Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Africa
Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
Sixth session

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Item 9 of the agenda[*]
Consideration and adoption of key messages

Sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development: summary, key messages and Victoria Falls Declaration

I. Introduction

1. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), together with the Government of Zimbabwe and in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and the United Nations system,[1] convened the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, from 24 to 27 February 2020.

2. The Forum was attended by more than 3,000 participants, comprising ministers and high-level representatives of the Governments of 52 ECA member States, intergovernmental bodies, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, other international organizations, major groups and other stakeholders.

3. A summary of the deliberations, including main issues and key messages emanating from the Forum, may be found in section III below.

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[*] ECA/RFSD/2020/1/Rev.1.

[1] The following entities of the United Nations system were involved as partners in that process: United Nations Development Coordination Office, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Volunteers programme, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, World Food Programme and World Trade Organization.

A.   Background

4.   The Forum was held against the backdrop that, notwithstanding their considerable efforts over the last four years, countries and partners were not on track to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. The current decade, 2020–2030, therefore offered a window of hope to speed up the pace and expand the scale of implementation for delivery of the goals. As such, the Forum represented an opportunity to translate into action the proclamation of the 2020s as a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, as endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 74/4.

5.   Accordingly, the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development was designed as an action-oriented gathering for member States and other stakeholders to explore and agree on solutions and transformative actions that would enable the countries to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, within the set time frame.

B.   Theme and activities of the session

6.   The sixth session was held on the theme: "2020–2030: A decade to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063". This theme is closely aligned with that of the 2020 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, namely: "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".

7.   The principal activities carried out during the Forum were the following:

(a)   Regional follow-up and review of progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. To that end, the Forum undertook a review of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063. To promote an interlinked and integrated approach to the review and deliberation process during the session, the 17 goals were clustered into five sub-themes articulated around the so-called "five Ps" – people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships;[2]

(b)   Peer learning, including sharing approaches, experiences and lessons learned in conducting voluntary national and local reviews and other efforts to advance the integrated implementation of the two agendas;

(c)   Identifying and articulating priorities, policy options and recommendations of Africa in the form of key messages, to accelerate implementation at different levels, and as the region's collective input to the 2020 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (7–16 July 2020, New York).

8.   The proceedings of the main session of the Forum were enriched by the more than 60 preparatory and side events[3] held on its margins. Among those events were the special session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa, the second session of the Africa Regional Science Technology and Innovation Forum; a regional workshop on voluntary national review:

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[2] The Sustainable Development Goals were arranged in the following clusters for each sub-theme: people: Goal 1 – no poverty, Goal 2 – zero hunger, Goal 3 – good health and well-being, Goal 4 – quality education, and Goal 5 – gender equality; prosperity: Goal 7 – affordable and clean energy, Goal 8 – decent work and economic growth, Goal 9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure, Goal 10 – reduced inequalities, and Goal 11 – sustainable cities and communities; the planet: Goal 6 – clean water and sanitation, Goal 12 – responsible consumption and production, Goal 13 – climate action, Goal 14 – life below water, and Goal 15 – life on land; peace: Goal 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships: Goal 17 – partnerships for the goals.

[3] See https://www.uneca.org/arfsd2020.

strengthening voluntary integrated national reviews of and reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063; and a preparatory and capacity-development workshop for major groups and other stakeholders in the African region.

II. Opening of the session (agenda item 1)

9.   The session was moderated by the Director of the African Centre for Statistics of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Oliver Chinganya.

10.   The Executive Secretary of ECA, Vera Songwe, said that Africa had it all, and needed to succeed in achieving sustainable development, which it had not been able to do despite progress in some areas. The obstacles were many, including climate change, diseases and trade challenges, but Africa could overcome them if countries worked together. In 2018, the economy of Zimbabwe had grown at a rate of 6.2 per cent, especially as a result of the Kariba Dam. Then, because of cyclones Idai and Kenneth, the economy had contracted. She noted that young people in Zimbabwe had developed solutions for future development and sustainable growth. African young people needed 13 million jobs per year. Those jobs should be created by business and through private sector development. With a smoke that thundered, an eagle that soared and an active youth population, Africa was ready to soar.

11.   Nkosilati Nwatitu, a representative of young people and a climate ambassador from Zimbabwe, highlighted the negative effects of climate change on the environment, noting that a lack of rain had affected the water level of Victoria Falls. Millions of young people were affected by the impacts of climate change. He called upon African Governments to combat climate change to protect the environment. Young people needed to be part of national development plans and bringing them to the front lines should be encouraged.

