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African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

Seventh special session

Meeting of the expert group

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

**Preparations for the fourteenth meeting of the
Conference of the Parties to the United Nations
Convention on Biological Diversity and the African
Biodiversity Summit**

**Land and ecosystem degradation and restoration: priorities for
increased resilience in Africa**

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. At its sixteenth regular session, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) welcomed decision XIII/33 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to host the 2018 United Nations Conference on Biodiversity, comprising the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention and the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, in November 2018. It also endorsed and supported the proposal of the Government of Egypt to host a high-level event on African biodiversity in conjunction with the above-mentioned meetings to provide policy and strategic guidance on Africa's biodiversity priorities for inclusion in future work programmes of the Convention and its Protocols.
2. Accordingly, the Government of Egypt will host the African Ministerial Summit on Biodiversity on 13 November 2018, ahead of the high-level segment to be held from 14 to 15 November and the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol, to be held concurrently from 17 to 29 November 2018.
3. The present note has been prepared to assist experts and ministers at the seventh special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in their deliberations on Africa's preparations for the above meetings. It provides an update on the 2018 United Nations Conference on Biodiversity and the main substantive issues to be discussed. It also provides an overview of the status and trends of biodiversity in Africa and highlights potential biodiversity priorities for Africa. It further highlights a possible way forward to combat land degradation and enhance ecosystem restoration in Africa.
4. The Conference may wish to use the information provided in the present document to identify Africa's priorities for inclusion in future work programmes of the Convention and its Protocols, as well as opportunities for increased investments in biodiversity at the regional and national levels. The Conference may also wish to discuss Africa's views and perspectives on the post-2020 global

* AMCEN/SS.VII/EGM/1.

biodiversity framework, to be submitted for consideration during its preparation. The Conference may also wish to discuss proposals on the way forward to combat land degradation and enhance ecosystem restoration in Africa, including possible country commitments and actions on ecosystem restoration, taking into account the key messages of the IPBES Global Land Degradation Assessment and the regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).¹ Finally, the Conference may wish to propose elements of a draft AMCEN ministerial declaration, as well as a draft pan-African action agenda on ecosystem restoration for increased investments in biodiversity and resilience in Africa for consideration at the African Ministerial Summit on Biodiversity.

II. Preparations for the African Ministerial Summit on Biodiversity

5. The African Ministerial Summit on Biodiversity is being organized by the Government of Egypt in collaboration with the African Union Commission and with support from the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) under the theme “Land and ecosystem degradation and restoration: priorities for increased investments in biodiversity and resilience in Africa”.

6. The Summit will bring together African ministers and partners to review the status and trends in land and ecosystem degradation in Africa and their potential impacts on biodiversity; provide policy and strategic guidance on African biodiversity priorities for inclusion in future work programmes of the Convention and its Protocols; identify strategic measures to combat land and ecosystem degradation in the region; review the current and potential new national commitments; and identify opportunities to promote further uptake and upscaling of ecosystem restoration. Furthermore, it will allow participants to identify opportunities for African countries to contribute to enhanced implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, promote synergies among the Rio conventions and contribute to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

7. The Summit will be organized around five plenary sessions covering the opening session; expert presentations on the current status and trends of land degradation and of biodiversity and ecosystem services in Africa; a panel discussion by five ministers from the main subregions on Africa’s biodiversity priorities and the way forward to combat land degradation and enhance ecosystem restoration in Africa; presentations of country commitments on ecosystem restoration; and adoption of the Summit outcomes.

8. It is expected that representatives will adopt a ministerial declaration and a pan-African action agenda on ecosystem restoration for increased resilience. The action agenda will elaborate ambitious continent-wide efforts to combat land degradation and promote ecosystem restoration for increased resilience. It will include strategic measures for strengthening integration and coordination of relevant policies and actions across the region, promoting coherent approaches and synergies, and fostering transformative initiatives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the region, while increasing climate change resilience, food security and poverty alleviation and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063 of the African Union. The proposed pan-African action agenda will complement and help to upscale previous commitments and initiatives related to ecosystems, including the African Resilient Landscapes Initiative, the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative, the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, The Restoration Initiative, the Central African Forest Initiative and others.

9. Initial consultations on the Summit and its preparations were held in Montreal, Canada, on 1 July 2018 on the margins of the twenty-second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice. The consultations benefited from a presentation by the Co-Chair of the IPBES regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa on the key messages from the assessment that could be taken into account in the preparations for and outcomes of the Summit.

