

ECA - CEA



***Economic Commission for Africa
Commission économique pour l'Afrique***

REMARKS

By

Ousmane LAYE

Chief

**Environment and Sustainable Development Section
Food Security and Sustainable Development Division
Economic Commission for Africa**

At the

Africa Regional Session

Sixteenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

**New York
5 May 2008**

Chairperson,
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates from Member States,
Distinguished members of the Panel,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issues tabled for review at this 16th Session of CSD are of critical importance for sustainable development in Africa. Indeed, the conjunction of the current food crisis in a region where chronic under-nourishment and extreme poverty respectively affect nearly one-third and half of the population, and the evolving debate on climate change all point out to the centrality of issues of agriculture, rural development, land, drought and desertification for economic and social development as well as environmental protection in Africa.

Unlike other developing regions of the world where progress towards meeting the poverty and hunger MDG has been tangible, the level and nature of economic growth have not yet yielded any significant reduction of the proportion of people living below the poverty line in Sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, GDP growth remains below the 7-percent minimum annual target rate and mostly associated with enclave sectors, with little impact on employment and income for the majority of the poor. Yet we know that at least two-thirds of the increasing numbers of poor Africans live in rural areas, where their livelihoods depend primarily on activities related directly or indirectly to agriculture, a sector with proven great potential for lifting scores of people out of poverty. This fact strongly underscores the need for significant and consistent investment to effect a structural and sustainable transformation of the African agriculture and rural economy.

The much-needed transformation entails shifting from subsistence-oriented production systems towards market-oriented ones. This process involves a greater reliance on input and output delivery systems and increased integration of agriculture with other sectors of the domestic and international economies. It calls for taking a broader view of the food and agriculture system, which encompasses an integrated approach to investing in improving productivity and efficiency at all stages of the commodity value chains, from research and development to input markets, farm level production, produce processing, storage, handling, transport and distribution to the final consumer. The linkages among these stages, and among agriculture and the other sectors of the overall economy, are key to achieving an optimal contribution of the food and agriculture system to broad-based economic growth, employment and poverty eradication. Moreover, such a desirable contribution of agriculture to growth and development will also depend to a significant extent on how successful we are at integrating the economies and markets of the region.

This is why, within the framework of the NEPAD Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), ECA has advocated for an approach articulated around concerted efforts to develop coordinated value chains for selected strategic food and agricultural commodities within a regional integration perspective. The approach, which was endorsed by two Summits of the African Union, stresses the need to address, through agribusiness development, the central challenge of the double disconnection of African farmers, backward from the input/factor markets, and forward from the product markets. ECA and FAO are collaborating in providing technical support to the African Union Commission and NEPAD towards the operationalisation of the proposed regional framework for the development of the value chains of strategic food and agricultural commodities, while taking into account critical issues related to climate change and the growing biofuel sector.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

While pursuing efforts at agricultural development and food security, we know that land lies at the heart of social, political and economic life in Africa. And several factors such as rapid population growth, urbanisation and globalisation, have significant impacts on land resources. About two-thirds of Africa's total population today lives in rural areas and depends directly on land for their basic livelihoods and survival. Providing secure land rights for these hundreds of million people is key to lifting them out of poverty. Reducing the transactions costs of attaining secure rights to land is also a pre-condition to reducing the cost of doing business in the farming and agribusiness spheres. At the same time, rapid urbanization is taking place throughout the continent, raising land values and increasing the insecurity of informal settlers. It is imperative that land policies also recognize the rights of slum dwellers and squatters and provide for effective methods of managing these rights. Likewise, the most vulnerable members of the African society, especially women, have little ownership or control over land and natural resources. Land policy reforms must therefore guarantee women's rights to land and address a history of inequality in land distribution.

Addressing these challenges also requires dealing with the pluralistic systems of land tenure in Africa. Customary systems, which govern the majority of land in Africa, are under pressure from population growth and competing land uses. Yet, the law, in most cases, does not provide adequate protection for customary rights holders due to multiple, and at times, conflicting legislation relating to land acquisition and management.

For peace, security, social and economic development, it is imperative for African countries to develop and effectively implement comprehensive land policies that take adequate account of principles of economic efficiency, social equity and environmental sustainability. It is in this regard that ECA, in strong partnership with the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank, have embarked on the challenging initiative of developing a pan-African land policy framework that provides guidelines and principles for better land governance and land reforms.

Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates,

Drought and desertification threaten the livelihoods of millions of people in Africa, increasingly making them unable to edge out of poverty. This trend is set to worsen with the onset of climate change, to which many countries in the region are most vulnerable. The current trends in land degradation and high level of vulnerability of the region to the impacts of drought and desertification will be major impediments to eradicating poverty, attaining food security, ensuring environmental sustainability as well as security and social stability at all levels, both within the region and at global level. Addressing drought and desertification therefore merits urgent attention in policies and actions at national, regional and global levels. ECA recently concluded an MOU with UNCCD, whose Executive Secretary has kindly accepted to join this panel, to assist African countries face up to this challenge.

These are some of the key issues that were thoroughly discussed during the Africa Regional Implementation Meeting (RIM) for CSD-16. You will hear more about the outcome of this meeting from the Chair of the Africa RIM, Dr. Ali Mohammed, and about various facets of the same issues from the distinguished panellist of this Session.

Thank you for your kind attention and, in advance, for your fruitful discussions.