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AMCEN Priorities for the period 2025 to 2027

African Ministerial Conference on the Environment Priorities for the period 2025–2027

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the continent's environmental agenda. As Africa navigates the complex interaction between sustainable development, climate resilience, and environmental stewardship, the period 2025–2027 presents a critical window for action and offers a strategic opportunity for the region to consolidate environmental gains and accelerate the implementation of transformative policies by focusing on critical priorities.

2. This background note outlines the key environmental priorities for Africa for the period 2025–2027. It seeks to provide a strategic framework for addressing the continent's pressing environmental challenges and aligning efforts with regional and global agendas.

3. The priorities are aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, multilateral environmental agreements, and the United Nations Environment Programme's Medium-Term Strategy 2026 - 2029.

II. Context

5. The environmental landscape in Africa is characterized by a range of challenges that require urgent and coordinated action.

6. For example, the year 2024 was either the warmest or the second warmest on record for Africa.[1] In Southern Africa, rainfall was significantly below average from the beginning of the year, which led to widespread drought conditions that adversely affected the availability of water resources, including for agriculture.[2]

7. The region also experienced a series of extreme weather events with significant impacts across the continent. The Horn of Africa, for instance, faced drought conditions in some areas, with severe flooding occurring in Kenya and Tanzania.[3] Extreme heat events were especially intense in North Africa, while the entire ocean area around the African continent was affected by strong and intense marine heatwaves.[4]

[1] World Meteorological Organization. (2025). *State of the climate in Africa 2024*.
[2] Ibid
[3] Ibid
[4] Ibid

5. In the meantime, climate finance remains critically low. Africa needs $277 billion annually to meet its climate goals, but only $29.5 billion was mobilized in 2020.[5] Moreover, 60% of climate finance is concentrated in just 10 countries, highlighting regional disparities.

5. Despite the fact that over 40 African countries have either completed or are currently in the process of developing their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), the quality and efficacy of their implementation differ significantly among countries.[6]

6. Africa faces a formidable climate adaptation challenge, with countries in the region bearing a disproportionate burden of climate impacts, compounded by underinvestment in climate-resilient infrastructure and limited access to climate finance.

7. The continent faces a growing sustainable cooling challenge such as rising temperatures, rapid urbanization, and limited access to electricity expose millions to life-threatening heat stress, food insecurity, and health risks. As temperatures rise, access to affordable and energy-efficient cooling becomes vital for protecting health, preserving food and medicine, and maintaining productivity.

8. It is estimated that the demand for cooling will triple globally by 2050, with Africa particularly vulnerable due to its large population lacking access to modern cooling technologies.[7]

9. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing access to climate finance, and investing in resilient infrastructure and early warning systems. Community-based adaptation strategies, nature-based solutions, and regional cooperation are also critical. International support, particularly in the form of technology transfer and capacity building, is essential to empower African countries to implement effective adaptation measures tailored to local contexts.

10. The loss of biodiversity on the continent is equally concerning. Africa is experiencing some of the highest levels of biodiversity loss globally.[8] The main drivers of biodiversity loss in Africa are climate change, habitat conversion (for agriculture settlements and infrastructure), overharvesting, pollution (air, water and soil), invasive alien species, and illegal wildlife trade[9]. Sub-Saharan Africa is identified as one of the global hotspots for biodiversity loss. Madagascar and parts of Central and West Africa are particularly affected due to their rich endemic species and high rates of habitat conversion.[10]

11. The increase in Africa's population, estimated to reach 2.5billion people by 2050, will further exacerbate loss of biodiversity if appropriate measures including sustainable urban and regional planning are not considered.

12. 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, urban and infrastructure development, among other human-induced changes, have led to habitat loss, degradation of catchments and soil erosion, leading to loss of biodiversity and livelihoods.

13. Meanwhile, land degradation, desertification, and drought (DLDD) continue to pose significant challenges to Africa, impacting livelihoods, food security, and environmental sustainability. DLDD is driven by climate change, unsustainable land management practices, and increasing population pressures. Africa is particularly vulnerable to these problems, with a large portion of the continent classified as desert or dryland, and a significant percentage of land already degraded.

