



12th ARFSD

Twelfth Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development



LEAD STORY

Africa needs a new approach to development – Gatete ➤



Multilateralism is alive and well ➤



Winning back the youth ➤



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People at work ➤



Africa Risks falling behind ➤



Poverty needs all hands on deck ➤



Ethiopia can bridge climate gap ➤

Africa needs to move beyond ad hoc interventions and embrace a fundamentally different approach to development to turn around its fortunes, says Claver Gatete, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa.

Opening the 12th Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Addis Ababa, Gatete was speaking to the theme of the event, Turning the Tide: Transformative and Coordinated Actions for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

“What is required now is a decisive shift – from sectoral approaches to systems thinking; from plans to implementation at scale,” he said.

He said longstanding constraints are intersected with rapid demographic, urban and climate transitions, which demand urgent action. Nowhere are these pressures more evident than in the sectors under review at this year’s event.

“Far from being peripheral objectives, the goals under review this year, covering water and sanitation, sustainable cities, energy and resilient infrastructure and partnerships, form the productive foundation of Africa’s transformation.

“Where these systems are weak, growth is undermined, inequality intensifies and progress slows. But where they function well, they drive productivity, competitiveness and inclusion across the economy.

This same pattern is echoed



Africa needs a new approach to development – Gatete

across energy, infrastructure and cities – where gains in access are not yet translating into resilience, jobs or competitiveness at the scale required, particularly in light of rapid urbanisation, he said

“If cities are expanding, but jobs are not; if energy access is improving, but reliability is not; if infrastructure is growing, but value chains are not: are we truly on a transformative path?”

Economic assets

Gatete proposed five priorities for consideration.

“First, we must reposition foundational services – water,



WE MUST REPOSITION FOUNDATIONAL SERVICES – WATER, ENERGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE – AS CORE ECONOMIC ASSETS

energy and infrastructure – as core economic assets.

“These must be systematically integrated into industrial strategies, urban planning and regional value chains, rather than treated as standalone social sectors.

“Second, we must close Africa’s infrastructure financing gap through scale, innovation and partnerships.

“Domestic resource mobilisation must be complemented by targeted efforts to attract private investment, both domestic and foreign. This begins with setting up a conducive business climate and robust pipelines of bankable projects that attract private investment.”

Urban transition

Third, Africa must harness its urban transition as a driver of jobs and productivity.

“This requires aligning city planning with industrialization, investing in public transport and affordable housing, and upgrading informal settlements as engines – not obstacles – of growth.

Fourth, he said, the digital and green transitions must advance together with climate resilience at the core. Skills need to be built for the future and more investment made in research and development.

Lastly, delivery must be anchored in data, strong institutions and regional cooperation and partnerships, he said.



Mauritius takes over Bureau

Gilles Fabrice David, Junior Minister of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries, Mauritius, was elected head of the Bureau for the 12th Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

Mauritius is representing Southern Africa on the Bureau, taking over from Uganda.

The First Vice Chair is from Gabon, representing Central Africa, the Second Vice Chair from Cote d’Ivoire in West Africa and the third Vice Chair from Libya, representing North Africa. Uganda is the rapporteur.

David thanked his predecessor, Chair of the outgoing Bureau and Prime Minister of Uganda, Robinah Nabbanja, expressing gratitude for the confidence being placed in a small island state to sit in this important position. “We accept this mandate with

humility and determination.

“We stand at a decisive moment in our shared journey. With just a few years to achieve our ambitions for the sustainable development goals, we must move beyond gradual progress. The time for cautious steps has passed. We now need bold transformation.

David said Mauritius stands at the crossroads of Africa’s regional dynamics, geographically part of East Africa but institutionally and economically part of SADC. “This is not a contradiction; it is a strength.”

He said although Mauritius is a small island, it is vast in maritime terms, with an exclusive economic zone of 2.2 million square kilometres. “We may be small in size but we have an ambition to be seen and valued as a big ocean state.



African leaders opened the 12th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-12) in Addis Ababa with a strong call for urgent, coordinated and transformative action to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063.

The event brought together ministers, senior government officials, regional institutions, United Nations entities, civil society, the private sector and development partners to review Africa's progress and shape the continent's common position ahead of global sustainable development processes, including the High-Level Political Forum.

Lok Bahadur Thapa, President

Multilateralism is alive and well

of the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC) told the opening session that Africa is at a critical juncture in the implementation of the agendas.

"We have seen significant tumult at the global and regional levels. All these pose additional challenges to national governments that are already faced with competing demands on limited resources."

Thapa said the continent faces a substantial financing gap of between \$670bn and \$848bn annually, driven largely by rising

debt vulnerabilities, fluctuations in foreign direct investment, low domestic resource mobilisation, and sharply falling official development assistance.