10. A panel discussion was also organized during the 2018 Global Landscapes Forum, held in Nairobi from 29 to 30 August 2018, to generate input for the Summit. The panel discussion focused on how to make effective use of the short-term action plan on ecosystem restoration and other tools adopted by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to enhance and accelerate efforts to

¹ <https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/africa>.

achieve Aichi Biodiversity Targets 15 (on ecosystem restoration) and 14 (on conserving and restoring ecosystem services) in Africa.

11. An expert preparatory meeting for the Summit will also be held on 16 September 2018 in the margins of the AMCEN session to examine the status and trends in land and ecosystem degradation and current restoration efforts and commitments in Africa and propose additional commitments and actions for adoption by representatives at the Summit. The results of the expert preparatory meeting will be provided to AMCEN at its seventh special session and will eventually feed into the Summit.

III. Preparations for the 2018 United Nations Conference on Biodiversity

12. The 2018 United Nations Conference on Biodiversity is expected to address a series of issues that are of critical importance to Africa regarding the future implementation of the Convention and its Protocols. The Conference will take place at a critical juncture in the history of the Convention as the world celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of its entry into force and as Governments and relevant stakeholders embark on preparations for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

13. The high-level segment of the 2018 United Nations Conference on Biodiversity will be organized around the theme “Investing in biodiversity for people and planet”. It will be focused on mainstreaming biodiversity considerations in the sectors of energy and mining, infrastructure, manufacturing and processing, and health, within the broader context of sustainable development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is envisaged that the high-level segment will adopt a political declaration on mainstreaming biodiversity in those sectors.

14. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its fourteenth meeting will, inter alia, review progress in the implementation of the Convention and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and consider the long-term strategic directions to the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, approaches to living in harmony with nature and preparations for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. It will also consider issues regarding resource mobilization and the financial mechanism; capacity-building and technical and scientific cooperation; knowledge management and communication; mechanisms for national reporting, assessment and review; and cooperation with other conventions, international organizations and initiatives. Furthermore, it will review the effectiveness of processes under the Convention and its Protocols and consider measures to enhance integration between the Convention and its Protocols. Other issues to be addressed are article 8 (j) of the Convention, on traditional knowledge and related provisions; sustainable wildlife management; biodiversity and climate change; mainstreaming of biodiversity within and across sectors; conservation and sustainable use of pollinators; protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures; marine and coastal biodiversity; invasive alien species; digital sequence information on genetic resources; synthetic biology; and liability and redress.

15. The Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety at its ninth meeting will consider matters related to the financial mechanism and resources; capacity-building; operation and activities of the Biosafety Clearing-House; monitoring and reporting and assessment and review of the effectiveness of the Protocol; and measures for enhancing integration under the Convention with respect to biosafety-related provisions; and cooperation with other organizations, conventions and initiatives. The meeting will also review the effectiveness of the relevant structures and processes and consider preparation for the follow-up to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety 2011–2020. Other issues to be considered are risk assessment and risk management; unintentional transboundary movements of living modified organisms and emergency measures; transit and contained use of living modified organisms; socioeconomic considerations; and the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

16. The third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol will, inter alia, consider the following issues: assessment and review of the effectiveness of the Protocol; review of the effectiveness of its structures and processes; financial mechanism and resources; capacity-building and capacity development; the Access and Benefit-sharing Clearing-House and information-sharing; monitoring and reporting; measures to raise awareness of the importance of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge; enhancing integration under the Convention and its Protocols; cooperation with other international organizations, conventions and initiatives; digital sequence information on genetic resources; specialized international access and benefit-sharing instruments; and preparation for the follow-up to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020.

17. The Conference may wish to review the above items and identify the priorities of critical importance to Africa, which may be addressed within the context of the post-2020 global biodiversity agenda, Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as various instruments, initiatives and programmes adopted by the African Union and its member States.

IV. Overview of the status and trends of biodiversity in Africa

18. Africa has rich and diverse ecosystems, including deserts and drylands with unique flora and fauna; savannah grasslands with the world's greatest diversity of ungulates; moist tropical forests; mangrove forests in south Mauritania, the Saloum Delta in Senegal, the Sudan and Central African countries; tropical dry and humid forests; islands and coastal ecosystems; wetlands around freshwater bodies like rivers, lakes and estuaries; urban and semi-urban systems and agroecosystems; and marine ecosystems.

