
Senegal and First Step: Infrastructure to Support Critical Agricultural Supply Chains

2013-03-29

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The Minister of Economy and Finance, Amadou Kane, acting on behalf of the Government of Senegal signed a Letter of Intent (LOI) yesterday with First Step Economic Opportunity Zone Inc. (First Step) to commence planning and fundraising for the development of a special economic zone in the Casamance region of Senegal. First Step is a subsidiary of World Hope International, a US non-profit organization.

World Hope International's CEO, Tom Armiger stated, "First Step is an innovative approach to alleviating rural poverty. A First Step zone is an island of infrastructure on which key agro-processors can establish and thereby help catalyze entire agricultural value chains, creating jobs, income and business opportunities."

In 2010, First Step developed a pilot special economic zone (SEZ) in Sierra Leone. This is currently the only US-owned and operated SEZ on the continent of Africa. Africa Felix Juice (AFJ), a fruit juice processing company, is First Step's anchor tenant in Sierra Leone. "Previously, fruit

crops in Sierra Leone like mango and cashew apple would largely rot because of their sheer abundance, short harvest periods, and perishability. Now, these fruits are being processed into concentrate and sold in the global market,” said Richard Schroeder, CEO of First Step.

The Economic Bureau at the Embassy of Senegal in Washington recognized the potential of First Step and found it tremendously valuable for Senegal.

Senegal President Macky Sall commented that First Step is a welcome innovation in how NGOs may support industrial and agricultural development. President Sall praised the vision of Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma for his personal role in helping to establish the First Step SEZ in Sierra Leone. “We look forward to seeing First Step replicated in Casamance. First Step will complement our economic development strategy in Casamance, a region that has much economic potential but is still in great need of more infrastructure to attract agro-processors. My government is committed to strengthen the economic fundamentals of Casamance, and First Step will play an important role in making that happen.”

Yesterday, United States President Barack Obama welcomed Senegal President Sall, Sierra Leone President Koroma, Malawi President Joyce Banda and Cape Verde Prime Minister José Maria Pereira Neves to the White House. The US has strong partnerships with these countries based on shared democratic values and shared interests. The five leaders discussed strengthening democratic institutions across sub-Saharan Africa, and building on Africa’s democratic progress to generate increased economic opportunities and expanded trade and investment. The visit of these leaders to the US underscores the strategic importance President Obama places on building partnerships and substantive engagement with sub-Saharan Africa. The LOI was signed at a Corporate Council on Africa banquet in honor of

the four African presidents.

The LOI was facilitated by WilmerHale, a US-based international law firm, which serves as pro bono counsel to First Step. WilmerHale facilitated First Step's prior agreements with the Government of Sierra Leone.

For more information visit www.worldhope.org or www.firststepEOZ.com.