CSO-LA online Consultation on the

Regional Multi-annual Indicative Program for Sub-Saharan Africa (2021-2027)

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TEMPLATE FOR WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS

Please send your contributions to the INTPA-A2@ec.europa.eu email address by **30 March 2021** the latest

This paper lays out the recommendations of **WWF, TRAFFIC, Climate Action Network Europe, Conservation International, International Fund for Animal Welfare and Wetlands International** for the environment, biodiversity and climate regional initiatives in the EU Sub-Saharan Africa regional multi-annual indicative plan for the period 2021 - 2027 with the objective to deliver on the ambitions of the European Green Deal in the NDICI - Global Europe.

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1. Green transition

1.1 Which EU initiatives at regional/continental level in Africa would you like to see in areas related to "green transition" (*which includes Agriculture, energy and climate change, biodiversity, water/Blue economy/oceans & nutrition*)? Are there any EU programmes in this region linked to this priority that are particularly relevant and you would like to see a further phase?

1.2. What will be the major added value in tackling suggested issues at regional/continental level? What would be the biggest challenges?

1. Biodiversity, conservation and wildlife management

Conservation has the potential to be a central pillar of sustainable development in Africa - to put nature and people at the centre of economic development. To achieve this, engagement, participation, and investment in nature from governments, the private sector, and civil society through an inclusive conservation approach that benefits both people and planet are needed. Africa's population has

quintupled from 229 million in 1950 to 1.2 billion today, and is expected to double to 2.5 billion in 2050[1], with youth the segment of the population growing the fastest and reaching 1.5 billion by 2050[2]. As population grows so does poverty and inequality, with sub-Saharan Africa hosting 27 of the 28 poorest countries in the world[3] and by 2050 is projected to have 86% of the world's extreme poor[4]. Across the continent, demands on natural resources continue to grow in the face of increasing population growth, shifting aspirations and a growing middle class, and the associated development of agriculture, large-scale infrastructure, extractives industries and other natural-resources dependent economic sectors. However, conservation and development are not at odds and the barriers between them must be torn down. Support to conservation must enable diverse partners to work together to integrate nature into economic development and livelihoods.

With a significant **drop in the funding to the EU Thematic Global Challenges programmes** under the current 2021-2027 MFF compared with the previous 2014-2020 period, NDICI regional programmes are critical to achieving commitments made at Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Previously, 27% of GPGC funding targeted the environment, of which 30-38% directly supported protecting, improving and sustainably managing ecosystems through the Biodiversity for Life (B4LIFE) flagship initiative - representing approximately 400M€ over the 2014-2020 period. To materialise the momentum created by integrating the Green Deal throughout NDICI programming and to enable a green and just recovery in Sub-Saharan Africa, **regional programmes must foresee adequate funding to biodiversity, environment and wildlife management.**

Currently the two biggest drivers of global biodiversity loss are **habitat loss/degradation and overexploitation** due to unsustainable human activities such as illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade, poorly planned infrastructure development, deforestation and ecosystem conversion from *inter alia* agricultural supply chains. Evidence shows that these global and regional threats and drivers are also linked to the emergence of zoonotic diseases, such as Covid-19, and increase the likelihood of future pandemics with devastating consequences for people's health, wellbeing, livelihoods and cost to the global economy[5]. Connectivity of landscapes is also at stake, undermining the ability of wildlife to migrate or disperse to feed and breed, and of ecosystems to function properly, threatening key ecosystem services like pollination.

Biodiversity in Africa requires urgent attention. The most recent Living Planet Index revealed a 65% decline in monitored vertebrate populations on average between 1970 and 2016. Numerous plant and freshwater species are threatened. The forest elephant is a flagship example of this decline - numbers dropped by more than 60% in 10 years[6] with further surveys showing that some National Parks experienced even more dramatic declines, like Boumba Bek and Nki National Parks in Cameroon that lost 90 and 80% respectively, of their forest elephants in less than 10 years[7]. In East and Southern Africa species such as lions have also experienced population declines and range contractions, and pressures on a wide range of coastal and marine species are driving continued population declines. Transformative action is needed to halt and reverse nature loss, and the EU should continue to play a leading role in shaping and adopting an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, and commit to provide adequate finance in the Sub-Saharan regional MIP **for implementation of conservation programmes which require a regional approach** (such as the **Transfrontier Conservation Areas** and shared **Key Landscapes for Conservation**) while following through on the global aspects of the new EU Biodiversity Strategy.

Support to conservation, and equitable economic development must be built upon **Inclusive Conservation.** This approach encompasses a holistic outlook of working that brings people into each step of the decision-making process and develops solutions that work for all stakeholders ensuring the

[1] BCG Report
[2] World Bank Population Estimates and Projections
[3] World Bank
[4] Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation - BCG report
[5] https://science.sciencemag.org/content/369/6502/379
[6] Maisels et al, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23469289/
[7] https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?314730/Central-Africa-biomonitoring-report-Several-forest-elephant-populations-close-to-collapse-in-Central-Africa

people that share landscapes, seascapes and habitats are included in the critical decisions that affect their livelihoods and in the benefits. Conservation impact that is relevant to the people and places where it occurs, must be articulated with and reinforce the interconnectedness of development, global and regional trends, and nature, highlighting a shared regional agenda that responds to global and regional threats and opportunities. To achieve this, new sectors and partners outside of the usual conservation circles must be included, while continuing to empower Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLC) to sustainably manage their territories and resources in a manner that positively contributes to their livelihoods and promoting the employment of women and youth in conservation jobs. Through partnerships, engagement, and participation, the scope of conservation can be expanded to recognize and embrace the development context as an opportunity for ensuring relevance and creating impact on people's lives and livelihoods.

a. People Living in Harmony with Nature

Conservation must be for all people and all nature. Based on an integrated and inclusive cross-border landscape approach there is an opportunity to integrate the needs of people and nature, and support the enabling conditions for long term conservation and sustainable development ensuring conservation outcomes and human wellbeing benefits are delivered both now and into the future. **NaturAfrica** and regional programmes providing funding for biodiversity and fragile ecosystems should:

- **Promote integrated and inclusive landscape approaches that ensure ecological connectivity to deliver multiple benefits for local communities and critical biodiversity.** Encompassing terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems, the long term sustainability of essential landscapes depends on an inclusive and participatory conservation approach that highlights their inherent value to local livelihoods, regional economies and climate change adaptation. All initiatives involving all relevant cross-border stakeholders, especially Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to ensure a holistic and systemic approach that tackles all drivers of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation are critical.
- Continue supporting regional programmes such as **ECOFAC in Central Africa** and **EU-ACP Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM)** aiming at improving wildlife conservation and food security and developing innovative, collaborative and scalable new approaches to conserve wild animals and protect ecosystems, whilst at the same time improving the livelihoods of IPLCs who depend on these resources.
- **Foster inclusive conservation:** Through participatory approaches, develop and implement cross-border strategies for protecting critical habitats in key biodiversity areas (KBAs) based on inclusive and equitable conservation models that respect environmental and social safeguards. Link the wellbeing of people and nature through effective and participatory land use planning that includes restoration, sustainable agriculture and freshwater resource management, infrastructure and other economic sectors where conservation drives inclusive green economic growth. Promote development of employment and income generation based on or related to biodiversity conservation and restoration, including tourism, commercialisation of non-timber forest products, responsible production of forest related products like cacao, employment in conservation (law enforcement, training, community engagement, monitoring deforestation and restoration), payments for ecosystem services, wildlife ranching etc. The need to provide local communities with more resilient livelihood options and income streams is essential now more than ever.
- **Expand and Improve Equitable and Effective Management of Protected and Conserved Areas**. Support the establishment of new Protected and Conserved Areas where critical gaps in species and/or ecosystems protection occur, with a particular focus on Key Biodiversity Areas, and support robust KBA identification processes. Ensure solutions for shared-governance models, strengthen community wildlife stewardship and the flow of benefits from wildlife and natural habitats, and promote sustainable community enterprises. Consider supporting existing regional initiatives that support landscape level management[8]. Promote the application of sustainable practices (agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries production practices), and sustainable use of wild resources in target areas as a means of positively transforming critical biodiversity

[8] For example, the KAZA Secretariat supported by the 5 partner countries https://www.kavangozambezi.org/en/

areas, supporting species conservation, enhancing ecosystem services, and addressing climate change impacts. Support strategies and initiatives that lead to improved management and/or restoration of critical habitats (forests, coastal, marine, freshwater, grasslands and savannas, etc.) in and outside of priority cross-border landscapes and seascapes. Proactively manage these landscapes in ways that reduce conflicts between humans and wildlife for the continued persistence of Africa's wildlife, to prevent loss of life and food insecurity for rural communities, and to allow for productive agricultural development.

