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Item 7 (d) of the provisional agenda*
Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made and peer learning on the sub-themes of the Regional Forum: parallel meeting on the sub-theme of life on land[1]

Background report on the sub-theme of life on land

I. Introduction

1. The present document is one of the background papers for the eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which is being held in preparation for the meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development to be convened in New York in July 2022. The theme of the regional forums is "Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." The report describes trends and progress towards the achievement of Goal 15 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is aligned with goal 7 of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. In addition, the report outlines challenges and opportunities to build back better from COVID-19 and accelerate efforts to attain Sustainable Development Goal 15 and goal 7 of Agenda 2063. It also highlights key messages for consideration by the Regional Forum, drawing on existing assessments and literature on the two related goals.

2. Life on land, including forest, biodiversity and other land resources, is crucial for the attainment of most of the Sustainable Development Goals and for fostering a transformation towards a green, inclusive and resilient Africa. The linkages between Goal 15 and the other Sustainable Development Goals, including those for consideration by the high-level political forum at its 2022 meeting, is amply captured in the following statement by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF): "There cannot be a healthy, happy and prosperous future for people on a planet with a destabilised climate, depleted oceans and rivers, degraded land and empty forests, all stripped of biodiversity, the web of life that sustains us all".[2] The implications of life on land for the attainment of other Sustainable Development Goals are demonstrated by the key role played by

* ECA/RSFD/2022/1.

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

[2] World Wide Fund for Nature, *Living Planet Report – 2018: Aiming Higher* (Gland, Switzerland, 2018.

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biodiversity, forests, wetlands and other ecosystems in protecting water supplies, regulating floods and healthy soils, increasing water and nutrient availability for crops and reducing off-farm environmental impacts, such as flooding and siltation.

3. It is estimated that, across the world, 1.2 billion jobs (40 per cent of total employment globally) directly depend on healthy and stable nature (the subject of Goal 8).[3] Forest and wood resources contribute on average 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 (Goals 7 and 8).[4] More than 62 per cent of the African population depend directly on ecosystem services for food, water, energy, health and livelihood needs (Goals 2, 3, 6 and 7).[5] Urban and rural ecosystem services and biodiversity contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, including disaster risk reduction (Goals 11, 12 and 13). The peatlands of the Central Congo basin, for example, cover some 145,000 square km^2 and can lock in up to 30 billion tons of carbon – equivalent to three years of global carbon emissions. Biodiversity and ecosystems in marine and coastal areas contribute more than 35 per cent of GDP (Goal 8). Tourism relies largely 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.

4. Biodiversity plays an important role in the imperative of the 2030 Agenda to "leave no one behind". Ecosystem services are estimated to constitute between 50 and 90 per cent of the total source of livelihoods among poor rural and forest-dwelling households (Goals 5, 8 and 10).[6] 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 minority status, and is likely to accentuate the inequality and marginalization of the most vulnerable in society (Goal 5).[7]

5. Accordingly, land degradation and the loss of forests and biodiversity jeopardize the achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa and globally. Estimates indicate that 500,000 km^2 or approximately 2 per cent of the continent's surface is degraded owing to factors such as unsustainable agriculture and climate change. Land degradation in the region affects over 650 million people by harming livelihoods, the ecosystem and economies.[8] In many cases, those 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. These groups include indigenous people, traditional communities, small-scale farmers, urban poor, landless people, women and several other marginalized sections of society.

[3] See David Passarelli, Fatima Denton and Adam Day, "Beyond opportunism: the UN development system's response to the triple planetary crisis" (New York: United Nations University, 2021). Available at https://cpr.unu.edu/research/projects/the-triple-planetary-crisis.html.

[4] 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).

[5] See Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, "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, Germany, IPBES Secretariat, 2018).

[6] See Economic Commission for Africa and others, *Managing Africa's Natural Resource Base*.

[7] See the report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/HRC/34/49).

[8] Africa Regenerative Agriculture Study Group, "Regenerative agriculture: an opportunity for businesses and society to restore degraded land in Africa" (2021). Available at www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/regenerative_agriculture_in_africa_-_2021_report.pdf.

