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Parallel panel meetings on the subthemes of the session

Life on land[1]

Background paper

I. Introduction

1. The present document is one of the background papers for the fourth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which is being held in preparation for the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held in New York from 9 to 18 July 2018. The theme of the Regional Forums is "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies". This paper provides a brief assessment of the status of and progress made in efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 15 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the corresponding goal 7 of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. In addition, the challenges and lessons learned pertaining to combating land degradation and the sustainable management of forests and biodiversity are highlighted. An outline is also provided of some key messages, including actions to accelerate the achievement of those two goals in Africa. The paper draws from existing assessments and literature on the two related goals.

2. Life on land is crucial for the attainment of most of the Sustainable Development Goals and for fostering a transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies in Africa. The land, forests and biodiversity resources of Africa underpin diverse livelihoods and economic sectors and, as a result, form the foundation for poverty eradication, sustained and inclusive growth and sustainable development in the region. This underlines the importance of achieving 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). This Goal is aligned with goal 7 of Agenda 2063, namely, environmentally sustainable climate-resilient economies and communities. As illustrated below, Goal 15 and goal 7 are interconnected with and are important means of realizing many other Goals and

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[1] Prepared with input from co-lead partners on the theme: the Economic Commission for Africa, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the secretariats of Convention on Biological Diversity/United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa).

those contained in Agenda 2063 and fostering sustainable and resilient societies in Africa.

3. Forest and wood resources contribute an average of up to 6 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in sub-Saharan Africa and provide up to 80 per cent of the energy in some countries,[2] and more than 62 per cent of the population of Africa depends directly on ecosystem services for food, water, energy, health and livelihood needs.[3] Biodiversity and ecosystems play a key role in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 15 but they are also significant in achieving other Goals,[4] including in the specific Goals to be discussed at the 2018 high-level political forum. Forests protect water supplies, wetlands regulate floods and healthy soils increase water and nutrient availability for crops and help to reduce off-farm impacts. Bioenergy produced from renewable biomass, such as forestry by-products and agricultural residues, and other forms of renewable energy based on ecosystems, such as hydropower systems, can offer major opportunities for supplying cleaner and affordable energy. Ecosystem-based solutions for the provision of water, urban runoff, climate control and other challenges can protect biodiversity and be cost-effective. Moreover, urban and rural ecosystem services and biodiversity contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Lastly, using cleaner and more resource-efficient approaches that minimize waste and pollutants can spur economic opportunities and create a better quality of life for consumers and producers alike, and at the same time benefit biodiversity.

4. Biodiversity is also critical for the pharmaceutical industry, given that 75 per cent of the leading global commercial prescription drugs contain plant derivatives.[5] Biodiversity and ecosystems in marine and coastal areas contribute more than 35 per cent of GDP. The total fishery value added (inland, marine and coastal) alone is $13 billion annually in the region.[3] Tourism relies in large part on terrestrial ecosystems. In 2014, tourism contributed 9 per cent of global GDP and accounted for 7 per cent of all exports on the continent. Sustainable forest management forestalls greenhouse gas emissions associated with land degradation and loss of forests and contributes to climate change mitigation and adaptation. It is estimated that 10 per cent of all human-induced greenhouse gas emissions stems from deforestation alone.[6]

5. Biodiversity plays an important role in the imperative of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind”. Ecosystem services are estimated to comprise between 50 and 90 per cent of the total source of livelihoods among poor rural and forest-dwelling households.[4] In addition, the loss of biodiversity-dependent ecosystem services has a disproportionate effect on people who are vulnerable for other reasons, including on the basis of gender, age, disability, poverty or

[2] See Economic Commission for Africa and others, *Managing Africa’s Natural Resource Base for Sustainable Growth and Development. Sustainable Development Report on Africa IV* (Addis Ababa, 2013).

[3] See E. Archer and others, eds., *Summary for policymakers of the regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (Bonn, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, 2018). Available at www.dropbox.com/sh/9cu6sv14gik0k9m/AACVxk_gMRP6IG_7NG2Qeug7a/Africa%20Assessment%20Media%20Resources/1%20Africa%20Assessment%20Report%20Summary%20for%20Policymakers?dl=0.

[4] See Convention on Biological Diversity and others, *Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Technical Note* (Montreal, 2016) (accessed 14 April 2018).

