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**Building climate resilience in Africa:
Turning political commitment into action**

Discussion Paper for the Ministerial Session

Presented on behalf of the Executive Director by UNEP's DEPI

Building climate resilience in Africa: Turning political commitment into action

Introduction

1. At the Tenth African Union Summit, held in January 2008, the Executive Council expressed concern regarding the seriousness of climate change and highlighted the importance of tackling the challenges of climate change in the international arena and the particular threats it poses on Africa. The Council requested that the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) makes appropriate recommendations (AU, 2008).
2. The 12th session of AMCEN will be held from 7 to 12 June 2008 in Johannesburg, South Africa. One of the three important themes for this session is climate change, with a special focus on adaptation.
3. Consequently, UNEP has prepared a scoping paper on climate change adaptation for the expert meeting at the 12th session of AMCEN. This discussion paper, based on the key findings of the scoping paper, is developed to facilitate the ministerial dialogue on the same issue. This dialogue will help shape the framework of adaptation activities in Africa and contribute to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) processes, including a post-2012 agreement on climate change.
4. This briefing consists of three parts:
 - **Defining the issue: prudent optimism**
 - **Turning political commitments into action**
 - **Role of UNEP**

Defining the issue: prudent optimism

5. Africa has been identified by both the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report (2007) and the 13th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (Bali Action Plan), as one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change and climate variability. Yet it contributes the least to global emissions of Green House Gases (GHGs). African countries face the worst of the impact and have the least capacity to adapt to the changing climate. Building resilience in Africa needs to be a global undertaking, requiring an unparalleled expression of solidarity of both African countries and the international community.
6. The vulnerability of Africa to climate change has been identified and projected in key sectors securing lives, livelihoods and life supporting systems of this continent. For instance, the population at risk of increased water stress in Africa is projected to be between 75-250 million and 350-600 million people by the 2020s and 2050s, respectively. Projected reductions in yield in some countries could be as much as 50% by 2020. The

cost of adaptation to sea-level rise could amount to at least 5-10% of gross domestic product. These specific threats need to be addressed adequately and in a timely manner, to avoid serious consequences to the livelihoods of the affected populations and regional security. While it is important to address the medium-term impacts, there is an urgent need to respond to the short-term impacts, such as the threats to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and increased potential for conflicts. The present global food crisis, which has severe impacts across Africa, is a case in point.

7. The vulnerability of Africa is exacerbated by 'multiple stressors', such as widespread poverty, limited access to capital and technology, poor infrastructure, ecosystem degradation, disasters and conflicts.
8. African governments and communities have been struggling to cope with the increasing impacts of climate change and the related threats of disasters and conflicts. Limited adaptation is already taking place with some success stories in securing agricultural production and reducing risks of disasters, such as water harvesting and cultivation of drought resistant crop varieties. There is enormous wealth of knowledge and experience in Africa in dealing with climate variability. However, it is essential to move from reactive adaptation to proactive policies, strategies and plans, taking advantage of synergies with disaster reduction and ecosystem management efforts.
9. The projected rate and magnitude of climate change and the impacts are far beyond the adaptive capacity of African countries with the current level of direct foreign investment. There are significant barriers and constraints which need a fundamental change in the way of thinking, development path and the scale of investment. Nonetheless, these challenges must be and can be met. This is a situation of prudent optimism that requires enormous yet concerted efforts by stakeholders in the region and by the international community.

Turning political commitments into action

10. Political justification and commitments from both governments and the international community have been in place since the facts of climate change were established by science. Despite these commitments, the poor in Africa are still suffering, losing lives, livelihoods and life-supporting systems. This is a thorny irony, taking into account Africa's acute vulnerability and its legitimate development needs as well as the significant additional financial burden that adaptation will create. There is an urgent need to turn these political commitments into action.
11. The aim of adaptation is to achieve sustainable development that is resilient in the face of future threats. Building resilience is a formidable challenge for all. In the context of disaster reduction, conflict prevention and sustainable development, resilience is about maintaining the delivery of vital services and resources to meet both short-term and long-term needs to prepare for shocks and complex changes through adaptation. Building resilience-thinking

into policy and practice will be a major task for all throughout the new century.

