As COP 16 in Mexico looms.....

Ping tells Africa to speak as one on climate

By Brenda Zulu

African Union Commission (AUC) chairperson, Jean Ping has urged Africa to come up with a common position on climate change, and articulate it with one strong voice.

Addressing the Seventh African Development Forum (ADF-VII), he said having one position, and everyone sticking to it, will help Africa in its negotiations on climate change.

The continent is negotiating possible compensation from developed countries for damages and losses it is suffering from global warming.

Climate change is principally a result of heavy greenhouse gas emissions in developed countries.

Africa is the least contributor to climate pollution, at just 3.8 percent, and yet suffered the most from its effects.

Ping said having a common position on climate change, and articulating it with one strong voice will help Africa secure a good deal for itself in ongoing talks on global warming.

At the Copenhagen global warming summit last year, developed countries pledged US$30 billion in compensation to developing countries for climate change between 2010 and 2012, and thereafter US$100 billion annually from 2020.

Developing nations, including Africa, feel the funds were not enough to finance their adaptation projects and programmes.

They are also unhappy with proposed disbursement modalities of the funds, saying most were drawn out.

It is in view of this, Ping said, that Africa should reach consensus and have a common negotiating position in the ongoing climate talks.

He advised non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are also involved in the negotiations – in most cases on the sidelines – to respect Africa’s views and position on global warming.

At the Copenhagen climate summit, for example, NGOs opposed Africa’s greenhouse gas emission target, and tried to force their own ceiling for the continent. “NGOs should do their work as they should, and not disrupt governments’ work. We saw a lot of disorganization among NGOs,” Ping said, referring to the Copenhagen summit.

Climate change provides opportunity for green economy - Steiner

By Ochieng’ Ogodo

The shift to a green economy in Africa and elsewhere should not be looked at just as an alternative climate change survival strategy but as a viable window of opportunity to catapult sustainable economic development on the continent, a top United Nations environment expert said on Thursday.

Achim Steiner, United Nations Under-Secretary General, and executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) told a green economy session at the Seventh African Development Forum (ADF-VII) that Africa must weigh its climate change adaptation and mitigation options carefully.

The continent, he said, must move away from programmes that led to destructive developments like deforestation, to those that were sustainable and addressed people’s needs like water, food and soil nutrients.

“Green economy is making the invisible visible,” he said.

“Do we realise the value of eco-system services that we get from the natural resources?” he asked.

The fact of the matter, Steiner noted, is that leaders across the world, especially in Africa, were increasingly beginning to face the challenges of development facing them.

Green economy, he said, was not adding colour, but another core value to ensuring that the current generation does not exploit eco-system resources in a manner that will not leave the coming generation with nothing to depend on.

“This is not foreign to Africa and leaders here are beginning to address sustainable development,” said Steiner.

He advocated a change in the way countries measured economic development to include the economic and social value of eco-system services, not just do so in Gross Domestic Product terms.

“This concept is not new, perhaps it has just reached an umbrella level,” Steiner said.

He cited Ethiopia as example of trailblazers in Africa in fostering a green economy, with wind and geothermal power projects, he said.

He said land degradation and eco-system depletion in Africa had been severe, and that forests and wetlands had been destroyed in the name of, among others, solving landlessness, and fuel supply.

For Africa to prosper, Steiner noted, it must mainstream development of renewable energy as part of its economic development.

“The value of global investments in renewable energy was much more than that of gas, oils and nuclear power put together last year,” he told the Forum.

On agriculture, Steiner said Africa needed to adopt farming practices that did not degrade the eco-system, and avoid mechanized agriculture that affected soil fertility.

Speaking in the same Forum, Benoit Labot, regional technical advisor on Climate Change and Energy at the UNDP, said climate change was a challenge to development, but also an opportunity to develop clean energy programmes.

“We have to change the way we do things about energy. We have to anchor our thoughts on climate change,” he said.

