

**THIRD INTERMINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT IN  
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***Health and Environment Strategic Alliance in Africa:  
A Spearhead for Implementation of the SDGs***

**IMCHE/3/CP.3**

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**Summary**

In adopting the 17 Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders outlined bold and transformative steps urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path for the people, planet and prosperity. The SDGs provide a renewed commitment to sustainable development and identified necessary measures to address in an integrated manner key economic, environmental and social challenges.

At the first Inter-Ministerial Conference on Health and Environment in Africa, governments adopted the Libreville Declaration that was specifically designed to recognize the linkages between health and environment with a view to achieve sustainable development, to promote an integrated approach to policy-making and to undertake specific actions required to leverage the necessary changes in institutional arrangements and investment frameworks for mitigating environmental threats to human health. This recognition was re-affirmed at the second inter-ministerial conference through the adoption of the Luanda Commitment on the implementation of the Libreville Declaration.

The progress and results achieved under the Libreville Declaration implementation process reveal its capacity and potential role and contribution in translating the Africa's aspirations into actions at the continental and country level. The purpose of this paper is to position the Libreville Declaration as a unique policy instrument that brings health and environment jointly into the broader context of sustainable development and provide a complementary route to positive change to be replicated and scaled up particularly within the context of the SDGs. It highlights as well how the Health and Environment Strategic Alliance for Africa constitutes a key platform to support the concerted implementation of international agendas and agreements.

## I. Background

1. In adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development world leaders recognized that the interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda, which is to profoundly improve the lives of all and to transform our world for the better, is realized. This renewed political commitment to sustainable development calls upon national Governments and development partners to further strengthen and consolidate their efforts to effectively integrate the economic, environmental and social dimensions in their development policies and strategies and to recognize their interlinkages so as to achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions. It further highlights some of the key measures that need to be taken at the national, regional and global levels to address key economic, environmental and social challenges.
2. At their first conference in Libreville, Gabon, 2008, Ministers of health and Ministers of environment decided to demonstrate the importance of interlinkages between environment and health with a view to achieving sustainable development. They agreed to promote an integrated approach to policy making in the health and environment sectors that fully takes into account the services that ecosystems provide to human health. They also agreed on specific actions required to leverage the necessary changes in institutional arrangements and investment frameworks for mitigating environmental threats to human health.
3. Since its adoption in 2008, the Libreville Declaration has yielded significant results. Tangible achievements have been made in relation to the normative work, advocacy, strengthening country systems through provision of technical guidance, tools and methodologies and resources to countries. Multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary task teams have been established. Inter-ministerial consensus has been reached on continental and national priorities on health and environment. Pan-African strategic frameworks and plans of actions have been developed and endorsed by ministerial fora. Effective intersectoral actions have been undertaken on key environmental risks factors that are of great relevance in achieving sustainable development objectives. Partners have repeatedly expressed their full support for the Libreville Declaration. All this progress converge towards the recognition that the Libreville Declaration has the capacity and yet not fully tapped, potential to play a significant role in translating the ambitious aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and its SDGs into actions at the African continental and country levels.
4. The Health and Environment Strategic Alliance generated a new spirit of cooperation and alignment between the health and environment sectors in order to achieve sustainable development. It provides an institutional and programmatic impetus for the translation of political commitments and aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into concrete actions and interventions.
5. The SDGs present a key opportunity to address the linkages between environment and health across the 17 goals and 169 targets. The natural and built environment can be a major determinant of health and how we live. Our surroundings can influence our health through a variety of channels—through exposure to physical, chemical and biological risk factors or by triggering behavioural changes. Likewise, there is a growing awareness that

humans, through their intervention in the environment, play a vital role in exacerbating or mitigating health risks. Directly tackling the inter-linkages between environment and human health presents new and interwoven key opportunities to meet the SDGs, as environment and health is reflected across the various goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **II. Purpose**

6. The purpose of this paper is to position the Libreville Declaration as a unique policy instrument that brings health and environment jointly into the broader context of sustainable development and provide a complementary route to positive change to be replicated and scaled up. It particularly highlights how the Libreville Declaration can spearhead the implementation of the SDGs It highlights as well how the Health and Environment Strategic Alliance for Africa constitutes a key platform to support the concerted implementation of international agendas and agreements in Africa.
7. This document along with the Framework for Scaling up Investment on Priority Health and Environment Interventions is intended to support the development and implementation of the Strategic Action Plan on Health and Environment in Africa.

