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English and French only*African Ministerial Conference on the Environment***African Ministerial Conference on the Environment**
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Abidjan, 3–6 September 2024**Raising ambition for accelerating action on drought resilience and combating land degradation and desertification*****Note by the secretariat****I. Introduction**

1. This note highlights the need for member States in Africa and other stakeholders to raise ambitious and collaborative actions to tackle desertification, land degradation and drought in the continent. Land degradation, desertification, and drought pose significant threats to Africa's socio-economic development, food security, and environmental sustainability, among others. Despite Africa's steady efforts to address desertification, land degradation, and drought, the region is still facing significant challenges affecting its environment, people as well as its economies: an estimated 65% of Africa's land is already degraded, affecting over 400 million people.¹

2. This note explores land as an asset in Africa and the multifaceted impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought across critical areas. Additionally, the note examines current national, regional and global initiatives aimed at mitigating desertification, land degradation, and drought, and achieving land degradation neutrality. The note will also analyse Africa's strategy ahead of the Sixteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The note concludes by discussing opportunities for strengthening these efforts and achieving long-term environmental and societal well-being in Africa.

II. Land as an asset in Africa

3. Land is one of the most critical assets in Africa, playing a central role in the continent's economic development, social stability, and environmental sustainability. Land is the most important asset for the majority of Africans, with over 60-70% of the population living in rural areas and 80% depending on agriculture for their sustenance². Africa has abundant arable land, estimated at over 202 million hectares³, which could be sustainably developed to dramatically reduce poverty, boost growth, create jobs, and promote shared prosperity. Sustainable management of land resources in Africa offer numerous benefits, including enhanced carbon sequestration, improved food security, preservation of biodiversity, climate resilience, and prevention of drought and desertification.

4. Sustainable land management, supported by robust conservation initiatives, are essential for addressing the continent's environmental challenges and promoting long-term socio-economic development. It. The agriculture sector employs about 60% of the Africa's workforce and accounts for

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

¹ <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb6111en>

² UNCCD, 2022. Summary for Decision Makers. Global Land Outlook, second edition. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Bonn

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/publication/securing-africas-land-for-shared-prosperity>

approximately 23% of its Gross Domestic Product⁴. However, about 281.6 million people in Africa faced hunger in 2020, a figure that has been increasing due to various factors including land degradation and climate change.⁵ Africa faces significant soil degradation challenges, with approximately 65% of the continent's arable land affected by degradation, impacting agricultural productivity and food security.⁶ Soil degradation costs Africa approximately 68 billion United States Dollars per year, highlighting the economic imperative for sustainable soil management and governance to support food security and economic development.⁷ Sustainable practices ensure the long-term viability of food production systems.

5. Sustainable land management is fundamental to achieving food security in Africa and the livelihoods for millions of people. It increases the resilience of agricultural systems to climate shocks. In the Horn of Africa, improved water management practices, such as building check dams and restoring wetlands, have mitigated the effects of drought and ensured availability of water for agricultural and domestic use. According to the International Food Policy Research Institute, farmers practicing conservation agriculture in Kenya have reported yield increases of up to 60%⁸. These practices not only boost productivity but also improve the nutritional quality of crops. By prioritizing land conservation.

6. One of the primary strategies for land conservation in Africa is to support Africa's rich biodiversity through its protected areas, savannas, forests, and deserts. According to the World Database of Protected Areas, Africa has designated over 6,000 protected areas, covering approximately 17% of the continent's land area.⁹ These areas serve as safe havens for endangered species and help maintain ecological processes. Africa's forests, which cover approximately 624 million hectares, sequester around 1.5 billion tons of CO₂ annually.¹⁰ Effective management of these ecosystems, including reforestation and afforestation projects, can significantly enhance their carbon storage capacity. Conservation initiatives, such as the Great Green Wall initiative aims to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land across the Sahel region, potentially sequestering 250 million tons of carbon and creating 10 million green jobs by 2030.¹¹ These efforts not only mitigate climate change but also provide socio-economic benefits.

7. Sustainable land management is also key to enhancing diversity of soil microorganisms that are essential to healthy soils and promote water purification. Soil biodiversity is important as it forms the basis for improving and sustaining agricultural production to ensure food security. Besides, soil biodiversity also contributes to climate change mitigation and adaptation. A healthy soil stores more carbon than that stored in the atmosphere and vegetation combined. Healthy soils also control and buffer and subdue pathogens that could be harmful to animal, plant and human health. Furthermore, soil biodiversity is the first line of defence from land pollutants such as oil spills and chemicals such as pesticides. For instance, it has been shown that soil microbials can bioremediate oil spills by rendering up to 85% of the oil innocuous¹².