- **Minimise conversion and improve connectivity** by actively advocating for improved connectivity of critical biodiversity areas through the protection and restoration of cross-border land and waterways. Secure the structural and functional connectivity between protected and conserved areas, thus ensuring long term viability of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and resilience to climate change related impacts.[9] Ecological connectivity can be effectively strengthened by ensuring land uses in corridor areas are ecologically permeable (eg agroecology approaches in which activities such as sustainable agriculture and fishing are fully integrated) ensuring wildlife friendly infrastructure (green infrastructure), and via the restoration of forests and other ecosystems in crucial connectivity zones that have been lost.
- **Embed climate change mitigation and adaptation:** create conservation approaches that are climate smart to ensure that nature is resilient to current and emerging climate change challenges and that nature is recognized as a critical component of the climate change solution through both adaptation and mitigation. Ensure that nature based solutions for climate adaptation are unlocked and scaled up within priority landscapes. Support innovative solutions to allow protected area management systems to effectively adapt to climate change induced shifts in species and ecosystems.
- Consider supporting **regional monitoring platforms/excellency centres** that would bring together biodiversity, socio-economic and law enforcement related data (from space and earth, so GIS and ground-truthed data) for flagship and endemic species
- Support **regional policies and monitoring systems** that have built a momentum at country levels but are in need of more effective enforcement and cooperation at the regional level and institutional support, for example COMIFAC's Wildlife Law Enforcement Action Plan 2012-2017 (Plan d'Action sous-régional des pays de l'espace COMIFAC pour le renforcement de l'application des législations nationales sur la faune et flore sauvages en Afrique Centrale, PAPECALF) or a Central African Bushmeat monitoring system (SYVBAC)

b. Scale up efforts to fight wildlife crime and high-risk wildlife trade

Wildlife crime can only be effectively tackled by working across the whole wildlife trade chain to stop poaching, trafficking and buying of illegal wildlife products, with coherent and integrated approaches in source, transit and demand countries. Stopping illegal, unregulated and high-risk wildlife trade and consumption not only contributes to biodiversity conservation but also reduces the risk of the emergence and spread of novel zoonotic diseases, whose potential for devastating impact has so recently been illustrated by the Covid-19 crisis, as well as more localised epidemics, such as Ebola in Africa. These efforts should include support for work to reduce the elements of wildlife trade that pose the highest risk of zoonotic spill over. The SSA regional MIP should focus on:

- **Professionalization of the ranger force** to stop the poaching covering capacity, technology, prosecution, cooperation and assessment.
- To stop trafficking, key activities include **training of customs officials, police, Interpol, prosecutors, national parks officials in the latest technology, sharing of information and transboundary collaboration**. Interagency collaboration - both within countries and internationally - is essential to trace and stop criminal networks.
- Following the financial flows coming in from wildlife crime, partner with financial institutions to effectively block laundering by organized criminal groups
- Complementary efforts should aim at **promoting sustainable and resilient alternatives to support the livelihoods of those who currently rely on wild meat** as a protein or income

[9] Guidelines for Connectivity Conservation

source and ensuring biosafety standards are taught and respected[10]; for pathogen surveillance across human, livestock and wildlife communities, increased coordination between public health, agriculture and environmental agencies at local and national levels is necessary. As critical, is to strengthen government and civil society efforts to reduce consumer demand for illegal and/or high-risk wildlife products, through broad public education and evidence-based campaigns targeting known consumer groups. To support this, the Sub-Saharan SSA regional programme should allocate sufficient funding for the **EU Wildlife Trafficking Action Plan**. Building all such efforts into holistic One Health programmes that bring together partners from all relevant sectors should be encouraged, particularly in African landscapes where zoonotic spill over risk is highest.

- The EU regional programmes have a unique role to play in addressing illegal wildlife trade and overexploitation by **strengthening regulatory frameworks, developing appropriate economic and market incentives and shifting consumer behaviour,** and by supporting regional and global enforcement efforts against wildlife crime. CSOs have an essential part to play in informing this line of work through targeting emerging threats through strategic interventions and research.
- Engage with private transport sectors (airlines, cargo, airports, couriers etc.) to increase their awareness about the wildlife trafficking and to effectively stop being an 'involuntary accomplice" to the trafficking

c. Making nature count

It is critical to promote a conservation approach that works in unison with Africa's regional development agenda to find a common ground and embrace nature focused means of development as a way of achieving the SDGs. To achieve impact, **regional momentum is required.** This is grounded in influencing and linking national and regional influential stakeholders to mainstream the appreciation of nature as a basis for economic and livelihood opportunities and harness the drivers of economic development to embrace a greener future in policy, finance and markets. Systemic and transformational change to the perceptions and behaviours of the three stakeholder groups of governments, corporates and civil society at regional level are required to achieve critical change and build a post-COVID 'Green and Just Recovery' narrative.

- **Nature Positive Finance**: To shift both public and private investments from negatively affecting long-term sustainable development, towards investments that contribute positively to the conservation of natural capital and related livelihood benefits. To achieve this, it is important to demonstrate to investors, governments, and communities how ecosystem services can deliver beneficial outcomes to both people and nature. This will provide a foundation to strengthen and mainstream the use of natural capital assessment tools in national planning and investment decision-making. Identify, develop and promote nature positive investment cases in the form of concrete bankable solutions as well as sustainable green and blue economy financing frameworks and plans for improved livelihood and transboundary resilience. Develop and explore new and innovative solutions to the sustainable financing and business models for nature conservation in Africa. Support sustainable financing initiatives that provide incentives for communities to value and protect wildlife such as elephants and the big cats[11] and impact investing (thus reducing donor dependency) for species conservation, e.g. through wildlife credit systems, green bonds, trust funds.

- **Greening Development:** In Sub-Saharan Africa, the conservation movement must work with and not against agriculture, infrastructure, and extractive industries. Working with key partners in the agricultural sector, develop and promote a roadmap towards a model for sustainable food, water and energy systems that meets both the immediate food, water and energy security, and the long-term sustainability needs of Africa. Actively engage with infrastructure and extractives industry development in priority landscapes/seascapes/river basins to ensure that these adequately integrate inclusion principles, environmental sustainability measures, nature and climate risk and resilience analysis, and science-based planning. Fully integrate biodiversity

[10] For example the EU funded Sustainable Wildlife Programme, which aims at creating innovative, inclusive and scalable new models on the nexus of conservation and food security through diverse partners from local communities to governments (including FAO, CIRAD, CIFOR, WCS), experienced in wildlife conservation, food security, and policy development.
[11] see Wildlife Credits https://wildlifecredits.com/

considerations, including restoration, into key sectors, such as agriculture, energy, transport, extractives and infrastructure, and tourism by promoting effective spatial land use planning that incorporates data on species, ecosystems and connectivity as a key part of the decision making process, effective environmental and social impacts assessments and management, good governance in these sectors, supported by collecting and streamlining detailed spatial information on areas of biodiversity importance, such as KBAs[12]. Address market drivers together with partners, to identify and influence consumers and processors to source extracted products responsibly, noting that many of these may reside in urban areas or outside of Africa (e.g. China).

- **An Engaged Society:** It is imperative to design strategies that target civil society, in particular youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, through education and engagement, to become the agents of change for an African ecological future where nature is seen as an important cornerstone of long-term poverty reduction and economic development. Through formal education systems, as well as through social media, citizen science approaches, interactive outreach programmes and direct support to youth advocacy groups, build both awareness and capacity of youth groups to engage in conservation and to strive towards lifestyles and social norms to position nature in a manner that resonates within African society. Provide support to concrete youth-led innovative conservation solutions and initiatives that may lead to scaled and transformative social, environmental and economic returns to youth and African society at large. Together with partners in the educational sector, actively engage with learning institutions in target countries and landscapes to transform their institutions into centres of sustainability with transfer of best practices and peer to peer learning to surrounding communities and vice versa. Promote regional research and education programmes (e.g. African Erasmus equivalent, or Erasmus + with north south exchanges) to increase local knowledge; ownership and leadership for biodiversity conservation; monitoring; and sustainable development[13]. Support research and and innovative thinking into sustainable use options and restoration to provide resilience of Forest and Wildlife Economy models[14].

2. Regional forest initiatives for people, biodiversity and climate

The SSA regional programme should follow through on the commitments laid out in the EC communication on "'Stepping up Action to protect and restore the world's forests" by adopting and implementing a comprehensive set of measures and initiatives, including supporting the upcoming EU legislation to stop products linked to deforestation and ecosystem conversion from entering the EU market, to reduce the EU footprint on the world's natural ecosystems and to address underlying drivers. As an essential and complementary effort, the SSA regional programme should strengthen cooperation with producing countries in Africa, and other consumer countries to support them in halting deforestation, forest degradation and conversion or degradation of natural ecosystems and human rights violations.

The proposed "EU Forest Partnerships'[15]' negotiated with African partner countries should be complemented by regional forest initiatives, especially in key deforestation fronts such the **Congo basin**, **East Africa** (mainly Zambia, Madagascar, Mozambique) and **Upper Guinea forest** (Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana) which experienced the most deforestation and forest degradation from 2004 - 2017[16]. The initiatives should be complementary and supportive of ongoing work in the context of FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements. They should take a comprehensive approach, tackling threats and key drivers of deforestation and other ecosystem conversion (including grasslands, savannahs, and wetlands), ensuring involvement and respect of IPLCs rights.