Industrialization and job creation remain insufficient, with manufacturing value addition and employment below global averages.

ECOSOC is prioritising actions to support African countries to deliver better to the people on the ground. This includes advancing financing for development, strengthening

food systems, empowering youth, advancing climate resilience, reinforcing multilateral cooperation, and promoting the interests of countries in special situations.

Multilateral cooperation is more important than ever before, he asserted. "Regional platforms are vital in aligning national priorities with global agendas. Though we are in a challenging moment for multilateralism, let us not forget that, together, we have still managed to find a path forward."

Uganda's Prime Minister of Uganda, Robinah Nabbanja said Africa, with just four years remaining to 2030, must move with greater urgency from commitments to concrete,



measurable results.

Reflecting on Uganda's tenure as Chair of the ARFSD-11 Bureau, Nabbanja recalled the adoption of the Kampala Declaration and the Key Messages to the High-Level Political Forum in 2025. She noted that the Bureau had remained actively engaged over

the past year, convening four meetings to provide strategic direction, sustain momentum and strengthen follow-up on implementation

Speaking on behalf of the African Union Commission Chairperson, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, the Deputy Chairperson Selma Malika Haddadi said, "This Forum represents not just a platform for reflection, but a decisive moment for collective action."

She reported progress in domesticating the Second 10-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063 across Member States, with countries increasingly aligning national development plans, policies and budgets with continental priorities.

Ethiopia can bridge climate gap

Ethiopia's hosting of COP32 in 2027 gives Africa an exceptional opportunity to help bridge the gap between climate ambition and sustainable development delivery, ECA Secretary General Claver Gatete told delegates at the opening of the ARFSD Forum in Addis Ababa.

The appointment is particularly important at a time when global progress on the Sustainable Development Goals is off track, he said.

"I am confident that all of you feel a sense of pride and gratitude that our host government has unreservedly assumed the responsibility of hosting the COP32, at a most consequential moment for climate action and for multilateral development cooperation.

"This is a huge responsibility, and we are deeply thankful to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed for assuming this mantle on behalf of Africa.

"It entails marshaling global consensus to overcome geopolitical complexities, including fiscal and other challenges to achieve transformational climate action at scale," he said.

Gatete pointed to Ethiopia's measurable record of sustainable development and climate action.

Its Green Legacy Initiative is one of the largest national reforestation programmes globally. Through the Initiative, the country has planted over 40 billion tree seedlings, while more than 95% of its electricity generation is renewable.

Climate-smart agriculture now covers nearly 18 million hectares of rain-fed cropland.

Gatete said for Ethiopia, and many other African countries, climate action and sustainable development are not competing priorities; they are mutually reinforcing. "That is because on this continent, climate change is a lived reality."

With the 2030 deadline for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) drawing closer, Africa risks being left behind due to the slow and uneven pace of implementation.

Presenting highlights of the 2026 Africa Sustainable Development Report at ARFSD-12 in Addis Ababa, Stephen Karingi, Director of the Macroeconomic Policy, Finance Macroeconomic Policy, Finance and Governance Division at the ECA, outlined the progress that Africa has made.

He focused on five SDGs under review at the event: Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

A mixed picture

He welcomed renewed political support to address gaps in water and sanitation, decrying the unacceptably high proportion of Africa's population without basic access to such services.

"We have an elevated political focus on water and sanitation as high impact sectors," he said. "We have 650 million people in Africa without basic sanitation services."

On energy, Karingi warned that Africa was on the back foot. "There is actually a regression in some of the targets."

Global electricity access increased from 87% in 2015 when the SDGs started to 92% in 2023.

Africa risks falling behind as 2030 SDG deadline approaches

Africa saw only modest progress over the same period, with access increasing from 46% to 53%.

"Our rural areas continue to be heavily underserved and there are huge investment gaps that need to be bridged in the next five years if we are going to make progress in this SDG or reverse the regression that we see," he noted.

The value of value-added manufacturing, which is where most of the secure jobs are created, remains very low. In North Africa, it's at 14.2% as a

share of GDP but in East Africa it's about 8.8%.

Highlighting the potential of SMEs, which generate over 30% of the continent's GDP, Karingi argued that their growth was being hampered by limited access to finance.

Another key challenge for Africa, he stressed, is unplanned urbanisation.

"We are urbanising very rapidly as a continent but planning and service delivery is not keeping pace. Nearly half of urban residents live in informal settlements and slum prevalence in Africa is very high compared with the rest of the world."

He called for innovative approaches to closing the financing gap, including enhancing domestic resource mobilisation capacity and tapping into remittances, which have outpaced official development aid.

