

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

### **Fifth Meeting of the Africa Committee on Sustainable Development (ACSD-5)/Regional Implementation Meeting (RIM) for CSD-16**

**By Mr. Josué Dioné**

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

22-25 October 2007

Chairperson,

Your Excellency Dr. Abera Deressa, State Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia ,

Distinguished Ms. Margaret Sangarwe, representing Honourable Mr. F.D.C. Nhema, Chair of CSD 16,

Excellencies, Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives to ECA and the African Union,

Distinguished Representative of the African Union Commission, Dr. Babagana Ahmadu,

Distinguished Delegates and Guests,

Dear Colleagues from the UN System,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, UN Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, I welcome you to Addis Ababa and to the fifth meeting of the Africa Committee on Sustainable Development. Due to unavoidable circumstances, Mr. Janneh could not be here to address you at this important meeting. However, he sends his compliments and appreciation for your presence at this important meeting where issues crucial to the socio-economic development of Africa will be discussed.

Distinguished Delegates and Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poverty eradication is the greatest challenge facing Africa and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. While national governments continue to shoulder the primary responsibility for fighting poverty in their respective countries, concerted efforts are required at the regional and global levels to enable Africa achieve its poverty-related targets. The cluster of issues to be discussed during the next few days -- namely agriculture and rural development, land, drought and desertification and Africa's development in general -- are among the key priorities of the continent.

Unlike other developing regions of the world where progress towards meeting the poverty MDG has been tangible, the level and nature of economic growth have not yet yielded any significant reduction of the proportion of people living below the poverty line in Sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, GDP growth remains below the 7-percent minimum annual target rate and mostly associated with enclave sectors, with little impact on employment and income for the majority of the poor. Yet we know that at least two-thirds of the increasing numbers of poor Africans live in rural areas, where their livelihoods depend primarily on activities related directly or indirectly to agriculture, a sector with proven great potential for lifting scores of people out of poverty. This fact strongly underscores the need for a substantial and sustainable transformation of the African rural sector.

The structural and sustainable transformation of agriculture and the rural economy in Africa entails shifting from highly diversified and subsistence-oriented production systems towards more specialized market-oriented ones. This process involves a greater reliance on input and output delivery systems and increased integration of agriculture with other sectors of

the domestic and international economies.

We need, therefore to take a broader view of the food and agriculture system, which encompasses an integrated approach to investing in improving productivity and efficiency at all stages of the commodity value chains, from research and development to input markets, farm level production, produce processing, storage, handling, transport and distribution to the final consumer. The linkages among these stages, and among agriculture and the other sectors of the overall economy, are key to achieving an optimal contribution of the food and agriculture system to broad-based economic growth, employment and poverty eradication. Moreover, such a desirable contribution of agriculture to growth and development will also depend to a significant extent on how successful we are at integrating the economies and markets of the region.

To address the challenges of Africa's sustainable development in a way that provides employment and improves living standards for the majority of the people, we must, therefore, adopt an integrated approach. The work of the United Nations Millennium Task Force shows that no "silver bullet" exists to reach any individual target, let alone the whole set of MDGs. We need to adopt an inter-linkages approach that recognizes the complexity of ecosystem dynamics and their interface with the equally complex social, economic and political dynamics inherent in human development and governance, particularly policies, laws and institutions. Such an approach stresses the importance of coordination of action across the relevant dimensions of sustainable development.

Chairperson,

Distinguished Participants,

Land lies at the heart of social, political and economic life. Land and natural resources are key assets for economic growth and development. In fact, most African economies continue to rely heavily on agriculture and natural resources for a significant share of GDP, national food needs, employment, and export revenue. Therefore, agriculture, natural resource use, and land-based activities are crucial for livelihoods, income generation and employment for the majority of Africans.

If we reduce the transactions costs of attaining secure rights to land, we will end up reducing the cost of doing business for the corporate sector in the farming, agribusiness and agro-industrial spheres. Obviously, while secure land rights are necessary to achieve meaningful transformation of these sectors, other complementary elements such as technologies, credit, markets, and hard and soft infrastructure are equally vital.

Several factors including rapid population growth and urbanization, globalisation and market development have significant impacts on land resources. For instance, it is projected that the urban share in Africa's total population will increase from 38 percent in 2000 to 55 percent in 2030. This trend clearly puts greater pressure on urban and peri-urban areas, raising land values and increasing insecurity for the livelihoods of informal settlements.

Likewise, the most marginalized members of the African society, including women, are the very people that are tasked with harnessing land for food security and development, and also being the "keepers of the environment". Yet, the majority of African women do not own or control land and natural resources. Given that women comprise more than 50% of Africa's population, if they lose out on development, African families lose, and indeed, the continent loses. In order for Africa to realize the full potential of all members of society, more must be done to ensure that land policy reforms are accompanied by the appropriate mechanisms that guarantee women's rights to land.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Drought and desertification continue to threaten the livelihoods of millions of people in Africa, increasingly making them unable to edge out of poverty. This trend is set to worsen with the onset of climate change, to which many countries in the region are most vulnerable. As such, drought and desertification are at the heart of development challenges in Africa and merit urgent attention in policies and actions at national, regional and global levels.

Combating desertification in Africa has tremendous benefits in enhancing the continent's progress towards meeting the MDGs, particularly in terms of eradicating poverty, attaining food security, fighting diseases and ensuring environmental sustainability. The current trends in land degradation and high level of vulnerability of the region to the impacts of drought and desertification will be major impediments to achieving these goals, as well to ensuring security and social stability at all levels, both within the region and at global level.

Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates and Participants,

These are some of the key issues you are invited to consider in reviewing the reports prepared by your Secretariat for this meeting. Your views, comments and additional inputs would be most valuable and valued in finalising the reports and generating well-informed recommendations that would contribute quality inputs from our region to the United Nations Secretary-General's Report and to the CSD-16 discussions. In this regard, I have no doubt on the positive outcomes of your debates.

I thank you all for your kind attention, and wish you a fruitful meeting.