6. Ecosystem degradation erodes the resilience of communities and nations and exposes them to increased risks of and impacts from disasters. For that reason, one of the areas of focus of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is building environmental resilience through the inclusion of ecosystems in risk analysis and planning.

7. 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, between 50 million and 700 million people globally will be forced to migrate as result of land degradation and climate change.

8. Africa had the highest annual rate of net forest loss between 2010 and 2020 (at 3.9 million hectares) and only in Africa has the rate of net forest loss increased each decade since 1990.[9] This loss is mainly attributable to population increase and forest conversion, largely for agricultural purposes which are dominated by small-scale agricultural activities. Poor forest management policies, including unrestricted logging, road construction, forest fires and the collection of wood for heating and cooking and for making charcoal, also contribute to the loss of forests.

9. Given the rapidly growing global population and urbanization, achieving sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12) will be indispensable for the sustainable management of the continent's ecosystems.

II. Trends and progress towards achievement of the 12 targets of Sustainable Development Goal 15 (life on land) and goal 7 of Agenda 2063

10. The following sections outline trends and progress towards achievement of the 12 targets of Sustainable Development Goal 15 (life on land) and goal 7 of Agenda 2063.[10]

A. 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

11. The proportion of forest area in Africa declined by 2.5 percentage points, to 21.3 per cent, over the period 2000–2020. In addition, the proportion of forest area in Africa is lower than the global total of 31.2 per cent and the rate of forest loss is higher than the global average (0.6 per cent, compared to 0.12 per cent). There are considerable differences among the African subregions. Central Africa has the highest proportion of forest are, with 44.3 per cent, while North Africa has a very low proportion, with only 3.5 per cent (see figure I).

12. African countries are committed to the conservation and sustainable use of forests and biodiversity. In all, 54 African countries are parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity,[11] while 45 have signed the revised African

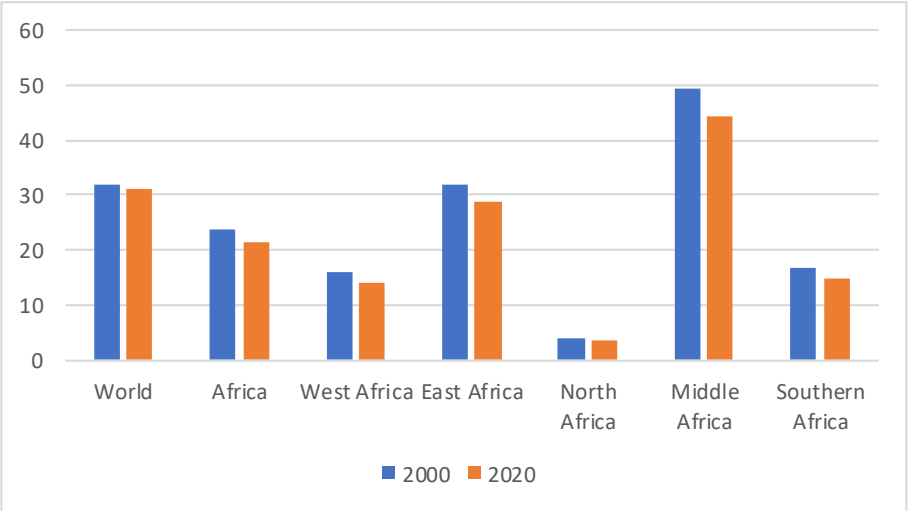
[9] See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020* (Rome, 2020). Available at www.fao.org/forest-resourcesassessment/2020.

[10] Where data and information are available.

[11] See United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre, *The State of Biodiversity in Africa: A Mid-term Review of Progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets* (Cambridge, 2016).

Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and 32 have ratified it.[12]

Figure I
Forest area as a proportion of total land area
(per cent)



Source: Based on Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020* (Rome, 2020).

