



Progress Towards Sustainable Development in Eastern Africa Key Policy Messages



Economic Commission
for Africa



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1 Introduction

This summary provides information on the progress made in the Eastern Africa subregion in implementing Agenda 21 and the various commitments, programmes and time-bound targets adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). It also assesses progress made in fulfilling the provisions relating to means of implementation, as contained in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI). The report was prepared as part of the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) also known as Rio+20. In this summary, a number of issues pertaining to sustainable development and the need to promote closer convergence among its three pillars are presented. Specific attention is given to priority sustainable development issues and trends in the subregion; concrete actions taken, highlighting best practices, progress made and achievements; implementation challenges and constraints; interlinkages between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development; institutional frameworks for sustainable development in the subregion; transition towards a green economy within the context of poverty reduction and sustainable development; new and emerging challenges and conclusions and key messages.

2 Priority sustainable development issues and trends

A number of priority sustainable development issues may be discerned in the subregion. The nine priority issues, include economic growth and wealth creation; agriculture, food security and climate change; investing in people; poverty, inequality and social deprivation; energy and energy poverty, environment for sustainable development; environment for peace and security; sustainable consumption and production, including the issue of waste management; the role of regional integration; and regional, national and local level partnerships for sustainable development.

The subregion has some of the fastest growing economies in the world. It also has some of the highest levels of poverty. Poverty eradication requires rapid economic growth and industrialization, which in the absence of access to new technologies and financial resources will lead to both the consumption of large amounts of natural resources and generation of wastes. This will exert considerable pressure on the environment and natural resource base. There is already evidence of such pressure in the subregion.

3 Concrete actions taken, highlighting best practices, progress made and achievements

A number of concrete actions at the legal, policy, institutional and implementation levels have been taken to address the numerous challenges to sustainable development in the subregion. Pertinent examples include deepening regional integration at the levels of both the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) and increased joint implementation of actions. In the area of wealth creation for instance, a number of interrelated actions aimed at reducing supply-side constraints, improving competitiveness and fostering comparative advantage have been taken. These, however, need further up-scaling and replication across the subregion. There are also joint actions to ensure environmental sustain-

ability, including the EAC Climate Change Policy and Strategy, Regional Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessment for Transboundary resources and guidelines and protocols on natural resources. The various actions have achieved far-reaching political, economic and social changes marked by increasing commitment to sustainable development.

4 Implementation challenges and constraints

A number of challenges deter rapid progression towards sustainable development in the subregion. They emanate from three key sources. The first source is poverty and low economic growth. The second is the high level of environmental degradation coupled with climate change. The third is lack of technical implementation capacity and slow response by the international community to address the subregion's development problems, including the HIV/AIDS pandemic, conflicts and institutional and policy failures. Overall, the challenges concern the three pillars of the economy, society and environment. This calls for smart ways of designing and implementing sustainable development options that harness the integrated total sum of the benefits from all the pillars. More emphasis should be put on good governance, building on existing successes in policy, regulatory frameworks and participative management of the subregion's natural resource base. Future progress will depend on how the region's natural resources, including forests, land, biodiversity, mountains, tourism, minerals and water resources are managed for social equity, economic prosperity and environmental integrity.

5 Interlinkages between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development

Sustainable management of the subregion's natural resources forms the basis for poverty eradication and sustainable development. The subregion's natural resource base however faces several threats, including environmental degradation, water scarcity, water quality deterioration, siltation, deforestation, over-fishing and over-grazing which, together, jeopardize the region's chances of achieving sustainable development. The subregion must recognize the contribution of the natural resource base to economic growth and social transformation and develop indicators that help to monitor the impact of economic growth on the natural resource base and of the natural resource base on the economy.

6 Institutional framework for sustainable development

Agenda 21 and JPOI both called upon countries to establish National Councils for Sustainable Development and National Strategies for Sustainable Development. The purpose of these institutions and strategic frameworks is to reduce fragmentation and foster integration of the three pillars of sustainable development. There is evidence that sustainable development and related national and regional governance arrangements have improved in the subregion. Further strengthening of these mechanisms, particularly to further improve the monitoring and integra-

tion of the three pillars of sustainable development in an integrated and balanced manner needs to be undertaken.

7 Transition towards a green economy within the context of poverty reduction and sustainable development

The green economy offers considerable opportunities for mobilizing resources towards a low-emission, climate-resilient development pathway. This, however, is not without challenges. The key challenge is how the green economy will contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction objectives while improving welfare and quality of life for the subregion's poor. The green economy will necessarily require an increase in the levels of consumption, particularly of food, energy and water. Policies and investments to sustain and enhance the natural capital assets - the soils, forests and fisheries on which many poor people depend will be instrumental. At the same time, the economic system needs to develop, enabling the region to improve its terms of trade and to increase its productivity. The pathway toward a green economy will require mobilization of new financial resources from public and private sources. This implies a realignment of policy goals and priorities and related allocation of capital, while addressing the immediate and pressing development concerns and poverty-alleviation objectives. Overall, the green economy is a welcome development that the subregion is willing and ready to embrace. However, transition will entail additional costs, which require new and additional financing, access to technologies and capacity-building, meaning that improved, adequate and predictable international support must be provided to the subregion. Transition on the other hand, should not be used as a justification for new barriers to trade, aid or access to finance.

8 New and emerging challenges

The key new and emerging challenges to sustainable development in the subregion include climate change and the associated extreme weather conditions; rising water scarcity; the unfolding financial crisis; halting progress towards the MDGs; the global food crisis and high food prices; the energy crisis precipitated by the unprecedented volatility in energy prices; biodiversity loss; degradation of ecosystems, including marine ecosystems; inefficient and wasteful patterns of consumption and production and a succession of natural disasters. The myriad of challenges justify a total change of economic policy, including the patterns of production, distribution and consumption within a framework of green growth.

9 Conclusion and Key messages

Although the subregion has progressed in integrating the pillars of sustainable development, a number of weaknesses and challenges still remain and must be addressed. The key challenges relate to lack of financial resources to foster sustainable development, in view of a weak private sector and limited public sector resources. This is against a backdrop that donor commitments have not been forthcoming. Yet, transition to a green economy requires additional resources, new technologies and human and financial resources. The following are some of key messages emerging from the review:

- i) Though endowed with a rich natural resource base, the subregion currently accesses the least amount of global environmental financing due to lack of technical capacity to develop bankable projects. Special windows for international financing need to be dedicated to the subregion to address mounting financing needs;
- ii) The international community will have to step up access to technology and technology transfer that is affordable and suitable to the African context in line with the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building (e.g. solar, small and mini hydro projects);
- iii) The green economy is a welcome development that the region is willing and ready to embrace. The development should, however, not be used as a justification for new barriers to trade, aid or access to finance;
- iv) Land use planning, urban planning and infrastructure development are needed as well as concrete actions and best practices. These practices must be stepped up to enable the subregion to embrace and benefit from transition to a green economy;
- v) Institutional mechanisms to monitor and ensure integration of the three pillars of sustainable development in an integrated and balanced manner need to be established and where they exist, strengthened and positioned in such a way that they can influence policy and decision-making;
- vi) Countries need to recognize the contribution of the natural resource base to economic growth and social transformation and integrate natural resource accounting into national economic statistics and reporting. This will provide an informed basis for them to increase the percentage allocation of their national budgets to sustainable development.