



AMCEN



AU



Distr.: General
21 June 2023

Original: English
English and French only

African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

African Ministerial Conference on the Environment Nineteenth session

Addis Ababa, 14–16 August 2023

Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda*

Progress in the implementation of decisions of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and consideration of emerging environmental issues: African Forum of Environment Protection Agencies

African Forum of Environment Protection Agencies

Note by the secretariat

1. Most Governments in Africa have established, in one form or another, institutions whose mandate is to develop, implement, and ensure compliance with and enforcement of national environmental laws and policies. The institutions may be environmental protection agencies, national environmental management authorities, or environment ministries, commissions, or departments; in the present note, the term “environmental protection agency” is understood to refer to all such institutions.
2. Environmental protection agencies are primary technical leads for environmental matters in their countries and play a critical role in enhancing efforts to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. They are custodians of environmental data, information, and knowledge resources at the country level, as well as leads for compliance and enforcement matters. They are also important sounding boards for the identification of national and regional environmental priorities.
3. Environmental protection agencies individually and collectively influence international, regional and national environment policies. They play a critical role in driving evidence-based policy- and decision-making. They also optimize implementation by overseeing the transmission of information about proven workable approaches and solutions that can further enhance implementation; such transmission is a critical need for the African region.
4. Environmental protection agencies face challenges in implementing multilateral environmental agreements, specifically because of duplication of efforts. Harmonizing the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements across Africa is of critical importance, with environmental protection agencies playing an important role in enhancing synergies, coherence and effectiveness and preventing duplication of efforts.
5. The creation of a formal regional forum of environmental protection agencies will facilitate collaboration, including the sharing of country-level best practices and experiences in environmental management, the exchange of knowledge, and the synergistic implementation of multilateral environmental agreements. The Forum will also take advantage of opportunities available for the heads of environmental protection agencies to contribute to the framing of regional and global environmental policies in order to address shared environmental challenges.

* AMCEN/19/EGM/1.

6. The inaugural meeting on the need to establish a forum of environmental protection agencies, organized by the Regional office for Africa of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), was held online on 27 May 2022. Participants agreed to establish a forum in which environmental protection agencies could discuss technical matters and strengthen their technical collaboration with UNEP.

7. At the resumed eighteenth ordinary session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, in decision 18/1, it was agreed to establish a forum bringing together heads of environmental protection agencies in Africa. The mandate of the Forum is to share experiences, knowledge exchange and best practices; enhance the science-policy interface; mobilize partnerships, and address technical and operational challenges. In addition, the decision urged member States to support environmental protection agencies in implementing decisions and resolutions adopted at the regional and global levels. The decision further called for promotion of utilization of appropriate and innovative methods for integrating, manipulating, and interpreting scientific data and information to enable sound policy and decision making as well as for development planning.

8. The Regional Office for Africa of UNEP, in collaboration with the Rwanda Environment Management Authority, hosted the first roundtable meeting on the topic of the Forum under the theme “Strengthening sound science to accelerate actions to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste” in Kigali on 7 and 8 March 2023.¹

9. The objective of the meeting was to discuss and agree on the nature, structure and operational modalities of the Forum and establish a common framework for scaling up the science-policy interface to address environmental challenges in Africa.

10. The meeting was attended by 80 participants from 33 African countries, including heads of environmental protection agencies, senior officials, directors of cleaner production centres, high-level representatives from Rwanda, and staff of UNEP as the provider of secretariat functions for the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

11. The meeting in Kigali showcased good practices drawn from national case studies in various thematic areas. Participants agreed to develop a platform for knowledge and data management based on sound science that would inform policy- and decision-making.

