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FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION IN AFRICA

I. Background

1. As a result of increased greenhouse gas emissions resulting from human activities, the Earth's average temperature has risen by 0.85°C over the past century, and is projected to rise by more than 1.5°C over the next hundred years if appropriate measures are not taken¹. Small changes in the average temperature of the planet can translate to large and potentially dangerous shifts in climate and weather.
2. Forests currently store about half the global terrestrial organic carbon pool. While forests sequester atmospheric carbon when they grow, deforestation and forest degradation are responsible for around 10 percent of global emissions of greenhouse gases.
3. Climate change is being experienced in various ways in the African region. Temperatures have increased, rains have become irregular, droughts are now occurring more frequently and lasting longer and the risks of losing flora and fauna are greater. In addition, desertification is increasing at an alarming rate, leading to serious food security and livelihood concerns for indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities. Furthermore sea level rise is predicted as 40-63cm by 2100. The coastal nations of west and central Africa (e.g., Senegal, The Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Togo, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Angola) are already experiencing negative impacts of climate change, including coastal erosion due to sea-level rise²,

¹ IPCC Fifth Assessment Report (AR5)

² IPCC <http://www.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/sres/regional/index.php?idp=0>

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4. Climate change is expected to have major impact on the provision of forest goods and services which are required to support agricultural productivity and food security, household economies and environmental sustainability. The effects of climate change are expected to be most acutely felt where vulnerabilities are greatest due to poverty, environmental fragility and/or institutional weaknesses.

5. Actions to respond to climate change, both mitigation and adaptation should be integrated into sustainable forest management policy and practices. Particularly relevant to all African countries are interventions that decrease the vulnerability and increase the resilience of the forests and forest-dependent people.

II. Developments in the international policy on climate change

6. In December 2015, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted the Paris Agreement, a legally-binding, universal agreement that aims to limit the rise of global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. The Paris Agreement, which supersedes the Kyoto Protocol, is due to take effect in 2020. Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, it applies to all signatories of the convention. The goal of limiting the rise of global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue an even more ambitious level of 1.5°C must come from strong actions in emission reductions

7. Prior to the Paris negotiations, 186 countries submitted plans, so-called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), for reducing their emissions and, in some cases for adaptation measures. The majority of the INDCs include actions in the land sectors, in particular forestry and agriculture. Countries will update their INDCs every five years, ratcheting up their emissions reductions goals, and they will regularly report on progress.

8. The agreement also calls for strong action in adaptation, enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change. It further reiterates the call made in Copenhagen in 2009 to attract at least \$100 billion for climate-related financing annually by 2020 through the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

9. Forests are quite prominent in the Paris Agreement. Article 5 recognizes the central role of forests in achieving the 2°C goal through mitigation options covered by REDD+³. Countries are encouraged to take action to implement REDD+, in line with the existing framework (i.e. the Warsaw Framework on REDD+, which was agreed at COP19 in 2013, supplemented by a decision taken in Paris on reporting information on REDD+ safeguards). The article acknowledges forests' potential for joint mitigation and adaptation approaches and their importance for yielding non-carbon benefits.

10. Article 7 calls for enhanced action on adaptation in all sectors, stemming from a country-driven, participatory planning process. National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) provide a valuable framework for this. The article does not highlight any sectors, as has been the case in other UNFCCC decisions on adaptation. It is evident that African forests are crucially important to climate change adaptation. They are also critical to the alleviation of poverty and food insecurity in the region – the first two of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon in September 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Actions on forests offer an important opportunity for synergies between countries' efforts in climate change adaptation and mitigation and plans for achieving the SDGs.

11. Some African countries are well positioned to benefit from results-based REDD+ payments which are likely to be triggered by the Paris Agreement, while others will be better placed to benefit from support for adaptation (including from the GCF). The challenge for countries will be to use these opportunities to build robust, self-sustaining forest sectors that meet national objectives on forests and

³ REDD+ refers to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries

the needs of their diverse stakeholders while contributing to global climate change and sustainability goals.

III. African forests contribution in climate change mitigation and adaptation

12. The African forest covers 674 million ha making up to about 17 per cent of the world forest area. It faces one of the highest annual degradation rate (0.5 percent) due to land use change in favour of agricultural expansion primarily and timber extraction.

