

Janneh urges Africa to develop capacity needed for its transformation

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Addis Ababa, 22 March 2012 (ECA) – Africa must have a clear vision of where it is headed to and build the capacity needed to attain its development and transformation processes, the United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa said in Addis Ababa today.

Mr. Abdoulie Janneh who was addressing the committee of African economic, finance and planning experts said that for Africa to jumpstart its development and become a global development pole, "it must rise to meet its domestic, regional and global challenges and undertake carefully calibrated policy responses and actions".

The experts are meeting to kick-start the 5th Joint Annual Meetings of the AU Conference of Ministers of Economy and Finance and ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

Before delving into the theme of this year's conference – Unleashing Africa's Potential as a Pole of Global Growth - the ECA Executive Secretary undertook a comprehensive overview of Africa's potential, actual achievements and charted a course for urgent action if the continent must take control of, and master its own development.

Mr. Janneh dressed a positive balance sheet of economic performance of the continent, although the "overview of economic and social conditions" shows that overall growth in the continent was 2.7% in 2011, down from nearly 4.6% in 2010.

He explained that with the political upheavals in North Africa and in spite of draught and associated challenges, the rest of the continent registered a respectable growth level of about the same as in the previous year.

He said that this could be attributed to increasing domestic demand, good economic management, in addition to high and rising commodity prices but warned that the region needs to improve on its governance structures.

"The experience of North Africa goes to show that these factors are not enough and that improved governance remains central to economic and social transformation", Mr. Janneh explained.

Commenting on the effects of the Eurozone crisis, he reiterated the fact that African countries also have very close trade, monetary, aid, and investment ties with Europe and will certainly be negatively affected by further deterioration of conditions in the Eurozone, but argued that Africa provides an opportunity for global development.

"In spite of these well known facts, it is evident that given its improved prospects and the extent of its untapped potentials, Africa provides an opportunity for the world as a place where investments can be made to boost demand and help reduce global imbalances", he added.

He stressed the need for an African pool of experts capable of leading this process, and said this has guided ECA's work over the past one year, especially as its African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) has been working to rapidly scale-up capacity needs, planning and development management.

He announced with appreciation the decision of the UN General Assembly to signal "strong support for our efforts by tripling the statutory allocation to the Institute in these austere times."

Mr. Janneh took the opportunity to highlight other major achievements by the ECA, such as the Reports on Governing Development in Africa; Regional Integration; the African eLearning Initiative; and the African Mining Vision.

He also mentioned the 2012 Innovation Prize for Africa during the Ministerial meeting as being the fruit of the High Level Panel on science and innovation under the leadership of former President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa.

The opening session of the experts' meeting was also addressed by Dr. Maxwell Nkwezalamba, the AU Commissioner for Economic Affairs, who praised Mr Janneh for his stewardship at the ECA, during which the UN agency has become the premier continental development partner of the African Union.

He recalled that the AUC and ECA have been working together in several areas, including the African Statistical Yearbook, the review of progress in the attainment of the MDGs in Africa; assessing regional integration in Africa; in preparations for major conferences; "All these speak to the excellent cooperation that exists between our two premier continental institutions", he added.

It would be recalled that on the eve of the 5th Joint Conference, the leaders of the two institutions have co-signed an opinion piece presenting no less than eight key arguments why Africa could easily become a new pole of global growth. The piece has been widely distributed to the media.

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