12. The outcomes of the meeting included:

- (a) Development of a blueprint for the operations of the Forum;
- (b) A decision to establish a digital platform for the Forum that would serve as a science-policy interface for sharing best practices and addressing environmental challenges in Africa;
- (c) A decision to host the secretariat of the Forum under the secretariat of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment;
- (d) A decision that the Forum would convene annually and report on its deliberations to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

13. The meeting also began to implement decision 18/1 of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment on the establishment of the African Forum of Environment Protection Agencies in Africa by, among others:

- (a) Development of strategic pillars;
- (b) Development of the mandate, vision, mission, values, and governance structures;
- (c) Development of a programme on environmental compliance and enforcement;
- (d) Development of a strategy and action plan for the Forum for the period 2023–2027.

14. To further advance the establishment of the Forum, elections were held to constitute the bureau of the Forum. The bureau was elected as follows, with the five subregions of Africa represented:

- (a) Chair – Rwanda, representing East Africa;
- (b) Deputy chair – Gabon, representing Central Africa;

¹ The report of the meeting is available at https://indico.un.org/event/1004125/attachments/9085/25767/Report%20of%20the%20EPA%20Roundtable%20Meeting%20-Final_Version.pdf.

- (c) Rapporteur – Zambia, representing Southern Africa;
- (d) Member – Niger, representing West Africa.

The member representing North Africa is to be agreed on in due course.

15. Under the strategy and action plan of the Forum for 2023–2027 on sharing knowledge and best practices for science-policy work, a technical review meeting was held in Cairo from 22 to 24 May 2023. The meeting was attended by 30 heads and officials of environmental protection agencies, 19 representatives of international organizations, specialized research centres as well as think tanks from across Africa on UNEP flagship scientific assessment reports, namely the *Africa Environment Outlook for Business* and *Africa's Atlas of Natural Capital*. The two reports will be used to inform policy and investment choices at the national and regional levels in Africa.

16. The next steps are:

- (a) To initiate development of programmes and fundraising for the work of the Forum;
- (b) To develop the digital platform to house the online database, knowledge, and data centre;
- (c) To strengthen the capacity of environmental protection agencies in different thematic areas to support the work of the Forum.

17. A blueprint for the Forum is set out in annex I to the present note.

18. The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, at its nineteenth session, is requested:

- (a) To endorse the blueprint for the Forum;
- (b) To affirm its commitment to supporting the work of the Forum.

Annex I

Blueprint for the African Forum of Environment Protection Agencies

Introduction

1. The success of the work of environmental protection agencies in Africa will depend on a combination of factors including political will, effective policies, and enforcement programmes, as well as a commitment to building strong partnerships with all stakeholders involved in protecting the environment and sustainable development.
2. The following blueprint for the African Forum of Environment Protection Agencies presents a multi-faceted approach designed to foster regional cooperation and collaboration. By working together, environmental protection agencies will contribute to the promotion of sustainable development and to the protection of Africa's environmental and natural resources for current and future generations. The planned key features of the Forum are outlined in the following 10 sections.

I. Strategic pillars

3. The following strategic pillars will be the basis of the African Forum of Environment Protection Agencies and will guide its work:
 - (a) Strengthening national and regional leadership in sustainable environmental management;
 - (b) Fostering cooperation and partnership in implementation of environmental commitments;
 - (c) Enhancing exchange of information, science, policies, knowledge, best practices, and capacity development;
 - (d) Promotion of compliance with and enforcement of environmental requirements;
 - (e) Identification and acting on Africa's emerging environmental issues and priorities, including those of a transboundary nature.

II. Vision and mission

4. The *vision* of the Forum will be to strengthen the leadership of environmental protection authorities in Africa in the areas of implementation, monitoring, compliance and enforcement.
5. The *mission* of the Forum will be to protect, manages and safeguard the environment while fostering sustainable use of natural resources and cooperation and collaboration with other relevant stakeholders.

III. Values

6. The Forum will adhere to the following values:
 - (a) *Dedication*: Consolidating and strengthening the administration of environmental protection agencies;
 - (b) *Integrity*: Transparency and accountability to promote good environmental governance;
 - (c) *Unity*: Contributing towards a better Africa through appreciation of the various environmental policies and programmes;
 - (d) *Diversity and inclusiveness*: Ensuring equity, mutual respect and courtesy in the fulfilment of the Forum's mandate;
 - (e) *Professionalism*: Ensuring responsibility, reliability, competence, expertise and ethics.

