



African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

African Ministerial Conference on the Environment
Sixteenth session
 Ministerial segment
 Libreville, 15–16 June 2017

Highlights of the achievements of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment*

Note by the Secretariat

A. Introduction

1. The Conference during its sixth special session held from 16-19 April 2016 adopted decision SS.VI/6 on the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and the African Union's Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment. The decision requested that the secretariat of the Conference to prepare a brief report highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of retaining AMCEN, based on (i) an evaluation of the work done by AMCEN over the last 30 years; (ii) achievements of AMCEN and (iii) challenges for Africa in the post Paris Agreement on Climate Change era and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

2. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the achievements of AMCEN over the last 30 years and also to make a case for the need to have AMCEN continue to operate as an independent body considering the indispensable role it has to play in the current phase of implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – particularly its environmental dimension – and other important international commitments on biodiversity, chemical and wastes management, United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) work and multilateral environmental agreements.

B. Establishment of AMCEN

3. At the initiative of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) was established in 1985 to: strengthen cooperation between African Governments in economic, technical and scientific activities with the prime objective of halting and reversing the degradation of the African environment.

4. In 1997, AMCEN adopted its Constitution and formalized its existence as the permanent African Ministerial authority on the environment and sustainable development. UNEP has, since 1985, provided the Secretariat of AMCEN together with the requisite staff and other technical and financial resources. A Trust Fund which is managed by UNEP as the AMCEN Secretariat was established for the financing of AMCEN activities.

C. Some of AMCEN's main activities and achievements

5. Over the years, AMCEN has demonstrated strong leadership in advancing African causes and interests in environment and sustainable development matters at national, regional and global levels. AMCEN has also achieved key results by way of concrete common measures in regional policy development, awareness-raising, advocacy, coordination, networking, knowledge management and dissemination, as well as training. Through its strong convening power, it has brought together African Governments and institutions and their development partners, to deliberate and craft common positions on important issues for consideration at national, regional and global levels. These include for processes such as the Rio+20 Process; the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development; the Paris

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

Agreement on climate change; the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) of UNEP, among many others.

6. AMCEN helped prepare the environmental action plan for the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA) and was actively involved in supporting its implementation. Recently AMCEN has been involved in the review of the action plan
<http://www.unep.org/roa/Amcen/docs/publications/ActionNepad.pdf>

7. AMCEN has developed and implemented projects and programmes in areas crucial to Africa's environmental and development agenda, as prioritized in the environmental action plan, such as combating land degradation; drought and desertification; the conservation of wetlands; prevention, control and management of invasive alien species; conservation and sustainable use of coastal, marine and freshwater resources; trans-boundary conservation and management of natural resources; and the sustainable management of ecosystems. Projects such as the Partnership for the Development of Environmental Law and Institutions in Africa, which AMCEN successfully implemented, have been highly acclaimed.

8. AMCEN has undertaken numerous scientific and technical studies on important issues of concern to the region such as the Africa adaptation gap report
http://www.unep.org/roa/Amcen/docs/publications/Africa_Adapataion_Gap.pdf, in addition to many capacity-building initiatives, by holding training seminars and workshops and by providing technical and financial assistance and other forms of support to expert group meetings.

9. For many years, it has ensured the publication of the Africa Environment Outlook reports
<http://www.unep.org/dewa/africa/aboutaeo/aboutaeo.asp> and the implementation of the African Environmental Information Network Programme, which discusses and analyse various topical science policy issues related to Africa's environmental challenges.

10. The recent global pre-occupation with climate change has made AMCEN to focus and concentrate more on preparing the African region to craft credible common positions and key messages on climate change. It will be noted that through the efforts of AMCEN, the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) and other stakeholders, Africa was instrumental in the adoption of the Paris Agreement in December 2015, the launch of the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI), and the Africa Adaptation Initiative (AAI).

11. AMCEN has initiated the development of regional flagship programmes as a means to contribute to the implementation of the Rio+20 outcomes in Africa. Five regional flagship programmes are at various levels of development and implementation. These include: African Green Economy Partnership; Sustainable Land Management, Desertification, Biodiversity and Ecosystems-based Adaptation to Climate Change; Partnership for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) in Africa; African Programme on Sustainable Energy Development; and Africa Integrated Environmental Assessment for Sustainable Development.

12. More recently, AMCEN has played a key role in facilitating the development of the African Common Strategy on Combatting Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora aimed at preventing, combating and eradicating the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products. For the first time, AMCEN was instrumental in convening a preparatory meeting for COP17 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and COP13 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which was held in August 2016 in Addis Ababa and helped African countries come up with a stronger common understanding and positions and enhance the continent's voice in the CITES COP17 and CBD COP13.

13. AMCEN has continued to play a critical role in global processes by ensuring coherent and common inputs from the region towards processes such as the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the sustainable development goals; and the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) of UNEP.

14. AMCEN has played a leading role in securing the African contribution to other international initiatives such as the Convention on Biological Diversity; the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification; the Abidjan Convention on Marine and Coastal Environment; the Nairobi Convention on Marine and Coastal Environment; the Maputo convention; the Bamako Convention; and many more. AMCEN has facilitated the formulation of common positions and consensus statements on important issues such as International Environmental Governance (IEG), Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) and the green economy.

15. There is no doubt that the existence of AMCEN and its varied activities have had a positive impact on efforts to strengthen environmental management in Africa. The work of AMCEN has also

contributed significantly to the heightened policy responses of African Governments and the international community to Africa's environment and sustainable development opportunities and challenges. Through its activities, Africa has had a voice in the international discourse on environment, climate change, poverty reduction and development.

