

Q and A

What is the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment?

The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment sets the environmental agenda in Africa. Established in 1985, the Conference brings together African governments, institutions and development partners to craft policies aimed at tackling the continent's most pressing environmental issues.

The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment holds its ordinary sessions once every two years and special sessions between ordinary sessions when necessary. The Africa Office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) serves as the secretariat for the Conference.

Membership

All 54 African countries are members of the Conference.

What is the role of the Conference's Bureau?

The Bureau of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment is responsible for the implementation of the decisions that are taken by the Conference and for maintaining relations between the Conference and its Member States and observers between the sessions. The Bureau meets once a year and at any other time that circumstances warrant. The members of the Bureau are elected by the Conference at every ordinary session.

Why does the Conference matter?

Like many parts of the world, Africa is battling a range of environmental challenges. Land is being degraded at an alarming rate, making it harder for the continent to feed itself. Biodiversity loss is destroying the continent's natural wealth, ruining ecosystems that underpin every single aspect of life on the continent. Global warming is already causing human suffering on the continent as climate change hits the most vulnerable the hardest. A hotter planet will only make it harder to end hunger and poverty, or achieve other goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. Tackling these issues is all the more urgent because the population of sub-Saharan Africa is set to double by 2050, placing a further strain on the region.

Many of Africa's socioeconomic challenges can be addressed by tackling its environmental issues. Ecosystems straddle national boundaries, rivers cross borders and the damage done to one country's natural wealth reverberates across the continent. This is what makes the Conference's ability to enhance regional co-

operation and develop common environmental policies so important in the fight to boost prosperity and enhance well-being in the region.

Thanks to decades of hard work identifying issues, developing solutions and crafting better policies, the continent now has an excellent blueprint for environmental action. The path to sustainable economic growth and a more prosperous Africa is well lit.

What outcomes are expected this year?

It is hoped that the 17th session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, which will be held in Durban, South Africa, 11–15 November 2019, will inspire and mobilize actions that lead to a greater accounting of the progress made so far and the gaps that remain. A robust monitoring system would help spot shortcomings and ensure that the decisions made at the Conference are properly implemented. While pockets of success exist across the continent, there is an urgent need to account for progress made.

Member States are also being urged to formally communicate their plan on how they intend to clear the arrears and sustain their contributions to the General Trust Fund of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, which is one of the mechanisms available for kick-starting financing for the implementation of the body's decisions.

It is also hoped that ministers will support a call for the creation of a cross-sectoral taskforce in each country to ensure that environmental policies are harmonized across government departments.

How is the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment related to UN Environment Assembly?

The UN Environment Assembly is the world's highest decision-making body on the environment. The Conference and its Bureau work with UNEP to ensure that the African Group of negotiators present an effective and unified front at the Assembly. Decisions made by the Conference form the common negotiating positions of Africa at the UN Environment Assembly.

The most recent Assembly took place in March 2019. Africa sponsored several resolutions that were adopted by the Assembly: addressing environmental challenges through sustainable business practices; innovations in sustainable rangelands and pastoralism; innovations on biodiversity and land degradation; and the poverty-environment nexus.