

AU Roots for Food Security and ICT Innovations

By Wanjohi Kabukuru

Food security, poverty reduction and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) issues are key concerns to the African Union (AU). Rhoda Tumusiime Peace, AU's Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture affirmed this position during the 14th Summit of the AU Heads of State and Government currently being held in Addis Ababa under the theme, *Information and Communication Technologies in Africa: Challenges and Prospects for Development*.

“We are making progress towards extricating ourselves from these quagmires and harnessing the benefits of the knowledge economy to achieve progress.” she told a media briefing on the sidelines of the summit.

According to Commissioner Tumusiime, AU is mobilizing the international community towards this endeavour.

“We are advocating for an increase in investment on agriculture. Already 13 countries are moving forward towards food secure societies.” said Tumusiime. She regretted that the continent was spending US\$40billion annually on food imports, a situation that could be reversed. She further reiterated that AU member states had made rapid progress in addressing climate change. She noted that during the recently concluded Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, Africa had for the first time taken a common position, stood on a unified objective and was represented from technical up to the highest levels of the Copenhagen Climate Change (COP15) talks.

Commissioner Tumusiime also reiterated that Africa needs technological transfer in order to catch up with the rest of the world.

“If our rural areas are to develop we need adequate and adaptable technological transfer, investments in renewable energies and access to ICTs to link our rural backyards to the world. In the next Climate Change Conference, Africa will be pushing for a better deal and funding for these interventions.” she said.

Fielding questions from a battery of local and international journalists in the well-attended press conference, the AU Agriculture and Rural Development chief reckoned that there have been great lessons learnt by African states on both climate change and ICT interventions and that the continent will always seek for win-win relationships with other donors on all her engagements especially on technology transfer.

Currently the Nairobi-based International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) has trail-blazed in e-agriculture courtesy of her two unique ICT ventures namely African Soil Information Service (AfSIS) and the Domestic Animal Genetic Resources Information System (DAGRIS). These two e-agriculture initiatives are among a plethora of many ICT-related success stories in Africa credited to the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) which was spearheaded by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Union.

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