

President Robinson talks climate justice in Addis Ababa

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) recently hosted former president of Ireland and UN special envoy on El Niño and climate Mary Robinson, in a session dubbed 'A Conversation on Climate Justice'.



Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland and UN special envoy on El Niño and climate

Chaired by ECA's executive secretary Vera Songwe, the discussion revolved around Robinson's recent book *Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future*.

Robinson deplored the fact that "those who suffer the worst effects of climate change are often the least responsible for it," thus the need for climate justice.

She described climate change as a "man-made problem that requires a feminist solution", noting that some of her most cherished forces in the battle for climate justice are women, mothers and grandmothers at grassroots level.

"Those are my heroes," she said, "and that's why nine of the 11 stories in this book are about women."

She said it was crucial and urgent that everyone in the world takes personal responsibility for our families, our communities, and our ecosystems. That way, we would all be helping to create a "much fairer world that talks of leaving no

one behind”. She expressed optimism that “the developed world has woken up” and something is being done.

Such levels of optimism may differ in Africa where Mithika Mwenda, executive director of the Pan African Justice Alliance, argued that climate justice isn’t getting the priority it deserves from governments.

Mainstreaming climate justice

“Africa is most affected and impacted by climate change but we don’t do much about it. Climate justice is becoming a mainstream issue in the global north than here in Africa,” said Mwenda.

We need strong governance systems to move the climate discourse and actions forward, he argued, urging the ECA to fortify collaboration with the AUC and AfDB in line with the ClimDev-Africa programme, which was mandated by African leaders and established to create a solid foundation for Africa’s response to climate change.

He highlighted that Africa did not cause the enormous environmental degradation the world is suffering from - something Songwe said the continent can leverage to its advantage.

“We didn’t create it but we can profit the most from it. A climate smart economy is an extremely profitable economy. It’s an economy that will create more jobs and leave us cleaner and better,” said Songwe.

She encouraged the youth to “go out there and innovate”, and urged sister UN agencies to “create an alliance” to spur us all to go out there and do something – tree planting, for example.

Robinson was appointed UN special envoy along with Macharia Kamau of Kenya in 2016 to provide the leadership required to tackle climate-related challenges in the world.

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