16. AMCEN has been considered a success story globally. To this end, other regions such as Latin America and Caribbean as well as Asia-Pacific have approached UNEP to help them set up similar Forum to strengthen their positions at global environmental negotiations. During UNEA-2 in May 2016, Environment ministers from around the world adopted a resolution calling for UNEP to support and facilitate convening and/or strengthening the existing regional forums of ministers of environment and environment authorities; and support and facilitate convening new regional forums of ministers of environment and environment authorities upon the request of the regions.

D. The African Union (AU) and its Specialized Technical Committees (STCs)

17. The 2000 Constitutive Act of the African Union provide for the establishment of Specialised Technical Committees (STCs). Article 15 of the Constitutive Act spells out the responsibilities of the STCs, which are to prepare programmes and projects in their respective fields, for submission to the Executive Council of the Union; follow up, monitor and evaluate the implementation of Council decisions that are of relevance to their respective mandates; and make recommendations to the Executive Council for action.

18. In July 2011, by its decision Assembly/AU/Dec.365 (XVII), the Assembly requested the AUC to operationalize the STCs from January 2013 and thereafter sectoral ministerial conferences be abolished. However, by its decision Assembly/AU/Dec.526 (XXIII), adopted in Malabo in June 2014, the African Union Assembly decided that, given the importance of the ongoing global consultations on the issue of environment and taking into account the need to defend the interests of Africa, AMCEN be allowed to pursue the negotiations with concerned partners until they are concluded.

E. Likely implications of the abolition of AMCEN

a) Probable loss of focus and prominence

19. A management audit of the African Union¹ conducted by an independent high level panel in 2007, correctly observed that the sectoral clustering of the STCs "is not optimally aligned with the portfolios of the Commission and sectoral Ministries at the country level". It pointed out that the clustering of sectors in some STCs would require the attendance of four or five Ministers at cluster meetings.

20. In the case of the ARDWE STC, Ministers responsible for agriculture, livestock, water, rural development, forestry, the environment, etc. are members of this STC. Membership is thus rendered too large and problems of hierarchy and leadership within delegations may arise. The fact that this STC has to address too many important areas imposes problems of focus, depth and substance. Lumping the environment with all these other sectors risks diluting its desired prominence and losing focus.

b) Possible reduction of capacity to carry out functional mandates

21. AMCEN, through its Secretariat and its network of partners especially UNEP, has led the intellectual discourse on the environment and sustainable development in Africa through many activities and expert group fora. From these activities policies have been crafted and advice, guidance and direction provided which has enabled Africa to formulate and articulate the common positions it has taken with regard to the region's environment and sustainable development issues. AMCEN's ability to deliver this important service derives from its capacity for environmental information generation and dissemination, convening and servicing technical meetings of experts, and rallying support from international scientific and donor community, etc.

c) Likely reduction of financial support

22. Over the years, AMCEN has supported its activities from resources generated through its own initiatives and its Trust Fund under UNEP's management. Although the Trust Fund has not been capitalized to the levels desired, it still has the potentialities for leveraging large amounts of funds in support of AMCEN activities in Africa. The Fund has served AMCEN and the Africa region extremely well since its establishment.

¹ See African Union, Report of the Audit of the African Union and Comments on it by the Commission of the African Union, Addis Ababa, December 2007.

23. Should AMCEN be abolished what would become of this funding mechanism that has worked so well and whose legal status might not be easily or readily transferable to another institution? A single meeting of AMCEN costs some US\$1.3 million on average. Would the Assembly's funding provision for the ARDWE STC be adequate to meet the need?

d) Weakened convening power

24. Loss of financial strength will no doubt lead to a loss of strength in many other areas including the ability to get diverse actors to converge on a common stance and to build and strongly articulate common positions etc., and rally stakeholders and partners around its set agendas. This is the convening power that any intergovernmental, international institution must have if it is to realize its objectives and goals. AMCEN has demonstrated the strength of this power over the years. This asset must be maintained and enhanced by the pursuit of actions that are based on objective and realistic considerations.

e) Loss of an African brand on the environment

25. With all of the foregoing at play, it is very likely that the brand name for Africa in environment and sustainable development circles, which AMCEN has grown to become, could be lost; the networks and partnerships that have been built up over the years may be dismantled; and efforts to accord greater prominence to the mandates of AMCEN would be weakened.

F. Way forward and recommendation for consideration

26. AMCEN has a critical role to play in the current phase of implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – particularly its environmental dimension – and other important international commitments on biodiversity, chemical and wastes management, United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) work and multilateral environmental agreements. It is worth noting that most of the negotiations, including for the implementation of the Paris agreement, the Conference of the Parties for the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, UN Convention on Desertification and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, among others, are still going on and the key role of AMCEN would still be required in this regard.

27. The sixth special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment mandated the President of the Conference to submit a decision to the Africa Union Commission for consideration by the next African Union Summit that given the increasing importance of the environmental dimension in sustainable development in Africa and the world, AMCEN continues to operate as an independent body. The decision was also to request the Assembly of the African Union, at its next session, to review its decision to abolish the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment as a regional ministerial body. It noted that the continued existence of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment is at no additional cost to the African Union Commission.

28. In view of the above recommendation, it is imperative that the sixteenth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment comes up with the decision to be submitted to the next African Union Summit requesting that AMCEN continues to operate as an independent body. This independent body can operate as a specialized technical committee or a body affiliated to Africa Union.
