

Statement of the UNEP Major Groups & Stakeholders, Africa to the Tenth Special Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment Held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Outcome of the 2024 Regional Consultative Meeting, Africa Held at Sofitel Ivoire Hotel on September 1-2, 2024

We, the UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders, Africa having met in a hybrid manner in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire ahead of the Tenth Special Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), hereby adopt the following Statement and submit it to the member states of the AMCEN.

Preamble

We express our profound appreciation to the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire for graciously hosting the Tenth Special Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) and for their support to the preparations and hosting of the 2024 Regional Consultative Meeting of the UNEP Major Groups & Stakeholders, Africa. We congratulate the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for their progressive and inclusive Pan-African leadership since ascending to AMCEN Presidency at the Eighteenth Ordinary Session the Presidency of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment since. We also congratulate the Kingdom of Morocco for delivering a successful Sixth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, as the first African Presidency.

Acknowledging that there is a pressing need to address the escalating impacts of climate change on the continent's ecosystems and communities, *and that* Africa is grappling with prolonged droughts, severe flooding, and the degradation of arable land, and *that* this highlights the urgency of aligning Africa's environmental strategies, ahead of UNFCCC COP29, UN CBD COP 16 and UNCCD COP16,

Welcoming the outcomes of the 60th session of the Subsidiary Bodies (SB60) held in Bonn earlier this year ahead of the "Climate Finance COP," COP 29, which showed that there's an important opportunity for African nations to advocate for equitable climate finance mechanisms responding to our unique vulnerabilities,

Noting that, Africa, despite contributing less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, receives minimal financing,

Recognizing that The African Union's Agenda 2063 envisions a continent resilient to climate change, emphasizing the protection of natural resources and the promotion of climate-resilient economies and communities and that this vision calls for a concerted effort to scale up finance for ecosystem restoration and protection, ensuring that Africa's environmental and socio-economic vulnerabilities are adequately addressed,

Further recognizing that Africa currently receives minimal global climate finance, far below what is needed to build climate resilience and effectively address the continent's challenges,

Noting that a key focus at COP 29 will be the establishment of a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on climate finance, expected to surpass the current \$100 billion per year benchmark, with a particular emphasis on the needs of developing countries and that, for Africa, this could mean increased financial flows to support climate adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damages efforts across the continent,

Underscoring that financial commitments need to be met and funds made accessible to those who need them most and that empowering the most vulnerable can enhance Africa's contribution to global climate action while fostering sustainable development at the grassroots level,

Convinced that Africa can advance innovative and inclusive solutions that address the continent's unique challenges,

Further convinced that by aligning its strategies with global climate objectives, African governments can drive meaningful progress towards a sustainable and climate-resilient future for all,

Noting UNEA resolution 6/14 which encourages parties to consider how to strengthen adaptation and mitigation actions and further calls on states to shift from reactive to proactive mitigation, preparedness and response,

Convinced that Africa's path to climate resilience must therefore involve greater financial support, capacity development, community-led adaptation and energy efficiency,

Noting that, by focusing on these pillars and ensuring just transitions, gender mainstreaming and stronger youth engagement, the Continent can create a future that is both sustainable and equitable, positioning itself as a leader in the global fight against climate change,

Also noting that it is estimated that up to 65% of productive land is degraded, while desertification affects 45% of land in Africa¹, impacting over 400 million people²,

Acknowledging that women, youth and people with disabilities are more susceptible to droughts and land degradation shocks due to the lack of diversification of their assets, as well as access to resources to cope with and recover from the environmental crises,

Aware that direct and indirect gender-related barriers limit the adoption of sustainable land management (SLM) practices,

¹ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/forest-landscape-restoration-mechanism/news-and-events/news-detail/en/c/1441648/#:~:text=While%20the%20overall%20trend%20is,resilient%20and%20sustainable%20food%20systems.>

² <https://droughtcp.unced.int/es/node/3584>

Taking note of the report of The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services³, land degradation affects 3.2 billion people globally, most of whom are in developing countries,

Acknowledging that approximately 4.4 million hectares⁴ of productive land is lost annually to desertification, reducing agricultural productivity, consequently causing undernourishment for about 68.1 million people⁵ in Africa, and particularly youth, women, vulnerable groups and the elderly,

Noting that, desertification results in the loss of over 27,000 species annually and costs the global economy 10% of its Gross Domestic Product yearly, with Sub-Saharan Africa bearing 22% of the total global cost of land degradation⁶.

