



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

Niamey (hybrid), 28 February–2 March 2023

Accelerating the inclusive and green recovery from multiple crises and the integrated and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union

Concept note

I. Background

1. The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is an annual multi-stakeholder platform organized jointly by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the host Government, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and various entities of the United Nations system. It brings together ministers, senior officials, experts and practitioners from ECA member States, the private sector, civil society, academic institutions and United Nations entities. Accordingly, the ninth session of the Forum will be organized jointly by ECA and the Government of Niger in collaboration with partners as outlined above.

2. Like all other regional forums on sustainable development, the Africa Regional Forum is mandated by the General Assembly. The Regional Forum is one of the three mechanisms mandated to follow up, review and catalyse action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by Member States of the United Nations in September 2015. The other mechanisms are the voluntary national reviews and, at the global level, the high-level political forum on sustainable development. To complement these processes and to bolster local action, national and subnational governments have embarked on voluntary subnational review processes. At its sixth session, the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development mandated the development of regional guidelines to support voluntary local reviews by cities and other subnational governments.

3. In an arrangement unique to Africa, the Africa Regional Forum undertakes integrated follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. This is because, for Africa, the two agendas provide a synergistic framework for achieving inclusive and people-centred sustainable development in the region. The Forum also provides a platform for peer learning, including on voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews by subnational entities.



4. To date, eight sessions of the Africa Regional Forum have been held. Currently, Rwanda occupies the chair of the five-member Bureau¹ of the eighth session of the Forum, which was held in Kigali in March 2022.

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

5. The theme of the ninth session of the Forum will be “Accelerating the inclusive and green recovery from multiple crises and the integrated and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union”, and is aligned with the theme of the 2023 meeting of the high-level political forum, namely “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”.

6. The world is at a crossroads, caught up in economic uncertainty about recession and sluggish economic growth and battling self-reinforcing crises on multiple fronts. Multilateralism is being contested by geopolitics and inflationary pressures as the war in Ukraine persists with no end in sight. The long tail of COVID-19 persists relentlessly as numerous countries, battered by a significant rise in debt distress and dramatic decreases in foreign direct investment and trade, stand on the brink of financial crisis, having scarcely recovered over the past two years. Furthermore, climate-change-induced disasters have become more severe and frequent, while biodiversity decline and terrestrial ecosystem degradation continue at alarming rates, exerting pressure on African countries to exploit their natural resources in an unsustainable manner with diminishing returns in terms of economic value added. Hence the convergence of these geopolitical, financial, climate and biodiversity crises have only served to amplify economic hardship, reducing prosperity and societal progress throughout the world by exacerbating poverty, food insecurity and access to affordable energy, which, in turn, aggravate existing inequality and hamper progress in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. According to recent assessments, the world has failed to make significant progress towards the Goals. For instance, the average Sustainable Development Goal Index score slightly declined in 2021, partly due to slow or non-existent recovery in poor and vulnerable countries. Performance on Goal 1 (no poverty) and Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) remains below pre-pandemic levels in numerous developing countries.² Prior to the pandemic, over the period 2015–2019, the world witnessed improvements in the Goals at a rate of 0.5 points per year (which was, however, also too slow to fully achieve the Goals by the 2030 deadline), with developing countries making greater gains than developed countries. Progress on climate and biodiversity goals has also been sluggish, especially in advanced economies. Thus, restoring and accelerating progress on the Goals should be a major policy priority of recovery plans going forward.

8. With regard to climate change, similarly, the world remains woefully off track in meeting the targets of the Paris Agreement on climate change as concentrations of major greenhouse gases inexorably rise. Despite the agreement to establish a historic loss and damage fund at the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt from 6 to 18 November 2022, new commitments on emissions reduction, strong signals for a transition away from fossil fuels and increased financial flows to the

¹ The Bureau members are: Chair: Rwanda; first Vice-Chair: Cabo Verde; second Vice-Chair: Morocco; third Vice-Chair: Namibia; and Rapporteur: Congo. Information and documents related to the eighth session of the Forum are available at www.uneca.org/arfsd2022.

