



AFRICAN UNION BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

AND ACTION PLAN (ABSAP) 2023-2030

SUMMARY



BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

The close of the last decade saw a heightened concern by the global community around the triple planetary crisis of biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution. This stemmed from the growing awareness of the unprecedented loss of wild species and the threats to ecosystem resilience from climate change and natural disasters, resulting in the loss of productivity of vital ecosystem services. Projections of this regressive trend, based on a business-as-usual scenario, highlighted significant risks to human wellbeing and sustainable development pathways. Recognition of the need for urgent action to tackle this crisis led to the emergence of new, more ambitious global commitments to 2030 targets and 2050 goals under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), adopted at the 15th Conference of Parties (COP 15) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Several other commitments and targets were established through other biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) and emerging global agreements related to biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions and plastic pollution.

Africa is host to some of the most intact and diverse ecosystems on the planet, with an extraordinary wealth in nature, which is further enriched by its Indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. Several biodiversity assessments, including the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment and Africa Regional Assessment, confirm the value of Africa's biodiversity wealth. Coupled with its Indigenous and local knowledge, the wealth of Africa's biodiversity provides an extraordinary and strategic asset in the pursuit of the continent's sustainable development. Valuation studies on Africa's natural capital, though limited, have established that the flow of goods and services from diverse ecosystems constitutes vital direct support to over 62% of the continent's rural population.

As elsewhere, however, the continent is faced with the challenge of addressing the triple planetary crisis. The economies of low-income countries, which are highly dependent on natural resources, are particularly at risk. Increasing human pressures on Africa's natural resources, and inequities in the sharing of benefits from its utilisation, greatly limit the potential of the continent's natural capital to contribute to building resilient communities and economies, as well as address the multiple conflicts and security issues that plague the continent and greatly undermine Africa's efforts to attain the aspirations of the continental development framework, Agenda 2063. Unplanned urbanisation, habitat loss due to land use change, unsustainable uses and overexploitation of natural resources, poaching and illegal trade in wild species, pollution, and invasive alien species have been identified as the main drivers of ecosystem change, resulting in the loss or threat of extinction of valuable species, as well as contributing to ecosystem fragmentation and degradation across the continent.

Africa is the most rapidly urbanising region globally, with 43% of its population living in cities. Africa is projected to transition to a majority urban population in 2030, and a 60% urban population by 2050. Urban growth is associated with rapid changes in land cover. With a sixfold increase in urban land cover projected between 2000–2030, several ecologically sensitive areas are at risk.

Demands for wildlife, hunting and wild meat harvesting have drastically reduced wildlife populations, with an estimated 1.6 - 4.6 million tonnes of wild meat extracted each year in Central Africa, and illegal ivory trade doubling from 2007 to 2015. Equally, demands for wood energy remain high, accounting for more than 80% of primary energy supply, with more than 90% of the population depending on fuelwood and charcoal for energy and cooking. Regarding opportunities for markets and value addition, Africa is the only continent that derives most of its value from nature through primary production.

Africa's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters is highlighted by the 6th Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Assessment Report of 2022. The report confirms that the magnitude and extent of local extinctions predicted across Africa will increase substantially with every 0.5°C increase above current levels of global warming.

There is strong evidence of zoonotic viral pathogens hosted by wild species and, with the encroachment of human activities into natural habitat, the risk to human health posed by the outbreak of zoonotic diseases is increasing. Additionally, the past decade experienced a significant increase in the number of total alien species identified in African countries.

In terms of pollution, plastics constitute 10% of solid waste across the continent due to its extensive use and weak management. Another critical challenge faced by the continent is soil degradation which has led to reduced incomes and wellbeing amongst small-scale farmers.

However, these are not new challenges and action has already been taken. Protected areas have increased considerably across the continent over the last decade. Protected areas established during 2011-2020 represent 20% of the protected areas created in the 21st century, highlighting the strong

political will to bring about this positive change. There has also been an increase in marine protected areas, facilitated by the recognition of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas in some African countries. From a policy perspective, the last decade saw increased attention across the continent on the development of national policy instruments, though with varied country experiences and capacities. Key national policy actions include the development and submission of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions and Land Degradation Neutrality Plans.