Noting with concern that over 23 million people in the Horn of Africa⁷ and another 23.5 million in the Sahel⁸ are facing severe food insecurity due to drought and land degradation.

Acknowledging that efforts are being made to mitigate desertification and ensure ecosystem restoration across the continent and that restoration efforts must be synergized and allocated resources including finances, human capacity, and technological efforts,

Noting that, as emphasized in the Durban Declaration on Biodiversity by AMCEN, a coordinated approach is vital to restoring degraded lands and achieving sustainable development across Africa,

Noting Decision 3/12 of the UNCCD, we concur that mainstreaming land degradation neutrality targets in national policies and commitments is important to ensure the delivery of multiple benefits to address different environmental challenges encountered in halting biodiversity loss and mitigating the climate change crisis,

We recognize that land is a critical issue in Africa as it provides habitats for people and species, provides livelihoods, and ensures food security. It is crucial to take care of the state of health of land in Africa to reduce exposure to challenges such as food insecurity and loss of biodiversity,

Welcoming UNEA 5/14 resolution to develop a legally binding instrument to End Plastic Pollution and the AMCEN 19/2 decision to “protect the African region from the health, climate, and biodiversity threats posed by plastic pollution” must guide the African positions in the plastic policy,

Appreciating that the plastic crisis is deeply interconnected with the climate crisis as both meet under the triple planetary crisis, and plastics significantly contribute to biodiversity loss and climate

³ https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/spm_3bi_ldr_digital.pdf

⁴ <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/press-releases/least-100-million-hectares-healthy-land-now-lost-each-year>

⁵ <https://www.fao.org/in-action/forest-landscape-restoration-mechanism/news-and-events/news-detail/en/c/1441648/>

⁶ <https://droughtclp.unccd.int/ar/node/3584>

⁷ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/situations/drought-food-insecurity-greater-horn-of-africa>

⁸ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/west-central-africa/card/6uW0IQYfGL/>

change; that recent studies show the need to reduce plastic production between 11.8% and 17.3% a year⁹ from 2024 to avoid breaching the 1.5-degree limit set by the Paris Agreement. *Further acknowledging that* plastic production harms human health, with recent studies finding microplastics in the human brain, placenta, and breastmilk,

Noting that Africa is responsible for only 5% of plastic production and 4% of consumption globally. Every year, over 400 million tons of plastic are produced worldwide, and an estimated 19 to 23 tonnes end up in lakes, rivers and oceans. Overall, less than 10% of the world's annual plastic production is recycled,

Further noting that, thousands of plastic chemicals have been identified as toxic (“chemicals of concern”), due to their harmful effects on human health or the environment and that of the over 16,000 chemicals associated with plastics, fewer than 1%¹⁰ are regulated in existing global MEAs throughout their full lifecycle,

Alarmed that, many toxic chemicals, including already globally banned ones, have been shown to be present in plastics recycled for other uses,

Appreciating that, currently, there is an absence of national, regional, and international policy that articulates the necessary measures to reduce the impact on human health and the environment from agricultural plastics along their life cycles, nor one that provides guidance for their sustainable use,

Noting that vulnerable, in particular women, youth, and PWDs are generally disproportionately impacted by exposure to plastic pollution and have less access to participation in decision-making and that the groups are impacted differently by hazardous chemicals and waste and gender inequalities exacerbate these differences, they are also impacted throughout the plastics lifecycle,

Acknowledging that science, when conducted with integrity and free from external pressures, offers the most reliable insights into the complex challenge of plastic pollution and that it is through rigorous, evidence-based research that we can develop strategies that genuinely protect human health, preserve our environment, and promote sustainable development,

Appreciating that education for sustainable development is a key pillar for Africa to change behaviors,

Noting that energy efficiency plays a crucial role in climate resilience,

Committing that, the UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders, Africa stands ready to support the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) in achieving meaningful outcomes that end plastic pollution and benefit the African Region,