8. The value of land in sustainable development is therefore clear with an estimated 1.4 trillion United States Dollars in production value forecasted globally by adopting sustainable land and water management practice.¹³ For example, approximately 4 million hectares of degraded land within "strict intervention zones" have been rehabilitated under the framework of the Great Green Wall initiative. 4% of the Wall's ultimate target of restoring 100 million hectares, will support reduction of the immanent threats of desertification and drought.¹⁴

⁴ FAO (2021) Report on Africa – Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021. Statistics and trends accessed at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7496en/cb7496en.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.fao.org/global-soil-partnership/areas-of-work/soil-governance/en/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ IFPRI. (2021). International Food Policy Research Institute.

⁹ UNEP-IUCN- World Database of Protected Areas (WDPA)

¹⁰ FAO. (2020). The State of the World's Forests

¹¹ <https://www.unccd.int/our-work/ggwi>

¹² FAO, Global Soils Partnership (2020)

¹³ Drought in Numbers 2022: <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/drought-numbers>

¹⁴ Drought in Numbers 2022: <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/drought-numbers>

III. Impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought in Africa

9. The drivers of desertification, land degradation and drought in Africa are diverse. Unsustainable agricultural practices, such as overgrazing, deforestation, and overuse of fertilizers, are major drivers. These practices strip the land of its natural nutrients and leave it vulnerable to erosion. climate change, with its erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged droughts, exacerbating the already fragile ecosystems. An estimated 65% of Africa's land is already degraded, affecting over 400 million people.¹⁵

10. Land degradation is deeply intertwined with social and economic factors. Poverty and inadequate security of land tenure often drive communities to exploit the land beyond its capacity. Land degradation affects the poor the most since they heavily depend on natural resources.¹⁶ In the 2015 report of the Economics of Land Degradation it is was estimated that the cost of inaction against poverty induced land degradation accounts for about 665 billion Purchasing Power parity (PPP) United States Dollars in present value, which is equivalent to 11.3 billion United States Dollars per year¹⁷. For the 42 sub-Saharan countries in the study, the benefits of action against nutrient depletion caused by soil erosion accounted for about 2.83 trillion Purchasing Power parity United States Dollars, or 71.8 billion United States Dollars per year. Thus, taking action against soil erosion from the 105 million hectares of croplands in the 42 countries over the next 15 years (from 2015) would generate benefits of about 2.48 trillion PPP United States Dollars or 62.4 billion United States Dollars per year in net present value¹⁸.

11. Rapid population growth also puts immense pressure on limited land resources. These complex interactions create a vicious cycle of degradation, poverty, and food insecurity. The consequences of land degradation are far-reaching and devastating. Livelihoods are lost as fertile lands turn barren, forcing people to migrate in search of better opportunities. Water resources dwindle as degraded soils lose their ability to retain moisture. Biodiversity suffers as natural habitats are destroyed, disrupting delicate ecological balances. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services estimates that land degradation negatively affects 3.2 billion people, most of whom live in developing countries, and that degradation and associated biodiversity loss cost the global economy 10% of Gross Domestic Product per year. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 22% of the largest share of the total global cost of land degradation.¹⁹

12. Africa's increasing energy demands are also a driver of land degradation. Africa's energy demands that are predominantly met through biomass and fossil fuels, exert significant pressure on land resources. The reliance on biomass for cooking and heating leads to deforestation and soil erosion, especially in rural areas where access to alternative energy sources is limited²⁰. According to the International Energy Agency, over 60% of Africa's population lacks access to electricity, driving the unsustainable use of natural resources for energy production²¹. Furthermore, mining, a crucial economic driver in many African countries, directly impacts land through deforestation, soil erosion, and contamination of water sources with toxic chemicals. The extraction of minerals such as gold, diamonds, and uranium often occur in ecologically sensitive areas, leading to habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity²². The Global Land Outlook reports that mining activities are a significant contributor to land degradation in over 100 countries worldwide²³. In countries like Ghana and South Africa, mining activities have left scars on the landscape, altering ecosystems irreversibly. Another key driver is infrastructure development, including roads, dams, and agricultural expansions, that fragment habitats and disrupt natural drainage systems, increasing soil erosion and sedimentation in rivers²⁴. The construction of dams for hydroelectric power alters river flows and affects downstream communities and ecosystems, leading to land degradation and reduced agricultural productivity.