14. Marine and coastal environments, although of significant ecological and socioeconomic importance to the African continent, are under immense threat from human activities. Biodiversity and ecosystems in marine and coastal areas are

[5] Ibid
[6] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Least Developed Countries (LDC) Expert Group. National Adaptation Plans 2023 – Progress in the Formulation and Implementation of NAPS; UNFCCC: Bonn, 2023.
[7] UNEP. (2023). Global Cooling Watch 2023: Keeping it Chill: How to meet cooling demands while cutting emissions. Nairobi.
[8] UNEP. (2024). *Global Resources Outlook 2024: Bend the Trend – Pathways to a Liveable Planet as Resource use spikes*. UNEP. Nairobi
[9] IPBES Regional Biodiversity Assessment Report 2018 spm_africa_2018_digital.pdf
[10] UNEP. (2024). *Global Resources Outlook 2024: Bend the Trend – Pathways to a Liveable Planet as Resource use spikes*. UNEP. Nairobi

diverse and provide significant economic, social and cultural contributions to the people of Africa.

15. The loss of biodiversity and natural habitats also compromises the health security in Africa as benefits accruing from healthy and productive ecosystems, such as prevention of pandemics e.g. COVID-19 and outbreak of zoonotic diseases as well as the development of antimicrobial resistance.

16. Concerning air pollution, vulnerable populations including women and children in the region continue to bear a disproportionate burden of pollution-related health risks.

17. Pollution in Africa is shaped by a complex interplay of energy poverty, biomass reliance, and industrial emissions. The dominant source of emissions includes household biomas burning, open waste burning, agricultural residue burning, wildfires, and transport using low-quality fuels and high-emitting vehicles[12].

18. Fifty-one per cent of Africa's energy mix comes from biomass and as a result, the continent is the second-largest emitter of PM10 globally (after Asia).[11]

19. Around 3 billion people use open fires and stoves to heat their homes, leading to over 4 million premature deaths from illness and over 50% of pneumonia deaths in children under five years. Exposure to household air pollution also causes 3.8 million premature deaths annually.

20. Outdoor air pollution is projected to get worse, causing about 930,000 premature deaths per year in 2030 and about 1.6 million premature deaths per year in 2063.[12]

21. Despite advances in clean cooking technologies, household air pollution would still cause about 170,000 premature deaths per year in 2030 (150,000 by 2063.).[13]

22. Without action, economic growth compounded by population growth, unplanned urbanization, and unsustainable lifestyles will exacerbate pressures on resources, the environment, and human health, and could increase inequalities and limit Africa's ability to achieve sustainable development.[14]

23. The land degradation situation is equally disturbing.

24. About 67 per cent of land in Africa is made up of deserts and drylands, putting significant pressure on the continent to feed its growing population. Moreover, an estimated 75 per cent of this land, which encompasses the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, is degraded, predisposing the continent to severe, recurrent droughts.[15]

25. The dual challenge of land degradation and desertification is made worse by the extraordinary rate of deforestation that the continent is grappling with.[16]

26. In the meantime, the continent is experiencing rapid urbanization and industrialization, which will continue to impact the region's pollution, biodiversity, and climate outlook.

27. There is a need, therefore, to speed up environmental and climate actions if the continent is to achieve its climate and environment-related goals under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

28. Some priority actions are proposed below to support the realization of these climate and environment-related goals.

III. Strategic Priorities for the biennium 2025–2027

29. Based on the identified challenges, this section outlines the strategic priorities for environmental action in Africa from 2025 to 2027. The priorities are designed to guide policy, investment, and collaborative efforts.

