



Economic Commission for Africa
Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
Seventh session
Brazzaville (online), 1–4 March 2021

Item 2 of the provisional agenda*

High-level panel on transformative action and investment to build forward better from the COVID-19 crisis towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

Building forward better: Towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

Concept note

I. Background

1. Regional Forums on Sustainable Development are part of the follow-up and review architecture of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The other follow-up mechanisms are the voluntary national reviews and the high-level political forums on sustainable development. The mandate to establish the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development is derived from United Nations General Assembly resolutions 67/290, 70/1 and 70/299. These resolutions, among other provisions, acknowledge the importance of the regional dimension of sustainable development; invite the United Nations regional commissions to contribute to the work of the high-level political forums on sustainable development, including through annual regional meetings; and encourage member States to identify the most suitable regional forum to contribute to follow-up and review at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

2. In the light of the above, the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development has been instituted by resolution 930 (XLVIII) and resolution 939 (XLIX) of the Joint Annual Meetings of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration, and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development of 2015 and 2016; and resolution 961 (LI) of the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development of 2018. Through these resolutions, ECA is requested to convene the Regional Forum, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and other partners, on an annual basis, to follow-up and review the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

* ECA/RFSD/2021/1/Rev.1



3. The aim of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is therefore to advance integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, which are mutually reinforcing. To that end, the Regional Forum provides a multi-stakeholder platform for follow-up and review of progress and challenges in the implementation of the two Agendas, while strengthening learning and advocating effective policy measures and actions. The Regional Forum makes important contributions to bolstering multi-stakeholder engagement and synergies, and promoting concerted efforts to implement and achieve the development objectives of the two Agendas. Six sessions of the Forum have been held since 2015.

II. Theme of the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

4. The seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will be convened under the theme “Building forward better: Towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.”

5. This theme is aligned with that of the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development, namely “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.” In the wake of the pandemic and the economic and social devastation it has wrought, both themes acknowledge the importance of reconstructing our socioeconomic systems by leveraging opportunities presented by green and low carbon development trajectories with a view to building a resilient, inclusive and sustainable Africa. Current growth trajectories suggest, however, that many countries will fail to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by the 2030 deadline. If we are to “leave no one behind”, a whole-of-society approach is needed, together with concerted and ambitious efforts to transform our world during the 10-year window provided by the decade of action to deliver on the Goals.

6. The year 2020 has proven to be acutely challenging and the COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage economies worldwide. We are living through some of the most disruptive and uncertain times in recorded history. Having triggered a public health and economic crisis on a scale unwitnessed in generations, the pandemic continues to exacerbate systemic socioeconomic weaknesses, unmasking deeply entrenched vulnerabilities, gaps and inequalities within countries. In the African region, in particular, it has severely tested countries’ social, economic, political and environmental resilience, exacting a massive toll on the poor and most vulnerable and jeopardizing decades of hard-won development gains. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the COVID-19 pandemic has widened the continent’s financing gap to \$345 billion and derailed progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, placing many African countries in a vicious cycle in which liquidity challenges, reduced fiscal space and the cost of debt mean that they are unable to undertake many of the pressing counter-cyclical investment and stimulus measures that support a strong recovery. Accordingly, the 2020 high-level political forum called on countries to embark on risk-informed transformative sustainable development pathways to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. Efforts in that regard must be stepped up urgently as time is not on our side.

7. The COVID-19 crisis is playing out against the backdrop of hitherto unseen climate change and biodiversity loss. In a year of economic and social turmoil, the most significant disruptions may be yet to come. It can, moreover,

