



Report on sustainable development goals for the Central Africa subregion

Key messages

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United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa



African Union
Commission



African Development
Bank

A. Introduction

1. One of the key commitments agreed upon at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) was the compelling need to draw up sustainable development goals, because of their potential usefulness for pursuing focused and coherent action on sustainable development at the global, regional, national and local levels. Rio+20 also recognized that the goals should be coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015.
2. As a follow-up to the outcomes of Rio+20, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, organized the Africa Regional Implementation Meeting to discuss the main outcomes of Rio+20 and their implications for Africa. The meeting called for an effective, broad-based and bottom-up consultative process in Africa to flesh out the goals, indicators and targets that should underpin the sustainable development goals.
3. In the framework of the African consultations on the post-2015 development agenda, and with a view to helping African countries to engage effectively in the global process on establishing sustainable development goals and ensuring that the goals agreed upon are aligned with the continent's sustainable development priorities, five subregional reports were prepared. They were presented at the African Regional Consultative Meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals, which was organized by ECA, AUC and AfDB, and held from 31 October to 5 November 2013. The meeting adopted its final document in the form of a technical input for consideration by the African High-level Committee on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.
4. The key points of the report on sustainable development goals for central Africa are summarized below.

B. Sustainable development issues and priorities for the central Africa subregion

Significant natural resource endowment

- 5 **The Governments of the subregion have become aware of the considerable economic, sociocultural and environmental roles of their significant natural resources.** This natural wealth includes a wide range of ecosystems, and abundant water, forest and mineral resources. Various initiatives have been launched with a view to implementing instruments, legal and institutional frameworks, and coherent action frameworks for the conservation and sustainable management of these resources. The Governments have also made considerable efforts to promote and ensure the transparency of social investments that benefit local communities, with the aim of reducing poverty. Ambitious major infrastructure programmes are also underway (such as roads and hydroelectric dams) in response to national and cross-border needs. Lastly, significant efforts to boost subregional integration are beginning to yield results in those areas where a lasting peace has been restored.

Key development concerns

- 6 **Even if all the member States of the Economic Community of Central African States are, to varying degrees, in the process of democratic transition, the subregion has been marked by considerable sociopolitical instability in recent decades.** Rebellions, intra and inter-ethnic

conflicts, inter-State conflicts, illicit trafficking in arms, drugs, human beings and precious stones, and struggles for the control of resources have weakened the member States and had a grave impact on the subregion's natural resources. Maritime border security is also a growing global security concern, with the combination of both old and new threats, including kidnapping for ransom, piracy and terrorism.

7. **Throughout central Africa, the establishment of the rule of law remains a challenge.** The frequency with which political crises erupt is closely related to weak national institutions, corruption, and a lack of transparency and accountability. This is a real problem in the natural resources sector, particularly mining. Similarly, the credibility of electoral processes and mechanisms is generally questioned.
8. **One of the major constraints remains inadequate funding for sustainable development.** Recognizing the significance of the global economic crisis and its impact on public development aid, the countries of central Africa are exploring different funding avenues, although they continue to call on developed countries and the international community to honour their commitments. These avenues include public–private partnerships, the mobilization of domestic savings through obligatory State loans, and the setting up of mechanisms for solidarity-based funding or mutual funds from the subregion's own internal resources, which could be used to fund national, cross-border or inter-State sustainable development projects.

Economic sustainability

9. **Inadequate infrastructures is one of the major challenges that African countries face.** This can be observed in the areas of transport, drinking water, sanitation and access to energy, which is the greatest obstacle to economic growth. This is in spite of the subregion's significant potential, which is currently being underexploited.
10. **The overall positive economic growth of the countries in the subregion is a major asset for successfully implementing sustainable development programmes,** despite significant disparities, low economic diversification, dependence on agricultural, forest and mining commodities, and considerable vulnerability to fluctuations in international commodity prices.
11. **The subregion's agro-ecological conditions are conducive to agricultural production, and yet this remains underexploited and agricultural production is poor.** Out of a total surface area of 6.7 million km², 1.6 million km² is arable land, and only 3.75 per cent is farmed. Land grabbing is a growing problem, making it imperative to implement conservative land policies.
12. **Transforming the subregion's economies into green economies should be a priority in the coming years,** since the industrial sector, with the exception of the mining industry, is not particularly dynamic. Exports mostly consist of raw, unprocessed products, and there is not much diversification. The contribution of the manufacturing sector to total value added is very low, except in Cameroon, where it was 16.72 per cent in 2007. Progress is being held back by low investment incentives and the prevalence of fraud, smuggling, counterfeiting and unfair competition from illegal factories. Other constraining factors include under-developed intra-community trade and a financial system that does not favour long-term financing.

Social sustainability

13. **The problems posed by the subregion's weak economic and social infrastructure are compounded by significant population growth and rapid urbanization.** In 2025, the population in central Africa will exceed 200 million, and the problems related to demographic pressures will

be pervasive and growing. Central Africa will have to cope with country-like mega-cities, which will cause land development problems and have an impact on natural resources and sustainable development (for instance, lack of available land, and insufficient housing, intra-urban transportation, water and sanitation, and electricity). Issues such as urban poverty, slums, unemployment and underemployment, especially of young people, will have to be addressed. Concerns regarding food, health and education will become more pressing. Access to improved sanitation facilities will be even more problematic given that slums are already starting to appear in the big cities.

