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Item 8 (e) of the provisional agenda*

**Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made,
peer-to-peer learning and acceleration measures regarding the sub-themes
of the Forum: partnerships for the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063****Background report on the sub-theme of partnerships
for the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063****I. Background**

1. The theme of Sustainable Development Goal 17, partnerships for the Goals, is the backbone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Central to that Goal is the importance of global collaboration, development financing, trade, technology and innovation, statistics and capacity-building to drive progress across all the Goals. The following implementation enablers have been incorporated into the second 10-year implementation plan (2024–2033) of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union: (a) coordination; (b) communication and advocacy; (c) partnerships; (d) financing; (e) monitoring, evaluation, data, accountability and learning; (f) capacity development; (g) domestication; and (h) harnessing technologies.

2. The global and regional contexts in 2023 and 2024 have been marked by progress and setbacks. African countries are grappling with crises, including climate change, and rising geopolitical tensions, which have strained financial resources and diverted attention away from long-term development priorities.

3. Meanwhile, there has been a renewed focus on innovative financing mechanisms, including green bonds, public-private partnerships and enhanced mobilization of domestic revenues. The African Peer Review Mechanism and other organizations have continued to advocate the establishment of an African credit rating agency.

4. In technology and innovation, Africa has made transformative progress through digitalization in order to accelerate the attainment of development goals. From the proliferation of mobile-based financial technology solutions that enhance financial inclusion, to the adoption of artificial intelligence in the delivery of public services, the continent is leveraging technology to address systemic challenges. Digital divides, in particular in rural areas, and inadequate infrastructure for information and communications technology, however, continue to limit absorptive capacity. Africa must embrace an innovation-led, knowledge-based economy in pursuit of Goal 17, targets 17.6–17.8. The African Union,

* ECA/RFSD/2025/1.



through its initiatives on science, technology and innovation; the African Union Development Agency; the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa; the African Development Bank; and other organizations are focused on repositioning the continent as a global leader in innovation and technology in healthcare, agriculture, energy, infrastructure development, mining, security and telecommunications.

5. The Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, signed by all members of the African Union except Eritrea and ratified by 48 of them, is a pivotal initiative for Goal 17. It is aimed at establishing a unified continental market for goods and services and, thus, enhancing intra-African trade and driving economic growth and inclusive development. As an initiative to foster regional integration, the Free Trade Area is aligned closely with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Fully harnessing its transformative potential requires strong partnerships among Governments, regional economic communities, the private sector and members of the international development community in order to address such challenges as non-tariff barriers, infrastructure deficits and digital connectivity and to ensure effective implementation.

6. The availability and use of data and statistics have improved across Africa. Initiatives led by the African Union and development partners have reinforced statistical capacities to track the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals. Insufficient funding remains a significant challenge, undermining the resilience of statistical systems and their monitoring capacity.¹

7. Capacity development remains critical to enhancing institutional and human capital across Africa. Equipping policymakers and decision makers with tools to craft and implement effective responses to global economic and political crises can boost resilience and foster economic self-sufficiency. Prioritizing policies that promote the creation of decent jobs further amplifies those outcomes. The integration of the priorities of the 2030 Agenda and the second 10-year implementation plan into national development plans is crucial for fulfilling the two agendas. Regional organizations, such as the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), the African Peer Review Mechanism and the African Association for Public Administration and Management, through their training initiatives, have played a vital role in aligning national development plans with global and continental agendas.

8. In the present report, an overview is provided of progress, challenges and opportunities with regard to achieving Goal 17 in Africa. Emphasis is placed on the thematic areas of finance, technology and innovation, trade, data and statistics, and capacity development. It includes actionable recommendations to strengthen partnerships and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the second 10-year implementation plan, in the light of the recommendations of the Secretary-General in his report on Our Common Agenda,² to ensure that no one is left behind, in particular the most vulnerable, including children and young people.

¹ African Union and others, *Africa Sustainable Development Report 2024* (2024).

² A/75/982.

II. Important trends and progress in implementation

A. Finance

9. An annual financing gap of approximately \$200 billion, as estimated in 2015, must be closed in order for Africa to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.³ Some \$402.2 billion are needed by 2030 to accelerate structural transformation and match the progress of high-performing developing countries in other regions.⁴ It will cost about \$2.8 trillion between 2020 and 2030 to implement the nationally determined contributions in Africa, or \$277 billion annually, but, in 2020, Africa received only \$30 billion, or 11 per cent of its requirement.⁵ Given that African countries have committed themselves to mobilizing 10 per cent of the cost of the contributions, the outstanding climate finance gap remains \$2.5 trillion.

