

## **1<sup>st</sup> Africa Environment Partnership Platform**

**Dates: 20-21 September, 2018**  
**Location: United Nations Office at Nairobi, UN Avenue, Nairobi, Kenya**

**Topic: “African Ecological Futures”**

**What is the future Africa wants, and how do we get there?**

### **Introduction**

On the eve of the African Environment Partnership Platform (AEPP), as Africa’s leaders converge to discuss how to address the continent’s most pressing issues, never before has it been so imperative to adopt the right planning approach to address Africa’s developmental challenges, harness the opportunities and resources in order to achieve a just, equitable and prosperous future for all Africans. But to reach this dream, we need a new paradigmatic approach to development planning. Futures thinking provides just such an approach. This concept note sketches Africa’s developmental problematic, explores the challenges and opportunities, and illustrates how this approach could work practically.

### **Problem Statement:**

Africa is a prosperous continent given its vast mineral and natural wealth, and yet it is still poor. With a growing population, uneven economic development across the continent, and an underdeveloped human capital base, dependence on natural resources and ecosystems will continue into the long future.

Expansion of much needed agricultural, extractive and manufacturing industries, and urban and built infrastructural investments could put natural assets (or ecological infrastructure) at risk of degradation - undermining the very basis of its competitive edge. The challenge is how to allocate and manage natural resources and ecological sinks in the context of constant trade-offs between economic development and conservation.

A significant number of people in Africa continue to depend on both the cash and non-cash (ecological economy) economy for livelihoods and other material needs. By 2050 most of Africa's population will be urbanized but dependence on, and linkages with the rural agricultural and nature-based economy will continue unless there are substantial shifts in income levels and human capital development. Urban migration will also put pressure on existing hard and ecological infrastructure to provide service delivery.

African countries also participate and set goals in myriad developmental accords and pacts – Africa Union’s Agenda 2063, United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs), country Nationally Determined Contributions from the COP Paris Agreement, and the Convention for Biological Diversity’s (CBD) National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. Such goals offer frameworks to drive action to address developmental challenges, however thus far, they have not succeeded in realising the need for a new developmental planning approach which could manage the trade-offs and ensure the integrity of ecological infrastructure. The traditional “growth at all costs” and “business as usual” development approaches plan for the future as if resources were infinite, and as though we are not currently staring down the barrel of climate change.

Africa has the potential to leapfrog the systemic failures of the dominant political economic approaches of the western world which have failed the poor and have led to massive environmental destruction of resources and global ecological risks like climate change. To do this requires a united continental approach to economic development in Africa to ensure a more environmentally sustainable growth path which addresses wide scale poverty and inequality alleviation. This is no easy task, as Africa is also a complex political and economic continent with multiple political state governance models, varying degrees of economic success and with considerable political instability and poverty. It has also been ravaged by colonialism, and this exploitation still exists in the form of neo-colonialist economic relationships. To safeguard against exploitive foreign direct investment, there needs to be strong governance systems in place, with a high degree of transparency to ensure that major infrastructure projects benefit the poor and future generations.

Traditional development planning approaches also reinforce the myth of trade-offs – that in order to achieve economic growth, growth must be coupled with resource consumption, and that sustainable development is impossible or does not make economic sense. Such a position will weaken Africa's economic and political strength on the global stage, which can lead to further exploitation and political instability. Growth at all costs has not worked in the west, and should Africa adopt the same approach – it won't work in Africa either.

Finally, ecological infrastructure ignores country and continent borders. One country's poor environmental laws can destroy a river system which feeds the economies of other countries downstream. It is therefore vital that Africa acts in unity to agree on the future that we want and how we will get there.

### **Futures thinking - as a new developmental paradigmatic approach**

The theme of the African Environment Partnership Platform conference is "50 years of Environmental Governance and Sustainability in Africa". Leaders will appraise what has been achieved in the past 50 years since the adoption of the Algiers Convention in 1968 in Regional Flagship Programmes and other interventions. They will then discuss key issues and identify ways forward to meet future goals of protocols like the Agenda 2068, CBD and the Paris Agreement. To a large extent, this is an exercise in futures thinking. Futures thinking is not about predicting the future. It's about creating scenarios of what could happen through examining current and past drivers. It involves understanding and managing trends, challenges and opportunities which could influence the future. Drivers could be infrastructure development, population growth, technology, political stability, governance, policy, climate change impacts, and the like. It requires that decision- and policy-makers look beyond the immediate constraints and short-term goals, and agree on a collective future, and then plan for what capacity is needed to enable that future.

