



“Turning Possibilities into Realities”

The Year of Togetherness....

Newsletter No. 2 of 2009 by TESS in accordance to Article 7 Section 3 of its Constitution.

Wake up call No. 4



La nuit port conseilles

Kot Man-Ya Garden
Belle de Nuit @ 16.00hrs

CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

GIVING DESERVING CONSIDERATION TO THE PRIME IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY: THROUGH LUNGOS – THE NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOS)

Enhancement of the effective Role of Civil Society as a tool for Nation Building in the New Millennium

Sharing of Ideas

- 1.0 It will be recalled that in November 2008 LUNGOS issued a communiqué entitled: Civil Society, NGO Response, Solidarity, Engagement and Participation in the 2008 Economic Reform Programme initiated by the Government of the Republic of Seychelles.
- 1.1 The communiqué in question was issued in line with the recommendations made by the meeting organised by LUNGOS on 24th November 2008 at Exiles Club which brought together 30 Committee Members, chief executives, and the many other players concerned.
- 1.2 A set of constructive contributions and recommendations were made for the way forward for LUNGOS, and Civil Society organisations to identify areas of engagements, participation and entry points within the Economic Reform Programme.
- 2.0
- 2.1 Pursuant to that it will further be recalled that in early December 2008, LUNGOS and Civil Society had the honour and the privilege to have a fruitful meeting with Mr Danny Faure, the Minister for Finance, which resulted into a budget support of SR 700,000 by the Seychelles Government, a small gesture which was most appreciated by one and all concerned.
- 2.2 Furthermore during our discussion, various concrete proposals were made by the participants present on the way forward for appropriate action by LUNGOS and the “powers that be” working in close collaboration with Civil Society organisations.
- 2.3 That meeting saw the need for LUNGOS to; quote: - “collate a more detailed portfolio of all the priority key situations that NGOs need to tackle in close collaboration and intervention with Government within a priority period of 3-6 months” - unquote. Three months have already passed and these situations which were viewed as “causing obstacles, barriers, and/or hindrance to growth” and “which needs to be addressed as a top priority, especially during the phases of the Economic Reform Programme” seems to have now been placed on the back burner for TESS is to date unaware of any tangible follow-up action.
- 2.4 At the same time we read in the news media that both the Chairperson and the Chief Executive Officer of LUNGOS are fully engaged with the creation of a “New Civil Society organisation” which in itself seems to have now taken priority over other activities.
- 2.5 On the other hand, it is at this point to be recognised that two prominent fellow NGO organisations namely the Seychelles Hotel and Tourism Association (SHTA) and the

Seychelles Chamber of Commerce and Industries (SCCI) have taken the lead and have recently joined in partnership with the Government through STB and the Ministry of Finance to promote the Seychelles Tourism Product abroad, imperative and necessary, at this point in time of our history as a Small Island Developing State.

2.6 While TESS commends them for that long overdue Bold Initiative, whereby action could now “speak louder than words”, TESS also feels that other related NGOs could also be invited to join in the fray, in making this initiative more encompassing in addressing the important issue of direct Community benefits. How should such a proposal be treated, is left to be considered by one and all interested and concerned.

2.7 But where do we start? That is the question...which is now preoccupying TESS.

For one: No ‘compte rendu’ of our Meeting with Mr Faure has to date been issued by LUNGOS...that could have served as a way forward.

For two: TESS is unaware of what is being done by LUNGOS in this direction, whereby the Society is unable to contribute further as should be, for we do have a duty and a commitment to do so for the benefit of the Reform Programme.

For three: TESS like others is unaware, and has no idea as to what the SR 700,000 budget support allocation will entail.

For five: After one year in operation, TESS now feels that there is a great lack of dialogue, transparency, information sharing for capacity building between LUNGOS and Civil Society organisations (both individually and collectively) for the further development of appropriate strategies, so as to effectively address issues pertaining to the Economic Reform Programme as Civil Society organisations.

For six: Furthermore TESS feels that Civil Society Organisations are also not collaborating enough as a Team but instead are acting on an individual basis, whereby the right hand is totally unaware of what the left hand is doing.

As a result of the above indicators and the many other related factors TESS is of the view that Civil Society organisations simply cannot move ahead in Unison in the fulfilment of their individual mission for lack of moral support, let alone financial, both internally and/or externally for the achievement of a common goal. Furthermore, correct me if I am wrong, TESS is of the view that there is a great lack of transparency between LUNGOS and the Civil Society organisations it represents.