Heightened uncertainty

Karingi cautioned that Africa's development remains constrained by external risks including financing gaps, weak institutions, climate shocks, and persistent inequalities.

"At the moment we are also facing rising risks from the conflict in the Middle East. If it is prolonged it will make it even more difficult to address the challenges that slowed the achievement of the SDGs."

He said Africa needs to transition from being reactive to driving transformation of the continent.



Winning back the youth

Bening Ahmed Wiisichong, Secretary-General, Pan African Youth Union, noted that political leaders needed to rebuild trust with the youth, who he says feel unseen and unheard due to the pervasive mistrust of the political class.

Speaking at High Level Panel 1 in Addis Ababa, he said moving from promises to delivery will help remedy this deficit of trust.

"Young people mistrust leaders because they are unable to translate ambitious policies into practical solutions on the ground. That is the challenge that we have."

Wiisichong also highlighted the opportunity presented by the African Continental Free Trade.

However, he noted that barriers to free movement of goods, capital and people pose significant obstacles to its successful implementation.

"If we want to trade to work, we should be able to move. We need to be able to open up our borders."



With less than five years left before the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), African Union Commission Deputy Chairperson Selma Malika Haddadi has issued an urgent call for coordinated, transformative action to accelerate delivery under both the global agenda and AU's own Agenda 2063 second 10-year implementation plan.

Delivering the keynote address for a high-level panel at the 12th session of the ARFSD, Haddadi stressed that Africa's leaders have "a clear responsibility to ensure that our commitments translate into tangible results for our people".

Haddadi acknowledged that Africa has made measurable progress across key SDGs but stressed that the scale of implementation remains insufficient.

She pointed to the five goals under review at the event – water & sanitation, energy, infrastructure & industrialisation, sustainable cities, and partnerships – as examples of areas where gains have been made but not at the pace and scale needed to reshape development outcomes.

Service delivery

"Access to water and sanitation has improved, yet millions still lack safely managed services," she noted. "Energy access is expanding, but Africa remains

Africa must scale up coordination and financing to meet goals



home to the largest energy deficit globally. Infrastructure and industrial development are advancing, but not at the scale required to transform our economies."

"Urbanisation is accelerating, often without the planning and investment required to ensure resilience and inclusion. And while partnerships have expanded, the means of implementation, particularly financing, technology and industrial capacity, remain

AFRICA DOES NOT LACK FRAMEWORKS. EXECUTION MUST BE STRENGTHENED

constrained."

These challenges, Haddadi warned, are compounded by a turbulent global environment. "This is precisely the tide we are being called upon to turn," she noted.

She also highlighted Africa's internal challenges, citing fragmentation, uneven implementation, and a persistent gap between commitment and execution. "Not only do we face external pressures, but we also face internal realities that continue to limit delivery," Haddadi cautioned. "This is why this is a moment for scaling up transformative and coordinated actions."

Accelerate progress

Haddadi outlined several strategic imperatives to accelerate progress towards both



the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

First, Africa must strengthen implementation and delivery systems. "Africa does not lack frameworks," she pointed out. "What must now be strengthened is execution – aligning national development plans with Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, and strengthening monitoring, evaluation and accountability to ensure that we track progress and drive results."

Secondly, leaders across the continent must shun siloed approaches and advance coordinated and integrated approaches that transcend borders and sectors. "Fragmentation remains one of the greatest barriers to progress," Haddadi stressed.

Unlocking sustainable financing at scale is also vital.

Delegates@Work



Leaders highlight strategies to fast-track Africa's development



At High Level Panel 1 at the 12th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-12) in Addis Ababa, senior policymakers and UN officials delved into strategies to accelerate the realisation of selected sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Across the discussions, one key message dominated: Africa's transformation will depend not on more projects or promises, but on coordinated action, integrated

systems, and partnerships that bring in private investment and expertise to complement public sector efforts.

Agriculture as strategy

Abebe Haile-Gabriel, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Africa at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), argued that African agriculture has long been treated as a social sector rather than an engine of growth.

"For far too long we have treated African agriculture and agrifood

systems as social sectors, rather than the engines of economic growth and transformation that they are. That was a strategic mistake," he said.

The continent, he said, must move beyond primary production to agrifood industrialisation, investing in processing, storage, logistics, and distribution.

Value addition, he stressed, is key to ending import dependence and the economic fragility it inevitably creates. "When Africa exports raw commodities and imports

processed foods to the tune of \$65 billion a year, we are not just losing value; we are exporting jobs and importing poverty."

Bankable platforms

Gabon's Minister of Agriculture, Pacôme Kossy, said his country's "whole-of-government" approach to food systems was informed by the realisation that isolated projects cannot deliver transformation.