10. Financial flows to Africa, such as foreign direct investment (FDI), official development assistance (ODA) and remittances, have stagnated. In 2023, global FDI flows fell by 2 per cent to \$1.3 trillion, owing to trade and geopolitical tensions, with flows to developing countries dropping by 7 per cent, to \$867 billion, and to Africa by 1.9 per cent, to \$53 billion.⁶ ODA increased from \$219.8 billion in 2022 to \$223.3 billion in 2023, but remained \$196 billion short of the target to give 0.7 per cent of national income in aid.⁷ In 2023, only five countries – Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden – met that target. Africa received \$59.7 billion in 2023, up from \$55.8 billion in 2022 but below the 2021 level. Remittance flows to sub-Saharan Africa reached \$54 billion in 2023, a slight decrease of 0.3 per cent from the previous year, but are expected to rise by 1.3 per cent in 2024.⁸

11. Joint programming by entities of the United Nations with national partners is a powerful approach to accelerating implementation by fostering collaboration and pooling resources for greater impact. In Kenya, a multi-partner trust fund launched by the United Nations has successfully mobilized more than \$34 million,⁹ and the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund has helped to mobilize a development impact bond of over \$20 million in support of adolescent health, benefiting nearly 500,000 girls.¹⁰

12. Debt challenges continue to constrain access to international markets, with rising debt burdens eroding development funding. The ratio of debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) remains high in Africa, limiting fiscal space. Debt

³ African Union Commission and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Africa's Development Dynamics 2023: Investing in Sustainable Development* (Addis Ababa; OECD Publishing, Paris, 2023).

⁴ African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2024: Driving Africa's Transformation – The Reform of the Global Financial Architecture* (Abidjan, 2024).

⁵ Sandra Guzmán and others, "The state of climate finance in Africa: climate finance needs of African countries" (Climate Policy Initiative, 2022).

⁶ *World Investment Report 2024: Investment Facilitation and Digital Government* (United Nations publication, 2024).

⁷ ONE Campaign, "Official development assistance (ODA)", available at <https://data.one.org/topics/official-development-assistance/> (accessed on 17 December 2024).

⁸ World Bank, "Remittances slowed in 2023, expected to grow faster in 2024", Migration and Development Brief, No. 40 (Washington, D.C., 2024).

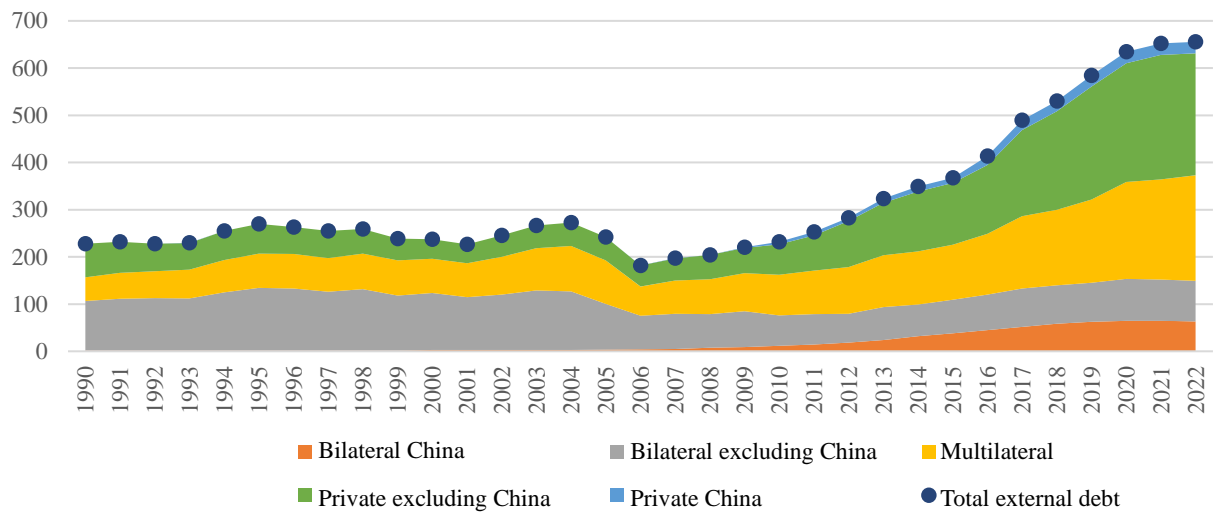
⁹ Development Coordination Office, "Kenya: case studies on SDG 17 – partnerships for the Goals" (n.p., n.d.).

