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African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

Fifteenth session

Meeting of the expert group

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

Consideration of the report of the secretariat

Report of the secretariat for the period 15 September 2012 to 31 December 2014

I. Introduction

1. The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment was established in December 1985, following a conference of African ministers of the environment held in Cairo, with the aim of promoting regional cooperation in addressing environmental challenges facing the region. The Conference provides guidance to its member States in respect of key political events, regional policies and initiatives related to the environment, including the implementation of regional and multilateral environmental agreements. The Conference holds its ordinary sessions once every two or three years. The Regional Office for Africa of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) serves as the secretariat for the Conference.

2. The objective of the present report is to provide information to participants at the fifteenth session of the Conference on the status of implementation of decisions taken by the Conference at its fourteenth session and its fifth special session and of other activities under the work programme of the Conference during the reporting period. The report provides a summary of some key activities related to the Conference and is in no way exhaustive in terms of the activities that may have been undertaken since the fourteenth session.

3. Activities undertaken during the reporting period from 15 September 2012 to 31 December 2014 are categorized under the following three main areas:

- (a) Status of implementation of the decisions adopted by the Conference at its fourteenth session and fifth special session;
- (b) Status of implementation of Conference-related activities for the period from 15 September 2012 to 31 December 2014;
- (c) Conference-related meetings.

II. Status of implementation of the decisions adopted by the Conference at its fourteenth session

4. The following twelve decisions were adopted by the Conference at its fourteenth session:

- (a) Decision 14/1 on Africa's post Rio+20 strategy for sustainable development;
- (b) Decision 14/2 on strengthening and upgrading the United Nations Environment Programme;

* AMCEN/15/EGM/1/Rev.1.

- (c) Decision 14/3 on review of the action plan for the environment initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development;
- (d) Decision 14/4 on sustainable consumption and production in Africa;
- (e) Decision 14/5 on strengthening the Africa Environment Outlook and environment information networks in support of decision-making in Africa;
- (f) Decision 14/6 on African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in the context of the African Union structures;
- (g) Decision 14/7 on the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative;
- (h) Decision 14/8 on management of biodiversity in Africa;
- (i) Decision 14/9 on engaging member States to ratify and adopt a strategy on the promotion of the ratification of the Maputo Convention on Nature and Natural Resources;
- (j) Decision 14/10 on engaging parliamentarians in the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements;
- (k) Decision 14/11 on joint celebration of Africa Environment Day and Wangari Maathai Day;
- (l) Decision 14/12 on climate change.

A. Decision 14/1. Africa's post Rio+20 strategy for sustainable development

5. At its fourteenth session, held in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, from 10 to 14 September 2012, the Conference adopted decision 14/1 on Africa's post Rio+20 strategy for sustainable development. In the decision, ten key areas were identified that needed to be considered for the development of the regional flagship programmes as a means to ensure the effective implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20). The decision was subsequently endorsed by the Executive Council of the African Union at its twenty-second ordinary session in January 2013.

6. At subsequent working sessions convened by the African Union Commission and the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, poverty eradication and sustainable livelihoods were defined as overall objectives that had to guide all the flagship programmes while capacity-building, technology transfer and skills development were to be addressed in a cross-cutting manner across the flagship programmes. At the working sessions, the eight remaining priority areas were further consolidated into five regional flagship programmes, namely an African green economy partnership; sustainable land management, desertification, biodiversity and ecosystems-based adaptation to climate change; partnership for sustainable consumption and production in Africa; African programme on sustainable energy development; and Africa integrated environmental assessment for sustainable development.

7. Draft concept notes for the respective flagship programmes were developed and subsequently reviewed and updated during the meeting of experts of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment that took place in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, in April 2013. The overall objective of the meeting was to discuss and provide inputs for updating the concept notes of the respective regional flagship programmes covering background, objectives, expected outcomes, key actions and modalities of implementation. A draft regional flagship framework document for the flagship programmes was also developed.

8. The draft concept notes for the five regional flagship programmes were presented, reviewed and later endorsed by the Conference at its fifth special session held in Botswana in October 2013. At the session, the Conference also adopted a decision calling for the establishment of a steering committee within the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency to guide the overall development and implementation of the regional flagship programmes.

B. Decision 14/2. Strengthening and upgrading the United Nations Environment Programme

9. The implementation of decision 14/2 on strengthening and upgrading the United Nations Environment Programme was achieved in resolution 67/213 of 21 December 2012, in which the General Assembly decided to strengthen and upgrade UNEP and establish universal membership in its governing body, and resolution 67/251 of 13 March 2013, by which the General Assembly changed the designation of the Governing Council of UNEP to the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP.