12.   The outgoing chair of the Bureau, Nezha El Ouafi, stressed that African countries had made substantial, but still insufficient, progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. The main challenge continued to be mobilizing funding for implementing the two Agendas. That required a concerted effort, including South-South cooperation. At its fifty-second session, the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development had recognized the crucial role of strengthening fiscal policies with an objective of increasing public revenues by 12–20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Digital technologies remained key not only in improving revenue collection, but also in strengthening the efficiency and transparency of revenue use and management. In that context, he also drew attention to the national sustainable development strategy developed by Morocco.

13.   The Deputy Chairperson of the African Union, Kwesi Quartey, noted that a priority task for Africa was to deliver on the commitment of "silencing the guns", to create an environment conducive to macroeconomic growth and stability. Prosperity, inclusion and the commitment to "leave no one behind" were not possible without peace, security and stability. Progress on sustainable development had been mixed and uneven. Poverty rates were declining, and gains had been registered on health and literacy. Progress had also been made on gender equality, but it was not sufficient. At the same time, high population growth, a lack of access to decent jobs, education and health care, inequalities and data gaps persisted. Women, girls and young people in general continued to be left behind. The African Union was advancing a joint approach with the United Nations to reinforce action, review, reporting and resource mobilization for implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Member States had the responsibility to translate ambitions set out in the two agendas into tangible results. The Forum was an opportunity to reinforce joint implementation, monitoring and resource mobilization to attain the two agendas.

14. The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed, recognized the significant progress that had been made in Africa, in particular in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction. Given the many challenges that it still faced, however, Africa was not on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations development system, in the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, would focus on accelerating the pace and scale of progress, with the regional forums on sustainable development serving as building blocks. The new generation of United Nations country teams and the regional repositioning of the development system would, in cooperation with the African Union, provide stronger, more cohesive platforms for integrated support to member States, thereby strengthening coordination, mobilizing resources, enabling transparency and results-based management, and the effective positioning of regional issues in global forums. With climate change, hunger and terrorism causing considerable human suffering, success was possible only if member States integrated the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in their national development plans and adopted adequate national financing frameworks. All sectors of society, including the private sector, civil society, universities, local authorities and young people, must embrace action. Stronger public involvement and ownership of both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 were needed, with young people being the drivers of change. In the light of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and the impetus to silence the guns, Africa had the skills, leadership, optimism and creativity to realize its full potential.

15. The Minister of Public Services, Labour and Social Welfare of Zimbabwe, Paul Mavima, said that threats to sustainable development required everyone to share experiences to determine a common vision and implementation framework. Zimbabwe had ensured that its national development plan took into account the Sustainable Development Goals, and had put in place a dedicated unit in the Office of the President to ensure coordination. There was an effort to integrate the Goals into local and provincial development initiatives. In Zimbabwe, the funding gap was large but investment in smart agriculture was a starting point in addressing hunger and extreme poverty.

16. The President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, highlighted the Forum's current session as an opportunity to review progress as the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development began, recognizing the interlinked and indivisible nature of the Sustainable Development Goals and the need not to leave any country in Africa behind. Zimbabwe had been implementing Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda, including by refocusing its national budget to align the programmes of government ministries with specific Sustainable Development Goals and establishing a coordination and implementation framework under the Office of the President for collaborative technical coordination, supported by partners, the private sector and civil society. The Goals had also been integrated into local development initiatives for grass-roots impact. To accelerate achievement of the Goals and the implementation of Agenda 2063, priority areas of focus included transboundary projects; social safety nets and social protection to mitigate the impact of persistent shocks and substantial financing gaps; investment in agriculture and associated value chains; efficient exploitation of natural resources; public-private partnerships; empowerment of small and medium-sized enterprises and the informal sector; gender equality; and technology and innovation in line with the fourth industrial revolution. Climate resilience was a key priority, given its severe consequences on the continent. It was important to build strong institutions, improve standards of living and address corruption, which hampered meaningful development. Credible data were needed for implementation, monitoring and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, the support of ECA in the preparation of

voluntary national reviews was commendable. He also saluted the initiative of the young people and promised to support their initiatives.

III. Summary and key messages

17.   The following sections summarize the main issues, trends and key messages, including policy recommendations arising from the presentations and deliberations during the sixth session of the Regional Forum. The key messages comprise priorities, policy options and recommendations for Africa, to accelerate implementation at different levels, and the region's collective input to the 2020 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

A. High-level panel on accelerators to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 within the decade 2020–2030 (agenda item 2)

1.   Key trends and issues

18.   There had been some progress on some of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 4 on education. In Africa, however, progress on Goals relating to other social spheres had been slower than it should have been. There had been barely any reduction in inequality, which continued to have a negative effect on peace and security.

19.   There was an urgent need to strengthen financing mechanisms for the two agendas.

20.   Every effort must be made to have quality and timely data and statistics to ensure results-based monitoring and evaluation.

