

ECA

Supporting Africa's Development Agenda

Since the last Conference of Ministers in May 2005, the Economic Commission for Africa has continued with its efforts to address the continent's development challenges. The aftermath of the conference was marked by a change in leadership of the organization, as Executive Secretary K.Y Amoako bowed out after 10 years at the top. In his farewell speech, he said his time at ECA had witnessed close cooperation with African policymakers and leaders to sharpen economic and social policy on the continent.

In October 2005, he was replaced by Abdoulie Janneh from the UN Development Programme. Janneh has placed great emphasis

on boosting ECA's cooperation with the other institutional giants on the continent – the African Union and the African Development Bank – so as to avoid duplication of efforts in the work for Africa and move the development agenda forward.

In the intervening year, ECA has pressed ahead with its advocacy and facilitation work to promote positive development in Africa. Notable events include convening high-level meetings to assess progress in poverty reduction strategies and in least developed countries, helping African countries prepare for last year's World Trade Organisation conference in Hong Kong, and launching key publications such as the 'Economic Report on Africa' and the 'African Governance Report'. ■

Promoting poverty reduction

African ministers and policymakers met in the Egyptian capital Cairo from 26-28 March 2006 to discuss how poverty reduction strategies (PRS) could help achieve the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. After two days of intense discussion and review of the PRS experience, they concluded that African countries must develop bold new national development strategies that were consistent with the MDGs. Jointly organized by the ECA and the African Union, in collaboration with UNDP, the meeting highlighted the need for strong emphasis on national ownership of the strategies. It also urged countries to maintain good macroeconomic policies - necessary for improved and sustained economic growth. The meeting's outcome document noted that the first generation of poverty reduction strategies, which are just coming to an end, had fallen short of expectations particularly in balancing social concerns with the productive sectors. So participants at



the Cairo meeting stressed that the next generation should be instrumental in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, by basing development strategies on national requirements and boosting core areas such as education and gender equality. ■

Helping develop least developed countries

A three-day intergovernmental meeting in February 2006 drew together finance and planning ministry representatives from 34 Least Developed Countries in Africa and from Haiti. Sponsored by the the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UdN-OHRLLS), ECA and UNDP, the regional meeting was held to prepare for a global review of the 2001 Brussels Programme of Action. The BPOA is a commitment undertaken by heads of state worldwide to promote development in the LDCs. Participants heard calls for speeding up economic growth in Africa, with special attention to poverty reduction.

The meeting was attended by the OHRLLS Special Representative Anwarul Chowdhury who stressed the importance of boosting Africa's trade potential to achieve the targets set by the BPOA. He said dependency on primary commodities remained a challenge to be overcome by most LDCs. He added that addressing population and health issues in Africa was crucial to helping LDCs achieve the Millennium Goals. Augustin Fosu of the ECA noted the overwhelming need to improve governance at national level and to scrap barriers to development, such as unnecessary bureaucracy. Participants agreed that collecting credible data was critical for monitoring the targets of programmes such as the BPOA.

In connection with this meeting, ECA's Executive Secretary Abdoulie Jannah in March attended a similar gathering in Bangkok, Thailand which concentrated on Asian LDCs. In his address to this meeting, he noted that south-south cooperation had a critical role to play in addressing the development challenges of least developed countries. "With very little disposable income and a growing population, if we do not immediately lift the LDCs from the cradle of poverty, humanity will be taking a step back in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals," he told participants. ■

Pioneering data awareness

The second forum on African statistical development, held at ECA headquarters from 9-10 February, overwhelmingly approved the creation of a reference framework aimed at improving the collection and collation of data on the continent. Participants – including statistics experts from individual countries, ECA, the African Development Bank, World Bank, OECD, and NGOs - were unanimous in underlining the importance of credible data for Africa's development agenda. ECA's Executive Secretary Abdoulie Jannah stressed the critical need to invest in statistics. He noted that consensus on

the regional framework confirmed a commitment to improving data gathering systems in Africa.