[12] As per the IUCN WCC Motion 096 Strengthening national spatial planning to ensure the global persistence of biodiversity
[13] https://www.eraift-rdc.org/, a great regional example for higher education in forestry and tropical ecosystems in collaboration with UNESCO
[14] The African Leadership University has a promising body of work on this front.
[15] https://brussels.wcs.org/Portals/0/Brussels/Briefing%20-%20Forest%20Partnerships.pdf?ver=2020-06-23-121136-807
[16] https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/deforestation_fronts___drivers_and_responses_in_a_changing_world___full_report_1.pdf

a. Regional responses to the challenges of the African deforestation fronts

There are some clear responses needed at regional level both inside and outside African deforestation fronts, with close liaison needed to ensure consistent messaging and mutually supportive actions:

- Focus conservation efforts (newly protected and conserved areas, improved management of existing areas, voluntary certification schemes, Payment for Ecosystem Service [PES] and REDD+ schemes) in the areas of greatest need within deforestation fronts.
- Apply regional and landscape-level planning to minimise forest fragmentation, maintain ecological connectivity, buffer territories of indigenous peoples and local communities, and avoid forest conservation leading to conversion of ecosystems such as grasslands and savannahs (leakage).
- Work with indigenous peoples and local communities to develop mutually beneficial strategies to secure traditional cultures and territories and to benefit biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- Tighten, where necessary, policies and implementation of regulations and sanctions controlling illegal extraction of and trade in timber, illegal use of fire for vegetation clearance and destructive land speculation.
- Look at new opportunities, for example arising through the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, to restore forests and particularly to maintain and enhance connectivity between remaining natural forests.
- Work with upstream suppliers to ensure effective legality and chain of custody, in collaboration with markets in consumer countries.
- Support governments in identifying and classifying their national carbon stocks and developing action plans to protect and manage these stocks. Identify the main areas of fast forest degradation (deforestation fronts) and develop and implement fast action tools to stop these processes and prevent the further spread. This will include e.g. better management of slash-and-burn agriculture in the forest zone and alternative fuel production in the wooded savannah zone.

b. Prioritise protection, restoration and sustainable management of forests and other important ecosystems through inclusive governance and human-rights based approaches

- Develop incentive mechanisms for smallholders and IPLCs to maintain and enhance ecosystems and products provided by sustainable forest management and agriculture.
- Help partner countries to implement sustainable and fair forest-based value chains and promote sustainable biocultural-economies.
- Develop private sector to adopt sustainable business models for forest exploitation and restoration with strong foundations in social and environmental safeguards.
- Continue to promote transparency, inclusiveness and participatory forest governance by stepping up action and increase funding for civil society actors to engage in policy, advocacy and legislative reform processes, independent monitoring, as well as to secure land and resource rights to local and indigenous communities in forests as well as in other ecosystems, such as mangroves, peatlands.
- Assist producer countries in the application of and tracking progress in the implementation of policy objectives, including commitments related to deforestation, the forest-related components of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), legal and sustainable commodity production and related trade.

c. Recommendations for the regional EU Forest Partnership in the Congo basin

The Congo basin still holds large and intact forest areas, although the rate of deforestation has accelerated in recent years. Much of the forest conversion is driven by small-scale and shifting agriculture, timber harvest for charcoal production which contributes to deforestation (mainly in DRC and CAR) and forest degradation and large scale agriculture (Gabon, Cameroon and Republic of Congo). Improved policies are in place aimed at sustainable forest management, forest monitoring and diversification of livelihoods but are in need of more effective enforcement and cooperation at the regional level and institutional support.
A regional approach in the Congo basin should focus on:

- Enforce existing policy responses to deforestation, including sustainable forest management, forest monitoring and diversification of livelihoods.
- Promote land-use planning taking into account high conservation value areas to prevent allocation of primae forest areas for industrial development.
- Complement efforts focused on illegal timber with enhanced responses related to agriculture as a primary driver of deforestation.
- Increase public and private sector commitments to sustainable development of agriculture through adoption of best management practices and multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at deforestation-free commodity supply. WWF is testing an 'integrated agribusiness-conservation' model in Cameroon to engage smallholder farmers in a deforestation-free supply chain, which if successful could be replicated in the entire Congo basin.
- Large scale investments in alternative (green) energy projects to convert urban dwellers away from charcoal for cooking. Such alternatives must be competitively priced to reduce demand for charcoal, which is increasing apace with the rate of population growth.
- Support existing regional forest initiatives, such as the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI)[17] .

d. Invest in innovative, cross-regional and multi-sectoral approaches to fight deforestation, ecosystem conversion and illegal logging, building on existing EU frameworks

Regional and global dynamics and trade flows are driving deforestation, ecosystem conversion and illegal logging. For instance, Asia imports timber from Africa in large quantities and this is expected to increase in the future due to a number of factors related to policies, market demand and consumption habits of consumers. According to IIED[18] and Forest Trends[19] reports this has negative impacts on producer African countries, like DRC, Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, such as low contribution to local employment, weak labour standards, and fuels deforestation, illegal logging and timber trade. The EU should use existing instruments (e.g. FLEGT) and the Regional Programmes to promote collaborative and ground-breaking South–South-North partnerships, and foster multi-sectorial and driver-focused approaches but also to help fulfil requirements under the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR). More particularly, priorities should be to:

- Strengthen Africa-Asia mechanisms to promote sustainable forest industry and address illegal timber trade and forest governance with an effective mix of financial and market tools, incentives, and regulation and deterrence mechanisms.
- Strengthen Government-to-Government cooperation to reduce illegal and unsustainable logging and timber trade between the two continents.
- Pilot companies and incentives for lessons and scale-up. This would improve traceability and support EUTR enforcement as well as minimize risks of loopholes in FLEGT VPAs implementation. Invest in secondary transformation, to create jobs and tax revenues for the country, increasing the economic value of their forests and securing their long term importance for the national economies.
- Support already existing regional forest initiatives, such as the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR 100)[20] and East Africa Regional Forest Programme[21]

3. Resilient and environmentally and socially sustainable Agri-Food systems

Humanity has succeeded in dramatically increasing food production in the last decades but at a very high environmental cost. As announced in the EU Farm to Fork Strategy, the EU should support not only an internal but also a global transition towards sustainable and equitable food systems. Our global food systems are heavily interconnected, and as the world's largest agri-food trader, the EU should use the regional programmes as a strategic tool to drive their sustainability and fairness. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the cracks in our food systems that are threatened by climate change, land degradation, nature loss, incoherent policies, chronic underinvestment and Africa's increased food

[17] https://www.cafi.org/content/cafi/en/home/our-work/governance.html
[18] https://pubs.iied.org/17569IIED/
[19] https://www.forest-trends.org/publications/forest-products-trade-between-china-and-africa/
[20] https://afr100.org/
[21] https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_success_stories__1__1.pdf

system vulnerability. Countries closed their borders, cutting off food imports on which many parts of Africa depend. Movement restrictions within Africa have hampered the flow of goods from smallholder farmers to markets and vice versa. Furthermore, the suspension of operations by seed producers and anxiety over travelling to markets for fear of contracting the virus have meant that many farmers have been without the necessary inputs for the planting season. These compounding factors have resulted in diminished food availability and increased food insecurity across the region, while future outputs could be vastly insufficient following the failures to plant and harvest. The WFP estimates that since February 2020, approximately 12 million people have been pushed into acute food insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Beyond immediate food aid actions, there is an opportunity to **redesign food systems so that they are both resilient and sustainable, working with, rather than against, nature**. Now more than ever is the time to investigate tailored solutions to support the sustainable evolution of Africa's food systems, covering the full spectrum of drivers from climate change through to governance and the outcomes that shape the future of food on the continent. The way food is currently produced, distributed and consumed in Africa is in conflict with the natural capital that people and wildlife depend on. From natural resource utilization, expansion of productive lands and high levels of post-harvest food losses, to greenhouse gas emissions, and packaging and food waste at consumption, the various dimensions of the food system in Africa must transform. The system as a whole should evolve to be sustainable in the long-term for humans and nature. It must meet the growing demand for food even as the climate changes.

The primary points of intersection and **tension between the food system and natural resources** occur in specific areas:

- Conversion of land to accommodate the expansion of agriculture is the most significant cause of ecosystem disruption.
- An increasing amount of water is being diverted for irrigation, the quality of water is frequently compromised by agricultural run-off of fertilizers and pesticides and key wetland ecosystems are shrinking.
- Soils are becoming depleted of organic content, carbon and nutrients by overplanting, overgrazing and lack of regenerative farming practices.
- Forests and woodlands are being cleared at alarming rates for planting, grazing, construction and charcoal.
- Biodiversity is being lost due to mono-culture cropping practices and application of chemicals to manage pests and diseases, which are, in turn, exacerbated by the practice of monoculture.
- Wildlife is being brought to the brink of extinction in some areas by loss of habitat not only as a result of conversion of land to agriculture, but also because of the erection of barriers by private landowners (e.g. fences) that impede nature corridors and can spur human-wildlife conflict.
- Food systems are a leading contributor of greenhouse gas emissions that are inducing more damaging climate patterns.

These unintended and negative outcomes from the food system impact on people as well as nature and generate feedback loops which further limit prospects for sustainability. As a result, the current food **system is failing to meet the basic needs of rural populations in Africa** in various ways:

- Low agricultural productivity from a few staple foods perpetuates a weak return on investment for many of the millions of smallholder farmers that comprise a large part of the food system. In turn this focus on staples (some of which are inappropriate for low rainfall areas) has a trade-off for the availability and affordability of more nutritious foods that are needed to achieve a nutritious diet. Child and maternal malnutrition is widespread across Africa and narrow diversity of diets is a main cause.
- Because agriculture is financially unrewarding for many smallholders it leaves little incentive for them to invest in appropriate technology or take steps to apply sustainable practices. More variable climatic conditions, especially in more marginal low rainfall areas is further reducing the ability of rural communities to benefit from agriculture.
- Health risks are increasing from food contaminated with pesticide residues, heavy metals and carcinogenic aflatoxins resulting from unsafe post-harvest handling and storage practices, and weak regulatory environments.

- Loss of grazing land for pastoralists, often due to increasing private land ownership, is increasing their vulnerability and forcing some of them to settle and establish farms. This disrupts adaptive practices of ecosystem regeneration and can increase human- wildlife conflict.