As a consequence, the majority of Civil Society Organisations have been reduced to the like of St. Martin de Porres, always with a begging bowl, knocking on doors in vain for support. While St. Martin’s cause must be considered as noble, TESS is of the view that this mentality within ourselves needs review for unless we take appropriate action now, we will remain at the receiving end, at the mercy of “conditional love”... and the weakness of NGOs could end up being worse off than before the Economic Reform Programme started.

3.0 The important question of Transparency and Accountability

3.1 Although TESS is relatively New in the Fray, i.e. only one year old, we are of the view that we should all be more transparent in the way we operate for Civil Society as a whole to become that necessary strong Third Pillar for Nation Building...that we consider ourselves to be, that we talk about with a mouthful while that glass remains three quarters empty...

- 3.2 Since its formation TESS has and continues to try and break that gridlock by being wide open about its activities, objectives, plans and targets, imperative for its sustainable future. We feel that the only way forward for success is for all of us to follow suit to cooperate, exchange views, be transparent and provide support to each other. In short we need to be much more interactive than we are now.
- 3.3 In so doing our ability to manoeuvre would be further enhanced and the resulting visibility would help attract possible contributors/supporters to come forward and to start acting in good faith for the benefit of all.
- 3.4 Civil Society hold talks with international groups
Nation Article of Monday 23 February 2009

TESS has noted with great pleasure and much satisfaction the various diplomatic endeavours being undertaken by LUNGOS with groups and individuals from international development organisations.

We have noted that the following pertinent issues were discussed:-

- a) "Views of the current local situations, especially following the initial phases of the Economic Reform Programme".
- b) With the Commonwealth Foundation: exploration of various routes of co-operation with Civil Society in Seychelles.
- c) With the European Union: "Capacity development projects for non-state groups being carried out under the 9th European Development Fund".
"The Economic Reform Programme and Civil Societies Role in the Programme to Accountability and Good Governance with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)"
"and discussion of the reform Programme and the impact it has been having on the Community as a whole from the perspective of NGO's that have close relationship with the grassroots".

Recently we again read in the News that LUNGOS has met and discussed Civil Society issues with the President of the Republic.

Why do we Civil Society Organisations have always to read in the public press about the activities of the LUNGOS, that is the question?

For while those initiatives are well and good, TESS is of the view that LUNGOS should keep Civil Society informed of such endeavours both before and after they occur, for our contribution, our views, our inputs, for we are the ones on the field, in direct contact with the community members being affected the most and who are more often than not the less fortunate and most vulnerable. Follow-up action is the key here, and unless it is so with concrete results, such moves could be considered as nothing else but photo-ops.

4.0 Tess Strategic Plan for 2008 -2013

- 4.1 Pursuant to the release of its draft Strategic Plan for 2008 -2013, TESS has received feedbacks and words of support and encouragement for its endeavours from various prominent sources/players and calls for collaboration have also been accompanied. One of such came from Captain David Savy of Air Seychelles, who is also a prominent Member of STB.

4.2 In his response he said and I quote: “once again, I applaud you and your team in doing this as it is the future of diversification in our tourism industry” unquote.
He also took the opportunity to suggest the creation of Creole homes in each district, the like of Kot Man-Ya where our visitors can visit the gardens and enjoy refreshments and a Creole meal.
Today TESS wishes to express its sincere thanks to Mr Savy for his continued support and to assure him of our continued close collaboration in the future. We have no doubt that he will be a strong advocate of TESS on the STB and the many other tourism related endeavours being undertaken by him and Air Seychelles. He is indeed a “Goodwill Ambassador” for TESS and we appreciate very much.

5.0 For the sustainability of Seychelles Tourism, comments from Mr Alain St Ange, Vice-Chairman for Marketing at STB.

While Mr Alain St Ange made no direct mention of direct “Community benefits” in his various interventions pertaining to his new role as head of STB Marketing wing, it was heartening to note that he had the following to say and I quote:-

“Immediate consideration for the country will be to promote a range of new sites and new attractions to ensure that our culture and natural treasures are still used to promote our country”.

We are confident that this can be done, and know that it will have to be done for Seychelles to continue to consolidate its tourism industry but how sad is this for Seychelles? Time will tell....?” unquote.

In line with what Mr St Ange had to say it will at this point be recalled that in 2008 Dr. Anna Spenceley of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) effected a mission to identify Ecotourism potentials of the Anse Royale district. It will now be recalled the implementation of Pilot Projects as called for by SETS 21...which was conceived eight years ago and has been placed on the back burner until 2008 when I took over the chairmanship of the Anse Royale Ecotourism Committee (TAREK)...during that period direct Community Benefits from the Tourism Industry have been minimal to say the least.

