

Summary of discussions – 7th APF Meeting – Moscow, Russia

Agenda item 1: Progress Reports - Infrastructure, HIV/AIDS and Agriculture

Under this agenda item, the participants had before them three Progress Reports on Infrastructure, HIV/AIDS and Agriculture. Participants welcomed the progress reports and generally agreed that, overall, the reports were balanced, detailed and were an objective assessment of the reality on the ground in Africa. The “traffic lights” system was referred to as a very useful tool for monitoring progress. For all three reports it was noted that whilst some progress has been made in all three sectors, agriculture was recording the slowest progress in some crucial areas.

With regard to infrastructure, participants welcomed the creation of the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa (ICA). It was agreed that one of the major constraints to infrastructure development is the implementation of multi-country projects, and that the ICA could play a useful role as a mechanism for facilitating joint action. However, participants underscored the need for more attention to be paid to building capacity at national and regional levels in order for African governments to take advantage of public-private partnerships (PPPs). In addition, cross-border projects are facing serious obstacles which are hampering infrastructure rationalization at the regional level. Participants further added that many African countries are experiencing an energy crisis and emphasized the important role energy played in reducing poverty. The German representative notified participants that the next G8 Summit would be held at the beginning of June 2007 in Berlin and that strengthening partnerships with Africa will remain a top priority, particularly in the areas of fulfilling ODA commitments and promoting sustainable investment. Participants were also informed that there is an up-coming African Infrastructure Consortium meeting which will be held in Berlin in early 2007.

Based on the presentation on HIV/AIDS, participants noted that enhanced efforts were needed in order to deliver universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010. It was also stressed that up to 60 per cent of persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWA) on the African continent are women, and therefore that more emphasis needs to be accorded to the gender dimension of the virus – including more attention to girls’ education. On the issue of national health budgets, a UK representative emphasized that there needed to be a lot more focus on the strengthening of national health systems which should be reflected by an increased allocation of resources from national budgets into the health sector. The World Bank representative further added that there is also need for more refined planning and co-ordination amongst donors.

Regarding agriculture, participants agreed that agriculture and food security is a key priority for African governments, noting in this regard that recent commitments made reflected the importance that African leaders have attached to the agriculture sector. Participants also highlighted specific developments such as the alignment of national plans to CAADP priorities and objectives and also the identification of RECs plans of action. However, there was general consensus that productivity levels remain low which was partly a result of a low use of fertilizer amongst African farmers. Participants emphasized the need for a sharper focus on rural infrastructure and land policies and, in addition, reform of the international agenda.

Agenda item 3: African Action Plan

The Africa Action Plan was well received and it was noted that the presentation had clearly outlined Africa's development priorities. Some progress was noted, including project preparation capacity through the ICA, as well as advocacy and knowledge sharing. In addition, it was noted that progress that had been made in implementing the APRM mechanism. It was agreed that some of the NEPAD projects were vital for the continent (such as the Inga Dam). However, some donor community representatives felt strongly that there was a need to establish an appropriate framework for financing the AAP and that more efforts were needed in terms of designing relevant projects. A representative from OSAA emphasized the importance of peace and security and stressed that the work taking place will not be consolidated without the end of conflict. It was also brought to participants' attention that the UN and AU have launched a 10-year capacity building programme and that the APF should devise ways to support these efforts.

Agenda item 4: Energy Poverty

The World Bank presented an action plan for energy access in Africa. There are five main points 1) increase energy coverage for households and enterprises; 2) enhance energy generation; 3) provide energy services to key facilities (schools and clinics); 4) equip unconnected households with modern lighting; and 5) push for cleaner cooking and heating techniques. In the discussions that followed, it was agreed that improved energy access should be increased to reduce poverty and alleviate climate change. The UK representative underscored that budget support and sector-wide approaches are good instruments of support for the energy sector and a Netherlands representative suggested that it would be useful to develop an indicator to show the number of people with access to energy. Finally, the APF was asked to address the negative impact of rising oil prices on low-income countries.

Agenda item 5: Infectious Diseases

Under this agenda item the discussion centered mainly on the importance of strengthening health systems given a general consensus that integrated health systems should underpin all medical interventions. Participants also raised the issue of the role of sub-regional institutions in the delivery of health services and some emphasised that there should be a greater role for African specialized institutions and health ministers in setting the agenda for health reform. A representative from SADC also mentioned that the delineation between HIV/AIDS/TB and Malaria is not clear. It was stressed that TB and malaria are also outcomes of HIV and that monitoring and information is paramount to reduce the number of infections and to enhance the lifetime of those living with HIV. The linkages between HIV, gender, poverty and nutrition was also highlighted, as well as the need to ensure that financing reaches women. Participants were informed about the OECD Global Forum for Development, which is looking into issues such as the scaling-up of global funds in health.

Agenda item 6: Market Access

During the discussions on market access there was a general consensus that rules of origin need to be simplified and harmonized and that much more progress is needed on the Aid For Trade agenda and the Doha Round negotiations. Participants also stressed the importance of infrastructure (particularly rural infrastructure) and road construction to enhance domestic trade between African countries and regions and the need to bring together public and private partners (through initiatives such as the COMESA Infrastructure Fund) in support of infrastructural development. A representative of the OECD informed the participants that the General Council of the WTO had recently agreed that the Aid For Trade initiative should be separated from the integrated trade framework and also operationalised. To this end, the OECD is establishing a Task Force on Aid For Trade and is also tracking performance of commitments. A representative from the EU further noted, however, that market access is not a sufficient condition to improve trade and reduce poverty and that these initiatives must be complimented by South-South trade, supply side investments and domestic reforms. Finally, a NEPAD representative stressed the importance of the rationalization of the RECs, supply-side constraints and the elimination of protectionism.

