

Climate change can create job opportunities in Africa

Utilising the many sources of energy in Africa is the best safeguard against the negative effects of climate change. This was a key message from the international conference on climate change and employment in Nairobi, staged by the Africa Commission.

Droughts and floods are increasingly affecting both rural and urban populations. But there are ways to tackle climate change, and investments in improved irrigation, water storage, hydro-electric power generation and drainage schemes as well as flood protection can create growth, jobs and opportunities for Africa's youth.

This and many others positive statements was brought forward at the fourth of five thematic conferences staged by the international, high-level Africa Commission. Under the theme "Employment and Economic Growth - The challenge of climate change," participants from all over Africa shared their ideas on how tackle this complex issue.

The conference was opened by Prime Minister Raila Odinga. In his opening remarks, the prime minister described Nairobi as the "green city in the sun" that is no longer so green due to pollution and climate change. He emphasised the need for an approach that takes into account the reality faced by both urban and rural populations.

The conference was hosted by two of the eighteen members of the Africa Commission: Betty Maina, executive director of the Kenya Association of Manufactures and Dr. Christian Friis Bach, international director, DanChurchAid.

They both expressed their great satisfaction with the recommendations put forward by the participants.

"Africa contributes the least but suffers the most when it comes to climate change. But we cannot keep blaming others, when we are facing drought and floods every day somewhere on the continent. We have to find ways to cope. A good starting point is thinking about our future livelihoods, growth and development and start acting on it to make these dreams come true," said Maina.

"Instead of looking at the obstacles, the participants came up with many concrete ways of turning obstacles into opportunities for growth and employment. Today the inspiration and innovation have come from Africa itself, sharing experiences in areas like renewable energy, water management, and biomass production. This really created an atmosphere of optimism," said Dr. Christian Friis-Bach.

Climate change is likely to have a major impact on economic growth, employment creation for growth and poverty reduction in Africa. Climate change may also provide new opportunities in the form of access to new sources of investment and finance, new market niches for agricultural products and renewable energy; perhaps forging new global partnerships for sustainable development.

The conference brought together experts on climate change, representatives from the private sector, academia, government and the civil society, as well as youth organisations.

The Africa Commission was launched in April 2008. The aim of the commission is to present new ideas and strategies to strengthen international development co-operation with Africa.

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