B. 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 of 2011 and the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative, known as "AFR100". As of December 2021, 32 African countries had committed themselves to restoring 128 million hectares, surpassing the target of 100 million set under the Initiative.[13]

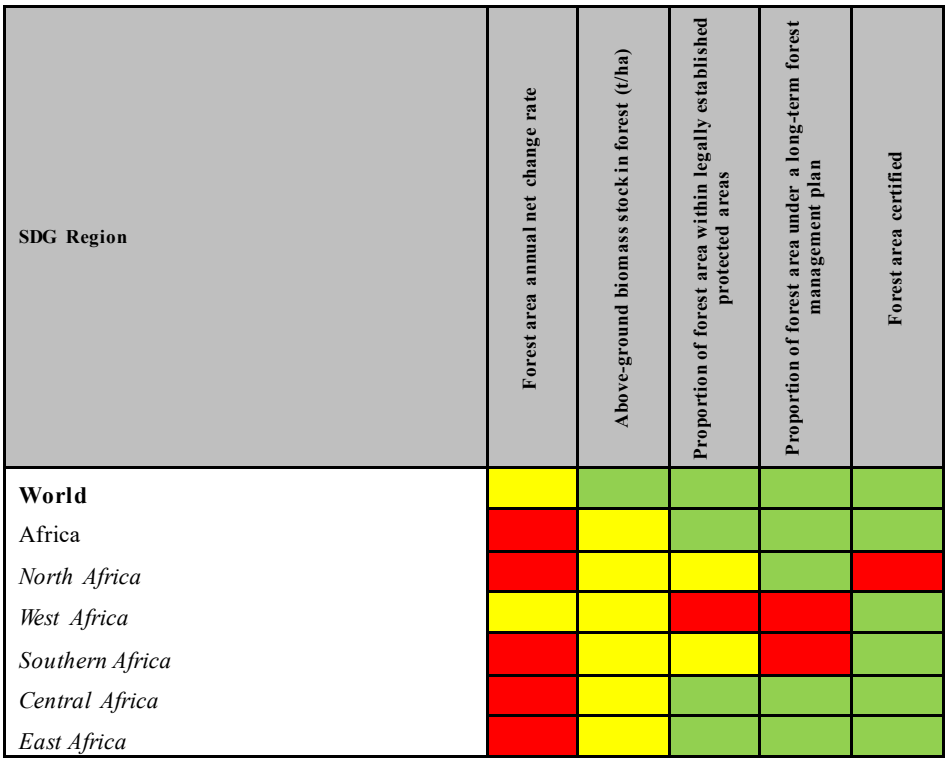
14. The rate of forest loss in Africa is not only higher than the world average, but has also increased.[14] As shown in figure II, indicator 15.2.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals comprises five sub-indicators that either show progress (green), are stable (yellow) or are becoming worse (red). In general, the trend is for forest areas to be negative, with a loss rate either stable or increasing for all subregions. Changes in the above-ground biomass stock in forests is stable across all subregions The other three sub-indicators show an overall positive change, except in West Africa, where the proportion of forest area within protected areas and under long-term management plans has gone down. This proportion has also decreased in Southern Africa, while in North Africa there has been a decrease in certified forest area.

15. With the support of the African Union Commission and FAO, African countries have adopted the Sustainable Forest Management Framework for Africa (2020–2030). The framework, among other objectives, provides strategic guidance to member States and regional economic communities, and

[12] See the list of countries that have signed, ratified or acceded to the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Available at www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/List/African Convention on nature and natural resources.pdf.
[13] See infographic at https://afr100.org/sites/default/files/21_AFR100_Infographic_Web_December.pdf.
[14] See Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015* (Rome, 2015).

facilitates the harmonization of policies and legal frameworks on sustainable forest management.

Figure II
Dashboard of indicators for target 15.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals



Source: Based on Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020* (Rome, 2020).

C. 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

16. In Africa, approximately 18 per cent of the total land area consists of degraded land. 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.[15]

17. As of December 2021, 52 African countries were among the 120 countries worldwide that were setting land degradation neutrality targets under the land degradation neutrality target-setting programme of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.[16] Of those 52 African countries, 28 have already set their land degradation neutrality targets and the remainder are in the process of doing so. It is, however, critical to ensure and support the full and

[15] See United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, *The Global Land Outlook*, first edition (Bonn, Germany, 2017).