C. Decision 14/3. Review of the action plan for the environment initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development

10. The action plan for the environment initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was prepared in response to the call by NEPAD for the development and adoption of an initiative to address Africa's environmental challenges while at the same time combating poverty and promoting socio-economic development. The action plan was prepared through a consultative and participatory process under the leadership of the Conference.

11. The NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency, the African Union Commission and the Conference, with the support of UNEP, reviewed its implementation of the action plan with the aim of assessing the progress made as well as addressing certain emerging environmental issues in Africa.

12. The review concluded that the implementation of the plan was characterized by notable achievements and some glaring challenges. Significant progress had been made in achieving the priority objectives under each of action plan's thematic areas and at the different levels (continental, regional and national). However, "the quantitative propensity of projects implemented differed across the thematic areas and across the different levels."

13. It was recognized that the regional flagship programmes adopted by the Conference would be viable channels to overcome some of the challenges to the implementation the action plan. In essence, the regional flagship programmes provide a framework to accelerate the implementation of the action plan.

14. There are strong linkages and complementarities between the programme areas, the main issues addressed in the action plan and the objectives of the flagship programmes. They all seek to address environmental challenges, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development simultaneously. The revised action plan captures the salient elements of the flagship programmes, and illustrates how the programmes feed into the action plan while contributing to the implementation of the Rio+20 outcomes.

15. The TerrAfrica partnership on sustainable land and water management in sub-Saharan Africa, which is an important component of the action plan for the environment initiative, has twenty-six African country members to date. Of those, 12 have completed their country strategic investments frameworks. As a result, the Executive Committee of TerrAfrica, comprising members from African countries, regional economic communities, civil society and financial institutions, has agreed to the extension of the Partnership's leveraging fund for a further five-year cycle (2016–2020)

16. This new phase of the TerrAfrica partnership will contribute, among other things, to further strengthening the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, supporting the implementation of the regional flagship programme on land management, biodiversity and adaptation to climate change, the global landscape alliance and the Africa landscape action plan, which promote integrated landscape approaches as a way of addressing land degradation issues.

17. The revised action plan for the environment initiative of NEPAD will be submitted to the Conference at its fifteenth session for consideration.

D. Decision 14/4. Sustainable consumption and production in Africa

18. The African region has been at the frontline of the promotion of sustainable consumption and production. The main objective of sustainable consumption and production is to promote social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems and the decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation.

19. The African 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns has become the primary framework or strategy for the implementation of sustainable consumption and production in the region. To date, several projects and initiatives have been implemented under the African framework. The organizational support provided by UNEP together with the political leadership and support provided by the Conference and the financial support provided by the Marrakesh Task Force on Cooperation with Africa have been highly instrumental in terms of the achievements attained and the significant level of interest among development partners in working with the region.

20. At its fourteenth session, the Conference decided to develop and implement regional flagship programmes as a means of ensuring the effective implementation of the outcomes of Rio+20. One of the regional flagship programmes is the "Partnership for SCP in Africa", which includes a review of the African 10-year framework.

21. The objective is to hasten the implementation of the 10-year framework adopted by the international community in Africa, replicating and upscaling successful activities and initiatives in partnership with key regional institutions such as the African Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption and Production, the African Union, NEPAD, the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the regional economic commissions and United Nations entities.

22. The establishment of the “Partnership for SCP in Africa” by the Conference will ensure that the upscaling of sustainable consumption and production activities in Africa is attained by partnering with a wide range of stakeholders as well as through the 10-year framework of programmes. UNEP continues to lead the provision of support to the “Partnership for SCP in Africa” and the Partnership’s activities will be integrated in the regional flagship programme on sustainable consumption and production.

23. A detailed report summarizing progress made to date in the implementation of sustainable consumption and production can be found in document AMCEN/15/INF/4.

E. Decision 14/5. Strengthening the Africa Environment Outlook and environment information networks in support of decision-making in Africa

24. The Africa Environment Outlook (AEO) reports underpin environmental governance and ecosystems management in Africa through the provision of information to the Conference and African Governments. The AEO reports are therefore a substantive tool for African policymakers to use in their assessment of pressing environmental issues and they continue to inspire dialogue in the region.

25. AEO provides comprehensive, credible, environmental information in a way that is relevant to policymaking. It is a unique tool, providing an analysis of the state of the environment, the driving forces behind environmental change, and the consequences for social and economic development. These consequences are presented both in terms of impacts on ecosystems, and vulnerability of human populations to floods, droughts, earthquakes, pests and diseases. The approach has since influenced a number of sector strategy plans in many countries.

