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Africa will negotiate for a new era of green industrialisation

Paris, France 7 December 2015 (ECA) - Africa can leverage opportunities from climate change to engineer a new era of industrialisation that can drive clean economic growth, create sustainable jobs and reduce poverty, according to the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

Speaking at the African Pavilion at COP 21, Mr Carlos Lopes asserted that the rapid economic growth experienced by many African countries over the last decade comes despite major challenges that other continents have not had to face, such as complexities around intellectual property and more sophisticated trade regulations.

"Africa is industrialising in an environment where achieving growth is more challenging. Windows that were open for other continents, enabling them to industrialise quickly and easily, are now closed for Africa."

However, in these seemingly adverse conditions lie clear opportunities which Africa can readily harness. As a latecomer, Africa can take immediate advantage of the new technologies that have been put in place over the last ten years.

Africa has, for example, asserted itself as the leader in mobile banking technologies. In the same way, the continent is well placed to capitalise on new advances in renewable energy infrastructure and technologies.

"We have the potential to access renewable energy at a time when the price for producing this energy is comparable to fossil fuel production. Industrialised countries will have to retrofit older infrastructure to harness the sector's vast potential. Africa, however, is not married to any technological platform and is ready to leapfrog to these new, efficient and more sophisticated technologies."

Furthermore, with a rapidly growing population – set to reach 2 billion by 2050 – Africa will have an immense labour force ready to support this growth.

By capitalising on these new technologies, Africa is poised to be the first continent to industrialise through powering renewable energy potential.

"Our renewable energy potential is the best in the world, giving us a ticket for green industrialisation; a ticket to do things differently. Africa is here at the COP21 climate negotiations to clearly make this case. We are ready to negotiate hard for a climate deal that will allow the continent to pursue this pathway to a greener industrialisation that will not only further Africa's development but also make a significant contribution to global efforts to reduce emissions," Lopes concluded.

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