¹⁵ <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb6111en>

¹⁶ Economics of Land Degradation and Improvement – A Global Assessment for Sustainable Development, Nkonya, Ephraim et al

¹⁷ ELD-UNEP (2015). Economics of Land Degradation in Africa

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Economics of Land Degradation and Improvement – A Global Assessment for Sustainable Development, Nkonya, Ephraim et al.

²⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2020: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/6e2d2772-5976-4671-9e2a-0b2ad87cb646/content>

²¹ International Energy Agency (IEA). (2021). World Energy Outlook 2021. Retrieved from IEA

²² UNEP. (2020). Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in the Amazon. Retrieved from UNEP

²³ UNCCD. (2017). Global Land Outlook. Retrieved from UNCCD

²⁴ UNEP. (2020). Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in the Amazon. Retrieved from UNEP

13. On the other hand, desertification in Africa has significant economic, social, and environmental impacts, affecting the livelihoods of millions of people, posing challenges to sustainable development. Each year, Africa loses an estimated 4.4 million hectares of productive land to desertification. In the same breadth 45% of Africa's land area is affected by desertification, with 55% of this area at high or very high risk of further degradation.²⁵ The United Nations estimates that 68.1 million people in Africa were undernourished in 2020, with desertification reducing agricultural productivity and contributing to this figure.²⁶ The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification estimates that desertification leads to the loss of 27,000 species each year.²⁷

14. The economic and social consequences of desertification are closely tied to issues of security and stability, making it crucial to address desertification for long-term development in the region. Desertification disrupts traditional farming practices, leading to food shortages, increased poverty, and heightened vulnerability to climate-related shocks. Additionally, desertification contributes to resource-based conflicts, as communities and even nations may compete for diminishing resources, particularly water and land. Such conflicts can undermine stability and impede sustainable development efforts. A comprehensive and coordinated approach that integrates sustainable land management, water resource management, and conflict prevention is essential for achieving security and stability, thereby laying the foundation for sustainable development in the region.

15. The World Bank estimates that up to 216 million people could be forced to migrate by 2050, largely due to drought, together with other factors such as water scarcity, declining crop productivity, sea-level rise and overpopulation.²⁸ In Africa, the 2023 Global Drought Snapshot²⁹ report speaks volumes about the urgency of this crisis and building global resilience to it. The report notes that over 23 million people have been deemed severely food insecure across the Horn of Africa and this is as a result of drought and land degradation. Consecutive rainfall season failures in the Horn of Africa, have caused the region's worst drought in 40 years, with Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia and other countries affected.³⁰ Africa has faced severe drought affects more than any other continent, with more than 300 events recorded in the past 100 years, accounting for 44% of the global total. More recently, sub-Saharan Africa has experienced the dramatic consequences of climate disasters becoming more frequent and intense.³¹

16. The United Nations estimates 23.5 million people in the Sahel faced acute food insecurity in 2023, partly due to drought impacting agricultural production.³² Climate change, on the other hand, has caused severe and frequent drought events leading to the death of livestock and human beings, while displacing hundreds of thousands of people. Women, children and youths bear the brunt of drought and land degradation. In fact, drought and land degradation are causes of internal displacement of peoples and droves of migrants witnessed in the Mediterranean Sea and other border crossings. Nowhere else in the world is more impacted by drought, land degradation and desertification than is Africa, mainly because two-thirds of the African continent is desert or drylands, while the remaining land not covered by water is facing serious degradation.

IV. Global and regional commitments addressing desertification, land degradation and drought

17. Land is central to Goal 15 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which seeks to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. Drought on the other hand is recognised in the Sustainable Development Goal 6 and 13 with a significant focus on addressing droughts and water scarcity and focus on climate action, which highlights the need to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards, including droughts.

²⁵ <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb6111en>

²⁶ FAO: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en?details=cb4474en>

²⁷ Economics of Land Degradation and Improvement – A Global Assessment for Sustainable Development, Nkonya, Ephraim et al

²⁸ World Development Report 2021: DATA FOR BETTER LIVES accessed at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2021>

²⁹ 2023 Global Drought Snapshot accessed on https://www.droughtglobal.org/_files/ugd/648a9d_af549f9432e84673804730e2c0529049.pdf?index=true

³⁰ <https://wmo.int/publication-series/provisional-state-of-global-climate-2023>

³¹ Drought in Numbers 2022: <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/drought-numbers>

³² FAO: <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en?details=cb4474en>

18. In recognition of the centrality of land to sustainable development, including peace and security, all African countries are parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The majority have prepared their national action plans in line with the Convention requirements. The Fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification notably decided to establish an Intergovernmental Working Group on Drought for the triennium 2022–2024, with the purpose of identifying and evaluating global policy instruments and regional policy frameworks and linking them to national plans to effectively manage drought under the Convention and supporting a shift from reactive to proactive drought management.