[11] UN Policy Paper "Understanding Africa's Global Air Pollutant Emissions and Contributing Economic Sectors" (2024)
[12] UNEP. (2022). Integrated Assessment of Air Pollution and Climate Change for Sustainable Development In Africa. UNEP. Nairobi
[13] Ibid
[14] Ibid
[15] United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. (2023). The Regions: Africa. [Online] Available at: https://www.unccd.int/convention/regions/annex-i-africa
[16] Mansourian, S. and Berrahmouni, N. (2021). Review of Forest and Landscape Restoration in Africa. [Online] Available at: https://doi.org/10.4060/cb6111en

(a) Climate Action

30. To address the climate change challenges in the continent, the African Union has developed a Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022–2032). The Strategy and action plan identifies four overarching strategic priorities to guide the continent's collective climate action and development efforts until the year 2032.

31. The strategic priorities on climate action could include:

    (i) Strengthening Policy and Governance;

    (ii) Adopting Pathways Towards Transformative Climate-Resilient Development;

    (iii) Enhancing the Means of Implementation Towards Climate-Resilient Development;

    (iv) Leveraging Regional Flagship Initiatives;

32. The conference may wish to call for the implementation of specific activities of the strategic priorities in the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan.

33. In addition, the continent may also wish to consider investing in innovative and sustainable cooling solutions, which play a pivotal role in climate adaptation across Africa. Solutions such as solar-powered refrigeration, passive cooling architecture, and district cooling systems offer sustainable alternatives that reduce emissions while enhancing resilience. Scaling up these technologies, supported by policy incentives and investment, can help bridge the adaptation gap and foster climate-resilient development across the continent.

34. Owing to its vast resources of energy transition minerals, the continent will play a major role in the future of clean energy technologies. The African Green Minerals Strategy 2024 provides a roadmap for harnessing Africa's mineral wealth to drive value addition at source, regional industrialization, and climate resilience. It also places emphasis on mineral stewardship, including responsible mining, environmental sustainability, and circular economy principles. The conference may wish to call for the implementation of the recommendations of the Strategy.

(b) Biodiversity Loss, Land Degradation, Desertification, and Drought

35. To address the biodiversity challenges, the African Union has developed the African Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2023 – 2030. Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (ABSAP) 2023–2030 is structured around five strategic pillars, each aligned with specific targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the voluntary Global Action Plan on biodiversity and health.

36. The strategic pillars include:
    (i) Strengthening Biodiversity Governance and Practice
    (ii) Sustainable Use and Benefit Sharing from Biological and Genetic Resources
    (iii) Sectoral Mainstreaming and Integration of Ecosystem-Based Approaches
    (iv) Increasing Financing for Africa's Biodiversity
    (v) Enhancing Capacities, Equity, and Inclusion for Effective Implementation

37. The Conference may wish to call for the implementation of the focus areas under the strategic pillars in the AU Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2023 – 2030.

38. Land degradation, desertification, and drought challenges could be addressed by fully implementing the Strategic Framework for Drought Risk Management and Enhancing Resilience in Africa and by embracing nature-positive food systems.

39. Specifically, this would involve African countries developing drought policies and governance mechanisms for drought risk management; drought monitoring and early warning; drought vulnerability and impact assessment; drought mitigation, preparedness, and response; knowledge management and drought awareness; and reducing the underlying factors of drought risk.

40. Embracing nature-positive food systems is also important in averting land degradation while simultaneously addressing

biodiversity loss and building resilience and adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

(c) Pollution Action

41. To address the pollution crisis and accelerate the realization of the 2030 Agenda and the 2063 Agenda, Africa should implement measures in transport, residential energy, energy generation and industry, agriculture, and waste management areas.

42. This will significantly help Africa move towards a more decarbonized or low-carbon energy system and consequently improve air quality on the continent.

43. Specifically, Africa may wish to:

(i) shift from biomass to cleaner fuels (e.g., LPG, electricity);
(ii) increase public awareness campaigns on health and environmental risks;
(iii) provide subsidies and microfinance for clean cooking technologies;
(iv) enhance afforestation and reforestation to combat deforestation and,
(v) establish carbon credits and pricing mechanisms to incentivize cleaner energy
(vi) Provide policy and financial incentives to promote circularity in high-impact sectors

44. Mercury pollution from ASGM remains one of Africa's most urgent environmental and health crises, with the continent responsible for over 35% of global mercury emissions due to informal gold mining. The toxic impact on ecosystems, water systems, and vulnerable communities—particularly women and children—requires sustained action under the Minamata Convention on Mercury, which obligates parties to reduce, where feasible eliminate, mercury use in ASGM.

