



# West Africa Environmental Policy

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**Reverse trends of natural resource degradation and depletion in order to guarantee to the people of the sub-region, a healthy environment that consequently improves on the living conditions of the population.**

West Africa's environmental policy spells out the objectives, resources and actions meant to improve on environmental and natural resource management in West Africa in a bid to guarantee a healthy environment for the population. It is the response to major environmental concerns of the West African sub-region.

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# West Africa Environmental Policy

## Briefing note

The briefing note aims to give the public the essential points for better understanding the West Africa Environmental Policy. Written in an accessible language and structured to facilitate understanding, the briefing note is intended to be a practical tool made available to the public to help them better engage in the issues related to environmental resources management.

## Why a regional environmental policy for ECOWAS

### Improve on the management of the environmental heritage to support development

Environmental protection in West Africa is facing many sustainable development challenges. These challenges are primarily in terms of food security and the fight against rural poverty because environmental degradation causes soil degradation and declining agricultural productivity. Then there is the human health challenge because environmental destruction generally affects the health of urban and rural populations. There is finally the challenge of survival of natural ecosystems that provide many goods and services to the population.

In view of these challenges, ECOWAS and UEMOA, the two regional integration organizations charged with promoting cooperation and economic integration in West Africa, decided to develop environmental policies. Both organizations are competent on environmental matters because their objectives include the harmonization and coordination of national policies and promotion of programmes, projects and activities in the areas of agriculture and natural resources as well as the harmonization and coordination of policies to protect the environment. It is in this context that each organization adopted in 2008 an environmental policy (Supplemental Act No. 01/2008/CGC/UEMOA of 17 January 2008 to adopt the UEMOA common policy on environmental improvement; Supplemental Act A/SA 4/12/8 of 19 December 2008 to adopt the ECOWAS environmental policy).

Though these two documents cover all the environmental concerns of the sub-region, they have mainly focused on cross-border issues and shared resources with the view of strengthening regional integration.

Both environmental policies were

developed in a participatory manner, with Member States closely involved in both the diagnostic phase and that of outlining major guidelines. As concerns UEMOA in particular, it ensured the participation of actors through visits/interviews, organization of national forums/workshops in States, sessions of the ad hoc Scientific Committee and the holding of a regional workshop on the draft document. Hence more than 150 meetings were eventually held and outreached nearly 4 000 people and 8 national workshops attended by over 500 people from various relevant walks of life.

### A threatened environment but still productive and full of vitality

West Africa's natural resources are considerable but poorly distributed, insufficiently known and under-developed. They need to be well managed and shared to support the well-being of the sub-region.

Today, natural resources and the entire environment in West Africa are characterised by strong trends of degradation and deterioration from natural and human factors that affect them. The region suffers from serious phenomena of all kinds of natural resource reduction and modification, which undermine its long-term development. In fact, West Africa's environmental system produces diverse goods and services that often support the livelihoods of rural people or nearly 80% of the West African population. These major environmental problems hinder sustainability of actions undertaken at regional, national and local levels.

Among the major environmental problems the region is facing, it is important to first mention land degradation caused by erosion and negative traditional, customary or agricultural practices, aggravated by drought and desertification resulting



in loss of large areas of arable land, in a region that is agriculture dependent. It is important to also include gradual biodiversity loss through deforestation, loss of tree resources, degradation of pastoral resources, simplification and trivialisation of landscapes among the main environmental threats. This biodiversity loss is the result of recurrent phenomena such as bushfires, negative impact of armed conflict, inadequate knowledge of biodiversity species, poor knowledge of the real contribution of environmental goods and services to the national economy and particularly their contribution to the livelihood systems of grassroots communities. Biodiversity loss is also the result of weak cooperation initiatives and joint management of transboundary forest ecosystems in the region.

Water resource and aquatic ecosystems degradation is also a major environmental concern in ECOWAS countries given the vital role water plays in the economy in general, agricultural development and drinking water supply to cities in particular. The degradation of watersheds, drying up of spring sources, wild proliferation of invasive aquatic species, various types of pollution are all constant concerns of States and regional institutions. In the same light, coastal ecosystems are subject to various degradations among which we can mention the degradation of mangroves and coastal erosion that increasingly threaten arable coastal land and human infrastructure.

