

ECA says agriculture can unlock Africa's transformation even in a changing climate.

Warsaw, Poland, 19 November 2013 (ECA) – A senior official of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa today shed new light on the agriculture and climate change nexus, pointing to new avenues through which the sector can become the driving force behind Africa's transformation agenda. In opening remarks at a panel discussion during the Africa Day event on the sidelines of the 19th session of the U.N-led international conference on climate change in Poland, Ms. Fatima Denton said that even in a changing climate, the agricultural sector still retains its full potential to lift millions of Africans out of poverty, and to take the driver's seat on the continent's development train.

Ms. Fatima Denton who is the Coordinator of the African Policy Centre and Officer in Charge of New Initiatives Division at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), facilitated the panel discussion.

She said that agriculture and climate change are linked in important ways as climate change has significant effects on agriculture, adding that the negative impacts of climate will further erode the capacity of poor farmers and food producers to adapt to the changing climatic conditions, that is, climate variability and climate change.

She explained that "technical and financial support are needed to address damages caused by climate change and to support adaptation activities of African farmers", and that such efforts can be implemented through a framework that stimulates and delivers new low carbon emission pathways in the agricultural sector and along the entire food value chains.

Ms. Denton explained that mainstreaming adaptation into the agricultural transformation agendas of African countries needs to focus on integrating adaptation into the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), a highly successful programme of the African Union Commission. Recognizing the significant contribution of the agricultural sector to African economies (it supports nearly 75 percent of the population), a number of African countries have taken up proactive steps to increase investments in the sector, she added.

She cited examples that include details of National Adaptation Programme of Actions (NAPA), National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIP) as well as National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), calling for an in-depth understanding of the adaptation programmes and investment plans as well as an examination of the extent to which such inter-related activities have recognized the case for mainstreaming climate change adaptation into the African agricultural transformation agenda.

She made the case for innovative research and technology for adaptation to climate change in Africa, saying the role of research and innovation systems in generating more precise evidence and possible solutions that vulnerable people employ to adapting to climate change cannot be overemphasized.

"Even though recent scientific findings confirm that human-induced climate change is already happening, and its effects are being felt in many places, there still exist knowledge gaps about how to cope and adapt to it, based on temporal and spatial variations," she said.

Research in climate change and adaptation is aimed at addressing these knowledge gaps. African scientists, community stakeholders, private sector practitioners, and policy makers are working to advance a better understanding of this challenge.

The agricultural sector is often the largest sector in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and employment. The world population is projected to increase to 9 billion by 2050; and experts concur that agricultural production will need to increase by 70 percent to feed the world. Given that 60 percent of the world's available land and unexploited cropland is in Africa, agriculture will remain a strong contributor to Africa's transformative and inclusive development. However, the sector is still seriously affected by the impacts of climate change and the need for adaptation is most critical.

Ms. Denton facilitated the panel discussion at which speakers answered questions related to different aspects of the theme, including on agriculture in the climate change negotiation by Mr. Fred Kossan of Malawi; mainstreaming climate change adaptation in to the African agricultural development agenda by Dr. Ayalneh Bogale of the AUC; innovative research and technologies for adaptation to climate change in African agriculture by Dr. Tom Owiyo of ECA; and options for financing climate change adaptation in African agriculture by Mr. Anthony Nyong of AfDB.

The panel also talked about available options for financing adaptation and other co-benefits generated by the agricultural sector to support investments that assist African countries in adopting low carbon growth pathways to agricultural development and ending hunger.

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