Action to address biodiversity loss across the continent is hindered by weak capacity to mobilise financial resources and insufficient flows of international finance to support the efforts of developing countries. Efforts over the past decade to double biodiversity financing from international flows and Overseas Development Assistance and to build capacity through the Biodiversity Finance Initiative and other resource mobilisation initiatives, remain insufficient. The Financing Nature Report of 2020 estimated an average biodiversity financing gap of US\$711 billion per year, in respect of a total estimated biodiversity protection need of US\$722 - US\$967 billion per year.

Capacity building remains a core issue for many actors in Africa. Over the last decade, capacity building efforts supported by Global Environment Facility and other funding partners, together with training/networking initiatives and academia largely focused on strengthening the enabling conditions for policy making. Africa continues to lag behind on capacity for implementation, technical and technological capacity for effective management, access to tools, including information and communications technology, as well as capacity to communicate biodiversity information.

The African Union (AU) recognises the urgent need for a coordinated effort across the continent to strengthen regional and national efforts in addressing the root causes of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. The AU Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (ABSAP) (the Strategy) provides the opportunity to support the implementation of the GBF. This will help the continent address the expanding demand for land and sea use, and the associated increase in pressures on natural resources, while supporting sustainable use and securing a fair distribution of benefits generated.



PURPOSE AND KEY PRINCIPLES

This Strategy seeks to provide the strategic orientation for a coordinated and aligned approach to ensure that AU Member States comply with their commitments to global biodiversity and climate agreements. The development and implementation of this Strategy is driven by the following key principles and considerations:

- **Aligned and coherent response to biodiversity-related MEAs.** In undertaking the internalisation of the GBF as an overarching global framework, this Strategy supports an aligned approach that integrates the globally agreed goals and targets under these biodiversity-related multilateral instruments.
- **Synergy between the Rio Conventions.** The Strategy seeks to develop synergies through a continental approach to the CBD, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Forum on Forests, amongst others.
- **Biodiversity mainstreaming and integration.** The Strategy focuses on mainstreaming biodiversity and climate change priorities across policies and biodiversity-dependent sectors as a key approach to inform development and investment trade-offs, and to support healthy and resilient ecosystems that secure food-nutrition-water-energy production systems and their value chains.
- **Guidance for regional and national uptake.** The Strategy constitutes a guidance framework to support regions and countries in their implementation efforts with a focus on developing and implementing regional action plans and NBSAPs.
- **Multistakeholder engagement.** The Strategy calls for inclusive and gender-responsive engagement in all phases of implementation of the GBF in Africa and in the uptake of this Strategy, respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), women, and youth as major vulnerable groups.
- **Increasing biodiversity finance flows to and within Africa.** Filling the existing gaps in biodiversity financing and effectively managing protected areas represent major challenges for the successful implementation of this Strategy. Developing a resource mobilisation plan for Africa is therefore a priority.
- **Cooperation and collaboration.** This Strategy calls for cooperation across Africa to share experiences at transboundary or landscape/seascape levels to strengthen implementation, and to collaborate on thematic issues for focused actions relevant to specific targets.
- **Relationship with Africa's Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.** The vision, goals, targets, and indicators for this Strategy are aimed at contributing to attaining the aspirations of Africa's development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.



METHODOLOGY

The highly consultative process followed in developing this Strategy allowed for the inclusion of diverse perspectives from National Focal Points for the MEAs, Experts, Convention Secretariats, stakeholders and partners, as well as incorporating insights from several global and regional assessments. Data was collected from a variety of sources, including the relevant biodiversity-related convention websites, for information on their mandates, resolutions and specific strategic orientations. This informed efforts to take advantage of synergies in a continental response and support coordinated uptake and implementation by AU Member States.

Knowledge from recent biodiversity assessments within the Convention frameworks, especially the Global Biodiversity Outlook 5, the IPBES Global Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and associated regional assessments and several continental and regional assessments helped inform the review of the state of Africa's biodiversity, including its contribution to human wellbeing and economic growth across the continent, and in identifying the gaps in biodiversity governance, financing and capacity development that need to be urgently addressed. Special attention was given to the indicators of the GBF to better understand the underlying intent of each GBF goal and related targets.

