

Agriculture key sector for Africa says Dlamini-Zuma

ADDIS ABABA: Agriculture remains one of the key sectors that can transform the African continent, African Union Commission Chairperson Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma said in Ethiopia on Wednesday, 29 January 2014.



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"We have an extremely big land which can accommodate several countries such as china and the United States but we are not utilising it to our economic benefit and this needs to change," Dlamini Zuma said.

She could not understand why Africa, which has not exhausted its arable land, continued to import food from other continents. The African Union has chosen agriculture and food security as this year's theme for the 22nd Heads of State Summit which gets underway in Addis Ababa on Thursday.

Describing Africa as "food and nutrition insecure", Dlamini-Zuma emphasised the importance of African countries and the AU to concentrate on land and ensuring that prospective farmers had access to capital.

"As we are going into the next 50 years, we need to see how we can change the situation from being net importers of food to producing enough food for ourselves, processing and exporting to major markets".

Agriculture was one area that brought the revenues directly to the famers and the families that were involved in the sector, she said.

According to the Nepad, a technical body of the African Union, the majority of African countries should be able to produce enough food for their people and export more if correct investment choices in agriculture were followed.

Non-governmental organisation Oxfam says the Horn of Africa has been in the grip of a major food crisis, with millions of people severely affected in drought-stricken areas of Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Uganda. The food crisis that hit East Africa in the middle of 2011 affected 13 million people and in Somalia triggered the first famine of the 21st century.

Nepad's own initiatives such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) aims to raise agricultural productivity in Africa to at least six percent annually to contribute to poverty alleviation and elimination of hunger across the continent. In addition, CAADP requires countries to commit at least 10 percent of their national budgets to agriculture. Since 2003, thirty countries have signed up to the CAADP Compact and eight have surpassed the 10 percent target.

Dlamini-Zuma said the AU Commission had agreed on a number of strategies to scale up its response to Africa's food crises and these would include investing more in scientific research and technology.

"As the commission we have agreed that throughout this year, we will do our land through the lands of agriculture. We must say, in human resource, how are we going to improve...how are we going to improve the research in agriculture that would contribute to improving our productivity".

In addition, the commission needed to encourage investments in agriculture infrastructure that would make intra-trade possible among African countries, Dlamini-Zuma said.

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