

Conference on Climate Ecosystems and Livelihoods for Africa

Nairobi Communiqué

Africa is most vulnerable continent to the impacts of climate change. Already Africa is warmer: some regions are suffering historic drought, and malaria zones are expanding. Rising sea levels are inundating coastal areas. Mountain glaciers are receding. Today, Africa is facing serious climate-induced threats on ecosystem health, food security and livelihood assets. Countries that lack resources and capacity for achieving sustainable development in a changing climate face major challenges. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate envision climate resilience as a top priority for scientific research and policy.

China, as an emerging economy, has deep and highly relevant experience in using science for development, and currently hosts an ambitious international research programme focused on climate and ecosystems. The Belt and Road (B&R) Initiatives advocated by the Chinese government aim to promote diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in countries along the B&R routes. The B&R Initiatives, following those under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, have brought China and Africa closer together, with joint research initiatives to explore sustainable development and climate resilience.

UN Environment, the leading global environmental authority, is supporting developing countries in the effective implementation of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. In November 2016, UN Environment launched a decade-long (2016-2025) flagship programme on Climate, Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CEL), designed to assist countries in the South to improve livelihoods through ecosystem restoration and conservation in the context of climate change. UNEP's International Ecosystem Management Partnership (IEMP), a joint effort with the Chinese Academy of Sciences since 2011, will lead the flagship programme.

On 4-5 September 2017, UNEP-IEMP convened an international conference in Nairobi, at UN Environment headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, "Conference on Climate, Ecosystems and Livelihoods for Africa." The organizers had ambitious objectives: identify challenges related to achieve the SDGs targets and the Paris Agreement; share experiences in research and practices to adapt to climate variability and change; and develop a roadmap for future activities. The overall goal was to strengthen the Africa-China partnership for cooperation on CEL issues in Africa.

The conference was attended by 70 scientists and policy leaders from 10 African nations and China, representing 40 national and international organizations. In addition to UN Environment, there were three co-sponsors: The World Academy of Sciences; the National Natural Science Foundation of China; and the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Judy Wakhungu, Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Regional Development Authorities, and Ibrahim Thiaw, Deputy Executive Director of UN Environment, in opening remarks emphasized the vulnerability of African countries and the importance of China-Africa cooperation. Following other high-level opening remarks, the conference

participants heard presentations focused on conditions, challenges and CEL initiatives in Africa and on China's research in areas such as grassland ecosystems, ecosystem monitoring and agricultural development. On the second day of the conference, participants held detailed group discussions about areas for potential China-Africa collaboration.

The conference marked a shift from individual to institutional cooperation, and from a project to a programme approach. At the conclusion, participants agreed that future cooperation should be based on existing institutions, networks and ongoing programmes in both Africa and China, including centres of excellence. The institutions should join forces to pursue three goals:

- Promote awareness and knowledge of the Climate, Ecosystems and Livelihoods nexus;
- Build capacity for the implementation of the CEL programme towards achieving the SDGs and the Paris Agreement; and
- Develop policy recommendations – including innovative, integrative solutions – to support the work of policymakers and to strengthen the science-policy interface.

To achieve those goals, the participants advocate a China-Africa partnership aligned with the 10-year timeframe of CEL, with a two-year pilot phase. It would create a standing mechanism under which UN Environment would provide a platform to support future China-Africa cooperation on CEL. Specifically, the partnership would work to:

- Synergise existing programmes and explore possibilities of collaboration within the CEL programme;
- Identify CEL – relevant programmes on short- and long-term time scales; and
- Bring scientific support to policy makers within the China-Africa collaboration, in harmony with the Belt and Road Initiatives.

Africa has much to learn from the experience of China in addressing the challenges of Climate, Ecosystems and Livelihoods. However, this programme will also benefit from intensive South-South cooperation among the nations of Africa.

With the right commitment and focus, we expect this programme to advance scientific knowledge and build African scientific capacity. In addition, the programme would reinforce local ownership and local partnerships; increase the participation of women scientists and young scientists; and build new partnerships between the public and private sectors. We further believe that this programme will have a long-term effect of strengthening environmental governance.

Through this conference, the scientists of Africa and China, with the involvement of many national and international partners, have taken the first step on an important journey. The journey will be long, but we are confident that it will make great contributions to prosperity for the people of Africa, and around the world.