19. However, according to the second edition of *The State of Biodiversity in Africa*, prepared by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre in 2016 as part of the mid-term review of progress towards the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Target,² and the recent IPBES regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa, the rates of ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss are increasing. Under business-as-usual scenarios, it is predicted that a further 11 per cent of biodiversity would be lost.

20. The total forest cover in Africa was estimated to be 650 million hectares in 2000, representing 17 per cent of the global forest cover and approximately 22 per cent of Africa's land area. Forests make up approximately 45 per cent of the land area of Central Africa, constituting 37 per cent of Africa's total forest cover. However, according to the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015 of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, from 1990 to 2015 Africa experienced the biggest forest area loss compared to the rest of the world except South America, although the rate of forest loss in Africa decreased substantially from 2010 to 2015, while average per capita forest area declined from 0.8 hectares to 0.6 hectares per person.

21. Savannah and grasslands are also one of the most important ecosystems in Africa. Savannah grasslands, with an estimated 13 million square kilometres, cover almost half of the continent and are found widely in the west, the east and the southern subregions. The savannahs represent the largest area in Southern Africa, occupying 54 per cent of its territory. Savannah and grasslands in many parts of Africa are vulnerable to drought and under pressure from anthropogenic activities such as expansion of agriculture and plantation forestry, spread of invasive alien species, human settlements, mining activities, and other commercial or subsistence activities.

22. Wetlands cover about 1 per cent of Africa's total area and are present in every country. The largest wetlands include swamps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Upper Nile wetlands, the Lake Victoria and Chad basins, and the floodplains of the Niger and Zambezi rivers. Lake Tanganyika is one of the most important wetlands in Africa, draining an area of approximately 200 000 km², and is home to more than 2000 plant and animal species.

23. The African coastal region is also vast and includes a variety of habitats from spectacular coral reefs along the Red Sea coast of Egypt to mangrove forests and sea-grass beds in many other areas. Biodiversity and ecosystems in marine and coastal areas are diverse and provide significant economic, social and cultural contributions to the people of Africa. In some regions, they contribute more than 35 per cent of the gross domestic product.

24. Those environments are, however, under threat owing to a number of human-induced factors such as climate change, infrastructural development (e.g., ports), urbanization, tourism, mining and overharvesting of marine and coastal resources, leading to loss of biodiversity and extensive damage to key ecosystems, including coral reefs, estuaries and mangroves. Damage to coral reef systems, mostly the result of pollution and climate change, has far-reaching implications for fisheries, food security, tourism and overall marine biodiversity. Moreover, with overexploitation, habitat degradation and loss, acidification, pollution from land-based sources, alien invasive species and sea-level rise, highly valuable ecosystem services are under severe threat.

25. Mangroves in Africa are particularly overexploited and becoming heavily degraded or destroyed by multiple pressures on resources and pollution. Wetlands and mangroves in East Africa and adjacent islands account for 80 per cent of the total wetland area. The largest mangrove areas are in one of the global biodiversity hotspots (Madagascar, Mozambique and the Rufiji Delta in

² <https://www.eldis.org/document/A100651>.

Tanzania). Mangroves in the Kilifi area in Kenya only make up a small proportion but have seen the highest rate of loss, estimated at 18 per cent. Mangroves in North and West Africa are marginal ecosystems, but remarkable because of the extreme natural conditions, very dry and hot. Only a few groves of mangroves are found in the Sudan, south Mauritania, the Senegal Delta and the Niger Delta.

26. The desert comprises much of North Africa, excluding the fertile region on the Mediterranean Sea coast, the Atlas Mountains of the Maghreb, and the Nile Valley in Egypt and the Sudan. The Sahara Desert covers large parts of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia. In Southern Africa, drylands and deserts are diverse and are represented by various ecosystems such as the Succulent Karoo, Namib Desert, Nama Karoo and the Kalahari Desert and xeric savannah. Dryland and desert ecosystems are facing decline due to anthropogenic disturbances such as overgrazing, mining, illegal harvesting of succulents and alien invasive species.

27. Africa has five of the global 25 internationally recognized biodiversity hotspots and shares one hotspot with other Mediterranean countries. These include the Mediterranean basin forests, which constitute over 1.5 per cent of the world's forests; the Guinean Forest hotspot running along the coast of Western Africa; the Eastern Arc Mountain forests of East Africa, where more than 25 per cent of the plant species are endemic; the Western Indian Ocean islands, including Madagascar, which has the highest number of endemic species in Africa and ranks sixth in the world in terms of vertebrate endemism; the Succulent Karoo hotspot between South Africa and Namibia; and the Cape Floristic Region in South Africa, which has the world's richest floral kingdoms.³

28. The IPBES regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa, which integrated evidence from a range of knowledge systems, including peer-reviewed literature, grey literature and indigenous and local knowledge, profiled the uniqueness of Africa's natural assets and the magnitude of pressures on those assets. It also highlighted frameworks for strengthening African transformation and offered options for building together the future of "The Africa We Want".