The EU Sub-Saharan regional programme should focus on the regional food initiatives which support diversified**, ecologically and socially sustainable food production models, particularly those based on agroecology, seeking nature-based solutions and taking into account the rights, needs and aspirations of local groups and communities**. A good example of an integrated regional approach is the Africa's Food Future Initiative (AFFI)[22] with a strong focus on two cross-boundary landscapes: Kavango-Zambezi Trans frontier Conservation Area (KAZA) and Southern Kenya Northern Tanzania (SOKNOT) which contributes to the broader 2030 vision for a food system in Africa rooted in environmentally, economically and socially sustainable agricultural practices that supports the livelihoods of local communities while preserving thriving natural ecosystems.

a. Support sustainable production and implementation of transparent, sustainable value and supply chains, while promoting and respecting smallholders' and farmers' rights

There is huge potential for sustainable agricultural systems within multi-functional landscapes to provide habitat and corridor functions for biodiversity, contribute to greenhouse gas reduction, enhance - rather than erode - ecosystem services, ensure food security and nutrition, and promote food sovereignty and respect of farmers rights. Low agricultural productivity and an over-dependence on a few staple and cash crops (e.g. maize, cassava, palm oil, cocoa, rice, coffee, etc.) perpetuates a low return on investment for smallholder farmers and has trade-offs for the availability and affordability of more nutritious foods. Further, food is lost on farms due to value chain inefficiencies such as poor storage options, and actors along the value chain have little incentive to invest in sustainable practices. Regional food initiatives provide the opportunity to help actors along the supply chain re-envision value chains in relation to their sustainability and impact on people and nature. SSA regional food initiatives should focus on:

- Activities that avoid any further natural habitat conversion, rebuild ecological systems and enhance farm resilience, conserving natural resources and reducing agrochemical inputs like synthetic fertilisers and pesticides;
- Adoption of sustainable agriculture practices based on agroecology principles, such as regenerative and organic agriculture, which embrace the diversification of farming systems. This involves, for instance, promoting intercropping and mixing of crop varieties, as well as agroforestry systems, which have shown numerous benefits for food security such as more consistent crop yields, diversified food options and improved nutrition;
- The recovery of agrobiodiversity, pollinators and organisms critical for soil fertility and health, as part of larger efforts towards soil restoration and rehabilitation;
- Sustainable land use planning to eliminate deforestation and conversion of natural habitats from food supply and value chains;
- Agricultural systems that have holistic approaches to managing human wildlife conflict
- Agricultural systems that support ecological connectivity of the broader landscapes in which they sit, by allowing the flow of wildlife and ecological processes through them (eg right fences right places, the maintenance or establishment of wildlife corridors within larger farms etc).
- Agriculture systems that build restoration of degraded landscapes
- Promotion of small and subsistence farming, land rights and farmers' rights to seeds and other genetic resources for agriculture in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants;
- Establishment of sustainable and transparent value chains with special focus on local communities and short supply chains;
- Enhancement of extension services and trainings; support urban-rural relations (including young people education and job creation);
- Support a transition to efficient irrigation and sustainable water use levels;
- Investments in digital technology including for better weather information, traceability of supply chains, early warning of pest and disease outbreaks;

[22] Reimagining Africa's Food Future report, 2020

- Strengthen and support local and regional food markets, where most economic interactions around food take place. Select priority crops; develop value chain upgrading strategy (to include climate mitigation and loss prevention).
- Investment in supply chain infrastructure and storage facilities to reduce post-harvest food loss including equipment and techniques;
- Support of short supply chain management (e.g. transport to local markets; urban-rural linkages; and connection between food producers and consumers);
- Investment in renewable energy and energy-efficient cold chains
- Support to the agroecological transformation must go hand in hand with **shorter territorially-embedded food systems** – which is in line with the EU own objectives under the Farm to Fork Strategy. Don't link all agriculture interventions to the Africa Continental Free Trade Areas and, rather, to privilege actions that strengthen agroecology production and access to territorial markets by the family farms that are the background of the African food/agricultural economy. These actions should be accompanied by attention to promoting consumption of local foods, by protecting markets against adverse imports from Europe (e.g. milk) and supporting local production, processing, packaging and marketing.

b. Implementation of Agroecological Hubs

Slash-and-burn agriculture is slowly degrading natural ecosystems while not providing sufficient produce to keep up with the increase in demand. Soils are becoming depleted of organic content, carbon and nutrients due to over-planting, overgrazing and lack of regenerative farming practices. This reduces agricultural productivity, and in turn leads to an increased pressure for conversion. Agroecology offers an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. Agroecology's transformative resilience building potential depends on its holistic and systemic nature, which goes beyond a set of practices and includes: a social movement, for producers' empowerment and a multidisciplinary scientific paradigm. Fostering agroecology to build resilience should be recognized as a viable climate change adaptation strategy[23]. Agroecology is proposed as one of the approaches to hedge against climate change by African countries, with 12.5 percent of the national determined contributions (NDCs) mentioning agroecology. Importantly, agroecology places a strong focus on equity, including land use rights of women, youth and IPLCs. The regional initiatives should focus on:

- Support comparative research on the multidimensional impacts of agroecology in different SSA regions to understand: a) existing models and performance against (i) ecosystem health indicators; (ii) barriers to adoption; (iii) policy drivers and (iv) key partners.
- Barriers to the scaling-up of agroecology need to be addressed: amongst others, improved access to knowledge and understanding of systemic approaches should be fostered across sectors, stakeholders and scales
- Tailor and pilot most promising agro-ecological models and restorative approaches with smallholders, alongside partners; develop training materials.
- Develop and deploy measurement tools.
- Training farmers on improved agriculture methods including restorative approaches, provision of means (material, access to finance) and good governance to prevent the expansion into HCV areas.

c. Integrated Land-use Planning and Management

Conversion of land to accommodate the expansion of agriculture is the most significant cause of ecosystem disruption and biodiversity loss. Wildlife is being brought to the brink of extinction due to a loss of habitat - not only as a result of land conversion, but also due to the competition among livestock and wildlife for grazing and the erection of barriers by private landowners that impede nature corridors. The regional food initiatives present an opportunity to showcase **trans-frontier conservation landscapes with effective integrated land use planning and management**, which allow for clearly zoned areas based on suitability, and demonstrate that sustainable agriculture can make a positive contribution to wildlife dispersal by acting as connectivity areas. The focus should be on:

[23] THE POTENTIAL OF AGROECOLOGY TO BUILD CLIMATE-RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SYSTEMS

- Support governments and communities to develop and implement land use plans
- Assess existing land use plans to understand their effectiveness and food footprint
- Build stakeholder coalitions to address challenges in effective land use planning and management.
- Provide technical support to local authorities; incorporate sustainability for food systems into plans; monitor sustainability indicators.

4. Freshwater

As the European Green Deal increases the focus on climate and environment globally, water should be at the heart of the project design. Climate change is most often felt through water, in the form of floods, droughts, eutrophication and other extreme weather events. However, water can also play a central role in climate adaptation for people, economies, and nature when programmes are designed to build water resilience from the basin to the community level. **The SSA regional programme should support a mainstreaming of adaptation projects linked to freshwater ecosystems that reduce risks of disaster to people and support healthy ecosystems that support healthy societies.** There are also important learnings from the EU's transformational Water Framework Directive that can be shared and adapted through the SSA Regional Programme, such as the importance of connectivity and ecological flows, water quality, and data quality and monitoring systems for effective management.

Africa's freshwater resources are the interface of Sub-Saharan Africa's livelihoods, ecosystems and economies, ensuring food security to the continent either through agricultural activities or freshwater fisheries, promoting sanitation and health, and indirectly supporting all of Africa's species while providing essential ecosystem services in the form of weather regulation, pollution handling or transportation of nutrients. Moreover, Africa's economies rely on sectors that are highly water-dependent, such as agriculture, tourism or energy.

Today: 25% of Africa's population suffers from water stress, 64% of African farmers rely on water that is highly variable and 40 billion working hours are lost to the collection of drinking water per year - mainly born by women. **In the future**: water scarcity holds the potential for significant conflict – 90% of rivers and lakes in Africa are transboundary, 40% of croplands are expected to become unsustainable under expected level of water stress and by 2030, 70% of hydropower capacity in eastern and southern Africa will face increasing risk of concurrent disruption to power generation

When effectively managed and conserved, water provides an integrated approach to preserving local and globally important ecosystems, biodiversity while simultaneously providing a foundation for sustainable development and secure livelihoods. The main priorities for the regional initiatives should be:

a. Mainstream water-focused climate adaptation projects and investment at scale

Healthy rivers, lakes and wetlands underpin societies, economies and ecosystems and will be critical to mitigating these impacts and building resilience. Freshwater ecosystems provide a range of services that support many global sustainable development objectives, often for the most vulnerable communities: these include provisioning services such as drinking water and inland fisheries and regulating services such as waste assimilation; sediment transport; flow regulation; and the maintenance of estuarine, delta and near-shore marine ecosystems. But freshwater systems are under increasing pressure. By 2050 Africa's population is predicted to grow by half a billion with an increasing share that will suffer from water stress with implications for people's health, food security, poverty, equality and conflict. As water stress increases, the trend of drastically declining freshwater biodiversity will intensify. Water stress in combination with climate change will lead to dysfunctional ecosystem services leading to droughts in some areas and floods in others. Water scarcity will put sectors at the heart of African economies at risk: the agricultural sector will not have sufficient water for production and other sectors particularly in heavily hydropower-dependent East and Southern Africa, will be faced with energy shortages.

- Critical to successful climate change adaptation is **investment in nature-based solutions** (NbS) for climate change adaptation (which will also be contributing to adaptation NDCs), to reduce the

risk of water related disasters on rural communities and cities, such as extreme floods, droughts, and storms by enhancing the natural functioning of rivers, lakes and wetlands. Examples include reconnecting rivers to floodplains, restoring urban and coastal wetlands, safeguarding water supplies in degraded watersheds by replacing invasive species with indigenous trees and plants, and using natural, restored or constructed wetlands to improve water quality.