¹⁰ For more information about the adolescent health initiative, see the website of the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund: www.jointsdgfund.org/programme/championing-worlds-first-adolescent-sexual-reproductive-health-development-impact-bond.

servicing reached 11.6 per cent of exports in 2022, with 4.8 per cent of GDP allocated to debt payments in 2021, compared with 2.6 per cent allocated to health and 4.8 per cent to education.¹¹ The Sustainable Debt Coalition initiative, for which the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development at its fifty-fifth session, held in March 2023, urged the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to mobilize support, promotes innovative financial instruments, such as debt-for-climate and debt-for-nature swaps and climate-resilient debt clauses.

13. As shown in figure I, the debt landscape on the continent is evolving, with commercial debt rising from 17 per cent in 2000 to 43 per cent in 2022, while bilateral debt fell from 52 per cent to 25 per cent over the same period.¹² China, India and Türkiye are major bilateral creditors. The increasing complexity and cost of debt servicing demand better coordination mechanisms.

Figure I
Evolution of the external debt landscape in Africa, 1990–2022
 (Billions of United States dollars)



Source: Adapted from the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Unpacking the debt of Africa: towards a lasting and durable solution” (A/79/295).

14. Domestic resource mobilization is gaining traction. In 2018, African public revenues and private savings amounted to \$911.4 billion in 2018, which is 20 times the amount of inward FDI and 16.5 times the amount of net ODA.¹³ To enhance policy space, Africa must leverage untapped domestic resources, including through tax reforms, innovative finance and improved efficiency in public expenditure.

B. Technology and innovation

15. Africa is undergoing a technological transformation, but challenges remain in rolling out developments equitably. In 2024, the cost of mobile broadband was

¹¹ Economic Commission for Africa, “The rising debt burden in Africa’s least developed countries is eroding funding for sustainable development”, 17 November 2024.

¹² *Unpacking Africa’s Debt: Towards a Lasting and Durable Solution* (United Nations publication, 2024).

¹³ *Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19: The Primacy of Domestic Resource Mobilization* (United Nations publication, 2022).

4.2 per cent of gross national income per capita in Africa compared with 1.1 per cent globally, and fixed broadband was 13.4 per cent on the continent compared with 2.5 per cent worldwide.¹⁴ In 2024, 25 per cent of the urban population in Africa had 5G access; of the rural population, 49 per cent had 4G access, 26 per cent had 3G access, 14 per cent had 2G access and the remaining 11 per cent had no mobile network access at all.¹⁵

16. At the eighth Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa Week, held in November 2024, participants reaffirmed their commitment to building high-quality, resilient infrastructure that will accelerate sustainable development and regional integration.¹⁶ Infrastructure projects that were showcased during the Week included: the transborder submarine fibre points of presence, regional smart hub facility and data centre, which will enhance connectivity for 285 million people in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania; and the Abidjan–Lagos corridor highway and the Cameroon–Chad railway, which will enhance regional connectivity and economic growth. The Medusa project, a Mediterranean subsea cable system, estimated to cost 342 million euros, will provide underwater cable connectivity between Europe and North Africa by 2026.¹⁷

17. E-governance is vital for building resilient institutions, which is relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 16 and the achievement of Goal 17. The African Union Development Agency has launched a report on one-stop border posts across Africa and various digital transformation projects to enhance continental infrastructure. In Africa, between 2022 and 2024, the online service index score increased by 5.2 per cent, and the e-government development index score grew by 4.8 per cent.¹⁸

18. During its forty-fifth ordinary session, held in July 2024, the Executive Council of the African Union endorsed¹⁹ a continental artificial intelligence strategy²⁰ to promote innovation, safety and ethics and to reposition Africa as a global leader in inclusive artificial intelligence.

C. Trade

19. The implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area will profoundly transform the African economic landscape by fostering intra-African trade and advancing sustainable growth. The Agreement could help to increase intra-African trade by 45 per cent in 2045, compared to a scenario without the Agreement, with substantial value addition in such sectors as processed food, pharmaceuticals, tourism, the automotive industry, textiles and other manufactured goods,²¹ which is crucial for the development of regional

¹⁴ International Telecommunication Union, *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2024* (Geneva, 2024).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ African Union Development Agency, “8th PIDA Week concludes with strong commitment to transform Africa’s infrastructure and drive Agenda 2063 forward”, 29 November 2024.

¹⁷ Africa-Europe Foundation, *The State of Africa-Europe: Africa-Europe Foundation Report 2024* (2024).

¹⁸ *E-Government Survey 2024: Accelerating Digital Transformation for Sustainable Development* (United Nations publication, 2024).