[5] See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *A Compendium of Issues Briefs Prepared by the United Nations Inter-Agency Technical Support Team for the United Nations General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals* (New York, 2014). Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/goal-15/ (accessed 4 April 2018).

[6] See Robert Scholes and others, eds., *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Summary for policymakers of the thematic assessment report on land degradation and restoration of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (Bonn, 2018).

minority status, and is likely to accentuate the inequality and marginalization of the most vulnerable sectors of society.[7]

6. Land degradation and loss of forests and biodiversity therefore pose serious threats to social and economic stability and to the long-term sustainable development in Africa. In many cases, indigenous people and local communities and small-scale farmers that rely heavily on land and ecosystem resources are the first to experience the negative impacts of and are disproportionately affected by the degradation of land, forests and ecosystems. This exposes such communities to various forms of inequality. In a recent global assessment, it was indicated that at least 3.2 billion people worldwide are adversely affected by land degradation. In Africa, estimates indicate that 500,000 km^2 or approximately 2 per cent of the continent's surface is degraded because of such factors as unsustainable agriculture and climate change.[3] Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions where most degradation, including transformation to urban areas, is projected to occur. Degradation in dry lands was one of the key factors associated with the failure of grain yields in sub-Saharan Africa between 1960 and 2005. This trend undermines progress towards poverty eradication, the elimination of hunger and the achievement of food security and sustained economic growth in the region, given that the local population relies heavily on productive land resources. Land degradation is also a threat to stability and resilience in the region because it affects the cultural identity and stability of some communities. Every 5 per cent loss of GDP that is caused in part by land degradation is associated with a 12 per cent increase in the likelihood of violent conflict. In that regard, it is projected that, by 2050, 50 to 700 million people globally will be forced to migrate as result of land degradation and climate change.[7] With regard to deforestation, Africa lost approximately 81 million ha of forest area during the period 1990-2005 as a result of population increase and forest conversion, mainly for agricultural purposes.[8] This agriculture-based deforestation is dominated by small-scale agricultural activities.

7. The rapidly growing population of Africa is expected to double to 2.5 billion by 2050. Along with the rising per capita consumption, this will no doubt escalate requirements for food, water, energy and shelter and placed pressure on land, forests and wood and biodiversity in the region. Achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns will therefore be indispensable for the sustainable management of the continent's ecosystems.

8. In summary, combating land degradation, restoring land and enhancing conservation and the sustainable use and management of forests and biodiversity in the region is pertinent. To do this, the full and effective implementation of global and regional frameworks is required. Chief among them are the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030. In line with the objectives of those frameworks, countries have committed themselves to meeting, and need to meet, the time-bound targets to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 15 of the 2030 Agenda and goal 7 of Agenda 2063. Below is the status of and the progress made in the achievement of some of those targets and commitments.[9]

[7] See United Nations, General Assembly, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment*, thirty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva, 27 February–24 March 2017 (A/HRC/34/49).

[8] See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015* (Rome, 2015).

[9] Where data and information are available.

II. Progress and initiatives towards meeting the targets on life on land

9. Sustainable Development Goal 15 consists of 12 targets, which are in line with the seven commitments made by African countries in goal 7 of Agenda 2063.

Target 15.1: By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements

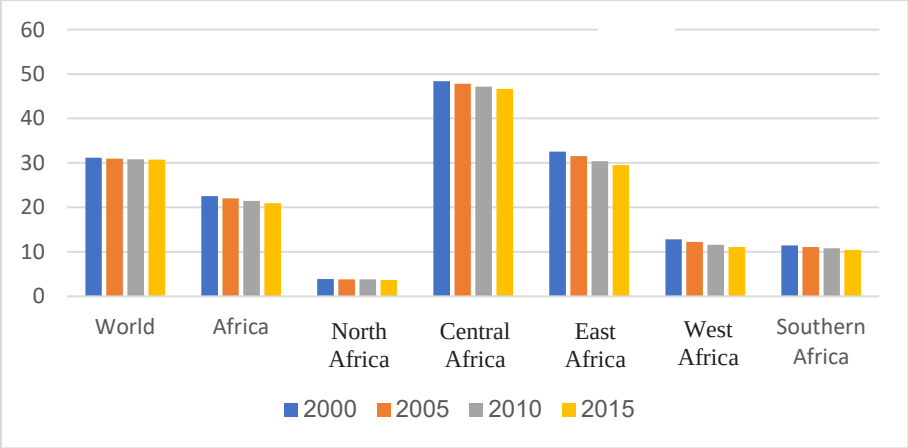
10. The proportion of forest area in Africa declined by 1.5 percentage points, to 21 per cent, during the period 2000–2015. In addition, the proportion of forest area in Africa is lower than the global total and the rate of forest loss is higher than the global average. There are considerable differences among the African subregions. Central Africa has the highest proportion of forest, while North Africa has a very low proportion of forest area (see figure I).