14. **The creation of decent jobs is a major goal in the coming years in terms of sustainable development.** Unemployment in central Africa is very high, at 23.12 per cent. In addition, unemployed young people – given the characteristics of this group and the fragility of the social and political systems – are a true time bomb that could explode and set the region ablaze at any time if no action is taken to defuse it.
15. **As a result of high unemployment, inadequate infrastructure and inefficient social policies, living conditions remain unsatisfactory.** The limited access of the population to basic social services (such as water, housing, health and education) results in a strong tendency towards poverty. In many cases, insufficient progress has been made towards achieving the goal of poverty reduction. Central Africa as a whole has the world's highest prevalence of malnutrition.
16. **Although the countries of the subregion have introduced new legislation on the protection of women's rights, in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, there is still sex-based discrimination in many areas.** With respect to schooling, there are still many disparities in access to education, even though they tend to be less visible at primary-school level. The figures regarding the political participation of women are worse. In no country in the subregion is the number of women in parliament equal to that of men. Economically, women have less access to land than men, are confined to the agricultural sector and the informal sector, and rarely become business managers or directors of State corporations.

Environmental sustainability

17. **The impact of climate change on the natural resources and various sectors of the economy of the subregion has not yet been systematically studied.** Further research will make it possible to identify the most common climate risks; the resources, socioeconomic groups and areas most exposed to these risks; and the degree of vulnerability of populations and ecosystems, to enable them to be prioritized. This will enable adaptation solutions to be drawn up for resources and socioeconomic groups that are most vulnerable to climate change.
18. **With regard to the sustainable management of water resources, the water sector has to contend with hydroclimatic variability, inadequate storage, rising demand and a lack of cross-border cooperation.** Many challenges remain, particularly in terms of managing knowledge, hydrological information, water-related risks, shared water resources, and water governance.
19. **The conservation of the biological diversity of ecosystems is of paramount importance for all countries in the subregion.** Pollution, waste and the exploitation of land and marine resources are helping to weaken or destroy many ecosystems. Massive deforestation of tropical regions, the expansion of urban areas, and the trafficking of rare animals or plants are other threats. The regional authorities must work to reduce these problems by, for instance, establishing a regional legal and institutional framework for the sustainable management of protected sites and areas, in order to contribute significantly to the acceleration of economic growth and job creation while protecting biodiversity. Such a framework should involve all stakeholders (local communities, traders, etc.) in a participatory process for managing and conserving protected areas.

20. **Desertification, which mainly affects the north (Chad and the northern parts of Cameroon and the Central African Republic) and south (Angola) of the subregion, is a real threat in central Africa.** Indeed, degradation resulting from erosion can be observed through a reduction in agricultural production, soil fertility and arable land. Similarly, recurrent droughts combined with population pressure in the Sahelian zone accelerate the desertification process through soil and plant cover degradation. This leads to illegal and unsustainable logging, although admittedly, this type of operation makes it possible both to satisfy the energy needs of urban and rural populations, and to supply local and even international markets with logs and timber.
21. **Management of chemicals and non-biodegradable industrial waste is also a major challenge.** The most problematic waste comes from the following sectors: electronics, household appliances, hospitals and oil. In many developing countries, 80 to 90 per cent of wastewater discharged into rivers or the ocean is raw, untreated sewage. Pollution associated with rapid population growth and inadequate sanitation and waste treatment facilities is a threat to public health and wildlife, as well as to sources of income such as fishing and tourism. It is important to conduct a comprehensive study on the state of waste management in the subregion, together with a plan for strengthening the capacities of stakeholders.

C. Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

22. The analysis of the situation of the subregion has helped to highlight the progress made by the countries in the three areas of sustainable development and to identify opportunities. These opportunities stem from the existence of an impressive endowment in natural resources, rich biodiversity potential, development prospects and potential for a green economy, the capacity-building of stakeholders in the evaluation of public policies, the political will of Governments at all levels as well technical and financial partners, and the prospect of cooperation with emerging countries that are ahead in terms of the implementation of sustainable development goals.
23. However, there are challenges that could hamper the sustainable development goals from being met, mainly related to insufficient ownership of the process, in particular by politicians, the lack of reliable data and appropriate instruments, governance issues, instability and sociopolitical tension, inadequate financial resources and climate change. The following recommendations are aimed at building capacity for ownership and operationalization of sustainable development goals in the subregion.

Recommendations

24. To facilitate the implementation of sustainable development goals in the subregion and to mitigate the risks identified, the report contains the following recommendations:
 - (a) **Continue efforts to restore and consolidate peace**, and strengthen mechanisms that promote good governance, responsibility and accountability, with a view to putting in place the environment needed for sustainable development. To help achieve this, a subregional observatory on sustainable development and the rule of law for central Africa should be established.
 - (b) **Continue to develop infrastructure**, including transport, energy, water and sanitation, and make them into powerful levers of subregional integration.

- (c) **Strengthen subregional integration** and make it more effective, especially as regards the formulation and management of common industrial policies (for instance, the sustainable wood processing industry in the Congo Basin).
- (d) **Ensure donor coordination and strengthen member States' capacity to design, implement and monitor effective planning frameworks**, and continue the operationalization of the Fund for the Green Economy in Central Africa, managed by the Bank of Central African States.
- (e) **Improve the effectiveness of national production systems and the dissemination of statistical data**, with a view to formulating and managing public policies that facilitate the setting of priorities and the monitoring of progress.

Proposed sustainable development goals

Goal 1: Promote democracy, the rule of law, peace, security and sociopolitical stability.

Goal 2: Promote good governance and accountability.

Goal 3: Develop physical, economic and social infrastructure to improve living conditions.

Goal 4: Fight against poverty and promote food sovereignty.

Goal 5: Promote green growth and the creation of decent jobs.

Goal 6: Improve access to health care for all.

Goal 7: Ensure access to secondary education and vocational training for all.

Goal 8: Ensure environmental protection and promote resilience to climate change.

Goal 9: Promote social inclusion, gender equality and women's empowerment.