- Investments in freshwater are critical to improve the use of and availability of water for farming, industrial and household use.
- Current development in Africa is happening in an uncoordinated and unsustainable way, with a focus on extracting rather than building value. To efficiently support the multifaceted role of freshwater in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is critical to support high rainfall headwaters which contribute disproportionately to the flow of Africa's major rivers.

b. Prioritize cross-border river connectivity through flee flowing rivers

Rivers underpin entire landscapes, and contribute to economic growth, food security, and human well-being. However, there is a boom in infrastructure development that is drastically changing river ecosystems. Hydropower is the biggest infrastructure threat to freshwater ecosystems and it is continuing to grow in many regions to meet rising energy demands. Many countries still prioritise hydropower in their energy plans because it is viewed as a low cost domestic source of power and a 'green' alternative to coal. As highlighted in the climate and energy section below, investing in "shovel ready" non-hydro renewables will help power a green recovery. With the plunging price of solar, wind and energy storage, research shows that investing in low carbon, low cost and low impact power grids could keep global warming below 1.5 degrees, provide access to electricity for the one billion people who currently lack it and safeguard free flowing rivers in Africa. Accelerating investment in non-hydro renewables will require facilitating the right enabling environment, particularly engagement with investors to leverage finance and a clear and transparent regulatory environment.

To protect the ecosystem services these rivers provide, it is critical to ensure that **coordinated cross-border and regional protection measures are in place** (such as gaining Water Resource Protection Area status) ensuring investments in energy, mining and agriculture, across the several countries through which these rivers flow, limit degradation, protect livelihoods and create opportunities based on sustainable investments.

SSA regional programmes should support existing regional initiatives such as **the KAZA headwaters** (Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe) which support a human population of 40 million and the Zambezi River system plays a vital role in sustaining livelihoods and stimulating economic growth regionally. KAZA is home to 2.5 million people and serves as the migratory corridor for the largest population of elephants in Africa, and other important wildlife. It contains culturally significant wetlands (Barotse Floodplains and Liuwa NP.) This relatively pristine water tower is under severe threat from deforestation (illegal and unmanaged hardwood timber extraction, charcoal manufacture and shifting agriculture systems), damming, water abstraction and flow alterations (unsustainable energy development options predominantly in the form of large and small scale hydro-power development) and large scale developments in the mining industry (impacts water quality and quantity, creates large demand for power, results in in-migration of people putting additional pressure on finite natural resources). The Zambezi headwaters have been earmarked as development hotspots, with particular focus on the energy (hydropower), mining and agriculture sectors.

c. Improve governance, management and sustainable use of water resources

To increase healthy and resilient ecosystems that are well managed (ensuring that there is enough water in the system for people and nature, of good quality and at the right time of year), working across borders with key stakeholders, private sector and communities is important. The interplay between government, private sector and financial systems varies widely, with the need for transboundary cooperation 90% of rivers in Africa adding another layer of complexity.

National governments are the ultimate decision-makers and local governments the primary water managers and implementers of policy. They are influenced by International and regional treaty organisations decide on the standards and commitments that member states must fulfil.

The EU can support and influence these regional level organizations to ensure they promote bolder agreements and take braver action to hold member governments to account for their commitments. Key actors are the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar), global water Conventions (UN Watercourses and UNECE Water Convention), the various agencies working on the SDGs and UNFCCC to unlock climate adaptation finance for water resources and influence NDCs. Other actors include UN Water, and the UNEP Minimata Convention on Mercury, while influential regional actors include the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

5. Oceans and blue economy

The Southwest Indian Ocean (SWIO) Seascape is a global centre of biodiversity, covering 11,000 km2 (equivalent to 4% of the world's coral reefs and 35% of the total reef area within the entire Indian Ocean) and containing 300 coral species (38% of the global diversity). Other key ecosystems in the seascape include 7,300 km2 of mangroves (constituting 5% of global coverage), sea grasses, atolls, large rivers and their estuaries, and islets. The SWIO is very biodiverse, with many of its flora and fauna found nowhere else on the planet.

The annual "gross marine product" of the Western Indian Ocean region – equivalent to a country's annual gross domestic product (GDP) – is at least US$20.8 billion. The region's total ocean asset base is conservatively estimated to be at least US$333.8 billion. These values are derived from direct outputs from the ocean (e.g. fisheries), services supported by the ocean (e.g. marine tourism) and adjacent benefits associated with the coastlines (e.g. carbon sequestration). The Western Indian Ocean's economy is thus comparable to the largest national economies in the region. Several of the countries of the South West Indian Ocean are among the poorest in the world; the ocean's contribution is significant toward alleviating poverty.

The recent offshore discoveries of oil and gas deposits in the East-African countries bordering the Indian Ocean – namely Mozambique, Tanzania and Kenya – have significantly changed the general view of the sea. It has also dramatically increased extractive activities in an area that hosts some of the most important biodiversity hotspots in the world and is home to several vulnerable and endangered species. There is a major overlap of oil and gas concessions and Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSA) (28.1%) and Marine Protected Areas (MPA) (8%) in the SWIO-region, particularly in the Northern Mozambique Channel, although the region has a very low proportion of MPAs yet. The extractive industry, and particularly oil and gas, can therefore have serious consequences for both wildlife and communities in the South West Indian Ocean region (SWIO) who rely on coastal habitats, particularly those who depend on fisheries for a living. The impacts of a major spill event could be immense, particularly for some of the poorest communities in the world.

SSA regional programmes such **PESCAO on sustainable blue economy in West Africa and ECOFISH (Eastern Africa, Indian Ocean, South Africa)** should be maintained and focus on:

a. Facilitate the implementation of a sustainable blue economy[24]

As with the entire continent of Africa, the countries of the South West Indian Ocean are expected to enter into a period of rapid economic growth, enabled by their current low baseline, rapid demographic growth and access to new energy sources[25]. The population growth rates anticipated for the coming decades will result in an even larger increase in the workforce, from 42 per cent of the population now to 51 per cent in 2100, potentially providing a demographic dividend to help lift the countries out of poverty[26]. Investment in the region by corporations, and in major infrastructure and transport corridor projects, is increasing. Much

[24] Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Principles & Reviving the Ocean Economy
[25] AEO 2015, APP 2015
[26] UNFPA 2014, WEF 2012

of this is driven by the expected increase in regional consumption and demand, as well as greater participation in global trade. In parallel with these factors, there are plans to exploit petroleum and gas reserves throughout Eastern Africa – although low prices, volatility, the development of renewable energy sources and climate change commitments make it difficult to predict the sector's potential development[27]. Similarly, there have been discoveries in mining, such as coastal titanium sands. While these resource sectors are not dependent on a healthy ocean, they could have a significant impact by increasing maritime transport and the associated risks to the ocean, and pose a considerable direct threat to ecosystems and livelihoods if poorly managed.

- **Robust regional coastal planning and careful infrastructure management** – and thorough consideration of cumulative impacts – will be fundamentally important for mitigating development impacts. How the countries regulate their growth and manage development will be critical to maintaining their ocean assets and the value these provide.
- The case for protecting healthy natural infrastructure, such as reefs and mangroves, is strong and momentum is building for scaled-up intervention, including from a climate change perspective[28]. However, conservation efforts are at risk of being undermined and overtaken by the proposed development on the horizon and projected tens of trillions of investment in heavy infrastructure and exploitation expected in the next decade, much of which will take place on or within reach of the coast. **A new approach to coastal development would reap major dividends for nature and people**. In order to 'bend the curve,' on biodiversity loss, efforts must be focussed on restoring, managing and protecting productive coastal zones. Investors, governments, developers and community stakeholders need to approach coastal infrastructure development in a way that recognizes the true value of natural capital – making clear links with how intact natural infrastructure supports the Agenda 2030 Development ambitions and taking actions to underpin its integrity and build its resilience. Adopting a Sustainable Blue Economy approach will reduce the risks to coastal communities, protect and enhance biodiversity, mitigate the impacts of climate change and reduce misguided investments that can result in stranded assets.
- The regional programme should focus on regional initiatives which work with investors, governments, developers and community stakeholders on approaching coastal infrastructure development in a way that recognises the true value of natural capital.
- **Invest in sustainable fisheries:** The Indian Ocean is the second largest tuna production area, accounting for nearly 20% of global tuna catches, valued at US$ 1.3 billion. Many coastal states continue to face capacity or infrastructure constraints that limit their ability to fulfil their fishery management ambitions and responsibilities. Many of the industrial fishing fleets operating in SWIO waters supplying tuna to 'food secure' nations are contributing to reduced species abundance (by at least 50%) and changing species distributions and reduced Catch Per Unit Effort. These actions are reducing the ability of coastal states to access resources, meet nutrition security and livelihood needs and to take greater responsibility for managing their tuna resources.
- **Tackle illegal fishing:** Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) depletes fish stocks, destroys marine habitats, distorts competition, puts honest fishers at an unfair disadvantage, and weakens African coastal communities. Closing loopholes will be essential.

b. Accelerate community led conservation for restoration and inclusive management of productive coastal ecosystems

In many parts of the SWIO seascape, the on ground management of coastal and marine ecosystems depend on coastal communities. There are thousands of, often remote, villages that are de facto custodians of coastal ecosystems. Degradation of blue infrastructure, such as mangroves, and sea grasses, which moderate the impact of climate change, leave communities extremely vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather events and rising sea level. Many of African coastal communities are struggling to overcome poverty and pursue their legitimate right to develop economically. It is both unrealistic and unjust to expect them to conserve these ecosystems for the globe without support, including investment, from the broader global community. Any attempt to improve the management or

[27] APP 2015
[28] UNFCCC so-called 'Blue CoPs' in 2019 and 2020 have a substantial focus on oceans and the importance of the ocean's so-called blue natural capital to achieving climate change mitigation and adaptation

restoration of coastal ecosystems will need to work alongside coastal communities to enhance their capacity, provide alternatives and create incentives to drive behaviour change. SSA regional initiatives should:

- **Focus on the small-scale fisheries**, which mainly operate in coastal and inland freshwater ecosystems, account for more than 90% of the world's commercial fishers, processors, and other employees along the value chain - roughly 108 million people[29]. Women also play a very significant role in the fisheries sector, but their contributions are still undervalued, underreported, and consequently overlooked. Access to natural resources and appropriate local community led governance continues to be limited by a lack of resources, ownership, information and enforcement resulting in coastal communities' marginalisation from power and decision-making processes.
- **An inclusive conservation approach** should be pursued, by recognising, protecting and securing legitimate tenure rights to marine resources, promoting women's rights, as well as ensuring that indigenous and local knowledge is incorporated into decision making through sustained engagement with decision makers at local, regional and global scales. Examples of existing approaches include: community-based octopus fishery closures in Madagascar spreading 'virally' across the entire Western Indian Ocean; community buy-in and management through citizen science monitoring in South Africa and economic resilience and expansion of livelihood bases through financial inclusion programmes and community enterprises in Tanzania.
- This must be supported by **systematic capacity building efforts across coastal communities**, so they can effectively mobilise, self-organise and join forces to ensure their voices, needs and rights are recognized and fulfilled. Support for finance, tools, equipment and methods to effectively manage coastal habitats and small-scale fisheries while simultaneously dealing with pressing needs such as accessing health care, security and education is needed. Ongoing efforts have been fragmented and isolated: strategic investments are needed to rapidly scale up local scale successes to build lasting change.

c. Protect valuable coastal ecosystems

Much of this value is concentrated on the coasts, assets that we're now rapidly eroding so much so that we have already lost half of our coral reefs and mangroves over the last 30 years. Coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds are some of the planet's most productive ecosystems, providing food security, important breeding and feeding grounds for fisheries and other species, protection from storms, economic opportunity and a host of other goods and services. For example, mangrove coverage is diminishing in most countries in the region – Kenya and Tanzania lost about 18 percent of their mangroves over 25 years, and Mozambique lost 27 per cent over a shorter timeframe[30]. This is largely due to overharvesting for firewood, timber and charcoal; clearing and conversion to other land uses; pollution; sedimentation; and changes in river flow. Warming, acidifying seas and increasingly frequent major climate-related events (like mass bleaching), coupled with the inexorable increase in pressures from local human populations, are rapidly ratcheting down the health of coral reefs. The loss of coral reef biodiversity and ecological function has severe consequences for countries bordering the South Western Indian Ocean. Coral reef-associated fisheries sustain the livelihoods, food security and protein intake of many small-scale fishers in the region. Further, coral reefs are the primary asset for the coastal tourism sector, providing coastal protection, recreation areas and seafood worth US$18.1 billion annually. Tackling climate change is a global challenge, but countries in the region must take urgent action to protect reef health. This includes reversing the rise in those threats under their control, such as destructive fishing and pollution, and taking a proactive approach to improve reef conditions and identify reef-specific management actions and options.

The economic value of coastal protection provided by coral reefs, mangroves and salt marshes in the Western Indian Ocean is estimated at US$1.2 billion annually. As coastal development, urbanization and industrialization progress in the South West Indian Ocean, the value of coastal property and infrastructure will grow rapidly, and the measured economic value of coastal protection will climb accordingly. This will be reflected in a higher gross marine product. However, this will only be sustained if such development

[29] Illuminating Hidden Harvests – FAO, 2018; Hidden Harvest report - WB, 2012
[30] Bosire 2015

does not degrade the condition of critical habitats and biodiversity, or of the physical assets that provide coastal protection (e.g. by sand mining off beaches, or clearing mangroves and coastal forests for development). A major contributor to future wealth is the regulating potential of coastal estuaries, wetlands and lagoons. These habitats process and recycle organic waste from domestic and commercial sources. Appropriate design and/or protection and restoration of wetland systems can greatly enhance this function.

6. Climate and sustainable energy

The climate crisis is among the biggest challenges of our time. The IPCC special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C details how increasing impacts including sea-level rise, increased frequency and intensity of tropical storms, devastating wildfires, persistent and recurring droughts, which are affecting and will increasingly affect health, income and fuel conflicts. Moreover Climate change has disproportionate impacts across the globe, affecting the most vulnerable people and ecosystems and developing countries who have contributed the least to the climate crisis. The report also sets out how limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C is an essential prerequisite to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Aside from the necessity for the EU to enhance its own climate commitments, it should also seek to drive and accelerate global action towards a just, net-zero carbon and climate resilient future and help partner countries deliver on their commitments under the Paris Agreement. To be a leader of international efforts to fight climate change, and to deliver on the equity principle under the Paris Agreement, the EU should provide additional support to African partner countries to adapt to climate impacts and to strengthen their climate and socio-ecological resilience.

In terms of biodiversity, addressing climate change is crucial. The recent IPBES Global Assessment Report identifies climate change as one of the five main drivers of biodiversity loss, driving between 11% and 16% of the impact. Africa is predicted to be among the continents with the largest habitat loss by 2050[31]. By 2100, climate change could result in the loss of more than 50% of African bird and mammal species, a 20-30% decline in the productivity of Africa's lakes and significant loss of African plant species[32]. The reality of climate change driven nature loss is critical for both people and biodiversity.

a. Boost investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency

The transition to a sustainable energy system is underway in Africa, however it has considerable distance to reach. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the charcoal industry has grown into one of the biggest carbon emitters in the region, consuming an estimated 30 million m^3 of wood annually[33] and accounting for one-third (221 million-tonnes) of carbon dioxide equivalents emitted annually, which is approximately 2–7% of total anthropogenic GHG emissions[34]. Furthermore an estimated 750 million people are excluded from on grid electricity expansion programmes and still use paraffin and biomass (wood, charcoal, etc.) as their sole energy sources. Reinforcing and accelerating the shift to a system based on highly efficient use of renewable energy will be a key part of the recovery from COVID-19. Investments in energy efficiency and off grid renewable energy create 2.75-2.85 times as many jobs as investments in fossil fuels and as much as 4 times as many investments as large hydropower. Aligning with visions and frameworks of **existing Africa-owned initiatives such as the African Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI), LDC Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Initiative (REEEI) and African Renewable Energy Framework (AFRETRAP)** should provide important insights on how to frame priorities and enhance collaboration, including on regional energy coordination[35]. Instruments such as **Africa-EU Green Energy Initiative** should:

- **Support and investments focused on increasing off grid solutions** to guide a just energy transition in Africa with focus on good governance of the energy sector; increasing access to finance for renewable energy entrepreneurs; and establishing strong markets. More importantly, supporting efforts should target the key barriers to energy access, particularly regional markets

[31] Visconti P, et al. (2011). Future hotspots of terrestrial mammal loss. Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B. 366, 2693–2702
[32] IPBES, (2018). Regional Assessment report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Africa, Summary for policy makers.
[33] Global Environment Facility, 2016
[34] FAO, 2017
[35] https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2021/03/CSO-letter-ARI_EU-Africa-Green-Energy-Initiative-March-2021.pdf

for scale, Working only at the national and local levels will hinder effective transition to renewables. According to current demographic and economic trends as well as national energy plans, the total primary energy demand in SSA is projected to grow by 30% in 2030[36] As such the focus should be to support the continent to developing and becoming self-sufficient in renewable energy for its own, rapidly growing energy needs, both to power industrialisation as well as overcoming energy poverty, and to support intra-regional and inter-continental cooperation.

- To cope with this demand, coal plants are planned in several countries in Africa. This is a big threat to transition to renewable solutions and emission reduction goals. **Climate diplomacy and technical and financial support, must seek to impact the conditionality of investment in energy**, particularly international investment from China, which continues to flow into coal power in Sub-Saharan Africa. Helping the recipient countries of this investment to better understand the opportunities created by falling renewable energy costs; as well as the potential that reforming the market and regulatory environment for renewables has international investment can be re-focused away from coal power and towards wind and solar energy and energy efficiency as has been demonstrated by the WWFs Africa Energy Access Initiative and REPOWER Asia program.
- **Prioritise energy efficiency**, as demand growth in Africa has so far overwhelmed the expansion of renewables. Innovative solutions for space cooling can be particularly impactful if combined with installation of rooftop solar, which can provide power in times of peak cooling demand, as demonstrated in WWF's Cool and Solar initiative. These are major pillars of action for achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, the SDGs as well as the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol.
- **Promote inclusive access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy in accordance with SDG 7**. The falling costs and improving performance of renewables, particularly solar and wind, offer opportunities to ensure that poor and rural communities can access energy while also promoting the transition to a sustainable energy system. Decentralised renewable energy access which **leaves no one behind**, and using the energy efficiency first principle should be prioritised. Distributed, smart, flexible, diverse, and democratised energy systems, in contrast with conventional approaches favouring grid-based systems with centralised control, offer more resilient forms of supply. To be more effective, the support should target partnerships at both regional and national levels with specific focus on private sector engagement and friendly enabling environment.
- Systems should be developed with **local participation and community focus** positioning energy democracy and broad, multi-stakeholder participation at the centre, and ensure energy access to productive sectors such as small-scale agriculture, micro, small, and medium-sized businesses, and community services that form the backbone of livelihoods and economies in least developed countries in particular; beyond bare-minimum focus on, for instance, light provision for households. Civil society can play an important role, and support should be given to new forms of collaboration with civil society in governance and implementation beyond traditional advocacy and watchdog roles, from local to national to regional level. CSO networks operating at regional level can play a valuable role in oversight at each of these levels. Further, the private sector particularly local SMEs should be empowered with both technical and financial skills so that they can access finance and expand their market reach in order to drive the renewable energy transition to remote areas which are normally considered "economically non-viable" due to high infrastructure costs, scattered households and low disposable income.
- **All investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency should be implemented with the principles of a Just Transition in mind.** Systemic energy system change, while bringing a net increase in jobs, could lead to job losses and deprivation in some areas if these risks are not actively managed. Analysis of the impacts of the transition should be facilitated at the local level and wherever possible, projects should be developed in consultation with local communities and led at the level of local municipalities, together with the private sector, ensuring decentralised benefits and fair sharing of transition costs.

