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Event :

## Lakhdar Boukerrou, regional director at the University of Florida, in "Le Quotidien d'Oran": "Algeria can do better"

by Mokhtaria Bensaâd

Present at the 4th Annual Conference on Climate Change and Africa's Development CCDAIV, organized between October 8 and 10, in Marrakech, Dr Lakhdar Boukerrou, an Algerian researcher, occupying the position of regional director at the International University of Florida (FIU) currently manages the USAID-West Africa Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Initiative (WA-WASH) program, funded by the US federal government, for countries in the United States. 'West Africa, Burkina-Faso, Ghana and Niger.

As a specialist in the WASH sector, in Africa and in Europe, he talks to us, in this interview about climate change and its impact on the continent, of the funds mobilized to finance projects, in Africa and the

Le Quotidien d'Oran: You are the only Algerian present at the CCDAIV. Did you come to represent Algeria or the University of Florida?

Lakhdar Boukerrou: I am present at the conference as a scientist. The point is not to represent one country or another, but to represent the knowledge that we have and to share it. I work, a lot, in the field of climate change, food security and interaction with water. I manage a project funded by the US federal government for West African countries, Niger, Burkina-Faso and Ghana. I can say that the aspect of climate change is no longer a subject for debate, but a reality that poses a great threat to Africa.

In this conference, we discussed the harmful effects of climate change which are very visible in some countries. Already coastal erosion has reached a residential area which a few years ago was far from the coast. Currently, we see the erosion that has invaded the entire beach. It is therefore very important to carry out studies and evaluations to find out exactly where we are and what the problems are, specifically. It is a job that must be done, at the highest level and at the lowest possible level, when it comes to a country. When we speak of a country, it is a set of communities. For example, for coastal communities in Algeria, what are the risks? For communities that are in semi-arid areas, do they will be affected with less frequent rains and much higher temperatures. In the countries of West Africa, where it is very hot during the eight months of the year, the evaporation of water from dams constitutes

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25% of losses. It's a lot. So we should think about doing vulnerability studies, at the level, as far as possible. In Algeria, we have geographical areas which are very diverse. We have the desert, the steppe, the mountains and each of its areas is going to be affected, differently. We must know, exactly, what are the answers we must provide and prepare for. where it is very hot during the eight months of the year, the evaporation of water from the dams constitutes 25% of losses. It's a lot. So we should think about doing vulnerability studies, at the level, as far as possible. In Algeria, we have geographical areas which are very diverse. We have the desert, the steppe, the mountains and each of its areas is going to be affected, differently. We must know, exactly, what are the answers we must provide and prepare for. where it is very hot during the eight months of the year, the evaporation of water from the dams constitutes 25% of losses. It's a lot. So we should think about doing vulnerability studies, at the level, as far as possible. In Algeria, we have geographical areas which are very diverse. We have the desert, the steppe, the mountains and each of its areas is going to be affected, differently. We must know, exactly, what are the answers we must provide and prepare for. mountains and each of its areas will be affected, differently. We must know, exactly, what are the answers we must provide and prepare for. mountains and each of its areas will be affected, differently. We must know, exactly, what are the answers we must provide and prepare for.

QO: Do you believe that through the organization of such conferences, the problem of climate change can be solved?

LB: Everything that has been discussed at this conference remains abstract, if it is not implemented by the countries and the organizations concerned. The greatest responsibility lies with the people, in each country and at the level of the institutions that are responsible for implementing such ideas. For example, in Algeria, as in other countries, we should draw lessons and recommendations from these conferences and see how we could adapt them in our country. How we might implement some of these recommendations. We must also share what we have as knowledge. The presence of Algerians at these conferences is certainly very important but it is not the only place where we can contribute. There is a lot of spaces at the African and regional level where there are many opportunities to contribute and learn from others. It is not about creating the wheel. It's about seeing what we can learn because we have to be open to knowledge.

QO: Any idea about the research being carried out in Algeria on climate change?

LB: The work that is being done in terms of research and education in Algeria is quite substantial, but it still has to be something more practical. There are quite a few investments in this area. There is work being done but we have to see the practical side and the implementation of all this work.

There is a contribution to international institutions by Algerians. But, we can do better. Algeria has invested heavily in the water sector and solved many problems of access to drinking water, at the rural or urban level. Dams have been built. So we have experience and knowledge that we can share and enhance with other countries.

QO: How to reach a consensus among African countries on climate change if politically, the situation is tense between some of them?

LB: The political level operates in a field higher than the scientific level. But the two areas intersect. In my opinion, when they

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intersect, the political side is not too harmful to the scientific side. Why ? Because we cannot close the door to science.

We can close the border, but we cannot close the sharing of knowledge. With the technological development that exists, people talk to each other and are in contact to share information.

The Algerian who wants to find the results of research in Morocco, he can have access to them. The Moroccan who wants to have access to knowledge, in Algeria or Tunisia, he can do it. There are also these conference participations. Where the political side influences is when it comes to having a vision or a representation of the African idea. Very soon, in April, there will be the World Water Congress, scheduled for South Korea. We must present ourselves there, with an African program and an African vision. This is where it all gets complicated. Because before arriving at an African vision, we must have a regional vision because the four regions of Africa are different. So when we talk about North Africa, we need Africans from North Africa agree. This is where it gets complicated. But consensus is possible, from an environmental and climate point of view, between African countries because they are all experiencing the same problem. If they are smart, they must all agree.

QO: What will Africa defend at the United Nations Conference on climate change COP 21, scheduled for Paris in 2015?

LB: What Africa must defend at COP21 is the impact that this continent is undergoing, because of pollution. Africa does not pollute. Her problem is that she suffers the pollution of others. Africa has a unique opportunity to defend its interests well, because it is a developing continent. It is the only continent where economic growth has been close to 10% for the past five to ten years. Where Africa has a very important role to play is to take advantage of the knowledge that exists elsewhere to take advantage of it and avoid the problems of others and defend Africa's position by saying: pollution we are not the ones who create it. I think there are several ways to apply pressure directly. From cause to effect. You pollute, you pay. VS'

QO: Should we create a new development model that is different from the Western model? Are the funds mobilized by the African Development Bank (AfDB) sufficient?

LB: We must not reinvent the wheel but also, we must not make the mistakes that others have already made. Today, a country's economic development model must be based on the sustainability of the use of resources and renewable energies. In Algeria, there is plenty of sun which is not exploited. There is also wind power and biomass.

To invest in this area, you have to make the difference between an investment that is expensive today, but which, in the long term, is profitable, and an investment that is less expensive but which, in the long run, will cause you a lot of problems. If tomorrow there will be no more oil or if the prices fall, what are we going to do? We will certainly have a lot of problems. What is lacking in Africa is that there is no long term policy. This is what makes the difference between developing countries and developed countries. As for the funds mobilized by the ADB, they represent nothing at all. It's not sufficient. Research is expensive. Especially since we are talking, on a continental scale. We must seek other funds and self-finance. Must also, involve the private sector in the projects to be carried out on the climate. The government must play a regulatory role.