⁹ <https://eta.lbl.gov/publications/climate-impact-primary-plastic>

¹⁰ <http://www.basel.int/Portals/4/Basel%20Convention/docs/plastic%20waste/UNEP-FAO-CHW-RC-POPS-PUB-GlobalGovernancePlastics-2023.pdf>

We make the following submissions:

To reduce land degradation, desertification and drought in Africa, we urge member states to strengthen *institutional capacities* to monitor, assess and act on land-related risks and to communicate risk information. The information will enhance ecosystem protection and especially help communities devise locally-led initiatives to reduce land degradation, desertification and drought in Africa. We call on all member states to urgently implement policies and legal frameworks such as the Drought Protocol/Framework and to adopt the African Union Land Governance Strategy that could facilitate Major Groups and Stakeholders involvement in mitigating drought. We also call upon member states to establish a multi-stakeholder and sectoral framework community of practice that will propel knowledge sharing and best practices on land degradation, desertification and drought. Therefore, both member states and Major Groups and Stakeholders should cooperate to develop an inclusive mechanism to restore and nurture land.

With respect to research, development and design, we strongly encourage member states to invest in continuous research and to establish databanks for differentiated data for timely and actionable decision making internationally, regionally and locally. We urge member states to provide opportunities to support high-quality data gathering and analytics to evaluate the effectiveness of land degradation, desertification and drought resilience programs and to co-design mechanisms with Major Groups and Stakeholders on creating a nexus between climate action and land degradation, desertification and drought resilience programs.

Concerning education for sustainable development, we request member states to prioritize education for sustainable development especially for children and youth, women, PWDs and other vulnerable groups, in technical institutions to equip them with technical skills. This will foster the development of courses that focus on integrated landscape management with a holistic, intergenerational perspective. Further, we recommend that education for sustainable development better integrates culture and local languages in delivery of pedagogy to ensure the skills transfer to and from indigenous communities.

In relation to technology deployment and absorption, we call upon the urgency to harness the power of technology; both indigenous and emerging innovations to address the root causes of land degradation and land restoration can re-engineer transformative strategies for restoring ecosystems. Indeed, we further call attention to the recognition of the capability of geospatial technologies to provide real-time data. This will enable deployment of tools and systems to map land degraded regions, which can inform deployment and absorption of localized solutions to strengthen local innovations.

Relating to nature based solutions, we call the member states to pay a particular attention to nature-based solutions, focusing on women, children, youth and offer technology, in agroecology, agroforestry, sustainable landscape management and agricultural innovations to restore degraded lands, prevent the spread of desertification and build community resilience.

On sustainable finance for drought, desertification and land degradation, we encourage member states to work with Development partners to support and explore innovative green financing for healthy people and land. The changing land paradigms can only be regenerated and restored through partnerships and collaborative relationships through green investments portfolios to reverse desertification and land degradation. We encourage the creation of green businesses through the establishment of small and medium enterprises to ensure sustainable income generation options for alternative livelihoods and the posterity of land resilience programs.

Concerning monitoring and evaluation, Member States and Major Groups and Stakeholders should measure progress of existing programmatic interventions, such as the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018-2030 and other programs on reducing land degradation, desertification and drought resilience.

On Climate Change and relating to **building climate resilience**, capacity development at the local level is essential to enhance community resilience and adaptive capacities. It is essential for African countries to develop more responsive and relevant solutions and technologies particularly for the most vulnerable, to enhance their resilience against climate impacts. These solutions must directly address local needs to be relevant and effective, and African countries must receive the means of implementation to advance this.

To develop responsive and contextual solutions to the climate crisis, we urge African governments to value, finance and empower African climate resilience researchers, local experts and institutions who have an understanding of the specific national contexts, trusting in the accuracy and relevance of local data, and reducing dependence on data from developed countries.

We call for African governments to develop specific, measurable, and time-bound indicators in the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) that are needed to monitor progress effectively and transparently. Setting clear, time-bound targets for critical sectors such as water, food, and health is another priority. Furthermore, support and prioritization of adaptation strategies that are led by local communities, combining scientific research with indigenous practices, will result in more effective adaptation. It is also important to distinguish between loss and damage and broader adaptation goals to ensure that interventions are targeted and precise.