² See <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/>.

developing world were sorely lacking. Even following through on commitments made at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties, held in Paris in 2015,³ and at the twenty-sixth session, held in Glasgow in 2021, proved challenging. Indeed, the planet has already warmed by 1.09°C⁴ and emissions are at record levels,⁵ wreaking havoc across the globe with far-reaching adverse effects, in particular for African economies. Hence, it is crucial that nations of the world urgently enhance climate ambitions by reinforcing their commitments.

9. Considering the above, the need to transition to greener, more inclusive and sustainable economies could not be more compelling. African nations can redefine their socioeconomic development models through a strategic focus on investing in a green transformation. Such a transformation is viable if the means to implement it are rooted in the productive capacity of the continent. African green growth trajectories have the potential to create better jobs, advance gender equality, tackle growing poverty, reduce carbon emissions and conserve natural resources and tackle inequality in a sustainable way. In this vein, the African Continental Free Trade Area will be an important lever for a green future in enhancing value addition. With the right investment in a sustainable value chain, intra-African trade can flourish on the basis of green investment – with no better example than the value chain for batteries linked to critical minerals. Investment in sustainable technology and innovation, climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy and transport, biodiversity and human capital development will all be crucial in accelerating the drive towards an inclusive, green and resilient recovery.

10. An African green transition, and a successful redesign of the African economic model, hinges on the right formula for the continent’s energy transition. The scale of investment required for universal access, based on existing technological availability, requires an energy mix which, in many cases, given existing technologies, cannot be achieved with renewables alone. However, the emerging potential of green hydrogen could mean that this transition can be accelerated if the appropriate investment is made at the right time. It is critical that African countries avoid being locked into defunct energy models and stranded assets. Investment in country platforms that are built with an energy transition in mind can enable the appropriate matching of financial resources with infrastructure projects that have high returns on investment. Given that the continent’s long-term ambition, as stipulated in Agenda 2063, is to develop an energy system based on sustainable energy sources, the continent aims to ensure a smooth transition and progressively following a low-carbon, climate-resilient trajectory, which will improve prospects for meeting development challenges while simultaneously adapting to and mitigating the impact of climate change.

11. The lynchpin of success for the accelerated implementation of the Goals and recovery and transition to green and inclusive economies in Africa remains the availability of resources for investment. While such resources are theoretically available globally, in practice they are not appropriately channelled towards Africa. Closing the financing gap for the Goals will require a disruptive approach that promotes domestic resource mobilization, innovative finance and long-term investment. The reallocation of special drawing rights towards countries with the greatest liquidity needs is promising and a step in the right direction. Furthermore, the opportunity to deploy carbon taxation and the potential development of carbon credit markets also represents an

³ In Paris, at the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, nations agreed to limit global warming to well below 2°C, and preferably to 1.5°C, this century, compared with pre-industrial levels, in a bid to attenuate the adverse impact of runaway climate change.

⁴ See <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>.

⁵ See <https://www.globalcarbonproject.org/>.

opportunity to create new sources of revenue quickly, while helping to build nature-positive investment. Africa is facing some of the highest rates of environmental degradation globally, which are having immediate and negative effects on populations. Initiatives such as those led by countries of the Congo Basin are designed to facilitate adaptation to climate change, while also aiming to develop livelihoods connected to the preservation of the continent's unique natural heritage. The development of high-integrity regional carbon markets will provide a platform for investment in nature-based solutions and critically needed financial resources that can be invested in improving the lives of the people of those regions. Debt-for-nature swaps also have the potential to bring about positive environmental and social benefits, as well as serve as a source of innovative financing.

12. Hence, urgent reform of the international financing architecture, long overdue, will be indispensable to make it fit for purpose, address the multiple crises outlined above and the imminent threats to people's livelihoods and well-being, and build long-term resilience. Africa will not be able to bridge the large financing gap to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, estimated at \$200 billion per year to 2030,⁶ on account of its severe challenges in managing public debt, which have been exacerbated by reduced fiscal space and prohibitively expensive borrowing costs, which are restricting efforts to leverage additional financial resources for investment in critical infrastructure, trade development, just transitions and the achievement of a post-pandemic green and sustainable recovery. It is crucial that advanced economies channel far larger flows of financing to developing countries so that the latter can achieve economic development and meet the Goal targets. The lending capacity and annual flows of the multilateral development banks must be increased, primarily through greater paid-in capital to these institutions, but also through greater leveraging of their balance sheets. Other measures, such as notably increased overseas development assistance, large-scale philanthropy and refinancing of debts that are falling due, are required to bolster finance for implementation of the Goals in low-income and lower-middle income countries. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and credit-rating agencies need to redesign their assessments of debt sustainability, taking into account the growth potential of developing countries and their need for far larger capital accumulation. Finally, working together with IMF and the multilateral development banks, developing countries need to strengthen their debt management and creditworthiness by integrating their borrowing policies with tax policies, export policies and liquidity management, all with a view to preventing future liquidity crises.

