

ECA - Africa can lead in energy, agriculture and manufacturing

Addis Ababa, 04 November 2013 (ECA) - Addressing Ministers at the Africa Regional Consultative Meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals, Mr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa has urged Ministers to be guided by a moral compass of ensuring the “greatest good for the greatest number.”

Mr. Lopes told the eminent gathering that sustainable development is about reframing the global development agenda in ways that will give both present and future generations the autonomy to be active forces in their own destinies. “Africa has within its reach, the capacity, the people, resources and opportunities to lead the way on sustainable development,” he said.

He also proposed opportunities in three sectors where Africa can lead.

In the energy sector, Mr. Lopes said evidence is mounting that Africa’s need to expand its capacity to generate power can be met through renewable energy technologies that deliver clean and sustainable energy supplies. “Overcoming the barriers that prevent the development of renewable energy in a context of climate change will depend largely on improving the policy and institutional environment in Africa,” he said. He added that inclusive green growth is a frontier that could focus on affordable renewable energy services, the promotion of green jobs and the reduction of poverty.

In the agriculture sector, he stressed that it holds the key to unlocking Africa’s growth potential, to attain the 7% threshold. “Leveraging the continent’s agricultural sector is critical given our growing population and an ever-increasing demand for food, he said adding that this would entail making efficient investments in technologies, innovation, enhanced water management capacity and sustainable land tenure systems.”

“Africa needs agro-business, higher productivity and backward and forward linkages to work,” he stressed.

The third sector proposed by Mr. Lopes is manufacturing. He proposed that Africa can prove that climate change is better tackled by moving industrial production next to where the resources are. “Not only would

we reduce CO2 emissions and deal effectively with green technology leapfrogging, but we could also add value to commodities,” he said and added that Africa has the option to choose technologies that may be too costly for others.

He challenged the Ministers to define solutions that do justice to the inter-generational social contract that defines Africa’s sustainable development goals, stating, “Our actions are being watched by the younger generation already - they are not waiting to be actors in this debate; they already are.”

In less than three generations, over 40% of the world’s youth will be African. By 2050, Africa’s youth will constitute over a quarter of the world’s labour force. “Young people are calling for transformation and a strong anti-poverty push.” “But they also feel that focus is not enough for creating jobs, having electricity or communicating through mobile phones, they want the future to be no different from region to region and natural resources to be used wisely by all, not just by some,” said the Executive Secretary.

He concluded by saying that the Hausa from Nigeria say that escaping with your reputation is better than escaping with your property. In making the case for a different narrative Africans are saying they want their reputation to match reality. They want a future that sees the continent for more than its natural resources riches. They want an outcome that reflects their reputation.

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