Also, pollution and nuisances, whether urban or industrial, remain a major concern in the region. States have difficulties to ensure sound management of urban and rural waste and provide the population with an adequate sanitation system. It is the same for the difficulty of satisfactorily managing industrial pollution and nuisances with all the associated health risks.

### **ECOWAS and UEMOA: two institutions, two policies, a common objective**

Given that they did not write a single common document, the two intergovernmental organizations have formulated very close compatible policies, with the ECOWAS environmental policy being considered as having been developed on the same foundation as the UEMOA environmental policy. The latter was expanded and enriched by contributions from all other States of the Organization, with the necessary hindsight and spirit of synthesis applicable to a wider area of study. Although they are two policies, their vision, goals and means of action converge. Within the purview of the development of these policies, the two organizations coordinated their initiatives closely to come up with convergent documents to facilitate their coordinated implementation at regional level.

That is why this Technical Brief will be built on the ECOWAS environmental policy to which is incorporate that of UEMOA.

Extractive industries are also a major environmental challenge due to their harmful effects on the environment. Many mines seriously affect availability of farmlands, contribute to destruction of vegetation and landscape degradation, and are major sources of pollution and nuisance due to the misuse of dangerous chemicals. Environmental risks related to extractive industries will in the years to come be all the more worrying given that there are major oil development prospects in the region given the immense reserves identified.

Besides these major national and regional environmental problems, it is important to mention the global threats that require global cooperation. This has to do with



global warming resulting from the negative effects of climate change, depletion of the ozone layer, plundering of marine resources and environments of West African coastal States or international transportation of toxic and dangerous products, including transboundary movements of hazardous wastes. Although Africa's contribution to these pollutants and nuisances is globally very low, it is however among the most vulnerable regions to these phenomena, thus it is compelled to take an increasingly active part in international efforts to fight against these global threats.

### Challenges of the environmental policy

The main environmental challenges that the policy has to tackle in order to encourage the advent of a healthy and productive environment in a context of social equity and peace between States are as follows:

- **good governance of natural resources** resources that are affected by many factors of degradation arising from irregular climatic conditions, that are transitional or accidental and methods of use imposed by societies;

- **protection of cities and the countryside against pollution and nuisances** that are fast generated by the development of industries, agglomerations and other human settlements;
- **contribution of good management of resources to production and food security, effective fight against poverty and general improvement of the livelihoods of the population.** It is the necessary condition to enable environmental protection to provide economic and social support to communities and thus capture their interest;
- **fight against ignorance, lack of information and communication** particulièrement en ce qu'ils limitent (particularly in that it limits understanding issues and challenges and continue with predator and perverse behaviours on the environment);
- **adaptation and orientation of institutional bodies** to better organize and optimize synergies and partnerships.



# How does the regional environmental policy work

## Objectives and guidelines of the environmental policy

In highlighting regional integration and the strategic role of natural resources in the economic development of the region, the environmental policy's overall objective is to reverse trends of degradation and depletion of natural resources, environments and living environments, in a bid to ensure a healthy, easy-going and productive environment in the region, thus improving on the living conditions of the population.

## Guiding principles of an intervention based on continuity and a structured partnership

The environmental policy includes principles and major guidelines divided into strategic avenues. The environmental protection guiding principles outlined in the Policy fall in line with achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These are principles of continuity, minimizing duplication and interdisciplinarity as well as the polluter pays principle. It is important to add to these principles enshrined in the ECOWAS environmental policy, other major principles enshrined in the UEMOA environmental policy that are the principles of good governance, precaution, prevention, continuity or better still of information and notification. In addition to these general or specific principles, it is vital to emphasize the importance of the principle of cooperation especially between the three strategic partners of ECOWAS/ UEMOA/CILSS but also with organizations of the water basin. It is the same with the principle of integrating ECOWAS initiatives in those of the African Union and NEPAD in its environment component.