be argued that the climate emergency demands a more comprehensive and bolder response than the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many erroneously perceive the climate crisis as distinct from the health and economic crises instigated by the pandemic, yet the three crises, and their solutions, are interconnected. COVID-19 is merely the latest manifestation of a planet that is profoundly out of balance. The pandemic has highlighted the centrality of nature to development, revealing the systemic nature of risk and the cascading impact of disasters across all three dimensions of sustainable development. COVID-19, a disease with zoonotic origins, has emerged, at least in part, because of the pressures exerted by human development on the natural environment. Both the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development and the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development underscored that societies must take into account the crucial role played by natural capital, including biodiversity assets, in order to establish sustainable economies and build long-term resilience. Indeed, the natural environment is humanity's first line of defence against numerous hazards. Our exploitation of the planet continues unabated and in many cases is outpacing natural systems' regenerative capacity. For example, with 3.9 million hectares of forests lost each year, Africa experienced a higher annual rate of net forest loss than any other continent between 2010 and 2020. Indeed, Africa is the only continent that has seen forest loss increase in each of the three decades since 1990.¹ Warning that the planet is broken and that humanity is waging a suicidal war on the natural world, the Secretary-General of the United Nations recently called for radical change before it is too late. This merely underscores the urgent need for pressing and ambitious climate action as future shocks will, in all likelihood, far outweigh the pandemic in terms of their long-term impact. For Africa, crucially, climate change poses an existential threat, jeopardizing the attainment of the continent's development agenda. Annually, climate change typically costs African countries between 2 and 5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), but may reduce GDP by as much as 15 per cent. Though African nations must now address the serious economic and health repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that climate action is not sidelined in favour of efforts to address the colossal economic damage wrought by the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic has brought biodiversity, climate and economic imperatives into closer alignment than ever before: a healthy planet is a prerequisite for healthy people and the foundation of a healthy economy. Building forward better will require the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and concerted efforts to strengthen the capacity of Africa to respond to shocks such as COVID-19, climate change and biodiversity loss. By so doing, African countries can shift the trajectory of development back on track towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals, aspirations and targets of Agenda 2063, while also strengthening implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

8. As of 2021, the global community has only 10 years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and only 3 years to complete the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063. On average, African countries were achieving average growth of more than 3 per cent per year before the onset of the current pandemic, a figure that compared positively with growth rates in other parts of the world. Regrettably, however, and as affirmed by the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development and the 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, growth in Africa is expected to fall sharply because of the pandemic, which has seriously undermined the capacity of African countries to address the needs of their populations and take action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The immediate impact has been on poverty (Goal 1), food security (Goal 2), the well-being of

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020: Main Report* (Rome, 2020). Available at: www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/2020.

populations (Goal 3) and decent work and economic growth (Goal 8). Other negative repercussions stem from interlinkages among the Goals themselves. The following provides a brief summary of the status of the nine Goals that will be considered in depth at the Regional Forum.

(a) Goal 1 (End extreme poverty): Nine out of ten extremely poor people in the world live in Africa. Before the onset of COVID-19, progress towards the achievement of poverty targets in Africa was already slowing but ECA estimates that COVID-19 will push between 5 million and 29 million more people below the extreme poverty line. Some 17 per cent of households affected by COVID-19 will face at least transient poverty and, instead of economic growth of some 3.2 per cent in 2020, the continent is now likely to witness a contraction in GDP of between 1.8 and 4.1 per cent;² if the COVID-19 curve does not flatten until 2021, an additional 59 million people could be pushed into extreme poverty, with the total number of extremely poor Africans potentially rising as high as 514 million people. Inequality is also likely to increase in the coming years. The repercussions of the pandemic thus pose significant challenges to the achievement of Goal 1 by 2030.

(b) Goal 2 (Zero hunger): COVID-19 has seriously disrupted agrifood supply chains. Lockdown measures restricting movement and trade across borders have exacerbated food insecurity across the continent, shortages of labour and raw materials and price instability. It is estimated that some 73 million Africans have faced food insecurity in 2020.³ Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many African countries were facing food crises, including as a result of conflict, climate-related shocks and crop pests. According to the World Food Programme, the pandemic is likely to more than double the number of people experiencing hunger, with urban poor populations at particularly high risk.⁴ One in five people in Africa are already undernourished and, unless COVID-19 is contained, an additional 64.9 million Africans could find themselves without sufficient food. Children are particularly vulnerable: unable to attend school because of COVID-19 restrictions, many children no longer enjoy access to school meals, on which many families rely.

(c) Goal 3 (Good health and well-being): The most immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been on people's health. It should be noted that Africa has experienced proportionally fewer infections than other continents, reporting 2,334, 651 cases and 55,677 deaths as of 12 December 2020, and has perhaps fared better by virtue of the fact that many African countries instituted early lockdown measures or were already familiar with managing contagious diseases, such as Ebola. African countries' experience with managing multiple health challenges also mean that they are relatively well-positioned to manage health emergencies at the community level. With notable exceptions, however, healthcare systems across the continent remain fragile and, on average, there are only 1.3 health workers per 1000 people.⁵ Indeed the continent now faces the world's most severe health workforce shortage and it is estimated that some 6.1 million additional health workers will be needed by 2030. Furthermore, on account of the pandemic, many health workers have been reassigned to care for COVID-19 patients, exacerbating shortages in other areas and severely

² ECA, *Economic report on Africa 2020: Innovative finance for private sector development in Africa* (Addis Ababa, 2020). Available at www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/keymessageanddocuments/ERA2020-HIGHLIGHTS_INTERACTIVE-CONSOLIDATED.pdf.