29. The overall finding of the assessment is that Africa's highly diverse terrestrial ecosystems are threatened by conversion of land to agriculture, deforestation, habitat fragmentation, land degradation, climate change and several other drivers, which, if not addressed, will lead to further loss of biodiversity and drive several species into extinction. Most, if not all, terrestrial ecosystems in Africa have already experienced major biodiversity losses in the past 30 years. Biodiversity loss is by and large interlinked with land and ecosystem degradation.

30. Addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss should be done simultaneously with restoration of degraded land and ecosystems. Land and ecosystem degradation has a direct negative impact on people's livelihoods, leading to resource-related competition and insecurity, as well as migration of youth to urban areas and to Europe/overseas. Unless major interventions are implemented, the prospect is that this trend will continue in the future.

V. Africa's biodiversity priorities

31. The IPBES regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa provides an assessment of the key priority issues regarding biodiversity and ecosystem services in Africa. It also underlines the need for African policymakers to gain a first-rate understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem services and, thus, to fully integrate them as assets into Africa's growth and transformation plans.

32. The report notes that the main cause of biodiversity loss in Africa is the destruction or degradation of natural ecosystems owing to their conversion into agricultural lands and urban settlements. Other causes include unregulated development of infrastructure and human settlements; overharvesting of biological resources; introduction of invasive alien species; and air, water and soil pollution. Land degradation is considered to be one of Africa's biggest problems and a major threat to biodiversity and all aspects of life and development.

33. Some 20 per cent of Africa's land surface (6.6 million km²) is estimated to be degraded because of soil erosion, salinization, pollution and loss of vegetation or soil fertility. This is a result of a combination of factors, such as deforestation, unsustainable agriculture, overgrazing, uncontrolled mining activities, invasive alien species and climate change. Agricultural expansion is the dominant driver of biodiversity loss, in particular the conversion of natural habitat to cultivated land.

³ UNEP/Global Resource Information Database (GRID)-Arendal, *Africa Environmental Outlook: Past, Present and Future Perspectives*, published by UNEP/GRID-Arendal, Arendal, Norway (2002). Available at <http://www.unep.org/aeo/index.htm>. World Resources Institute (2003). *EarthTrends: The Environmental Information Portal*. Available at <http://earthtrends.wri.org>. Washington DC: World Resources Institute (2003).