12. Both financial assistance and technology transfer are essential to assist African countries with their adaptation needs. These needs should be met in a timely manner and targeted at the sectors and countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. Enhanced regional adaptation efforts require a substantial increase of financial and technical assistance to build the adaptive capacity within Africa.
13. There is a need to assist African countries to move from “reactive adaptation” to “planned adaptation”, and to prioritize actions for implementation at various levels - local, national and regional. Urgent actions required in the next few years are reflected in **Table 1** of the attached **scoping paper**.
14. The urgency of the short term issues — tackled through immediate action which too often ends up taking the shape of fragmented “adaptation” initiatives, should be reconciled with the pressing need for mid-to-long term investment, notably in building a sound institutional infrastructure and putting systems in place to deal with unfolding impacts of climate change.
15. The most urgent needs, with immediate potential benefits, are to rapidly build the adaptive capacity in existing institutions in Africa, form a professional body of practitioners, and implement pilot actions in each country and vulnerable sector.
16. Enhancing the capacity to plan and implement adaptation requires long-term engagement and enduring efforts. It should build on lessons learnt from pilot actions and deployed strategies with a view to activating climate change adaptation in vulnerable regions, sectors and communities. The assessment of current vulnerabilities has helped define country-level priorities for adaptation that provide a sufficiently solid launch pad for investment in capacity building and pilot actions.
17. Financial support for climate change adaptation in Africa has been growing, from the initial funds for Least Developed Countries (LDCF) to major investments planned by bilateral donors. Increasing contributions are expected from foundations and the private sector. The estimates of the cost of adaptation in Africa are no more than 'thought experiments', and further studies within Africa are required. It appears that the capacity to utilize additional funding on climate adaptation over the next few years is of about the same order of magnitude as the funding available.
18. Effective national adaptation strategies must be integrated into countries' economic, social and governance systems, and firmly embedded in domestic policy planning across the board. At the local and national scale, it will be important to improve knowledge and awareness of the most vulnerable communities, to improve downscaling of climate models and early warning systems, to integrate climate change issues into social networks while respecting the social and cultural values, and to strengthen regional cooperation in order to

transfer best practices related to national adaptation programmes.

19. Regional cooperation becomes increasingly crucial, given that climate change impacts are not confined by national borders. At the regional and international scale, it is important to share information and knowledge across the region, to address transboundary issues such as river basin management, and to integrate adaptation with the MDG's and to ensure that resources, including international development funds, are well targeted to help the vulnerable groups in the society.

Role of UNEP

20. UNEP recognizes that the challenges for adaptation to climate change impacts in Africa are enormous and that the frequency and magnitude of potential disasters and conflicts is expected to increase, should adaptation efforts not be timely and adequate. It further realizes the urgent need for a coherent regional approach for climate change adaptation activities to minimize the threat of disasters and conflicts in Africa.
21. UNEP has been working with African countries to build adaptive capacity and integrate climate change adaptation into national planning process, through implementation of key projects such as Assessment of Impacts and Adaptations to Climate Change (AIACC), National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs), and Climate Change and Development – Adapting by REducing vulnerability project (CC-DARE), and through partnership initiatives such as the development of the weADAPT information platform. Building on these joint efforts, and with its headquarters in Africa, UNEP will strengthen its cooperation with the governments of Africa to help build resilience in this region.
22. UNEP supports the implementation of current and planned activities on climate change adaptation, initiation of a regional policy framework and addressing identified priority areas such as better water resource management, agriculture, and disaster reduction. Through these activities, existing partnerships with governments, regional organizations and development agencies will be strengthened.

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