IV. Mandate

7. The mandates of the Forum are contained in decision 18/1, paragraph (e) of the Africa Ministerial Conference on the Environment on enhancing the role of environmental protection agencies in Africa. To elaborate the above decision, the following are the key mandates:

- (a) Improve the capacity of environmental protection agencies in Africa to achieve their objectives, including influencing implementation of environmental commitments;
- (b) Advance the role of environmental protection agencies in Africa's environmental governance and sustainable development;
- (c) Produce and disseminate knowledge on implementation of outcomes of national, regional and global commitments;
- (d) Develop and support cooperation and collaboration within and between African countries and development partners;
- (e) Strengthen compliance with and enhance enforcement of environmental commitments;
- (f) Support evidence-based policy development, capacity-building and benchmarking.

V. Contribution of African ministers for the environment

8. With the mandate from the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, the Forum aims to contribute to:

- (a) Implementing or achieving the development agendas of the Africa Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, Agenda 2030, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and other global and regional environment outcomes;
- (b) Solving legacy and emerging environmental gaps and taking advantage of opportunities through innovative solutions.

VI. Governance structure

9. The following governance structure is designed to promote efficient and effective operation.

A. Membership

10. The Forum will be composed of national institutions responsible for protecting the environment in Africa: national environmental management agencies, environmental protection authorities and directorates of environment of the African Member States.

11. Each Member State will be represented by its head or representative of the national institutions responsible for protecting the environment.

12. Each Member State will have one vote.

B. Meetings

13. Meetings of the Forum will be held as follows:

- (a) Annual meetings or other regular meetings (the modalities of which will be determined by the Forum) with a view to developing and coordinating the programme of work of the Forum;
- (b) Ad hoc working group meetings to discuss various thematic issues.

14. The meetings of the Forum will be subject to the rules of procedure of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

15. The meetings may be held in person, online or in a hybrid format.

16. National technical advisors from different thematic areas may attend the meetings of the Forum.

C. Appointment and functions of officials

1. Bureau

17. The bureau will comprise five members.

18. The five members will be elected from the five regions of Africa on a rotational basis and in accordance with the African Union system.
19. The members of the bureau will serve for a two-year period.
20. The chair, the vice-chair and the rapporteur will be appointed from among the five members, while the remaining two other members may act in their absence.
21. Nominations from within the regions will be made on a rotating basis.
22. The Bureau will meet annually or at such times as may be decided.
23. The Bureau will work with the secretariat to ensure the smooth operation of the Forum.
24. The Bureau will report regularly on the progress of its work to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

2. Functions of the chair, the vice-chair and the rapporteur

25. The chairperson will coordinate the Forum's work; convene meetings in consultation with the bureau and the secretariat; prepare draft agendas for Forum meetings; and serve as the spokesperson of the Forum.
26. The vice-chair will serve as acting chair in the absence of the chair.

D. Establishment and functions of the secretariat

27. There is established a secretariat of the Forum.
28. The secretariat will support the Forum in its operations, assist in strengthening its capacity, mobilize technical and financial support, and provide secretariat services.
29. The secretariat of the Forum will, at least initially, be based at the UNEP Regional Office for Africa in accordance with decision 18/1 (e) of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment requesting UNEP to provide support to the Forum and its programme of work.

E. Observers

30. The Forum has the option to invite observers to attend either a portion or the entirety of its meetings.

F. Institutional linkages

31. The Forum will, through the chair, coordinate and cooperate on important shared areas of concern with other institutions such as the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, the African Union, the African Development Bank, and other institutions and bodies such as regional economic communities, United Nations entities, including but not limited to UNEP, the Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, development partners, civil society organizations, research organizations, national authorities, and the private sector.

