



MADAGASCAR



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Panel discussion on "Working together to promote integrated rural development in developing countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries"

Statement by

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Please check against delivery

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Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here with you today to represent my country, Madagascar, and bring you the best wishes of our President, Marc Ravalomanana, and the Prime Minister, Jacques Sylla, who himself had hoped to join us.

Today, over 80 percent of Madagascar's 16 million people reside in rural areas and are dependent on agriculture, livestock and fishing. A large majority lives below the poverty line and are struggling to secure adequate household food supplies and generate income to improve their lives. Our President is committed to democratic reforms, free-markets, reduced corruption and poverty alleviation.

Madagascar has joined the world in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The Government in particular is striving to meet the goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015. Our National Strategy for Poverty Reduction gives high priorities to rural development, education, health and infrastructures. A Rural Development National Policy has been devised.

For necessary linkages and stronger results, my Government, and especially the Ministry of Agriculture, is committed to creating fruitful alliances and partnerships.

We were therefore pleased when, last July, the Economic and Social Council adopted a Ministerial Declaration which encourages alliances and partnerships among all stakeholders for the advancement of rural development. This led to the creation of the United Nations Public-Private Alliance for Rural Development, for which Madagascar is the pilot country. The UN Alliance is part of a growing family of efforts, within and outside the UN system, that emphasize the positive role business can play in development.

Mr. Chairman,

The mission of the UN Alliance is to identify, highlight and promote replication of successful business policies and practices that are both profitable and promote social and economic advancement of poor people in rural areas. Results of this "win-win" approach will be brought to the attention of the international community through ECOSOC.

Allow me to talk with you about the involvement of my country with this UN initiative and to enlist your ideas and involvement in the issues at hand.

Since the presentation of the UN Alliance concept in Madagascar, it has raised a lot of support and hope from the highest political and business levels in the country. During an extended mission led by our Ambassador to the U.N, we took the initiative to create a sister organization, called "Alliance-Madagascar," thereby putting ECOSOC policy into action.

A decree has been signed by the Prime Minister and published by the Government to establish Alliance-Madagascar as a public interest non-profit organization. This decision confirms again that rural development is one of the top priorities of the Government.

A General Assembly of the Alliance-Madagascar is established under the supervision of the Prime Minister, with participation from the public sector, private sector, NGO and financial and technical support communities.

A Management Committee is functioning, with membership from the main groups of stakeholders. All are Madagascar nationals with the exception of the United Nations Resident Coordinator/UNDP Representative. I myself am very actively involved in this. Two local managers have been hired, from public and private sector backgrounds.

The match making and catalytic work of the UN Alliance and of Alliance-Madagascar especially relates to opportunities identified in the business community and the activities of UN system agencies.

So far, the following efforts have been conducted or are underway:

- Promoting and facilitating bankable projects from my Ministry and FAO;
- Arrangement for Land O'Lakes Inc. to assist the Government in preparing a market-driven Master Plan for Rural Development;
- Collaboration with the Madagascar Professional Association of Mutual Credit Institutions to expand rural credit;
- Promotion of small grants that balance environmental protection and income generation at village level;
- Assistance in marketing value-added products in the U.S. and elsewhere;
- Facilitating local and international investments, large and small, especially in the rural sector.

Mr. Chairman,

Yesterday, we had the opportunity to hold a Ministerial round-table breakfast hosted by the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa. The participants highlighted the critical role rural development plays for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Madagascar and other least developed countries.

The participants at that breakfast underscored the importance of the UN Public-Private Alliance, as a vehicle for concrete action. They offered ideas on issues ranging from expanding micro-finance services to reviving native silk production and sales, to protecting and marketing Madagascar's rich biodiversity, to establishing large-scale agribusiness for import substitution. Follow-up with the breakfast participants will be an important next step.

Mr. Chairman,

The UN Alliance aims to make useful contributions to new development efforts through strong and innovative efforts for economic and social development, in Madagascar and in additional countries.

Moreover, in preparations for the High-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly that will take place next year, ECOSOC will have a key role and could consider highlighting the critical role of rural development for the achievement of the MDGs.

It is encouraging to have as fellow panelists, this afternoon, senior representatives of UNDP, FAO, WFP, and IFAD. The UN Alliance is working with each of these organizations in Madagascar and needs to build even closer cooperation.

We will be happy to share with you information on how we hope you, your agencies, your corporations, your non-governmental organizations and others can become involved.

Mr. Chairman,

The U.N Alliance has been working for a year now, in New York, and in the pilot country on the basis of limited existing resources of the UN and the Madagascar Government. Results are being achieved. Now recognition is necessary, and resources for support. An ECOSOC resolution is needed, to help this UN initiative and to let other countries benefit as well.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.