11. Approximately 14 per cent (4 million km^2) of the total land area of Africa is protected, including 6 per cent of the biodiversity-rich tropical evergreen broadleaf forests.[3]

12. African countries are committed to the conservation and sustainable use of forests and biodiversity, as demonstrated by ratifying key global and regional conventions. For example, 54 African countries are parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.[10] With regard to regional conventions, 45 countries have signed the revised African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and 32 have ratified it.[11]

Figure I

Forest area as a proportion of total land area (Per cent)



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015* (Rome, 2015).

[10] See list of parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Available at https://www.cbd.int/information/parties.shtml.

[11] See list of countries that have signed or ratified /acceded to the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20120902043558/http://www.africa - union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/List/African%20Convention%20on%20nature%20and%20natural%20resources.pdf.

Target 15.2: By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

13. Many African countries have pledged to restore their forest landscape under the Bonn Challenge and the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative, totalling more than 80 million ha, with several countries preparing additional commitments.[12] It is a response to the African Union mandate to restore 100 million ha of degraded land by 2030. It also contributes to the realization of the African Resilient Landscapes Initiative, Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals, among others.

14. While the rate of forest loss in Africa has, in general, slowed, it remains high, compared with the global average.[13] As shown in figure II, indicator 15.2.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals is comprised of five subindicators that are showing progress (green), are stable (yellow) or are becoming worse (red). In general, the tendency for the first two subindicators is stable, except in North Africa, where the rate of forest loss has increased. The other three subindicators show an overall positive change, except for in West Africa and Southern Africa, where the proportion of forest area within protected areas has gone down.

Target 15.3: 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

15. In Africa, approximately 16 per cent of the vegetated land surface is assigned as cropland, of which approximately 24 per cent shows signs of decreasing or unstable land productivity. African rangelands and grasslands, an essential resource for livestock production and the livelihood of large parts of the population, are experiencing productivity declines similar to that of affected croplands. The overall expansion of declining land productivity appears to be above global averages and exceeds the extent of areas experiencing increasing productivity or recovery, especially in the croplands and grasslands.[14]

16. As of October 2017, 50 African countries were among the 117 countries worldwide that had committed themselves to setting land degradation neutrality targets under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification land degradation neutrality target-setting programme. Of those 50 African countries, 28 have already set their land degradation neutrality targets and the remaining are in the process of doing so. It is, however, critical to ensure and support the full and successful implementation of the land degradation neutral targets at the country level. Notably, funds have been set up to support the implementation of the targets. Related to that, 11 countries in the Sahel region are receiving support in their efforts to restore degraded land through the African Union Commission-led Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, which is aimed at strengthening the resilience of the region's people and ecosystems.[15]

[12] See African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative website. Available at www.afr100.org. (Accessed 5 April 2018).

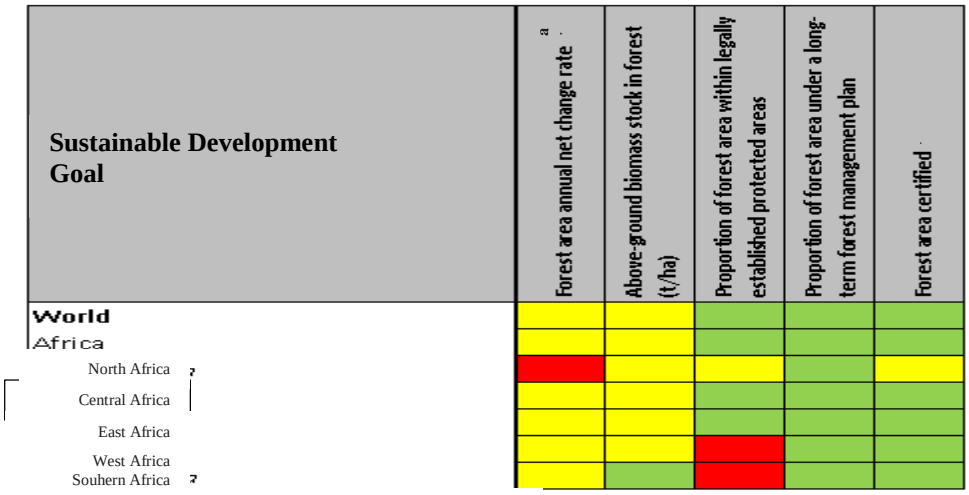
[13] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015* (Rome, 2015).