21.   Young people must be empowered with technological skills and included in the conceptualization, implementation and monitoring of efforts to accelerate the implementation of programmes for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, capitalizing on the opportunities afforded by the fourth industrial revolution.

22.   Women's involvement in science had been slow and, for that reason, more women should be involved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

23.   Many member States were mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals into their national development plans and aligning implementation arrangements with existing frameworks. The link between national development frameworks and two agendas needed to be further strengthened, however.

24.   The meeting of the high-level political forum should be an opportunity for global partnerships to assist in addressing the challenges faced by Africa, not solely to showcase what had been achieved.

2.   Key messages

25.   Following that discussion of the key trends and issues, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

        (a)   In view of the historical and environmental imbalances that it had experienced, Africa should be more assertive with regard to the resources that should be provided by the global community for the region to effectively implement sustainable development;

        (b)   Given that the effects of greenhouse gas emissions were deeply felt in Africa, despite the continent's low greenhouse gas emissions, developed

countries should take more responsibility for their own industrial emissions, following the polluter pays principle;

(c)   In addition, member States should:

(i)   Support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level, through strengthening local governance structures and funding;

(ii)   Strengthen participation of the private sector and harness diaspora remittances to invest in social services, in particular health and education and transformational infrastructure;

(iii)   Adopt a results-based management approach combined with a monitoring and evaluation system to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

(d)   Good governance and trade within and among African countries, underscored by quality infrastructure and supportive policies, are key to inclusive growth;

(e)   Member States should take advantage of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, which entered into force in May 2019, by investing in areas that support increased production and value addition, trade facilitation and trade-related infrastructure;

(f)   The United Nations development system should provide support, including tools for member States to cost the implementation of the two agendas so that they can refine funding strategies required to achieve the goals within the coming decade;

(g)   The United Nations development system should scale up support for member States to strengthen integrated planning and reporting, including through rolling out the relevant tools;

(h)   In order to ensure that no one is left behind, member States should mainstream the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 into their national development plans and planning processes at the local levels of government, and ensure that the planning, financing, implementation and monitoring development processes are genuinely inclusive of all stakeholders from all sectors of society;

(i)   The United Nations and its development partners should create and strengthen partnerships to finance capacity-building and the strengthening of data collection to ensure that Africa can meet the Sustainable Development Goals and the aspirations of Agenda 2063.

B.   Progress report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 at the regional and subregional levels (agenda item 4)

1.   Highlights of the *Africa Sustainable Development Report 2019*

26.   The *Africa Sustainable Development Report* was produced annually by the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Development Bank, the African Union Commission and the United Nations Development Programme. The 2019 report covered all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, clustered around people, prosperity, the planet, peace and partnerships.

2.   First continental report on the implementation of Agenda 2063

27.   The African Union Commission, in collaboration with the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development, had prepared the first continental report on the implementation of the first 10-year implementation plan (2014–2023) of Agenda 2063. The report covered the

period from 2014 to 2019 and was based on data from 31 member States and six regional economic communities. It indicated that aspiration 4, on a peaceful and secure Africa, was the best-implemented aspiration. That was attributable mainly to the fact that the majority of African countries had put in place mechanisms to attain peace. Performance on aspirations 3 and 5, however, had registered the lowest scores. The continent had performed very well in the implementation of goal 9, owing mainly to the signing and ratification of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area by the majority of member States, but had performed poorly on aspiration 5.

3. Discussions and trends

28. The Forum acknowledged the findings of the first continental report and highlighted the need for further reporting frameworks at the national level and for uniformity in defining relevant indicators.

29. Poverty rates were declining, while gender equality and access to primary education, health care and electricity was improving. Coverage, however, was insufficient and absolute number of people living in poverty was increasing, owing to high population growth rates. Moreover, millions of children were not receiving quality education, not completing key grades or were out of school altogether.

30. Measures to improve the reach and quality of social services, by expanding access to health care, electricity and safe water, were critical to realizing sustainable development.

31. To realize sustainable development in Africa, strong and accountable institutions and inclusive economic growth were critical. Those could be built only on the firmest foundations of just, transparent and efficient governance.

32. Improvements in road, rail, air and marine transport systems and interconnections throughout the continent would help to spur economic growth.

33. The convergence between the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063 and the "High Five" priorities of the African Development Bank was an opportunity for strong collaboration and coordination between national Governments and development partners.