[16] See United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Knowledge Hub. Available at https://knowledge.unccd.int/home/country-information/countries-with-voluntary-ldn-targets.

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. In that context, 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, aimed at strengthening the resilience of the region's people and ecosystems.[17]

18. With support from such partners as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the African Union Commission is implementing the Great Green Wall initiative, which aims to create an 8,000 km swathe of restored land across the width of Africa, forming a new natural wonder of the world. By 2030, the initiative aims to restore 100 million hectares of land, sequester 250 million tons of carbon and create 10 million jobs in rural areas.

19. To date, 14 African countries[18] have developed and, with the support of the secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification, are implementing the Initiative on Sustainability, Stability and Security, which aims, among other outputs, to restore 10 million hectares of degraded land and safeguard or create 2 million rural jobs in climate-stressed areas of Africa.

D. 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

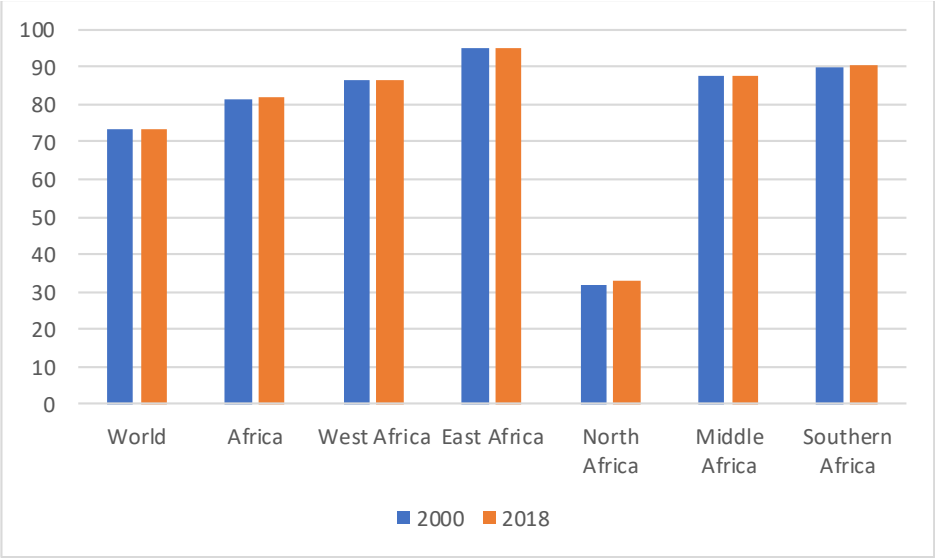
20. In Africa, as a whole, and in most of its subregions, the proportion of mountain green cover has grown marginally between 2000 and 2018. There are notable differences between subregions, however, in the extent of such cover, which ranges from 95.2 per cent in East Africa to 32.7 percent in North Africa.

21. The average proportion of mountain key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas in Africa has increased notably between 2000 and 2020. In particular, in North Africa it increased from 16 to 27.6 per cent over this period and, in sub-Saharan Africa, from 33.2 to 41.7 per cent.

[17] 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).

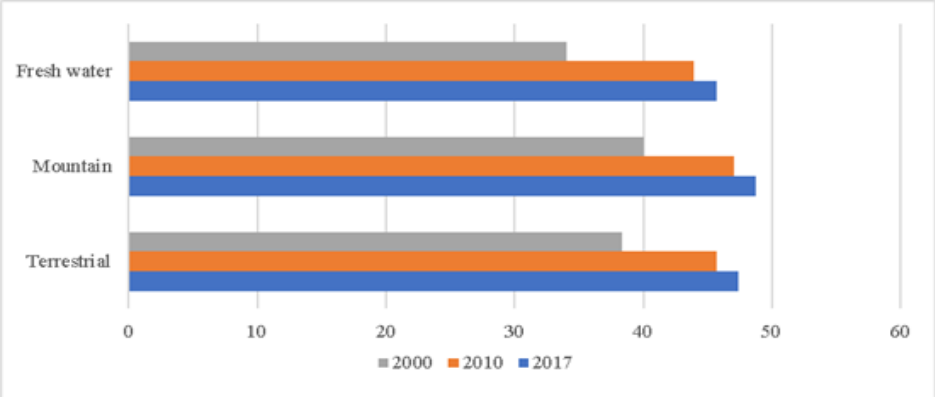
[18] Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Figure III
Proportion of mountain green cover land versus areas of mountains, by subregion
(per cent)



Source: Based on Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020* (Rome, 2020).

