

Africa to develop its water resources for agriculture, energy

TRIPOLI: A three-day pan-African ministerial conference pledged on 17 December to promote water development throughout the continent to fully exploit Africa's agricultural and hydroenergy potential.

In a final Declaration the conference on "Water for Energy and Agriculture in Africa: Challenges of Climate Change, noted that water is a key resource to economic and social development as well as to hunger and poverty eradication in Africa, and that food and energy security are prerequisites for the development of Africa's human capital.

The conference, which brought together ministers from 53 African countries, recognised that the challenges faced by the continent concerning food security, achieving the Millennium Development Goals, increased energy demand and combating climate change required all countries to move together.

Implementation of integrated water, agriculture and energy programmes to enhance sustainable development in Africa should be considered a priority, the Declaration said.

This involved expansion of the area under sustainable land management and reliable water control, and accelerated investment in water for agriculture and energy.

The conference declared its support of efforts to enhance clean energy production in the continent, particularly in developing hydropower potential and in strengthening regional power pools.

Climate change

On climate change, which is likely to have a severe impact across Africa, the conference agreed to foster research and development of renewable energy and agriculture in Africa in order to increase resilience and adaptation to climate change.

It called on countries bordering Lake Chad to double their efforts, and on donors and development partners to provide immediate assistance to help save the lake and its basin from "looming human and environmental disaster." Once the world's sixth largest lake, Lake Chad has shrunk to 1/10th of its size in the last 35 years, endangering the livelihoods of local populations.

World Summit

It welcomed a proposal by FAO to convene a World Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2009 to agree on the rapid and definitive eradication of hunger from the planet through improved governance of world food security and by finding \$30 billion a year to invest in water and rural infrastructures and in increasing agricultural productivity in the developing world.

The conference was organised by FAO together with the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya Government and in collaboration with stakeholders including the African Union, the African Ministers' Council on Water Development, the African Development Bank and the Economic Commission for Africa. FAO is currently chair of UN Water, the inter-agency mechanism co-ordinating the UN's water-related activities.

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