

Progress Update on the Establishment of the China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Centre

A. Objective of the Centre

1. It is anticipated that the China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Centre (the Centre) will serve as:
 - a. A forum for environmental policy interaction and dialogue.
 - b. A clearing house for information exchange and technical co-operation in sustainable business development and innovative technology.
 - c. A platform for capacity development in support of environmental policy and best practice to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
 - d. A catalyst for joint environmental programmes and project development and implementation.
 - e. A platform for mobilization of funds for environmental projects and programmes that will contribute towards Africa's development priorities.

B. Background to UN Environment's Work on South-South Cooperation

2. General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972 directs the UN Environment Programme, "to provide, at the request of all parties concerned, advisory services for the promotion of international co-operation in the field of the environment". This includes providing guidance and advice on how investment and business practices can be made more sustainable.
3. The Rio+20 Conference of 2012 identified South-South Cooperation as a key enabling tool for developing countries to work along these lines. The UN Environment Programme Governing Council highlighted the link between the Green Economy and South-South Cooperation by requesting the UN Environment Programme to collect initiatives and experiences on different pathways for reaching a resource-efficient, low-carbon and socially inclusive economy. UN Environment's role is to disseminate these initiatives and facilitate information sharing among countries, so as to support them to promote sustainable development and poverty eradication.

4. In 2005, the 23rd session of the United Nations Environment Programme Governing Council adopted the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building. Under this plan, the United Nations Environment Programme was requested to strengthen its South-South Cooperation strategy as a means of implementing the Strategic Plan. The creation of the Centre is thus in line with the South-South Cooperation Strategy and the Bali Strategic Plan.

C. Background and Rationale for the Centre

5. The rationale behind this initiative is the enhancement of South-South Cooperation between African countries and China, particularly in accelerating and reaching sustainable development.
6. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which was established in the year 2000, serves as a key platform for collective dialogue and practical cooperation between China and African countries. It also serves as an important driver for China-Africa cooperation in various areas, including in the field of the environment.
7. At the 6th Ministerial Conference of FOCAC, held in Johannesburg (3-5 December 2015), the participating countries agreed on the "Johannesburg Action Plan" (2016-2018). At the Conference, China pledged to set up a China-Africa Environment Cooperation Centre, "[...] to enhance China-Africa environmental cooperation and promote African countries' green development".
8. The Centre will strengthen cooperation between China and African countries in the field of environment, as well as to promote green investments and development. The Centre will provide tailored services to support African Member States to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, and the Africa Union's 2063 Agenda. The Centre will thus become a platform for broad environmental policy dialogue, information exchange, capacity building and co-operation on green development that will be directed and steered by both African countries and China.
9. At the 7th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit held on 3-4 September 2018 in Beijing, which was attended by 50 African Heads of State and/or Government, President Xi Jinping announced the establishment of the Centre during his opening speech.

10. The Centre is also referenced in the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan 2019-2021, which is the main outcome document from the meeting. Article 4.6.3 of the Action Plan states, “The two sides will work together to set up a China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Centre and deepen environment cooperation through more policy dialogue and joint research on environmental issues and stepping up exchanges and cooperation on the environment industry and technical information sharing, among others.”
11. All interested countries and entities will be welcome to join and support the work of the Centre. This includes the African Union Commission, international financial institutions, as well as international non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

D. Linkages to the Medium-Term Plan and Programmes of Work and Budget (2018-2021)

12. These objectives are aligned with, and contribute to, expected accomplishments outlined in the UN Environment Programme’s Medium Term Strategy 2018-2021. This particularly relates to work in the Resource Efficiency Sub-Programme, with direct input into the following expected accomplishments: “Science-based approaches that support the transition to sustainable development through multiple pathways, including inclusive green economy and sustainable trade, and the adoption of sustainable consumption and production patterns at all levels”; and “Public, private and financial sectors increasingly adopt and implement sustainable management frameworks and practices”.
13. By strengthening national legal frameworks and helping ensure that social and environmental safeguards are effective – and that best practices in participatory processes and stakeholder engagement are in place – the Centre will also contribute directly to the Environmental Governance Sub-Programme’s Expected Accomplishment (b): “Institutional capacities and policy and/or legal frameworks enhanced to achieve internationally agreed environmental goals, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.”

E. Letter of Intent

14. On 5th December 2017, during the 3rd session of the United National Environment Assembly held in Nairobi, the Government of China, the Government of Kenya and the United Nations Environment Programme signed a Letter of Intent, in which the three Parties agreed to work together to establish the Centre. While the letter is not

legally binding, it sets out an ambition to work together to this end. It was agreed that the Centre will be hosted in Kenya, and that it will be supported financially – during its inception phase – by the China Trust Fund for the United Nations Environment Programme.

15. In the Letter of Intent, the United Nations Environment Programme committed to the following specific and time-bound actions: (a) To provide office space and supporting facilities for the Centre during its inception phase to kick-off initial operations; (b) to provide “in kind contribution” for the initial operation of the Centre; and (c) to appoint, in close consultation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection of China, a Director of the Centre who will be responsible for management and operation of the Centre.

The Letter of Intent is attached as Annex I of this Note.

F. Initial Engagement on the Centre

16. The first briefing organized for the African Diplomatic Corps on the Centre was held on 13 June 2018. At that meeting, the UN Environment Programme presented the key elements of the Draft Concept Note on the Centre for comments and inputs. The ADC requested time to consult with capitals and revert.
17. Given that Kenya had volunteered to host the Centre, a meeting was organized between the Kenya and China missions on 26 June 2018 to take the process forward. Subsequent to this meeting, on 18 July 2018, UN Environment Programme convened a tri-partite meeting to review the establishment of the Centre, particularly its Interim Secretariat.