Figure IV
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/.

E. 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

22. A number of species in Africa are likely to become extinct. On the Red List Index for sub-Saharan Africa, the subregion's score dropped from 0.79 in 2000 to 0.72 in 2021.

F. 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

23. As at 5 April 2018, there were 45 African countries among the 128 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 the use of genetic resources.[19]

24. With specific regard to agricultural biodiversity, as of 2020, 148 countries had ratified the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, 46 of them in Africa. A component of this international treaty is the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-Sharing, which facilitates exchanges of plant genetic resources. Across the world, 57 countries, 15 of which are in Africa, have provided information on their access and benefit-sharing measures relating to plant genetic resources in their compliance reports. The African Union Commission and FAO, in cooperation with Biodiversity International, are supporting African countries in implementing the treaty.

G. 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

25. The illicit hunting of and trafficking in wildlife continue to undermine efforts to conserve wildlife in Africa. Between 1999 and 2015, more than 25 per cent of African mammals, birds and reptiles were reported in illegal trade and trafficking.[20] The African Union-led African Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa is key to addressing the threat posed to African economies by the illegal trade in wildlife.

H. Target 15.8: By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species

26. New data[21] suggest that Africa is making progress towards introducing measures to prevent alien species invasion. The proportion of countries with National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan targets aligned with Aichi Biodiversity Target 9, as set out in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, rose from 83 to 88 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa between 2016 and 2020, while it remained stable at 67 per cent in North Africa. At the same time, 50 per cent of sub-Saharan African countries receive global funding for projects related to invasive alien species management, while 40 per cent of sub-Saharan African invest earmarked funds from their own national budgets to manage the threat of invasive alien species.

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

[20] 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).

[21] SDG *indicator* 15.8.1, official figures.

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

27. Most African countries have developed and revised their national biodiversity strategies and action plans, in line with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, 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.[22]

28. Some countries in the region have embarked on the implementation of these strategies and action plans, including setting and implementing national targets to meet the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.[23] 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.[24] Consequently, there is great scope for countries to revise the ambition of their national targets to meet the Aichi Targets. 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.

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

29. Over the period 2000–2018, total official development assistance in support of biodiversity in Africa increased from $345 million to $2.77 billion.[25] It is, however, important to ensure the equitable channelling of this assistance throughout the ecosystems in the region.

K. 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

30. Under the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, a total of 128 countries, 33 of them from Africa, have pledged more than $20 billion of public and private funds to reverse forest loss by 2030.

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

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

[24] See David Passarelli, Fatima Denton and Adam Day, "Beyond opportunism".

[25] Sustainable Development Goal indicators 15.a.1 and 15.b.1: official figures.

III. Challenges, constraints and emerging issues

31. The following paragraphs identify significant challenges and constraints faced in efforts to attain the relevant goals and targets of the two agendas and issues arising in this area.

32. *Financing gap*: There is a huge financing gap for nature-related efforts, including the protection and restoration of biodiversity, forest and land. According to the seminal report of the issues: *Financing Nature: Closing the Global Biodiversity Financing Gap,*[26] globally, an annual amount of between $722 billion and $967 billion is needed to halt global biodiversity decline by 2030. Yet in 2019, flow funds for biodiversity protection amounted to between $124 billion and $143 billion. Over the next decade, some $700 billion a year is therefore needed in extra funding.

33. *Impact of COVID-19*: The COVID-19 crisis has had a negative impact on the delivery of sustainable forest management, including forest governance and forest financing availability, and the livelihoods of forest-dependent people, creating potential setbacks in efforts to deliver on the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030.[27] Although significant progress has been made in investments in the Great Green Wall initiative, the Sahel region still faces enormous environmental, social and development challenges. COVID-19 has reversed some of the development gains in the region.