³ Sara Gustafson, *Global Report on Food Crises: 135 million in 55 countries faced acute hunger in 2019*, International Food Policy Research Institute Blog (23 April 2020). Available at: www.ifpri.org/blog/global-report-food-crises-135-million-55-countries-faced-acute-hunger-2019.

⁴ World Food Programme, "COVID-19 will double number of people facing food crises unless swift action is taken", 21 April 2020. Available at: www.wfp.org/news/covid-19-will-double-number-people-facing-food-crises-unless-swift-action-taken.

⁵ World Health Organization, Africa Health Workforce Observatory database, 2015.

affecting the continent's already fragile health-care systems. Chronic shortages of health sector personnel is a crucial vulnerability that could impede efforts by African countries to provide universal access to health care by 2030.

(d) Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth): Even before the COVID-19 crisis, annual GDP growth in Africa was below the 7 per cent target needed to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. The economies of many African countries are now likely to contract, further impeding their efforts to achieve the Goals by the 2030 deadline. Indeed, as mentioned previously, the continent is now likely to witness a contraction in GDP of between 1.8 and 4.1 per cent in 2020. As African economies weaken, as many as 19 million jobs could be lost. With approximately 18 million young job seekers entering the labour market every year, the COVID-19-related economic slowdown will further exacerbate an already delicate situation. To make matters worse, more than 60 per cent of African men and almost 75 per cent of African women in employment are in informal jobs. The economic impact of the pandemic is likely to be felt most severely in urban areas and an expected rise in the cost of living in some African cities could see the price of some food items rising by up to 100 per cent. Furthermore, at only \$26, the per capita expenditure of African local governments is the lowest in the world: already inadequately resourced, numerous local authorities have very limited capacity to deal with the COVID-19 crisis.

(e) Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities): The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated inequalities worldwide, particularly in Africa, and vulnerable groups, including refugees and migrants, have suffered disproportionate health and socioeconomic repercussions. Weak or non-existent social safety nets for lower income brackets in most African countries, lockdowns and travel restrictions have affected virtually everyone on the continent.

(f) Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production): Through its disruption of global supply chains, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has impeded the attainment of numerous Goal 12 targets. There has, for example, been an increase in the consumption of single-use plastics as a result of people's growing preference for pre-packed items. On the positive side, supply side disruptions have encouraged local production, resulting in a certain degree of responsible consumption. Another positive development that bodes well for climate change has been the reduction in transportation-related CO₂ emissions. A reduction in fossil fuel subsidies has also been observed.

(g) Goal 13 (Climate action): Lockdowns, which have severely curtailed human activity, have led to a decrease in carbon emissions. Indeed, according to the World Meteorological Organization, carbon emissions in 2020 are some 17 per cent lower than they were at their peak. Nonetheless, the global COVID-19 pandemic has only marginally slowed the overall rise in atmospheric CO₂ concentrations. Preliminary estimates suggest that CO₂ will continue to increase in 2020, albeit at a reduced rate. That reduction, which has occurred because of the global response to COVID-19, illustrates what is achievable. Although efforts to meet the commitments enshrined in the Paris Agreement on climate change may be impeded by the current slowdown in economic activity, the climate emergency can only be addressed through sustained and ambitious climate action and by adopting green and low carbon development pathways.

(h) Goal 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions): COVID-19 has led to an increase in political tension and a heightened risk of conflict in certain countries, while restrictions on the press and the free flow of information have been imposed as part of measures by countries to halt the spread of the virus. Nonetheless, peaceful elections and transfers of power have taken place in several African countries, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Peaceful and inclusive societies remain a vital prerequisite for sustainable and inclusive development.

