

House of Lords

Wednesday 15th October 2003

Unstarred Questions:

African Development Strategies

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Lea of Crondall for initiating this debate. Its wording is carefully chosen because it does not imply that any particular organisations or countries are responsible. But, in asking Her Majesty's Government about progress, I think that supporters of the resolution are implying that the Government should be involved in Africa's development, especially in supporting initiatives led by African countries through the arrangements of NePAD.

Some of those initiatives are supported by governments, United Nations agencies and African and international non-governmental organisations. We should acknowledge that the Government, through DfID are looking into and supporting these contributions to development strategy and projects. I declare an interest as chairman of ACOPS.

I shall take this opportunity to report on positive developments taking place in Africa in the sphere of environmental improvement and sustainable development—an aspect highlighted by African leaders and our Prime Minister at the Johannesburg summit in 2002. During the debate in this Chamber on 21st May, I explained how NePAD's environment initiative is led by President Wade of Senegal. One of the eight elements of the initiative concerns the coastal and marine issues of vital concern to Africa. About 50 per cent of Africa's population and about 30 per cent of its economic activity is based in these areas.

However, their future sustainability is in doubt because of the many damaging influences caused by actions of the developed world. These need to be addressed urgently, starting with the rapacious fishing by ships from Europe and Asia, restrictive trade practices, emigration of experts and climate change effects. Those issues were highlighted by experts from Africa and the UK and by Ministers from Senegal, Kenya and the Seychelles at a meeting held in London in May. My noble friend Lord Evans spoke on behalf of the Government.

Several positive developments, however, were presented, such as the effective policing by some countries of these foreign fishing fleets, new measures to ensure that tourism is beneficial ecologically, economically and, as one might hope, culturally, the establishment of marine protected areas, and most importantly, the involvement of many African communities in genuine sustainable development projects.

The encouraging news this month is that the first NePAD operation has now been set up—the Coastal and Marine Co-ordinating Unit—under the auspices of the Minister for the environment in the Government of Kenya, Dr Kulundu. President Kibaki of Kenya has given his full support to this initiative, which will help to reverse the trend of marine environmental degradation and to help reduce poverty in these areas.

I look forward to hearing from my noble friend the Lord president of the Council on how sustainable development is an integral part of the Government's strategy for Africa.

Baroness Amos: I must answer two specific questions from the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Chesterton, on sustainable development. Our policy is to integrate environmental issues into broader support for government financial and planning systems in developing countries.