

Hon. Simataa

GENERAL BUDGET DEBATE

General

Hon. Speaker, Hon. Members, it is yet that time of the year when we as representatives of the Namibian people, are engaged in critical debate on the budget – the financial instrument at our disposal to address our nation's often competing needs. Prepared against the backdrop of a global economy still reeling from one of the worst financial crisis to beset the world, both the Minister of Finance and the Director General of the National Planning Commission and their able teams, deserve to be commended for having crafted a budget that attempts to respond to our people's needs.

Human Capital Development

Hon. Speaker, Hon. Members increased allocation to human capital development is welcomed and appreciated. Yes, as we all know, our nation's competitiveness is severely constrained by the lack of human resources. Yet while acknowledging the increased investment in this area, judicious utilisation of the financial resources provided, is likely to be constrained by the continuous lack of a comprehensive human resources development plan (HRDP) according to which higher education and training institutions, must flex their academic offerings. I am therefore tempted to re-iterate the plea I made last year for the relevant institution to expedite the development of such a plan. Procrastinating on such an important matter will certainly be at the peril of our nation.

In the absence of a national HRDP, I just wonder how we can do justice to the generous allocation made to human capital development. I trust that I am not over-flagging this important issue.

Capacity Development – Regional Councils

The allocation made in the budget to develop the capacity of Regional Councils, is applauded. It is in the regions where poverty levels are pronounced. It is indeed in the regions where effective implementation of the planned projects/programs has the potential to yield the greatest impact on the lives and livelihood of our people. Yes, as a government that derives its mandate to govern from people a majority of whom are located in the regions, we have an obligation to channel our energies in building conducive environments that will facilitate the implementation of planned projects and programs in all the thirteen regions. It is only through effective capacity development at regional level that decentralisation will be meaningful.

Employment Creation

Hon. Speaker, Hon. Members, government deserve to be commended for having allocated substantial financial resources to the Targeted Intervention Program for Employment and Economic Growth (TIPEEG). This program bears testimony to our government's resolve to address the seemingly pervasive unemployment as well as rejuvenate the growth of our economy. I have no doubt that should targeted sectors vigorously implement planned projects, this program has potential to create the much needed jobs.

However, due care should be taken to ensure that we create a good mix of both short and long term jobs to avoid unemployment relapses.

Agricultural Production and Manufacturing

Support provided to subsistence farmers in form of subsidised seeds and ploughing services need to be sustained, perhaps increased. Subsistence farmers should be encouraged to embrace the use of fertilisers (also subsidised). This will boost agricultural production which will lead to improved food security. However, as a country we need to redouble our efforts to encourage Namibian businesses and individuals alike to source their supplies from local producers. At the moment production of agricultural commodities even expansion of our manufacturing base, is severely hampered by a very unsupportive local market. The tendencies we have as Namibians to prefer foreign produced products over those that are locally produced, does not encourage local production and as matter of fact need to be addressed. As a sovereign nation, we cannot rely on the goodwill of other countries to produce even the most basic commodities we need. We must aspire for self-reliance.

Hon. Speaker, Hon. Members, I am relieved to note that we are now making serious efforts to harvest excess flood waters in flood prone north and north eastern parts of our country. Harvesting flood waters will not only minimise flooding but has potential to increase agricultural production in instances where irrigation is embraced.

On this note, I support the budget as presented.