

By Abraham Machuor Lum

The Government of South Sudan has unveiled an ambitious three-year development strategy to help bring about the improvements to infrastructure, education, health and other sectors promised during the Independence Day celebration last July.

Finance, Trade and Industries Minister Mr Pur Changan Dabai told journalists recently that the multi-faceted plan was already being implemented by the new government and its development partners.

The three year plan is part of the Central Government's national blue print that is expected to rapidly usher in positive changes for its people.

Dabai said his ministry together with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has engaged consultants from Uganda and Kenya to help in the formulation and implementation of the plan. "To make the development plan successful, all the director generals in all ministries were requested to spell out all the urgent priorities in their respective ministries to be included in the development plan," he said.

He added that the new government was already undertaking various development projects to improve the livelihoods of its citizens across the country. "The government is constructing county headquarters, state ministry offices and working to improve security, all these just within a short time," said the minister.

For example, he explained that some 17 million US\$ has been allocated by the Sudan recovery fund to construct feeder roads that link villages to county headquarters. "The project consists of constructing a security road from Karich through Amokping of Lakes state to Panijar of Unity state, and another security road from Aluak-luak in Lakes state linking Akuocok through Unity state," said the minister. He added: "The clearances of these roads has already started and equipment is ready, waiting for the dry season so that construction can begin immediately.

According to the World Food Programme's (WFP) new Country Director, Chris Nikoi, the two roads, totaling 114 km, will connect the villages of Karich with Amokping and Aluak-luak with Akuocok, providing farmers with better access to markets in Rumbek East County in Lakes State. The project is being carried out in close cooperation with the Ministry for Roads and Bridges and local government authorities. WFP plans to build 500 km of feeder roads throughout South Sudan, said Chris Nikoi. "South Sudan has tremendous agricultural potential and yet only 4 percent of arable land is currently cultivated," he added.

Another project will involve the construction of water points (wells) in dry areas for local people and their livestock. This is expected to reduce conflicts over pasture and cattle rustling which are widespread.

Minister Dabai said the new Government has moved to shed the bad image of previous lopsided development strategies. "We are a different government. We do what we say and I urge the people of South Sudan to be patient and support us as we plan to deliver what we promised during the birth of our nation," he explained.

But, for many ordinary South Sudanese, still smarting from the aftermath of a long civil war, it is a wait and see scenario, as they patiently anticipate the benefits that independence might bring. Many of the villagers interviewed said they welcomed the government's initiatives but, would only believe it when the development plans are fully implemented.

Bol Mamur, 40, urged the state government to concentrate on the delivery of social services such as schools and health facilities as well as introducing new agricultural methods. "We, the citizens, will ensure the government is held fully accountable for its actions and that all the promises it made are fulfilled," he asserted. Bol acknowledged that opening up feeder roads will reduce the rampant insecurity and will ease service delivery which would improve the living standards of ordinary people.

His sentiments and skepticism are shared by many ordinary South Sudanese who spoke to *The People's Voice*.

Ms Elizabeth Poth Domic, the chair lady for Rumbek North Women's Association called upon the government and non-governmental organizations to support women in building the new nation.

She further requested that they provide adult education programmes, health facilities, and clean water by drilling boreholes, as well as providing agricultural tools and loans.

Despite the general perception that independence and freedom will eventually improve living standards in South Sudan, citizens understand that there are many challenges that their new country has to deal with, amongst them being: lack of a basic health care, poor infrastructure, insecurity, low literacy levels, and high levels of poverty.