Tips for travelers

• Hours of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia at ECA: 9-12:45, 14-16:30
• Sweet tooth: Bilo’s pastry at the Old ECA building has delicious millefoglie, fruit tarts and irramisu for less than Br10. Open 8:30-6.
• Top the pastries with a machiato or expresso from Kaldis, just above Bilo’s.
Africa needs US$ 150 billion for climate change - expert

By Ochien’ Ogodo

The Seventh African Development Forum (ADF VII) was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 8 October. Under the theme “Getting it right: Reporting Climate Change for Sustainable Development in Africa”, the training workshop was organized by the Africa Climate Policy Centre (ACPC), in collaboration with the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), in the run-up to the Seventh African Development Forum (ADF) which opened Tuesday.

The theme of ADF VII is “Acting on Climate Change for Sustainable Development in Africa” and AfDB organizers are counting on the media to play a leading role in both the debates and processes.

The workshop therefore aimed to improve participants’ understanding of the issues around climate change and how it impacts Africa, so that they can be better prepared to raise awareness of the international negotiations and how local communities and individuals are affected by the impact of climate change in Africa.

Recognizing the stiff competition climate change stories face for news space from other newspaper sections, and radio/TV programmes, participants were challenged to “think outside the box” to write more compelling stories on what some described as an unfolding disaster for Africa.

In a statement at the opening session, Josué Dione, director of the ECA’s Division for Food Security and Sustainable Development, stressed the need for African journalists to adapt to the vast and increasing glossary of climate change terms and acronyms, conceding that due to the highly scientific nature of climate change science, “some technical issues, such as climate change adaptation, mitigation, finance and technology, require specialized training in order to enhance reportorial skills”.

For example, “What do all these mean for sustainable development and people’s livelihood? What about the Bali Platform and the Copenhagen Accord? What is the significance of the two degrees touted in Copenhagen? How close is Copenhagen Accord to the African common position and what are these common positions,” he asked.

During the experiences-sharing sessions that followed each presentation, it became evident that the current climate change specialists and related institutions also need to sharpen their communication approaches and the way they deal with reporters and the media as a whole for maximum impact. If accurate reporting and good journalism are critical to sound economic policy and good governance, then proper understanding of issues by reporters are essential prerequisites, participants agreed.

Organizers did not expect participants to become climate change experts within three days but they were confident that journalists would write better on these issues, if they understand exactly how climate change is affecting the livelihoods of African countries.
As adaptation takes centre stage...

Africa seeks new climate change development strategies

African Union Commission (AUC) commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, Tumusiime Rhoda Peace said on Thursday African countries should integrate climate change in their development strategies.

Speaking in a plenary session at the Seventh African Development Forum (ADF-VII), she said African states should also build strong climate change-related linkages, and exploit synergies that might exist.

Peace said Africa should work together to combat global warming, which had wrecked havoc in many countries on the continent, commonly in the form of droughts and flooding.

She highlighted the importance of capacity building and technology transfer in the battle against climate change, saying the two were critical in adaptation especially at community level.

The AUC official also implored African negotiators in ongoing climate talks to strongly articulate the continent’s position, and defend its interests.

World leaders are due to meet in Mexico shortly for the latest in a series of talks aimed at reaching an agreement ahead of climate concerns – as an example of marginalized groups such as indigenous people – being heard and considered in the ongoing negotiations.

But Peace said Africa should use, in the meantime, whatever local resources were available to adapt to climate change.

“In Africa, we must remain united and try to adapt with our resources,” she said.

Speaking at the same forum, Democratic Republic of Congo’s Minister of Environment, Nature Conservation and Tourism, Jose Endundo said Africa should remain steadfast in its position on climate change, and not shift ground.

He said Africa was not a big contributor to global warming, and therefore had no reason to soften its position in climate talks.

He implored developed countries not to just make climate change assistance pledges to developing nations, but to make good on the promises.

“We must stand on what we agreed. Africa reaffirms its position on a legally-binding agreement under the Kyoto protocol,” Endundo said.

He said as a global problem, every view on climate change – including that of marginalized groups such as indigenous people – should be heard and considered in the ongoing negotiations.

In departure from norm, Nigerian makes radical climate suggestion

Peter Ekweozoh, an assistant director in the Ministry of Science and Technology, said rich countries were at the moment not taking Africa’s climate concerns seriously because they were not as gravely affected by global warming as developing nations.

