



Side Event Draft Concept Note

Title: LAUNCH OF “AFRICA: ATLAS OF OUR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT”

Sponsor: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Date: 22 September, 2008

Time: 13:15-14:45pm

Venue: Conference Room 7

Focal Points: Jim Sniffen, UNEP NY, sniffenj@un.org, 1-212-963-8094;
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Programme:

Host: Ms. Angela Cropper, Deputy Executive Director, UNEP

Speakers:

Representative of South Africa, on behalf of AMCEN

Amb. Stephen Olukorede Willoughby, Chief Executive Officer, NEPAD

Dr. Mark Myer, Director, US Geological Survey (USGS)

Presentation of “Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment”

(Charles Sebukeera, UNEP Nairobi, and Ashbindu Singh, UNEP North America)

Presentation on the socio-economic and policy implications of the Atlas,

Mr. Mounkaila Goumandakoye, Director, UNEP Regional Office for Africa

Demonstration of the Atlas on Google Earth

Context:

Africa: Atlas of Our Changing Environment is a complementary publication to the Africa Environment Outlook report, a flagship publication of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN). This publication was produced by UNEP in cooperation with a number of organizations in Africa and the United States and was released at the AMCEN meeting in Johannesburg on 10 June 2008. The Atlas leverages upon scientific and technological assets of government agencies, academic institutions and private sector to promote evidence based policies and priority setting in countries. This is the first publication to highlight important environmental issues of all African countries and provide evidence of local changes like deforestation, shrinking of lakes, urban growth using current and historical satellite data. There are more than 316 satellite images, 319 ground photographs and 151 maps, along with informative graphs and charts for every country in Africa. This unique publication:

- Covers significant environmental issues in all African countries for priority setting;
- Highlights progress towards MDG7: Environmental Sustainability in all countries to draw political attention;
- Provides visual evidence of environmental changes in all countries for place based risk and opportunities arising of ecosystem changes;
- Identifies transboundary environmental issues that need international cooperation; and
- Provides interesting and comprehensive resource materials for educational purposes.

Public access to the Atlas materials is being provided through Wikipedia, currently the fourth most popular site on internet after Google, Yahoo and MSN; and Google Earth with over 300 million users. This book contributes to the knowledge and understanding that are essential for adaptation and remediation. This UNEP publication should be of immense value to all those who want to know more about Africa and who care about the future of this continent.

The Atlas has already triggered policy reflection and action on the continent and among development partners.

Main issues and challenges

- Africa is endowed with rich natural resources that provide the basis for its peoples' livelihoods. Africa holds approximately 30 per cent of the earth's minerals and oil production has been the main contributor towards Africa's economic growth, estimated at 6% in 2006.
- There are also grazing and agricultural lands that can support farming economies, as evidenced by about 57 per cent per cent of Africa's labor force engaged in agriculture.
- Rapid and, in some cases, dramatic transformations are taking place on the lands and waters that sustain Africa's people. These include land degradation and desertification, water stress, declining biodiversity, deforestation, increasing dust storms, rising pollution and rapid urbanization. Moreover, climate change is likely to intensify these conditions and alter the environment even further. Although Africa emits only 4 per cent of total global carbon

dioxide emissions, its inhabitants are projected to suffer disproportionately from the consequences of global climate change. Africa is the world's hottest continent with deserts and drylands covering some 60 per cent of the entire land surface. Only 10 per cent of farm soils are prime agricultural land, and more than one-quarter per cent of the land has moderate to low potential for sustainable agriculture, making them susceptible to climate variability.

- Towards the end of the 21st century, climate change will have caused sea-level rises that will affect Africa's highly populated low-lying coastal areas. About 2.7 per cent of Africa's population lives within 100 km of the coast and coastal populations are growing rapidly due to urbanization. Adaptation costs could amount to at least 5-10 per cent of GDP. By 2100, water flow in the Nile River region is expected to decrease by 75 per cent due to extreme climatic events, with serious consequences on the livelihoods in the Nile basin.
- Natural resources are important assets to the livelihoods of the poor in Africa. They account for 26 per cent of the wealth of most countries. Poor people depend directly on the goods and services provided by ecosystems. Forests cover over 20 per cent of Africa's 30 million km² of land area, but are being destroyed and degraded by logging and conversion to plantations, agriculture, roads and settlements. As a region, Africa is losing more than 4 million hectares of forest every year—twice the world's average.
- A large number of transboundary environmental issues related to shared lands and waters, migrating animals and people, and pollutants that drift over borders of neighbouring countries highlights both emerging challenges and success stories in addressing these issues.
- Africa is also making progress on the social front with a view to improving the quality of life of the people. Between 1990 and 2004, over 30 African countries improved their population's access to safe water and sanitation, and 23 countries reduced the percentage of people living in slums.
- Those who read this Atlas and reflect upon its images will have gained a deeper understanding of the impacts upon Africa's land, plants, animals, air and waters. The pace and scale of change are hard to ignore. The Atlas also contains a few signs of hope in our ability to protect against, and even reverse, environmental degradation. As shown throughout, there are inspiring photos of places where people have taken action – where there are more trees than 30 years ago, where wetlands have sprung back, and where land degradation has been stymied. These are beacons we need to follow to ensure the survival of our environment and of the world's peoples.

Possible questions to guide an interactive discussion

- What are the main findings of this publication?
- What are the socio-economic and policy implications of the findings?
- Which are some of the thematic areas and places where immediate interventions are needed to ensure sustainable livelihoods and foster economic growth in Africa?