¹⁹ Executive Council of the African Union, Decision on the reports of the Specialised Technical Committees, EX.CL/Dec.1268(XLV).

²⁰ African Union, *Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy: Harnessing AI for Africa’s Development and Prosperity* (Addis Ababa, 2024).

²¹ ECA and Centre d’études prospectives et d’informations internationales, “Implementing the AfCFTA Agreement and implications for Africa’s regional value chains” (forthcoming).

value chains, industrialization, job creation and economic diversification across the continent. The value chains could connect African economies with global markets and ensure significant value addition within the region, thereby strengthening the long-term economic resilience and global competitiveness of the continent.

20. The implementation of the Agreement benefits from the accelerating pace of digital transformation. The African Union strategy on digital transformation and the protocol to the Agreement on digital trade provide critical frameworks for enhancing digital trade across the continent. Digital advancement in the region, however, faces barriers, including limited Internet access and restrictive trade regulations. Reducing regulatory restrictions has a transformative potential: a reduction of 1 per cent in digital trade restrictiveness could increase intra-African digital trade by 21.5 per cent.²² These advancements could unlock digital trade benefits, enhance trade facilitation, simplify processes and create opportunities in such industries as e-commerce, logistics and cross-border services.

21. The guided trade initiative of the Agreement, launched in October 2022, has been rolled out to over 30 participants. By facilitating early trade activities, it demonstrates the potential of the Agreement to foster economic cooperation among participating States. It has, however, revealed significant challenges, including limited awareness of tariff liberalization schedules and processes among stakeholders; logistical barriers, such as inefficient transportation networks and customs systems; a lack of coordination among relevant authorities; and high compliance costs, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises.²³

22. With regard to adaptation of the Agreement at the national level, by December 2024, 42 national and 3 regional implementation strategies had been developed with support from ECA and other partners, including the United Nations Development Programme and the German Agency for International Cooperation. Through the strategies, commitments under the Agreement are integrated into broader national development agendas, reinforcing such critical areas as gender mainstreaming, the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises and the inclusion of sustainable value chains. Some national strategies have served as decision-making tools for countries considering the ratification of the Agreement, as in the case of the Comoros, Liberia and Madagascar.

23. Sustainability is fundamental to the implementation of the Agreement. Through a joint project of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and ECA to promote the inclusion of green considerations in national implementation strategies, 19 African countries have developed green value chains, supplementing their national strategies and emphasizing low-carbon and climate-resilient industries. Such initiatives align with global climate goals and demonstrate recognition of the importance of sustainable development in driving inclusive trade. The focus on sustainability not only reinforces the climate commitments of the continent but also strengthens the regional capacity to compete in an increasingly green global economy.

D. Data and statistics

24. ECA, with partners including the African Development Bank and the African Union Commission, advances innovation in statistical systems through

²² ECA, “Enhancing intra-African trade through digitalization from a regulatory perspective” (forthcoming).

²³ For more information, see Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and ECA, “The guided trade initiative: documenting and assessing the early experiences of trading under the AfCFTA” (Addis Ababa, 2024).

capacity-building, digital censuses, the modernization of administrative data and the use of big data and data science. The ninth session of the Statistical Commission for Africa, held in 2024, was focused on mobilizing technical and financial resources to support innovation for modernizing African national statistical systems and enable evidence-based policymaking.

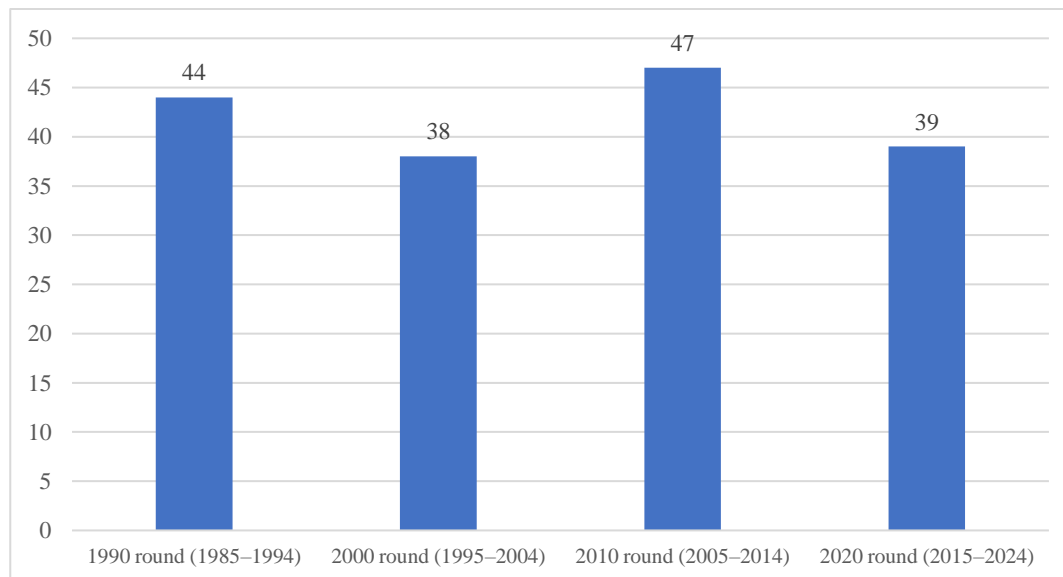
25. In 2023, the number of African countries that reported to have national statistical legislation in line with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics was 42, up from 31 in 2019.²⁴

