. Whilst the SDGs are expected to guide the various governments' actions and policies, including South Africa's over the next fifteen years, if there is not a decisive and positive change of attitude and behaviour in our country's leadership, these goals will more than likely not be achieved.

Indeed, if South Africa and the government are hopeful of achieving the SDGs, the SDGs will need to be included within the NDP so that there is a collective alignment between all the country's stakeholders in order to achieve the sustainable development espoused in the SDGs, including those found within the Africa Union's Agenda 2063.

Given the current reticent attitude by some quarters in South Africa toward the current contents of the NDP, it's highly unlikely that the SDGs (in its entirety) will be included within this contentious document. Expectedly, if the SDGs are treated in South Africa as a 'bolt-on' strategy, the chances of its ultimate success are remote and the intended beneficiaries will be overlooked.

Quite different to the MDGs, the SDGs were premised on five fundamental values which were developed by the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. These values encapsulate the notion of (i) not leaving anyone behind, (ii) ensuring sustainability is balanced between the socio-economic and environmental actors, (iii) transforming economies with inclusive job creation, (iv) building effective and accountable institutions for all, and finally (v) forging new global partnerships.

"The implementation of Agenda 2063 will really help us meet the Sustainable Development Goals of ending poverty, zero hunger, quality education, water and sanitation, protecting the planet, gender equality, reducing inequalities and ensuring prosperity for all."

Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma
(Chairperson: African Union)

Whilst the SDGs have an ambitious agenda, and they are undoubtedly a tall order for most developing countries, they are certainly attainable if the leadership of these countries are truly committed to see the change they desire.

If the South African government were to lead by example, and they enforced severe consequences to stem the billions of Rands lost to bribery and corruption, funding and achieving the SDGs would become that much easier and less of a burden on businesses operating in South Africa. Indeed, if such action were taken by the state, it would also send an unequivocal message that South Africa is truly the 'rainbow nation', where its entire people will benefit from the sacrifices made by Nelson Mandela and the supporting stalwarts of the African National Congress. As they say, only time will tell.

* Source: Has SA lost R700bn to corruption? By Sintha Chiumia and Anim van Wyk (01 October 2015)

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