26. During this reporting period, the summary for policymakers of the third Africa Environment Outlook report (AEO-3), *Africa Environment Outlook 3: Our Environment, Our Health*, was finalized and launched on 21 February 2013 in the margins of the twenty-seventh session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. The summary for policymakers provides information to help member countries strengthen their capacity for policymaking and advocacy at the national, regional and global levels. While focusing on the linkages between environment and health, the summary for policymakers highlighted emerging issues, assessed trends related to environmental change in the region, and proposed new policy directions for enabling transformative changes for a sustainable future. The summary for policymakers and the full report are available from: <http://uneplive.unep.org/region/index/AF#.VOMvFyyIWic>.

27. AEO-3 was finalized and launched during the fifth special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment held on 17 and 18 October 2013 in Gaborone. The report focuses on the linkages between environment and health, cognizant of the fact that environmental factors contribute about 28 per cent of Africa’s disease burden. This disease burden is dominated by diarrhoea, respiratory infections and malaria, which collectively account for 60 per cent of the known environmental health impacts in Africa. The publication is a living testimony to the fact that environmental pressures, mainly caused by humankind’s unsustainable development practices, can lead to altered ecosystem states, personal exposure to risks and adverse health effects.

28. The terms of reference for the development of a foundational platform to host AEO-Live have been developed. Efforts are still under way to mobilize resources towards the development of this online platform. AEO-Live will also be considered as one of the key elements in the regional flagship programme on integrated environmental assessment for sustainable development. Start-up activities to prepare the fourth AEO report, based on a live platform (AEO-Live) that enables continuous updates, will commence in late 2015.

29. A total of 31 countries (Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe) have signed up to and are participating in the Africa Environment Information Network (AEIN) and efforts to get others on board continue. A meeting of the AEIN national focal points was held in Kampala on 7 and 8 April 2014, at which participants were trained in data visualization, hotspot analysis and development of country environment profiles for data streaming into UNEP Live. Environmental information networking experiences were also presented as a way of demonstrating

functioning networks. The roll out of a national reporting system is planned to commence during the second half of 2015.

30. Support is being provided to two countries (Lesotho and Zimbabwe) to enable them to develop their state of the environment and outlook reports and a national thematic assessment (Uganda Wetlands Atlas) is under way. A regional thematic assessment (Africa Mountains Atlas) has been completed and will be launched at the fifteenth session of the Conference in Cairo. Two regional thematic assessments (Africa energy atlas and regional water hyacinth assessment) will be undertaken in 2015.

F. Decision 14/6. African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in the context of the African Union structures

31. At its fourteenth session, the Conference adopted decision 14/6, in which it requested the Assembly of the African Union at its next session to reconsider the decision to abolish the sectoral ministerial conferences, specifically the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment. In the same decision, the Conference also requested the Assembly of the African Union, given the high importance of the environment to the sustainable development of Africa and its cross-cutting nature as well as its varied composition, which includes the areas of disaster risk reduction, meteorology, climate change, forestry, biodiversity, desertification and water, to allow for further consultations and to authorize the Conference to function in its current form pending the determination of modalities that would define its future direction. It is worth noting that this decision, among others, was endorsed by the Executive Council of the African Union at its twenty-second ordinary session in January 2013.

32. An African consultative meeting in preparation of the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP was held in Nairobi on 21 and 22 June 2014. The main objective of the meeting was to develop a common understanding of how Africa should approach and engage in the first session and also to help participants to reach a common understanding of the key issues on the agenda of the session. During the discussions, the importance of the work and contribution of the regional ministerial forums, such as the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, to the work of the governing body of UNEP was stressed. Participants noted with great concern the decision of the African Union to operationalize specialized technical committees and subsequently abolish ministerial conferences, including the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

33. By its decision Assembly/AU/Dec.526 (XXIII), adopted in Malabo in June 2014, the African Union Assembly decided that given the importance of the ongoing global consultations on the issue of environment and taking into account the need to defend the interests of Africa, the Conference would be allowed to pursue the negotiations with concerned partners until they were concluded (AMCEN/15/REF/2). Moreover, in its decision EX.CL/Dec.834(xxv), the Executive Council requested the African Union Commission to continue consultations with the Conference in view of the critical role of the issue of the environment in African Union institutions. However, the long-term status of the Conference still needs to be clarified.

G. Decision 14/7. The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative

34. The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative was adopted as a Pan-African agency during the twentieth African Union summit in January 2013. In addition, a regional harmonized strategy for the implementation of the Initiative was adopted.