34. Rapid and unplanned urbanization puts immense pressure on existing and future urban infrastructure and demand for services, including water supply, food supply, pollution control and waste management, and also on energy supply for households and industrial development. Physical and ecological infrastructure in this respect are intertwined, and the prudent management of the trade-offs between the two will determine what type and quality of development is fostered on the African continent.
35. Land-cover change in Africa results in loss of the land's capacity to sustain biodiversity and provide nature's contributions to people. Unregulated conversions of forest (including logging) and rangelands for crop production, mining, and urban and infrastructure development, among other human-induced changes, have led to habitat loss, degradation of catchments and soil erosion, resulting in loss of biodiversity and habitat fragmentation and threatening the viability of animal migration corridors.
36. Population dynamics are strongly connected to those of land cover and land-use, including conversion of land for agricultural uses, urban settlements and the development of transport and other infrastructure. Key ecologically sensitive areas are expected to be affected by 2040, including the Nile River region; the urban West African corridor between Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and Lagos, Nigeria; the northern fringes of Lake Victoria and Lake Tanganyika in East Africa; and Nigeria's northern Kano region. Population-related degradation and drainage is a growing problem for Africa's important and internationally recognized wetlands.
37. Illegal exploitation and trade in wild fauna and flora remains a key challenge to the continent's biodiversity and species survival, as well as for the socioeconomic development of both the source and transit countries. For instance, illegal, unsustainable harvesting and trade of timber across Africa for export continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing most States in Sub-Saharan Africa. The increased demand at the national, regional and international levels is what is driving the flow of timber across Africa and for export. Most of the countries within sub-Saharan Africa act as transit points, where the flow of timber is weakly regulated and regional mechanisms are lacking to address seized timber stockpiles threatening national economies. At the moment, there are common principles, approaches and formal agreements or guidelines among African countries to address the issues of the management and disposal of stockpiles of confiscated timber.
38. Climate change is another major challenge affecting ecosystems on the African continent. The adverse effects of climate on biodiversity are well documented in a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,⁴ including land degradation; crop failures and diminished yields and their impact on food security and nutrition, energy and livelihoods; regime shifts in the ecosystems; increased incidences of flooding and droughts; and the spread of diseases. Climate change affects virtually all the priority sectors for Africa, including the water, agriculture, fisheries, energy and health sectors. For example, in the Nile river basin, the dwindling water resources are significantly affecting fisheries and other inland biodiversity.
39. Marine and coastal environments are also under immense threat from human activities. Biodiversity and ecosystems in marine and coastal areas are diverse and provide significant economic, social and cultural contributions to the people of Africa. Marine and coastal resources are under threat owing to a number of human-induced factors resulting from climate change, infrastructural development (e.g., ports), urbanization, tourism, mining and overharvesting of marine and coastal resources, leading to the loss of biodiversity and extensive damage to key ecosystems, including coral reefs, estuaries and mangroves.
40. Invasive alien species are another major threat to Africa's biodiversity. Thousands of species have been introduced into Africa from around the globe and many are successfully cultivated for agriculture, forestry, fisheries and horticultural purposes. Unfortunately, some of the introduced species are invasive and have had an extremely harmful impact on Africa's biodiversity and ecosystem services, such as the sustainable, adequate supply of usable water, fertile soil for crop farming, natural pasturage for stock farming, loss of access to fisheries and beneficial insects for pollination and natural pest control. In 2001, the cost of managing invasive species worldwide was estimated at \$1.4 trillion or 5 per cent of global gross domestic product⁵ and this percentage is likely to be much higher in Africa.
41. Africa's ecological futures can be fundamentally altered by economic and development decisions made today. To better understand what those futures might be and how to manage their

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change and Biodiversity*, Technical Paper V (2002).

⁵ Pimentel et al., "Economic and environmental threats of alien plant, animal and microbe invasions", in *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*, Volume 84, Issue 1 (March 2001).

impacts, it is important to investigate key forces shaping Africa's today and tomorrow and draw a picture of how they come together across plausible scenarios to influence ecological futures. Guiding principles for decisions and interventions by decision makers that create the opportunity for more robust and resilient development are needed.

42. A review of the national biodiversity strategies and action plans also shows that a majority of African countries have highlighted the following as their top priorities, in the following order of priority: access and benefit-sharing; ecosystem restoration; protected areas; invasive alien species; biodiversity information systems and knowledge management; climate change and biodiversity; biodiversity monitoring and assessment; biodiversity valuation and ecosystem accounting; protection of threatened species; and biosafety.

VI. Major ecosystem restoration initiatives and commitments in Africa

43. In the last few years, a number of commitments and initiatives on ecosystem restoration have been proposed and implemented. Some of the main regional and subregional initiatives include the African Resilient Landscapes Initiative, the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative, the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, The Restoration Initiative, the Central African Forest Initiative, and the African Union's flagship programme on climate change, biodiversity and land degradation.

(a) The African Resilient Landscapes Initiative is an initiative that aims to promote integrated landscape management with the goal of adapting to and mitigating climate change. It mobilizes African countries and partners to leverage sectorial interventions and collectively ensure the integrity, resilience, restoration and sustainable management of landscapes across the region. The initiative was launched by the African Union New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and TerrAfrica, in collaboration with the World Bank, the World Resources Institute, African centres of excellence and others. The two main operational pillars of this initiative are the African Landscapes Action Plan (ALAP) and the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative. Phase 1 of the Action Plan (2014–2016),⁶ endorsed by the African Union, provided a blueprint for sustainable landscape management across Africa highlighting a number of priority actions. Phase 2 of the ALAP (2017–2020)⁷ lays out renewed priorities, in the light of new opportunities for creating and maintaining sustainable landscapes across Africa.

(b) The African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative⁸ is a country-led effort launched in 2015 to restore 100 million hectares of land in Africa by 2030. To date, the 27 countries currently involved in the initiative – Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, the Sudan, Togo, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania – have committed a combined total of 96.4 million hectares of land to be restored. The initiative is coordinated by the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency with support from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the German Agency for International Cooperation, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the World Bank and the World Resources Institute.

