



# **Summary Note on the Development of an African Ecolabelling Mechanism**

**Outcome of a Regional Consultation Process**

Jointly facilitated by

**The African Union Commission**

**United Nations Environment Programme**

and

**United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**

*in collaboration with*

**Marrakech Taskforce on Cooperation with Africa**

## 1. The context

The development of an African 10 Year Framework Programme (10-YFP) on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) was one of the key activities that had been facilitated by UNEP as part of the follow-up on Johannesburg Plan of Implementation that was endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This process was carried out in active consultation with the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) and the framework document that was developed through a series of expert meetings was approved by the Second AMCEN Partnership Conference for the implementation of NEPAD Environmental Action Plan in March 2005.

The implementation of the African 10YFP was officially launched at a High-level launch session that was jointly organized by the African Union (AU), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and UNEP and was held in May 2006. The President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, His Excellency President Girma Woldeghiorgis and other high-level representatives of regional organizations and development partners expressed their support to the further development and implementation of the African 10YFP as a mechanism that would allow Africa to leapfrog towards a more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

One of the key activities identified under the African 10 Year Framework Programme is the need to expand the market access of African Products in regional and international markets by improving the environmental profiles of African products and establishing a mechanism that promotes their marketability. The Fourth African Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption and Production (ARSCP-4) which deliberated on the key follow-up steps that need to be taken identified the development of an African Ecolabelling Mechanism as one of the five priority areas for follow-up.

UNEP in consultation with the Marrakech Taskforce on Cooperation with Africa, which is facilitated by the German Ministry of Environment, developed an activity that is aimed at laying down the basis for the development of an African Ecolabelling Scheme. This activity included conducting an overall assessment of existing ecolabelling initiatives in the region and convening of a Regional Expert Group Meeting on Ecolabelling. The following are the key findings and recommendations of the assessment and the Regional Expert Meeting on Ecolabelling that was held from 11-13 June 2007 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

## 2. Key findings and consensus points

The following are the key findings and consensus points of the Regional Expert Meeting on the current status of ecolabelling in the region and world wide.

1. The global market share for Environmentally Preferable Products (EPPs) has been consistently growing over the last decades and is expected to grow with an even faster rate with the growing recognition of the global environmental challenges including climate change.
2. Sectors such as forestry, fisheries, tourism textiles, leather, natural products and agriculture are some of the key sectors that are of vital importance to the region and whose market access could be significantly influenced by labelling programmes.

3. Labelling programmes that are currently run by institutions such as Marine Stewardship Council on fisheries, Forest Stewardship Council on Timber and forest products, Blue Flag Beach and Ecotourism on Tourism sector and the East African Organic Farming Standards facilitated by UNEP have demonstrated the benefits of labelling programmes to the region.
4. There is a strong need for harmonizing the various ecolabelling initiatives in the region and promote their region-wide utilization through a common approach in order to maximize the benefits to the region.
5. The development of a regional ecolabelling mechanism could be instrumental in addressing the prevailing misperceptions around ecolabelling and the potential use environmental consideration as technical barriers.
6. The proposed regional ecolabelling could also serve as a platform for demonstrating Africa's proactive engagement in emerging environmental markets and promote the branding of African products.
7. African businesses need to be actively engaged in ecolabelling their products in order to benefit from the growing demand for environmentally preferable products and expand their access to new market niches.
8. The introduction of labelling programmes in Africa need to be coupled with the improvement of the production capacity and efficiency of African enterprises in order to lead to concrete benefits to the region.
9. The effective implementation of a regional ecolabelling programme in Africa requires developing supportive technical and financial programmes to industries. In this regard, the engagement of industry support institutions such as National Cleaner production Centers, Universities and Industrial Research Institutions is vital.
10. The selection of the specific sectors that are going to be covered under the regional ecolabelling mechanism need to be based on a comprehensive criteria that includes the importance of the sector for national economies, poverty reduction and sustainability.
11. Introducing different recognition mechanisms such as awards and business profiling and promoting the visibility of businesses that are championing the cause is a valuable instrument in promoting competition amongst business enterprises and enhancing the effectiveness of the programme.
12. Establishing a dynamic and transparent institutional mechanism that ensures the active involvement of key stakeholders including the private sector and consumer organizations is critical in ensuring the broad acceptance of an ecolabelling initiative.
13. National and local governments could also play a critical role of 'leading by action' by adopting sustainable procurement practices in public procurement thereby promoting economic, social and environmental efficiency.
14. The experience of the major successful national and regional ecolabelling programmes have shown that the level of ownership and political commitment demonstrated by national governments and regional bodies are the critical factor that determined the success.
15. International and Regional coordinating mechanisms such as the Marrakech Taskforce for the development and implementation of the 10 Year Framework Programmes and the UN Cluster on Industry, Trade and Market Access could be valuable supporting mechanisms for the regional initiatives.

### 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

At the closing of the Regional Expert Group Meeting on African Ecolabelling Scheme, participants adopted the following key points of conclusions and recommendations that were adopted by the Regional Expert Meeting.

1. The development of an African ecolabelling scheme would make significant contribution to expand market access to African products in a global market which has increasingly become conscious of environmental considerations while also enhancing the Region's ability to achieve the MDGs.
2. The political ownership and guidance of the African Union in the development and implementation of the Regional Ecolabelling mechanism is vital for the success of the initiative and consolidated effort needs to be made in order to secure such a political backing from the continental organization.
3. The development of the African Ecolabelling Scheme has to be responsive to the priorities of the AU/NEPAD Initiatives, in particular to NEPAD's priorities on expanding market access to African products and the NEPAD Environmental Initiative..
4. Effort needs to be made in order to get the Regional Ecolabeling scheme as part of the Region's development agenda by working through the relevant ministerial forums of the African Union such as the Council of African Ministers of Industry (CAMI), Council of African Ministers of Trade (CAMT) and AMCEN
5. In view of the various ecolabelling initiatives that are currently operating in the region, the initial focus of the Regional scheme has to be on adaptation, validation, harmonization and facilitation of existing ecolabelling initiatives with a possibility of initiating new ones for specific product areas.
6. The mechanism needs to ensure the active engagement and participation of business communities, consumers' organizations and other relevant stakeholders.
7. Existing capacities on standardization, certification and cleaner production need to be enhanced and effectively utilized in order to provide a cost effective support programmes for the effective implementation of the mechanism.
8. Existing global and regional coordination mechanisms such as the Marrakech Taskforce on Cooperation with Africa and the UN Industry, Trade and Market Access cluster in support of AU/NEPAD need to be used in order to promote the required strategic partnership for the effective implementation of the initiative.
9. It is proposed to establish an African working group in which those institutions that are active in ecolabelling activities in the region and that could make specific contribution towards the process could participate and contribute to the further development of the scheme.
10. The African Union, in partnership with UNEP and UNECA, is called upon to provide the required leadership and guidance for the further development and implementation of the mechanism.

#### 4. The way forward

As a follow-up to the Regional Expert Meeting discussion and consultation was held between UNEP, African Union Commission, UNECA and the Marrakech taskforce on Cooperation with Africa and the following were agreed as the key elements of the way forward.

##### **A) *On securing political endorsement***

- Prepare the summary of the findings and recommendations of the Regional Expert Meeting together with a brochure that highlights the need for developing a regional ecolabelling mechanism. (UNEP)
- Organize a briefing session to the Ambassadorial subcommittee of the Permanent Representative Council (PRC) of the African Union on the proposed regional ecolabelling mechanism. (AU, UNEP)
- Facilitate the inclusion of the summary document and the brochure as an information document in the documents of the Council of African Ministers of Industries (CAMI) that is scheduled to be held in September 2007. (AU, UNECA)
- Work towards having a ministerial decision on the proposed regional ecolabelling programme from the Council of African Ministers of Trade that is to be held before the end of the year. (AU, UNECA, UNEP)

##### **B) *On substantive development and coordination***

- A coordinating committee having members from UNECA, UNEP, AU, African Organization for Standardization (ARSO), UNIDO and UNCTAD to be established to facilitate the interagency support under the UN Industry, Trade and Market Access (ITMA) Cluster. (UNECA, UNEP)
- A substantive working group having representatives of the major institutions that have an on-going ecolabelling programme in the region and/or can contribute to the process will be established to provide substantive input to the follow-up activities.

##### **C) *On mobilizing resources***

- The German Ministry of Environment to look for additional funding that could be allocated through the Marrakech Taskforce on Cooperation with Africa and look for other additional sources including the 'German Presidential Initiative for Africa'. (Marrakech Taskforce and UNEP)
- The African Union Commission to flag the development of a Regional Ecolabelling Mechanism as one of its priority activities and facilitate the securing of additional resources from its development partners.