Third world countries accuse developed nations, the main climate polluters, of playing cat and mouse games in current global warming talks, behaviour the Nigerian official said stemmed from the fact rich countries had not as seriously threatened by climate change as Africa.

To forcefully drive home its climate concerns to the West, Ekweozoh – attending the Seventh African Development Forum (ADF-VII) - suggested Africa increases its greenhouse gas emissions to dangerous levels that will force developed nations into being serious and sincere in global warming negotiations.

“Africa is grossly under-utilizing its (greenhouse gas) emission quota. We have the population, we have the natural resources, the human capital and the expertise to catch up with the developed world in greenhouse gas emissions,” he said.

He said Africa already had the technology needed to meet its own greenhouse gas emission quota, and should use it.

He cited China - which put industrial development ahead of climate concerns – as an example of what Africa should do.

The Asian country is now one of the world’s top climate polluters, but had transformed itself into an economic giant.

“Why can’t Africa do the same thing? It is only through this approach that the rest of the world will listen to Africa,” Ekweozoh said.

He said there were many benefits of doing this, including economic and social development and employment creation on the continent.

To help realize industrial development, he said African countries should lure back its citizens who had emigrated to developed countries.

He said these had both the capital and expertise to help industrialize the continent.

Climate Change Meets Policy

United, Africa can tackle climate change – Zambia

The Seventh African Development Forum (ADF VII)

By Ochieng’ Ogodo

Afric a can achieve self-sufficiency in adaptation and mitigation with a consensual self-driven agenda, Zambian Minister of Natural Resources, Energy and Environment, Grain Malunga, said on Wednesday at the Seventh African Development Forum.

“Africa has demonstrated that all things being equal, Africa is not poor and with a consensual African-driven development agenda, we can be self-reliant,” he said.

Malunga said the African Development Bank (ADB) had the knowledge and capacity to support African countries in addressing challenges posed by climate change.

“We cannot over-emphasize the importance of the African Development Bank location in relation to the hosting of part of the fast-track funds that are critical for Africa as this will improve direct access to the funds, increase ownership and appreciation for addressing issues aligned to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa,” Malunga said.

While the continent was endowed with natural resources suitable for clean energy generation such as hydropower, it must not stop, however, getting worried about the impacts of climate change.

The phenomenon could, for example, cripple hydropower generation, and constrain efforts to increase energy supply in Africa.

We therefore need to mitigate and adapt to climate change by conserving our energy through proper catchment management,” said Malunga.

Last month he told the United Nations General Assembly that emphasis in MDG attainment should be put on ensuring access to energy.

But for Africa to adapt to the adverse impacts of global warming, Malunga noted capacity building, technological transfers and funding will be crucial.

The ADB, he said, was an important institution that could be of great value in helping the continent address climate change, and its involvement would go a long way in helping people cope.

“We believe that after intensively studying Africa’s problems and effectively managing them, we will not be disappointed,” he said.

He added: “We therefore hope that Africa Green Fund will provide allocations for mitigation and adaptation in order to finance projects and programmes that contribute to climate change resilience and low carbon.”

Reflecting on COP 15 in Copenhagen last year, Malunga said the outcome was disappointing but the funds under the fast track programme should be utilized.

He called on African climate negotiators to keep pushing for a good deal.
AFRICA: Thinking big on climate change modelling

If African countries had the capacity to do climate change projections, their data could have been fed into the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) assessments for the continent, said Richard Odingo, former vice-chair of the IPCC at one of the discussions ahead of the Seventh African Development Forum (ADF-VII).

The IPCC is still recovering from its controversial warning about the impact of climate change on food production in Africa, cited in its synthesis report. The warning turned out to have been based on a non-peer reviewed academic paper for three North African countries.

The warning said that since most agriculture in Africa is rain-fed, climate change, which is affecting vital rainfall patterns and pushing up temperatures, could halve crop yields in some countries by 2020.

