

Partner of the future

Green initiatives, economic openness, and sub-regional development: The President of the Republic of Congo presents what is at stake

Editor's note: The President of the Republic of Congo talked with InFocus on the country's development strategy.

Q: Mr President, how is the Congolese economy evolving with regards to the global turmoil still affecting developed countries?

A: The economic turmoil that has deeply affected most of the Northern and Southern economies has created financial and budgetary uncertainties. However, this belongs to the past for us.

Congo was hit badly by the rise in food prices and the price drop regarding our main export products. To rectify the situation, we undertook a series of initiatives that enabled us to reduce the consequences of the inflation. The activity increase in several sectors of our economy shows that tremendous efforts have been made. According to IMF forecasts, Congo should see a 7.5 percent growth in 2012, following an 8 percent growth in 2011. However, our own analysis of today's conjuncture points toward a 10 percent growth in GDP.

We hope our ongoing modernization and industrialization projects will, among other things, help fill the gap in terms of basic infrastructure and will contribute to supporting various crucial and growing sectors, such as the agro-industrial one.

tries Initiative. The consequence of this has been the cancellation of a large part of our external debt that constituted a bottleneck to the development of our economy.

However, the biggest weakness of our economy, as we know it, is the fact it relies essentially on oil. This resource represents 90 percent of the country's exports and 85 percent of the national revenues.

Prudence recommends not putting all our eggs in the same basket – in this case, oil – and diversifying our economy, particularly in the crucial sectors, such as agriculture, mining, and services, to name a few.

To support this idea, we have launched the Project to Support the Diversification of the Congolese Economy, also known as PADE, which aims to promote private sector growth and encourage investment in the sectors not related to oil.

During the second half of 2012, we will inaugurate 16 new industries currently under construction. We plan to build cement industries in the cities of Pointe Noire, Dolisie, Madingou and Mindouli, and ceramic and aluminum industries in Makoua and Brazzaville respectively. We also plan to intensify the massive construction works related to the exploitation of iron ore deposits in Zanaga.

Several years ago, Congo adopted

Q: Is this the realization of your society program?

A: The "Path of the Future" program aims to improve the living conditions of our citizens who continue to trust our work and has been massively embraced by our people. With the priorities visible to all, we are committed to making this a reality.

Q: How do you expect to realize the two main axes of this program: the modernization and industrialization of the country?

A: Industrialization is the cross-sectorial activity that will benefit all the domains of our economy. This is precisely why it is the first pillar of the "Path of the Future" program. It is the dawn of industrialization but it represents many hopes for sustainable growth capable of supporting the country's development.

Next to the reinforcement of existing activities, like the cement and wood industries, other major projects have been envisaged with the help of our partners. This includes promotion of fishing industrial products from the lower zone of Alima; the development of palm oil and rubber industries in Sangha, la Cuvette, the western Cuvette, Lekoumou and Kouilou; the implementation of an agro-industrial complex of 12,000 hectares dedicated to cassava production and the construction of



PHOTO BY XINHUA

Chinese President Hu Jintao and Republic of Congo President Denis Sassou N'Guesso in Shanghai, April 29, 2010.

es, airports, railways, waterways and electricity network are being built or renovated.

When it comes to the road network, the RN1, linking Pointe Noire on the coast to Brazzaville, inland, illustrates our efforts well. It shows how determined we are to become a regional hub that will actively participate in sub-regional integration.

Massive investment has been allocated to these sub-regional roads; many are either under construction, like the one linking Gabon's border to Congo (Okoyo-Lekety road) or about to start works, like the one connecting Cameroon to Congo (the Ketta-Sangmelima road).

Q: How will you preserve the environment while developing the economy?

A: It is imperative we tap our resources responsibly, just enough to answer our basic needs, to let it regenerate. For this reason, we have identified protected or controlled zones within the inhabited areas. Deposits taken must be supported by economic initiatives that benefit the population.

We have also launched a reforestation program that will replant

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PRESIDENT OF CONGO

trees on 1 million hectares over the next 10 years. Congo hosts 23 million hectares of primary forests.

The goal is to add value to 10 million hectares of savannah through reforestation and thus spread our national forestry area, and contribute to the international efforts to fight against global warming.

Q: Do you think China brings real value to Congo's development?

A: Congo and China have maintained a historical friendship for more than 50 years now. It is a friendly, supportive, cooperative relationship with mutual benefits. China's presence here can be seen through its many constructions and achievements.

It is an exemplary partnership, fruitful and dynamic.

Q: Beyond all these efforts, are there reasons to believe in the country's emergence when it has shown some weaknesses related to the drama of the March 4?

A: Before I answer your question, I would like to convey my utmost gratitude on my behalf and on behalf of the Congolese people, to all the governments and people around the world, to all the charities, associations, sub-regional, regional and international institutions, as well as all the women and men for the wonderful surge of solidarity shown during and after this drama.