G. Interim Secretariat of the Centre

18. A briefing on the Centre was organized by the Secretariat of the UN Environment Programme for the African Diplomatic Corps on 15 August 2018. At that meeting, the Secretariat provided a progress update on the establishment of the Centre, including on plans for a launch event for the unveiling of an Interim Secretariat hosted by the UN Environment Programme, with the purpose of supporting, coordinating and facilitating the establishment of a permanent Secretariat of the Centre at a later stage.
19. Members of the African Diplomatic Corps welcomed the briefing and the launch of an Interim Secretariat. They requested that consultations and briefings on the Centre be held regularly, and that key institutions and platforms such as the African Union Commission and the African Ministerial Conference of the Environment be engaged.

20. An Interim Secretariat of the Centre was unveiled on 17 August 2018 at the United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi.
21. The Interim Secretariat is thus a temporary arrangement. The Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme is expected to host the Interim Secretariat of the Centre for a period estimated not to exceed 6 months from its establishment, in order to allow for a permanent Secretariat of the Centre to be put in place.
22. The Interim Secretariat will be made up of a small team from the Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme. It will consult broadly with African Member States, China, and other interested parties to establish the institutional structure (including a permanent Secretariat), steering mechanisms, operating modalities, and initial workplan and budget for the Centre itself.
23. Staff from the UN Environment Programme Secretariat, who are assigned to the Interim Secretariat, are staff whose current tasks already encompass South-South Cooperation, capacity development for the attainment of the SDGs, and provision of policy support. A limited percentage of their time will be used to support the establishment of the Centre – a task which is in full accordance with their existing job descriptions. The staff composition of the Interim Secretariat of the Centre is as follows:
 - Gary Lewis (Barbados, D1 – Director) – 10% time;
 - Cyrille-Lazare Siewe (Cameroon, P4 – Programme Officer) – 25% time;
 - Angela Mwandia (Kenya, P3 – Programme Officer) – 25% time.
24. UN Environment has requested that the time which the staff devotes to the Interim Secretariat will be covered in full by financial resources made available from the China Trust Fund.
25. The initial elements for the work of the Centre are currently being developed in a Concept Note and Proposal on institutional arrangements.
26. It is expected that the parties (China, Kenya, African countries as well as other interested countries), facilitated with the support of the UN Environment Programme, will finalize arrangements on the Centre and its operations within the anticipated 6-month lifespan of the Interim Secretariat.
27. Any potential long-term engagement of the UN Environment Programme Secretariat within the auspices of a Permanent Secretariat of the Centre, which would go beyond the six-month life span of the Interim Secretariat, will be subject to approval by the relevant United Nations Environment Programme governing bodies.

H. Operationalization of the Centre

28. On this basis, the Secretariat of the UN Environment Programme will continue to facilitate the dialogue among China, African countries and the African Union Commission (AUC), to establish operational modalities of the Centre, through transparent, open and inclusive consultations among all interested parties.
29. The Secretariat of the UN Environment Programme is currently working closely with the Chinese Government to agree on the financial modalities for the Interim Secretariat, to ensure that all costs related to the initial set-up and running of the Centre are covered, in their entirety, by the China Trust Fund. At present, US\$ 1 million has been committed towards the Centre by China, with the possibility of increasing this amount by another US\$1 million from the same source in future.
30. Funds from the China Trust Fund will be accessible after the UN Environment Programme has:
 - i. Reviewed the Concept Note on the Centre shared by China and sent comments and inputs on this document to counterparts in the Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China.
 - ii. Prepared a proposal on the way forward toward the operationalization of the Centre. This will include the proposed structure and governance arrangements of the Centre, the proposed staffing of the Permanent Secretariat, financing and initial activities. This Proposal will be shared with African countries and/or their representatives for their inputs. The Proposal will also be shared with the Committee of Permanent Representatives.
31. The objective is that the Centre will become operational before the end of 2018.
32. The final location of the Centre in Kenya will be determined by African countries and China, as part of the discussions on the operationalization of the Centre.

I. Next Steps:

- i. The Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China is preparing a fundraising strategy going beyond the current financial parameters of the China Trust Fund for other extrabudgetary resources in support of the Centre.
- ii. China, African countries and the UN Environment Programme will jointly finalize the **Concept Note** for the Centre.

- iii. The United Nations Environment Programme will prepare a **Proposal** on the way forward to set up the Centre. This will be shared and discussed with all interested parties, and shared with the Committee of Permanent Representatives.
- iv. A briefing on progress on the Centre will be held for the African Diplomatic Corps on a monthly basis.
- v. A briefing will be held for the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) on 4 October 2018 with subsequent briefings and consultations taking place as needed.
- vi. The United Nations Environment Programme will engage other important stakeholders such as the African Union Commission and AMCEN.
- vii. Provisional timeline of consultations by Interim Secretariat:
 - 1) Consultation with Committee of Permanent Representatives (4 October 2018).
 - 2) Consultation with Africa Group of States in Nairobi (October 2018).
 - 3) Consultation with African Union Commission and UN Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa (later October/early November 2018 tbc).
 - 4) Discussion with Member States on South-South Cooperation in the context of 2020-2021 Programme of Work at 5th Annual Sub-Committee Meeting of CPR (22-26 October 2018).
 - 5) Technical consultations and workshops with National Focal Points of China and Africa countries (January/February 2019).
 - 6) Progress update to Africa Group of States (January 2019).
 - 7) Progress update to Committee of Permanent Representatives (29 January 2019).
 - 8) Stock taking and definition of next steps. Submission of activity report of Interim Secretariat (February 2019).
 - 9) Possible event in UN Environment Assembly (March 2019).

Annex:

1. Letter of Intent on a Joint Project for the Establishment of China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Centre