We strongly encourage governments to translate the COP28 Global Stocktake commitment to “double the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030” into Nationally Determined Contributions by March 2025 as it is considered the "first fuel" in clean energy transitions, reducing emissions and strengthening energy security. Energy-efficient appliances build the climate resilience of communities by lowering their exposure to climate risks and improving their overall quality of life.

Governments must set ambitious energy efficiency targets through their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and implement relevant policies, standards, and incentives to meet critical adaptation and mitigation goals on the continent. In this regard, energy efficiency emerges as a cornerstone of clean energy and cooking transitions that not only strengthens energy security for communities, including those affected by climate-induced disasters and desertification, but also

reduces greenhouse gas emissions. In that regard we also urge governments to mobilize investment and support innovation of African entrepreneurs to accelerate access to clean cooking.

Ensuring an energy-efficient transition in the cooling sector is particularly important for Africa. Additionally, there should be an emphasis on the importance of climate mitigation by accelerating action to phase down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) and HCFCs under the Montreal Protocol and the Kigali Amendment, while also reducing industrial emissions associated with their production. Addressing nitrous oxide, a significant ozone-depleting substance and greenhouse gas, is another critical area. Controlling emissions from industrial sources and enhancing international cooperation on sustainable nitrogen management through mechanisms such as the UNEP Nitrogen Working Group will be vital. This should include consistent and adequate financial assistance to Africa to support implementation. Moreover, a just and measured transition away from fossil fuels is necessary to benefit African workers, communities, and national economies. African countries should also focus on developing local economies to reduce dependency on external resources, building mechanisms that rely on local labor and innovation.

Environmental education must be prioritized to build long-term climate resilience. We strongly urge African governments to integrate climate change education into the mainstream curriculum, either as a subject or an after-school activity, which will help awaken young people to the importance of taking charge of climate action, similar to their involvement in other ethical issues. By raising awareness and integrating climate change education into schools and communities, Africans will be better equipped to understand and mitigate the impacts of climate change. These initiatives will help young people see the direct benefits of climate action, fostering a deeper commitment to climate justice.

Involving young people in the climate negotiation processes, especially those from grassroots communities, will also boost their engagement and impact. We invite African governments to collaborate with major groups and stakeholders, and grassroots movements running climate education programs should be given the opportunity to nominate youth for capacity-development workshops and climate negotiations. Member states should continue to encourage and support organizations and grassroots movements promoting climate education among youth, ensuring these initiatives receive the same level of support as other educational efforts.

To further enhance Africa's climate resilience, support for grassroots movements, major groups and stakeholders should be expanded. These groups are often well-positioned to identify community needs and ensure that local voices are heard in the planning and implementation of climate action projects while incorporating indigenous knowledge and community-driven solutions. Strengthened coordination among African negotiators and with African major groups and stakeholders is needed to present a unified stance at international forums.

On mainstreaming gender, it is imperative to focus on several key areas to ensure that gender equality and inclusivity are central to development and decision-making processes. To strengthen gender inclusion, it is crucial for governments to enhance the capacity of national gender focal points and ensure that climate policies include clear references to indigenous and other

marginalized communities. Strengthening the language around means of implementation will empower those responsible for gender issues at the national level, enabling them to advocate for and execute gender-responsive policies effectively.

Promoting gender parity in decision-making forums and local development projects is essential. This includes ensuring equal representation for women, youth, and vulnerable groups in all discussions, particularly those focused on climate change negotiations and local development initiatives. The strategic pillars of the African Gender Agenda must be fully applied and implemented to reflect true gender equity.

Leadership and governance structures must see a significant increase in the representation of women at decision-making levels. By boosting the representation of women in leadership roles related to climate action, Africa can ensure that gender perspectives are fully integrated into all levels of decision-making. It is essential to fast-track and incorporate transformative climate initiatives and financing solutions that address the inequalities faced by women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PWDs). Governments are called upon to decentralize and simplify access to climate finance, actively engaging all stakeholders and major groups in policy-making and implementation processes related to climate action.

Women must be actively involved in the design, planning, implementation, and monitoring of all climate initiatives. A clear and structured mechanism should be established to support their participation, ensuring that their perspectives are not only heard but also valued. In the media and discussion forums, creating a balanced platform that amplifies the voices of women and youth is necessary, ensuring that their contributions are recognized and impactful. Additionally, it is crucial to maintain an authentic African perspective on gender, finding a balance that fully involves all segments of society in the development process.