Futures thinking is a good approach to assist in co-creating a future between very disparate needs. It identifies what the future could look like given the current developmental trajectory. It can identify what Africa would need to cope with the demands of that trajectory, and then it can look at how to take opportunities, and cope with threats. It enables parties to hold each other accountable to this future, and it demands greater transparency in terms of future physical infrastructure development. For example, country A says yes to a foreign company creating a hydro dam on a river which feeds other countries. The local agricultural economy of country B collapses due to ecological infrastructure damage causing refugees to flee to country A which puts strain on its economy, causes political instability and its ability to deliver services to the additional inhabitants. The economic benefits of the hydro dam have now been offset by the negative impacts. An event which might have been avoided with clear, transparent developmental goals, supporting policies, regional development accords, and proper scenario planning.

It seems so obvious, because futures thinking is not new, and it is used in planning. But we still operate from a mainstream development paradigm where traditional infrastructure investment decisions are made based upon short-term thinking and non-transparent decision-making.

### **African Ecological Futures II as a vehicle to demonstrate this approach**

The African Ecological Futures II (AEF II) programme combines futures thinking with physical and ecological infrastructure planning in order to present a holistic planning approach to achieving an African future which benefits all. The first African Ecological Futures, launched in 2015, was a partnership between WWF Regional Office for Africa and the African Development Bank that realized the tremendous challenges and opportunities facing the African continent.

AEF I was designed to: chart Africa's ecological futures in relation to development challenges and drivers; provide a framework that can align natural resources with development needs and vice versa; develop scenarios to explore how different development trajectories might impact ecosystems; influence policy and investment decisions of governments, inter-governmental organizations, development banks, and inform the strategies and investments of development finance institutions (DFIs). African Ecological Futures II now takes this thinking into practice.

The five year programme will be delivered through four flagship projects: Trends in Physical and ecological infrastructure developments; Enabling platforms for delivering AEF II impacts; Resilient ecologies and cities, and the Adoption of ecological futures thinking tools, methods, and approaches. Partnerships are critical, and the programme will foster partnerships with intergovernmental institutions, foreign direct investment groups, youth representative groups, universities, think-tanks and scientific bodies.

### **Key focal areas for address**

AEF II seeks to build an understanding of the key future challenges and opportunities for development and implications for Africa's ambition to ensure that development initiatives are consistent with the United Nations SDGs and the Plan of Action for "people, planet and prosperity" under Agenda 2030 and the AU's Agenda 2063. AEF II will map the intersection between sensitive ecosystems and the expanding extractives industries, population concentrations and associated physical infrastructure.

A key developmental issue is the future of urban areas in Africa. AEF II recognises that urban futures will be a major driver of economic growth as Africa's aspirant youth see urban centers as places for innovation and entrepreneurship. Demographic shifts will see population densities in coastal cities grow, exposing them to pronounced impacts of climate change. Urban futures hold promise if they can be made more adaptable and resilient to economic and climate change shocks. Physical and ecological infrastructure in this respect, are intertwined, and the prudent management of the trade-offs between the two will determine what type and quality of development is fostered on the African continent. Urban futures also offer the opportunity to tackle SDGs holistically given the advantage of cities being central aggregating points for scaling essential services and infrastructure development.

Acknowledging that at least 75% of SDG targets globally will be met through delivery of programmes at city level, AEF II will establish a broad trends analysis in terms of the physical infrastructural needs and existing ecological infrastructure.

Ecological systems and infrastructure will continue to play a role in food security, livelihood diversification, and the provision of services such as high quality potable water and

supplementary energy. AEF II is designed to ensure a sustainable development pathway and demonstrate the importance of ecological infrastructure for well-being and broader notions of economic, environmental and social security.

A key component of the AU's Agenda 2063 is to foster regional integration and growth through interconnected infrastructure plans and a free trade regime. AEF II supports this vision and seeks to strengthen its development and people-centered goals by enhancing the AU's ability to better integrate SDGs, ecosystems and ecological futures thinking in its present and future physical infrastructure plans. The programme as a mechanism for action in Africa can also work across large landscapes like the Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area and (Tri National Dja, Odzala and Minkébé (TRIDOM).

### **Proposed questions for discussion at by the Panel**

1. How does the panel see physical infrastructure unfolding within the Africa region in the next three years? And what would the main characteristics of this infrastructure development be?
2. To what extent are environmental safeguards and ecological futures thinking incorporated in physical infrastructure investment planning by government, Development Finance Institutions, and private investors?
3. What kinds of initiatives should NEPAD and the African Union take to ensure that physical and ecological infrastructure can be managed in a sustainable and balanced way within Development Finance Institution and through government planning?
4. How does the panel see the urban futures evolving within the next 20-30 years in Africa, and what kinds of demands will urban growth have on physical and ecological infrastructure?
5. What new forms of governance are needed to ensure transparency in infrastructure investments?