VII. Platform for the science-policy interface of the Forum

32. The Forum will establish a dynamic platform for daily information and data sharing, enhancing the science-policy interface for informed decision-making and governance.
33. This platform will facilitate efficient information and knowledge management and bolster monitoring and evaluation for sustainable and integrated environmental management. Moreover, it will strengthen interactions between environmental protection agencies and other sectors to fulfil environmental commitments.
34. The platform will offer up-to-date data, tools, standards and methodologies, creating a community of practice for peer learning, training events and materials.
35. It will also serve as a hub for sharing opportunities such as resource mobilization, growth prospects and training initiatives.
36. The environmental protection agencies will be responsible for providing and regularly updating information concerning their countries. The Regional Office for Africa of UNEP will support the management of the platform.

VIII. Environmental compliance and enforcement

37. The Forum will have a programme on environmental compliance and enforcement, as this is one of the principal functions of environmental protection agencies. The programme will focus on promoting mechanisms for effective implementation of environmental laws, addressing transboundary challenges and exchange of ideas and experiences as well as capacity-building in compliance and enforcement.

38. The activities under this programme will include:

- (a) Promoting voluntary and non-voluntary compliance:
 - (i) Strengthening environmental management systems, including self-auditing, monitoring systems, record-keeping, reporting, codes of practice, and awareness and education programmes;
 - (ii) Support for compliance monitoring and strengthening of enforcement and compliance strategies at the country level;
 - (iii) Enhancing the human and institutional capacity of regulatory entities to monitor compliance, including training for environmental inspectors, customs, police and prosecutors in environmental inspection, advocacy, auditing, enforcement, evidence gathering and prosecution;
 - (iv) Enhancing compliance assistance efforts such as the use of national cleaner production centres; promotion of the use of disincentives such as environmental performance bonds; promotion of the use of permitting and licensing systems, environmental restoration orders, the polluter and user pay principle;
- (b) Promotion and dissemination of operational manuals, guidebooks and guidelines relating to environmental compliance promotion and enforcement;
- (c) Organizing training and train-the-trainers programmes for regulatory and enforcement entities, industry, financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other private-sector organizations;
- (d) Promoting collective agreement on enforcement actions, including regional efforts to ban plastic pollution, among others;
- (e) Transboundary aspects such as pollution, ecosystems, regional environmental standards and harmonization of policies and legislation.

IX. Financial mechanism

39. The objective of the financial mechanism is to mobilize funds to support the provision of technical assistance to assist countries in compliance and enforcement, develop strong knowledge and data management systems, and support related activities.

40. Key elements that may govern the financial mechanism include:

- (a) *A cost-effective approach*: The financial mechanism will use the most cost-effective and efficient options for its operations;
- (b) *A country-driven approach*: National resources will be used to implement the activities of the Forum, such as back-end data management and the establishment and activities of the country chapters of the Forum;
- (c) *In-kind contributions from Governments, the scientific community, other knowledge holders and stakeholders*: Such contributions will be key to its success, and will be consistent with the functions, operating principles and institutional arrangements of the Forum;
- (d) *Resource mobilization through partnerships*: technical capacity for developing bankable projects; develop strategies to fundraise from potential partners;
- (e) *Voluntary equal contributions*: Each environmental protection agency will be encouraged to make voluntary contributions, for example, by supporting the attendance of country technical advisors at meetings and supporting logistical arrangements (by providing venues, transportation, etc.).

X. Strategy and action plan

41. The following strategic objectives are defined for the next five years (2023–2027):
- (a) Ensuring a financially sustainable and robust Forum;
 - (b) Fostering intersectoral policy coherence in implementation of environment policies and actions;
 - (c) Driving regionalization through bilateral and regional cooperation in Africa on environment matters;
 - (d) Strengthening the capacity of environmental protection agencies to ensure current and future compliance and enforcement with regard to environmental matters in Africa;
 - (e) Providing data and knowledge regarding best practices in environmental matters.

