

ECA aims to be Africa's economic thinktank

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia - The Economic Commission for Africa is aiming to become Africa's premier think tank, executive secretary Vera Songwe told African Ambassadors recently at a retreat, as most African countries were facing similar issues in an ever-more challenging global context.



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Songwe said the ECA wanted Africa to rely on it to address some of its social, economic and environmental challenges. ECA, working with member States through engagement and practical application of quality research and evidence generated through the organisation's work, can offer solutions to accelerate the achievement of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda.

"ECA should be your door to the best policy advice. And if we don't have the knowledge in-house, we have the capacity to bring the best of the world to you," she told the Ambassadors. "We want to be your partners in building a prosperous Africa."

In addition, she briefed the Ambassadors on the new strategic directions of the ECA, which are:

- Building sustainable development solutions to accelerate Africa's economic diversification and industrialisation.
- Creating innovative solutions to finance sustainable infrastructure, human, physical and social for a transforming Africa.
- Contributing solutions to transboundary issues, with a focus on social inclusion.
- Developing regional solutions as a contribution to global governance issues, as well as building knowledge to advocate for and manage Africa's next-generation challenges.

As part of the proposed reform agenda, the Executive Secretary plans to create a private sector division, focusing on the business environment with respect to energy, infrastructure services, financial sector and capital market development. In addition, the issues of poverty and inequality, as well as governance, will receive added attention in dedicated sections.

Songwe said the retreat was an opportunity for the ECA's senior team to listen to the permanent representatives, build a stronger relationship between Addis and the member states and ensure that country and continental priorities were aligned and consistent with those of the African Union.

"This retreat is the first of its kind, but we hope to build on it to ensure ECA delivers value to its member states and the AU," she said.

For his part, the deputy chairperson of the African Union, Kwesi Quartey, welcomed the meeting and said, "The conversation on how to collaborate is useful and helpful, and attention needs to be given to the origin of African states. Collaboration is a process that requires enlightening discussions on capacity building, investment and application of science and technology, education for every boy and girl, among others. It is great to know that we are in this process together."

Songwe said that with African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), there was momentum on the continent, "that says that we as a continent are breaking borders and we need to work together".

She also briefed the Ambassadors on a number of issues, including the recent annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank that focused on financing for development.

Agenda

The main agenda of the retreat was to discuss ways of improving the working relationship between the permanent representatives and the ECA. As an ice breaker, a presentation on the review of the intergovernmental structures launched the discussions with the objective of collecting the feedback of permanent representatives on how the Commission's intergovernmental structure and processes could be more effective and fit for purpose.

Permanent representatives appreciated what they said was great work being done by the ECA but said more could be done to improve communication and collaboration between the Ambassadors, the ECA and the African Union Commission (AUC).

Permanent representatives offered a number of actions with responsibilities on both sides that will contribute to strengthened collaboration and coordination between the ECA and AUC, as well as with their permanent missions. They welcomed the opportunities to take an active role in shaping the delivery of the Commission's mandates and fostering a more accessible ECA that works in tandem with permanent representatives and their respective capitals.

It was agreed that the retreat should be an annual event at the least, allowing ECA and the permanent representatives to improve their engagement, foster better communication with the Africa Groups in New York, Brussels and Geneva particularly, and leverage the role of the permanent representatives in advocating the impact of ECA's work at UN headquarters and globally.

Identity

As a demonstration of ECA's reach and analytical work, permanent representatives were briefed on a digital identity initiative that ECA is embarking on to ensure every African has a legal identity. The briefing was done by ECA staff and Sanjay Jain who was the project manager for India's famed Aadhaar program that helped to register over a billion people.

Ambassador Hope Tumukunde Gasatura of Rwanda and chair of the African Union Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) thanked the ECA for organising the retreat.

“We are really appreciative and we are happy because it was educative, it was insightful and we have shared our understanding, thoughts and views on what we think the ECA should be doing and we learnt so much, especially how the ECA is working and what it is that we can come to them for. We will continue with the discourse,” she said.

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