13. With regards to data, the COVID-19 crisis underscored the importance of timely and high-quality data for both promptly responding to and recovering from crises, and of accelerated and innovative approaches to data and information collection, dissemination and use. Looking ahead, consolidating and scaling-up data innovation and new forms of partnership are essential for the design of evidence-based recovery and policies, plans and other interventions for implementation of the Goals.

14. Ultimately, none of the above can be achieved in the absence of a renewed commitment to strengthening international solidarity and partnerships, as no one economy can respond alone to the multiple and complex crises facing the globe. Given the interconnected nature of the world economy, a shared global response is required to ensure that all countries, and developing countries in particular, can effectively put in place equitable, just and transparent processes and systems to manage and implement rapid growth solutions. In this effort, action and participation from all sectors of society, including government at all levels, the private sector, academic institutions,

⁶ See <https://sdg-action.org/funding-those-with-the-greatest-need%EF%BF%BC/#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20estimates%20a.and%20improved%20tax%20collections%20combined.>

civil society and individuals – young people and women, in particular – will be essential. Above all, African agency and ownership of its development paradigm and of the solutions that it develops with global partners, will underpin the generation of positive spillovers and delivery on common goals that will benefit Africa as well as the rest of the world.

15. With dedicated leadership at the highest political level, countries can accelerate progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 with a view to realizing a green and inclusive future. The decade of action and delivery for sustainable development (2021–2030) thus presents an opportunity and a window of hope to dramatically speed up the pace and expand the scale of implementation to deliver on the regional and global goals, alongside accelerating the recovery from multiple crises. Previous sessions of the Africa Regional Forum and meetings of the high-level political forum, including at the level of Heads of State and Government, have helped to spotlight several areas in which ambitious and transformative action will drive progress across multiple goals of the two agendas. Governments need to seize the moment to make this a decade of action, transformation and restoration to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and make good on the Paris Agreement.

16. Within that context, the objective, sub-themes and format of the ninth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will be as set out below.

III. Objective of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

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

18. With a particular focus on the five Sustainable Development Goals to be considered at the 2023 high-level political forum and the corresponding goals of the first 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063, the specific objectives of the ninth session of the Forum are as follows:

(a) To carry out an in-depth review of progress made in the implementation of five Sustainable Development Goals, namely Goals 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals), along with the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063;

(b) To provide a platform for sharing experiences, good practices and lessons learned in voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews and other efforts to implement the two agendas; and

(c) To identify and build consensus on policy options and actions, to be adopted in the form of key messages and a declaration, to drive action towards an accelerated, inclusive and green recovery from multiple crises, alongside the full implementation of the two agendas.

The key messages and the declaration will also serve as the collective input of the African continent to the 2023 high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held in New York from 10 to 19 July 2023, and to the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, to be held during the week of the high-level debate of the General Assembly in September 2023.

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

19. The activities of the ninth session of the Forum will be conducted on the basis of the following sub-themes, which have been crafted around the five Sustainable Development Goals to be considered at the 2023 meeting of the high-level political forum:

- (a) Clean water and sanitation;
- (b) Affordable and clean energy;
- (c) Industry, innovation and infrastructure;
- (d) Sustainable cities and communities;
- (e) Partnerships.

20. The 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, through which they provide a framework for transformative and sustainable development on the continent. Overall, and in considering each of the sub-themes, the Forum will identify concrete measures to mitigate the impact of the multiple crises and to accelerate implementation of the two agendas; consider the linkages among all the Sustainable Development Goals; and identify and promote integrated action to meet multiple objectives in a coherent manner that ensures that no one is left behind.