In keeping with the key principle for a multistakeholder engagement approach, several consultations were carried out with selected experts across the continent, as well as the Secretariats of the CBD, CITES, CMS and Ramsar Conventions.

The AU High-Level Conference on the Implementation of the Outcomes of the CBD COP 15 and CITES COP 19 was the key platform for engagement on the draft Strategy. Organised by the African Union Commission (AUC) from the 30th of May to 2nd June 2023, the Conference was attended by 19 Ministers, Senior Officials and Experts from 44 AU Member States, representatives from Regional Economic Communities (RECs), United Nations agencies, international and regional conservation organisations, and civil society organisations. The Conference provided a platform for AU Member States, partners and other relevant stakeholders to conceptualise the Strategy. Following the Conference, countries were requested to hold further consultations at the national level and provide comments on the draft Strategy through the AUC by August 2023. The revised draft was then presented for consideration to the fifth ordinary session of the Specialised Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment held from the 14th to 18th of November 2023 at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Specialised Technical Committee endorsed the Strategy and requested the AUC develop a programme to facilitate its implementation as a vehicle for supporting Member States' efforts to meet their commitments under the GBF at the national level. The AU Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan was subsequently endorsed by the 37th AU Summit held from the 17th to 18th of February 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Following its endorsement by the AU Summit, the AUC launched the development of the annexes to the Strategy, with an initial focus on the Resource Mobilisation Plan for the implementation of the Strategy.

STRATEGIC FRAMING

This Strategy aligns the vision and mission of the GBF with Africa's Agenda 2063 and is thus anchored on aspirations for a prosperous Africa where the continent's unique natural endowments, its environment and ecosystems, including its wildlife, wild lands and ocean, are healthy, valued and protected, with climate resilient communities and economies. The long-term vision statement for the Strategy is:

“ By 2050, the rich biodiversity and resilient ecosystems across Africa significantly contribute to the aspirations of Africa's Agenda 2063.”

The mission statement for the Strategy is:

“ By 2030, urgent action is taken to coordinate and support implementation of the GBF across the continent, catalysing synergy and coherence in governance and practice responses to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and increase ecosystem resilience, ensuring equitable sharing of benefits from sustainable utilisation, with increased biodiversity financing and enhanced capacities for Africa.”



Five strategic pillars

Based on its mission, this Strategy defines key systems that are critical to transforming Africa's development pathway, with changes that result in reducing biodiversity loss and threats to ecosystem health, supporting sustainable use and the equitable sharing of benefits, and effectively mainstreaming and integrating biodiversity and ecosystem-based approaches into national and societal processes. To ensure these desired outcomes are achieved, the Strategy further defines a system of significant change with increased financing for biodiversity and strengthened capacities and decision-making processes that are inclusive and gender responsive. The design of each system of change is supported by the ABSAP's strategic pillars, which are aligned with the global orientation of the overarching goals and targets of the GBF and also takes into consideration the strategic goals of other biodiversity-related MEAs. The objectives that underpin each strategic pillar are as follows:



Strategic Pillar A: Strengthening biodiversity governance and practice

To strengthen and catalyse synergy and coherence in policies and actions to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and build the resilience of ecosystems across Africa. (GBF Targets 1-8)



Strategic Pillar B: Sustainable use and benefit sharing from biological and genetic resources

To promote the sustainable use of biological resources and ensure access to genetic resources and traditional knowledge and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from their utilisation. (GBF Targets 9, 11, 12, 13)



Strategic Pillar C: Sectoral mainstreaming and integration of ecosystem-based approaches

To strengthen biodiversity mainstreaming and the integration of ecosystem-based approaches within and across all levels of government and development sectors, particularly those with significant impacts on biodiversity, to ensure an aligned biodiversity and climate action response. (GBF Targets 10, 14 -17)



Strategic Pillar D: Increasing financing for Africa's biodiversity

To mobilise and increase the level of financial resources for Africa's biodiversity, from all sources, including through international and domestic public and private resources in accordance with Article 20 of the CBD, and ensure equity and accountability with regards to access to these resources. (GBF Targets 18, 19)



Strategic Pillar E: Enhancing capacities, equity and inclusion for effective implementation

To enhance capacities and ensure equity, inclusion and gender responsiveness for effective implementation across all pillars of this Strategy. (GBF Targets 20-23)

To achieve the objectives of each strategic pillar, intervention areas that are critical in triggering the shift across the five pillars have been defined. These intervention areas directly support the achievement of the targets of the GBF and aligned targets of other biodiversity-related MEAs.

