

# 'Yogi has a clear vision on USD 1trn economy goal, connects UP to India's development plans

**W**orld Bank country director **Auguste Tano Kouame** is upbeat about the growth prospects of Uttar Pradesh. After a meeting with Chief Minister **Yogi Adityanath**, Kouame said the World Bank was looking forward to having a long-term association with UP. In an interview with **Rajiv Srivastava**, Kouame praised the CM for his vision about UP's growth trajectory. Excerpts:

## How was your first visit to UP as the country director of the World Bank?

■ It was excellent. I regret having waited for so long for my first visit to Uttar Pradesh. Technically, it is not my first visit to UP but I am visiting Lucknow for the first time. I have been to Agra and was in Varanasi a couple of weeks ago for the G20 development ministers' meeting. The visit went well. I will come back for deeper engagements with some of our partners. We did have very important meetings especially with the government counterpart, with the Chief Minister, the agriculture minister, the agriculture production commissioner (APC) and several additional chief secretaries. We talked about specific projects that we are working on.

## How was your meeting with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath?

■ I was very pleased to hear the CM talk about various projects on which we are working. He was very articulate, eloquent and knowledgeable about the projects. He is very committed and passionate about promoting education. He said if you want to create a qualitative education system in future, you need to invest now. Investing means borrowing from various institutions, including the World Bank, to improve the quality of education so that children can stay in school and teachers can teach, so that we can build quality skills and stand-



ards to prepare pupils for new requirements of the market. We worked with the education secretary to put together a project, part of which is already being implemented with financing from other sources but the CM seems to be very interested in seeing the World Bank loan come through so that we can implement the project fully focusing on some districts and then expanding to other parts of the state.

## Will it be a pilot project to begin with?

■ Yes. We also talked about air quality where he recognised the importance of working with the World Bank to achieve transformation in sectors like cooking stoves at household level using new technologies to cook in a way that is less damaging for the environment. We also discussed transformation in the industrial sector and SMEs so that these contribute less to pollution and that UP can have good air quality. Other states will take cue from UP as it leads the charge on air quality. We talked about agriculture, where we are preparing a project. The CM recognised the importance of farmers and is

supportive of the project.

## How many World Bank projects are underway in UP?

■ We have two projects, one on roads and the one on tourism, which will be completed in 2024 and 2025, respectively. At the national level, several projects are benefitting UP as well. One such project is the Clean Ganga project that benefits UP because of the river's importance in the state. We also have a project to support women in the Sewa network. We should showcase more how Sewa is helping women earn more by cutting out middlemen connecting them easily to the market. We are preparing three important projects for UP on education, air quality and agriculture.

## How did you find Yogi Adityanath as CM?

■ He is impressive. He was very well prepared and was on top of all the topics that we discussed today. He knew everything about the specifics of our engagements and the programmes we are supporting in UP. He had some interesting exchanges with high-level officials from the state. He has a clear vision on where he wants

to take Uttar Pradesh. Talking to him, you get a sense that UP can indeed become a trillion dollar economy because he has that vision and wants to deliver. I was impressed by how he connected his plans for UP to the broader vision of India's development as a USD 5 trillion economy.

## How will World Bank's engagement with UP be long term?

■ We want our engagement with UP to be long term. Even after UP becomes a trillion dollar economy, it will want to become a two trillion or five trillion dollar economy. UP will want to engage with the development agenda for the long term and we want to be a part of it. Our long term agenda will be primarily driven by the knowledge side of our partnership. We are a finance bank, but we are also a knowledge bank. What we do is we bring global knowledge and expertise, cutting-edge knowledge to our client countries or states. So, what we discussed with the CM and officials as well is the World Bank's commitment to work closely in making UP a one trillion dollar economy and designing a programme to support UP's trillion dollar economy goal. These programmes may not be financed by World Bank but can help design the implementation of programmes and do analytical work.

## And on the financing part?

■ We want to engage with UP by financing for the long term. The financing terms today might look expensive for UP, but it can change depending on market terms. For the long term, we are already thinking about urban development projects.

## How will UP cope with World Bank's expensive borrowing?

■ In the meeting, we talked about

the cost of borrowing from the World Bank as it fluctuates depending on global interest rates. At the moment, the global interest rate is high because the world is trying to fight inflation, which has pushed up the World Bank's borrowing cost. We agreed to look into the options to reduce the cost of borrowing for UP. We are exploring if borrowing in currencies other than the US dollar could lead to lower interest rates. We did some number crunching and realised that if UP were to borrow in Japanese Yen, it would bring down borrowing cost. It is possible because the World Bank has four currencies to exchange. We are making our loan easier to service and we are seeing how we can do some more blending to bring concessional financing as part of or in parallel to World Bank loan.



## How do you plan to help the agriculture sector in Uttar Pradesh?

■ Agriculture is really at the heart of UP's development. Even if we think about industrialisation, a good part of it would be agro industry in future. We had a good discussion with the agriculture minister. We are discussing how to connect farmers with private sector and bring MSMEs into agricultural sector.

## Will the World Bank's project focus on primary education?

■ In the context of agriculture, we are also looking at the connection of the education system with higher education for research and development. We will be working at primary and secondary school level education. In the meeting, the CM was emphatic about the need to support high level learning centres. The agriculture minister talked about a new university and wanted the World Bank to support it. The project will be flexible.