34. In addition, countries continue to report a range of challenges encountered when implementing the strategy and action plans for the Great Green Wall initiative, both in direct relation to the initiative and also associated with sustainable soil management and the restoration of degraded land in general. These challenges include, first, governance issues causing institutional challenges; second, the lack of a system to identify, monitor and report on activities on the ground; third, funding challenges (an overall insufficient, unpredictable and insecure funding situation; the mastery of environmental finance); and, fourth, technical challenges in restoration projects. These challenges continue to place severe strain on the resilience of the Sahel population. Given the magnitude of the challenges facing the region, a new vision is under discussion for countries to continue their collective efforts for a sustainable, resilient and prosperous Sahel.

35. *Debt stress*: Debt constraints have restricted spending on nature in many poor African countries. Poorer countries, most of them in Africa, spend five times as much on debt repayments as they do on climate action.[28] This undermines the capacity of countries to take meaningful and tangible action to cope with climate change, including ecosystem restoration and improvement.

36. *Reform of harmful subsidies*: There is also need to reduce or redirect $500 billion per year, currently provided in such forms as incentives and subsidies that support intensive agriculture, forestry and fishing, thereby causing harm to nature.[29]

[26] Andrew Deutz and others, *Financing Nature: Closing the Global Biodiversity Financing Gap* (Paulson Institute, The Nature Conservancy and Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability, 2020.

[27] As reported by the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

[28] See Phillip Inman, "Poorer countries spend five times more on debt than climate crisis – report", *The Guardian*, 27 October 2021. Available at www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/27/poorer-countries-spend-five-times-more-on-debt-than-climate-crisis-report.

[29] See Megan Rowling, "Starting gun fired on global hunt for hundreds of billions to fund nature protection", Thompson Reuters Foundation News, 28 September 2020. Available at https://news.trust.org/item/20200928165350-jv56m#:~:text=Protecting%20and%20restoring%20biodiversity%20will%20take%20%24700%20billion,say%20-%20a%20challenge%20during%20a%20pandemic%20downturn.

37. *Lack of quality data and statistics on biodiversity, forests and land resources*: In Africa, the availability of data on indicators, especially those relating to environmental sustainability, is weak. One analysis revealed that nearly two thirds of the Sustainable Development Goals indicators cannot be tracked in Africa because of severe data limitations.[30] It is therefore important to prioritize environmental statistics in efforts to strengthen national statistics systems.

38. *Inadequate integration of nature into development frameworks*: The true value of land, forests and biodiversity is not adequately appreciated and integrated into planning and decision-making processes in Africa. There is therefore an urgent need for the integration of sustainable land, forest and biodiversity management into sectoral and national frameworks, in particular those for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

39. *Shortcomings of land resource tenure regimes*: Most women neither own nor have control over land resources. Globally, fewer than 20 per cent of land holders are women and only 13 per cent of the land users who make the major decisions on agricultural land are women.[31] Ensuring secure access to land and other ecosystem resources by women, indigenous peoples, local communities and other marginalized groups is central to the protection and restoration of forests, biodiversity and other land resources.

IV. Opportunities and transformative actions, partnerships

40. In all, as of 30 September 2021, 92 countries, 16 of them from Africa,[32] committed themselves to undertaking urgent actions over the next ten years as part of the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, designed to put nature and biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030. These actions shall include such measures as implementing a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; tackling pollution and deforestation; and boosting financing to safeguard the planet.

41. Evidence now abounds indicating that targeted green investments can create the largest multiplier effects, such as an increase in gross value added, more new jobs and a better recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, than would be possible with traditional, fossil fuel-based investments. A case study of South Africa by ECA and its partners revealed that green investments for renewable energy, sustainable transport solutions and nature-based rehabilitation deliver 250 per cent more jobs and 420 per cent more value added in the economy than traditional fossil fuel investments. In addition, a recent report by the World Economic Forum, *The Future of Nature and Business*, suggests that a nature-positive recovery could generate annual business opportunities worth $10 trillion and 395 million jobs by 2030.