Africa's model for a shift in the five strategic pillars and nested intervention areas recognises the need for a multiscale approach with options that are adapted to the realities of national circumstances and development needs.

Actions within each of the intervention areas assist AU Member States in setting priorities, with due consideration of the national socio-cultural and economic contexts. Member States will implement these actions through national and subnational programmes, as well as through enabling independent action by non-state actors, including the private sector and corporations, civil society organisations, and IPLCs, taking into consideration gender equality.

The Strategy also recognises the critical role of regional and continental approaches to support Member States in their efforts in attaining the objectives of each pillar and in strengthening collaboration and cooperation in transboundary ecosystems. A set of broader regional and continental mechanisms are defined as priorities in support of each strategic pillar, to support alignment and synergies in providing responses across the continent.

The intervention areas and their alignment with the GBF Targets is as follows:



Pillar A

- Land and sea use planning (Target 1)
- Effective ecosystem restoration (Target 2)
- Effective conservation and management of land and sea (Target 3)
- Halt human-induced extinctions and maintain and restore genetic diversity (Target 4)
- Sustainable use, harvest and trade in wild species (Target 5)
- Mitigate or eliminate the impacts of invasive alien species (Target 6)
- Reduce pollution risks and impacts from all sources, in particular excess nutrients, pesticides and plastics (Target 7)
- Minimise the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification, support mitigation and adaptation (Target 8)



Pillar B

- Sustainable use and management of wild species (Target 9)
- Nature's contributions to people and ecosystem services (Target 11)
- Increase area, quality and access to urban green/blue spaces (Target 12)
- Ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources and digital sequenced information (Target 13)



Pillar C

- Sustainable management of areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry (Target 10)
- Integration of biodiversity into policies, regulations and development across all sectors (Target 14)
- Transform businesses to progressively reduce negative impacts on biodiversity (Target 15)
- Encourage sustainable consumption by reducing food waste, post-harvest loss, overconsumption and waste generation (Target 16)
- Regulation of biotechnology and harnessing benefits (Target 17)



Pillar D

- Phase out or reform harmful subsidies and incentives (Target 18)
- Increase the level of financial resources for biodiversity from all sources (Target 19)



Pillar E

- Capacities, technology transfer and scientific cooperation (Target 20)
- Information and knowledge to guide effective and equitable governance (Target 21)
- Representation and participation in decision-making (Target 22)
- Gender equality (Target 23)

SUPPORT MECHANISMS AND ENABLING CONDITIONS

This part of the Strategy aligns with the goal of Pillar D, to ensure the carrying out of priority actions proposed at various scales of intervention and defines the progressive development of key support tools required to ensure effective implementation. The proposed measures and tools to support national, regional and continental level interventions include:

- Coordination organs;
- A Resource Mobilisation Plan;
- A Capacity Building and Development, and Technical and Scientific Cooperation Plan;
- A Communication, Education, and Public Awareness Plan; and
- A Stakeholder Engagement Framework.

To ensure coherence and alignment in implementation, this Strategy provides for a programming approach and a coordination framework of existing and proposed structures.

Programmes and coordination organs

The implementation of the Strategy will be carried out through five continental programmes designed in alignment with the five strategic pillars. This programming approach will further be developed at the regional and national levels to align with the continental programmes.



Continental coordination

- **The AU** is responsible for overall coordination of the Strategy and for high-level political support for its implementation. Coordination, monitoring and reporting will be supported by the AUC through the Directorate of Sustainable Environment and Blue Economy.
- **AUC Programme Coordination Working Groups.** The technical coordination to monitor, assess, report and review the implementation of the priority actions in each programme will require coordination through five working groups with each to coordinate a programme and to align with other AUC Nodes.
- **Biodiversity Working Group for Africa.** This is a new organ which will function through several units including a liaison group as the direct coordinating body of CBD and all biodiversity-related MEAs and processes, the African Group of Negotiators on Biodiversity (AGN) for CBD, and the AGN for CITES.
- **Partner Coordination Platform for Biodiversity.** Support provided by the Informal Biodiversity Support Group of partners to the AGN has been recognised as fundamental in strengthening the capacity of the AGN to coordinate and support the development of an African common position that has effectively influenced global negotiations. The AUC is to ensure this platform is revived and re-oriented to ensure greater visibility and alignment to programmes based on the value add of each partner.