As for your question, history teaches us that turmoil, dramas, and disasters often herald the gestation of human genius.

Indeed, the days following these most painful and tragic moments often inspire more fervor, more awareness, a more fertile imagination, and as a consequence paves the way to progress.

I can assure you the Congolese people will be no exception. They will find the resources needed for this inevitable new start. We are standing and ready to face the future.

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Q: Can we glean from this that Congo's economic outlook is good?

A: Absolutely. The markers are extremely positive. The Republic of Congo has shown very promising macroeconomic perspectives for the past two years and even for 2012. The growth rate should naturally reach the 10 percent mark, thanks to the start of production of new industries in the industrial zone of Brazzaville, the increasing FDI and the growth in domestic demand.

This is the result of many years of effort. We have launched structural reforms at all levels and proceeded to streamline our public finances. Efforts have also been made by our people. This synergy has made possible the country's access, in 2010, to the Heavily Indebted Poor Coun-

a mining code that favors foreign and national investors. Prospects are very promising in that sector.

Q: How will the creation of special economic zones create additional value to these efforts?

A: We want to encourage sustainable growth. This is the reason behind the installation of four special economic zones: in Pointe Noire, Brazzaville, Ollombo-Oyo and Ouesso.

Things are moving steadily with regards to these sites.

The creation of agricultural villages is another initiative that, once started, will reinforce Congo's economic growth. Important measures have been invested in this sector as our country enjoys enormous agro-pastoral potential.

a flour processing factory, with a total production capacity of 33 tons of fermented and bread-making flours; and the implementation of an industrial complex on the shore of the Congo River, at Makoulou Trevot, that will specialize in the production of building materials, such as galvanized sheet metal, orange tubes, PVC pipes and other products.

Our ambition is to make Congo a transit hub for the sub-region as our geographic location which is one of our strongest assets.

It is important to underline the efforts we have made in recent years to develop the basic infrastructure that plays a crucial role in the country's development.

To realize this ambition, Congo has become a giant construction site where the roads, bridg-

Congo launches major reforestation program

Rural communities encouraged in sustainable development with small-scale industry

With more than two-thirds of Congo's landmass taken up by forest, lumber (timber) and plywood are Congo's biggest foreign exchange earners after oil. However, years of deforestation have taken their toll.

In November 2011, President Denis Sassou N'Guesso launched a major reforestation program, known as PRONAR, in a concerted effort to improve Congo's forest environment and soil quality. Financed by both the government and the private sector, the program will see the resurrection of more than a million hectares of forest over the next decade.

As well as contributing to the country's industrialization, the scheme will create more than 50,000 rural jobs.

Congo's woodlands account for a 10th of the forests in the Congo Basin, an area that has been described by the World Wildlife Fund as one of the most important wilderness areas left on Earth. Spanning 500 million acres of land and six countries, the Basin is larger than Alaska and houses one quarter of the world's tropical forests and the largest rainforest after the Amazon.

President N'Guesso, a passionate environmentalist, was delighted to have been selected by his African peers to represent the continent at the Rio +20 United Nations conference on sustainable development in June.

During an interview last year, he said: "Africa has always lived in harmony with nature and protect-

ing the environment is at the very heart of our concerns. Congo is a member of the African Committee for Climate Change, which is represented by chiefs of state under the Ethiopian patronage.

"The African Union summit (held in January 2012 in Addis Ababa) has given me the chance to harmonize the different positions expressed by the African states and ensure a fair and efficient participation to all the negotiations about the green economy and the international measures.

He was confident Congo's voice would be heard by the greatest amount of people at the Rio Summit.

The launch of the PRONAR program is essential for the country's sustainable development, the presi-

dent later stated.

"We want to increase our national forest territory, while also valuing the 10 million hectares of savannah. This initiative is part of our plan to develop carbon sequestration (the removal of carbon from the atmosphere.) The sustainable management of our forests and this reforestation program represent a significant contribution from our country to the global warming issue.

"More than a billion people depend on the forest to live," he added.

"It is an impressive figure and is an important one to remember. Our mission is to help those people in the protected zones use the natural resources in a sustainable and respectful way. We also have to develop breeding, agriculture, education and health services next to the safeguarding of the forest resources."

Around 1.2 billion XAF (Central African Francs), equivalent to

\$2.4 million, has been committed to the program and the president has called upon the financial support of public or private partners to help implement large-scale industrial plantations, as well as banks and sleeping partners, such as the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the

and associations, as well as local government officials, to organize the programs falling under their jurisdiction."

He concludes: "It is unique situation here in the heart of the Congo Basin. We have extraordinary flora, fauna and biodiversity."

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Central African Development Bank and the African Development Bank, to finance feasibility studies and projects submitted by government; and donations from bilateral or multilateral agreements.

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