21. A concise analytical report on each of the sub-themes will inform deliberations. The analysis will encompass the corresponding goals of the first 10-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 Forum will consider and highlight links among the selected Goals and other goals and targets, taking into account the impact of multiple crises as outlined above;

(b) Challenges, constraints and emerging issues, including, in particular, the implications of multiple crises and fiscal challenges for countries as they endeavour to implement the two agendas;

(c) Opportunities and transformative actions, partnerships and measures that countries should adopt to accelerate an inclusive and green recovery and dramatically accelerate implementation of the two agendas.

V. Format of the ninth session of the Forum

22. The ninth session of the Forum will be held in a hybrid format that will provide for both in-person and online participation. The Forum will encompass the pre-session meetings and events and main segments that are described in detail below.

A. Pre-session Forum meetings and events

23. The session 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 Forum. The outcomes of those meetings will

inform the deliberations of the Forum. It is anticipated that the pre-session meetings and events will include the following:

- (a) A regional preparatory and capacity-building workshop for major groups and other stakeholders, including civil society, academic institutions and the private sector;
- (b) A regional preparatory workshop for African voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews to strengthen integration and reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;
- (c) The African Science, Technology and Innovation Forum;
- (d) Africa climate talks;
- (e) Expert workshops and other thematic meetings aligned with the theme and sub-themes of the Forum.

B. Main segments of the ninth session of the Forum

24. The ninth session of the Forum will comprise the following main segments:

- (a) The opening of the ninth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, at which addresses will be delivered by: a representative of Rwanda, as Chair of the Bureau of the eighth session; the Executive Secretary a.i. of ECA on behalf of the agencies and organizations of the United Nations system; and special guests and high-level representatives of the African Union Commission and African Development Bank. A representative of Rwanda will then officially open the session;
- (b) Two high-level panel dialogues:
 - (i) The first panel will set the tone for the Forum, by focusing on the priority measures that are needed to accelerate and achieve an inclusive and green recovery from the overlapping crises, including the COVID-19 crisis, climate change, biodiversity loss, the war in Ukraine, and debt distress in Africa, with a view to the integrated and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;
 - (ii) The second panel will focus on examining the level of funding needed to finance an inclusive recovery, just transitions and accelerate implementation of the two agendas. It will also provide high-level policy perspectives and guidance on effective and innovative measures to mobilize financing;
- (c) A plenary round-table panel that will facilitate learning and strengthen practice in conducting and following up on voluntary national reviews in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Participants will focus on solutions and good practices, and exchange experiences and lessons learned in voluntary national reviews;
- (d) A plenary round-table panel that is designed for participants to share progress and achievements, good practices and challenges in conducting voluntary local reviews in Africa at subnational levels. The panel will also demonstrate the role of voluntary local reviews and the need for measures to scale up such reviews and strengthen the links between voluntary local reviews and national voluntary reviews;
- (e) A plenary round-table panel that will focus on the importance of and challenges in boosting the generation, dissemination and use of high-quality data and statistics in designing, and monitoring and reporting on, timely and effective interventions to respond to shocks and to accelerate implementation of the two agendas;
- (f) Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made and peer learning on the five sub-themes of the Forum:
 - (i) Clean water and sanitation;
 - (ii) Affordable and clean energy;

- (iii) Industry, innovation and infrastructure;
- (iv) Sustainable cities and communities;
- (v) Partnerships;

The parallel meetings will provide an in-depth review and facilitate peer learning on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, with a special emphasis on the selected sub-themes. Panellists and participants in each parallel meeting will identify, articulate and agree on a set of key messages that address policy options and other measures for accelerated recovery from crises and implementation of the two agendas;

(g) A plenary round-table panel that will showcase the importance of leveraging science, technology, innovation and digital transformation to accelerate recovery and implementation of the two agendas, while highlighting initiatives and lessons learned in enabling the transformational power of these domains;

(h) Presentations and discussions on actions and partnerships to accelerate an inclusive and green recovery from multiple crises and the integrated and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063:

(i) A presentation on the role of the United Nations development system in ongoing and planned interventions, including through opportunity and issue-based coalitions, to support ECA member States, regional economic communities and the African Union Commission;

