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**Building a Safer and Greener Africa:
A Pan-African Strategy for the Environmentally Sound Management of Chemicals and
Waste and Action Plan**

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. Africa's evolving industrial landscape and burgeoning waste streams underscore an urgent continental imperative: to shape an integrated approach for the sound management of chemicals and waste that transcends national boundaries and policy silos.
2. This note introduces the need to develop a strategy and action plan on environmentally sound management of chemicals and wastes in Africa. The note is intended to inform the twentieth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment with a clear understanding of why Africa must collectively address chemicals and waste governance and elevate chemical safety and waste management as continental priorities in the context of the Global Framework on Chemicals and Africa union Agenda 2063.

II. Background

3. Rapid economic and demographic shifts have transformed Africa's chemicals and waste landscape. Industrial output has surged, with the global chemical industry valued at an estimated USD 5 trillion in 2017 and projected to double by 2030¹, yet much of this growth has outpaced national capacities for waste management².

¹ UN report: Urgent action needed to tackle chemical pollution as global production is set to double by 2030
<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/un-report-urgent-action-needed-tackle-chemical-pollution-global>

² engineeringx.raeng.org.uk https://engineeringx.raeng.org.uk/media/u4mnsto5/open-burning-final-report_1.pdf

4. Urbanisation and infrastructure expansion have exacerbated the influx of e-waste, textiles, and plastics, often routed through informal channels into open dumps or combustion sites. As a result, more than 90 percent of all waste in Africa is either openly dumped or burned³, releasing toxic emissions and contaminating soils and water bodies, with acute impacts on respiratory and other chemical-related diseases in surrounding communities⁴.
5. Historical episodes, such as the voyages of the “ships of death” in the 1980s, underscore how weak regulations and corruption have facilitated illegal transboundary movements of hazardous materials into disused mines and makeshift dumpsites, prompting the adoption of the Basel Convention in 1989⁵ and the Bamako Convention⁶ in 1998⁷ to curb these practices.
6. Despite near-universal ratification of key multilateral instruments, the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm, Minamata and Bamako Conventions, alongside voluntary frameworks like the Global Framework on Chemicals, implementation remains uneven and under-resourced. Fewer than half of African States have comprehensive national legal frameworks for chemicals management, and only a minority operate functional hazardous waste treatment or recycling facilities, leaving critical gaps in the life-cycle oversight of chemicals.
7. Fragmented mandates across environment, health, industry and customs agencies further hinder coordinated action, while the absence of national chemical inventories and pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs) in most countries undermines transparency, accountability and evidence-based policymaking.
8. Informal recycling and scavenging, though providing vital livelihoods, expose workers and local residents to carcinogens such as lead, mercury, dioxins and brominated flame⁸ retardants, perpetuating health inequities in the very communities that can least afford them.
9. At present, chemicals and waste issues are marginally reflected in national development plans, climate adaptation strategies, biodiversity conservation policies and public health programmes, resulting in missed synergies and policy contradictions.
10. Africa’s voice in global negotiations has likewise suffered from fragmented representation, despite the formation of the African Group of Negotiators on Chemicals and Waste in 2023; limited technical resources, scientific data and legal expertise

³ greenpeace.org https://www.greenpeace.org/static/planet4-africa-stateless/2025/05/9e653a42-greenpeaceafrica_wastecrisisfactsheet_005.pdf

⁴ engineeringx.raeng.org.uk https://engineeringx.raeng.org.uk/media/u4mnsto5/open-burning-final-report_1.pdf

⁵ Basel Convention > The Convention > Overview > History > Overview
<https://www.basel.int/TheConvention/Overview/History/Overview/tabid/3405/Default.aspx>

⁶ Hazardous waste and the right to a healthy environment: reflections on the LIDHO decision of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights <https://www.ahry.up.ac.za/waswa-s>

⁷ The Bamako convention | UNEP - UN Environment Programme <https://www.unep.org/bamako-convention>

⁸ Turning e-waste into gold: the untapped potential of African landfills <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/turning-e-waste-gold-untapped-potential-african-landfills>

continue to constrain the continent's ability to advocate for outcomes that align with its priorities⁹

11. A harmonized continental strategy, linking lifecycle management, capacity building, financing and stakeholder engagement, will be pivotal in elevating Africa's collective bargaining power and ensuring that international commitments translate into tangible, on-the-ground improvements.