H. Decision 14/8. Management of biodiversity in Africa

35. The January 2013 decision of the Executive Council endorsed the decision on the establishment of the coordination mechanism on biodiversity and further requested the African Union Commission to support the process. In that regard, the African Union Commission organized a one-day meeting with African, Caribbean and Pacific African Union member States and international experts on 15 August 2014 to discuss the way forward on the establishment of a coordination mechanism on biodiversity.

36. The Convention on Biological Diversity has three main objectives, namely (a) the conservation of biological diversity; (b) the sustainable use of its components; and (c) the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. The Convention covers all ecosystems, species and genetic resources by linking traditional conservation efforts with the economic goal of using biological resources sustainably. The Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization lays down principles for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources and the associated traditional knowledge of indigenous and local communities. The Convention also covers the rapidly

expanding field of biotechnology through its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, addressing technology development and transfer, benefit-sharing and biosafety issues.

37. It is also worthy of note that certain member States have separate national focal points (ministry or institution and/or individual experts) for the issues of biodiversity and biosafety. Biodiversity, for example, is often addressed by ministries of environment or agriculture, whereas biosafety is dealt with by ministries of education, environment or science and technology.

38. Owing to the complexity of the issue and the fact that the Convention is an umbrella multilateral environmental agreement that covers all ecosystems, the participants at the one-day meeting decided to focus on the Convention as a model of a coordination mechanism for biodiversity. The recommendations that emerged from the meeting will be brought to the attention of the Conference at its fifteenth session.

39. The African Union Commission developed a policy framework for the coordinated implementation of the Nagoya Protocol and its accompanying guidelines for the coordinated implementation of the Nagoya Protocol in Africa (AMCEN/15/REF/12). A workshop was held at the headquarters of the African Union Commission from 11 to 14 August 2014 with participants from member States and international experts in order to validate the guidelines, which will be brought to the attention of the Conference at its fifteenth session.

I. Decision 14/9: Engaging member States to ratify and adopt a strategy on the promotion of the ratification of the Maputo Convention on Nature and Natural Resources

40. The development of the strategy on the promotion and the ratification of the Maputo Convention on Nature and Natural Resources were followed by the development of a guide to the Convention. This tool was disseminated in member States thereby resulting in an increase in the number of ratifications by countries.

41. To date, the Convention has been ratified by 12 countries, namely, Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Comoros, Congo, Ghana, Libya, Lesotho, Mali, Niger, Rwanda and South Africa. Only three additional ratifications are needed for the Convention to enter into force.

J. Decision 14/10: Engaging parliamentarians in the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements

42. The training and sensitization of African parliamentarians resulted in the establishment of a network of African parliamentarians on environment called "Green Bird Africa", which was launched in Addis Ababa in November 2012. A source book on the mainstreaming of environmental issues into programmes has been developed

K. Decision 14/11: Joint celebration of Africa Environment Day and Wangari Maathai Day

43. The 2013 celebrations of Africa Environment Day and Wangari Maathai Day were held in Tunis under the theme "Partnership for African transition to green economy in support of African renaissance." The 2014 celebrations were hosted by Lesotho under the theme: "Combating desertification: enhancing agricultural productivity and food security."

44. The Government of Kenya has offered to host the 2015 celebrations with the theme "Empowering women for sustainable natural resource management" in order to highlight the important role that women play in managing natural resources in societies across Africa.

45. At its fifteenth session, the Conference should identify two countries to host the celebrations for the next biennium (2016 and 2017).

L. Decision 14/12: Climate change

46. In its decision 14/12, the Conference called for a number of actions in the context of Africa's strategies for a common approach to engaging with the international community on climate change negotiations in the lead up to the eighteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Doha in December 2012.

47. The Conference, the African Union Commission, regional economic commissions, AfDB, the Economic Commission for Africa and other partners provided support for the participation of the African group of negotiators at the eighteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the eighth Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol held in Doha to ensure a strengthened common position regarding matters of relevance to the continent.

48. Consultative meetings were organized by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in the margins of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change before the start of the high-level segments in order for ministers for the environment to be briefed on the status of the negotiations, including issues at stake, enabling them refine their strategies for negotiation and engagement with other important parties and groups.

49. A meeting of the member States of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC) was also held in Doha on 3 December 2012. The Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Mr. Desalegn Haile Mariam, represented Africa at the climate negotiations in Doha and delivered a statement on behalf of Africa as the CAHOSCC coordinator. African countries participated actively during the negotiations.