4. Key messages

34. Following the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Sustainable development is everybody's business. Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are critical to realizing sustainable development;

(b) Member States should adopt and implement inclusive policies which should be backed by sustainable funding mechanisms;

(c) Poverty and inequality should be addressed in tandem. Member States should take measures to expand job creation, increase household incomes, secure property rights, develop infrastructure and enhance human capital and labour productivity, which are key to promoting inclusive growth and reducing poverty;

(d) Member States are encouraged to sign and ratify the legal documents for the establishment of the continental financial institutions and other African Union treaties;

(e) Member States should plan for growing urbanization and ensure that cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;

(f)   To realize the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, member States should design measures to expand fiscal space for equitable spending, adjusting fiscal and tax policies and the management of tax revenue;

(g)   Member States should address the issue of mounting debt, which has adverse implications for the realization of sustainable development;

(h)   With regard to the United Nations decade of action, Governments, the private sector, civil society and development partners should collaborate to translate development aspirations and strategies into action;

(i)   As Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda are well aligned, the African Union and the United Nations system should develop a common monitoring and reporting framework, including one continental report on both agendas. Such a reporting framework will reduce the reporting burden on member States and ensure that Africa can speak with one voice.

C.   Plenary round tables: voluntary national reviews on implementation of the two agendas [agenda item 5 (a)]

1.   Discussion

35.   Prior to the sixth session, 35 African member States had conducted and participated in voluntary national reviews at high-level political forums. Another 17 had committed themselves to participating in such reviews in 2020. The voluntary national reviews were important in focusing attention, in particular on legislation; strengthening the engagement of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, young people and vulnerable groups; and promoting reforms in areas such as poverty reduction, health, water and sanitation and renewable energy.

36.   The key challenges facing member States in voluntary national reviews were financing both for the reviews themselves and for implementation of the resulting recommendations; and the lack of disaggregated data and statistics.

37.   Voluntary national reviews and the implementation of the resulting recommendations could be strengthened through increased political commitment to the reviews, raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, tackling corruption, building robust institutions, standardizing the review frameworks and involving a greater diversity of stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society organizations.

2.   Key messages

38.   Following that discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a)   Member States are urged:

(i)   To conduct regular voluntary national reviews. In that regard, member States that have not yet done so are encouraged to volunteer in the forthcoming cycle. Voluntary national reviews should not, however, be conducted as a formality; they should be objective and lead to fundamental changes in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(ii)   To develop clear mechanisms for and invest in generating and using disaggregated data to support evidence-based voluntary national reviews and national development frameworks. They should also invest in information and communications technology that can contribute to the timely collection, dissemination and use of data and information for voluntary national reviews and planning;

(iii)   To ensure that voluntary national reviews highlight flagship projects and good practices that contribute to transformation and accelerate implementation, in particular in key areas such as poverty eradication, women's empowerment and job creation. They should be supported by the United Nations country team, ECA and other partners;

(iv)   To strengthen resource mobilization for both conducting and implementing the recommendations resulting from voluntary national reviews that embody linkages and convergence between the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and national development plans;

(b)   ECA and the African Union Commission are encouraged to develop a peer review mechanism and a community of practice to promote effective voluntary national reviews and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

D.   Plenary round tables: voluntary local reviews and peer learning on implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 [agenda item 5(b)]

1.   Discussion

39.   Under this agenda item, the Forum considered the role of voluntary local reviews in accelerating the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in Africa. The 2030 Agenda encouraged States Members of the United Nations to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels which were country-led and country-driven.

40.   The insufficient localization of global and regional agendas in Africa was an impediment to accelerating implementation, follow-up and review.

41.   Voluntary local reviews were critical in ensuring ownership, accountability and the commitment of all stakeholders, at all levels. Voluntary local reviews were recognized as important tools for meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement and mobilization to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

42.   ECA was working with selected countries and localities on the preparation of voluntary local reviews, the experience and findings of which were considered by the Forum. Africa faced the challenge of the lack of reliable data, even at the local levels, which affected voluntary local reviews.

43.   The goal of leaving no one behind could be achieved only through engaging the different groups in the community; women, the elderly and young people should be encouraged to participate fully in efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

2.   Key messages

44.   Following that discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a)   In order to accelerate the implementation of the two agendas, local and regional governments should be fully engaged in the work of the Forum;

(b)   In addition, member States should:

(i)   Integrate voluntary local reviews in their voluntary national reviews;

(ii)   Assist local authorities to collect reliable, consistent local data and statistics in order to conduct voluntary local reviews;

(iii)   Establish voluntary local review mechanisms to improve accountability, transparency and public ownership of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(iv)   Promote effective devolution and provide local authorities with tools and adequate resources to enable them to localize and implement the goals in the context of their local sustainable development priorities;

(v)   Promote strong partnerships and coordination with local stakeholders for effective voluntary local reviews, with particular focus on vulnerable groups;

(vi)   Establish peer reviews among local authorities to improve implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(vii)   Institutionalize the engagement of young people as key stakeholders for the conduct and follow-up of voluntary local reviews;

(viii) Integrate, with the assistance of the United Nations development system, local development and urban issues in national and key sectoral development plans, policies and budgetary instruments;

(c)   The United Nations system should:

(i)   Assist in the development of a common template for voluntary local reviews for ease of integration and standardization of those reviews;

(ii)   Design a template for peer-reviewed voluntary local reviews in Africa that is aligned with voluntary national reviews in order to better standardize key principles.