26. The Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems, in partnership with ECA, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), is aimed at modernizing registration systems, with a view to promoting the accuracy and timeliness of data.

27. Censuses and surveys are vital for providing baseline data on population dynamics and socioeconomic conditions. The use of electronic tablets and geospatial technologies has improved the speed and accuracy of data collection. The 2020 round of population and housing censuses covers the period 2015–2024. As shown in figure II and according to the records of ECA, only 39 African countries conducted their censuses by the end of the round, a decrease of 8 countries, or 17 per cent, from the previous round, which underscores the need for sustained investments in national statistical systems to ensure the timeliness and reliability of data.

28. In 2024, UNICEF provided technical support for strengthening national survey capacities for children through its programme of Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys in Africa.

Figure II
Censuses undertaken in Africa, by round
 (Number of countries)



Source: ECA.

²⁴ E/2024/54, annex.

E. Capacity development

29. The African Capacity-Building Foundation, the African Peer Review Mechanism, the African Union Commission, IDEP, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and other institutions, such as regional organizations, are leading efforts to equip African policymakers, civil servants, including focal points for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and members of the private sector with skills to address development challenges.

30. Focused on building capacities relating to trade in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area, IDEP has conducted training programmes on trade negotiations, digital trade and policy implementation. In 2024, it partnered with the Government of Italy on e-learning programmes for strengthening capacities in digital trade, targeting policymakers, trade experts and representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises from various African countries, empowering them to leverage digital platforms for trade. In February 2024, the African Capacity-Building Foundation organized training on accelerating the implementation of the Agreement and advancing trade and economic integration, targeting African ambassadors accredited to the African Union.

31. To support members of ECA in relation to integrated development planning, with a view to fostering the transformation of Africa through capacity-building, research and knowledge management, IDEP, in collaboration with the African Peer Review Mechanism, validated in Johannesburg, South Africa, the curriculum for a training programme on the fundamentals of development planning. The initiative, which involves the African Union Development Agency, the Development Coordination Office and Malawi, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Zambia, is aimed at improving understanding among development planners of the frameworks, tools and methodologies for designing and implementing national development plans that are aligned with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

32. The African Peer Review Mechanism and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have worked together to promote policy coherence for sustainable development, with a focus on Ghana, Kenya, Namibia and South Africa.

33. In August 2024, the International Centre for the Education of Girls and Women in Africa relaunched its three-month online training programme on gender in education, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, digital literacy, financial literacy and entrepreneurship.

34. The African Development Bank approved, for the period 2023–2024, a financial package of 5 million units of account to strengthen the capacity for structural transformation in its regional member countries with regard to inclusive growth and sustainable development.

35. To further North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, in support of target 17.9 of the Goals, Renewable Energy Solutions for Africa dedicated the 2024 edition of its Executive School initiative to a flagship training programme on the renewable energy sector, designed for institutional leaders, managers and major stakeholders across Africa. In addition, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization has facilitated industrial technology transfers between countries.

36. Digital transformation has enhanced access to capacity-development initiatives. E-learning platforms, virtual workshops and mobile applications have

expanded access, in particular to individuals in remote and underserved regions. There have been growing numbers of participants in the online training courses of IDEP, which cover such topics as economic management, fiscal policy and gender-responsive planning. In 2024, IDEP trained 4,808 individuals from 52 African countries, of which women and young people comprised 35 per cent.

