Africa must develop relevant knowledge for its problems

Addis Ababa, 02 November 2014 (ECA) - Africa continuously suffers from a “copy-paste” pattern of policy implementation, which prevents it from realizing relevant solutions to persistent problems like poverty and unemployment.


In a session titled “Knowledge Generation for Structural Transformation”, Nkosana Moyo, the Executive Chair of Mandela Institute for Development Studies in South Africa, said that leaders should desist from the “laziness” of simply adapting policies from the developed world and instead develop locally researched policies.

“It appears that Africa continues to mimic developed countries, sometimes blindly, rather than developing indigenous knowledge. It is good to watch and learn, but we cannot convert the continent into something that it is not,” Moyo asserted.

“Imposing ideas and systems that are not sustainable have a negative impact on the majority of the people who do not understand them. If we are to develop sustainably, we need governments to invest heavily in research and policies that are homegrown in order to address real issues. Concentrating on doing what England, France or China did without putting into context where they came from is not long-term thinking.”

Gunilla Carlsson, former Minister for International Development Cooperation in Sweden, said that before Europe transformed into a developed world, it faced many challenges in the earlier centuries, most of which Africa also faces today.

She said that political leaders in Africa should pick some lessons from Europe, but must first of all provide a favourable environment for innovativeness and allow their citizens to participate in nation-building.

“Sweden is one of the most developed countries in Europe. This is largely because we have not participated in any war for 400 years – which has been a great boost. Africa needs to first get rid of...
political instability because most policies cannot work unless there is security,” she said.

Her argument was complimented by Steve Kayizzi-Magerwa, the Acting Chief Economist and Vice-President of African Development Bank, who warned that many countries in Africa are in danger of trying to “reinvent the wheel” instead of investing in appropriate policies that address their social-economic and political structures right from the grassroots.

“We need to stop being lazy analysts and take our challenges for ourselves; stop wasting resources and implement our own ideas. Africa must first understand where we are, what brought us here and then try to understand what to do differently to bring different results,” Kayizzi-Mugerwa said.

Moses Rugutt, Acting CEO of Kenya’s Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, argued that several aspects of the education systems in Africa need drastic transformation from theoretical teaching to nurturing practical innovations.

“In Kenya, our science education policy needed serious renovation, so we embarked on serious change. We passed very critical laws that changed the landscape of how universities teach – and we have now realized crucial gains,” he said

“Several technological innovations have come through since then. Notably, M-Pesa, a mobile-phone money transfer service, was created in Kenya and has since expanded to Tanzania, South Africa Afghanistan, India and Eastern Europe. It has had great impact on the lives of ordinary Kenyans, but has also been Africa’s greatest technological export.”

The panelists also brought to light the plight of African innovators who choose to sell their works to large western companies, and advised government agencies to set up policies that encourage and reward local innovations.

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