

Outrage as Angola's poverty persists despite economic boom

The South Africa-Angola Investment Forum hosted this week in Johannesburg by the International Institute for Research (IIR) has showcased a two-faced Angola. While the political and business elite pockets most of the economic boom's benefits, over 60% of destitute and voiceless people live on the margins of society without job running water, electricity, adequate housing, sanitation and healthcare.



By Issa Sikiti da Silva: @sikitimedia 25 Aug 2011

SA companies advised

South African companies planning to invest in Angola have been advised not to worsen the corruptive behavior that has allegedly been running in the country's veins in the past 36 years.

"We still have a long way to go, as corruptive behaviour remains in force through the use of political influence, and the fact that successful economic activity remains a prerogative for companies owned by privileged persons, often strongly connected to those managing state institutions," Daniel Ntoni-Nzinga, senior lecturer at Methodist University of Angola, said.

"Investments must be people's needs-based and productivity-oriented, with an impact on the local job market rather than become an alibi for job import," he warned, as unhappiness and criticism mount about the China-Africa relationship which has seen thousands of not-so-skilled Chinese citizens swamping the continent and competing with locals over jobs.

A bizarre scenario

However, the most bizarre scenario remains the inability of Angola to turn its economic boom of the past decade into a much-needed social relief for its people. Fingers have often been pointed at the ruling MPLA and its cronies, who in the past have been blamed the war for bringing poverty and misery to the Angolan people. But critics believe the ruling party elite has been swindling huge amounts of oil and diamond revenues in the shadow of the war, while the majority of the population struggles to make ends meet.

Ntoni-Nzinga said: "The culture of survival, traditionally blamed on the cycle of civil wars, has made life easy for a few, while the majority struggled for survival."

Asked if he was not afraid of getting into trouble with the MPLA-led government, he told Bizcommunity.com, "What I say has been said in Angola, and I will continue saying it as long as I am not behind bars."

Angola, which has an appalling human rights record and lacks freedom of expression, hosted a SADC heads of states and governments summit last week in the capital city Luanda. Political commentator Moeletsi Mbeki has described SADC as a joke.

Scores of Angolan journalists have been arrested and indefinitely thrown in jail, and others killed by 'hitmen' for allegedly offending the government, and attempting to fuel uprisings, according to reports.

President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, in power since 1979, has made his intentions clear that he wants to run again at next year's presidential elections.

Changing lives

Like most of the African regimes who often talk about changing the lives of their people, the dos Santos government has done the same - undoubtedly following the footsteps of his predecessor, the late president Agostinho Neto. Neto, who most

the times said 'o mas importante e resolver os problemas do povo' (the most important priority is to solve the people's problems), died in 1979.

Ntoni-Nzinga said, "Priorities on investment are made in the name of 'resolving the problems of the people', but for the benefit of those in charge of the institutions that are managing the state."

He urged SA companies willing to invest in Angola to have a better understanding of their Angolan partners, and identify the right people and remain on alert, and go through this process with an open mind to avoid frustrations."

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