Participants however urged caution with regard to African participation in the world statistical system. "I would prefer if Africa were to really solidify its statistical foundation before it engages in major change," said Janvier Litse of the ADB. "But of course we can set our agenda based on modern systems, which will eventually put us on the same track as other continents."

Richard Manning of the OECD noted that donors had pledged to increase funding for statistical development in Africa, but he also called for close collaboration between ECA and the ADB in particular to raise funds for data development. ■

Spearheading the e-agenda

ECA attended the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Tunis from 16-18 November 2005 to help push forward Africa's development agenda in information technology. The summit, a follow-up to the first phase held in Geneva, essentially tackled the issues of internet governance and financing the information society.

One of the most contentious issues faced by Africa is that of internet governance, and agreement on a common position was reached ahead of the summit at a preparatory meeting in Ghana. In Tunis, ECA hosted several events notably panel debates on issues such as building regional partnerships. The African Regional Action Plan – which will have political leadership from the AU and technical support from ECA - was launched in Tunis. It forms the basis for ECA's implementation strategy of WSIS recommendations, especially with regard to achieving the MDGs.

ECA also sponsored the Highway Africa News Agency aimed at ensuring media coverage of Africans participating in WSIS in the form of a daily print and online newspaper, as well as audiovisual coverage. ■

Working to ward off water disasters

From 16-22 March, ECA took part in the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico City where African water ministers called for an early warning system to mitigate water-related disasters.

Forming part of the discussion on water issues in Africa were reports prepared by ECA and other partners. "Water Resources Development in Africa" for example revealed that Africa has only developed about three percent of its technically feasible hydropower potential, while only six percent of cultivated land is irrigated. Currently about 300 million people in Africa do not have access to safe water, about 313 million have no access



to sanitation and over 88 million people are malnourished. An annual investment outlay of US \$4.7 billion is required to achieve food security in Africa and about \$20 billion yearly is needed for African countries to meet the 2025 water vision.

ECA coordinated the African exhibition stand at the forum, on behalf of UN-Water/Africa and ADB, attracting huge crowds. ■

Supporting sustainable development

The 4th Committee on Sustainable Development, hosted by ECA in October 2005, looked at the anomaly of poverty on a continent richly endowed with natural resources. In his address to delegates, Josue Dione who heads ECA's Sustainable Development Division, noted that millions of people had no access to energy resources and only 23 percent of Africans were provided with electricity. He stressed the need to address this paradox by finding ways of harnessing land-based resources. Peace, security, and good governance were vital for the successful implementation of Africa's sustainable development agenda and ECA would continue to support critical policy making among member states, he said.

Tackling trade issues

ECA worked with the African group of trade negotiators ahead of the World Trade Organisation talks in Hong Kong last December. Experts from the commission advised negotiators on the ministerial text for the Hong Kong meeting, with particular emphasis on the development benchmarks agreed upon by African trade ministers in Arusha before the WTO talks. However in the final analysis, the outcome of the Hong Kong meeting was largely a disappointment for developing countries. Africa in particular believed the Declaration issued at the end of the meeting failed to address inequalities in the global trading system. ECA will continue to work with African government and other stakeholders to ensure vigilance and pro-activity in future negotiations in a bid to make the global trading system fairer.

In this vein, ECA and the AU hosted a follow-up meeting in Geneva in February this year to assess the outcome of the WTO meeting. Key issues were identified – including development,

services, agriculture and non-agricultural markets – and a strategy devised for approaching future negotiations.

Meanwhile in a speech to African trade ministers in April 2006, ECA Executive Secretary Abdoulaye Janneh pointed out that the Asian experience showed dynamic trade policies could lead to a complete economic transformation. “This experience strengthens our conviction that Africa can also be on to something big if trade could be allowed to play its rightful role,” he stressed. “It is for this reason, at the ECA, assuring development gains from international trade and the trading system is an overarching objective of our work.”