(c) The Restoration Initiative,⁹ jointly implemented by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and UNEP, aims to help countries to restore and maintain degraded and deforested landscapes at scale. It is funded by the Global Environment Facility (\$54 million in grant support) and other donors (\$200 million anticipated co-financing). Implementation began in 2018 and will last for 4 to 5 years. It covers 10 countries, including 7 African countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Sao Tome and Principe, and United Republic of Tanzania. The programme will provide tailored support in four key areas: policy development and integration; implementation of restoration programmes and complementary initiatives; capacity-building and finance mobilization; and knowledge-sharing and partnerships. The anticipated results are restoration of 1 million hectares of deforested and degraded landscapes; improved management of 46 million

⁶ <https://peoplefoodandnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/African-Landscapes-Action-Plan-FINAL-FINALwNEPAD-Dec15.pdf>.

⁷ <http://repo.ecoagriculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ALAP-Phase-2-September-2017-Final-web.pdf>.

⁸ <http://afr100.org>.

⁹ <https://www.iucn.org/theme/forests/projects/restoration-initiative-tri-scaling-support-forest-landscape-restoration>.

hectares of land incorporating conservation of biodiversity and sequestration of 190 million tons of CO₂.

(d) The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative,¹⁰ a pan-African initiative launched in 2007 by the African Union and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, aims to establish a nearly 8,000 km-long, 15 km-wide belt of trees, bushes and vegetation across the entire Sahel in order to stop the desert from moving southward; reverse land degradation in the Sahel and Sahara region and its associated detrimental social, economic and environmental impacts; boost food security and employment opportunities; and support local communities to adapt to climate change. The initiative brings together more than 20 countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Benin, Cabo Verde, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, the Sudan, Togo and Tunisia. Thirteen of those countries have developed national action plans for implementing the initiative and are implementing on-ground projects with financial support from various partners. The initiative aims to restore 100 million hectares of land, provide food security for 20 million people, create 350,000 jobs, and sequester 250 million tons of carbon by 2030. To date, more than 4 million hectares of land have been restored and farmers have revived vast tracts of arid land through natural regeneration using innovative practices such as reviving the roots of plants and trees.

(e) The Central African Forest Initiative¹¹ is a collaborative partnership supporting strategic country-level investments to preserve the value of the forests in six central African countries (Cameroon, Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon) to mitigate climate change, reduce poverty and contribute to sustainable development. The approach of the initiative is to substantially scale up international support for transformational reforms and ambitious investments on the ground. Support for the initiative thus focuses on developing and implementing national investment frameworks, providing funding based on the achievement of policy and programmatic milestones; and encouraging donor coordination and alignment of bilateral assistance to partner countries based on national investment frameworks. The initiative is hosted by the United Nations Development Programme and is also supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the French Development Agency and the World Bank. Its support is channelled through a trust fund managed by the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office.

(f) Integrated Lake Basin Management¹² seeks to integrate both lentic and lotic waters in the management of lakes, covering both rivers and wetlands that form part of lakes as water bodies. Kenya has developed a national strategy for integrated lakes management to guide its future protection and restoration of its lakes. This is in response to the Nairobi Resolution, which was endorsed at the African Water Ministerial Dialogue under the theme “Management of lake basins for their sustainable use: global experience and African issues”, held in Nairobi in 2005 during the eleventh World Lakes Conference. The Ministerial Dialogue reinforced the fact that lakes and reservoirs play a central role in integrated water resources management, sustainable development and responsible economic growth, and that sound policies, good governance, investment, and sustainable institutions, including community-based, private-sector, local, national and transboundary structures underpinned by scientific and local knowledge and gender mainstreaming, need to be encouraged and promoted in the planning and management of lake basins.

(g) The African Union programme on climate change, biodiversity and land degradation¹³ is one of the regional flagship programmes approved by the African Union and AMCEN for the implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Africa.

44. Most of the above initiatives are part of, or contribute to, various global commitments and initiatives, including the following:

(a) Bonn Challenge, a global commitment to restore 150 million hectares of deforested and degraded land by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030;

¹⁰ <https://www.greatgreenwall.org/about-great-green-wall>.

¹¹ www.cafi.org.

¹²The terms “lentic waters” and “lotic waters” encompass much more than lakes and rivers, in that the former may include such quiescent water systems as wetland, estuarine and embayment and aquifer waters, and the latter may include such moving water systems as spring waters, subsurface flows and impounded waters.

¹³ <https://au.int/en/blockdatas/rea>.