[36] Hafner M., Tagliapietra S., de Strasser L. (2018) The Challenge of Energy Access in Africa. In: Energy in Africa. SpringerBriefs in Energy. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92219-5_1

b. Support existing African initiatives and alliances on climate action

Research from the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate shows that bold climate action could deliver more than $26 trillion in global economic benefits by 2030, including 65 million new low-carbon jobs[37]. While the African continent contributes a small percentage to global carbon emissions, the growing impacts of climate change and the world's imperative to bend the emissions curve sharply in the next decade create a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Sub-Saharan Africa to attract investment and mobilize its domestic institutions in support of its development priorities while avoiding carbon lock-in.

National governments have a critical role to play. But the scale and speed of the transition cannot be addressed by them alone. The private sector, local and state governments, academic institutions and civil society have a critical role to play as the shapers of social and economic activity in each country. Sub-Saharan Africa has a growing number of cities with bold 1.5C aligned targets, businesses with science-based targets and civil society and academic institutions at the forefront of supporting climate action. But relative to other regions, the share of these actors is very small, with only 2% of cities that report to carbon, C40 Cities, CDP Cities, Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, and Climate Mayors coming from the African continent, and likewise disproportionately low representation from the private sector reporting to CDP[38] .

While underreporting of climate action is a factor, the data show nonetheless an enormous untapped potential. An analysis about the state of climate action in Kenya and India conducted by the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) underscored the latent interest by subnational and non-state actor institutions in being part of building the net-zero, climate-resilient economy in their countries. Likewise, the analysis pointed that bringing more actors into the fold is not enough: effectiveness can be significantly enhanced through coordination and collaboration through strategic partnerships that require non-climate actors leveraging on each partners' strengths[39].

As a complementary effort, the SSA regional programme should help **mobilize climate action among subnational and non-state actors**, using its Green Diplomacy channels as well as fostering and supporting "informal" efforts, including the **Alliances for Climate Action (ACA)**. ACA is a network of national alliances dedicated to driving the net-zero transition in each respective alliance countries by catalysing individual and collaborative climate actions in line with net-zero, garnering domestic public support for the transition, and mobilizing a unified subnational voice in support of adequate climate targets and policies. These national alliances play a unique role in the ecosystem of climate action because they bring together and mobilize in tandem the subnational and non-state institutional actors that shape social and economic activity at the country level. These include local, state and regional governments; companies and investors; academic and cultural institutions; tribal organizations and faith communities; healthcare institutions, and civil society.

In collaboration with global and national partners, ACA has contributed to the establishment of seven national alliances in countries that together account for 22% of the world's emissions, one of them in South Africa, and can offer its experience and lessons learned to mobilize subnational and non-state actor institutions in the African continent. The early results point to the power of aligning progressive institutions in support of ambitious national climate targets and policies, the potential of collaboration to address implementation bottlenecks and the inspiration for other institutions to take action. Whilst individual countries have unique priorities in their journey to reach net zero there are certain sectors, including energy, that play a role in all countries and consequently offer much to those looking to learn lessons and leap frog slower moving processes.

Good governance and African leadership and ownership through multi-stakeholder partnerships and civil society participation will increase acceptance and the probability of success within Africa and among African partners. The programme should support or step up support to additional existing African-led initiatives including the African Adaptation Initiative, the LDC Renewable Energy and Energy

[37] Global Commission on the Economy and Climate. 2028. Unlocking the Inclusive Growth Story of the 21st Century
[38] Data Driven Yale, NewClimate Institute, PBL 2018: Global climate action of regions, states and businesses
[39] African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS). 2018. Strengthening Sub/Non-State Climate Action in the Global South project: Workshop Report.

Efficiency Initiative for Sustainable Development and African Energy Transition Programme (AFRETRAP). African experts, stakeholders and policy makers, assisted by the existing African economic diplomacy channels and practices engaged in these initiatives.

c. Strengthen support for Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) for Climate change and disaster risk reduction

Nature plays a critical role in minimizing climate impacts and is a core component of effective adaptation. Nature can be a true ally in fighting climate change, contributing approximately 30% of the solutions to remain within a 1.5°C scenario. NBS for climate can provide a cost-effective and smart way to increase resilience, support adaptation and contribute to livelihoods of vulnerable communities while enhancing and protecting natural and socio-cultural capital, providing recreational and diversified revenue-generating opportunities. The SSA regional programme should support African partner countries in promoting and co-design NBS for climate with Indigenous peoples and local communities in a way that these are socially, ecologically and economically beneficial to all. Further, it should support partner countries to improve the integration of Nature-Based Solutions into their NDCs and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) in order to obtain updated and complete information on the quantity and quality of their mitigation and adaptation potential. These solutions should be promoted in parallel to and additional to systemic changes in our global energy, urban infrastructure and industrial systems. Recognizing the alarming impacts that climate change poses on our long term conservation and development goals in Africa, SSA regional programmes should support existing regional climate change adaptation initiatives such as the **Africa Adaptation Initiative regional programme**[40].

d. Climate mainstreaming across all SSA regional programmes

Beyond the more obvious sectors including sustainable energy and circular economy, climate mainstreaming needs to be better integrated across all sectors through the SSA geographic programmes. This means identifying more programmes and projects where climate and environment can act as a 'principal' or 'significant' objective (using the Rio Markers) and through stronger alignment of programmes with strategic climate objectives (decarbonisation and adaptation); and more thorough use of climate-proofing principles and tools. Compared to delivery in the previous MFF there is much more potential to deliver on climate objectives across transport, infrastructure, digitalisation and private sector development (for example urban development encompassing adaptation measures, renewables-based transport systems, digitised smart city infrastructure which improves energy efficiency). Delivering on climate also needs to contribute to human development and social inclusion, to improve health, particularly nutrition and the right to food, and public education outcomes. For example energy access and electrification of the health sector, programmes preparing the health sector for climate and environmental impacts, or nutrition and food security projects which strengthen adaptation through use of local indigenous knowledge, farmers-save seeds and agroecological practices. Identifying programmes and projects with multiple outcomes and benefits will maximise impacts, for example water resource management using nature based solutions, which contributes to health and adaptation to build both community and ecosystem resilience.

All programmes and projects financed from the SSA regional programme need to be **'climate-proof'**: compatible with the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C and to protect and restore ecosystems; support adaptation and are climate-resilient:

- Programming and evaluation instructions must include an obligation to check project and programming **compatibility with international human rights standards, social safeguards, and criteria excluding fossil fuels and environmentally harmful activities** in line with the NDICI regulation
- **Climate and environmental screening** needs to be used for every project and programme, and the scope of screening and the relevant tools improved to ensure compatibility with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C goal, that projects and programmes are adaptation-proof, and align with or do not contradict nature protection objectives. Current climate and environment mainstreaming

[40] https://wwfeu.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/brochure_overall_aai_13.pdf?uNewsID=358695

guidelines include three tools for determining compatibility with climate and environmental objectives. Climate and environmental screening is used to determine whether and which of a: Strategic Environmental Assessment (sector-level -applicable to budget support and programmes/projects that provide strategic-level support), Environmental Impact Assessment (applicable to projects or specific investments), or a Climate Risk Assessment (projects) is required SEAs need to be used more systematically across programmes, and not just those likely to have significant negative environmental impacts

- EU entities managing different components of the SSA regional programme should ensure all **tools deliver a more robust assessment of compatibility with climate mitigation and adaptation objectives**, as early as possible in the project or programme development, and should be governed by assessment of alignment to decarbonisation pathways in line with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C goal, and assessment of regional and sectoral vulnerabilities to climate impacts over the whole project / programme lifecycle. The assessment should result in a mitigation and adaptation strategy, with plans and measures to ensure projects and programmes adhere to mitigation and adaptation objectives.

7. Circular economy and footprint

The urgency for a systemic transformation has never been greater. Out of all the materials we extract globally, only 10% end up in products. The rest is wasted along the supply chain, before it ever reaches the hands of consumers. Even then, within six months, 80% of the products we produce end up in our waste system, where they have little chance of ever returning to products again. Our linear economic model leads to resource scarcity, global humanitarian issues related to both material extraction and waste processing, vulnerability to global shocks and the environmental impacts associated with the inefficient and wasteful consumption of materials. Despite interest from the private sector to increase circularity, there is no evidence of the necessary decoupling of environmental impact and material throughput from economic growth, and the urgency to drive this has never been greater. To ensure that humans can thrive within planetary boundaries, a shift towards circularity must be accelerated and the private sector has a key role to play in this transition.

The EU has a clear role to play: pushing the ambition level, creating momentum around sustainable transformation, and working with all stakeholders on impactful solutions. Future EU support to partner countries in moving towards a circular and more sustainable economy should build on successful regional programmes financed to date, such as **Switch Africa to Green**. They should be strengthened and go one step further, from reducing waste and improving resource efficiency, to "designing out" negative impacts and help transform our global and interconnected economies towards absolute decoupling of economic activities from the consumption of limited resources, thereby promoting positive environmental and society-wide benefits for all within planetary boundaries.

