

Carlos Lopes proposes concrete measures to sustain Africa's development in a changing climate

New Delhi, India 7 February 2014 (ECA) - The United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has warned that Africa's population growth rates could trigger serious competition resources such as energy, water and food and even undermine its development efforts if policy makers and scientists do not pay due attention to climate change.

Addressing the 2014 Delhi Sustainable Development Summit in India this morning, Mr. Carlos Lopes called for deliberate action on green industrialization to tackle the continents energy, water and food security challenges which the negative impacts of climate change have accentuated.

In a keynote address on "Tackling the Energy, Water, and Food Security challenges in Africa", Mr. Lopes urged regional governments to embrace green industrialization policies which, if implemented rightly, could offer incredible investment opportunities and real dividends.

"By 2050, Africa's youth alone will constitute over a quarter of the world's labour force. With a rising middle class and rapid urbanization taking place at a rate that is more than twice the world's urban growth rate of 3.7 % a year – invariably demand for food, energy and water will rise", he said.

He stroke a positive note when he compared Africa's current performance with that of countries in other regions of the world by stressing on the need to leverage the opportunities that arise for Africa's transformation agenda even under a changing climate.

"With an average GDP growth projected to climb to 6% this year, and with continuous good prosperity, Africa is likely to outstrip Asia's growth records by 2050. It is already the fastest-growing continent, despite an ailing global economy and it is imperative for Africa to capitalize on growth for real transformation", he said.

He argued that one of the main growth avenues for Africa is through industrialization, recalling that "it took Great Britain 155 years to double its GDP during the industrial revolution and Africa has achieved the same in the last twelve".

"The key for Africa is the type of industrialization path it chooses so that it can be part of the sustainable development solution without having to forfeit its right to industrialize", he stressed.

Mr. Lopes took the opportunity to share a six point strategy for Africa going forward --- drawing from ideas he initially laid out at the Third Annual Conference on Climate Change and Development in Africa (CCDA-III) which convened in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia last October.

He first mentioned Africa's immense potential to leap to a new clean techno-economic paradigm, especially as "just 0.3 % of the sunlight that shines on the Sahara and Middle East deserts could supply all of Europe's energy needs" quoting the European Commission's Institute for Energy.

In this respect, he argued that, because Africa is not locked in any technology preferences, it could follow a green and clean energy pathway and leapfrog old carbon-intensive models and pursue a low carbon development pathway.

Secondly, he called for greater investment in climate science, services and the production of high quality data to facilitate the development of early warning systems and initiate the much needed research on climate impact, vulnerability and adaptation; and for creating a knowledge economy.

He recalled that one of the fundamental and priority undertakings of the ClimDev-Africa programme, is to make climate information widely available; and cited, as a good example, a conference held last year in Arusha, Tanzania to define Africa's needs in the areas of research that could contribute to climate information and knowledge, inform policy decisions, and development planning.

Thirdly, he proposed major improvements in Africa's institutional and policy capacity, arguing that "there must be investment in mechanisms for a concerted engagement of all key players", including climate and social scientists, development economists, policy makers, entrepreneurs and users of climate information.

He then delved into the benefits of sustained South-South partnerships that could help risk management, saying that it was one of the reasons for his presence at the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit.

"By systematically sharing experiences and lessons learned, disaster-prone countries facing similar challenges can arrive at better climate change solutions. For example, the African, Caribbean and Pacific Small Island States share similar challenges.

"They can step up efforts to address these challenges and establish south-south cooperation to focus on their unique challenge and incubate several options that will insulate them from current vulnerabilities and develop future opportunities. It is essential for Africa to go beyond the sum total of individual countries capacities", he pointed out.

His fifth was on the need to leverage Africa's agriculture. "With a growing population and an ever-increasing demand for food, investments in agriculture are critical", he explained, adding that "investing in production technologies, innovation, water use efficiency and sustainable land management are essential".

He insisted on the need to leverage the capacity of the private sector to scale-up investment in agro processing that could create jobs and diversify export commodities to unlock the sector's strong multiplier effect in the economy.

Finally, he happened on the use of tourism to Africa's advantage. "According to the UN World Tourism Organization, Africa is one of the fastest-growing tourism destinations", he cited and said that there is already growing recognition of the urgent need for the tourism industry, national governments and international organizations to develop and implement strategies to face the changing climate conditions.

He prodded scientists and policy makers not to lose hope in the face of challenges that climate change pose to Africa, saying "climate change was responsible for bad and good in the past. Most of it happened without humans having a clue why it was so. Now we know. To avoid the bad and aim for the good Africa can take the lead and not be a spectator".

The Delhi Sustainable Development Summit is organized annually as an international platform to facilitate the exchange of knowledge on all aspects of sustainable development.

The Economic Commission for Africa is the foremost United Nations agencies in Africa. Part of its work is to assist regional governments to develop and implement climate change and sustainable development programmes.