III. Challenges, emerging issues and opportunities

A. Finance

37. Challenges to the achievement of Goal 17 with respect to finance include inefficient, ineffective and inequitable public finance allocations, limited access to financing for small and medium-sized enterprises, high borrowing costs and underdeveloped capital markets. The cost and levels of public debt remain a concern and are exacerbated by vulnerabilities stemming from global economic shocks, including rising interest rates and fluctuating commodity prices. An example of the effect that such challenges have is the inefficient and inequitable allocation by age of public spending on children across Africa.²⁵

38. The international financial architecture and the associated approach to debt management and restructuring is not conducive to sustainable development in Africa. Sovereign debt is often contracted when countries are in disadvantaged positions and have limited negotiating power. The countries are often undermined by poor or absent credit ratings and rating systems that do not take into consideration their fundamental characteristics. Improving the global governance of debt to make it inclusive, predictable and responsive to emerging shocks without compromising progress towards achieving the Goals requires the creation of a global debt governance framework.

39. Increasing access by Africa to climate finance requires human and institutional capacity to engage in climate finance negotiations, greater resources for adaptation, a clear distinction between climate finance and ODA, a system to track climate finance contributions and differentiated terms for adaptation and mitigation finance.

40. To mobilize resources for sustainable development, opportunities abound in leveraging innovative financing mechanisms, including blended finance, green bonds and impact investing. In addition, the African Continental Free Trade Area can be used to deepen regional financial integration and attract investment in infrastructure and trade.

B. Technology and innovation

41. Challenges to the achievement of Goal 17 with respect to technology and innovation include inadequate digital infrastructure, limited access to affordable Internet and significant digital divides between rural and urban populations. Furthermore, many countries face skill gaps in major areas, such as software development, data science and artificial intelligence.

²⁵ For more information, see UNICEF, “Fit for the future: how a rethink of the human capital model is needed in Africa to optimise the return on social spending”, Policy Note (2024).

42. The implementation of Agenda 2063 and the strategy of the African Union on science, technology and innovation²⁶ is aimed at advancing an innovation-driven, knowledge-based economy. Disparities exist in infrastructure readiness among African countries. In 2024, Cairo was ranked ninety-fifth among the world's top 100 science and technology clusters, the only African city on the list.²⁷

43. More work is needed to foster global competitiveness and innovation in Africa, where only two countries – Mauritius and South Africa – transitioned from high to very high e-governance digital coverage between 2022 and 2024.²⁸

44. There is a significant annual funding shortfall, of \$402 billion, that African countries must close by 2030 in order to fast-track their structural transformation and catch up with high-performing developing countries in other regions.²⁹

45. Despite strong partnerships between Africa and Europe in education and training, concerns remain about brain drain.³⁰ The growing population of young people on the continent represents an opportunity for innovation and entrepreneurship. Technology hubs, incubators and regional innovation systems can help to foster the growth of start-ups and cross-border collaboration. The African Continental Free Trade Area can be used to expand technological solutions across borders and, thus, enhance trade and integration.

C. Trade

46. The transformative potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area is limited by significant challenges requiring urgent attention. Non-tariff barriers, including technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary measures, can majorly disrupt intra-African trade. With an average ad valorem equivalent of 51.4 per cent for final goods and 40.9 per cent for intermediate goods, non-tariff barriers within Africa are more restrictive than tariffs.³¹ The situation is exacerbated by poor regulatory harmonization. Addressing those challenges requires stronger collaboration among regulatory bodies, alignment of regulatory policies with the protocols to the Agreement and streamlined cross-border processes.

47. Infrastructure deficits, including inadequate transport networks, inefficient border facilities and limited digital connectivity, hamper trade efficiency and increase costs. Africa requires approximately \$121 billion in infrastructure investments by 2030 to meet transport demands related to the Agreement.³² Prioritizing trade-enabling infrastructure and leveraging public-private partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms are essential to bridging resource gaps.

48. Institutional capacity constraints impede progress. Strengthening national implementation committees helps to align the commitments under the Agreement with national priorities and foster collaboration among regulatory bodies, such as

²⁶ African Union Commission, *Science Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa 2024* (Addis Ababa, 2014).

²⁷ Soumitra Dutta and others, eds., *Global Innovation Index 2024: Unlocking the Promise of Social Entrepreneurship* (Geneva, World Intellectual Property Organization, 2024).

²⁸ *E-Government Survey 2024*.

²⁹ African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2024*.

³⁰ Africa-Europe Foundation, *The State of Africa-Europe*.

³¹ ECA, *Economic Report on Africa 2025* (forthcoming).

³² *Ibid.*

customs and standards authorities, to reduce delays. Many small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular those led by women and young people, face challenges in understanding and navigating the provisions of the Agreement. Targeted initiatives to address those gaps and promote broader participation are essential.