Expanding and strengthening "Switch Africa to Green" programmes while promoting multi-stakeholders approaches:

- This should be done both at country and regional level, to support companies, particularly micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs), develop circular, regenerative business models which help to create and share value across the economy, support new employment opportunities and reduce poverty. Support should be provided to "design out" waste and pollution, increase utilisation of existing assets (sharing economy) and make decarbonisation a priority; keep products and materials in use as long as they maintain their quality, and up-cycle materials to optimise the use; design high quality products which can be upgraded and repaired; accelerate circular high positive impact innovations in order to avoid emissions from resource and energy-intensive sectors.
- Continuing to support innovative financial mechanisms and access to finance for MSME as well as cooperatives and informal workers who often play a leading role in waste prevention and material re-use should be ensured. Similarly, multi-stakeholder approaches should be promoted, in the context of "Switch" initiatives and beyond, by designing and implementing programmes that bring together companies, investors, civil society organisations, the public sector and other actors to foster, among others: regulatory changes and more conducive business environment; capacity

building and cross-company cooperation for circular economy across companies' supply chains; investments in local supply chains and shorter producers-consumers links important to revitalise rural and decentralized economies that can be more sustainable and equitable, and create green and blue jobs.

1.3. Which contribution CSO/LAs could provide in the framework of regional/continental initiatives? Could you mention up to three aspects of this support or of EU's way of working that you believe should continue and up to three aspects you would like to see changing?

Aspects that should continue:

- Continue to support the adoption of specific principles to guide activities which would reinforce and strengthen the role of CSOs in climate and environmental action: including the Aarhus Convention and Escazu Agreement where applicable
- Civil society groups should be supported to monitor progress, improve transparency and play their watchdog role effectively. The CSO should also remain the privileged partner of the EU in the implementation of the NDICI's programmes at the regional level. Their commitment to public good and unique position and status, allows them to develop partnership with both private and public actors, while maintaining their political neutrality. They are also the best conduits towards local communities and indigenous groups.
- The EU should continue to offer CSOs a space to engage with and influence the EU as well as for the EU to leverage CSO knowledge, capabilities and their role as advocates for biodiversity protection, fighting poverty and promoting gender equality, inclusion and sustainable development. This can be done though formal stakeholder consultation processes; CSO involvement in policy dialogue discussions, cross learning and sharing events, and mid-term assessments; role in implementation, monitoring, and public awareness.

Aspects that should change:

- **CSO funding allocations in the regional MIP**: significant and predictable funding should be made available to civil society organizations, to safeguard civic space and enable CSOs' participation in the implementation of the Green Transition programmes. CSOs have been often excluded from the implementation of the environmental and climate programmes during the previous MFF. For example global and regional GPGC environmental/food/climate programmes have been almost exclusively channelled and managed by International Organisations and private sector monopolised many of the EU Trust Funds in the energy area. Many global network NGOs have the operational and technical capacity to implement technically demanding multi-country programmes, as well as to carry the research. Funding should also be made available to CSOs to support their right of initiative, run their own programmes and to meaningfully contribute to the implementation of the Green Transition.
- The EU should **strengthen its dialogue with a diverse range of CSOs**, including IPLCs organisations and enhance efforts to reach more diverse and marginalised groups from grassroots, indigenous, youth and women's groups, climate justice and environmental defenders. New partnerships outside of the usual conservation circles must be included to achieve a truly inclusive conservation approach, while continuing to enhance the capacity of indigenous peoples and local communities to sustainably manage their territories and resources in a manner that positively contributes to their livelihoods. Integrate and value the local and indigenous knowledge, through adequate community dialogue, when developing solutions and programmes aiming at sustainable food production, community resilience, environmental protection and adaptation to climate change. Local populations should be supported to rediscover, adapt and use their knowledge. Local, small-scale and low-cost approaches should be scaled up. The Climate, Land Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA) showed in its 2018 report, "Missing Pathways to 1.5°C", the key role that IPLCs play in ecosystem protection and the need, therefore, to secure their land rights. Attacks against them and other environmental rights defenders are on the rise as pressure on natural resources increases. Protecting and empowering them must be part of the EU's approach.
- It will be imperative to design regional strategies that target CSOs in particular youth, women, and IPLCs, **through education and engagement, to become the agents of change** for an African

ecological future where nature is seen as an important cornerstone of long-term poverty reduction and economic development. Through formal education systems, as well as through social media, citizen science approaches, interactive outreach programmes and direct support to youth advocacy groups, build both awareness and capacity of youth groups to engage in conservation and to strive towards lifestyles and social norms to position nature in a manner that resonates within African society. Provide support to concrete youth-led innovative conservation solutions and initiatives that may lead to scaled and transformative social, environmental and economic returns to youth and African society at large.

1.4. How could those initiatives better tackle inequality (including gender and youth participation) and have a more "people & planet" approach?

Inclusive conservation: Support to conservation, and equitable economic development must be built upon inclusive approach which encompasses a holistic outlook of working that brings people into each step of the decision-making process and develops solutions that work for all stakeholders ensuring the people that share landscapes, seascapes and habitats are included in the critical decisions that affect their livelihoods and in the benefits. Conservation impact that is relevant to the people and places where it occurs, must be articulated with and reinforce the interconnectedness of development, global and regional trends, and nature, highlighting a shared regional agenda that responds to global and regional threats and opportunities. To achieve this, new sectors and partners outside of the usual conservation circles must be included, while continuing to enhance the capacity of indigenous peoples and local communities to sustainably manage their territories and resources in a manner that positively contributes to their livelihoods. Through partnerships, engagement, and participation, the scope of conservation can be expanded to recognize and embrace the development context as an opportunity for ensuring relevance and creating impact on people's lives and livelihoods. An inclusive approach also implies the direct involvement of local populations in conservation professions through community rangers, and community conservancies, for example.

Mainstreaming and prioritising climate and biodiversity objectives: Climate and biodiversity must be prioritised and mainstreamed throughout regional programmes. Identifying programmes and projects with multiple outcomes and benefits will maximise impacts, for example water resource management using nature based solutions, which contributes to health and adaptation to build community resilience, energy access and electrification of the health sector, programmes preparing the health sector for climate and environmental impacts, or nutrition and food security projects which strengthen adaptation through use of local indigenous knowledge and agroecological practices.

Promote gender equality in green transition: Women and girls are more exposed and vulnerable to the impacts of biodiversity loss and climate change, as well as to inequalities and inequity. Women, girls and women's organisations are often at the forefront of defence and sustainable management of natural resources, first responders in climate disasters and they play a key role in ensuring food security. And yet, the knowledge, skills and decision-making tactics of both women and men are currently absent from discourse on natural resource management and adaptation to climate change. Levelling the playing field between genders has already proven beneficial for environmental conservation, sustainability and gender equality, and women's rights are and should remain a high priority in the Green Transition programmes in line with the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP). Strengthen links with GAP 3 as it includes a commitment to **promoting a gender-transformative approach to agriculture and food systems**, based on (i) capacity building for rural women; (ii) policy reforms to regulate more fairly land tenure and to manage natural resources and (iii) economic empowerment and access to finance. **Improving data collection** on the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change and environmental degradation to inform gender-responsive policies and action is also part of GAP3 commitments, as well as creating an enabling environment for women's economic activities and access to productive resources and eco-system services, including women's access to land and natural resources.

A human rights-based approach to underpin all regional programmes: a human rights based approach should be promoted and upheld at all levels of the programme implementation. Strong social and environmental safeguards, along with the "do no harm" principle should apply, to counteract potential adverse human rights impacts on people, as already exemplified by biofuels and commodity imports,

which cause deforestation, land and water grabs. The regional programme should comply with and strengthen human rights and natural resources rights, including the right of IPLCs to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). Increased support should be provided to African environmental defenders and community-led solutions. Strong social and environmental safeguards, as well as effective monitoring and complaint mechanisms should apply to all programmes and investments funded by the SSA regional MIP, including blended finance operations and budgetary guarantees signed in the context of the EFSD+.

Nature based solutions approaches to reducing climate risks: Biodiversity and climate are interlinked, and need integrated responses. Climate change is threatening many natural ecosystems, undermining their capacity not only to provide traditional ecosystem services – such as water and food but also their ability to provide a buffer to local communities from intensifying climate impacts. Addressing the two issues simultaneously can also multiply the benefits. Nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation offer win-win solutions, when designed and implemented in partnership with local communities, with an equitable sharing of the benefits. Nature-based solutions, including forest and wetlands restoration and ecosystem protection, contribute to climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk management, increase community resilience and reduce vulnerability. A true opportunity lies in deploying and prioritising nature based solutions to break sectoral silos and leverage impact at scale.

Prioritising support to enhancement and implementation of NDCs in regional programmes will achieve better climate and environment outcomes, integrated with SDG plans, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), DRR strategies, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans where available. SSA regional MIP should support embedding strong governance principles, participation and concrete milestones within NDCs so they deliver strong and inclusive development, environmental and climate benefits. The EU should seek synergies between NDC processes and the FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreements in timber-producing countries and increase financial and political support for the FLEGT Action Plan.

Inclusive and equitable partnerships for conservation: A significant increase in the area of land and sea under effective and inclusive conservation and sustainable use is required as part of efforts to bend the curve of nature loss and mitigate climate change, also recognising that those most reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods are often the most disenfranchised. This can only be achieved by recognising the important role that African Indigenous People and Local Communities have played as nature custodians for generations and continue to play in safeguarding most of the planet's remaining biocultural diversity. The EU can play an important role in working with African governments, civil society and private sector to advocate and promote the recognition of those IPLCs who have been custodians of their lands and territories over generations and intend to conserve these areas effectively for the long-term (Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas-ICCAs, or territories of Life), support their efforts to secure rights to their ICCAs, and strengthen the governance systems of their territories, lands and waters, their culture and to build sustainable economies. Recognition and empowerment will better enable IPLCs to restore and defend these areas against encroachment of unsustainable development activities and become champions of sustainable, holistic development and equitable conservation.