

Third Meeting of the Committee on Sustainable Development (CSD3)

Opening Statement

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Chairperson,
Excellency Mr. Gebre Medhin Belay,
Vice- Minister of Agriculture of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates and guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this Third Meeting of the Committee on Sustainable Development (CSD-3). This meeting comes at a particular juncture as it follows recent developments of crucial significance for sustainable development. Indeed, your last meeting in November 2001 was followed by yet another major food crisis set against the promises of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), both of which underscore the importance of the challenge of eradicating poverty in a sustainable way in Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The overall theme of this meeting: *"Making Technology Work for the Poor"*, stems from a common observation that "technology is power" and that it should benefit all stakeholders, including the poor in particular. Indeed, it is now acknowledged that we will not achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and sustainable development in Africa without substantial progress in the appropriation of science and technology by the African poor themselves. In that regard, it is crucial for policymakers and scientists to introduce our farmers to appropriate new methods of science and technology. However, we have to admit that so far, science and technology policies in Africa have been too 'elitist', or much too centered on high-level experts and researchers. Not enough attention has been paid to impacting the daily lives of ordinary people. It is therefore important that we now focus on exploring the ways in which science and technology can empower the poor to make beneficial changes in their own condition.

Distinguished delegates and guests,

For us at ECA, sustainable development is defined as the merger of human well-being and natural resource stewardship. It means development that is scientifically valid, economically feasible, environmentally friendly and socially acceptable and manageable. In that context, we have developed an index that jointly measures the economic, environmental and institutional sustainability of African countries. Our analysis of the performance of 38 African countries between 1975 and 2000 found that overall sustainability is positively and strongly correlated with institutional development, human and physical capital accumulation and productivity. Nowhere are these principles more relevant than in the agricultural sector, which is the backbone of most African economies. It means, for example, that if we are to ensure sustainable development for the majority of our people, African governments must give a new impetus to sustainable modernization of agriculture and rural transformation. Among other things, this approach must seek to harness modern technologies that are directly relevant to solving Africa's most critical problems such as biotechnology for health and agriculture. This is very much in line with the recent appeals of the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, made at the France-Africa Summit in February and again, at the AU Summit in Maputo in July 2003, to African governments to promote a Green Revolution on the continent. This shift of emphasis also takes into account the recent food crisis and famine that put 38 million Africans at serious risk of starvation. The famine has come as a shock and a source of distress to many Africans. But it has also helped to focus our minds on a concerted search for a permanent and sustainable solution to the recurrent hunger crises in Africa. It is to this mission that our Commission has re-devoted its energies, and to which I urge African governments to also re-dedicate themselves with renewed determination and vigor. In line with the Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security made by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Maputo in July 2003, I urge you to come out of this meeting with innovative, feasible, national and regional options for bringing all

key stakeholders - including farmers, the private sector, civil society, women and youth - to participate actively in revitalizing Africa's food and agriculture sectors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Besides promoting agriculture as the backbone sector for food security and poverty eradication in most countries, Africa also needs to use its comparatively rich endowments in natural resources as a platform to engender growth and development. Africa must seriously investigate how it can harness its bountiful mineral, energy and water resources to help underpin its new drive for sustainable modernization and rural transformation. In all these areas, the development of human resources, science and technology cannot be over-emphasized.

Many challenges still remain in Africa's learning curve: How to develop the human resources, science and technology, infrastructure, institutions and policies necessary to drive the sustainable development process. And on the social side, how to tackle the issues of governance, conflict, equity, gender, land policy, health and regional integration that may hinder or enhance Africa's sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Your meeting will help move Africa's thinking on some of these issues forward. In this regard, I wish to note that your Committee is now more integrated than before, being a merger of the Committee on Sustainable Development (CSD) and the Committee on Natural Resources, Science and Technology (CNRST). This is the result of a decision by the twenty fifth session of the ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic development held on 19-21 October 2002. Your committee, therefore, will henceforth deal with all areas of sustainable development, including natural resources, science and technology. In this regard also, I want to propose that the meetings of this Committee on Sustainable Development be part of the cycle of the global UN Commission on Sustainable Development, beginning with the 2004-2005 biennium. This means that future CSDs will serve as the main regional review instruments for feeding Africa's input into the global process of progress on the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

In conclusion,

Mr. Chairman,
Honorable Minister,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

During this meeting, you will receive reports, issues papers and think pieces both on the theme and the work that ECA has been doing on sustainable development. I urge you to listen carefully, discuss and digest the material, in order to advise ECA and your countries on the best strategies and policies for sustainable development. I have no doubt that your deliberations will help put Africa on the path to broad-based sustainable economic growth, food security, and poverty eradication. This is your meeting, and I trust that you will commit yourselves to implementation of the results at your national level. Thank you for your kind attention.
