

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	i
Foreword	iii
Introduction	1
Poverty and the Environment	
Poverty and Access to Environmental Goods and Services	4
Freshwater	7
Lack of Access to Safe Water: Scale and Impacts of the Problem	7
Financing Increased Provision of Safe Water and Sanitation for the Poor	8
Water Management Issues	9
Watershed degradation	11
Changing Institutional Roles	
Land	15
Processes and Impacts	
Regional Variations	
Access to Land	
Sub-regional Issues	
Regional and Global Issues	
Biodiversity	23
Threats to Biodiversity	
Strategies for Biodiversity Conservation	
situlegies for blodiversity Conservation	20
Extreme Events	29
Environment and Security	31
The stakeholders preparatory meeting on environmental issues in the themes	
of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region	35
Climate Change	37
Mitigation Measures	
Small Island Developing States	41
International Responses to SIDS Issues	
Regional Institutional Developments	45
Action Plan of the Environment Initiative of NEPAD	
Poforonces	17

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Coordinating team

Munyaradzi Chenje, Regional Coordinator for Africa, UNEP/DEWA Charles Sebukeera, Programme Officer, UNEP/DEWA Janet Waiyaki, Programme Assistant, UNEP/DEWA

Technical support team

Steve Lonergan, Director, UNEP/DEWA

Marion Cheatle, Deputy Director and Chief of Early Warning Branch, UNEP/DEWA

Strategic support team

Sekou Toure, Director, UNEP Regional Office for Africa (ROA)
Alex Alusa, Deputy Director, UNEP Regional Office for Africa (ROA)
Peter Acquah, Senior Programme Officer, UNEP/ROA and Secretary to AMCEN

Author

Chris Huggins, Consultant

Design and layout

Audrey Ringler, UNEP/DEWA



Foreword

More than four years ago, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) requested UNEP to help launch an Africa Environment Outlook process to facilitate the monitoring and reporting on the state of the regional environment.

UNEP, through its Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA) and the Regional Office for Africa, accepted the challenge and the AEO process is now fully integrated in our programme of work. The first AEO report was presented to AMCEN in 2002 and there is no doubt that it has become a substantive tool for African policymakers to use in the assessment of the pressing environmental issues facing the region.

Two of the policy options highlighted in the first AEO report were the need for the African Union and AMCEN to persuade the international community to adopt the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); and to improve environmental information systems as a basis for sound decision-making. Both policy recommendations have since been implemented. NEPAD has been endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly and UNEP. The issue of environmental information systems is being addressed through the Africa Environment Information Network (AEIN), which AMCEN endorsed at its 9th Session. All six subregions in Africa and 13 countries are directly

involved in the AEIN pilot phase. The rest of the countries are involved indirectly through capacity building activities such as training in integrated environmental assessment and reporting. The AEIN process is critical to keeping the state of the regional and national environment under review.

The first AEO report also urged African governments to support the production of subregional environmental reports. It is pleasing to note that two sub-regions will during the course of 2004 produce sub-regional environment outlook reports. In the Southern African Development Community, the preparation of such reports on a regular basis is now a policy decision as highlighted in the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP). The RISDP, which was adopted by SADC countries during 2003, sets among others, a target to produce environmental assessment reports every five years.

It is important to note that the AEO process has facilitated these and other developments in a very short period. The process has informed policy discussions and facilitated action. Through this process, to which UNEP is fully committed, it has been possible to track environmental developments on a regular basis and to try and establish trends. It is through such tracking and determining trends that reliable information can be provided to policymakers for strategic decision-making. Reliable and

up-to-date environmental information is critical for sustainable development.

This targeted booklet on environmental issues and developments in two years since the launch of the first AEO report is yet another example of the premium we at UNEP place on keeping the Africa regional policymakers informed. Such information is critical to effective strategizing at the regional and even more important for action at the

national and local levels. It is at these lower levels of decision-making that information is most needed and UNEP will continue to support the region in disseminating relevant information to different stakeholders and facilitate action.

It is our wish that this booklet – *Africa Environment Tracking: Issues and Developments* – will be a key resource for policymakerss in the region.

Klaus Töpfer

United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme



Introduction

The African continent is rich in natural resources, many of high international value in terms of both monetary and global significance. The continent currently has six of the world's 25 biodiversity hot spots. Its resources are also of global importance for the world's climate and for the development of agriculture or industrial activities. The region has more than 50 000 known plant species, 1 500 species of birds and 1 000 mammals (NEPAD 2003).

Despite the richness of its biological, mineral and human resources, the continent remains poor. Food insecurity threatens millions each year, especially in the Horn and Southern African subregions, and Africa is home to more malnourished people than any other continent. Chronic food insecurity affects more than a quarter of the population at any one time, and interacts with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and structural economic problems to form a multi-dimensional emergency in many areas (Clover 2003). Various processes of environmental degradation threaten agricultural and pastoral lands, watersheds, surface and groundwater sources, and the rich forests and savannahs of the continent. There are 2018 threatened animal species across the region.

In response to such challenges, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) was established in 1985 to strengthen cooperation between African governments in

policy responses and on technical and scientific activities to halt the degradation of Africa's environment and satisfy the food and energy needs of the continent's people.

AMCEN provides continent-wide leadership by promoting awareness and consensus on global and regional environmental issues, especially those relating to international conventions on biodiversity, desertification and climate change, and developing common positions to guide African representatives in negotiations for legally binding international environmental agreements.

At its 8th Session in Abuja in April 2000, the Ministers decided that an Africa Environment Outlook (AEO) report should be prepared with the assistance of UNEP, to provide a comprehensive scientific assessment of the environment, policies, and environmental management programmes in Africa.

The report was launched at the Ninth AMCEN Session held in Kampala, Uganda between 4–7 July 2002.

The report revealed that environmental degradation remains a major challenge to sustainable development on the continent. A significant portion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of many African countries is eroded through environmental degradation.

Social and economic inequality is increasing and human vulnerability due to environmental change is also increasing and manifesting itself into disasters in many parts of the continent.

The 9th session consequently adopted the AEO report as a tool for monitoring sustainable environmental management in Africa and also to act as the environmental reporting framework at national levels. It would also be used as a tool for monitoring the implementation of AMCEN programme and NEPAD's Environment Programme.

UNEP was requested to continue assisting AMCEN in producing the AEO on regular basis and also to establish an Africa Environment Information

Network (AEIN) to support the production process.

This publication has been prepared as a complementary product of the AEO and it summarizes major environmental events and trends from July 2002 – November 2004, focusing on poverty and environment, freshwater, land, biodiversity, environmental emergencies and security, small island developing states, climate change and the major regional institutional developments in the area of environment. The objective is to keep these rapidly evolving issues in the focus of the decisionmakers in the region and stimulate timely action to address them.

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