(i) Goal 17 (Partnerships for sustainable development): As the pandemic has spread across Africa, support and assistance has been provided by numerous States and organizations, including the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, and the Group of 20, which has suspended debt servicing payments for the poorest countries. Notwithstanding those notable efforts, the current financing gap is \$345 billion. A challenge in that respect is that most of the resources mobilized to date are not new or additional funds, but are merely reallocated resources that were originally earmarked for other programmes.⁶ It should be emphasized, however, that international action by the scientific community, policymakers, businesses and civil society in the fight against COVID-19 has been remarkable and could pave the way for stronger international and multisectoral partnerships.

9. The pandemic is thus a global wake-up call. It represents both a grave threat and an opportunity for change. African countries must ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals, aspirations and targets of Agenda 2063 lie at the core of their post-COVID-19 recovery plans. To mitigate the massive socioeconomic disruption caused by the pandemic, significant investment will be needed and there is considerable scope to leverage those investments to promote change. Essentially, the future of the planet will be determined by the extent to which those investments facilitate a return to “business as usual” or are used to recalibrate current socioeconomic paradigms to promote green, inclusive and resilient development trajectories for people, planet and prosperity. To achieve that objective, it is critical that post-pandemic reconstruction is informed by the need to minimize climate system disruption. A truly sustainable and resilient approach to development will require a suite of policies that can reshape our societies and economies for the better over the long term. The choice is clear: delay and pay, or plan and prosper. Those policies should foster synergies among socioeconomic and climate imperatives, healing the dichotomous relationship between humanity and the natural world. This need not be a hard choice, as there are numerous opportunities to rebuild the continent’s economies by focusing on green investments while remaining mindful of current realities in African countries.

10. Directing investments and financial stimulus packages so that they support key enablers will facilitate implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 while also safeguarding livelihoods at this time of great upheaval. An instrumental challenge is to ensure that the post-pandemic recovery has a green focus so that countries generate jobs and revive their economies while also curtailing their greenhouse gas emissions. Embracing such a green pathway and incorporating a circular economy approach could foster inclusive and equitable growth and help eradicate poverty while also encouraging responsible production and consumption patterns. This will entail scaling up economic activity and productivity that provides for the creation of green jobs and promotes social well-being, climate resilience and natural capital sustainability. Crucially, nature-based solutions must be scaled up in order to mitigate disaster risks, build resilience, protect societies and ensure that no one is left behind. Building resilience also lies at the heart of the food-energy-water nexus, and efforts should be made to ensure food security while also fostering more sustainable local production, intra-regional trade, reliable, clean and affordable energy generation, and the provision of appropriate water and sanitation infrastructure to meet the needs of the continent’s growing and rapidly urbanizing population. In that regard, energy investment is a strong economic enabler that can promote job and wealth creation, the establishment

⁶ European Commission, “Q&A: Global EU response to the coronavirus pandemic”, 8 April 2020. Available at: ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_606.

of small and medium-sized enterprises, the inclusion of women and persons with disabilities and access to the digital economy. Africa should now establish parameters for a just transition towards renewable energy use, while the global community must recognize that Africa contributes less than 4 per cent of global greenhouse emissions, even though it is home to 17 per cent of the global population.⁷ In driving that transition, relevant stakeholders should focus on creating jobs through the use of renewable energy sources while, as an interim step, they should also explore power generation using relatively clean fossil fuels, including natural gas, in order to provide all African citizens with access to electricity. Moreover, domestic and regional value chains could be strengthened by leveraging the opportunities provided by the African Continental Free Trade Area.

11. The recovery endeavour will require an unprecedented coalition of relevant stakeholders and coordinated action on multiple fronts. If the COVID-19 crisis has shown us anything, it is that governments, businesses and civil-society organizations cannot, by themselves, address systemic global challenges in an effective manner. Global solidarity at all levels will be crucial and building resilience will require the effective mobilization of, and strong collaboration among, a wide range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, ensuring that the decision-making process encompasses as wide a cross section of society as possible so that “no one is left behind”. States must, moreover, adopt a whole-of-society approach that fosters the emergence of mechanisms for active engagement with civil society, the private sector, marginalized groups and other stakeholders that are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and climate change. Institutions should, in particular, seek to address inequality and the needs of the poor and most vulnerable, and every effort should be made to involve young people in that process, which will have a direct impact on their future lives. Additionally, transparency on the part of all is paramount in those efforts and a “business as usual” approach should be rejected.