45. Priority actions to curb mercury pollution and formalize ASGM in the Africa region could include:

(i) Enforce Minamata Convention commitments: sustain implementation of ASGM national action plans with renewed action on reduction targets, address diversion of mercury into ASGM sector, and enhanced monitoring of mining hotspots.
(ii) Formalize the ASGM sector: Establish legal and fiscal incentives for miners to operate legally, including simplified licensing, access to finance, and land-use security tied to mercury-free practices.
(iii) Scale up mercury-free technologies: Promote affordable alternatives through government subsidies, partnerships with equipment suppliers, and vocational training programs for miners.
(iv) Regional mercury elimination strategy: Harmonize cross-border efforts to disrupt illegal mercury supply chains, leveraging existing structures in the Bamako Convention and joint task forces with customs and law enforcement agencies.
(v) Aligning ASGM formalization with regional trade agreements to integrate responsible gold into regional supply chains.

46. The conference may also wish to call for the implementation of the priority measures identified in the 2023 Integrated Assessment of Air Pollution and Sustainable Development in Africa. These measures would deliver multiple benefits - including reducing near-term climate warming, improving public health, and advancing sustainable development goals through improved air quality.

47. The Conference may further wish to encourage member states to promote alternative fuels and clean cooking technologies to accelerate access to clean cooking aligned with national energy planning and universal energy access goals. Such a mission would enhance household air quality, reduce health risks, and contribute to Africa's clean energy transition.

(d) Other measures

48. Other cross-cutting measures, including strengthening environmental governance; digital transformation; and sustainable environment and climate financing and budgeting, could significantly accelerate the realization of Africa's development goals.

49. Environmental governance is the institutional and legal architecture needed to make environmental goals and commitments a reality. This work stream will support coherent decision-making towards more effective legal and institutional frameworks that underpin the achievement of internationally agreed-upon goals for climate, biodiversity,

and pollution in the context of the 2030 Agenda and Africa's Agenda 2063.

50. Several regional environmental agreements have also been dormant while new global agreements are ready for ratification.

51. Key focus areas under the environmental governance work stream may include: -

    (i) Supporting countries in building relevant capacity in environmental law and contributing to the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

    (ii) Advancing human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, including through the development of access to justice, information, and public participation strategy and action plan

    (iii) Supporting countries in Africa, at their request, in the development and implementation of the environmental rule of law

    (iv) Promoting the ratification, implementation, and revitalization of dormant regional environmental agreements including the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa (Bamako Convention), and the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (Maputo Convention)

    (v) Promoting the ratification and implementation of global environmental agreements of interest to the continent, including the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), as well as the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer

52. Digitalization is sweeping the planet, changing our economy, society, institutions, and even our humanity. This must, however, be done in an inclusive, equitable, or sustainable manner.

53. Key focus areas under the digital transformation workstream may include: -

    (i) Supporting and scaling up environmental change through an effectively governed and inclusive data architecture and digital ecosystem for Africa

    (ii) Catalyzing a transformative use of environmental digital public goods to amplify and accelerate progress towards global climate, biodiversity and pollution goals and targets

    (iii) Involve Ministries of Finance and National Statistics Offices in the design, governance, and deployment of digital public goods for environmental management, to ensure data-driven policymaking and integration with national budget processes.

54. Sustainable environmental and climate financing and budgeting are a critical pathway to addressing climate change, natural disasters, and environmental degradation in Africa.