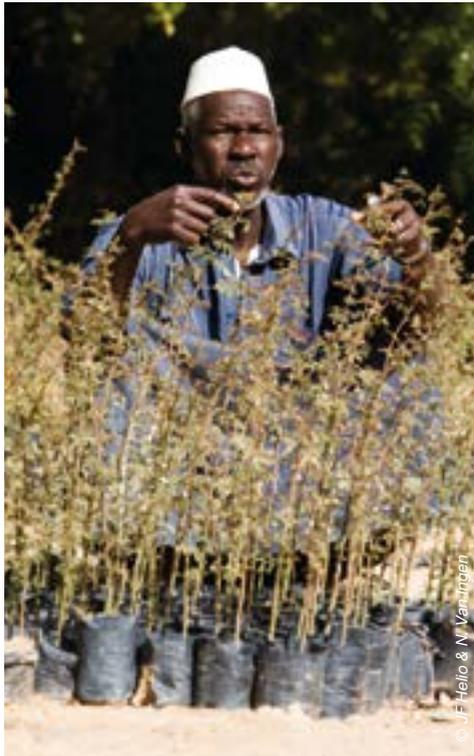
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## Strategic intervention avenues

In order to achieve its objectives, the Environmental Policy identifies four main directions, called strategic avenues around which ECOWAS and other partners have to organize the actions of sustainable environmental management.

**Strong environmental governance** driven by effective institutions. Three mechanisms have indeed been instituted for this purpose:

1. It is firstly a question of a permanent Mechanism for high-level regional consultation charged with coordinating and ensuring consistency in environmental initiatives of the main regional organizations in West Africa that are ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS.
2. Secondly it is a matter of the regional technical consultation to monitor and bolster the implementation of international conventions ratified by Member States, in a bid to help implement them.
3. Thirdly it is a matter of the Observatory, a technical tool charged with environmental monitoring, following up the environmental evolution and prevention of risks.



Good environmental governance also requires the establishment of partnerships for the implementation of the policy.

This partnership will give preference to research institutions in the sub-region, regional organizations and States should create national bodies for monitoring and evaluation of the policy.

**Promoting sustainable management of resources to improve the regional economy and the well-being of the West African people.**

This is to improve on the sustainable management of natural resources including the soil, and promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity (fauna, flora and ecosystems), with a particular focus on the sustainable integration of the forest sector and its products in the regional economy. It is also to fight against

land degradation and desertification by addressing the real causes of these phenomena. The fight against the silting of rivers and lakes, the development and implementation of reforestation programmes and local integrated rural development programmes within framework of the implementation of the convention to combat desertification are part of the preferred actions to be taken for this purpose.

**Fighting against pollution and nuisances** is another important avenue for achieving the community's objective of having a healthy environment. It is important under these circumstances to improve on urban policies to minimize or better manage the problems of pollution and nuisances, especially by adopting sanitation master plans for urban areas. It requires taking into account the link between poverty and environment by fighting against marginalization phenomena and urban slums. It is also necessary to develop and implement a permanent support programme for the treatment of waste and dangerous products, focusing on innovative and participatory management approaches with regard to urban solid and liquids waste.

**Promoting environmental information, education and communication (IEC)** as another strategic avenue is a fundamental condition for the successful implementation of the ECOWAS environmental policy, for in the long run it helps to shape West African citizens who are conscious of economic, social and cultural stakes involved in environmental protection. In terms of IEC, it will promote a regional environmental education programme by developing and teaching environmental education curricula at all levels of education (primary, secondary and higher education), strengthen ECOWAS and UEMOA

IEC activities and also encourage and reward good initiatives from institutions and individuals that contribute to better environmental management.

### **Implementation of the policy: institutionalized coordination and consultation**

The implementation of West Africa's environmental policy requires the adoption of a three-pronged strategy consisting of institutional capacity building, fundraising and monitoring and evaluation must be done in a coordinated manner between competent regional environmental organizations.

**In terms of institutional capacity building,** it should be noted that the West African region has a multitude of regional organizations with various authorities working in the field of the environment. In this backdrop, it is important to strengthen the ECOWAS department in charge of the environment to make it more capable of steering the implementation of the policy within the framework of partnerships with other regional institutions. In this context, it is important to consolidate the ECOWAS-UEMOA-CILSS strategic tripartite partnership already well established in the field of water. Also, it is necessary to organize more inter-institutional cooperation in West Africa, a better distribution of responsibilities between regional organizations and the promotion of a regional network of institutions or centres of excellence that may constitute a breeding ground for expertise for the implementation of the policy. The ECOWAS department in charge of the environment should be strengthened in this regard.