## **III. Libreville Declaration: A Concrete Expression of Institutional Strengthening Aspirations for Sustainable Development.**

8. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 associated targets are integrated and indivisible. Never before has such a commitment to common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy agenda been pledged to the pursuit of global development and of “win-win” cooperation which can bring huge gains to all countries and all parts of the world.
9. The adoption of these interrelated Goals calls for integrated and innovative solutions. To address them effectively, a new approach is needed. Sustainable development recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combatting inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent.
10. The success of SDGs implementation efforts will largely be measured by the capacity of countries to implement policies that break the vicious cycle linking poverty, environmental degradation, ill health and the continued inequities related to gender and vulnerable groups. Action at junctures of health and environment linkages is critical to meeting this challenge.

11. The SDGs present a key opportunity to address the linkages between environment and health across the 17 goals and 169 targets. The natural and built environment can be a major determinant of health and how we live. Our surroundings can influence our health through a variety of channels—through exposure to physical, chemical and biological risk factors or by triggering behavioural changes. Likewise, there is a growing awareness that humans, through their intervention in the environment, play a vital role in exacerbating or mitigating health risks. Directly tackling the inter-linkages between environment and human health presents new and interwoven key opportunities to meet the SDGs, as environment and health is reflected across the various goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

***A. An Effective Umbrella Framework to Put into Practice the Process of Integration***

12. The major orientations of the SDGs have been spelled out and the corresponding contributions of the Libreville Declaration to their implementation have been described below.

- a) ***Promoting balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development:*** The aim of the Libreville Declaration which is to integrate agreed objectives in the areas of health and environment in national poverty reduction strategies by implementing priority intersectoral programmes at all levels, and as such accelerating achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals is consistent with the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development;
- b) ***Taking an action- and result-oriented approach*** giving due regard to all relevant cross-cutting issues with the aim to contribute to the implementation of sustainable development: The Libreville Declaration has shown results of its contribution to sustainable development. Documented projects as shown by the *Synthesis Report on the Evaluation of Implementation of The Libreville Declaration (IMCHE/3/CP1)* demonstrate tangible outcomes on joint environment and health priorities identified in the Luanda Commitment. For instance, in Ethiopia, the intersectoral project on Urban Water Supply and Sanitation has allowed production of 30,000 Cu. m. per day of additional water through development of new boreholes and spring sources with combined IDA and Borrower resources including provision of yard taps for low income areas of Addis Ababa City. Other intersectoral projects developed in Mali, Gabon and Ethiopia, have had concrete positive impacts on the population in terms of access to water, sanitation and reduced vulnerability to environmental risks factors.
- c) ***Underscoring the importance of interlinkages among key issues and challenges and the need for a systematic approach to them at all relevant levels:*** Libreville Declaration recognizes that it is necessary and urgent to implement in African countries the imperative of sustainable

development in efforts to achieve economic growth. The Libreville Declaration further recognizes the constraints on accelerated implementation of the necessary integrated strategies to protect populations against risks resulting from environmental degradation. The risks factors include poor access to safe drinking water, poor sanitation and air pollution, vector-borne diseases, chemicals, poor waste management, new toxic substances, desertification, industrial and household-related risks, and natural disasters. Ministers jointly underscored that well-managed health and environmental risks impact positively on national economies, including through increased foreign direct investments and that health security can be achieved through a healthy environment.

