The 2026 Regional Consultative Meeting of the UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders, Africa
Concept Note
September 16-18, 2026
Venue: Best Western Premier Dynasty Addis Ababa
Theme: African Civic Leadership in Climate Change, Multilateralism, and Trade Amidst Geopolitical Volatility

Introduction

Climate change and its effects on the environment, people and planet remains the principal risk multiplier that continues to reshape and be reshaped by the volatility of the geopolitical dynamics further threatening the conventional approach to multilateralism and to the multilateral order. As is, the current situation is still deeply entrenched in post-war frameworks with climate change at the pivot of resource scarcity, environmental destruction, destabilization of governance and institutional systems, disruption of macro and micro economic trade, and shrinking civic space. Africa continues to provide leadership in building cohesive systems that will aid in safeguarding the future of the Continent. For example, there are strong, evident efforts by African states to speak in one voice globally concerning matters climate change, including through such Continental organs as the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), the Committee of African Heads of State and Government (CAHOSCC),[1] and the accelerated attempts at implementing the Agenda 2063 Flagship Project, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).[2]

Despite this, Africa continues to grapple internally with externally-induced challenges caused by geopolitical tensions such as the war in the Middle East, which has led to the projection of, "…a loss in output growth of at 0.2 percentage points on Africa's GDP," based on a policy brief that was released jointly by a joint Task Force led by the African Development Bank Group (AfDB), the African Union (AU), the United Nations Development Programme - Regional Bureau for Africa (UNDP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).[3] In matters climate change, it multiplies threats and increase economic risk significantly for Africa with agricultural disruption, weakening global multilateralism and multilateral order, and green protectionism with such policies as the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Whereas African states are encumbered in such embargoes, their responsibilities to their peoples are inevitable particularly in the wake of such eventualities as the July 23, 2025 International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion, which implicates binding responsibilities to prevent, mitigate, and remedy climate harm under the international law, accountability, and human-rights based

[1] https://au.int/sw/node/44469
[2] https://au.int/en/african-continental-free-trade-area
[3] https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-04/policy_brief-the_impacts_of_the_middle_east_conflict_on_africa-april_2026_.pdf

approaches amongst other critical elements.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play a critical role in holding governments to account for their responsibilities and are also important in supporting the achievement of the Agenda 2063 of the Africa We Want. To ensure collective impact in such avenues, CSOs need to be organized in a manner to push a common front through established avenues and channels. With over 300 organisations from all the 5 subregions of Africa and a convening history of more than 2 decades, the UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders, Africa have been and remain instrumental in delivering a collective multilateral position for Africa through, particularly, the AMCEN and the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) through the Regional Consultative Meetings (RCMs). Even with minimal resources, the RCMs Africa have recorded staggering growth in quality and numbers with eight (8) partners and over 700 applicants (314 in-person participants) during the four-day 2025 RCM Africa, which was the first to dedicate a Youth Day for African youth by African youth. Still, it has not been possible to convene the RCM early in advance and devoid of the AMCEN to consolidate a common civic voice for the African Continent. With Ethiopia hosting the Conference of Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2032, the next 21st Ordinary Session of the AMCEN organized by the UNEP Regional Office for Africa bringing together the Ministers of Environment and the 59th session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (COM-59), organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in March 2027, and the Eighth Session of the UNEA (UNEA) in 2027, 2026 would be the prime year to accelerate the timely consolidation of a collective African voice through an independent RCM to build adequate momentum to these key multilateral avenues. The 2026 RCM Africa will also provide an opportunity to evaluate and take lessons from the 2025 RCM Africa, UNEA7, and the 2026 AfCFTA Biashara Afrika 2026 Conference while looking ahead.

The 2026 RCM Africa

Purpose

The 2026 RCM Africa seeks to provide an in-person and virtual dialogic and expert platform for the UNEP MGS, Africa and other CSOs/actors on the environment, trade and economics through a three-day hybrid meeting to prepare inputs for the various multilateral forums including the UNFCCC COP31, future AMCENs, and other multilateral avenues.

Themes

The 2026 RCM Africa will engage UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders, Africa on the following themes:

Multilateralism and Multilateral Order: The African Civil Society Perspective

In, "Towards a Peoples' Multilateralism: The UN, Development Networks and Civil Society," synthesis by Tibett (2009) the role of CSOs and other non-state actors are heralded as fundamental to solving key development issues in the complex, multilayered process of multilateralism. The current multilateral order is constantly threatened by weakening systems and deliberate institutional attacks in a world muddled in geopolitical tensions. In addition, the UN80 Initiative launched in March 2025 aimed at making the organization more agile, coherent, and cost-effective

provides an opportunity for CSOs to contribute to the next definitive phase of the UN. For Africa, the initiative is a critical opportunity to reconfigure the global financial architecture and shift away from a "periphery" role to become a central actor in shaping global decision-making. An equally diverse and multilateral collective of CSOs is better placed to provide multilateral insights into Africa's effectiveness in multilateralism and shaping the African engagement in the shifting multilateral order. UNEP MGS, Africa will address the following sub-themes in the 2026 RCM Africa:

