



WELCOME STATEMENT

BY

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AT THE

**SECOND INTERNATIONAL APEDIA CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE
LAND USE IN AFRICA**

14:00

30 AUGUST 2010

WINDHOEK
(THE POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA)

Director of Ceremonies,

Distinguished Government Officials

His Excellency Egon Kochanke, *Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Namibia*

APEDIA members

Distinguished Professors and International Guests especially from:

Polytechnic of Namibia; Justus Liebig Universität Giessen; Makerere University; Hawasa University, Ethiopia; North-West-University, South Africa; University of Agricultural Sciences Bangalore, India; Frits Thyssen Stiftung; and DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service)

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

All protocol observed:

It is my distinct honour to welcome you to the Second International APEDIA Conference on Sustainable Land Use in Africa, themed “Land Use and Climate Change: Challenges for Adaptation Strategies.”

I am informed that the Academic Partnership for Environment and Development Innovations (APEDIA) network is supported by DAAD and was established to stimulate academic collaboration and research in the field of sustainable land use, environment and development in Africa. I also understand that its primary mission is the development of higher education capacities in this field, not only to serve academic purposes but to have a practical impact on the ground as well.

This conference in Namibia focuses on the strategies for **adaptation** to climate change in Africa with the emphasis on its implications for **land use**. The concept of climate change **mitigation** and **adaptation** strategies is being developed to overcome the **adverse impacts** of climate variability.

The selected topic: “*Land Use and Climate Change: Challenges and Opportunities for Adaptation Strategies*” approaches land use from different angles, including its environmental, socio-economic, cultural and legal aspects.

Four corresponding sessions will be organized around the papers of invited speakers who come from different fields of science and research. Its importance is underlined by the fact that in 2007, the UN Security Council, perhaps for the first time, recognized the threat posed by climate change. I thus believe that climate change as a topic will dominate the international agenda for years to come.

Why do we need urgent action on climate change? One perspective is that we need such action to safeguard our way of life. Another is because of our obligation to preserve the earth and its natural resources for future generations. I believe that to these two great motivations we must add a third: climate change is a defining **global social justice issue** for our generation. If we do not take the necessary action, we risk condemning the world’s poorest people to generations of poverty, loss of livelihood, and unimaginable hardship.

Great climate variability and climate change – and more importantly our response to it – will increasingly define the international development agenda. Development and climate change are – and must be seen as – inextricably linked.

People living in poorer countries are increasingly confronted with the reality of climate change, on a daily basis. For them, the majority of whom may never even have heard about the phenomenon of climate change, its consequences are very real.

The abject human misery in the Darfur region of the Sudan, for example, is, in part, a consequence of increasing aridity throughout central Africa. This increase is believed to derive from climate change, as are the increasing number of unusual and often disastrous weather-related disturbances. The scale of the latter was illustrated in the 2007/08 UNDP Human Development Report.

The Report estimated that, between 1980–1984, about 80 million people in developing countries were “impacted” annually by some kind of meteorological disaster, a figure which had risen to 262 million by 2000–04 – this is about 1 in 19 people.ⁱ

Both the absolute numbers and the ratio have almost certainly increased to even more alarming figures in the last five years. One merely has to recall the devastation wrought by severe drought followed by exceptional floods in Southern Africa recently, including Namibia’s northern regions.

Some experts predict that by 2020, between 75 and 250 million people in Africa will be exposed to water stress due to climate change, and that in some countries on the continent yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50%.ⁱⁱ

In order to address climate change challenges, 37 more or less developed countries and economies in transition – called Annex 1 Parties – some ten years ago agreed to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 5% below 1990 levels over a period of four years, starting in 2008. This agreement was captured in what now has come to be known as the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change. Instead, the rate of increase of world emissions *accelerated* following the treaty’s adoption, as many high-emitting industries simply and unconscionably moved from Annex 1 countries to developing countries.

In the climate change debate, two key issues always come into play, namely “*mitigation*” and “*adaptation*”. *Mitigation* is about reducing emissions of greenhouse gases to avoid the worst impact of climate change. *Adaptation* – which is the focus of this conference – is about how people adjust to, and cope with, climate change. As a result of climate change, millions of people (mainly in developing countries) will face water and food shortages as well as health risks.

Production systems may be affected and the current land use patterns we know today may be completely altered. This then makes the call for **adaptation and mitigation strategies** even more urgent and inevitable.

In my view, no consideration of mitigation and adaptation strategies would be complete without also reflecting on the issue of **technology transfer**. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions poses almost insurmountable challenges for developing countries unless they have access to modern, affordable technology for climate change **mitigation** and **adaptation**. In order to facilitate such access, international regulations on intellectual property rights (IPR) need to be reviewed and ways found to give developing countries reasonable access to the technology that is needed to fight climate change more effectively.

As a scientist myself, I am well aware of the need for IPR. If, however, it amounts to the protection of the commercial rights of wealthy corporations in developed countries even if at the expense of hundreds of millions of lives and livelihoods in developing countries, then there is an urgent need to take stock of the ethical thinking that forms the very foundation of laws and conventions governing IPR.

Ladies and gentlemen, this conference brings together scholars from **diverse backgrounds** with the task of focusing on adaptation strategies to fight climate change in Africa, particularly with reference to its implications for **sustainable land use**.

The fact that in most parts of Africa, between 65 and 80% of the population lives in rural and earn their livelihood mainly from the land, makes this conference even more topical and critically important as our continent charts its future in the face of so many challenges, not least of which is climate change

For these and many other reasons, this conference is most welcome, and I am delighted to welcome each participant to our shores and to the Polytechnic of Namibia, in particular. I sincerely thank all the main partners and sponsors, and wish you all fruitful and enlightened engagements.

I thank you.

REFERENCES

i

UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008 cited in “*The Thinker*”, Volume 12/2010.

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“*The Thinker*”, Volume 12/2010.