When it comes to climate finance, it is crucial to establish a robust and equitable framework that addresses the special needs and circumstances of Africa and other developing regions. The New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) must set a minimum quantum of USD 5.9 trillion by 2030,¹¹ reflecting the special needs and circumstances of Africa, provided as grants, not loans, reflecting the critical needs across loss and damage, adaptation, and mitigation. This amount should be seen as a baseline, without the need for justification, recognizing the disproportionate impact of climate change on developing countries that contribute the least to global emissions.

Direct and simplified access to climate finance is essential. The current processes and criteria are often too complex and burdensome for many African countries and communities which may lack the necessary knowledge and resources to navigate these systems. The NCQG should guarantee this by minimizing bureaucratic hurdles and ensuring that funds are available from public sources, not private investments driven solely by profit. Climate finance must be predictable, substantial, accessible, and responsive to the urgent needs of the most affected communities. Additionally,

¹¹ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/AILAC%20Inter-Sessional%20Submission%20AHWPM1_VF.pdf

the finance architecture should avoid exacerbating the existing debt burdens of developing countries, ensuring that financial support is non-debt creating.

The principle of "polluter pays" must be firmly embedded within the NCQG. Developed countries, which are historically the largest polluters, should lead by introducing taxes on major polluters and profiteers. This approach aligns with the principles of equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), ensuring that those most responsible for climate change bear the costs of mitigating and adapting to its effects. Furthermore, the NCQG must prohibit the use of climate finance for fossil fuel production or speculative technologies that extend the lifespan of fossil fuel assets, such as carbon capture and storage or fossil-based hydrogen. Instead, the focus should be on sustainable and resilient development, in line with the 1.5°C goal.

Carbon markets should not be considered as climate finance. The increased reliance on carbon markets as a resource for climate finance needs to be critically reevaluated. While carbon markets represent one avenue for resource mobilization, they are not a comprehensive solution for the African continent.

We call for a dedicated pillar for loss and damage that quantifies economic and non-economic losses and damages and that should be treated separately from broader adaptation goals while addressing the specific challenges posed by climate-induced losses and damages, particularly in vulnerable regions.

Goal-setting when it comes to climate finance should be independent of geopolitical influences and should be rooted in transparency, clarity, democracy and accountability. There must be a concerted effort to raise awareness about the available financing mechanisms and the accredited agencies responsible for disbursing these funds. This will make climate finance more accessible to grassroots communities, ensuring that those most affected by climate change, including women, youth, and marginalized groups, are informed about the opportunities available to them and understand how to access these resources. It is essential to also avoid structures where the developed countries dominate governance and designs policies that favor their geopolitical and economic interests.

Moreover, climate finance must integrate a human rights perspective to prevent solutions that exacerbate existing inequalities and human rights violations. COP 29 should intentionally include human rights in its agenda, potentially by establishing a Human Rights Day, to ensure that climate action is both equitable and just. The NCQG holds the potential to redefine global climate finance, ensuring that it supports sustainable development and human rights for all.

We demand financial resources that can strengthen the capacities of governments to enhance climate action. It is essential to equip ministers and government officials with the knowledge and tools needed to navigate the existing finance mechanisms successfully. The financing for such research should ideally come from the countries that are most responsible for pollution upholding the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-

RC) to ensure fair effort-sharing and equitable outcomes. This involves not only learning from best practices within Africa but also improving access to relevant documents and increasing the number of accredited agencies that can channel climate finance. Importantly, these agencies should not be exclusively government-led, ensuring a broader and more inclusive approach to resource mobilization.

When it comes to resource mobilization, it is imperative to prioritize effective implementation mechanisms and ensure that resources are directed toward their intended climate action goals, particularly in areas such as loss and damage and support for National Adaptation Plans. The focus should be on maximizing the impact of mobilized resources and preventing their diversion to other areas.

There must be deliberate efforts to develop local economies to progressively reduce dependency on external sources of funding. African countries should focus on identifying and leveraging their economic and non-economic resources, particularly natural resources, to finance climate action. Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS) play a crucial role in this process, as they can work alongside governments to identify community resources. Additionally, MGS live closer to the communities they serve and have a clear understanding of local challenges and opportunities, and can therefore help mobilize resources effectively and transparently.