12. Above all, efforts should be made to ensure the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. In the current decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, Africa has a narrow window of opportunity in which to realize the objectives enshrined in the two Agendas. Accordingly, the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will support efforts by all stakeholders to achieve that objective and allow participants to explore ways to foster synergies, address trade-offs and forge collaborative partnerships for concrete action. The Regional Forum will also give expanded space for intra-regional peer learning on voluntary national and local reviews. Key messages adopted at the Regional Forum will constitute the regional contribution of Africa to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be convened by the Economic and Social Council in July 2021, which will focus on the same nine Sustainable Development Goals as the Regional Forum. Resulting decisions will guide policy advocacy, formulation and implementation at regional and national levels.

13. Within that context, the objective, sub-themes and format of the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development shall be the following:

⁷ For further information, see United Nations: Global issues: Population. Available at www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/population/.

III. Objective of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

14. The overall objective of the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is to conduct a regional follow-up and review of progress made, facilitate peer learning, and advance transformative solutions and actions to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and aspirations, goals and targets of Agenda 2063.

15. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis and with a particular focus on the nine Sustainable Development Goals to be considered at the 2021 high-level political forum and the corresponding goals of the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063, the specific objectives of the Regional Forum are to:

- (a) Undertake a regional review of, and follow up to, implementation of the two Agendas;
- (b) Provide a platform for peer learning and for sharing experiences, approaches, good practices and lessons learned with a view to accelerating implementation of the two Agendas;
- (c) Identify and assess gaps, challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of the two Agendas;
- (d) Identify and articulate transformative actions, commitments, levers, partnerships and measures that countries should adopt in order to build back better in a post-COVID-19 world and accelerate implementation of the two Agendas within the decade 2021–2030;
- (e) Deliberate and agree on the priorities and recommendations of Africa in the form of key messages to accelerate implementation at different levels, and as the region's collective input to inform the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held in New York from 6 to 15 July 2020, and to inform implementation policies and programmes at various levels.

IV. Sub-themes of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

16. The activities of the seventh session of the Regional Forum will be conducted on the basis of the following sub-themes, which have been crafted around the nine Sustainable Development Goals to be considered at the 2021 high-level political forum:

- (a) No poverty;
- (b) Zero hunger;
- (c) Good health and well-being;
- (d) Decent work and economic growth;
- (e) Reduced inequalities;
- (f) Responsible consumption and production;
- (g) Climate action;
- (h) Peace, justice and strong institutions;
- (i) Partnerships.

17. The Regional Forum will emphasize the critical importance of efforts to ensure the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in

the light of their synergistic and mutually reinforcing nature; the two Agendas together provide a framework for transformative and sustainable development on the continent. In considering each of the sub-themes, the Regional Forum will: take into account the various repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic; consider progress in the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063; consider interlinkages among the Sustainable Development Goals; and identify and promote integrated actions to meet multiple objectives in a coherent manner that ensures that no one is left behind.

18. A concise analytical report will inform deliberations on each of the sub-themes. Such analysis will encompass the corresponding goals of the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063. Among the critical issues to be covered under each sub-theme are:

(a) Key trends and progress towards achievement of the selected targets of the given cluster of Sustainable Development Goals. Under each sub-theme, the Regional Forum will consider and highlight interlinkages among the selected Goals and other goals and targets, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;

(b) Challenges, constraints and emerging issues, including, in particular, the implications for States of the COVID-19 pandemic as they endeavour to implement the two Agendas;

(c) Opportunities and transformative actions, partnerships and measures that countries should adopt in order to promote a resilient and green recovery, build back better in a post-COVID-19 world and dramatically accelerate implementation of the two Agendas.

V. Format of the seventh session of the Forum

19. In the light of challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the seventh session of the Regional Forum will be held in a hybrid format that will provide for both in-person and virtual participation. The Regional Forum will encompass the following pre-Regional Forum meetings and events, and main segments:

A. Pre-Regional Forum meetings and events

20. The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will be preceded by meetings that aim to bring together and synthesize diverse stakeholder perspectives and exchange cutting-edge ideas, tools, experiences, good practices and lessons learned in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. In addition, similar meetings will be organized on the margins of the Regional Forum. The outcomes of those meetings will inform the deliberations of the Regional Forum. It is anticipated that pre-Forum meetings and events will include the following:

(a) A regional preparatory and capacity-building workshop for major groups and other stakeholders, including civil society, academia and the private sector.