Generating gender equality

ECA was active in promoting gender issues notably through the use of its African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), devised to help governments monitor the status of gender equality in their respective countries. A meeting in January of the Committee on Women and Development (CWD), which advises ECA, reviewed the work programme of the commission's



gender division and participants emphasized the need to press ahead with implementing the Beijing Platform of Action for gender equality.

“Ten years after the Beijing Platform for Action was agreed

on by world leaders, women continue to suffer from major inequalities, manifested in poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and violations, including rape and other forms of violence,” noted Aida Mbodj, current chairwoman of the CWD Bureau. Participants agreed that ECA's role in the follow-up strategy would include familiarizing countries with this strategy, helping build up national capacity in identifying key issues and obstacles, providing tools to track progress, and helping countries review national policies and challenges.

The AGDI, which was launched in 2004, has been acknowledged as a vital tracking mechanism by entities such as the EU, AU and various UN bodies such as UNFPA and UNIFEM. In 2004-2005, 12 African countries used the AGDI to collect gender data in the social, economic and political areas. The results of the field studies have been collated for publication in the African Women's Report (AWR), providing in-depth analysis of individual indicators, particular trends and salient issues, and promoting exchanges between African countries. It is hoped the index will soon be extended to other countries. ■



Producing New Publications

Since the last Conference of Ministers, ECA has produced several major publications and launched a new web magazine dedicated to the challenges faced in attaining the MDGs. And in order to bring the work of the Commission to as wide an audience as possible, it has also launched 'ECA Update' – a monthly newsletter highlighting main events, summarized for easy reading and mailed out to subscribers on ECA's vast database.

In September 2005, ECA issued the publication “**The Millennium Development Goals in Africa – Progress and Challenges**”, tracking developments along the continent’s path to meeting these goals. The key message of the report centred around the fact that despite widespread pessimism, some African countries were on course to meet key goals and that with the right policies, many more could meet the target date of 2015. But, the report stressed, faster progress was needed. To coincide with this publication, and keep the MDGs issue alive, ECA launched a web magazine with short accessible articles written by staff experts on themes affecting the MDGs. The magazine is updated as new articles come in.

The **Economic Report on Africa**, one of ECA's flagship publications, was produced in December 2005 and stressed the

overriding need to create jobs in a bid to tackle poverty. Despite record economic growth in Africa, poverty was actually getting worse, the report noted. Sub-titled “Meeting the Challenges of Unemployment and Poverty in Africa”, the report focused on four key areas in the fight against unemployment and poverty - structural transformation to break away from the under-use of rural labour; addressing widespread youth unemployment; harnessing globalization to create decent jobs; and creating an enabling environment for the fast expansion of private sector jobs through increased investments.

The other major publication launched by ECA was the **African Governance Report**, issued in March 2006. It concluded that overall governance was improving, but major challenges still remained. The report, a culmination of a three-year survey of experts and households in 27 African countries, listed some of these challenges as strengthening judicial systems, boosting the effectiveness of the civil service, and better integration of traditional institutions into the governance system. It highlighted the need for a strong and comprehensive capacity building agenda, focusing on strengthening parliaments and other government institutions, tapping the potential of information technology, promoting responsible media, and confronting the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on governance. ■

Cooperating for the continent

These are just a few of the Commission's main achievements over the past year since the last Conference of Ministers. With the arrival of the new Executive Secretary, the way forward will be to maintain strong and effective cooperation with the African Development Bank and the African Union. In March, the heads of the three organizations held a brainstorming session in Addis Ababa dedicated to achieving a more united, integrated and prosperous Africa. They agreed on the need to present a common front on key issues, help African states to develop and implement homegrown solutions to problems, and also take the lead in ensuring a transformed partnership with external development players.

Since that crucial meeting, cooperation has been stepped up with the organization of joint conferences such as the PRSP meeting in Cairo and the co-sponsorship of a workshop on the critical issue of land reform. The rest of the year will continue to witness a similar pooling of resources and initiatives to bring about the best for Africa. ■