(b) New York Declaration on Forests, a partnership of Governments, multinational companies, civil society and indigenous peoples who strive to halve deforestation by 2020 and to end it by 2030;

(c) Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration, a global network that catalyses voluntary action by Governments, organizations, academic/research institutes, communities and individuals to restore the world's lost and degraded forests and their surrounding landscapes.

45. Some of the national ecosystem restoration projects in Africa include the following:

(a) Lake Saint Lucia Estuary Restoration Programme, South Africa's largest wetland restoration project¹⁴ and the Skilpadsvlei Wetland Restoration Project, also in South Africa;

(b) The Buffelsdraai Reforestation Project in South Africa;

(c) United Nations Development Programme eight-year project entitled "Building Resilient Communities, Wetlands Ecosystems and Associated Catchments in Uganda", launched in 2017 to restore over 700 km² of degraded wetlands and build community resilience in Uganda;¹⁵

(d) Mt. Kenya forest restoration initiative, which aims at restoring 250 acres of degraded forest in Mt. Kenya by planting 100,000 tree seedlings by the end of 2018;¹⁶

(e) Sustainable Coastal Restoration and Development for Somalia (2015–2019),¹⁷ which aims to restore degraded coastal ecosystems and fisheries, improving food security and providing new livelihood opportunities to local communities;

(f) Wetlands International project on conserving the biodiversity of the Cacheu Mangroves Natural Park, Guinea-Bissau (2015–2018), which aims at protecting the Cacheu mangrove nature park in Guinea-Bissau, restoring this important buffer zone and encouraging sustainable use;¹⁸

(g) Capacity-building for Mangrove Assessment, Restoration and Valuation in East Africa, which aimed to help conserve and restore mangroves in East Africa by developing the expertise and capacity needed to exploit new and emerging markets for ecosystem services and utilized voluntary payments for carbon sequestration to fund new tree planting and mangrove conservation and restoration activities;¹⁹

(h) The De Beers Group's ecosystem restoration initiatives in seven former mining sites covering 145,000 hectares across southern Africa (Botswana, Namibia and South Africa).²⁰

46. Other examples can be found in the Restoration Resource Centre's searchable database of restoration projects from around the world.²¹

47. During the third high-level meeting of the Bonn Challenge, held in Brazil in March 2018, the Government of El Salvador introduced a proposal to request the United Nations General Assembly to proclaim the "United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030" at its seventy-third session, in 2018.²² The purpose of the proposed United Nations Decade of Ecosystem Restoration is to promote global awareness and catalyse action on existing commitments and mandates and boost current efforts under different binding agreements and non-binding international and regional initiatives towards restoring all ecosystems, including forests, grasslands, croplands, wetlands, savannahs and other terrestrial and inland water ecosystems, marine and coastal ecosystems and, as appropriate, urban environments.

¹⁴ <https://isimangaliso.com/newsflash/south-africas-largest-wetland-rehabilitation-project-achieves-important-milestone/>.

¹⁵ <https://www.greenclimate.fund/-/building-resilient-communities-wetlands-ecosystems-and-associated-catchments-in-uganda>.

¹⁶ <http://naturekenya.org/2018/07/11/mt-kenya-forest-restoration-phase-two-initiative-kicks-off>.

¹⁷ <http://adesoafrika.org/what-we-do/our-impact/our-current-projects/habitat-restoration-and-sustainable-fisheries/>.

¹⁸ http://www.turingfoundation.org/kw_mangrove_uk.html.

¹⁹ <http://www.espa.ac.uk/projects/ne-g008078-1> and <http://www.espa.ac.uk/projects/ne-i003401-1>.

²⁰ <http://www.debeersgroup.com/en/building-forever/our-issues-areas/environment/biodiversity-conservation.html>.

²¹ <https://www.ser-rrc.org>.

²² https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/26027/Ecosystem_decade_Salvador_Initiative.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

VII. The way forward: towards a pan-African action agenda on ecosystem restoration for increased resilience in Africa

48. Africa's biodiversity is under enormous pressure from direct causes, such as unregulated land use change and conversion of forests, rangelands, wetlands and other natural areas for food production and urban development. Other major drivers of biodiversity loss in Africa include rapid population growth, rapid and unplanned urbanization, infrastructure and industrial development, pollution and waste and an increased demand for services (including water, food and energy supply). Africa is also extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Land and ecosystem degradation are of great concern for Africa as they undermine nature's ability to support the well-being of people in Africa and hamper the sustainable social and economic development targeted by African countries. Land is facing increasing competition, and with other development needs for urban and infrastructure development, extractive industries and agricultural expansion, its productivity is declining at an alarming rate.