(ii) A presentation by major groups and other stakeholders in Africa that will highlight the outcomes of the preparatory and capacity-development workshop held just before the Forum. That will be followed by a discussion featuring perspectives from civil society, the private sector and academic institutions;

(iii) A presentation by the secretariat of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development that will highlight the key activities carried out and/or planned to implement the outcomes of previous sessions of the Regional Forum;

(iv) A presentation in which ECA member States, major groups, United Nations system entities and other development partners will be invited to showcase their commitments to scaling up transformative action to accelerate progress in achieving the goals of two agendas, in line with the decade of action and delivery on sustainable development, the Common Agenda of the Secretary-General, and the second 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063;

(v) A session during which the Rapporteur will present the key messages of the Forum along with the Niamey declaration on accelerating an inclusive and green recovery from multiple crises and the integrated and full implementation of the two agendas. After consideration and adoption, the key messages and the declaration will be put forward as the collective input by the African region to the 2023 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit.

VI. Expected outputs

25. 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) The outcome document of the ninth session of the Forum, which will set out the consensus priorities, policy options and recommendations of African countries in the form of key messages, which will accelerate the implementation of the two agendas and serve as the region's collective input to the 2023 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit;
- (c) The report on the proceedings of the Forum, which will cover the salient issues, priorities and recommendations pertaining to the theme and sub-themes of the ninth session.

VII. Expected outcomes

26. The ninth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is expected:

- (a) To achieve consensus on the urgent priorities for action at the subnational, national, regional and global levels to advance inclusive and green recovery from multiple crises and to accelerate implementation of the two agendas. These priorities will be captured in the form of key messages and a declaration, which will be adopted by the Forum, the outcome of which will be presented by the Chair of the Bureau of the ninth session of the Forum at the high-level political forum at its 2023 meeting, to be held in New York in July 2023, and at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, to be held during the week of the high-level debate of the General Assembly in September 2023;
- (b) To strengthen the capacity of the countries conducting voluntary national reviews in 2023 to undertake their reviews and to present the review reports at the 2023 meeting of the high-level political forum;
- (c) To equip ECA member States, civil society, the private sector, academic institutions and development partners with the knowledge, skills and tools necessary to act upon and widen the reach of the Forum's outcomes;
- (d) To enhance commitment and momentum and to expand partnerships to advance recovery from multiple crises and to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

VIII. Documentation

27. The documents for the ninth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will include:

- (a) Pre-session documentation:
 - (i) Concept note for the Forum;
 - (ii) Africa regional report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;
 - (iii) Report on the support provided by ECA and the African Union for the implementation, follow-up and review of the two agendas;
 - (iv) Concise analytical reports covering the sub-themes of the session;

- (v) Reports and outcome documents of relevant past meetings and events;
- (b) Post-session documentation:
 - (i) Agreed key messages of the Forum for presentation to the 2023 high-level political forum on sustainable development;
 - (ii) Final report on the deliberations of the ninth session of the Forum, including on salient issues, priorities and recommendations on the theme of the session;
 - (iii) Report on the fifth African Science, Technology and Innovation Forum;
 - (iv) Report on the regional workshop for countries conducting voluntary national reviews;
 - (v) Report on the regional workshop for major groups and other stakeholders.

IX. Participants

28. The meeting will be attended by representatives of:
- (a) All ECA member States;⁷
 - (b) The African Union Commission, the African Union Development Agency and the African Peer Review Mechanism;
 - (c) The African Development Bank;
 - (d) Regional economic communities;
 - (e) Agencies and organizations of the United Nations system and other international agencies and organizations;
 - (f) Major groups and other stakeholders, including civil society, business and industry organizations, and academic and research institutions;
 - (g) Development partners.

X. Working languages

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

XI. Dates and venue

30. The ninth session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will be held in a hybrid format in Niamey from 28 February to 2 March 2023.

⁷ Invitations will be extended to ministers and high-level policymakers, and experts from ministries and agencies in charge of economic planning, finance, environment, natural resources and mineral resources, social affairs, energy, industry, infrastructure, trade, statistics, and science and technology.

XII. Contacts

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