Finally, it is important to reassert the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Countries historically responsible for climate change have a clear responsibility to provide adequate funding to implement the conditional elements of the Nationally Determined Contributions of developed countries. Governments should, however, be accountable for the unconditional elements of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that they have committed to finance. By doing so, we can ensure that the resources set aside for climate action are utilized effectively to support sustainable development and climate resilience in Africa.

On biodiversity and nature loss, sustained integrated approach and substantial financial investments at regional and national levels to address ecosystem restoration, we note that sustainable finance for different conventions has been a challenge in Africa, characterized by reliance on external finance and the limited reach of funds to communities on the ground that are at the frontline of land degradation, desertification, and drought effects. We demand the resolution of the debt burden on Africa to unlock funding opportunities, including debt for nature swaps.

We encourage African member states to mobilize domestic resources through innovative financing mechanisms, including promoting biodiversity economies, payment for ecosystem services, crowding in private sector finance, and national budget finance through green taxation. This approach aligns with Decision 3/COP.12 of the UNCCD, which calls for enhanced resource mobilization and innovative financing to achieve land degradation neutrality, as well as with Decision XIII/20 of the CBD, which emphasizes the need for sustainable financing from innovative sources to support biodiversity strategies. Additionally, we assert the need to link the responsibility of financing initiatives that address land degradation to those responsible for degradation, as echoed in Article 9 of the Paris Agreement.

We acknowledge the good examples of efforts that are being taken by African member states to restore degraded ecosystems. We urge governments to develop and implement policies and legislation that encourage change in food habits to reduce environmental impacts. Further, we encourage African member states to promote inclusive approaches that recognize the role of local communities and the need to build their capacities to enhance their contribution to combating land degradation, biodiversity loss, and drought. We further encourage member states to develop localized solutions that are responsive to the African context and leverage and protect Africa's rich biodiversity through protected areas and integrated landscape management approaches.

On mainstreaming land degradation neutrality targets in national policies and commitments, we welcome the ongoing consultations on the land degradation neutrality targets. We acknowledge that the land degradation neutrality targets are critical in addressing ecosystem restoration. We urge member states to commit to the principle of land degradation neutrality. We urge AMCEN to prioritize accelerated action on ecosystem restoration and biodiversity loss. We recognize that land is essential to the continent. We encourage member states to scale up interventions on land with keen efforts to address food insecurity, loss of biodiversity and land degradation.

We note that there is a need for the implementation of integrated approaches to address land degradation, including ecosystems-based mitigation and adaptation, nature-based solutions and integrated landscape management. We encourage member states to strengthen policies and action plans to integrate sustainable climate smart agriculture and sustainable water management plans. We also encourage member states to establish inclusive monitoring and reporting frameworks to regularly track progress against commitments made towards addressing land degradation, biodiversity loss and drought.

With respect to strengthening science-policy interfaces by investing in coordinated and accessible data knowledge, and measurement systems, we applaud the member states for reinforcing the need for investing in coordinated and accessible data knowledge, and measurement systems to achieve science policy interfaces. However, we note the need for science that advances sustainable solutions. We assert that research is essential in understanding levels of biodiversity loss and land degradation. With significant investment in our African research institutions, we can build the foundation for innovative solutions to address biodiversity loss and land degradation. We therefore urge member states to invest in resources and implementation of the research.

We urge member states to co-develop research studies with Major Groups and stakeholders from the initial consultation ensuring research abides to the correct methodologies to ensure effective cooperation and collaboration. We acknowledge the need for Major Groups and Stakeholders to hold member states accountable in prioritizing data to inform advocacy. We encourage member states to prioritize the installation of a long-term archiving system in order to address challenges of continuity when governments and administrations are transitioning. We encourage member

states to work closely with communities and integrate indigenous science that has not been utilized to capacity and to promote its use in parallel with modern science.

On Africa's preparation for the Sixteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, we urge African member states to expedite the process of updating their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and the development of the associated National Financing Plans for Biodiversity, while ensuring the integration of the needs of marginalized groups, including youth, women, indigenous people, and local communities.