19. In the same breath United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement emphasizes the importance of addressing desertification, land degradation and drought as part of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Article 5 encourages actions to conserve and enhance sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases, including forests and other ecosystems. This addresses land degradation by promoting sustainable land management practices that enhance carbon sequestration.

20. Food systems are considered one of six transformative key transitions that can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the Sustainable Development Goals and an outsized determinant impact on achieving the said goals. The United Nations Secretary-General convened a United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021 as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The Summit launched bold new actions for progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and 100-plus countries developed their own national food systems pathways towards achieving healthier, more sustainable, and equitable food systems. The Summit also addressed land degradation by promoting sustainable agricultural practices, restoration initiatives, support for smallholder farmers, soil health management, strengthened land tenure rights, and prioritized integration of land degradation neutrality into national policies and frameworks.

21. The United Nations Environment Assembly has also adopted resolutions on combating desertification, land degradation and drought³³ as well as promoting sustainable pastoralism and rangelands.³⁴ In addition, the United Nations Environment Assembly has adopted related resolutions³⁵ drawing attention to the risks and impacts of soil pollution on health, the environment, and food security, including land degradation and the burden of disease resulting from exposure to contaminated soil. In 2019, the Fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly adopted resolution 4/10³⁶ which further reiterated that long-lasting droughts and the negative effects of unsustainable land management practices, contribute to the degradation of natural resources and ecosystems; increase desertification, deforestation and loss of biodiversity; and urgently need to be addressed collaboratively at the national, regional and global levels.

22. At the continental level, the African Union has taken bold steps in adopting various instruments related to addressing desertification, land degradation, drought and most notably, Agenda 2063 that sets Africa's long-term development vision, recognizing land as a foundational ingredient in that vision. Regional economic communities further cascade these steps at the subregional and national levels. The Economic Community of West African States has implemented the West African Action Plan for Combating Desertification, which aligns with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification framework and focuses on sustainable land management practices to prevent and reverse land degradation. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development has developed a Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative, which aims to enhance resilience to drought and promote sustainable land use and management in the Horn of Africa region. The Southern African Development Community has implemented the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, which includes components aimed at combating desertification and land degradation through sustainable natural resource management and agricultural practices.

23. Recently at the Fifth Ordinary Session of The Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment held between 14-17 November 2023, the Specialized technical committee recognized and adopted the Africa Ministerial Conference on the Environment report of the Nineteenth Session that emphasized strengthening the Conference's role on Forest Conservation, Drought, and Desertification.

24. The African Ministerial Conference on the Environment itself adopted several decisions on land degradation and desertification, all in line with the United Nations Convention to Combat

³³ UNEA resolution 2/24 on combating desertification, land degradation and drought

³⁴ UNEA resolution xxx

³⁵ Resolution 3/6, titled "Managing Soil Pollution to Achieve Sustainable Development,"

³⁶ Resolution 4/10 on Innovation on biodiversity and land degradation

Desertification, as well as the various decisions and declarations of the African Union.³⁷ Recently, at its eighteenth session, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in Decision 18/3 on Biodiversity, Wildlife and Desertification, the Conference requested support to carry out awareness raising and policy advocacy to catalyse action to address desertification, land degradation and drought in Africa in the framework of the pan-African Action Agenda on Ecosystem Restoration and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

25. Land degradation neutrality is a key strategy to address desertification, land degradation, and drought in Africa. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, through the Changwon Initiative,³⁸ launched during its 10th Conference of the Parties, global efforts to achieve land degradation neutrality. The Changwon Initiative provides technical and financial assistance to developing countries to implement sustainable land management practices and restore degraded lands. Consequently in 2015, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Parties were invited to formulate voluntary targets to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality in accordance with their specific national circumstances and development priorities.³⁹

26. With regard to drought, the 2016 Windhoek Declaration for Enhancing Resilience to Drought in Africa,⁴⁰ adopted at the African Drought Conference called for implementation of the Strategic Framework for Drought Risk Management and Enhancing Resilience in Africa and the need for a global protocol on enhancing drought resilience under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

27. The 5 year Abidjan Legacy Programme launched at the fifteenth Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, will unlock 2.5 billion United States Dollars and is the current key African programme that aims to (a) fight against deforestation and promoting forest restoration (b) improve agricultural productivity through mechanization and soil restoration, (c) focus on new value chains that are soil-friendly and climate resilient and sustainable value chains through local processing, to generate more wealth and jobs, especially for youth and women.