[14] See Stefan Sommer and Michael Cherlet, *Global Land Outlook – First Edition*, (Bonn, 2017).

[15] See African Forestry and Wildlife Commission, *Forest and Climate Change Adaption and Mitigation in Africa*. Paper for the twentieth session of the African Wildlife Commission, 1-5 February 2016, Nairobi (Nairobi, January 2016).

Figure II

Dashboard of indicators for target 15.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals



[a] Calculated using compound interest formula.

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015* (Rome, 2015).

Target 15. 4: By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development

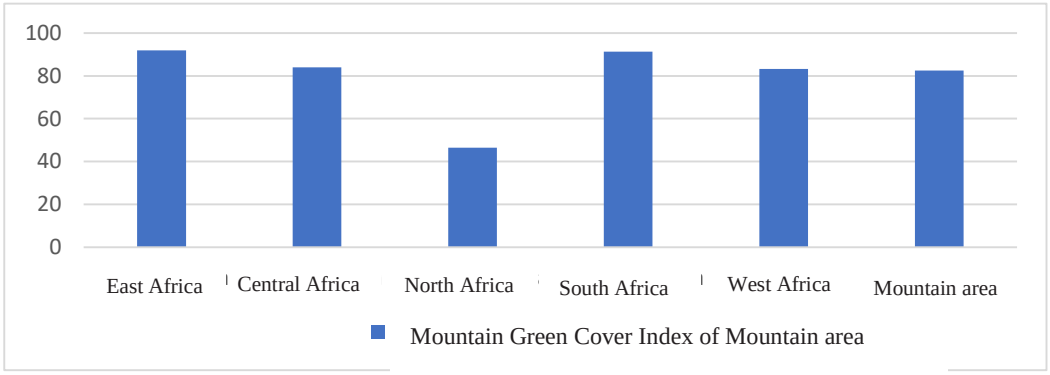
17. In Africa, the proportion of the mountain green cover is high, compared with the total mountain areas in all the subregions except in North Africa, where arid regions prevail (see figure III). The relative proportion of the three Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change land cover classes, however, varies considerably among the subregions. Grassland is dominant in East Africa and Southern Africa, while forest area is proportionally larger in the Central Africa and west Africa regions (see figure IV).

18. A comparison of Mountain Green Cover Index values among various regions of the world indicates that North Africa and the sub-Saharan African subregions are, respectively, below and above the world average score for the Index.

19. The percentage of key terrestrial, mountain and freshwater biodiversity areas covered by protected areas has reached the long-term conservation of nature target level for Africa and has increased since 2000. It was at 7.38, 48.77 and 45.69 in 2017 for terrestrial, mountain and freshwater ecosystems, respectively. Although encouraging, the 1 to 3 per cent increases since 2010 have been modest. Figure V shows the trend of protected area coverage of key biodiversity areas between 2000 and 2017 for each type of ecosystem.

Figure III

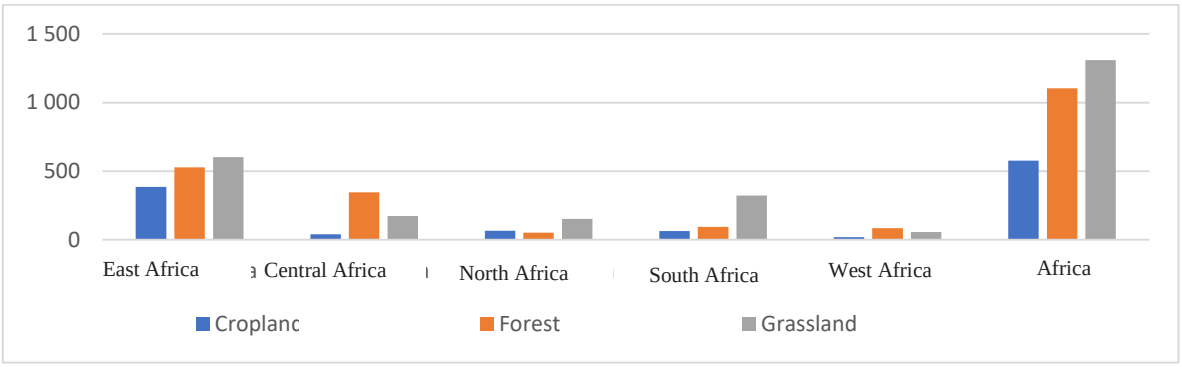
Proportion of mountain green cover land versus areas of mountains, by subregion (Per cent)