Concerning Plastic Pollution, the African Region must prioritize the targets outlined here in order to meaningfully address plastic pollution:

The plastic lifecycle includes the production of monomers, polymers, additives, and non-intentionally added substances. To address plastic pollution and fulfill the mandate of the UNEA 5/14 resolution and AMCEN Decision 19/2, the internationally legally binding instrument being negotiated must have internationally agreed targets to reduce plastic production to sustainable levels. Limiting the overproduction of plastics for major producers, none of them located in Africa, is an essential condition to enable any other solution throughout the plastics lifecycle, including reuse, recycling, and functional waste management systems. It is also key to achieving the 1.5° target of the Paris Agreement.

About chemicals, the internationally legally binding instrument being currently negotiated must eliminate chemicals that are hazardous to human health and/or the environment to address plastic pollution and to fulfill the mandate of the UNEA 5/14 resolution and AMCEN Decision 19/2. Criteria for regulating plastic chemicals may include that the chemicals are first evaluated to see if they i) are plastics chemicals ii) have available hazard data iii) increase barriers to circularity or have known or potential adverse effects for human health and/or the environment. Criteria may be evaluated quantitatively (against specific numbers) or qualitatively (weighing different aspects), or a combination thereof.

With respect to recyclability and reusability of products, to increase non-toxic circularity, including through recyclability and reusability, it is necessary that:

- Only plastics free of toxic chemicals must be considered for reuse, refilling, repurposing, and recycling. We need control measures and prohibition on recycling plastics containing hazardous chemicals, similar to the Stockholm Convention's prohibition on the recycling of waste containing Persistent Organic Pollutants. (Article 6(d)(iii)).
- Alternative plastics, including bioplastics, should have the same safety standards, as conventional plastics.
- Transparency requirements such as labels, reporting, and product passports are needed to ensure that the plastic industry is accountable for complying with these provisions and for their claims about their products (e.g., recycled content, circularity, etc.).
- The market for reusable non-toxic products must be accelerated to transform the throwaway economy into a reuse society, by creating the enabling environment to ensure the reuse market has a stronger business case than the single-use plastics market.

- The waste hierarchy is operationalized by prioritizing prevention and reduction before non-toxic recycling and disposal and ensuring environmentally sound management practices through effective measures for reusable and recycled non-toxic products must ensure

Concerning transparency and commitment, information on all chemicals including polymers and monomers used in plastics production and as plastic ingredients should be publicly available and communicated in the supply chain, including to waste managers, recyclers, and consumers through labeling and databases. Transparency approaches allow quick identification of hazardous chemicals and substitution with safer alternatives. The list of chemicals, to be controlled/regulated throughout their lifecycle should be transparent and shared publicly and globally. The list should be based on criteria to determine which chemicals to eliminate and phase out and should also include an initial list of chemicals and polymers of concern.

On health, the “No data, no market” approach, which means that only chemicals that have been tested for safety and have publicly available toxicity data, should be allowed in plastics and allowed to be traded between parties and major groups and stakeholders. Both hazardous and risk-based approaches should be avoided as they require long, costly, and often assumptions-biased evaluations of toxicity, exposure routes and levels, chemical leaching, and risk versus benefit analyses. Therefore, a hazard-based approach is the only feasible and most health-protective approach for addressing toxic chemicals in plastics. The toxicity of a chemical is enough to warrant health-protective regulations to prevent health harm. By contrast, a risk-based approach is based on the outdated assumption that a “safe” level of exposure to toxic chemicals can be established. This assumption disregards endocrine-disrupting properties and other non-threshold toxic impacts.

With regards to financing, real action means real money: as outlined in the CRP submitted by the African Group at INC-3, a dedicated Multilateral Fund should be the principal international vehicle for providing support to developing countries for implementing their treaty obligations. This support should include direct financial support for implementation as well as robust support for capacity building and technology transfer. The Multilateral Fund should provide support on a grant basis both for enabling activities and for the incremental costs of compliance. A strong framework for means of implementation is necessary to align ambition in control measures with the financial conditions to implement them. Binding commitments to end plastic pollution should be matched with clear commitments to provide multilateral finance - stable and predictable money - to support implementation, ensure a just transition, and clear requirements to make polluters pay.