28. As noted above, the African Union Great Green Wall initiative aims to restore the continent's degraded landscapes in the Sahel and is being implemented in 22 countries. The ambition of the great green Wall Initiative is to restore 100 million hectares of currently degraded land; sequester 250 million tons of carbon and create 10 million green jobs by 2030.

V. Raising ambition to meet Africa's land degradation neutrality targets

29. To achieve Land Degradation Neutrality, it is imperative to adopt strategies that raise ambition and align efforts with broader national development goals. Aligning land degradation neutrality targets with national development plans is crucial for ensuring that efforts to combat land degradation are integrated into broader socio-economic objectives especially those of poverty reduction, food security, and climate resilience.

30. Capacity building, strengthening institutional frameworks, policy coordination and advocacy and engaging policymakers and stakeholders in dialogues to raise awareness and secure commitments to land degradation neutrality goals, is critical for sustained action against land degradation.

31. Bridging the gap between science and policy is crucial for informed decision-making and the successful implementation of Land degradation neutrality strategies. Conducting research provides evidence-based recommendations for sustainable land management practices, while developing data-sharing platforms facilitates access to relevant information and resources. Enhancing collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and practitioners ensures that research findings are translated into actionable policies, thereby bridging the science-policy divide.

³⁷ See AMCEN decision 15/1 on land as natural capital and sustainably harnessing Africa's natural capital in the context of Agenda 2063; AMCEN decision SS.VI/4 on action to combat desertification, drought and floods and restore degraded land; AMCEN decision 16/2 on Desertification, land degradation and drought.

³⁸ <https://www.unccd.int/our-work/flagship-initiatives/changwon-initiative>

³⁹ AMCEN 18.1 accessed at <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/40573/AMCEN-18-II-12-EN.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1>

⁴⁰ The Windhoek Declaration for Enhancing Resilience to Drought in Africa accessed at https://www.droughtmanagement.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Windhoek-Declaration_Final-Adopted-by-ADC-15-19-August-2016.pdf

32. Securing adequate financing is vital for the successful implementation of Land degradation neutrality initiatives. Innovative financing mechanisms and effective mobilization strategies are necessary to attract investment in sustainable land management projects. Public-private partnerships can play a significant role in this regard, leveraging resources from both sectors to support Land degradation neutrality activities. Robust reporting frameworks are essential for tracking progress and ensuring accountability in Land degradation neutrality efforts. Establishing baseline data and indicators allows for the measurement of land degradation and restoration outcomes. Regular data collection and analysis assess the effectiveness of Land degradation neutrality interventions, while adaptive management approaches refine strategies based on findings. This iterative process ensures that Land degradation neutrality initiatives remain responsive to changing conditions and continue to achieve desired outcomes.

33. Integrating sustainable land management into broader development goals ensures that efforts to combat land degradation contribute to overall socio-economic development. Aligning sustainable land management practices with Sustainable Development Goals enhances their impact and visibility. Promoting the co-benefits of sustainable land management, such as improved livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience, underscores the importance of these practices. Mainstreaming sustainable land management into sectoral policies and programs ensures that sustainable land management becomes a central component of development planning.

34. Finally, encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships is vital for leveraging diverse expertise and resources to achieve land degradation neutrality targets. Building alliances between governments, civil society, private sector entities, and local communities fosters collaboration and facilitates the sharing of experiences and best practices. Supporting partnerships to leverage strengths of different stakeholders, ensuring a comprehensive approach to achieving land degradation neutrality goals. Africa's land degradation neutrality targets require an integrated approach that aligns with national development plans, builds capacity, and fosters cross-sectoral collaboration.