A report and a detail Strategic Plan was produced by Dr Anna Spenceley and TESS was subsequently asked to form part of the steering committee, the work of which should have started as of 1st January 2009 under the auspices of STB. To date no action has been taken by STB in this direction and we do hope that something is done soon for we have made a commitment to the Anse Royale Community and the UNWTO and they are demanding action/results.

6.0 Activities undertaken by TESS since the release of its Strategic Plan in January 2009

Even without the support of the powers that be, it's a relatively short time frame, TESS in good faith has submitted two projects under the Recomap Financing Mechanism, they are: Anse Royale Coastal Protection Project and Tess Ecotourism Project in Anse Royale.

7.0 Furthermore we have now requested the Ministry of Environment to allocate the Sweet Escot Wetlands to TESS, to amongst others, rehabilitate the wetlands, eradicate invasive species, develop a nature trail, set up a garden centre, a cafeteria and for mass production of rare exotic flowering plants, on the adjacent agricultural land that would be subsequently propagated in

the whole of Seychelles to satisfy the local market and for export to the gulf countries so as to earn much needed foreign exchange for the country.

- 8.0 TESS has also submitted a project through the American Embassy for assistance for its own Up-scaling and Production of Promotional Materials to make known to the wider public its aims and objectives for wider stakeholder involvements. This is imperative for the organisation as we are not of the view that if we are to bring about real community benefits we can do so by operating on our own. We need to bring more players on board for us to have much wider reaching impacts.
- 9.0 TESS has submitted to LUNGOS for 25,000 rupees... a project to implement an Advocacy Program on Community-based Ecotourism, for we are of the opinion that unknowing to many community players they already have the basic requirements for what we call successful 'eco-ventures' that may only need minimal up-scaling for them to become fully fledged eco-attractions. TESS is hoping that through experience sharing of the Kot Man-Ya establishment process, we will motivate more 'community' based on-goings to launch themselves in turning their 'products' into viable community tourism products.
- 10.0 TESS now has its own blog pending the setting up of a website which will be in operational in during the 1st half of 2009. The blog which is updated on a weekly basis can be access at <http://ecotourismseychelles.blogspot.com/>
- 11.0 UNDP Small Grants Program ... we were indeed much impressed to have the chance to meet with Mr. Ganapin late in 2008 to discuss the Small Grants Program whereby Civil Society Organisations were promised a new funding initiative/mechanism that was going to be made available early in 2009. With new timing of the program implementation in Seychelles, from what we gathered there had been several hurdles to overcome in the past, we were promised that by February 2009 calls for proposals would have been issued. February 2009 has now left us and we are still very much unaware as where UNDP is with the funding mechanism. We demand an update as the community, which will be at the receiving ends of these funds are eagerly awaiting to see "ACTIONS" on the ground.
- 12.0 TESS has released a brochure on the list of activities that we have started to undertake to build a STRONG STRUCTURE and to provide support to the committee in need.

In view of the Mr St Ange's statement, we do hope that with its new structure in place, STB will now take the cause of the community more seriously. Like he said, it is indeed a real shame that after nine years of Vision 21 very little attention has been given on the Promotion and Development of Community Based Tourism products as called for by chapter 4 of the Vision.

Conclusion

State of the Nation Address "Nobody has the Monopoly on ideas"

In his State of the Nation Address of Thursday 26th February 2009, President James Alix Michel spared no effort in stressing over and over and again and I quote: "Let us not wait for tomorrow to share ideas. Nobody has the monopoly on ideas. Now that we are going through difficult times, I think all our country's leaders should engage in increased consultation with the people. It is important during these difficult times to exchange ideas and engage ourselves in extensive discussion on what we can do better to overcome the difficulties we are now facing. What can we do to better help each Seychellois family in spite of constraints?" unquote.

It is indeed in this vein that TESS has decided to issue this press release in enabling us to effect an in depth analysis of the Role of Civil Society as a necessary tool for Nation Building... and to act swiftly and effectively. We simply cannot wait for tomorrow...!

And yes, together “What can we do (both individually and collectively) as Civil Society to better help each Seychellois family, in spite of the constraints?

That is the question?...

And the door is now wide open for ideas on the Role of Civil Society Organisations to FLOW smoothly and freely... without fear or favour... for success sooner rather than later.

Have a productive weekend full of love and happiness.

Love you all.

MARC MRM MARENGO
AMBASSADOR
SECRETARY GENERAL OF TESS