42. A total of 16 African countries[33] have developed and adopted the Congo Basin Blue Fund. The Fund is designed to boost climate-resilient blue economies in the Congo basin.

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

[31] See the submission by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to the 2020 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, available at https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/25971ECOSOC_2020_HLPF_UNCCD.pdf.

[32] See www.leaderspledgefornature.org.

[33] Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, South Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. For further details, see www.ndcs.undp.org/content/ndc-support-programme/en/home/impact-and-learning/case-studies/morocco-4c-blue-congo-bassin-fund.html.

43. ECA and partners have established the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, which could reach $30 billion. The facility is dedicated to providing African governments with a liquidity structure on par with international standards, so as to address the specific Eurobond issuance needs of the African continent. The facility will enhance the liquidity of bonds linked to the Sustainable Development Goals or to climate bonds that are issued by African countries and will dramatically increase the volume of green and blue bond financing, including at more affordable rates.

44. The African Continental Free Trade Area will provide opportunities to develop green regional value chains. In so doing, the Area will promote the sustainable exploitation of forests and biodiversity and the development of ecosystem-friendly agriculture and industrial development in the region.

V. Conclusion and key messages

A. Conclusion

45. Progress has been made, in particular 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. In view of the looming deadline of 2030 for attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, efforts are urgently needed and must be scaled up. The finance gaps must be plugged through increased government and private sector investments and innovative financing solutions are required. Investments for nature must be integral priorities of COVID-19 recovery strategies and financing plans. Data collection must be strengthened and the value of land, forests and land resources properly recognized in order to build awareness and focus policy attention and action on the sustainable management of these resources. Land governance reforms and integrated approaches are needed, in particular in response to the call to leave no one behind and to realize the goals in an integrated manner.

B. Key messages

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

(a) Governments and businesses need substantially to increase investment in efforts to combat land degradation and enhance the productivity and stability of diverse land, forests and biodiversity resources in Africa. It is also vital to ensure a sustainable management of land and water resources in order to contribute to the achievement of a number of Sustainable Development Goals. To ensure meaningful action, it is crucial to strengthen and support systems to channel public and private funds down to the decentralized levels of government and local initiatives;

(b) Given the huge financing needs for nature and existing gaps in such financing, governments and their partners need to strengthen their capacity to mobilize funding by exploring new and innovate sources. Countries should therefore strengthen their capacity and exploit the potential of financing vehicles such as the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility designed by ECA and partners; debt swaps for biodiversity and sustainability; and green and blue bonds;

(c) Governments and their partners should ramp up efforts to strengthen the integration of nature-based solutions and climate-friendly agriculture in voluntary national reviews and voluntary subnational reviews, in plans and programmes, and in budgets to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063. Such integration is crucial to the

catalysing of investments and action on nature, including biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration, which is crucial for progress across multiple Sustainable Development Goals;

(d) African governments and their partners should adopt green strategies and spending plans for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This will enable African countries to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and get back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Gaols and build long-term multidimensional resilience;

(e) Systems following the One Health approach are needed and should be strengthened in national governments. This is essential for the systemic collaboration and multidisciplinary approaches needed to attain optimal health for people, animals, and ecosystems, and thus to prepare better for and to contain pandemics;

(f) The Nairobi Declaration adopted at the seventh High-Level Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction in November 2021 provides a tangible framework for reducing disaster risk and building resilience through biodiversity conservation, combating desertification, nature-based solutions, sustainable land and biodiversity management. Governments, the private sector and their partners need to ensure full implementation of this Declaration to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 15 and the goals of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction;

(g) Tools and capacity for mainstreaming natural capital into strategic regional, subregional and national development frameworks need to be strengthened and implemented;

(h) It is crucial to strengthen land rights, tenure systems and access to forest and biodiversity resources and participative decision-making in the management of those resources, in particular for women, indigenous people and local communities. 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;

(i) 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. This is crucial to addressing the limited availability of quality data, statistics and information at various levels on many indicators associated specifically with land, forests and biodiversity and, in general, environmental degradation risks.