III. Continental and global deliberations on Chemicals and Waste Governance

12. Decision AMCEN 19(3) formally established the African Group of Negotiators on Chemicals and Waste to consolidate Africa's technical negotiating capacity across multilateral environmental agreement fora, Ministers have repeatedly called for a unified continental strategy to leverage this new structure.
13. Decision AMCEN 18/1(b) built on the AGN's early work by spotlighting key UNEP Assembly resolutions, notably UNEP/EA.3/Res.9 on the environmentally sound management of waste lead-acid batteries and UNEP/EA.6/Res.14 on highly hazardous pesticides, which collectively underscore the need for continent-wide guidelines, standards and public-private alliances to address these priority streams.
14. Regionally, the Bamako Convention remains the only legally binding instrument specifically prohibiting the import of hazardous and radioactive wastes into Africa. However, its impact has been constrained by uneven ratification, fewer than all AU Member States are yet parties, and chronic funding shortfalls for its Secretariat and national focal points.
15. In 2025, COPs to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions further cemented this approach by formally calling for deeper cooperation with both the Bamako and Waigani instruments.
16. Their joint decision emphasizes technical assistance, capacity-building and the integration of national implementation plans and NAPs under a harmonized framework, ensuring that lifecycle management of chemicals and waste is coordinated across all relevant MEAs.
17. Complementing these binding agreements, the voluntary Global Framework on Chemicals adopted in Bonn in September 2023 provides an overarching platform for lifecycle management, setting out 28 targets and enabling actions to 2030.

IV. Why a Pan-African Strategy?

18. Africa's existing array of binding and voluntary instruments has yet to overcome deep-seated fragmentation, institutional silos and chronic funding shortfalls in chemicals and waste governance, leading to overlapping mandates and weak data systems that stall coherent policy implementation.
19. With fewer than half of African States maintain comprehensive, up-to-date legal frameworks aligned with the Basel, Stockholm, Rotterdam, Minamata and Bamako Conventions, creating regulatory gaps that undermine enforcement and allow hazardous materials to slip through the cracks; developing model legislation and inter-

⁹ African nations have the power, tools to re-design a plastic pollution-free future <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/opinion/african-nations-have-power-tools-re-design-plastic-pollution-free-future>

ministerial guidance under a continental strategy will ensure consistent lifecycle management across all member States.

20. Historically fragmented negotiation positions have diluted Africa's voice in multilateral fora. By building on the African Group of Negotiators, a well-resourced, permanent framework for joint position-setting, data sharing and legal support will amplify Africa's collective bargaining power in forums such as the upcoming Plastics Treaty and future amendments to the Basel and Rotterdam Conventions.
21. Mainstreaming chemical safety into national development plans, climate strategies, public-health programmes and curricula will unlock synergies and reduce risks to vulnerable groups. Examples include embedding chemical-safety modules in schools, upgrading surveillance systems to track chemical-related illnesses and integrating pollution-reduction targets into National Development Plans and National Development Contributions.
22. Transforming ad-hoc recycling and waste-management efforts into inclusive circular-economy solutions requires engaging informal collectors, civil society and the private sector in co-designed EPR schemes, public-awareness campaigns and innovation incubators for low-cost treatment technologies. Convening governments, industry, Civil Societies and community networks around shared indicators will convert isolated initiatives into a unified continental programme delivering measurable public-health, environmental and economic benefits.

V. Journey to the Strategy

23. On 10 June 2025, the Africa Group of Negotiator on Chemical and Waste formally agreed the Strategy's concept note, setting the vision for a harmonized continental framework.
24. On 24 June 2025 an expert drafting team, comprising representatives of Member States, Regional Economic Communities, UNEP and the African Union Commission, finalizing the first full draft of the Strategy and Action Plan.
25. National Focal Points then convened on 12 and 13 July 2025 to review and validate that draft, providing country-level perspectives and ensuring that time-bound activities, indicators and lead institutions reflected on-the-ground realities.

VI. The Pan-African Strategy and Action Plan

26. The Pan-African Strategy and Action Plan (2025–2035) offers a single continental “umbrella” to harmonize legal frameworks, institutional mandates and financing mechanisms for chemicals and waste management. Its vision—a pollution-free Africa protecting human health and ecosystems.
27. The strategy on environmentally sound management of chemicals and wastes will facilitate the coordination and alignment of national actions, foster partnerships, raise Africa's voice in the global world, mobilise resources, and support the achievement of SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), the Global Chemicals Framework and the African Union 2063 Agenda, and implementation of Bamako Convention, Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) in the context of transiting towards a circular, non-toxic prosperous society and economy.

VII. Considerations for the 20th Ordinary session of Africa Ministerial Conference on the Environment

28. The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, at its twentieth session, is requested to:

- a) endorse the draft Pan-African Strategy and Action Plan (2025–2035)
- b) elevate chemical safety and waste management as one of the continents environmental priorities through political commitment and predictable financing for implementation.