E.   Plenary round table on the sub-theme of people [agenda item 6 (a)]

1.   Introduction

45.   The sub-theme of people covered five Sustainable Development Goals, namely Goal 1 – no poverty, Goal 2 – zero hunger, Goal 3 – health and well-being, Goal 4 – quality education, and Goal 5 – gender equality; and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

2.   Key messages

46.   Following its consideration of the sub-theme, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a)   Member States should invest in data, research and new knowledge, while being cognizant of social norms and practices. Exploiting existing data and leveraging innovative techniques and analysis, including data disaggregation and layering, will enable the identification of hotspots and pockets of deprivation, and the effective targeting of resources and interventions to reach those furthest behind first;

(b)   Member States should review and redesign their educational and health programmes and ensure that the development approaches are people-centred and rights-based;

(c)   Educational systems should be geared towards human capital

development and focus on investing in quality education, in particular in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and match the demand from the job market. Education systems should also cater for school age refugees and internal displaced children and youth;

(d) Member States should assist in the production of the annual African Education Monitoring Report to inform innovations required to accelerate the pace of implementation of education-related goals, given that Africa is lagging behind the rest of the world;

(e) Member States should tackle food security, build resilience and address human migration and security by scaling up strategies and programmes to mitigate and adapt to climate change, including through the management of underground water resources, climate-smart agriculture, and sustainable forest and land management;

(f) Member States should take a position on natural gas as a transitional energy source for the continent as they prepare for the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;

(g) Member States should increase investment in sectors that are key to tacking inequality among the population. notably security, as highlighted by the African Union theme for 2020, "Silencing the guns". In addition, member States in collaboration with their partners should address the various sociocultural constraints, especially issues related to gender inequality;

(h) Member States must move from single service, sectoral or siloed approaches to integrated, inter-sectoral, systems-wide approaches that leverage co-benefits using interlinkages across the goals, and collective actions focused on investing in people.

F. Plenary round table on the sub-theme of partnerships [agenda item 6 (b)]

1. Introduction

47. The sub-theme of partnerships covered Sustainable Development Goal 17, on partnerships for the goals; and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063, and the means of implementation needed to deliver the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 over the decade 2020–2030.

2. Key messages

48. Following its consideration of the sub-theme, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) African countries should design and implement innovative financing policies, combat illicit financial flows, and undertake reforms to broaden their tax bases, eliminate loopholes that permit tax avoidance and prioritize expenditure with the greatest impact on the less privileged;

(b) African countries should support multisectoral partnerships and promote South-South and North-South cooperation to strengthen human and institutional capacity, including for statistical offices and other public institutions and civil society organizations;

(c) African countries should identify and address critical capacity needs, to bolster national and subnational implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(d) Disaggregated data were required for evidence-based monitoring and evaluation, tracking progress and allocating resources to accelerate the implementation of programmes for achieving the Sustainable Development

Goals and the Agenda 2063 aspirations. In that connection, there needed to be greater collaboration among data generators, collectors and compilers for harmonization and in order to ensure the quality and completeness of data input into the national database;

(e)   African countries should design and implement digital transformation policies and strategies by 2025, and at least 40 per cent of their populations should be using digital financing.

G.   Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of prosperity [agenda item 6 (c)]

49.   The sub-theme of prosperity covered five Sustainable Development Goals, namely Goal 7 – affordable and clean energy, Goal 8 – decent work and economic growth, Goal 9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure, Goal 10 – reduced inequalities, and Goal 11 – sustainable cities and communities; and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

Key messages

50.   Following its consideration of the sub-theme, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a)   Member States should redefine the concept of prosperity in the African context to resonate with ordinary citizens, adopt a people and human rights-based approach and institutionalize stakeholder processes to jointly implement the goals of the two agendas;

(b)   Member States should integrate pro-employment policy approaches in their macroeconomic and sectoral economic policy frameworks to stimulate labour demand and decent jobs. These should be complemented with social protection systems to address extreme poverty and to facilitate a transition to affordable renewable energy;

(c)   Member States should accelerate structural transformation leveraging agricultural commodity-based industrialization and value addition to mineral endowments while addressing deficits in transformational infrastructure and governance frameworks;

(d)   Member States should integrate a spatial perspective and urban approach to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;

(e)   Member States should create and reinforce regional innovation systems as incubators for science, innovation and technology development and advance the development of emerging technologies, with emphasis on the involvement of youth and women;

(f)   Member States should create an enabling environment for increased private sector investments and involvement in financing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Africa;

(g)   Member States should consider migration governance as an integral part of all development efforts in the pursuit of prosperity;

(h)   Member States should advance gender equality and women's empowerment and effectively engage young people and persons living with disabilities, while paying particular attention to children and their specific needs and vulnerabilities;

(i)   The United Nations development system should provide technical assistance to regional economic communities to ensure that no country is left behind;

(j)   Member States are called upon to accede to the African Peer Review Mechanism and undergo governance reviews.

H. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of the planet [agenda item 6 (d)]

1. Introduction, main issues and trends

51.   The sub-theme of the planet covered five Sustainable Development Goals, namely Goal 6 – clean water and sanitation, Goal 12 – responsible consumption and production, Goal 13 – climate action, Goal 14 – life below water, and Goal 15 – life on land; and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

52.   The main issues and trends pertaining to this sub-theme were:

(a)   Climate change posed an existential threat to Africa, jeopardizing the attainment of the continent's development agenda;

(b)   There was an urgent need to mobilize adequate financial resources to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and to address the potential stranding of Africa's carbon assets;

(c)   Biodiversity was important in delivering sustainable development and building resilience to climate-induced disasters and human insecurities, and ensuring environmental integrity, sustainable land use and land management, along with access to sustainable ecosystem services as a human right;

(d)   There was need to build capacities to align nationally determined contributions, the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063 and national development plans to scale up action;

(e)   Integrated management of transboundary resources was important;

(f)   There was huge potential inherent in the blue economy of Africa and the multiple opportunities that it could unleash for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Key messages

53.   Following its consideration of the sub-theme, The Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a)   All parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change must take a more ambitious approach and accelerate actions to meet their commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, the Doha Amendment and the Paris Agreement;

(b)   Member States are encouraged to develop just transition strategies, using a new climate economy approach that guarantees social, economic and environmental benefits;

(c)   Member States should facilitate innovative financing mechanisms, including the enhanced mobilization and efficient use of domestic resources, the use of green and blue bonds and the creation of an enabling environment for direct private sector finance in delivering the Sustainable Development Goals;

(d)   Parties to the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity should ensure that the new deal for nature and people includes tangible actions and targets and the means for their implementation;

(e)   The United Nations system should provide technical assistance to the African transformative initiatives, including the Great Green Wall Initiative, the Congo Basin Climate Commission, the Sahel Region Climate Commission, and the Climate Commission for Small Island States. In this

regard, States are encouraged to support the establishment of a committee on climate governance at the regional level;

(f)   Member States should expedite national implementation of Africa's blue economy strategy through the development of policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks. The United Nations system should support this process, which complements the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway;

(g)   Member States should implement an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, and to water management and sanitation plans. In addition, they should increase resource allocation to national and regional hydrological and meteorological institutions and put in place or strengthen the legal and institutional frameworks for improved production and delivery of weather and climate information services.

I.   Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of peace [agenda item 6 (e)]

1.   Introduction, main issues and trends

54.   The sub-theme of peace covered Goal 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions – and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063. The main issues and trends pertaining to the sub-theme may be summarized as set out below.

55.   It was agreed that, in order to leave no one behind, an inclusive approach to governance was required, including access to justice and the rule of law, and opportunities for marginalized people, including young people, people with disabilities, women and indigenous people.

56.   Intergovernmental and international institutions involved in the observation of elections needed to be diligent and to curb corrupt practices, including the rigging of elections, which deprived populations of their rightful choices.

57.   Corruption had significant reach in Africa and had led to the weakening of governance structures and processes. It facilitated resource leakages through illicit financial flows, which led to the diversion of development resources.

58.   African Governments needed to respect the separation of powers and mandates of governance institutions to ensure good governance, eliminate State capture, curb rent-seeking and corruption, and also to ensure that resource allocation went to those sectors and activities most deserving of it.

2.   Key messages

59.   Following its consideration of the sub-theme, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a)   Member States must adopt a human rights-based approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and in so doing ensure that all people have access to justice, their rights are protected, the resource represented by volunteers is harnessed, all forms of discrimination of marginalized people are eliminated and people from all sectors of society have access to decent livelihoods;

(b)   Those who violate the rules must be discouraged through prohibitive penalties. Conflicts such as those in the Great Lakes region, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel must be prevented and managed responsibly and in a timely fashion, and adequate resources must be allocated to support the mandate in the resolution;

(c)   The United Nations and the African Union Commission must reinforce their governance mechanisms and hold member States accountable,

and banish the contradictions inherent in respecting the sovereignty of nations while they may be violating the aspirations of the peace goals;

(d)   Member States must practise transformative leadership that is committed to silencing the guns that kill and destroy livelihoods, leaving many people destitute.

