

## **Ensuing Long and Medium Terms Plans are realistic, if they're to be of any use**

The preference expressed lately by the Minister for National Planning and the Governor of SHP for the 20 year Strategic Development Plan (SDP) over the Vision 2050 is understandable considering the Minister initiated the SDP process after Planning was remiss in contributing to the planning framework sought by the National Planning Committee.

The Vision 2050 is a vision, so cannot be too specific; the time horizon is too long. At least it was, however, the result of extensive consultation. The SDP however, also extends over a long period, yet tries to put in considerable detail as the basis of the country's development. Unfortunately, much of the content is extremely unrealistic or recommends strategies which the professionals in various spheres consider wholly unsuitable. This was inevitable, because it was undertaken basically by a group of four who had little or no contact with respective line agencies, professionals or the wider community. Indeed such interaction with other agencies and professionals seemed to be strongly shunned. Hence a document has been produced which can only be described as 'cloud cuckoo land', and difficult to implement with so little sense of ownership of its contents by the implementing agencies or wider community. For example, with coffee having shown no production increase over the past 30 years, on what basis will coffee output increase 8-fold in the next 20 years, or six-fold for cocoa or similar leaps for other crops? Has the accessible land area grown substantially, or productivity, or our long forgotten roads all been revitalised massively.

Of course we all want improvements, but they must be based upon an understanding of the potential and constraints and a realistic programme to address them; likewise for health, HIV/AIDS etc... A unifying and practical longer term strategy can be useful, but unrealistic plans are simply unhelpful; they're like the old 5 year plans from China and the USSR, which specified unrealistic rice or other crop increases and merely resulted in false statistics, as no-one wanted to be seen failing to achieve their set targets. A bit more honesty is required, including by officials and Ministers who know how deeply flawed this document is; it's time to stop kowtowing and stand up and state the facts, or the country and its leadership will be lost in their own make-belief, or someone's!

We've also still not seen the outcome of the review of the last 5 years Medium Term Development Strategy (which might have formed a useful basis for a future medium or longer term strategy or plan). The top priority in the MTDS 2005-10 was extending opportunities into the rural areas, notably by restoring and maintaining roads, and yet in 2010 only K30 million has been provided for the country's entire national highways (excluding NRA and projects), most of which was instantly used for (unbudgeted) emergency repairs. If we cannot fund the priorities from the last five years, what prospect for these grandiose new long term plans? Let's now make them realistic and then have something solid as a basis for annual Budget allocations and sector plans; but this also requires that we effectively monitor expenditure (including at the local level) and restore reliable data bases and statistics, to help determine needs and priorities (notably with NSO, respective line agencies, like Transport – including of course the overdue and overlooked National Census).

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