13. Forests also constitute an important source of income for many African states and for local populations who harvest and sell wood and non-wood forest products. The role of forest products and services in building resilience and addressing the need for adaptation to climate change effects in Africa is therefore prominent in particular for the rural communities and for forest dependent people.

14. Climate change puts at risk the important biodiversity of Africa's forests, which is needed to help forests and the people adapt to climate change. Forest in Africa contributes to a remarkable extent to the preservation of the world endemic plant species. For example, among the 13,000 plants species found in Madagascar and the Indian Ocean Islands, 11,600 are endemics⁴. Furthermore of the 4000 forest species reported by African countries in The State of The World's Forest Genetic Resources in 2014, one out of four species is threatened⁵ by habitat loss, overharvesting, fire, climate change effects. Sustainable Forest Management programmes should therefore address challenges related to the above trends.

15. Specific forest ecosystems such as mangroves play an essential role as a habitat for biodiversity conservation and prevent coastal erosion from storms and sea level rise. Mangroves also support the livelihood of coastal communities through provision of food (eg. Fish, shellfish and mollusks), wood fuel and other products. Africa mangroves represent 19 percent of the world 15.2 million ha. It is however facing serious threats. 25-30 percent of Africa mangroves are reported a lost in the past 25 years.

IV. Key initiatives in the region

16. Several different REDD+ initiatives are being implemented in the region with the objective to contribute to the global effort in increased carbon sequestration and enhancing biodiversity conservation. The UN-REDD Programme has 67 partners countries of which 28 are Africans⁶.

17. Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA): The CSA approach includes technologies which contribute to water use efficiency, improved soil management and the promotion of increased green energy supply. The Smallholder agroforestry systems widely practiced in Africa are regarded as a viable strategy for C sequestration. However, it should be supported by adequate technical options (e.g. choice of species, tree density) to achieve high C stock and optimize benefit for the livelihood of the people. Several projects supported by FAO and its partners are implemented in countries in West Africa, East and Southern Africa. Climate Smart Agriculture initiatives are supported by FAO through projects in at least ten African countries.

18. Forest and Land Restoration: Every year, around 13 million hectares (ha) of land are deforested⁷. Continued deforestation and land degradation contribute to poverty, hunger and loss of biodiversity in many parts of the world and make it increasingly difficult for farmers and local communities to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Among others initiatives, FAO supports 11 Sahelian countries in restoring degraded land through The Great Green Wall Initiative for the Sahara

⁴ Conservation International, 2015

⁵ FAO, 2014

⁶ http://www.unredd.net/index.php?option=com_unregions&view=overview&Itemid=495

⁷ FAO 2010: FRA

and the Sahel (GGWISS), with the overall goal to strengthen the resilience of the region's people and ecosystems. Implementation of the programme on Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) Mechanism allowed FAO and its partners to start supporting work in Uganda and Rwanda in 2015 and to assist in attracting financial support for work in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Niger and Sudan.

V. Needs and challenges for integrating climate change into forest management

19. Many African countries have integrated climate change considerations into their national forest programmes and national plans and policy frameworks for climate change, such as Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and INDCs include actions in the forest sector. However, more comprehensive planning and implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts in the forest sector and better articulation of these with national climate change strategies and plans are needed.

20. Climate change programmes are usually cross sectorial and needs to be implemented in an integrated manner with strong collaboration between different development sectors and stakeholders. Development of good synergy among actors is a challenge.

21. The understanding of climate change and the links with tangible phenomena or effects at local level remains a challenge for development at local national or regional levels. Sound methodology is therefore needed to facilitate forest management projects implementation. Technical support through provision of guidelines, and trainings remains an importance need at country level.

VI. Points for consideration

22. The Commission may wish to:

- Encourage countries to strengthen and update forest components of climate change related strategies and policy instruments such as NAPs, NAMAs and INDCs.
- Encourage FAO to continue its support to countries in strengthening national capacities to effectively develop and implement climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes and projects at local, national and sub-regional levels
- Seek support from FAO and other technical and funding institutions, for countries to integrate climate change into their forest and related sectors.