

UNEP Public Lecture Kicks Off IDS@50 Festivities

The Institute for Development Studies (IDS) launched its series of Golden Jubilee celebrations with a well-attended United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) public lecture at the University of Nairobi's 844 Hall on 29th October 2015.

The lecture, "Optimizing Food Security for Jobs under Climate Change", was delivered by Dr Richard Munang, the UNEP Climate Change Coordinator for Africa. The packed occasion was a countdown to various activities lined up to mark the 50th anniversary of IDS, since its inception in 1965. The climax of the festivities will be a four-day conference between 18th November and 21st November 2015.

During the public lecture, Dr Munang explored some of the woes facing the African continent. He observed that though it is 15 years into the 21st century, Africa is still faced with challenges that are unprecedented in their scale and complexity, including ecological degradation, food insecurity, population growth, youth unemployment and climate change.

Referring to a famous African proverb, Dr Munang observed that when the music changes, so does the dance. He called for a new approach to build resilient and inclusive food systems under the changing climate change and utilize the opportunity to re-write the continent's trajectory in a way that puts poverty on the run and prosperity into the cockpit of progress.

Dr Munang said some of the challenges facing Africa include lack of shift in poverty levels, high food import bill, post-harvest losses, and climate change. "Optimizing the agriculture sector through working with nature and linking to the value chains in a continuum and ensuring this holistic approach is up scaled to be the norm of the continent can potentially solve nexus problems confronting Africa," he said,

Dr Munang observed that the 2015 Africa Adaptation gap report clearly pointed out that climate change will reduce up to 40 % of yield in major staples across Africa, with serious implications on food and nutritional security.

“But working with nature and applying Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) techniques can reverse this trend, and by embracing ecosystem-based approaches and technologies on African farms we could ensure sustainable increases in yields of up to 128 %,” he said.

The scholar further argued that the sector has immense unexploited socio-economic potential and is the only sector that is two to four times more effective in reducing poverty than other sectors. The African food market is projected to grow from US\$ 50 billion in 2010 to US\$ 150 billion by 2030. However, the full potential of this sector needs to be optimised.

On the way forward, Dr Munang made nine propositions:

- Do not overlook women. They produce up to 80% food in Africa
- Improve market and population access to food through better roads
- Reform trade practices and policies to unlock Africa’s trade potential and enhance inclusivity
- Reform air transport to facilitate an “open sky” model for African commercial airspace
- Mobile innovations to improve market access and access to imports and finance
- Youth involvement
- Tapping the growing middle class
- Reforming education policies
- Investing in partnerships and leverage existing policy and implementation up-scaling platforms

Speaking before the public lecture, the University of Nairobi Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs) Prof Henry Mutoro hailed IDS as a pioneer research institution that focuses on human development. The DVC conveyed the message in a speech read on his behalf by Prof Peter K’Obonyo, the Deputy Principal at the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The IDS Director, Prof Winnie Mitullah, observed that the launch of IDS@50 with a public lecture on climate change is a clear testimony that the Institute focuses on aspects that affect human development. The Director unveiled

other activities lined up for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations. The activities include:

- Hanns Seidel Foundation public lecture on “African Changing Economies and Demography” (10th November 2015).
- Society for International Development (SID) public lecture on “Academics and Activists: Reinventing the Future Role of CSOs” (17th November 2015).
- IDS/UoN Conference: “Rethinking Development and Development Studies in the Post-2015 Era (18th- 21st November 2015).