

REGIONAL EXPERT MEETING ON AFRICAN ECOLABELLING

OPENING REMARKS

By

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**Chairperson,
Commissioners of the African Union Commission,
Distinguished Participants,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), it is my pleasure to welcome you to this Regional Experts Meeting on African Ecolabelling Scheme. The collaboration between UNEP, AUC and ECA in organizing this meeting, clearly demonstrates the importance of partnerships in driving Africa's development agenda forward. The valuable support received from Africa's development partners, most notably the Federal Government of Germany, which took the lead to launch the Marrakech Taskforce on Cooperation with Africa, cannot be overemphasized.

**Chairperson,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Just over a year ago, the African 10- Year Framework Programme on Sustainable Consumption and Production (African 10-YFP) was successfully launched through an effective partnership arrangement involving key players in the region and Africa's development partners. The composition of the Regional Steering Committee, which was subsequently formed to oversee the further development and implementation of the African 10-YFP, is a reflection of the importance attached to such partnership arrangements. For its part, ECA is fully committed to the successful implementation of the programme.

Ladies and gentlemen,

ECA participated in the first and second meetings of the Regional Steering Committee, held in Addis Ababa and Arusha, respectively. At the second meeting, ECA provided an overview of its coordination role regarding the regional preparatory process to the sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and called for collaboration in the preparation of the African review reports on chemicals, wastes and sustainable consumption and production, which are among the thematic cluster of issues to be discussed at CSD 18/19.

Mr. Chairman,

I am happy to report that the response to this call was quite encouraging: While UNIDO agreed to take the lead in the preparation of the review reports on chemicals and wastes, UNEP agreed to take the lead in the preparation of the review report on sustainable consumption and production. Furthermore, ECA has held consultations with UNEP on the draft project concept notes on mining, ecolabelling and agriculture, prepared within the framework of the African 10-YFP. The co-hosting of this meeting on ecolabelling, is therefore, one among several collaborative ventures in the area of sustainable consumption and production.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The subject of today's meeting is very pertinent. Eco-labeling schemes are being developed in many countries to guide consumers on environmentally conscious choice of products. Despite the fact that ecolabeling remains a voluntary practice, consumers and retailers – mainly in industrialized countries, are giving preference to these products, even when prices may be slightly higher. The market preference for ecolabeled products is expected to force manufacturers or producers to redesign their products, their packages, and their processes to make them more environmentally acceptable.

Given this trend, Africa should be well prepared to exploit this niche market, which has a high potential of increasing market access for its products and contributing to poverty reduction- an important sustainable development imperative for the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Among the findings of an ECA commissioned study is that, organic farming, in addition to being environmentally sound and sustainable and providing a prospective niche market, is economically more profitable than conventional farming. The urgency for Africa to establish a mechanism to certify organic agricultural production is real. What makes Africa a suitable candidate to secure this niche is that a significant proportion of agricultural land in the region is still under traditional or “alternative” production methods with little or no use of agrochemicals.

However, the onerous technical requirements and high costs associated with the establishment of certification schemes have constituted a major obstacle to the effective marketing of Africa's products. Therefore, the establishment of an African Ecolabelling Scheme that promotes appropriate environmental and health standards within the design and production of African products and at the same time, promotes better market access of African products in the regional and global markets is a much welcome development.

Chairperson,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At this juncture, I should point out that certification is a necessary, but not the only condition to products entering international markets. There are a number of production and export constraints, many of which are common to agricultural production and trade in general. Major constraints include: competition in market with stringent quality requirements;

increasing pressure for subsidies; uncertain price premiums; and preferences for locally produced products. Other constraints are the small size of organic products in international markets and inadequate technical know-how on organic production. Therefore, the development of an African ecolabelling scheme should be seen within the broader context of Africa's production and trade challenges, as well as opportunities.

Chairperson,

Given the calibre of experts participating in this meeting, I am confident that your three-day deliberations will interalia, provide, useful recommendations and guidance on the finalization of the assessment report and the development of the an appropriate Ecolabelling Scheme for Africa that takes into account all the factors at play.

In this regard, I wish to thank all those who have worked so hard, and who have, in one way or the other, contributed to ensuring the convening of this important meeting. For participants coming from outside Ethiopia, I hope that your heavy schedule for the next three days will not prevent you from finding opportunities to enjoy the hospitality of Addis Ababa.

Finally,

On behalf of the Executive Secretary of ECA, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, and on my own behalf, it gives me great pleasure to declare this meeting opened.

I wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you all for your kind attention.