- d) ***Enhancing coherence, reducing fragmentation and overlap and increasing effectiveness, efficiency and transparency, while reinforcing coordination and cooperation:*** Climate change is recognized as one of the environmental risks presenting threats to health. The African Plan of Action for Public Health Adaptation to Climate Change which is an outcome of the Libreville Declaration process is a clear example of achieving greater coherence and reduced fragmentation. Ministers of Health and Ministers of Environment through the Libreville Declaration adopted a joint statement on climate change in Luanda in 2010. A year later, they adopted on a common framework for adaptation (AMCEN SS4/1 and WHO Regional Committee AGR/NC6111R2). This framework has been used by the country teams to prepare joint environment and health national adaptation plans to climate change. Similarly Ministers of Environment endorsed at AMCEN 14<sup>th</sup> session the Programme to Reduce Chemical Risks on Health and Environment as a joint health and environment intersectoral comprehensive response in support of SAICM and MEAs implementation process.
- e) ***Engaging high-level political leaders, providing policy guidance and identifying specific actions to promote effective implementation of sustainable development,*** including through voluntary sharing of experiences and lessons learned: The African Ministers of Health and Ministers of Environment in adopting the Libreville Declaration, called upon the Head of State of Gabon to present the Libreville Declaration to the African Union. It exemplified the capacity of the Libreville process in engaging high level political leaders in identifying sustainable development oriented type of actions and in creating new possibilities for a more rapid and effective response to global and continental challenges.
- f) ***Promoting the science-policy interface*** through inclusive, evidence-based and transparent scientific assessments, as well as access to reliable, relevant and timely data in areas related to the three dimensions of sustainable development, building on existing mechanisms, as appropriate; in this regard, strengthen participation of all countries in international sustainable development processes and capacity-building especially for developing countries, including in conducting their own monitoring and assessments: The Country Task Teams (CTTS) are

multidisciplinary and multisectoral teams of national experts that brings together the best possible evidence through SANAs to support national policy-making through NPJAs. They have provided a unique platform for experts from different sectors to engage in a constructive technical and scientific dialogue and to reach consensus on the priorities and concrete actions to be taken. Through these actions and dialogue it has been easier for decision-makers from the various economic and social sectors concerned to agree on the national and continental priorities for health and environment.

#### **IV. Libreville Declaration: A Strategic Policy Instrument to Deliver the 2030 Agenda and SDGs in Africa**

13. Given the cross-cutting nature of the environment and health nexus, the implementation of the Libreville declaration contributes to the achievement of various SDGs and targets. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA2), Member States decided to focus discussions on the overarching theme “Healthy Environment, Healthy People” recognizing the importance of the nexus between environment and health and the need to act urgently. Recognizing as well that moving from a reactive to a proactive policy approach is key to limit and avoid the highly damaging impacts that pollution has on ecosystems and the environment, the economy, and on human health and well-being, Ministers gathered again in Nairobi during the 3<sup>rd</sup> United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA3) to define a pollution-free planet agenda. They came up with a Ministerial Declaration and adopted resolutions relevant to the environment, health and pollution nexus. .
14. The UNEA3 Resolution 3/4 on Environment and Health calls for continued collaborative action amongst relevant intergovernmental regional processes on health and environment and organizations to avoid duplication and improve effectiveness. It also calls upon UN Environment, together with WHO and other entities to continue to support countries, in developing integrated environment and health policies and measures, and to develop methods, tools and guidelines to promote integrated environmental and health analyses, building on existing work.
15. The sixteenth regular session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) held in Libreville, Gabon, in June 2017 adopted an omnibus decision on Environment in Africa. The decision includes a section on managing pollution in Africa which commits African countries to improving the management of chemicals and wastes, as well as the control of land, air (indoor and outdoor), freshwater, marine and other forms of pollution. It commits inter alia to create awareness on the environmental, health and socio-economic negative impacts of pollution.

##### ***A. A Country Driven Approach to Deliver Regional Priorities for Health and Environment.***

16. In 2012, AMCEN adopted the Arusha Declaration which recalled the Luanda Commitment (2010) on the implementation of the Libreville Declaration on Health and Environment in Africa, in which ministers of health and the environment identified chemicals management as one of the top continental health and environment priorities to be addressed to accelerate the implementation of the Libreville Declaration.