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "15: Life on Land". Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/goal-15/.

Figure IV

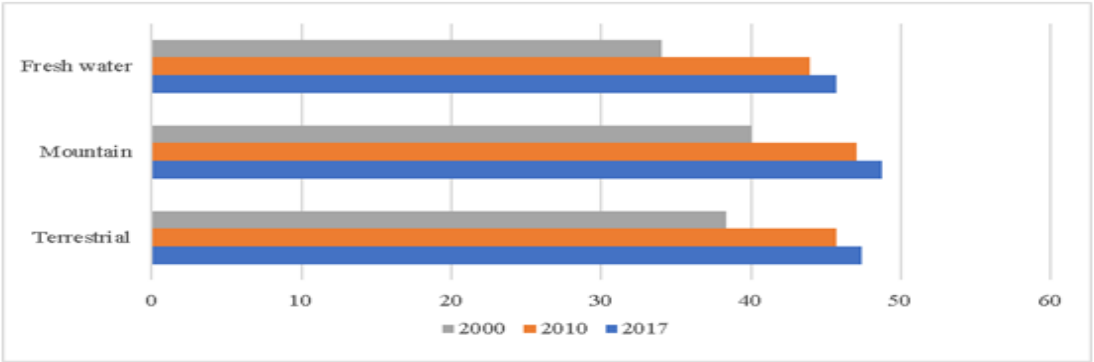
Mountain green cover land, by subregion (Thousands of km²)



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "15: Life on Land". Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/goal-15/.

Figure V

Proportion of key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas in Africa (Per cent)



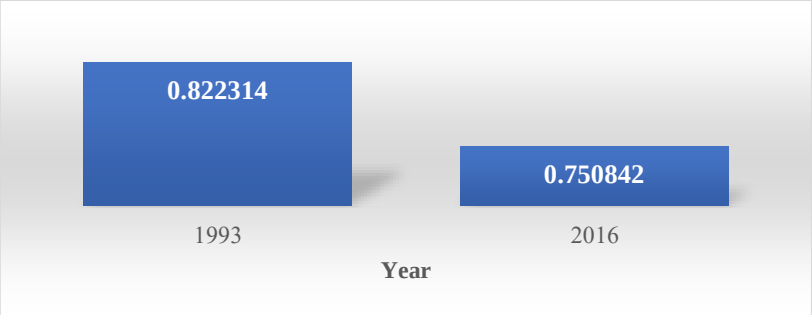
Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "15:
Life on Land". Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/goal-15/.

Target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species

20. A number of species in Africa are likely to become extinct. The Red List Index for sub-Saharan Africa decreased from 0.82 in 1993 to 0.75 in 2016 (see figure VI). Africa ranks third in terms of extinction risk for species, after Asia and Oceania.

Figure VI

Red List Index of species survival in Africa



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "15: Life on Land". Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/goal-15/.

Target 15.6: Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed

21. As at 5 April 2018, 42 African countries were among the 105 parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity that had ratified the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from Their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Protocol provides a transparent legal framework for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from using genetic resources.[16]

22. With specific regard to agricultural biodiversity, 144 countries had ratified the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, as at 1 February 2018. A component of this international treaty is the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-Sharing, which facilitates exchanges of plant genetic resources. Twenty-two countries have provided information on their access and benefit-sharing measures relating to plant genetic resources in their compliance reports. Forty-three countries in Africa are members of the International Treaty, which is the largest number of contracting parties per region. To date, five of those African countries have submitted their compliance reports. The African Union Commission and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in cooperation with Biodiversity International, are supporting African countries in implementing the International Treaty.

