

Remarks at the Convention's Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management
(IWRM) Meeting

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As we face this time of unprecedented crisis, and as we reflect on how to mobilise a green recovery, water is obviously a cross-cutting area of intervention.

Availability and access to water resources is crucial to human health, environmental sustainability, economic growth and overall socioeconomic transformation in Africa which can accelerate the pace toward the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 Aspirations. The sustainable harnessing and management of inland water resources is also integrated within the African Union's Blue Economy Strategy launched at the AU summit earlier this year.

The continent is well-endowed with water resources, it is home to 17 major rivers, 160 lakes (>27 km²) and roughly a third of the world's major international water basins (>100,000km²). There are about 80 river- and lake-basins with over 38 transboundary aquifers. The total renewable freshwater resources of Africa have been estimated between 4050 and 4590 km³ year⁻¹. Despite their abundance, surface waters resources are unevenly distributed and ground water aquifers are often inaccessible which pose serious challenges of development.

In addition, the increasing water demand caused by Population growth needs (projected to reach 1.7 billion by 2030), urbanization, agriculture, industrialization and other competing socio-economic demands continue to impact water availability and accessibility in Africa. Moreover, meeting the increasing demand will further be complicated by climate change impacts which will intensify water stress and affect up to 460 million people by 2025. The increased water scarcity if not well managed to meet competing demands overtime could become an issue of tension, conflict, environmental degradation which could threaten peace and security in the region.

Nature based solutions around water are also an area of priority to simultaneously protect water resources and build resilience to climate change.

The UNECA is supporting the development of nature based solutions as a means to improve access to water resources and build climate resilience. ECA is working with Ethiopia on its Green legacy programme- through which it has ambitiously planned to plant 20 billion seedlings from 2019-2024; of which 5 billion seedlings are being planted in 2020

The Green Legacy programme:

- Aims to provide low-cost solutions to protect water infrastructure while delivering a wider range of ecosystem services and protecting vulnerable sectors of society
- Will be implemented in three hot spot areas of the Nile Sub-Basins namely Mugar, Guder and Jemma watersheds
- It also considers a range of activities in Afar, Somalia and Addis Ababa Administration to diversify the livelihood of the community

It contributes to the nation's low-emission, climate resilient infrastructure and development plans by deploying appropriate forms of green interventions, developing the skills of young people, and harnessing new technologies through knowledge exchange, capacity building and technology transfer schemes.

Major outputs:

1. increase carbon sequestration by planting and managing 450 ha of indigenous and exotic tree species as part of Green Legacy Initiative campaign;
2. rehabilitate 100 ha of degraded lands through the construction of various soil and water conservation structures;
3. build resilience of infrastructure, ecosystems and local communities by reducing siltation and improving the livelihoods of 150,000 households

through the provision of energy saving stoves and other livelihood options (e.g., fruit trees, fodder trees, beehives);

Faced with consequential water management challenges, African countries must adopt good water governance that will ensure efficient balanced use of limited water resources among competing demands and safeguard the protection of ecosystems that store these water resources, particularly water systems that transcend national boundaries.

Hence, enhanced cooperation amongst states and good neighborliness will be crucial in addressing challenges of increasing water stress and scarcity to enable countries develop at a pace that will lead to attainment of Sustainable development Goals and Africa's Agenda 2063.

I am glad to note that several African countries have become party to the Water Convention and many more are at various stages of acceding to the convention and ECA stands ready to support those African countries in this process by providing technical support on water governance, policy formulation and law. In the same vein, the ECA is working with the Government of Senegal in the preparation of hosting the 9th world water Forum in Dakar, next March 2021.

Lastly, ECA in partnership with UNECE based on each comparative advantage will work together to promote transboundary cooperation and partnership for equitable utilization and management of water resources and work to diminish the potential risks of social conflicts under the changing climate to ensure a rapid and sustainable growth in Africa.