

Call for agriculture to be central to Africa's development

ABUJA, Nigeria - The 11th African Economic Conference (AEC) wound up in Abuja, Nigeria on Wednesday, after three days of intensive discussions on how African countries can achieve agro-allied industrialisation.



Image by 123RF

Over 300 participants attended the annual event, co-organised by the African Development Bank (AfDB), UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on the theme, “Feed Africa: Towards Agro-Allied Industrialization for Inclusive Growth.”

“This should not just be another conference. There has to be some key actions going forward, deploying agriculture to spearhead Africa’s economic transformation,” Ousmane Dore, the resident representative of the African Development Bank’s Nigeria Country Office, said as he closed the meeting.

Dore highlighted the Bank’s operations in Nigeria, a huge agriculture portfolio including the Enable Youth programme, which is assisting young graduates, or “agripreneurs”, to venture into a variety of agri-businesses. The theme of the conference was timely, he said.

Commenting on the outcomes, Adam Elhiraika, director of Macroeconomic Policy Division of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), urged participants to share the excitement and important messages that emerged from the conference with partners and governments in order to ensure their implementation.

For his part, Ayodele Odusola, chief economist and head of the strategy and analysis team for UNDP's Regional Bureau for Africa, said the theme of the conference was in tune with the African Union's 2063 agenda, as well as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. He echoed the sentiments of the Conference that agro-allied industrialisation would lead to the attainment of Africa's ultimate development objectives.

Several research papers were presented at the conference, alongside high-level panel discussions on agro-allied industrialisation. The research papers ranged from agriculture; climate change; and food security; which served the conference well as they initiated discussions on sustainable development.

Opening the conference earlier, Nigeria's vice-president, Yemi Osinbajo, commended the theme and the high-level participation in the conference, adding that the Government looks forward to the outcome of its deliberations "as it would be very useful as we design our new economic recovery plan where agro-industrialisation will certainly play a key role".

AfDB President, Akinwumi Adesina, gave a keynote speech in which he underscored the fact that agriculture, which contributes over 28% of Africa's GDP, holds the key for accelerated growth, diversification and job creation, for African economies and its people.

"Agriculture provides the basic raw materials needed for industrial development. Food accounts for the highest share of consumer price index and providing cheap food is critical for taming inflation. When inflation is low, interest rates decline and it brings greater private sector investments. A more productive, efficient and competitive agriculture sector is critical for boosting rural economies, where the majority of the population live in Africa," Adesina said. "The future of Africa depends on agriculture."

Two research papers claimed the top positions in the final review by the conference organisers. The first position went to Mintewab Bezabih of the UK School of Economics and Political Science, Remidius Ruhinduka of the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Mare Sarr, University of Cape Town, South Africa, who all presented their work on "[Climate change perception and system of rice intensification \(SRI\) in Tanzania: A moment approximation approach](#)". While the second position went to a paper titled "[Greenhouse Gas Mitigation in the Agricultural Sector: Win-Win or Trade-Off among Small Farmers from West Africa](#)", written and presented by Tiertou Edwige Some of Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegal and Bruno Barbier of the Centre de Recherche d'Économie Appliquée (CREA) in Senegal.

The conference attracted a number of eminent speakers over the three days, including Eric Maskin, economics professor at Harvard and co-recipient of the 2007 Nobel Prize; Xiaobo Zhang, economics professor and senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI); Chris Barrett, professor in Applied Economics at Cornell University; and Paul Amaza, a medical professor at the University of Jos, Nigeria.

Other high-level participants included, among others, Cho Gyoung-Rae, Secretary General of the Korea-Africa Good and Agriculture Cooperation Initiative (KAFACI); Charles McClain, deputy minister of agriculture for planning and development in the Liberia Ministry of Agriculture; Henry Eyebe Ayissi, minister of agriculture and rural development, Cameroon; and Godwin Emefiele, governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria.

The 12th African Economic Conference will take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in December 2017.