

UNECA organizes workshop on mainstreaming Water-Energy Nexus in Africa commences

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Children watch as women pump water from a borehole in Borno state

A three-day workshop to discuss mainstreaming and implementing the water-energy nexus for sustainable development in Africa opened today in Addis Ababa.

Organized by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), UN Environment, the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the Ethiopian Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity, the meeting organized from 4 to 6 September 2018, will discuss Africa's water and energy targets and indicators, including cross-sectoral mainstreaming, the challenges related to the water-energy nexus and possible solutions, and other related issues as the continent seeks to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Speaking during the opening session, Abraha Adugna Ashenafi, Ethiopia's State Minister for Irrigation in the Water, Irrigation and Electricity Ministry, said water and energy were closely interlinked and interdependent hence water and energy problems should not be addressed in isolation or at the expense of each other.

"It is critical to better understand the water-energy nexus and the driving forces of the water and energy cycles for efficient and sustainable use of these

resources,” he said, adding to manage both resources, planners and decision makers need to consider ways to maximize the supply of one while minimizing the over use of the other.

Mr. Ashenafi shared with participants projects Ethiopia has embarked on to protect its catchment areas that are critical for energy production and water supply, adding the country will be refining the interface between policies and strategies for water and energy to better capitalize on that nexus, in addition to food security.

Linus Mofor, a Senior Environmental Affairs Officer at the ECA, said African countries are already experiencing catastrophic climate change and variability impacts in inter-related ways across many sectors – including water, energy and agriculture.

This calls for integrated approaches in responding to the increasing energy and water demand to enhance livelihoods and sustain economic growth and address the additional pressures on natural resources due to urbanization and population growth in a continent affected by the changing climate.

“That is why for us at the ECA the nexus work is of high importance, especially in view of how we support our member States with the implementation of their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to climate change under the framework of the Paris Agreement,” said Mr. Mofor.

Interlinkages

Samba Thiam, Head of the UN Environment Liaison Office to the African Union Commission, ECA and Representative to Ethiopia, said that with the increasing demands for water and energy on the continent, it is important for experts to understand their interlinkages as well as potential water-energy nexus options that can effectively contribute to meeting Africa’s water and energy demands.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the centrality of energy and water resources to sustainable development, and the vital role that improved access to both water and energy play in advancing progress in other areas, including health, education and poverty eradication.

“An integrated approach to the water-energy nexus can increase energy efficiency, decrease water pollution, reduce costs of energy and water delivery, increase access to services, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions,” said Mr. Thiam.

Implementation challenges and lessons learned from the African Region and their linkages with other regions will be shared during the workshop to mainstream and implement water and energy nexus to achieve the sustainable

development goals, Manzoor Qadir, Assistant Director at UNU-INWEH added.

He said that significant advances would be required in policy reforms and institutional integration to mainstream and implement water and energy nexus in the region.

Jong Soo Yoon, Head of the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNSOD) said water was the key driver for sustainable development hence the need for such a workshop.

“At the end of the workshop we hope we would have contributed to developing the capacity of governmental institutions and relevant stakeholders in the African region to effectively manage the water-energy nexus and interlinkages with other SDGs for sustainable development to facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at national level,” he said.

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Organizers hope to enhance knowledge management and best practices’ sharing on the water-energy nexus and inter-linkages with other SDGs; and strengthening advocacy and outreach in the areas of energy and water and their interlinkages during the next three days.

Around 100 participants from the African Region will attend the workshop. These include officials and practitioners from the water and energy sectors. Experts from UN Environment, UN-Water, SE4All, United Nations University (UNU-INWEH and UNU-FLORES), World Bank, African Union Commission, African Development Bank (AfDB), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and other international organizations will also provide inputs to the workshop.