Southern Africa urged to re-orient national policies to incorporate blue economy opportunities

Pointe aux Piments, Mauritius, September 21, 2018 (ECA) – The 24th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts of Southern Africa (ICE) ended in Mauritius Friday with delegates urging member States to create stable policy environments to minimise uncertainties in order to attract investments in transformative sectors, including those with the potential to create decent jobs.

Participants said member States should re-orient national development policies, plans and strategies to incorporate blue economy opportunities for poverty eradication and inclusive industrialization and ensure they are aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Africa’s 50-year development plan, Agenda 2063.

The ICE, which was held under the theme; ‘Blue Economy, Inclusive Industrialization and Economic Development in Southern Africa’, also urged member States to mainstream environmental sustainability concerns in the development and implementation of blue economy strategies and national development plans to avoid over-exploitation or depletion of the resources.

“Member States should accelerate the harmonization of policies, legal and regulatory frameworks across national boundaries to facilitate the development of infrastructure to anchor development,” the meeting recommended.

Governments were also urged to develop integrated legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks to enable connectivity of various ocean based economic sectors and the coordination of the activities in the blue economy sector;

- promote stakeholder participation in the development of blue economy strategies and activities for effective and informed decision making;

- foster collaboration in implementation of blue economy policy frameworks amongst coastal, island and landlocked countries in order to strengthen regional value-chains and benefit collaboratively from the blue economy sector; and

- develop frameworks and strategies to facilitate private sector participation in the blue economy opportunities, including the active involvement of SMEs along the blue economy value chains.

Challenges

On addressing macroeconomic challenges facing the region, the meeting agreed that member States should build fiscal buffers during periods of high commodity prices to cushion the impacts of retreating prices, droughts and weak global trade and investments;

- manage rising public debt levels and restrict loans and guarantees to SOE’s as well as reduce unnecessary borrowing;
- invest in mechanisation and upgrade of the agricultural sector, including the development of irrigation systems for improved productivity, food security, and enhanced contribution to the reduction of poverty and inequality; and strengthen national tax policy and administration to facilitate improve participation and compliance.

On skills development, the meeting called for strong leadership or political will to steer the blue economy agenda and urged nations to:

- invest in the development of human and institutional capacity and relevant skills to anchor the exploitation of opportunities provided by the blue economy in collaboration with all stakeholders to ensure alignment of skills requirements with industry needs;

- provide the necessary financial and technical skills support to strengthen Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) to provide leadership in anchoring and implementing blue economy initiatives; and

- strengthen collaboration, through Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) and other agreements, on security to address piracy and environmental management in coastal zones and to facilitate joint research and capacity building on the blue economy.

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) were urged to support member States to develop requisite national strategies to domesticate and take advantage of opportunities offered by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA);

- facilitate the regional harmonization of tax policies and administration systems to create a level playing field;

- provide a platform for peer learning on blue economy frameworks and strategies;

- facilitate the documentation of knowledge of the benefits of blue economy activities and the development of comprehensive maritime safety and security in the sector;

- accelerate the harmonization of policies, legal and regulatory frameworks across national boundaries to facilitate the development of transboundary infrastructure to anchor development, trade and movement of persons, including the development of regional frameworks on the blue economy; and

- facilitate the development of harmonised regional policy, legal and regulatory frameworks and strategies to exploit blue economy resources to address the current uncoordinated approach to the sector.

For the past four days participants focused their discussions on opportunities and challenges presented by the blue economy as a strategic resource that can anchor development in the region.

Senior policy makers from the region, leading practitioners and experts, private sector operators, civil society, regional and international development agencies, including development financial institutions are attending the meeting. The meeting was hosted by the Government of Mauritius. The next meeting will be held in eSwatini, formerly Swaziland.

Issued by: