Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Africa: An Examination of the Global Environmental Framework and Indigenous Tools

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Kariuki Muigua

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Kariuki Muigua*

Abstract

This paper critically explores ways through which biodiversity loss can be reversed in Africa. The paper argues that Africa is witnessing an alarming rate of biodiversity loss with many species declining and others facing the risk of extinction. Further, it notes that ecosystems are being degraded in the continent with severe consequences for people and planet. The paper examines the causes and consequences of biodiversity loss in Africa. It argues that biodiversity loss is a major threat to the attainment of Sustainable Development in Africa. Consequently, the paper argues that halting and reversing biodiversity loss in Africa is a crucial agenda for sustainability. It examines various tools and approaches that can be harnessed to reverse biodiversity loss in Africa including the global environmental framework and indigenous tools in the continent.

1.0 Introduction

Biodiversity is at the heart of Sustainable Development. It has been argued that biodiversity forms the web of life, of which humans are integral and upon which people and the planet depend on for their health and well-being[1]. Biodiversity sustains life on Earth since species and organisms work together in ecosystems, like an intricate web, to maintain balance and support life on the planet[2]. Through these complex interactions, biodiversity supports everything in nature that is vital for survival including food, clean

* PhD in Law (Nrb), FCIArb (Chartered Arbitrator),OGW, LL. B (Hons) Nrb, LL.M (Environmental Law) Nrb; Dip. In Law (KSL); FCPS (K); Dip. in Arbitration (UK); MKIM; Mediator; Consultant: Lead expert EIA/EA NEMA; BSI ISO/IEC 27001:2005 ISMS Lead Auditor/ Implementer; ESG Consultant; Advocate of the High Court of Kenya; Professor of Environmental Law and Conflict Management at the University of Nairobi, Faculty of Law; Member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) [September, 2025].

[1] United Nations Environment Programme., 'UNEP and Biodiversity' Available at https://www.unep.org/unep-and-biodiversity#:~:text=Biological%20diversity%20is%20the%20variety,of%20human%20influence%20as%20well (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

[2] World Wildlife Fund., 'What is Biodiversity?' Available at https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/what-is-biodiversity#:~:text=Biodiversity%20is%20all%20the%20different,maintain%20balance%20and%20support%20life. (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

air, clean water and medicines[3]. It has been argued that from the pollination of crops by bees, to the natural filtration of water by wetlands, to the crucial carbon capture performed by vast forests, biodiversity is key to the endurance and adaptability of humanity and ecosystems[4]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), healthy communities rely on well-functioning ecosystems and their rich biodiversity[5]. Such ecosystems provide clean air, fresh water, medicines and ensure food security[6]. They also limit disease and stabilize the climate[7].

Despite its role in sustaining life on Earth, it has been observed that nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history and the rate of species extinction is accelerating, with grave impacts on people and the planet[8]. Biodiversity loss is therefore a major global problem. Biodiversity loss refers to the reduction of any aspect of biological diversity (diversity at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels) in a particular area through death (including extinction), destruction or manual removal[9]. Biodiversity loss can occur at various scales including global extinction of species to reduction in populations of species[10]. It is estimated that nearly one million species face extinction unless all of society works to reduce the drivers of biodiversity loss[11]. Global biodiversity

[3] Ibid

[4] Smith. M., 'Biodiversity as the Foundation of Healthy Communities' Available at https://edenthriving.org/biodiversity-as-the-foundation-of-healthy-communities/ (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

[5] World Health Organization., 'Biodiversity and Health' Available at Available at https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/biodiversity-and-health#:~:text=Biodiversity%20loss%20can%20have%20significant,cause%20or%20exacerbate%20political%20conflict (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

[6] Ibid

[7] Ibid

[8] Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services., 'Media Release: Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating'' Available at https://ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

[9] United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction., 'Biodiversity Loss' Available at https://www.undrr.org/understanding-disaster-risk/terminology/hips/en0008 (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

[10] Ibid

[11] United Nations Environment Programme., 'UNEP Nature Fund' Available at https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment-programme/funding-and-partnerships/planetary-funds/unep-nature-

loss is largely driven by human activities including agricultural expansion into habitats, deforestation, pollution and direct exploitation of species[12]. In addition, climate change is also driving biodiversity loss by altering marine, terrestrial, and freshwater ecosystems around the world[13].

Biodiversity loss is a major impediment in the quest towards Sustainable Development. Global biodiversity loss is impacting the availability of critical ecosystem services including food, water, clean air, and energy[14]. It also threatens essential ecosystem processes, including pollination, climate regulation, soil fertility, and water purification, with direct consequences for human health[15]. Biodiversity loss is also fueling public health risks globally[16]. Halting and reversing biodiversity loss is therefore a vital agenda globally for Sustainable Development.

This paper critically explores ways through which biodiversity loss can be reversed in Africa. The paper argues that Africa is witnessing an alarming rate of biodiversity loss with many species declining and others facing the risk of extinction. Further, it notes that ecosystems are being degraded in the continent with severe consequences for people and planet. The paper examines the causes and consequences of biodiversity loss in Africa. It argues that biodiversity loss is a major threat to the attainment of Sustainable Development in Africa. Consequently, the paper argues that halting and reversing

fund#:~:text=Around%20one%20million%20species%20face,Enhance%20nature%20conservation%20and%20restoration (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

[12] United Nations Environment Programme., 'Habitat and Species Loss' Available at https://www.unep.org/gef/focal-areas/biodiversity/our-work/habitat-and-species-loss#:~:text=Addressing%20the%20drivers%20of%20habitat,science%2Dbased%20and%20scalable%20approaches: (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

[13] United Nations., 'Biodiversity - our strongest natural defense against climate change' Available at https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/biodiversity#:~:text=Climate%20change%20has%20altered%20marine,and%20livelihoods%20provided%20by%20nature. (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

[14] United Nations Climate Change., 'What is the Triple Planetary Crisis?' Available at https://unfccc.int/news/what-is-the-triple-planetary-crisis (Accessed on 09/09/2025)

[15] World Health Organization., 'Biodiversity and Health' Op Cit

[16] Ibid

biodiversity loss in Africa is a crucial agenda for sustainability. It examines various tools and approaches that can be harnessed to reverse biodiversity loss in Africa including the global environmental framework and indigenous tools in the continent.

2.0 Biodiversity Loss in Africa: Causes and Consequences

Africa has been identified as one of the most biodiverse regions on Earth, hosting nearly a quarter of global biodiversity[17]. It is estimated that Africa hosts nearly one quarter of the planet's mammal species and a fifth of the word's bird species[18]. Further, it has been observed that at least one-sixth of the world's plant species are endemic to the continent[19]. Africa's rich biodiversity comprises of a wide range of vital ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity[20]. This includes iconic megafauna such as elephants, lions, and giraffes, as well as unique plant species and vital ecosystems like tropical rainforests, wetlands, savannas, and coral reefs[21]. It has been observed that Africa hosts critical ecosystems including mangroves, deserts, tropical forests, grasslands, savannahs and ice-capped mountains which are crucial in biodiversity conservation efforts[22].

Africa's rich biodiversity plays a fundamental role in fostering Sustainable Development. It has been argued that Africa's biodiversity is crucial for maintaining the balance of ecosystems and providing ecosystem services essential for human well-being including clean air, water, food, energy, climate regulation and disease control[23]. Further, it has been pointed out that most of Africa's rural population rely on the continent's diverse

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[17] Biodiversity loss in Africa: A critical risk and opportunity for impact., Available at https://www.controlrisks.com/our-thinking/insights/biodiversity-loss-in-africa-a-critical-risk-and-opportunity-for-impact?utm_referrer=https://www.google.com (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[18] Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services., 'Regional Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Africa' Available at https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/africa (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[19] Ibid

[20] African Development Bank Group., 'Biodiversity' Available at https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/topics/biodiversity#:~:text=Africa%20is%20one%20of%20the,%2C%20savannas%2C%20and%20coral%20reefs. (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[21] Ibid

[22] UNEP-WCMC (2016) The State of Biodiversity in Africa: A mid-term review of progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK., Available at https://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo4/outlook-africa-en.pdf (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[23] African Development Bank Group., 'Biodiversity' Op Cit

natural ecosystems for their food, water, energy, health, and secure livelihood needs[24]. The continent also hosts vital ecosystems such as the Congo Basin rainforest which supports the livelihoods of over 80 million people across 6 countries[25]. In addition, the Congo Basin rainforest has been identified as the world's largest carbon sink storing more than 60 billion metric tons of carbon making it an indispensable regional and global resource in climate action[26]. Millions of people in Africa also depend on the continent's rich and diverse coral reefs for food, income from tourism and fisheries, and coastal protection[27]. Africa's mangrove forests also have significant economic and cultural value and support key sectors including fishing and tourism while also serving as vital blue carbon sinks and offering coastal protection against flooding and storm surges[28].

From the foregoing, it emerges that Africa's rich biodiversity is at the heart of the continent's development. However, it has been observed that the rates of biodiversity in Africa are rapidly declining and disappearing with trend expected to accelerate unless transformative actions are implemented to reverse biodiversity loss in the continent[29]. Africa's biodiversity is declining with ongoing losses of species and habitats[30]. Biodiversity loss in Africa is majorly caused by human-induced factors including

[24] Africa Center for Strategic Studies., 'African Biodiversity Loss Raises Risk to Human Security' Available at https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-biodiversity-loss-risk-human-security/ (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[25] White. L et al., 'Congo Basin rainforest — invest US$150 million in science' Available at https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-02818-7 (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[26] United Nations Environment Programme., 'Supporting sound ecosystem management' Available at Available at https://www.unep.org/regions/africa/regional-initiatives/supporting-sound-ecosystem-management (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[27] Africa Center for Strategic Studies., 'African Biodiversity Loss Raises Risk to Human Security' Op Cit

[28] United Nations Environment Programme., 'Reviving wetlands in the Western Indian Ocean: Efforts and Progress' Available at https://www.unep.org/gef/news-and-stories/blogpost/reviving-wetlands-western-indian-ocean-efforts-and-progress#:~:text=From%20Chake%20Chake%2C%20Pemba%2C%20where,through%20constructed%20wetland%20technology%2C%20UNEP (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[29] Bonnor. C., 'Biodiversity loss in Africa: A critical risk and opportunity for impact' Available at https://www.controlrisks.com/our-thinking/insights/biodiversity-loss-in-africa-a-critical-risk-and-opportunity-for-impact?utm_referrer=https://www.google.com (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[30] UNEP-WCMC (2016) The State of Biodiversity in Africa: A mid-term review of progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. UNEP-WCMC, Op Cit

destructive farming practices, unsustainable mining activities, illegal logging and harmful fishing practices[31]. Further, it has been argued that illegal wildlife trade, habitat loss and fragmentation, overexploitation of plant and animal species, pollution, introduction of invasive alien species to habitats and ecosystems, climate change and genetic erosion are among the major causes of biodiversity loss in Africa[32]. Africa is also experiencing unprecedented rates of population growth, urbanization and agricultural development which are putting a lot of pressure on the continent's biodiversity and ecosystems[33]. These factors have increased demand for land and natural resources, leading to habitat destruction and fragmentation thus causing biodiversity loss in Africa[34].

Biodiversity loss is a major impediment to Sustainable Development in Africa. This challenge is causing the loss of vital plant and animal species, the destruction of local habitats and ecosystems that support human health, well-being and livelihoods, and the loss of critical ecosystem services such as climate regulation, pollination, water purification, disease control and food security[35]. Decline and loss of biodiversity in Africa threatens millions of livelihoods in the continent, increases food and water insecurity, fuels conflicts over land and natural resources, and can lead to the transmission of zoonotic diseases in the continent[36]. Biodiversity loss is therefore a threat to Sustainable Development in Africa since it affects livelihoods, human health and well-being while also undermining vital ecosystem services including climate regulation. On this basis, it has been argued that biodiversity conservation efforts in Africa are crucial for preserving the continent's rich biodiversity and the ecological services it provides to both local

[31] Africa Center for Strategic Studies., 'African Biodiversity Loss Raises Risk to Human Security' Op Cit
[32] East African Community., 'Biodiversity' Available at https://www.eac.int/environment/terrestrial-ecosystems/biodiversity (Accessed on 10/09/2025)
[33] UNEP-WCMC (2016) The State of Biodiversity in Africa: A mid-term review of progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. UNEP-WCMC, Op Cit
[34] Bezeng. B et al., 'An African perspective to biodiversity conservation in the twenty-first century' Available at Available at https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2023.0443 (Accessed on 10/09/2025)
[35] Bonnor. C., 'Biodiversity loss in Africa: A critical risk and opportunity for impact' Op Cit
[36] Africa Center for Strategic Studies., 'African Biodiversity Loss Raises Risk to Human Security' Op Cit

communities and the world[37]. Halting and reversing biodiversity loss in Africa is therefore a key continental objective towards Sustainable Development.

3.0 Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Africa for Sustainable Development

The loss of biological diversity undermines Africa's development efforts. Biodiversity loss in Africa affects vital ecosystem services while also undermining human health and livelihoods. Halting and reversing biodiversity loss is therefore important for Sustainable Development in Africa. It has been argued that halting biodiversity loss involves protecting, managing, and restoring natural habitats, ecosystems and species to maintain and enhance biodiversity[38]. These efforts aim to prevent the loss of biodiversity and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources[39].

The global environmental framework provides suitable policy interventions, tools and approaches towards sound biodiversity conservation both globally and in Africa. For example, the *Convention on Biological Diversity*[40] was adopted towards strengthening the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources[41]. The Convention recognises that the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity is of critical importance for meeting the food, health, and other needs of humanity[42]. It identifies several strategies for conserving biodiversity including *in-situ conservation* which entails the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings (emphasis added); and *ex-situ conservation* which involves the conservation of components of biological diversity outside their natural habitats (emphasis added)[43]. The

[37] African Development Bank Group., 'Biodiversity' Op Cit
[38] Ibid
[39] Ibid
[40] The Convention on Biological Diversity, 5 June 1992 (1760 U.N.T.S. 69)
[41] Ibid, article 1
[42] Ibid, Preamble
[43] Convention on Biological Diversity, articles 8 & 9

Convention on Biological Diversity envisages the use of various techniques in halting and reversing biodiversity loss including habitat conservation which entails the protection and management of ecosystems and habitats[44]; species-based conservation which involves the protection and management of individual plant and animal species[45]; and mixed approaches that take into account both habitat and species-based conservation strategies[46].

The United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*[47] further acknowledges the crucial role of biodiversity in sustaining life on Earth. Under the Agenda, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 seeks to inter alia halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity for Sustainable Development[48]. It urges countries to take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity, and protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species[49].

In addition, the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)*[50] was adopted towards strengthening efforts to conserve biodiversity worldwide for Sustainable Development. The Framework aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and ensure sustainable use of biodiversity towards meeting the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and enhancing the role of biodiversity in Sustainable Development[51].

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[44] Biodiversity Conservation Approaches & Designing Protected Areas., Available at https://www.savemyexams.com/dp/environmental-systems-and-societies-ess/ib/17/sl/revision-notes/3-biodiversity-and-conservation/3-4-conservation-of-biodiversity/biodiversity-conservation-approaches-and-designing-protected-areas/ (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[45] Ibid

[46] Ibid

[47] United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[48] Ibid

[49] Ibid

[50] Convention on Biological Diversity., 'Decision Adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity: 15/4. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework' Available at https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[51] Ibid

The Kunming-Montreal GBF acknowledges that the continued loss of biodiversity poses a threat to nature and human well-being[52]. It affirms that biodiversity is fundamental to human well-being, a healthy planet, and economic prosperity for all people, including for living well in balance and in harmony with nature[53].

The Kunming-Montreal GBF contains four overarching goals towards halting and reversing biodiversity loss. The first goal seeks to ensure that the integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems globally are maintained, enhanced, or restored, substantially increasing the area of natural ecosystems[54]. The second goal aims to ensure that biodiversity is sustainably used and managed at all levels and that nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, are valued, maintained and enhanced, with those currently in decline being restored, supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development for the benefit of both present and future generations[55]. Further, the third goal is towards ensuring that the monetary and non-monetary benefits from the utilization of genetic resources are shared fairly and equitably, including, as appropriate with indigenous peoples and local communities while ensuring that traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources is appropriately protected, thereby contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, in accordance with internationally agreed access and benefit-sharing instruments[56]. The fourth goal aims to ensure that means of implementation, including financial resources, capacity-building, technical and scientific cooperation, and access to and transfer of technology are secured and equitably accessible to all parties, especially developing country parties in order to foster sound biodiversity conservation globally[57].

[52] Ibid
[53] Ibid
[54] Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Op Cit
[55] Ibid
[56] Ibid
[57] Ibid

The global environmental framework is therefore vital in bolstering biodiversity conservation efforts in Africa. For example, the Kunming-Montreal GBF sets out global targets aimed at halting and reversing biodiversity loss, meeting the needs of all people through sustainable use and benefit-sharing in respect of biodiversity, and mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into national policies, planning and development processes[58]. Its implementation is consistent with the contribution and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, the right to development, national circumstances, priorities and capabilities, human rights, gender equality, and science, technology and innovation[59].
Implementing the global environmental framework is therefore key towards bolstering biodiversity conservation efforts in Africa. This framework as captured under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Kunming-Montreal GBF envisages the use of various tools and approaches towards reversing biodiversity loss. These strategies include establishment of biodiversity protected areas[60]; enhanced biodiversity data collection, monitoring, analyzing and sharing[61]; ecosystem restoration[62]; and unlocking biodiversity finance[63].

In addition to the foregoing strategies, indigenous tools are appropriate in ensuring sound biodiversity conservation in Africa. For example, it has been argued that indigenous peoples are stewards of unique knowledge systems, innovations and practices that have been passed down from generation to generation and have allowed different cultures and communities in many parts of the world to live sustainably, emphasizing the balance between humanity and nature[64]. Many indigenous traditional

[58] Ibid
[59] Ibid
[60] Bezeng. B et al., 'An African perspective to biodiversity conservation in the twenty-first century' Op Cit
[61] Ibid
[62] Ibid
[63] Ibid
[64] United Nations Development Programme., 'Indigenous Knowledge is Crucial in the Fight against Climate Change – here's why' Available at https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/indigenous-knowledge-crucial-fight-against-climate-change-heres-why (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

practices are rooted in a deep understanding of and respect for the environment and ecological systems and promote sustainable use of natural resources and biodiversity conservation[65]. It has been argued that indigenous peoples are at the heart of environmental conservation efforts throughout the world since conserving biodiversity relies on the knowledge, innovations and practices of those who live in direct contact with nature[66]. Indigenous peoples and local communities in Africa are custodians of unique cultural heritage, traditional knowledge systems and deep-rooted connections to ancestral lands which makes them indispensable stewards of biodiversity and ecosystems[67]. Utilising the knowledge, systems and tools of indigenous peoples and local communities is therefore key towards strengthening biodiversity conservation in Africa.

4.0 Conclusion

Biodiversity loss undermines the quest towards Sustainable Development both globally and in Africa. Halting and reversing biodiversity loss is therefore an urgent priority in order to fast-track Africa's journey towards sustainability. Achieving this goal requires Africa to implement the global environmental framework including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Kunming-Montreal GBF. Further, there is need to harness and utilise indigenous knowledge and tools for sound biodiversity conservation in Africa[68]. Applying the global environmental framework and indigenous tools provides a suitable and effective approach towards halting and reversing biodiversity loss in Africa for sustainability.

[65] Ibid

[66] United Nations Environment Programme., 'Environmental Rule of Law: Tracking Progress and Charting Future Directions.' Available at https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/43943/Environmental_rule_of_law_progress.pdf?sequence=3 (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[67] Fa. J., & Luiselli. L., 'Weaving the Middle Spaces Between Indigenous and Scientific Knowledge for Biodiversity Conservation and Ecology' *African Journal of Ecology*., Available at https://doi.org/10.1111/aje.70030 (Accessed on 10/09/2025)

[68] Ibid

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