49. Addressing threats to biodiversity in Africa requires strengthening the capacities of government and non-governmental actors, including the private sector, to integrate biodiversity considerations into mainstream decision-making. The work of the African Leadership Group on mainstreaming of biodiversity in development has raised the profile of biodiversity as a national concern across eight countries in Africa. It has delivered improved budgets for biodiversity policies, such as national development plans that reflect the value of biodiversity, and delivered regulations that better incorporate biodiversity into decision-making processes. There are many opportunities to scale up this peer-to-peer learning and leadership approach to further mainstream biodiversity and address the threats to biodiversity in Africa. The establishment of a pan-African network of national biodiversity mainstreaming champions could deliver transformational change in the way biodiversity is integrated into mainstream decision-making. The learning and leadership approach of the African Leadership Group is fully aligned with the Africa Environment Partnership Platform's main aim of promoting sustainable environmental management in Africa through enhanced partnership, coordination and harmonization of activities.

50. In that regard, African countries may wish to consider adopting an ambitious pan-African agenda on ecosystem restoration to complement and scale up ecosystem restoration initiatives in Africa. Some of the urgent strategic actions could include the following:

- (a) Identify and map critically degraded ecosystems across the region;
- (b) Review the current restoration commitments made by African countries under various initiatives such as those highlighted in section V above;
- (c) Identify on-going national, subregional and regional initiatives to combat land degradation and enhance ecosystem restoration in Africa and map them against the critically degraded ecosystems across the region to identify the major gaps and the strategic opportunities to replicate and/or upscale successful initiatives;
- (d) Compile relevant experiences, good practices and lessons learned from various initiatives to combat land degradation and enhance ecosystem restoration;
- (e) Identify and undertake the mapping of key stakeholders and partners involved in combating land degradation and promoting ecosystem restoration in Africa;
- (f) Identify the key capacity-building and resource mobilization needs and gaps and propose strategic interventions to address those needs and gaps;
- (g) Based on the above information, develop and adopt a forward-looking results-oriented pan-African action agenda on ecosystem restoration for increased resilience in the region;
- (h) Invite and encourage all African States to include in their national budgets financial resources to invest in projects and activities to meet their national targets and commitments to combat land degradation and promote ecosystem restoration;
- (i) Identify and invite strategic development partners and investors to complement the national investments to combat land degradation and promote ecosystem restoration in the region;
- (j) Establish a working group or panel of ecosystem restoration experts to provide advice and technical support to member States upon request and to monitor and track progress towards achieving the national targets and commitments to combat land degradation and promote ecosystem restoration.

51. Implementing the agenda will require setting ambitious commitments, focusing investments, mobilizing broad coalitions and ensuring active participation of various stakeholders, including the private sector.

VIII. Conclusion and recommendations

52. Africa has extraordinarily rich and diverse ecosystems and a wealth of indigenous knowledge, which are strategic assets underpinning the socioeconomic development and human well-being in the region even though the true value of nature's contributions is still underappreciated in decision-making processes. As a strategic measure, countries have declared 13.4 per cent of the continent's land mass and 2.6 per cent of the seas as protected areas. Other sites have been designated as wetlands of international importance, important bird and biodiversity areas, Alliance for Zero Extinction sites, ecologically and biologically significant marine areas, and community conserved areas.

53. One of the main key messages from the IPBES regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa is that Africa can move towards achieving its development aspirations, while at the same time improving the conservation of its valuable natural assets and meetings its biodiversity commitments and targets through multi-stakeholder and multilevel adaptive governance, as well as improved integration of indigenous and local knowledge through recognition of traditional institutions. The assessment also notes that one of the plausible futures for achieving the African Union's vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa by 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets is one that balances strong economic growth with minimizing environmental consequences, characterized by heightened environmental caution, social equity and human welfare.

54. There is an urgent need for policymakers and other actors to quickly identify and adopt practical measures to combat land degradation and enhance ecosystem restoration in Africa. Concerted effort is also needed to build the capacity of African researchers, policymakers and field practitioners to make informed decisions and take impactful interventions at various levels.

55. Planning and investment decisions for physical infrastructure need to be guided by greater transparency, inclusiveness and futures thinking so that physical infrastructure developments enhance ecological resilience and the well-being of African people. Investment opportunities in ecological and other types of green infrastructure in the African region should be scoped out and assessed for bankability or securing alternative sources of funding from unconventional sources.