49. Gender inequality and the exclusion of informal cross-border trade are additional barriers. Women often lack access to finance, trade networks and formal structures. The absence of trade data disaggregated by sex further limits the understanding of women's contribution to trade and the development of inclusive policies. The African Union Commission, ECA and the African Export-Import Bank have developed a methodology for the collection of data on informal cross-border trade, adopted by the African Union Commission Specialized Technical Committee on Trade, Industry and Minerals in May 2024, to empower women traders and promote equitable trade practices.

50. The Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area offers opportunities for inclusive and sustainable growth. Developing green value chains in low-carbon industries, such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and eco-friendly manufacturing, can simultaneously align economic growth with sustainability and address climate challenges.

D. Data and statistics

51. Limited financial resources delay censuses, surveys and civil registration. Unequal access to technology and a shortage of skilled personnel slow the adoption and application of innovations, such as big data and geospatial tools. Reliance on external donors for censuses and surveys exacerbates those issues. Persistent gaps, as exemplified by the failure of some countries in Africa to carry out a census during the 2020 census round, underscore the need for sustained investments to improve the timeliness and coverage of data and statistics.

52. Data quality remains a major challenge. Methodological inconsistencies and poor data collection undermine the reliability of surveys and censuses. The lack of data disaggregated by sex, age and geography limits the effectiveness of data in monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.³³ Concerns about data privacy, governance and security necessitate robust regulatory frameworks.

53. Despite those challenges, big data, artificial intelligence, digital platforms and other forms of technology and techniques can be deployed to modernize systems, improve data quality and foster regional collaboration, as has been demonstrated in initiatives of the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems and the Statistical Commission for Africa. The private sector can help to address funding gaps and improve technical capacity. With greater support from international organizations, statistical systems can be strengthened and evidence-based policymaking can be promoted.

³³ For more information, see Gilena Andrade and others, "The power of data to accelerate achievement of the three transformative results", United Nations Population Fund West and Central Africa Acceleration Paper, No. 6 (Dakar, United Nations Population Fund, 2024).

E. Capacity development

54. With contributions from pan-African institutions, such as IDEP and the African Capacity-Building Foundation, capacity development in Africa is advancing in line with the 2030 Agenda and the second 10-year implementation plan. Associated challenges include funding constraints, digital infrastructure gaps and limited capacity of human resources. Human resource planning must align with national development plans in order to achieve sustainable transformation.

55. The workforce in Africa needs skills to keep pace with technological advancements, evolving labour markets and structural economic transformation. Digital transformation requires robust strategies to prepare workers, in particular young people, for emerging job opportunities and to mitigate the risk of unemployment. Integrated human resource planning, tied to national development plans, is essential to aligning skills with labour market demands and the priorities of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

56. North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation can be avenues for the mobilization of technical and financial resources. Addressing funding gaps, strengthening infrastructure and adopting human-centred approaches to workforce planning can help to create a resilient workforce, ensure inclusive development and drive progress towards the implementation of the two agendas in Africa.

IV. Recommendations for integrated and accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

A. Finance

57. The following recommendations are made with respect to the finance aspect of partnerships for the goals of the two agendas:

(a) A United Nations framework convention should be established on sovereign debt, agreed by all States Members of the Organization, in an equitable, inclusive, participatory, accountable and transparent manner, addressing the commitment to establish a multilateral debt resolution mechanism and encapsulating a global consensus on the necessary principles, rules and structures that should apply throughout the various interdependent stages of the debt cycle;

(b) The international financial architecture should be reformed, with a view to reducing the excessive cost of sovereign borrowing, increasing access to contingency financing and long-term concessional financing and aligning debt sustainability with the Sustainable Development Goals and the priorities of debtor countries, including efforts to build resilience and fulfil international human rights obligations, in order to change the emphasis within the architecture from contingency measures to the prevention and resolution of long-term debt crises;

(c) Climate finance must be scaled up, historical climate and ecological debtor countries from the global North must meet their commitments in their entirety, and funding should be additional to already existing ODA commitments;

(d) Adequate, high-quality, new and additional public grants-based climate and environmental finance should be made available, including with direct targeting at the most vulnerable population groups, including children.

B. Technology and innovation

58. The following recommendations are made with respect to the technology and innovation aspect of partnerships for the goals of the two agendas:

(a) Strategic grants should be targeted at sectors that drive innovation in Africa, research must address critical challenges and foster collaboration and patentable innovations, and universities should be transformed from purely educational institutions into research hubs in partnership with businesses and the private sector, reducing reliance on solutions from outside the continent;

(b) Policy implementation must be inclusive, data-driven and free from bias and nepotism and be supported by robust monitoring and evaluation throughout the policy lifecycle to ensure transparency, accountability and effective outcomes;

(c) Countries should heed the call to allocate 1 per cent of GDP to infrastructure, science and technology development in order to implement the strategy of the African Union on science, technology and innovation, and public-private partnerships should be used to bridge infrastructure gaps and drive sustained growth and innovation.