“Africa should think big and do their own climate change modelling to forecast projections,” said Odingo, as climate scientists and meteorologists brainstormed on measuring climate change at the Forum organized by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

Better climate data will help countries prepare for soaring temperatures and natural events such as droughts, floods and storms set to become more intense and frequent as the impact of climate change unfolds. “There are gaps in our information collection,” he said.

Climate modelling initiatives launched in Africa in collaboration with universities in the West were not “good enough”, Odingo said.

To assess the impact of climate change, climatological data spanning at least 60 years is required. But countries in Africa have often had to shut down weather stations because of a lack of funds or political strife.

Amadou Gaye, head of the Laboratory of Atmospheric and Ocean Physics at Dakar’s University Cheikh Anta Diop, agreed. Gaye, who was one of the authors of the IPCC’s last assessment, said it would be easier for Africa to do projections on a large scale than prepare country-specific models. “We could start with that,” he said.

Obstacles

Some experts at the meeting said they lacked money to build capacity to collect and analyse climate data.

Sound climate data was the starting point in developing a climate change model, said Ntsolisi Shongwe, Swaziland’s national climate change co-ordinator. “And the quality of data varied across the continent,” he said.

But there were other stumbling blocks. “And when you have data, often departments within government are unwilling to share the information,” he noted.

Any modelling also needs to be validated by an authoritative body to make improvements. “When a few government agencies involved in data collection open themselves up for scrutiny,” Shongwe said. He South Africa was an exception on the continent. “All the government sectors [in South Africa] not only share their data but also open themselves up for scrutiny by the academics [climate change experts] at the University of Cape Town.”

Clim-Dev Africa

Gaye said the continent perhaps needed to look to the Climate Information for Development Needs: An Action Plan for Africa (Clim-Dev Africa), a programme aimed at improving weather data analysis, for assistance. The programme was started in 2005.

Recognizing the need to bring Africa on board, the action plan was put together for the continent with the help of the Global Climate Observing System, which in turn is a combined initiative of several UN agencies and the International Council for Science (ICSU). The other sponsors of the Africa plan were UNECA and the African Union Commission.

The programme was officially launched at the Seventh African Development Forum on 13 October. “It is a massive programme. We have had to develop strategy and terms of reference for the staff and then do the recruitment itself,” said Josué Dioné, one of UNECA.

Dioné, who heads the Food Security and Sustainable Development section at UNECA, was one of the prime movers for Clim-Dev Africa. “It is not that we are not working - we have already put US$30 million into the regional climate forecasting centres in Africa.”

Clim-Dev Africa also helped Africa develop its position at the UN climate change talks.

In a programme spread over 10 years, Clim-Dev Africa will support efforts to establish or upgrade weather observing systems to fill data gaps, expand capacity for analysing and interpreting data, and strengthen existing African climate institutions.

The programme also includes a climate policy centre, which will help governments draw up strategies to mitigate and adapt to the impact of climate change.

The Forum, which is focusing on dealing with climate change for sustainable development, will end on 15 October. - IRIN

Keta is a town in southeastern Ghana, on the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean, near the Volta River mouth.

Its double waterfront, once an asset to the main occupations of fishing and fish processing, eroded rapidly. During the 20th century more than half of what had been the area of the town was washed away. Many of Keta’s inhabitants moved south along the coast to Dzebu-kofe. In 1992, the Anlo-Keta Lagoon was placed on the list of Wetlands of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and in 1999 work began on measures to limit further erosion and to control flooding of the coastal region.

What is being done: Land reclamation from the lagoon in the area of Keta, Vodzra and Kedzri, providing areas where housing and businesses can be rebuilt. The project promotes protection of the environment through sustainable use, and fosters socio-economic interaction and growth. For example, there will be added territory for agriculture, and the road/causeway provides and re-opens the way for traffic to neighboring Togo and coastal Ghanian cities, towns and villages, providing farmers and other businesses in the area access to markets. The new beaches and rubble mound headlands will create protected areas where fishermen can launch their canoes, and give a secure home to the shore-based drag-net fishing industry. The flood relief will decrease farmer losses due to flooding of their lagoons, and reclaimed land will provide new areas for the creation of homes, businesses and communities.