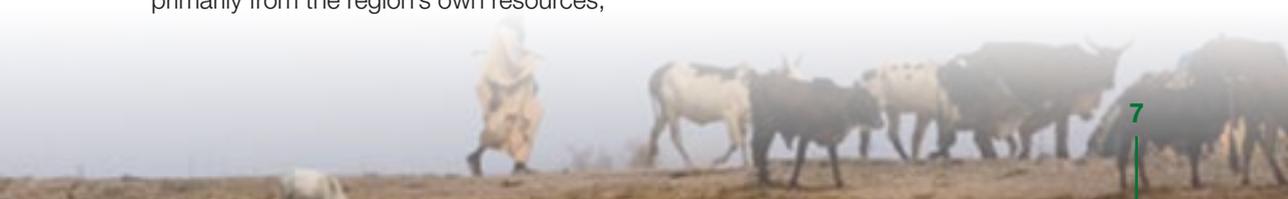
As concerns **financing the environmental policy,** funds shall come primarily from the region's own resources,

on the one hand, general or allocated funds of the ECOWAS Commission especially the Regional Solidarity Fund, and on the other hand from UEMOA resources, with the understanding that a significant regional contribution can be a catalyst for international fundraising. Funds shall come secondarily from international cooperation, be it bilateral or multilateral, particularly through programmes fighting against land degradation and desertification.

**Finally, as regards monitoring and evaluation,** a continuous periodic internal and external monitoring and evaluation shall be established in ECOWAS. Internal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms shall consist of a consultation and coordination mechanism for environmental policies and initiatives to be developed, ECOWAS Conference of Ministers in charge of the environment and high-level experts meetings. External evaluation shall be to assign independent experts to periodically evaluate the implementation of the environmental policy.



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## For more information

- Full text of the ECOWAS environmental policy: [http://www.iucn.org/backup\\_iucn/cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/politique\\_environnementale\\_de\\_la\\_cedeao.pdf](http://www.iucn.org/backup_iucn/cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/politique_environnementale_de_la_cedeao.pdf)  
Full text of the UEMOA common policy to improve on the environment:
- Volume 1 : [http://www.iucn.org/backup\\_iucn/cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/pcae\\_1.pdf](http://www.iucn.org/backup_iucn/cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/pcae_1.pdf)  
Volume 2 : [http://www.iucn.org/backup\\_iucn/cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/pcae\\_2.pdf](http://www.iucn.org/backup_iucn/cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/pcae_2.pdf)  
Volume 3 : [http://www.iucn.org/backup\\_iucn/cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/pcae\\_3.pdf](http://www.iucn.org/backup_iucn/cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/pcae_3.pdf)
- Supplemental Act A/SA 8/01/07 of 19 January 2007 to adopt the ECOWAS policy on disaster prevention.
- Supplemental Act A/SA. 4/12/8 of 19 December 2008 to adopt the ECOWAS environmental policy.
- Regulation C/REG.3/05/2008 on the harmonization of rules governing the approval of pesticides in ECOWAS countries.
- Supplemental Act N°. 01/2008/CCEG/UEMOA of 17 January 2008 to adopt a common UEMOA policy to improve on the environment.
- Regulation N°. 04/2009/CM/UEMOA on the harmonisation of rules governing approval, marketing and control of pesticides within UEMOA.
- Recommendation N°. 2/97/CM of 21

### **ECOWAS Environmental Unit**

Within the ECOWAS Commission there is the Commission of Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources. For each of these three sectors, Heads of State and Government respectively adopted ❶ the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP), ❷ ECOWAS Environmental Policy, and ❸ the West Africa Water Resources Policy. Clear objectives have been enacted of which overall coherence is entrusted to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources (DAEWR). Its objective is to «ensure sustainable food security and rational management of natural resources in member countries, a decent wage to agricultural assets, and expansion of trade on a sustainable basis, both within the region and with the rest of the world». To this end, the DAEWR is structured around three technical directorates: ❶ the Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development (ADR); ❷ the Directorate of the Environment (ENV); and ❸ the Water Resources Coordination Centre (WRCC). While the first two are based in Abuja, Nigeria, the third is based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

June 1997 on the implementation of a first generation community programme on environmental management within UEMOA.



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For more information: [www.iucn.org/page](http://www.iucn.org/page)

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**An animated presentation of the West Africa  
Environmental Policy is available online.  
To view it, thank you to flash  
the code below or visit:**

<https://youtu.be/WX2TwxNaSTM>

