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*African Ministerial Conference on the Environment***African Ministerial Conference on the Environment****Sixteenth session**

Meeting of the expert group

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Item 7 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

**Other issues related to sustainable development in Africa:  
desertification****Drought, land degradation and desertification in Africa****Note by the Secretariat****I. Introduction**

1. Land is an important natural resource that underpins most development. However, the pressures on land – both anthropogenic and environment-induced – are leading to its degradation. If the rate of land degradation is not reduced, the economies and security of the continent will be highly compromised. Land degradation neutrality is one of the tenets of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, to which all African countries are parties. Furthermore, all African countries have signed up to support target 15.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which states, “By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world”.

2. At its past sessions, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment has adopted decisions on land degradation and desertification, including land as natural capital. These are in line with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, as well as the various decisions and declarations of the African Union. Furthermore, African ministers of environment requested regular updates on drought, land degradation and desertification at subsequent sessions of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

3. While tremendous effort is being made by African countries to address land degradation and desertification, progress is slow. This is because many of the challenges associated with land degradation and desertification require sustained integrated efforts over long periods. Second, these efforts require substantial financial investments as well as technological, institutional and human capacity. Third, for Africa’s interests to be taken into consideration, it is necessary to speak with one voice and purpose at the forthcoming thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to be held in China in September 2017.

4. The present note gives an overview of the mandates set out in various AMCEN decisions and progress being made to implement those mandates. It further highlights some of the key challenges in implementing the mandates, and points to suggested future steps.

**II. Background**

5. Land is central to all aspects of human activity, be it food production, infrastructure development and settlements, or ecosystem and biodiversity conservation. However, many drivers contribute to depriving land of its productive and life-maintaining capacity. These drivers include climate change, rapid population increase, unsustainable land-use practices and insecurity. For

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\* AMCEN/16/EGM/1.

instance, as a result of insecurity, landmines and explosive remnants of war render vast tracts of land unusable for development or increase the cost of such development.

6. Climate change, on the other hand, has caused severe and frequent drought events leading to the death of livestock and human beings, while displacing hundreds of thousands. Women, children and youths bear the brunt of drought and land degradation. In fact, drought and land degradation are causes of internal displacement of peoples and droves of international migrants witnessed in the Mediterranean Sea and other border crossings. Nowhere else in the world is more impacted by drought, land degradation and desertification than is Africa, mainly because two thirds of the African continent is desert or drylands, while the remaining land not covered by water is facing serious degradation.

7. It is estimated that over the next 10 years, an additional 330 million young Africans will enter the labour market. During the same period, an estimated 60 million people are at risk of being forced to move from degraded land, both within and outside the continent. Land degradation and the other effects of climate change, on the most vulnerable populations, become in this way a global problem.<sup>1</sup>

8. In recognition of the centrality of land to sustainable development, including peace and security, all African countries are parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The majority have prepared their national action plans in line with Convention requirements. Land is also central to one of the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 15, protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss), to whose achievement world leaders have committed. Furthermore, at the continental level, the African Union has taken bold steps in adopting various instruments related to addressing drought, land degradation and desertification. Regional economic communities further cascade these steps at the subregional and national levels.

9. Agenda 2063 sets Africa's long-term development vision, recognizing land as a foundational ingredient in that vision. The Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa, endorsed in 2009 by African Heads of States and Government through the Declaration on Land Issues and Challenges, endeavours to address the thorny but necessary issues on land policy, including tenure and women's emancipation in documented land rights. In 2003, the African Union Summit declared the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) as Africa's policy framework for agricultural transformation, wealth creation, food security and nutrition, economic growth and prosperity for all.

10. Africa has been at the forefront of advocating for the concept of natural capital, for example through the Gaborone Declaration for Sustainability in Africa adopted at the Summit for Sustainability in Africa hosted by Botswana on 24 and 25 May 2012, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment's decision 15/1, on sustainably harnessing Africa's natural capital in the context of Agenda 2063, and decision SS. VI/4, on action to combat desertification, drought and floods and restore degraded land in order to achieve a land-degradation-neutral world.

11. As agreed in decision SS. VI/4, Namibia and Sudan introduced decision SS. VI/4 to the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly in 2016, resulting in the adoption by the Environment Assembly of resolution 2/24 on combating desertification, land degradation and drought and promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands.

12. In 2016, African member States and parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification adopted the Windhoek Declaration for Enhancing Resilience to Drought in Africa, which calls for the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Drought Risk Management and Enhancing Resilience in Africa and the Drought Resilient and Prepared Africa programme at the national level. In the declaration, the parties call upon African Union Heads of State and Governments to adopt a decision under the framework of the Convention to Combat Desertification to develop a binding protocol on drought risk management for enhancing resilience to be submitted for consideration to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention at its thirteenth session, in 2017.

### III. Current initiatives

13. Various efforts are being undertaken across the continent to address drought, land degradation and desertification, including issues related to pastoralism and rangelands management. The current practice is to promote landscape approaches that look at the productive use of land in all its forms and ecosystems. Examples of such efforts include:

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, "Sustainability. Stability. Security." Available from <http://www2.unccd.int/actions/sustainability-stability-security>.