Instruments with regards to plastic pollution, different instruments should be referred to as UNEA Resolution 5/14 is underpinned by many principles of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which includes among others, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), liability and compensation, transboundary environmental justice, also known as the “no harm rule” protecting states from transboundary harm, the preventive and precautionary principle, the polluter pays principle - protection of biodiversity-protection of land degradation. The implementation of the Bamako Convention should be strengthened to protect the continent from the plastic transboundary movement and provided with adequate means of implementation including, but not limited to, financing.

Concerning Plastics and agriculture, we call upon African Ministers to support the adoption of the Voluntary Code of Conduct on the Sustainable Use of Plastics in Agriculture at the upcoming Committee on Agriculture of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as a policy blueprint to guide national, regional and international policy development, as well as industry commitment and action to ensure the safe and sustainable use of agri-plastics into the future. This process would be complementary to work happening in parallel to strengthen existing governance and establish a new legally binding instrument on plastic pollution. We further urge the ministers to emphasize the inclusion of Agriculture as a dedicated program of work in the legally binding treaty.

Just Transition for affected communities must be secured, including the informal sector, waste pickers, and the small and medium African businesses currently relying on plastics. This includes financial support, official acknowledgment of their rights, and full participation in policymaking. Waste pickers groups and waste workers in cooperative settings must also be prioritized in the development of waste management mechanisms and reuse systems. The valuable role of waste pickers in society must be recognised and their health protected and fair earnings subsidized by the polluters.

With respect to vulnerable people, to address the lack of inclusion, in particular women, youth, and PWDs, we must fast-track mainstreaming gender and vulnerable groups in policy processes, promote inclusion in the waste management sectors, strengthen the participation of vulnerable groups in decision-making, and provide equal opportunities and recognition.

Concerning research on the science of plastic pollution, we urge ministers, as stewards of our Continent's future, with the profound responsibility of making decisions that will shape the health and well-being of millions of Africans and safeguard our environment for generations to come, to prioritize and consider independent, unbiased and best available science as the cornerstone of their decision-making processes. We further urge the ministers to embrace the best available science and thus ensure that our policies and actions are guided not by short term interests but by the long-term welfare of our people and our planet. In this critical moment, let us commit to fostering an environment where scientific inquiry can thrive, uninfluenced by political or economic interests, and where decisions are made based on the best evidence available. Only then can we fulfill our collective responsibility to protect the health of our citizens and the environment and end plastic pollution.

On education and behavior change, official programs should involve raising awareness of the impact of plastic pollution. Furthermore, it can reflect the ecological ancestral attitude to preserve the environment. Additionally, school curricula across Africa should embed eco-behavioural practices in the early stages of learning to encourage lifelong sustainable practices. The role of public leaders and influencers on the African continent in shaping the behaviors of the public should be harnessed to portray plastic use reduction in our daily lives.

On the United Nations Environment Assembly, we support the proposed draft theme of UNEA-7 on 'Accelerating Just Transitions for People and Planet', which adequately connects with the Sustainable Development Agenda the theme provides for inclusive participation, socio-economic development and the opportunity for UNEP to focus on enabling conditions for the implementation of existing multilateral environmental agreements. We further acknowledge the strengths and opportunities that are provided for by the other two proposed themes namely: (i) Shaping Tomorrow: Ways to create a habitable and sustainable planet; and (ii) New frontiers and solutions for a greener tomorrow. We urge member states as they look towards UNEA7 not to lose sight of the need to implement the resolutions of UNEA-6 and the previous UNEAs.

With respect to financing, we call upon member states to set up local financing mechanisms at national level for innovative financial mobilization for tackling drought, land degradation, desertification and pollution amongst other environmental issues. We further call upon member states to develop strong meaningful partnerships both in capacity building and technological support with inclusive, transparent participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders, to attract investments on the environment. We are also calling on member states to work together with the group of friends, especially the Major Groups and Stakeholders, in developing common understandings on emerging environmental issues and processes.

Concerning implementation, we call upon member states to accelerate implementation measures and knowledge sharing of UNEA-6 and previous UNEA resolutions at local level. Similarly, we call upon the continued robust commitment from member states and major groups and stakeholders for relevant ongoing environmental processes to be finalized by UNEA-7.

Concerning Multilateral Environmental Agreements, we call upon member states to enhance implementation of global and regional environmental frameworks including in particular the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.