J.   2020 session of the Africa Science, Technology and Innovation Forum [agenda item 8 (a)]

Key messages

60.   Following its consideration of the issues arising from the second session of the Africa Science, Technology and Innovation Forum, the Regional Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a)   Member States should build capacity in the basic sciences and engineering, guided by national heritage, priorities and comparative geographical advantages for Africa to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by emerging technologies;

(b)   Member States should significantly increase investment in research and development, universities and research centres;

(c)   Member States should strengthen critical skills at the country level to effectively harness science, technology and innovation;

(d)   Member States should establish innovation hubs, incubators and common equipment centres that serve industry, the academic sector and society at large and develop concomitant strategies to implement the second, third and fourth industrial revolutions in order to leapfrog ahead and achieve the goals of the two agendas and sustainable development in Africa by 2063;

(e)   Member States should redesign their higher education curricula to place emphasis on the production of goods and services.

K.   Perspectives of major groups and other stakeholders [agenda item 8 (b)]

Key messages

61.   Following its consideration of the perspectives of major groups and other stakeholders, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a)   Member States should guarantee space for civil society organizations and trade unions and protect all human rights defenders and media workers;

(b)   In the spirit of leaving no one behind, it is of utmost importance to achieve the meaningful and inclusive participation of all stakeholders, including children, young people, older persons, people with disabilities, women, internally displaced persons, refugees, indigenous communities, smallholder farmers, and other marginalized groups in the formulation and implementation of the two agendas.

L.   Support from the United Nations development system to implement the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 [agenda item 8 (c)]

62.   Under this agenda item, the Forum considered the outcomes of the special session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa.

Key messages

63. Following its consideration of those outcomes, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Advancing the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and various African Union-United Nations frameworks is at the core of the work of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa and shows the significance of the African Union as a strategic partner of the United Nations. The ongoing reforms provide opportunities for strengthening partnership between the two entities at all levels;

(b) At the subregional level, the subregional coordination mechanisms work with the regional economic communities within the framework of the two Agendas, taking into account the subregional specificities;

(c) The African Union theme of 2020, "Silencing the guns", calls for the mobilization of African Union and United Nations entities around the continent's peace and security agenda in a coherent fashion. To that end:

(i) It is necessary to strengthen partnership between the African Union and the United Nations in line with relevant resolutions, in particular Security Council resolution 2457 (2019), and in that regard, establish African Union-United Nations teams to coordinate joint initiatives;

(ii) The African Union Commission, regional economic communities and United Nations country teams should support African Union member States and other stakeholders in developing and implementing country-level strategies on silencing the guns, including supporting national structures to mainstream inclusive approaches for silencing the guns;

(iii) The United Nations should support the strengthening of capacities of the African Union blueprint mechanisms for the promotion of peaceful societies, such as the African Governance Architecture and the African Peace and Security Architecture;

(iv) National initiatives on conflict prevention should be mainstreamed into national, subnational and sectoral development planning, budgeting and implementation processes;

(v) Voluntary national reviews and reporting processes should integrate conflicts and peace and security issues;

(vi) Environment, natural resources and climate change challenges should be mainstreamed into peace and security initiatives;

(vii) The refugee-development nexus should be leveraged to contribute to local economies;

(viii) Cooperation in intelligence and information-sharing should be strengthened to combat human, drugs and arms trafficking, terrorism and terrorist groups and violent extremism, including whistleblowing;

(ix) The international community should implement international instruments, such as the Arms Trade Treaty, that prohibit the transfer of weapons into the hands of illegal end users;

(x) Member States should focus on youth employment as a core pillar for promoting peace and security in Africa by establishing income-generating programmes for young people in Africa to prevent them from joining rebellious groups;

(xi)   The African Union Commission and the United Nations should engage with the entities that are providing guns in Africa, to address the root causes of war in Africa;

(d)   In order to leverage the decade of action:

(i)   The African Union-United Nations frameworks should be translated into time-bound plans of action;

(ii)   The African Union should be consulted and engaged at the design stage of initiatives to ensure that it occupies the driving seat and facilitates the involvement of member States at the implementation stage;

(iii)   Interface between the regional, subregional and country levels should be ensured in the new evolving collaborative framework between the African Union and the United Nations at the regional level and member States and the United Nations Resident Coordinators and country teams should be actively engaged in the new cooperation architecture.