1. **Promoting "People's Multilateralism":** UNEP MGS Africa continue to transform the definition of multilateralism from a solely intergovernmental process into a more inclusive one that brings in NGOs, community groups, and social movements to ensure development solutions are participatory and equitable. The key pillars of People's Multilateralism in Africa will be articulated.
2. **Enhancing Regional-Global Multilateral Partnerships:** UNEP MGS, Africa work across different regional and global multilateral spaces and processes. During the 2026 RCM Africa, they shall explore how this advantage will help bridge the gap between regional bodies (the African Union and Regional Economic Communities) and global institutions (the United Nations), ensuring that "African ownership" remains central to peace and security operations. Further, the 2026 RCM Africa shall deliberate on their contribution to Africa's positioning on UN80 matters related to fair global finance, equal stakeholder representation, and operational efficiency and coherence within the UN System including on the necessary reforms for enhanced, transparent and inclusive stakeholder engagement such as in the Economic Commissions for Africa with the view to address pressing continental priorities such as trade, regional integration, and sustainable development.
3. **Geopolitical tensions and the impact on Africa:** While the rise of a multipolar world offers new opportunities for alliance-building (e.g., BRICS), the 2026 RCM Africa shall explore how the African civil society must navigate complex geopolitical contests to ensure African interests remain central rather than becoming secondary to the agendas of external actors.

Climate Change

Climate change remains a significant and incessant threat to the sustainable development, peace, economic prowess, and the stability of the African Continent as a whole. The July 2025 International Court of Justice (ICJ) Advisory Opinion on climate change is a landmark for Africa, transforming voluntary climate commitments into binding international legal obligations. This was further strengthened by the adoption of decision A/RES/80/263 of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) operationalizing the Opinion and calling on states to comply with climate responsibilities and requesting UN reporting to advance these goals. Conferences such as the April 2026, "African States Sensitization Conference on the ICJ Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change," organized by the Centre for International Forestry Research – International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF) (currently The Landscape Alliance – CIFOR & ICRAF in Action) have added to the momentum and

adoption of the Advisory Opinion. During the 2025 RCM Africa, the Constituency established a working group on climate change that will be leading discussions and consolidation of positions for African CSOs within the climate discourse to build accelerated traction for:

1. **COP32:** Ethiopia will host the 32nd UN Climate Change Conference (COP32) in Addis Ababa in 2027, marking a significant milestone for African climate diplomacy. This decision, finalized in late 2025, follows a successful bid by Ethiopia, which aims to leverage the summit for enhanced climate financing and to showcase Africa-led climate solutions and interventions. Without overlooking the significance of proper positioning during the COP31 in Turkey, delegates shall explore the means for ensuring strategic, influential African civic space positioning at the COP32 in Ethiopia.
2. **ICJ Advisory Opinion, Human Rights, Legal Accountability & Litigation:** African CSOs play a crucial role by leveraging on the Advisory and the UNGA Resolution to enforce accountability, protect human rights, and demand that high-emitting nations fund adaptation. The 2026 RCM Africa shall deliberate and form positions on how the UNEP MGS, Africa can exploit the ICJ Advisory Opinion to bolster domestic and regional litigation (e.g., in the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights) against governments and corporations for climate-related rights violations. This will include components such as the translation of the legal ruling into local action by advocating for policy shifts, demanding better enforcement of environmental regulations, and ensuring national climate strategies are rights-based.
3. **Advocating for Climate Justice & Finance:** UNEP MGS, Africa shall issue positions on the demand for loss and damage compensation, adaptation funding, and equity in international negotiations including in matters related to visa refusals for African delegates. Deliberations will also be about pushing for a "reconstruction of financial architectures" that prioritizes care economies and green transitions and protection of Africa's ecosystems, land and biodiversity.
4. **Mobilization, Sensitisation & Education:** For both state and nonstate actors, UNEP MGS, Africa will discuss avenues for sensitizing African governments and CSOs about the significance of the ICJ Advisory in pursuing climate justice for Africa and her peoples. Equally, they will explore avenues for educating communities on their rights to a healthy environment and elevating voices of marginalized groups—women, children, and indigenous communities—in the climate dialogue.