55. Closer collaboration among finance, economic development, and environment sectors can offer opportunities to accelerate environment and climate action for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

56. Key focus areas under the sustainable environmental and climate financing work stream could focus on: -

    (i) Supporting member states to develop incentives and innovative financing mechanisms for the environment and sustainable development to increase domestic fiscal and non-fiscal resource mobilization capacity for green investments

    (ii) Developing a common African framework on sustainable budgeting to support the mobilization of resources to facilitate coherent implementation of the priorities of the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063, the Addis Ababa Action

Agenda, the African Green Stimulus Programme, nationally determined contributions, and national adaptation plans

(iii) Convening a joint session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development in 2027 to forge innovative policy directions and actions to accelerate socioeconomic and environmental development, green investments and the mobilization of climate finance on the continent

(iv) Development of a regional bioeconomy framework to facilitate conservation financing and provide livelihoods to millions of local communities in the continent.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

57. The implementation of the regional priorities will constitute the main part of the work programme of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment for the biennium 2025–2027, and it is anticipated that this will offer an opportunity for accelerating Africa's progress towards achievement of the Agenda 2030 and Africa's Agenda 2063 goals.

58. The regional priorities will also offer a good opportunity for the creation of synergies with other ongoing initiatives and enhanced resource mobilization.

59. The Conference may therefore wish to encourage member states and request the AMCEN Secretariat, in collaboration with relevant partners and subject to availability of resources, to;

(a) Accelerate the implementation of the strategic priorities under the African Union's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022–2032).

(b) Promote scaling up of innovative sustainable cooling technologies, supported by policy incentives and investment to help bridge the adaptation gap and foster climate-resilient development across the continent.

(c) Speed up the implementation of the strategic pillars under the African Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2023 – 2030.

(d) Fast-track the implementation of the Drought Resilient and Prepared Africa (DRAPA) which was developed in the framework of the African Drought Conference held in August 2016 in Windhoek, Namibia

(e) Accelerate the shift from biomass to cleaner fuels (e.g., LPG, electricity); increase public awareness campaigns on health and environmental risks; provide subsidies and microfinance for clean cooking technologies; enhance afforestation and reforestation to combat deforestation and; establish carbon credits and pricing mechanisms to incentivize cleaner energy

60. The Conference may also wish to request the AMCEN Secretariat, in collaboration with relevant partners and subject to availability of resources, to;

(i) Support countries in building relevant capacity in environmental law and contributing to the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

(ii) Advance human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, including through the development of access to justice, information, and public participation strategy and action plan

(iii) Support countries in Africa, at their request, in the development and implementation of the environmental rule of law

(iv) Promote the ratification, implementation, and revitalization of dormant regional environmental agreements including the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa (Bamako Convention), and the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (Maputo Convention)

(v) Promote the ratification and implementation of global environmental agreements of interest to the continent, including the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), as well as the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer

(vi) Operationalize the Africa Clean Air Programme roadmap, including through the establishment and coordination of regional Centers of Excellence on air quality, to enhance technical capacity, foster knowledge exchange, and facilitate implementation across key sectors, in alignment with Agenda 2063 and the African Green Recovery Action Plan.

61. The conference may further wish to request the AMCEN Secretariat, in collaboration with relevant partners and subject to availability of resources, to: -

(i) Support member states to scale up environmental action through an effectively governed and inclusive data architecture and digital ecosystem for Africa

(ii) Support member states catalyze a transformative use of environmental digital public goods to amplify and accelerate progress towards global climate, biodiversity, and pollution goals and targets.

62. Finally, the conference may wish to request the AMCEN Secretariat, in collaboration with relevant partners and subject to availability of resources, to: -

(i) Support member states to develop incentives and innovative financing mechanisms for the environment and sustainable development to increase domestic fiscal and non-fiscal resource mobilization capacity for green investments

(ii) Develop a common African framework on sustainable budgeting to support the mobilization of resources to facilitate coherent implementation of the priorities of the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063

(iii) To develop a regional bioeconomy framework to facilitate conservation financing and provide livelihoods to millions of local communities in the continent.

(iv) Develop a publicly accessible African Resilience Finance Dashboard to monitor and report progress on aligning national budgets and investments with climate, nature, and SDG targets, thereby strengthening transparency and accountability at national and regional levels.

(v) Convene a joint session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development in 2027 to forge innovative policy directions and actions to accelerate socioeconomic and environmental development, green investments, and the mobilization of climate finance on the continent.