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## Smart Partnerships can help Africa

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THE local Kololo people call it Mosi-oa-tunya or "The cloud that thunders". Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River, one of the wonders of the world, provided the backdrop for the Third Southern Africa International Dialogue (SAID '99).

Just as the Zambezi which rises in the uplands of Zambia, flows through Zimbabwe and Mozambique before flowing into the Indian Ocean 3,540 kilometres from its source, poverty and hunger in Southern Africa know no political and geographical boundaries.

Leaders in Southern Africa recognise this, hence, poverty was made a central issue in the promotion of Smart Partnerships during SAID '99.

In highlighting the situation, President of Mozambique Joaquim Chissano said that for those who belong or live in Southern Africa - a region rich in human and natural resources, with an unspoiled environment - poverty remained one of the overwhelming concerns.

This, he said, meant that practical steps had to be found to bring change and uplift the peoples' standard of living.

At the dialogue, Smart Partnership was seen as a way to empower people.

According to Uganda's President Y. Museveni, "You cannot empower the region unless you empower individuals in the region", adding that it is also important to "empower each country in the region".

But how should this be done?

Southern African leaders and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who attended SAID '99, all agreed that economic empowerment was a means for "The Way Forward".

Development and progress, at the local, national and regional levels would pull people out of poverty.

To help them, Malaysia's experience and policies were cited as examples.

The participants were told how people were "empowered" to benefit from government policies and face the challenges of globalisation.

Dr Mahathir used the opportunity he had at the dialogue to outline Malaysia's economic policies and to explain the New Economic Policy, privatisation, Malaysia Inc and the development plans which have propelled the country's economic growth and stability for almost three decades.

He said these were only recently interrupted by the hedge funds and currency speculators, precipitating the Asian crisis and unwinding many of the gains.

Even so, Malaysia's unorthodox policies which have worked - even as the country was condemned by many in the developed countries, the US, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank - go to show that a national "Smart Partnership" can prove beneficial even in a short time.

But, he pointed out, there must be a strong government and political commitment to undertake and implement policies that may initially be unpopular.

In Southern Africa there are numerous possibilities for Smart Partnerships.

Sharing and "prospering thy neighbour" had to be seen in the context of a shared regional vision and prosperity. Various sectors of society - labour, media and the public and private sectors - had to be involved as partners.

Tourism was cited as one example where the concept could be successfully applied. While Africa is known worldwide for its wildlife, it nevertheless

attracts just one per cent of the world tourist trade.

The lack of infrastructure, managerial expertise and communications are among reasons cited for this.

Victoria Falls, one of the famous natural wonders of the world could and should be promoted as a tourist destination. It was proposed that both Zambia and Zimbabwe could promote Victoria Falls by jointly developing the necessary infrastructure.

It would be pointless to build two airports just across their geographical borders, for example, when one would be more economical and cost effective.

The promotion of Victoria Falls could also be used as a launch pad to promote other tourist attractions of the two countries, including safaris and wild game. It will be a "win-win" partnership for the two countries and their neighbours.

To promote regional tourism and travel will require air travel which in turn calls for aircraft maintenance. If every country in Southern Africa insisted on setting up an aircraft maintenance facility, there will not be enough aircraft to maintain to make it cost effective.

The smart thing to do would be to look at setting up joint facilities.

Negative publicity and constant reports of turmoil and misreporting on diseases such as AIDS have also kept visitors and tourists away - a point brought up by Dr Mahathir who added that the negative publicity needed to be countered.

Jerry Rawlings, President of Ghana, also stressed that reports of turmoil have driven capital away in addition to keeping away tourists.

Undoubtedly, tourism is not the only sector which lends itself to regional Smart Partnerships.

Dr Sam Nujoma of Namibia pointed out that telecommunications, water, roads, trade and Spatial Economic Development Corridors (Coast to Coast, Maputo, Walvis Bay, Lobito, Ndola Corridor) are being implemented on a regional basis.

The challenge before the Southern African leaders is to ensure that the implementation of specific projects and programmes benefit all. Commitment is needed and, as one participant said, it is time to "walk the talk".

South Africa, the most "prosperous" among the members with a gross national product of US\$136.7 billion (R519 billion) in 1997 - or 73.7 per cent of the 14 SADC members - is viewed as an important partner if the Smart Partnership concept is to work in Southern Africa.

South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki said there is still a continuing challenge to determine how the public and private sectors can interact.

But as Dr Mahathir told the participants, there is a need to be patient to achieve a win-win situation. Countries in the region must share their expertise and resources as well as the benefits.

It is also important to select the right partner or else the Ali Baba syndrome will prevail. If any partner thinks that it is "already smart" and does not need the "partnership" the concept will also not work.

Anton Robert from South Africa summed it up best. Probably the oldest participant at the dialogue, he said of Smart Partnerships: "It can be done. It will be done. Let's stand together."

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