VI. Africa's preparation for the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

35. The Sixteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification will be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from December 2 to 13, 2024. The sixteenth conference of the parties will be a landmark event to raise global ambition and accelerate action on land and drought resilience through a people-centred approach. It will coincide with the Convention's 30th anniversary. At the Sixteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties, countries are expected to decide on collective actions to:

- (a) accelerate restoration of degraded land between now and 2030,
- (b) boost drought preparedness, response and resilience,
- (c) ensure that land continues to provide climate and biodiversity solutions,
- (d) boost resilience to escalating sand and dust storms,
- (e) scale up nature-positive food production,
- (f) strengthen women's land rights to advance land restoration,
- (g) promote youth engagement, including decent land-based jobs for youth,
- (h) catalyse new initiatives on land restoration and drought resilience.

36. The Africa region has been calling for the development of a binding protocol on drought risk management for enhancing resilience, in line with the Windhoek Declaration for Enhancing Resilience to Drought in Africa.

37. Further the Africa Region, has been calling for ambitious commitments to tackle Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought, this has however not been realised by the global community, therefore there is need to address issues relating to the operationalization of the Land degradation neutrality fund, more investments in capacity to restore degraded lands, combat desertification and drought resilience.

38. Climate change, biological diversity, desertification, land degradation and drought are intricately related on the social, economic and environmental fronts.⁴¹ There is therefore a need for strengthening global collaboration and linkages between the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biodiversity and other relevant international frameworks to ensure a comprehensive approach to tackling land degradation and its impacts.

VII. Opportunities for strengthening efforts to mitigate droughts and ecosystems restoration in Africa

39. While tremendous effort is being made by African countries to address desertification, land degradation, and drought, the progress is slow. Many of the challenges require sustained integrated efforts and substantial financial investments as well as technological, institutional and human capacity. Regional and national approaches need to be promoted and funded. Such approaches may include, but not limited to, the promotion of sustainable land management practices, such as agroforestry, conservation agriculture, and reforestation, that can help restore degraded lands, improve soil fertility, and enhance resilience to climate change, as well as exploring agroecological approaches.

40. Mainstreaming land degradation neutrality in national policies and commitments and identify financing opportunities to support the implementation of transformative projects and programmes in land degradation neutrality will be key as well as establishing sound regional monitoring systems.

41. There is also an opportunity to leverage ongoing global and regional processes including the implementation of the national food systems pathways as recommended by the United Nations Food Systems Summit, and the mainstreaming of sustainable food systems through implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

42. Strengthening science-policy interfaces by investing in coordinated and accessible data, knowledge, and measurement systems will be essential to building a baseline of critical sustainable food systems indicators, including around soil health. This will enhance accountability, monitoring, and regulatory capacity, as well as better inform anticipatory adaptation actions for regeneration of degraded lands including degraded agricultural lands - at the regional and national levels. Digital systems will be a crucial avenue to support drought resilience by providing early warning systems, optimizing resource management, facilitating data-driven sustainable land management practices and enhancing information dissemination.

43. Additionally, more attention needs to be given to the implementation of decisions and resolutions that speak to desertification land degradation, and drought, through adequate financial resources, policy formulation and harmonization, capacity-building and networking among countries, development of regional and cross-border programmes, and technology support.

44. Addressing desertification, land degradation, and drought has a net economic gain compared to inaction. Furthermore, actions directed at addressing these issues provide immense co-benefits as they simultaneously address climate change, loss of nature and biodiversity, prevention and control of land pollution, poverty, and gender and youth issues. They also bring marginalized communities, indigenous peoples, and local communities to the forefront, expand livelihood options, sustain food systems and ensure food security, and prevent pathogens that impact animal, human, and plant health.

45. To conclude, desertification land degradation, and drought can be effectively tackled. The solutions exist, and key tools are strengthening cooperation at all levels, managing drought risk proactively, and building an ecosystem restoration economy that aims to rejuvenate - water cycles, land fertility and people's livelihoods at the same time.

Consideration by the 10th special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment

46. This note is not intended to highlight all the solutions of raising ambitions to tackle desertification, land degradation, and drought, however, it is intended to elicit discussions on the topic. Some of the key discussion question on the topic are:

(a) What actions can the region take to raise Africa's ambitions in combating desertification, land degradation and mitigation of drought?

⁴¹ <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/sdgs/unccd-cbd-and-unfccc-joint-liaison-group>

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- (b) What are the innovative strategies that can strengthen implementation of agreed upon commitments on land degradation, desertification and drought?
- (c) Key enabling actions to build drought resilience. How do we accelerate the building of land degradation free future?
- (d) How can we Create pathways to engage with partners at regional and international levels, to build synergies and identify potential actions for joint impact initiatives beyond the current ongoing initiatives?

ADVANCE