C. Trade

59. The following recommendations are made with respect to the trade aspect of partnerships for the goals of the two agendas:

(a) Non-tariff barriers should be eliminated by regulatory harmonization and streamlined cross-border processes using strengthened national implementation committees in order to align the protocols to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area with national trade strategies and to foster collaboration among customs authorities, standards agencies and policymakers;

(b) Investments in infrastructure that facilitates trade, such as transport networks, border facilities and digital connectivity, should be accelerated through public-private-partnerships;

(c) Subregional and continental institutions, such as ECA and the African Union Commission, should scale up capacity-building programmes targeting small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular those led by women and young people, with a view to expanding participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area;

(d) Data should be collected on informal cross-border trade at the national level in order to support evidence-based and inclusive policies;

(e) Green value chains and low-carbon industries should be promoted, with a view to aligning growth in trade with sustainability and driving inclusive economic transformation.

D. Data and statistics

60. The following recommendations are made with respect to the data and statistics aspect of partnerships for the goals of the two agendas:

(a) Investments should be made in statistical systems targeted at data infrastructure and capacity-building initiatives, in order to ensure the reliability and timeliness of data and the regularity of their collection;

(b) Investments in strengthening data systems should be prioritized, given their high rate of return, which can reach an average of \$32 in economic benefits for every \$1 invested;³⁴

(c) Capacity-building through expanded training programmes and knowledge-sharing initiatives, such as the Takwimu programme for young African statisticians at ECA, should be replicated;

(d) Partnerships among countries should be strengthened in order to promote regional collaboration and share experiences and examples of good practice in fostering the harmonization of statistical systems;

(e) Emerging technologies and techniques, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and the use of metadata, should be leveraged to help to revolutionize data collection and analysis.

E. Capacity development

61. The following recommendations are made with respect to the capacity-development aspect of partnerships for the goals of the two agendas:

(a) The capacity of the financial system to foster resilience and boost investments for the goals should be reinforced as a priority for the integrated and accelerated implementation of the two agendas;

(b) Institutional capacity should be developed in the areas of domestic resource mobilization and strategic foresight with regard to building financial resilience, with efforts focused on economic resilience and risk prevention and management, in order to decrease the financing gap and promote policies for job creation and economic growth;

(c) Science, technology and innovation should be at the core of capacity-building, given that skills in those areas, in particular artificial intelligence and data analytics, will enhance knowledge management and innovation;

(d) Training should be supplied on the benefits of the African Continental Free Trade Area and on fiscal policies, which are central to resource mobilization at the continental and national levels.

V. Main messages

62. Africa faces significant challenges in financing sustainable development, including limited access to affordable capital and external debt burdens. Innovative financing initiatives, such as the Sustainable Debt Coalition, debt-for-climate swaps, sustainability-linked bonds and development impact bonds, and increased private sector engagement provide opportunities to bridge the financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals and the second 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063.

³⁴ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *The Power of Data for Governance: Closing Data Gaps to Accelerate Africa's Transformation* (London, 2024).

63. Rapid digital transformation in Africa offers opportunities to accelerate development. Expanding digital infrastructure, improving access to technology and bridging the digital divide remain critical challenges. Strategic investments in technology and innovation, in particular in digital trade and industry, are vital to unlocking the economic growth and sustainable development potential of the continent.

64. The Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area offers a transformative opportunity to boost intra-African trade by 45 per cent in 2045, compared to a scenario without it.³⁵ Addressing trade barriers and infrastructure deficits and fostering national productive capacities, regional value addition and trade integration will increase the economic competitiveness of Africa.

65. Measuring progress towards attaining the Goals is constrained by fragmented statistical systems and gaps in data quality. Enhancing national statistical offices, leveraging big data and geospatial technologies and integrating data-sharing and the pooling of resources will improve the accuracy and timeliness of reporting.

66. Governments are encouraged to strengthen campaigns to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and to foster multi-stakeholder engagement with local communities in order to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development.

67. Governments, donors and stakeholders must invest in statistical systems as a strategic priority in order to achieve the objectives of global and regional development agendas.

68. Capacity development is crucial for accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the second 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063. Limited access to good-quality education, skill gaps and inadequate institutional frameworks should be addressed through innovative, inclusive and accessible training initiatives.

³⁵ ECA and Centre d'études prospectives et d'informations internationales, "Implementing the AfCFTA Agreement and implications for Africa's regional value chains".