(b) A regional workshop on voluntary national reviews of progress achieved in the context of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(c) A regional workshop on voluntary local reviews of progress achieved in the context of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and on bolstering local action for sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis;

(d) A forum on science, technology and innovation in Africa;

(e) Expert workshops and other thematic meetings aligned with the theme and sub-themes of the Regional Forum.

B. Main segments of the seventh session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

21. The seventh session of the Regional Forum will comprise the following main segments:

(a) Opening of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development: A representative of Zimbabwe, the Chair of the 2020 Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, will deliver short remarks and preside over the opening of the event. The Executive Secretary of ECA will deliver the welcome statement on behalf of the agencies and organizations of the United Nations system. This will be followed by statements from special guests and high-level representatives of the African Union Commission and African Development Bank. An official representative of the host country, the Republic of the Congo, will then officially open the 2021 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

(b) High-level panel dialogue on the theme of the Regional Forum: This dialogue will feature interactive discussions by a high-level panel comprised of policy makers and eminent persons from various backgrounds. The panellists will include ministers and special guests from voluntary national review countries and individuals who have participated in previous high-level political forums on sustainable development. While setting the scene for subsequent deliberations by the Regional Forum, this segment will provide high-level guidance on ways to build forward better in a post-COVID-19 world with a view to establishing a resilient and green Africa and achieving the objectives set out in the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

(c) Overview of the progress report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union: This segment of the Regional Forum will include an evidence-based review of progress achieved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 at the regional and subregional levels, taking into account challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. The segment will include presentations by the secretariat, and a discussion of progress in the implementation of the two Agendas and key messages from the report.

(d) Round table on voluntary national reviews: This round table will facilitate learning by highlighting solutions and good practices and exchanging experiences and lessons learned in the context of voluntary national reviews and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The round table will also raise awareness of the challenges impeding countries' efforts to conduct voluntary national reviews during the COVID-19 crisis, and the ways in which voluntary national reviews can foster sustainable recovery following the crisis while also accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Among the matters to be discussed during the round table are the outcomes of the pre-Regional Forum workshop on voluntary national reviews. The round table will be led by a panel comprising selected policymakers and senior experts from countries involved in voluntary national reviews in 2019, 2020 and 2021 and from other countries in Africa that are front-runners in the implementation of Agenda 2063. Major groups and the donor community will also have representatives on the panel. The panelists will outline compelling solutions, share their views, experiences and lessons learned, and identify actions and other measures to build forward better from COVID-19 and enhance the implementation of the two Agendas.

(e) Round table on voluntary local reviews: This round table will provide participants with an opportunity to discuss the experiences of cities and

local government authorities in conducting voluntary local reviews and their efforts to promote implementation of the two Agendas at the local level in the context of COVID-19. The round table will be led by a panel comprising selected policymakers and senior experts from cities and subnational entities conducting voluntary local reviews and from countries that are currently engaged in the voluntary national review process.

(f) Plenary on meeting data and statistics needs for evidence-based inclusive and sustainable recovery: This plenary meeting will articulate the importance of strengthening access to accurate data and statistics in order to facilitate the evidence-based implementation of, and reporting on, the two Agendas. The meeting will review data availability and access, potential approaches and policy options and the investments needed to generate timely and accurate data with a view to promoting inclusive and sustainable recovery, building forward better from the COVID-19 crisis and achieving the aspirations, goals and targets of the two Agendas.

(g) Plenary and parallel meetings to facilitate an in-depth review and discussion of the sub-themes of the Regional Forum: Nine parallel meetings will be held. Participants in each of those meetings will discuss and conduct an in-depth review of implementation of the two Agendas in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, while focusing, in particular, on one of the nine selected Sustainable Development Goals. The nine parallel meetings will facilitate peer learning and identify and articulate possible policy options and other measures that can help States build forward better while also accelerating implementation of the two Agendas.

(h) Plenary on leveraging science, technology, innovation and digital transformation: This plenary meeting will emphasize the importance of science, technology and innovation in the implementation of, and reporting on, the two Agendas. The meeting will review potential approaches and policy options in that area and the investments needed to leverage science and technology and promote innovation with a view to building forward better in a post-COVID-19 world and achieving the aspirations, goals and targets of the two Agendas. The plenary meeting will, in that connection, highlight and discuss outcomes of the third Africa Science, Technology and Innovation Forum.