- (a) The sustainable land management flagship programme of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment under the leadership of the New Partnership for Africa's Development;
- (b) Initiatives that take a landscape approach, including the African Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, which has a membership of 11 countries.<sup>2</sup> Under the leadership of the Government of Sudan, the countries have come up with an innovative idea of setting up a carbon bank;
- (c) The drought resilience programme of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, which oversees and coordinates long-term policies, programmes and interventions aimed at addressing food security and building drought resilience on a sustainable basis;
- (d) The Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel/Comité permanent inter-États de lutte contre la sécheresse dans le Sahel, which addresses drought resilience as an approach to achieving land degradation neutrality;
- (e) The Land Policy Initiative between the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and the Economic Commission for Africa, which has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of land policies and institutional arrangements across the continent (region by region);
- (f) The Sahel and Sahara Observatory<sup>3</sup> which, under its land and environment programme, helps countries to map, address and monitor land management initiatives, including climate change conditions;
- (g) The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) publication entitled *The Economics of Land Degradation in Africa: Benefits of Action Outweigh the Costs*, which provides innovative policy support and arguments for investing in efforts to address land degradation by comparing the cost of action versus the cost of inaction to the gross domestic product of nations;
- (h) Drylands agroecosystems, using intermediate technologies such as plastic and paper mulching in ridge-furrow agriculture combined with agroforestry, which has been shown to double grain outputs and improve soil fertility, carbon content and moisture;
- (i) Profitable agroforestry programmes that have demonstrated that soil fertility can be improved while increasing crop yield and maintaining soil moisture and soil carbon content;
- (j) The Sustaining CAADP Momentum Results Framework – Next Decade of CAADP 2015–2025, which is now an inherent part of the CAADP and Agenda 2063 implementation processes. This enables Africa to have tangible parameters to benchmark advancements in agricultural performance, while at the same time reinforcing a culture of results-based programming, results for evidence and objective analysis, as well as concerns on aspects such as returns on investment;
- (k) The Sustainability, Stability and Security (3S) Initiative, which aims to address the root causes of instability in Africa, particularly migration and conflict related to natural resource degradation. The objective of the 3S Initiative is to provide alternatives to forced migration and radicalization by:
  - (i) Creating jobs for young people, women and migrants through the restoration of degraded lands;
  - (ii) Strengthening land access and tenure rights;
  - (iii) Enhancing early warning systems to predict drought and other natural disasters and effectively respond to displacement of populations.

## IV. Challenges

14. Africa's political voice on drought, land degradation and desertification is loud and clear. However, the ability to translate that voice into action is hampered by:

- (a) Lack of adequate funding to mobilize local resources, which on their own are too limited to have a significant impact. Nevertheless, local financial resources need to be gradually increased as the benefits of addressing land degradation and desertification translate into improved economies, food security and human health;

<sup>2</sup> Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sudan.

<sup>3</sup> Members include 22 African countries, 6 non-regional countries, 10 organizations (including subregional organizations representing West Africa, East Africa and North Africa) and a non-governmental organization.

- (b) Weak institutions and institutional arrangements at the country level, which need the capacity to effectively execute their mandates;
- (c) Lack of harmonization and strengthening of land policy, including land tenure, bundles of rights, documented women's rights and youth emancipation;
- (d) Inadequate human capacity (knowledge and skills) in some areas of drought mitigation and disaster preparedness, land degradation monitoring and data standards at the national level, including access and capacity to use high-resolution geospatial satellite data;
- (e) Inconsistency in pursuing the common goals of the continent when designing and/or implementing development programmes, which causes investors to prefer certain countries owing to weaknesses in their laws and policies, at the expense of countries that have sound policies and laws on land management.

## V. Thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

15. The thirteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification will be held in China in September 2017. The Conference of the Parties, whose theme is “Towards a new generation”, will be held in conjunction with the sixteenth session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention and the thirteenth session of the Committee on Science and Technology. The high-level segment is scheduled to be held on 11 and 12 September 2017. Prior to that, the meetings of the regional implementation annexes are scheduled to be held on 4 and 5 September 2017 in preparation for the above-mentioned meetings. Parties will consider and decide on the strategic framework that will guide action under the Convention during the period 2018–2030, adopt a reporting and monitoring framework, and discuss how to secure additional financial resources to meet the Convention's goals.

16. Regarding funding, the establishment of the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund has been a welcome development. While its establishment is being finalized, there is a need to accelerate the operationalization of the fund; prioritize investments directed to African countries, including the pre-investment financing to prepare bankable projects; and build the requisite national capacity, including the capacity of African countries to monitor and report on land degradation. Building capacity in this regard would help decision makers identify the significant opportunities for the conservation, rehabilitation, restoration and sustainable management of land resources.

17. More funding sources should be explored in the effort to expand the funding sources available for the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund, and hence to contribute to the realization of most of the Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, the 11 member States of the Great Green Wall Initiative are exploring the possible establishment of a regional funding mechanism, known as the “Carbon fund”, which would invest in projects that promote sustainable land management, carbon sequestration and drought resilience at both the large scale and smallholder scale. While this is still at the proposal stage, other regions may want to explore such an initiative to support the efforts of the countries of the Great Green Wall Initiative.

18. The Land Degradation Neutrality Fund is being structured as a layered fund, designed as a public–private partnership for blended finance. It will complement and scale up existing financial instruments and funds for sustainable land management and rehabilitation, by providing financing that would not otherwise be available in the market.

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