Target 15.7: Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products

23. The illicit hunting of and trafficking in wildlife continues to undermine efforts to conserve wildlife in Africa. Between 1999 and 2015, more than 25 per cent of the illegal trafficking in wildlife was of African mammals, birds and reptiles. [17] The African Union-led African Strategy on Combating Illegal

[16] Information on national development plans to implement the Nagoya Protocol is available on the Access and Benefit-Sharing Clearinghouse website. Available at https://absch.cbd.int/.

[17] See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "15: Life on Land". Available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/goal-15/ (accessed 14 April 2018).

Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa is vital in addressing the threat posed by the illegal trade in wildlife on African economies.

Target 15.9: By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

24. Most African countries have developed and revised their national biodiversity strategies and action plans, in line with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 to 2020, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. As of March 2018, 47 African countries had submitted their revised national biodiversity strategies and action plans and 5 had reported that their strategies and action plans were under revision. Only two African countries were yet to submit their first national biodiversity strategies and action plans.[18]

25. Some countries in the region have embarked on the implementation of their national biodiversity strategies and action plans, including setting and implementing national targets to meet the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.[19] By September 2017, 16 per cent of all the targets adopted by African countries were commensurate with or exceeded the Aichi Targets. Half the adopted targets were similar to the Aichi ones but at lower or significantly lower levels, while the remaining 34 per cent adopted by African countries were not relevant to the Aichi Targets.[3] Consequently, there is great scope for countries to revise the ambition of their national targets to meet Aichi Targets. Although information on progress in meeting the targets is limited in some countries, overall, many of them have made some progress in achieving the Aichi Targets. The rate of achievement is insufficient for more than 50 per cent of the countries in the region in meeting targets 1, 2, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17 and 19. On the other hand, one country is set to exceed target 16.[3]

26. Twelve African countries are party to the Gaborone Declaration for Sustainability in Africa. The Declaration is aimed at ensuring that the contributions of natural capital to sustainable economic growth and the maintenance and improvement of social capital and human well-being are quantified and integrated into development and business practices.

Target 15.a: Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

27. During the period 2002–2014, bilateral official development assistance in support of biodiversity in Africa increased from $250 million to $1.75 billion.[20] It is, however, important to ensure the equitable channelling of this assistance throughout the ecosystems in the region.

Target 15.b: Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation

28. Several initiatives aimed at reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD-plus) are being implemented in the region, with the objective to contribute to the global effort to increase carbon sequestration and enhance biodiversity conservation. The United Nations Collaborative Programme on

[18] See Convention on Biological Diversity, "National biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs)". Available at https://www.cbd.int/nbsap/ (accessed on 14 April 2018).

[19] See Convention on Biological Diversity, "Aichi biodiversity targets". Available at https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/ (accessed on 14 April 2018).

[20] See African Development Bank Group, "Monitoring Sustainable Development Goas in Africa. Goal 15: life on land". Available at http://sdg.opendataforafrica.org/zkrqjrc/goal-15-life-on-land# (accessed 14 April 2018).

Reducing Emissions for Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries has 67 partner countries, of which 28 are from Africa.

III. Challenges and lessons learned

29. In Africa, the availability of data on indicators, especially those relating to environmental sustainability, is weak. One analysis revealed that approximately 6 of every 10 Sustainable Development Goals indicators cannot be tracked in Africa because of severe data limitations.[21] To tackle the data challenges, strong action is required to forestall the risk of unbalanced reporting and to address the lack of policy attention and activities aimed at improving long-term sustainable land, forest and biodiversity management. It is therefore important to prioritize environmental statistics in strengthening national statistics systems.

30. Conservation and the sustainable use of land, forest and biodiversity resources require approaches that recognize the multiple contributions of those resources to people and, accordingly, the multiple interests of stakeholders and the interlinkages with various sectoral goals and priorities. Countries need to embrace multidisciplinary and holistic approaches, break sectoral silos and pursue landscape approaches to development.

31. The true value of land, forests and biodiversity needs to be appreciated and integrated into planning and decision-making processes in Africa. To achieve this, the link between land, forests and biodiversity degradation, on the one hand, and social and economic development, on the other, needs to be established and recognized. This will pave the way for the integration of sustainable land, forest and biodiversity management into national and sectoral development frameworks.

