

SADC experts call on member States to mainstream climate change in rural development policies

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South Africa, 27 August 2012 (ECA) - The three day Expert Group Meeting on "Climate Change and the Rural Economy in Southern Africa" ended on 24 August with a call on member states to mainstream climate change in rural development policies.

The three-day meeting which took place in Johannesburg, South Africa from 22-24 August, aimed at strengthening sub regional capacity in developing climate adaptation and mitigation strategies and mainstreaming climate change into rural development policies and programmes.

While reviewing the Issues Paper on "Climate Change and the Rural Economy in Southern Africa: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities", the meeting identified key capacity building needs and pertinent issues at the sub regional and national levels towards building climate change resilient rural economies and highlight opportunities arising from the climate change global development agenda.

In his welcoming remarks, Mr. Sizo D. Mhlanga, Senior Economic Affairs Officer at the ECA Subregional Office for Southern Africa reiterated climate assessment outcomes that predict a significant temperature increase over the coming decades and increasingly variable rainfall for the Southern Africa subregion.

He emphasized that "these predictions must be taken seriously as Southern African rural economies are particularly sensitive to the direct impacts of this change given that over 50 percent of the Gross Domestic Product of SADC member States comes from primary and climate-sensitive sectors of production such as agriculture, mining, forestry and wildlife." He further highlighted that between 40 and 85 percent of SADC populations live in rural areas where they depend on natural resources for survival.

Mr. Mhlanga called on the experts to continue refining and building long-term adaptation strategies towards enhancing climate change resilience and ensuring that initiatives to address climate change reach all farmers, including the most poor and vulnerable in Southern Africa.

He explained that while such measures might not be sufficient to reverse the impacts climate change has on agricultural productivity and rural incomes, the subregion needs to embark on diversifying its rural economy from over reliance on agriculture and other weather sensitive sectors. He also called on "governments to mainstream climate change into their rural development policies and strengthen national bodies responsible for climate change adaptation and mitigation and match policy with budget allocation". He further called for enhanced efforts aimed at helping the sub region's access to existing climate change related funding facilities.

Speaking at the same function, Mr. Jabawu Nkomo, Senior Economist from the Africa Climate Policy Centre and Ms. Alessandra Sgobbi, Environmental Affairs Officer from the Food Security and Sustainable Development Division reiterated ECA's commitment to assisting member States in strengthening their capacities to address climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The three day Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting was attended by 22 experts from Ministries, Representatives of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern (COMESA), the private sector, the Academia and the Civil Society engaged in agriculture, rural economy and climate change.

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