50. Similar support was also provided during the nineteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol held in Warsaw as well as the twentieth session of the Conference of the Parties and the tenth session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties held in Lima. The African group of negotiators was coordinated under the leadership of the Conference at the ministerial level and under the guidance of the Committee of the African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC). African countries participated actively in the nineteenth and twentieth sessions.

51. CAHOSCC further provided the necessary political back up to the Conference and the African group of negotiators at its meeting held in New York on 23 September 2013 in the margins of the sixty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly. The current CAHOSCC Coordinator, Mr. Mrisho Jakaya Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, represented Africa and delivered a statement on behalf of Africa at the nineteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. An “Africa Day” was also organized in Warsaw under the theme: “Climate change and agriculture in Africa’s development.” An “Africa Day” side event with the theme “Africa in a post-2015 new climate change agreement” was held in Lima in the margins of the twentieth session.

52. During this reporting period, the African Union Commission developed the African strategy on climate change. The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework for integrated and coordinated mechanisms designed to give strategic direction to member States and other stakeholders in addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with climate change on the continent.

53. The Assembly of the African Union, at its twenty-third session held in Malabo in June 2014, adopted decision Assembly/AU/Dec.538(XXIII) on the High-Level Work Programme on Climate Change in Africa and Preparations for the Global Climate Change Events in 2014. In the decision, the Assembly requested the African Union Commission, in collaboration with the relevant specialized technical committees and other relevant African institutions to develop a CAHOSCC women and gender programme on climate change to engage women and gender in climate change related actions, in view of the particular vulnerability of women and young people to natural and human-induced disasters, including those related to climate change.

54. Several consultative meetings of the African group of negotiators have been held since the fourteenth session of the Conference. The meetings were held with the view to elaborating and strengthening the group’s internal coordination, positions and negotiating strategies as well as updating Africa’s common negotiating position on climate change. The secretariat provided policy and technical advice to the African negotiators and Government officials at all these and other global climate change meetings. The first *Africa’s Adaptation Gap* report was produced in 2013 with key findings showcasing the consequences of inaction. The second report in the series is under preparation and is due to be launched at the fifteenth session of the Conference.

55. The support provided to the African negotiators by the Conference is expected to continue in preparation for the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to be held in Paris in December 2015.

III. Implementation of Conference-related activities for the period from 15 September 2012 to 31 December 2014

56. A number of Conference-related activities were undertaken during the reporting period.

A. Environmental education

57. In the 2012 Arusha Declaration on Africa's post-Rio+20 strategy for sustainable development, ministers of the environment agreed to strengthen environmental education and training and develop an action plan for Africa, covering formal and non-formal education, capacity-building and information networking components, among others, and to explicitly include a focus on technology enhanced learning in this action plan.

58. The secretariat, in partnership with the UNEP Education and Training Unit and in consultation with the Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in African Universities partnership programme, the Horn of Africa Regional Environmental Programme and the Southern African Development Community Regional Environmental Education Programme, among others, initiated the process of developing the Africa environmental education and training action plan through a participatory consultative process.

59. The proposed action plan is intended to promote capacity in environmental education and training in Africa through formal education; training; life-long learning; and capacity-building. The action plan would also focus on technology enhanced learning and information networking.

60. The proposed key result areas, programmes and projects contained in the action plan are considered by the environmental education and training community in Africa to fundamentally improve the environmental, social and economic state of Africa for the benefit of Africa's people, especially those who suffer the effects of persistent poverty and loss of access to natural resources resulting from historical, political, social-ecological and social-economic system changes. They are also carefully designed to address the Conference's priorities of the environment and sustainable development through environmental education and training activities.

61. The actions and priorities presented in the action plan are considered to be catalytic in the sense that they will deliver compelling, tangible results that are measurable and achievable in the medium to the long term.

62. The draft action plan, which will be finalized and presented to the Conference for consideration at its fifteenth session, is available from:
http://unep.org/training/docs/EE&T_Action_Plan_draft1.pdf

B. Gender policy of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

63. Over the years, the Conference has, through various decisions, called for policies that ensure the protection of interests of vulnerable persons, particularly women and children. At its twelfth session held in Johannesburg in June 2008, the Conference noted the disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation on women and underscored the importance of mainstreaming gender into national and subregional environmental programmes. It also emphasized the significance of initiating programmes aimed at promoting gender-sensitive capacity-building in relation to the environment.

64. In addition, at its third special session held in Nairobi in May 2009; its thirteenth session held in Bamako in June 2010; its fourth special session held in Bamako in September 2011; and at its

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