M.   Outcomes from the youth forum

Key messages

64.   Following its consideration of the outcomes of the youth forum convened earlier by the Deputy Secretary-General, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a)   Youth agency is important in development processes and, as such, voice, power and participation should be accorded to young people in all stages of the development, design and implementation of peace and security policies;

(b)   To harness the youth demographic dividend, there is need for significant investment in young people, in particular young girls, including through innovation, science, technology, engineering and mathematics curriculum, and sex education;

(c)   Persons with disabilities should be accorded expanded access to good quality education and national-level budgeting frameworks should address their practical needs and strategic interests;

(d)   The United Nations should further inclusion by promoting and strengthening the participation of people with disabilities.

N.   Submission of the key messages to the high-level political forum and their presentation by the Chair

65.   The Forum requested the secretariat to submit its key messages to the high-level political forum through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, by 28 April 2020. The Forum further requested the Chair to make a presentation of its key messages to the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council at its meeting in New York from 7 to 17 July 2020, during the session on the reports of the regional forums for sustainable development.

O.   Appreciation

66.   The ministers, high-level officials and participants expressed their appreciation to the President of Zimbabwe and to the Government and people of Zimbabwe for hosting the sixth session of the Regional Forum and for the

warm hospitality extended to them. They also expressed their appreciation to the President, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union for their attendance at the Forum.

Annex

Victoria Falls Declaration on the United Nations Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development in Africa

We, African ministers and officials responsible for sustainable development, finance and economic development, social development, agriculture, justice, statistics, and science and technology and representatives of the African Union Commission and other intergovernmental organizations, parliaments, the private sector and civil society,

Having met in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, from 24 to 27 February 2020 at the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development on the theme "2020–2030: a decade to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063",

Expressing profound gratitude and appreciation to the President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, and the Government and people of Zimbabwe for generously hosting the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and the warm hospitality extended to participants,

Expressing also warm appreciation for the attendance at the Forum of President Mnangagwa, the Deputy-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed, and the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union, Kwesi Quartey,

Recalling and reaffirming the political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, held on 24 and 25 September in New York, proclaiming the 2020s as the decade of action to deliver on the goals,

Recalling and reaffirming also the Marrakech Declaration on Sustainable Development and the key messages adopted at the fifth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development held in Marrakech, Morocco, from 16 to 18 April 2019,

Recalling and reaffirming further General Assembly 70/1, in which the Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals,

Recalling Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union at its twenty-fourth annual ordinary session,

Recognizing the efforts by member States and other stakeholders in implementing the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063,

Considering the critical role of young people in the continent's transformation agenda,

Welcoming the presence for the first time in the Regional Forum of voluntary local review and underscoring the essential role of voluntary local review in localizing and strengthening voluntary national review, and ensuring the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063,

Noting with serious concern that Africa is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and that there is a window of opportunity within the decade 2020–2030 for decisive action on a continental scale to achieve the Goals,

Emphasizing with serious concern the existential threat posed by climate change and the urgent need to raise ambition on climate action to avert

catastrophic impacts of climate change across multiple goals,

Reaffirming our commitment to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals and implementing Agenda 2063,

1. *Call upon* all African countries to urgently revisit frameworks for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, to align their national development plans with the principles of the two agendas and to set in motion programmes and projects to deliver on the 10 commitments for action outlined in the political declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, and invite the United Nations country teams to provide strong, coordinated and coherent support to member States in that regard;

2. *Also call upon* all African countries to develop and implement people-centred and inclusive national strategies to support the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, which are mainstreamed in the national development plans and budgeting processes, and in that regard strengthen mechanisms for the mobilization of resources at the national level and make efficient use of funding for the two agendas;

3. *Further call upon* all African countries to implement the key messages of the Regional Forum;

4. *Call upon* the United Nations development system and partners to scale up their support of member States' capacity development for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and develop and implement coherent and mutually reinforcing strategies at regional, subregional and national levels to support the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development through targeted interventions and capacity development in transformational areas, including climate action; youth; education; entrepreneurship and innovation; empowerment of women and persons with disabilities; food systems; health; data and statistics; trade; evidence-based voluntary national and local reviews and integrated planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting tools; science, technology and innovation; and stakeholder engagement;

5. *Reaffirm*, in the spirit of leaving no one behind, the centrality of the Sustainable Development Goals in the realization of the objectives of the global compact on refugees, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness, in particular to ensure protection, inclusion, assistance and the identification of solutions for affected populations, including with regard to the situation of internal displacement;

6. *Invite* the Economic Commission for Africa, together with the United Nations development system, to report annually to the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development on the development and implementation of a regional strategy in support of the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development;

7. *Request* the Government of Zimbabwe to present the key messages on behalf of Africa to the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council at its meeting in New York from 7 to 16 July 2020; and in various global, regional and subregional forums in order to advocate accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

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