

African Union/ International Events

Water for Agriculture and Energy in Africa: Preparations Kick Off

The water sector is geared for another major African Union (AU) high-level process, following closely in the footsteps of the July 2008 Summit focus in Sharm El Sheikh that dealt with the theme of water and sanitation. The coming event will underline the urgent need for long-term solutions to the energy and food crises that have dogged many regions and countries in the continent this year. The event is a Ministerial Conference on Water for Agriculture and Energy in Africa, to be held in Sirte, Libya Arab Jamahiriya on the 15-17 December 2008. A consultative meeting on the preparation for the conference was convened under the auspices of the African Union Commission (AUC) on 6 August 2008 at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa.

The conference will address water for agriculture in relation to food security and poverty alleviation and as well as water for energy security in the face of climate change. It will also examine investment needs and management problems for harnessing of water, irrigation at village level, rehabilitation of large-scale hydro-agriculture works and for the development of major river basins.

The impetus for the ministerial was generated at the margins of the margins of the Summit on the food security crisis that was held in Rome, and a steering committee evolved on 5 June 2008 at the consultations. It discussed, among other things, the conceptual framework of the conference and the mandate, composition and mode of operation of the steering committee. The consultative meeting at the AU reviewed the progress made on preparation for the conference and worked on a road map towards achieving its main objectives. As in the Rome consultations, AUC is being supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to steer the process, facilitate the conference and follow up the outcome of the conference. The FAO has established a support secretariat for this conference at its headquarters in Rome.

The consultations at the AUC involved members of the diplomatic corps, representatives from AUC departments of Rural Economy & Agriculture and Energy & Infrastructure, representatives from FAO headquarters in Rome, UNECA and UNEP. The secretariat took the meeting through the proposed structure of the three-day Ministerial conference that will be informed by a comprehensive process of sub regional workshops from which sub regional view reports will be compiled and synthesized into thematic papers for the conference. The conference will have three working sessions that will address: Prospects for food and energy demands by 2030-2050; Defining the investment envelope and

Financing Mechanisms; and implementation strategies. There will also be two roundtable sessions, one covering saving Lake Chad and the other dealing with partnership for the financing of water and energy investment projects. The sessions will be concurrent with the final declaration drafting session that will precede the closing session to and adopt the action plan.

Anticipated outcomes of the Ministerial conference were reviewed at the meeting. They include stocktaking of the major issues regarding water for agriculture and energy and the impacts of climate change. The conference is expected to generate key decisions and action plans, concrete investment programs for water development, and partnership agreements for food and energy security in Africa.

It was agreed that the next consultative meeting was going to be held in September 2008 on a date and venue to be communicated to the members. There is also going to be a workshop in October and the last steering committee will reconvene in November, a month to the Ministerial conference. The event was among the last to be presided over by Dr. Ahmadu Babagana, AUC Director for Rural Economy and Agriculture, who has joined the FAO as its representative in Banjul, The Gambia. Dr. Babagana steered the technical work of the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) for over four years, and left shortly after his colleague Mr. Foday Bojang who served DREA as Head of Environment and Natural Resources Division. The latter was a long-serving professional and seasoned manager who carried over from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the AU. Foday Bojang has returned to his technical forte as Senior Forestry Officer in the FAO based in Accra, Ghana. Both Dr. Babagana and Foday Bojang attended the June 2008 session of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) in Johannesburg and consolidated AU support for AMCEN in areas such as climate change and African environmental conventions



Mr. Foday Bojang