Trade and Environment

African CSOs serve as essential intermediaries within the trade-environment relationship, fostering sustainable development, food sovereignty, and ecological agriculture while connecting policymakers, the private sector, and communities. They are instrumental in advocating for and executing the policies of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which emphasize climate-resilient development and aim to avert environmental degradation. The key areas of discussion shall include:

1. **Implementing Climate-Resilient Trade:** Delegates will discuss how best African can align her trade policies with her climate goals, ensuring that the adoption of environmental goods and services—such as clean energy technologies—is prioritized, especially as climate hazards threaten existing trade infrastructure.
2. **Strengthening Policy Governance:** Delegates will deliberate on how MGS Africa can foster evidence-building for evidence-based decision-making and how best to serve as a link between stakeholders (such as in the East Africa Renewable Energy Federation), aiding in the harmonization of environmental standards in regional trade.
3. **Enhancing AfCFTA Implementation:** Delegates shall explore the active involvement of constituent CSOs in monitoring the AfCFTA to ensure its implementation includes gender equality, benefits small-scale producers, and integrates local environmental protections, rather than just facilitating external corporate interests.

Biodiversity

Africa is home to roughly a quarter of the Earth's biodiversity, but receives only around 6% of international biodiversity funding. African CSOs are vital in defending the continent's ecosystems by empowering local communities, advocating for environmental justice, and championing policies that directly support indigenous land rights. The 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) provide an avenue for anchoring the African biodiversity cause to protect the Continent's diverse species and ecosystems. The COP17 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), which will take place weeks after the 2026 RCM Africa is an integral moment for action on biodiversity and the UNEP MGS Africa have an opportunity to speak with one voice and explore partnership opportunities for biodiversity in Africa. Having established a UNEP MGS, Africa Biodiversity Working Group as an outcome of the 2025 RCM Africa, the working group shall curate and consolidate positions focusing on the following matters during the 2026 RCM Africa:

1. **African Union Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (ABSAP) 2023–2030 and KM-GBF:** The ABSAP outlines Africa's framework to halt nature loss, adapt to climate change, and meet the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) targets. Centered on sustainable development, it aims to protect ecosystems while supporting local communities. The UNEP MGS, Africa shall develop consolidated African CSO positions on, among other aspects, bridging the 30x30 gap, integration of binding human rights indicators and safeguard mechanisms into the global monitoring framework, direct access to finance, and youth, women, and community inclusion.
2. **UNCBD COP17:** With COP17 convening in Yerevan, Armenia from October 19 to October 30, 2026, the UNEP MGS Africa shall deliberate on consolidated African CSOs' positions, partnerships for COP17 within the Biodiversity Working Group, and strengthening of the African civic voice in advocating for the inclusion of human rights indicators, equitable biodiversity financing, and

local community-led conservation as African nations submit their revised NBSAPs.

Pollution

Pollution, hazardous chemicals, and waste management are critical environmental crises in Africa, driven by rapid industrialization and toxic imports. UNEP MGS, Africa as a convening platform remains central to pushing for stricter regulations, corporate accountability, and the strict enforcement of regional and global environmental treaties. As an outcome of the 2025 RCM Africa, the UNEP MGS, Africa constituted two separate working groups on:

1. Plastic Pollution and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to End Plastic Pollution Including in the Marine Environment
2. Chemicals and Waste

During the 2026 RCM, Africa, these two working groups will work to develop positions and create lines of synergies-of-action against pollution in Africa while feeding into other processes such as INC 5 processes on the Global Plastics Treaty, the UNEP Science Policy Panel, Minamata Convention, Basel-Rotterdam-Stockholm (with prioritization of the Bamako Convention), among others.

Youth and Women

The UNEP MGS, Africa dedicates special efforts to promoting and strengthening the significant role that youth and women play in defining and shaping Africa's path to prosperity. For the first time in the history of the RCMs, the 2025 RCM Africa held in Nairobi featured a dedicated youth day where the inputs of the youth of Africa informed the position of the Constituency on all matters that were delivered to the 20th Ordinary Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN). In six of the working groups setup for the 2025 RCM Africa, This year, the 2026 RCM Africa will feature a youth and women day that will inform the larger discourse on the second and third day with older generations and men sitting in to be led by youth and women in the discourse.

Delivery Mode

The 2026 RCM Africa will be held in a hybrid manner (in-person and virtual).

Target Audience

Building on the successes of the previous RCMs and, particularly, the 2025 RCM Africa, the 2026 RCM Africa targets to bring together, in total, 200 in-person and about 100 virtual participants comprising UNEP MGS, Africa, representatives of organizations accredited to the UNCCD, non-accredited non-state organizations, UN Environment staff, and key resource persons relevant to the proceedings of the Tenth Special Session of the AMCEN.

Principal Outcome

A joint (long and summary) statement of Major Groups and Stakeholders, Africa to be delivered to the world including with the African Union, UNEP/UNEA Bureau, African Development Bank (AfDB), AfCFTA), and the AMCEN Secretariat.

Other Outcomes

- Key messages for policymakers from youth, women, and African CSOs.
- Consultative dialogue and strengthening of UNEP MGS, Africa working groups and working relations.
- Consolidation of UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders, Africa roadmap and working groups towards the upcoming regional and global engagements including, but not limited to, the AMCEN Ordinary and Special Sessions and COP31 in Turkey.