17. In this context, it recognized that to resolve current health and environmental challenges through the effective implementation of both the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the chemicals-related international conventions, requires that the policies of the health and environment sectors be aligned with each other, and the strengthening of institutional mechanisms to facilitate collaboration and the greater integration of the sound management of chemicals into the sustainable development agenda.
18. It requested the member States, the African Union Commission and the United Nations Environment Programme, in collaboration with the World Health Organization and other partners, to support the implementation of the African programme to reduce chemical risks to health and the environment in Africa and to develop and disseminate for use by member States the necessary technical tools required for the implementation of the programme in the context of the Libreville Declaration on Health and Environment in Africa.
19. With this request, Ministers recognized the powerful linkages and causal relationship between health and environment along with significant advantages that can be achieved by looking at these together particularly towards the achievement of sustainable development objectives as envisioned in the SDGs.
20. Ministers of Health and Ministers of Environment underscored the power and values of the health and environment linkages when, they endorsed the Joint Statement on Climate Change and Health as well as the framework of public health adaptation to climate change. This framework represents today the overarching platform for articulating the health sector response to climate change in Africa. Subsequently a regional plan of action covering the period 2012-2016 was developed and implemented. Over 20 countries have conducted vulnerability assessment and developed their Health National Adaption plans (HNAP).
21. It should be recalled that about 34 countries have undertaken Situation Analysis and Needs Assessments (SANAs) for the identification of knowledge gaps on health and environment linkages. Based on the gaps identified through the SANAs, over 20 countries have prepared National Plans of Joint Action (NPJAs) which have further catalyzed the development of over 18 priority inter-sectoral projects and investment plans.

### ***B. Emerging, Tangible and Scalable Outcomes***

22. The Libreville Declaration was forged on the recognition that good environmental management promotes good health and averts the need for certain types of investment in public health hence saving scarce financial resources for other public health uses. Assessment of some actions undertaken at the national level provide evidence of the effectiveness of intersectoral coordination which convince decision-makers from the various sectors to work together on national and continental priorities. This set of actions on the ground also demonstrates that joint health and environment actions can be an effective catalytic force critical to bring development sectors to the table to achieve sustainable development.

23. For example, in Kenya “The Nairobi River Basin Rehabilitation Programme” was developed to enhance the ecological integrity and economic value of the rivers in the Nairobi river basin. The project involved many stakeholders from a wide variety of sectors. Kenya committed \$60 million on concrete interventions such as cut off drains, erection of fences, landscaping and reforestation to provide a safer environment, recreational parks established at riparian zone and improved water quality. These product and services directly benefits the riparian populace of approximately 120, 000 peoples, property value have increased significantly, business increased tremendously which has generated employment opportunities.
24. This example along with the other intersectoral projects shows how the assessment of linked health and environmental impacts can play a significant role in expanding the narrow focus and frequent shortcomings of sectoral responses. It also ensures that the direct contributions of ecosystems to better health are duly captured in the decision-making process. It requires not only the linkage of health and environment in the assessment process, resourceful use of evidence, and judicious use of qualitative and quantitative tools – but also the appropriate enabling conditions.
25. Intersectoral actions undertaken at the national level under the Libreville framework reveal the potential of shaping existing and planned investments in key economic sectors in a manner that considers, health, environment and economic synergies and trade-offs together – rather than in isolation from each other. As such, they reflect the capacity of the Health and Environment Strategic Alliance to provide an effective strategic platform for the implementation of the flagship programmes that are long term initiatives and aimed at responding to Africa's needs in a more coordinated way and contributing to the effective implementation of the SDGs in the African region.
26. Health and environment linkages are vital elements that underpin each aspect of a green economy and most of the African countries development plans and should be integrated not only by investments in the realm of agriculture, fisheries, forest, water but also in the investment in energy, resource efficiency, manufacturing, chemicals and waste management, building and urban design, and transportation.

## **Conclusion**

27. The Libreville Declaration on Health and Environment in Africa has evolved as a successful country driven regional initiative. It has proven to be an effective umbrella framework upon which African countries and their development partners can put into practice an integrated approach to address coherently, the environmental determinants to human health and ecosystem integrity as a vital contribution to sustainable development. The inter-ministerial conferences have provided Africa with a unique opportunity to drive national and international agendas on health and environment and demonstrate Africa’s leadership in implementing sustainable development policies. Tangible outcomes are emerging and need to be scaled up .They demonstrate that sustainable development principles are implementable and that the comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred

set of universal and transformative Goals and targets is achievable and that a better world between now and 2030 is possible.