Regional level coordination nodes

A regional coordination structure is needed to support greater visibility and impact of biodiversity-related MEAs at the regional level and to link regional inputs for both negotiations and implementation to wider continental processes, the proposed structure to provide this response includes:

- RECs, for overall coordination.
- Regional Coordinating Bodies on Biodiversity, for direct coordination.
- Regional partnership coordination or alignment with existing partnership networks under the RECs, where these exist.



National level coordination nodes

National level coordination nodes will be established at institutions charged with overall and sector-based coordination. These may include National Focal Institutions for overall coordination and Sector National Focal Nodes or National Centres of Excellence for programme coordination.



Biodiversity Resource Mobilisation Plan

Providing the framework for mobilising biodiversity financing, aligned to the priority actions of this Strategy, constitutes a strategic response to meeting the implementation needs of the GBF and other biodiversity-related MEAs across the continent, as well as providing transparency on financial flows to Africa from all sources. Most of the resources will be mobilised at the national level by individual countries depending on needs and capacities. There is also a need for enhanced financing to support continental efforts to drive Africa's biodiversity agenda.

Financing opportunities from all sources will be identified, including from domestic public finance, public international funds, and private funds from industries and private finance institutions. Based on (and across) each pillar of this Strategy, the Biodiversity Resource Mobilisation Plan will define access procedures and opportunities, as well as expenditure procedures and priorities at the continental level. Priorities for information sharing and capacity building will be identified and indicators for tracking trends in financial flows from diverse sources will be defined.



Major support tools

Monitoring and Indicators Framework

The monitoring framework for this Strategy is intended to assist countries in the reporting required for the GBF without additional burden. Accordingly, the primary indicators for each target should be drawn from the approved headline, component and complementary indicators, augmented by achievement indicators for each of the actions identified for the five pillars. Given the in-progress work of the Ad-Hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG), it is recommended that the monitoring framework be completed in parallel with the work of the AHTEG, with oversight by African Parties represented in the AHTEG, and supported by relevant observers represented in the AHTEG. In addition to the specific indicators, capacity and resource needs for monitoring must be specified and included in all communications and projects supporting implementation of the Strategy.

Capacity-building and Development, and Technical and Scientific Cooperation Plan

Developing the Plan for Capacity Building and Development, and Technical and Scientific will take into consideration several ongoing processes and tools, including the CBD Long-term Strategic Plan for Capacity-building and Development and Technical and Scientific Cooperation for the implementation of the GBF. Complementary to this are the Capacity Building Action Plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and the findings on capacity building needs for the Nagoya Protocol. Priorities for capacity building defined in Pillar E of this Strategy will also inform this Plan.

Biodiversity Communication, Education, Public Awareness and Uptake Action Plan

This Plan constitutes an important tool for promoting awareness of this Strategy, and supporting knowledge sharing, and will support implementation across the continent. Developing this Plan will take into account the CBD goals for communication aimed at, inter alia, increasing understanding and awareness of the multiple values of biodiversity, including associated systems of knowledge of IPLCs; raising awareness amongst all actors on progress in achieving the GBF; developing and promoting platforms and partnerships, to share information and experiences; and, disseminating information on the relevance of the GBF to key thematic and developmental processes.

Stakeholder Engagement Framework

Across the continent, a wide range of stakeholders at various levels have been engaged in activities aimed at promoting the conservation and sustainable use of the continent's biodiversity and ecosystems. Developing a Stakeholder Engagement Framework for the continent provides the opportunity for mapping and providing greater visibility to the contribution that these key actors make towards each pillar and intervention area for this Strategy. This is expected to trigger greater commitment from non-state actors towards the implementation of the GBF within the continent. The tool will be developed through an inclusive process with the participation of key stakeholders.



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