32. Integrated land-use planning is required to combat land degradation and restore land and for the conservation and sustainable management of forests and biodiversity. Integrated land use is critical in the African context, which is the most rapidly urbanizing region in the world. Given that most urban areas have yet to be developed, African countries can decouple urbanization from land and ecosystem degradation by adopting integrated land-use planning to accommodate and foster nature-based solutions to social, cultural and economic challenges in urban and peri-urban areas.

33. Land tenure systems and access to land and ecosystem resources are central to combating land, forest and biodiversity degradation. Accordingly, it is important that African countries pursue land governance reforms, including the development and implementation of policies that ensure secure access to land and other ecosystem resources by indigenous peoples, local communities, women and other marginalized groups.

34. Attaining the financing and capacity development and technology support required for sustainable land and ecosystems management is an ongoing challenge. Integrated approaches and strengthened partnerships could be used to leverage funding and other support needed.

[21] See Economic Commission for Africa and others, *African Sustainable Development Report: Tracking Progress on Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals* (Addis Ababa, 2017).

IV. Conclusion and key messages

Conclusion

35. Diverse productive land, forests and biodiversity resources underpin wealth creation. They are crucial for economic progress. Those resources are central to achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals and for building resilience in Africa. Degradation and the loss of those resources could jeopardize the transformation of economies and undermine resilience and long-term sustainable development in the region. In that regard, countries need to meet the time-bound targets to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 15 and goal 7 of Agenda 2063. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 remains in the early stages. Noticeable progress has nevertheless been made, especially with regard to conservation, restoration and sustainable use, promoting the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests and fostering land degradation neutrality and the conservation of mountain ecosystems.

36. More remains to be done if Sustainable Development Goal 15 and goal 7 of Agenda 2063 are to be achieved within the set time frame. Concerted and scaled-up efforts are required. Strengthening data on and recognizing the value of land, forests and land resources are important in building awareness and strengthening policy attention and action in the sustainable management of these resources. Land governance reforms and integrated approaches are needed, especially in the context of leaving no one behind and realizing the goals in an integrated manner.

Key messages

37. The following are some of the key messages that the Regional Forum may wish to consider.

(a) Investment aimed at achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 can be applied for most of the other Goals and the goals contained in Agenda 2063 because their achievement is inseparably linked to productivity and the sustainability of life on land. Accordingly, countries need to substantially increase investment directed towards combating land degradation and enhancing the productivity and stability of diverse land, forests and biodiversity resources in Africa;

(b) Achieving the ambition of the sustainable management of land, forests and biodiversity, as set out in the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, requires moving from high-level policy and strategic goals and commitments to tangible on-the-ground outcomes by ramping up the implementation of the agendas at the national, subnational and local levels. Accordingly, funding, capacity development and technology support linked to such outcomes need to be scaled up to implement national biodiversity strategies and action plans, national land degradation neutrality targets and sustainable forest management programmes;

(c) Tools for mainstreaming natural capital into strategic regional, subregional and national development frameworks need to be strengthened and implemented. Such tools are urgently needed, in particular to integrate nature into priority development frameworks for agricultural transformation, the expansion of trade and the development of urban centres, industries and infrastructure, including for energy, water and transport. National capital accounting initiatives, such as those already carried out in most of

the Gaborone Declaration member countries in Africa, need to be scaled up and replicated throughout the region;

(d) It is crucial to strengthen land rights and access to forest and biodiversity resources and participative decision-making in the management of those resources, in particular for indigenous people and local communities. This is to ensure equitable benefits and that no one is left behind. Countries therefore need to strengthen their land governance, including resource tenure systems. It is also necessary for Governments to expand the space and strengthen the mechanisms for multi-stakeholder engagement on land resources development, including through strengthening multi-actor coordinating and implementing bodies for the Goals. Those systems are essential to leaving no one behind and making durable progress in achieving land degradation neutrality and the sustainable management of forests and biodiversity;

(e) Lack of data and information at various levels on many indicators associated specifically with land, forests and biodiversity and, in general, environment degradation risks unbalanced reporting on progress and inadequate awareness and insufficient national policy attention to and action on the sustainable management of those resources. In that regard, it is vital that countries strengthen their capacity to collect, manage and disseminate data and information on environment-related sectors as an integral priority of national statistics systems. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services assessments provide a springboard for expanding the availability of relevant information and knowledge and linking it to national policymaking and the implementation of strategies and programme regarding sustainable land, forests and biodiversity.