(i) Presentation by the major groups and other stakeholders: This will be followed by a discussion of the outcomes of the regional workshop to strengthen the capacity of major groups and other stakeholders, and a review of the perspectives of civil society organizations, private-sector stakeholders and academic institutions with regard to building forward better from the COVID-19 crisis and achieving the objectives of the two Agendas.

(j) Presentation on support provided by the United Nations development system to facilitate sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Regional Collaborative Platform, an agile internal collaboration platform established to facilitate the work of the United Nations system at regional level, will report to the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development on the outcome of its initial meeting. A presentation will be made on ongoing and planned interventions by the United Nations system, including through the opportunity/issue-based coalitions, to support efforts by member States, regional economic communities and the African Union Commission to build forward better from the COVID-19 crisis and achieve the objectives of the two Agendas.

(k) Review and adoption of key messages of the Regional Forum: During this segment of the Forum, member States and other stakeholders will review, propose amendments to and adopt key messages aimed at accelerating implementation of the two Agendas, which are to be submitted to the 2021 high-

level political forum on sustainable development as the regional inputs of Africa.

VI. Expected outputs

22. The meeting will generate the following outputs, which will be disseminated widely:

(a) Policy reports on the sub-themes of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;

(b) An outcome document of the seventh session of the Forum, containing agreed priorities, policy options and recommendations of Africa, in the form of key messages to accelerate implementation of the two Agendas and to serve as the region's collective input to the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(c) A report on the proceedings of the Forum, including on salient issues, priorities, and recommendations pertaining to the theme and sub-themes of the 2021 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

VII. Expected outcomes

23. The 2021 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is expected to:

(a) Enhance the capacity of the 2021 voluntary national review countries to undertake their reviews and present the review reports at the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(b) Raise the profile of voluntary local reviews and strengthen the capacity of cities and local governments to implement and report on progress achieved in the context of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(c) Increase the knowledge and capacity of member States, major groups and other stakeholders to design and implement policies;

(d) Strengthen the commitment of relevant stakeholders to accelerate the pace of implementation and ensure effective follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(e) Facilitate a clear articulation of, and agreement on the collective inputs of Africa in the form of key messages to the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held from 6 to 15 July 2021. Key messages will include regional priorities, policy options and recommendations pertaining to the theme and sub-themes of the Regional Forum.

VIII. Documentation

24. The documents for the 2021 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development include:

Pre-session documentation:

(a) The concept note for the Forum;

(b) Africa regional report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union;

(c) Report on ECA and African Union support to the implementation, follow-up and review of the two Agendas;

(d) Concise analytical reports covering the sub-themes of the meeting;

- (e) Reports and outcome documents of relevant past meetings and events.

Post-session documentation:

- (a) Agreed key messages of the 2021 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development to the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development;
- (b) Final report on the deliberations of the session, including on salient issues, priorities and recommendations pertaining to the theme of the 2021 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;
- (c) Report of the forum on science, technology and innovation in Africa;
- (d) Report of the regional workshop on voluntary national reviews;
- (e) Report of the regional workshop for major groups and other stakeholders.

IX. Participants

25. The meeting will be attended by representatives of:

- (a) All 54 member States of ECA (high-level policymakers and experts from ministries and agencies in charge of economic planning, finance, environment and natural/mineral resources, social affairs, energy, agriculture, justice, statistics and science and technology);
- (b) Major groups and other stakeholders, including civil society, business and industry organizations, and academic and research institutions;
- (c) The African Union Commission, Development Agency and Africa Peer Review Mechanism;
- (d) The African Development Bank;
- (e) Regional economic communities;
- (f) Agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, and other international agencies and organizations;
- (g) Development partners.

X. Working languages

26. The meeting will be conducted in English and French, with simultaneous interpretation in both languages.

XI. Dates and venue

27. The seventh session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will be held, in a hybrid format in Brazzaville from 1 to 4 March 2021.

XII. Contacts

28. Enquiries on the organization of the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development should be directed to:

Mr. Jean-Paul Adam

Director

Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resources Management
Division

Economic Commission for Africa

Email: jean-paul.adam@un.org

Mr. Nassim Oulmane,

Chief

Green Economy, Innovation and Technology Section

Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resources Management
Division

Economic Commission for Africa

Email: oulmane@un.org