Annex II

Proposed action plan for the Forum for the period 2023–2027¹

<i>No.</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Related activities</i>	<i>Performance measurement</i>	<i>Estimated budget for 2023</i>	<i>Estimated budget for 2024</i>	<i>Agency responsible</i>
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information effectively managed, disseminated and exchanged at the national and regional levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of an environmental protection agency platform for information collection and dissemination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey of information needs Development/strengthening of national environmental information systems Training in use of the environmental protection agency platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of surveys conducted Number of national information systems developed or strengthened Number of key enforcement staff trained in use of the environmental protection agency platform Level of adoption and use of the environmental protection agency platform by trained staff Number of training workshops reports 	200 000	200 000	Secretariat/ environmental protection agency/partners
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhanced implementation of global, regional and national obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of national agendas for the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish formal working relationships with secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements to implement outcomes Hold workshops on the obligations of the parties, including reporting requirements of multilateral environmental agreements Hold training events on developing national inventories of multilateral environmental agreements Capacity-building activities for development of national expertise in implementation of multilateral environmental agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of formal working relationships initiated with secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements on implementation of outcomes Number of training workshops held on developing national inventories of multilateral environmental agreements Number of workshops held on the obligations of parties, including reporting requirements of multilateral environmental agreements Number of officers of national expertise on implementation of multilateral environmental agreements trained 	120 000	120 000	Environmental protection agencies/ secretariat/ secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements

¹ All dollar amounts are in United States dollars.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Related activities</i>	<i>Performance measurement</i>	<i>Estimated budget for 2023</i>	<i>Estimated budget for 2024</i>	<i>Agency responsible</i>
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperation between environmental protection agencies and the United Nations country teams enhanced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of strategies and action plans to mainstream environmental issues in the work of United Nations country teams and national development policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training in provision of national environmental summaries, Support provided in the preparation of Common Country Assessments and UNSDCF's Enhance the UNEP country focal point system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of training events held in provision of national environmental summaries Number of workshops held for the preparation of common country assessments and UNSDCF's Number of countries receiving support through the UNEP country focal point system 	200 000	200 000	Secretariat/ environmental protection agency/other United Nations entities
4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental compliance and enforcement promoted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of collective agreements on compliance and enforcement actions Promotion of voluntary and non-voluntary compliance programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote manuals and guidelines relating to environmental compliance promotion and enforcement Hold training and train-the-trainers events on compliance and enforcement Enhance compliance assistance programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of manuals and guidelines relating to environmental compliance promotion and enforcement promoted Number of training and train-the-trainers events on compliance and enforcement held Number of compliance assistance programmes held 	150 000	150 000	Secretariat/ environmental protection agency/partners
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative partnerships strengthened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development partners Collaboration with stakeholders, judiciary, legislature, ministries, departments and agencies, civil society and the private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize consultative meetings with stakeholders on environmental management Prepare tools and methodologies for use by the stakeholders Develop collaborative partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of consultative meetings held with stakeholders on environmental management Number of tools and methodologies prepared for use by stakeholders Number of collaborative partnerships 	100 000	100 000	Secretariat/ environmental protection agency/partners

<i>No.</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Related activities</i>	<i>Performance measurement</i>	<i>Estimated budget for 2023</i>	<i>Estimated budget for 2024</i>	<i>Agency responsible</i>
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of the Forum as a vehicle for facilitating environmental management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding strategies developed and available at the country and regional levels Resource mobilization strategy for the functioning of the Forum and its secretariat Meetings of the Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop national and regional project proposals for environmental management for submission to potential donors for funding Develop and submit to donors a project proposal for holding Forum meetings and for the operations of the secretariat Hold the second, third and fourth regional meetings of the Forum Prepare fact sheets, briefings papers, booklets, press kits on the Forum Carry out benchmarking visits on best practices in environmental management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of programmes/projects developed and submitted to donors for funding Number of programmes/projects funded Number of joint programmes/ projects implemented Number of donors approached Level of funding mobilized Number of Forum meetings held Number of fact sheets, briefings papers, booklets and press kits prepared about the Forum Number of benchmarking visits on best practices in environmental management 	150 000	150 000	Secretariat/ environmental protection agency/partners

Abbreviation: UNSDCF – United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.