Copenhagen failure to hit Kenya hard

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Prime Minister Raila Odinga signs a petition at the Pan African Climat Justice Alliance exhibition stand during the climate talks in Copenhagen, Denmark. PHOTO/ PMPS

In Summary

- No deal leaves the poorer countries exposed to effects of climate change

By DAVE OPIYO

Kenyans should brace for more devastating effects of climate change following a failure by world leaders to deliver a legally binding agreement in Copenhagen.

Mrs Grace Akumu, Kenya's technical advisor on climate change issues, told *Nation* on Tuesday that with the outcome of the two-week summit, rich countries are now not legally obliged to make sharp reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Reduce emissions

This, she said, will have serious effects on developing countries — especially in Africa — which has so far borne the brunt of global warming.

The talks that ended last Friday came up with an agreement, dubbed the Copenhagen Accord, which was negotiated by five countries: the US, China, South Africa, India and Brazil, under the leadership of US President Barack Obama.

While the agreement maintains that the scientific thinking for keeping temperature increases below two degrees Celsius was important, it failed to make commitments to reduce emissions to keep the temperature rise in check.

The “deal” was immediately criticised by leading environmentalists.

Greenpeace executive director Kumi Naidoo said: “This is not a fair, ambitious and legally binding deal. The job of world leaders is not done. They have failed to avert catastrophic climate change.”

The sentiments were echoed by Mrs Akumu: “This is why I am saying that Kenyans should brace for more devastation from climate change. The deal in Copenhagen will do very little to end the damage of climate change, particularly for the poorest in Africa.”

Indeed, the fourth assessment report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change projects that if emissions continue to rise at the current pace and are allowed to double from pre-industrial levels, the world will face an average temperature rise of 3°C this century.

This will lead to a rise in sea-level, shifts in seasons and more frequent and intense extreme weather such as storms, floods and droughts.

Climate analyses indicate that should this happen, Kenya will very likely be warmer by up to five degrees by 2100. Droughts will continue, possibly becoming more severe

while in other parts of the country, rains could become more intense, leading to floods.

The rise in sea level could affect Mombasa, with one study suggesting that 17 per cent of the island could be submerged by a rise in sea level of up to 30 centimetres.

Kenya is seeking at least $3 billion annually to roll out the first phase of its recently launched climate change response strategy but it is unlikely the country will receive all this money as the summit only approved a start-up fund of about $10 billion.

Said Mrs Akumu, “The money is very little ... all of us were shocked when the continent’s spokesperson, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, backed this proposal.”

She added: “We would have got a far much better financial deal had we pushed harder.”