"We need to shift from a project-by-project approach to investable and bankable platforms. Public resources will never be enough for us to make progress on the 2030 Agenda and 2063 Agenda," he said.

He noted that making room for the private sector to grow and succeed was key to addressing chronic joblessness.

"We recognise that jobs are created by the private sector, not the public sector. We must therefore bring in private investments to generate jobs for young Gabonese."

Matthias Naab, Director, Regional Service Centre for Africa, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), reiterated the need for integrated approaches and systems thinking.

"What we consistently see is that challenges are interconnected yet our responses are fragmented," he stated.

Amos Lugoloobi, Minister of State for Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Planning), Uganda, echoed the need for private sector involvement in financing and driving

transformation.

Political renewal

To accelerate Africa's transformation, states need to become more agile, argued Brian Kongoro, Managing Director Programmes, Open Society Foundation. This demands political renewal.

"You need a particular kind of state to do the work we are talking about – and that kind of state is

an entrepreneurial state that can pivot midstream if a particular course that has been adopted is not working."

He stressed that states must strengthen democratic governance to ensure development gains are not monopolised by a connected few. Private sector actors, too, must exhibit some degree of patriotism if they are to act as trusted partners in Africa's transformation.



in cities. In 2050 we are going to have 70% of the population living in cities.

"An estimated 2 billion people are set to come to cities, of which 600 million to 900 million are coming to African cities," she said.

She noted that urbanisation was an enabler of other SDGs, beyond SDG 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), including industrialisation.

"We need to recognise the linkages between urbanization and industrialisation, creation of jobs, and access to basic services like water. We need to look at the urbanisation process carefully to enable the other SDGs."

She urged governments to leverage public and private land more effectively to attract investors and ensure urban projects are socially, environmentally, and climate-sustainable.

Managing rapid urbanisation

Africa's cities are expanding faster than planning and investment can keep up with, warns Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

"Right now half of the population in the world lives

Africa's path to sustainable development remains constrained by structural barriers, rising debt burdens and high costs of capital, says Gedion Timothewos, Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and president-designate of the 32nd session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Timothewos was speaking at High Level Panel 2 on financing climate action in Africa on the first day of the 12th African Regional Forum for Sustainable Development.

Despite a system that penalises African countries through outdated and biased credit rating methodologies, reinforcing a cycle of constrained fiscal space and underinvestment, Timothewos said Africa remains resilient.

It has the potential to accelerate the progress of the SDGs if matched with decisive leadership, stronger institutions and effective partnerships.

Noting the scale of the financing gap for achieving the SDGs, Timothewos called for renewed efforts to reform the global financial architecture.

"The current international financial architecture is no longer fit for purpose. It does not adequately respond to climate-driven shocks or the growing debt vulnerabilities of the global south," he said.

COP32 presidency

The recently adopted



Advocacy can turn the tide for Africa's climate ambitions

Compromiso de Sevilla offers a rare once-in-a-decade opportunity to reform the global financial system and mobilise development finance at the scale and urgency required, he said.

With Ethiopia set to take up the

COP32 presidency, Timothewos pledged that it would pursue the integration of climate action into action plans for poverty eradication, livelihoods, energy access, and ecosystem resilience.

Antwi-Boasiako Amoah, who chairs the Africa Group of Negotiators on Climate Change, said Africa must make a clear demand for the implementation of pledges, rather than settle for more pledges.

"The outcomes of the FD4 and COP30 must translate into predictable, accessible, ground-based, and concessional finance that supports adaptation, resilience, loss and damage, and green industrialisation across Africa," he stressed.

Amoah said Africa must be guided by three priorities, namely structured annual monitoring of climate finance delivery; urgent reform of the global financial architecture; and scaling investment in resilience sectors such as climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, water systems, and green industrialisation.

Aggregating funding

The Director of Engagement and Capacity Building and Head of Africa at Convergence, Aakif Merchant, stressed the need for coordinated action to make sure that finance is effectively and efficiently deployed on the continent.

An initiative of the Canadian government, Merchant said the organisation's proposition is to aggregate funding for Africa's climate actions.

Africa's challenge, Merchant argued, is not the absence of capital, but the absence of coherent, scalable structuring and partnership.



IMF instrument RSF remains underused by African countries

A key concessional financing instrument designed to help countries tackle climate risks is already in place, but it remains significantly underused across Africa.

The IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF), introduced in 2022, offers long-term, affordable financing for climate and resilience investments. Yet, fewer than 20% of eligible countries have benefited, says IMF Executive Director Regis N'Sonde.

Describing the RSF as "a genuinely good instrument," N'Sonde pointed to its favourable terms, including a 20-year maturity and a 10.5-year grace period.

However, he identified structural barriers to access, notably the requirement for countries to have a full IMF-supported programme in place. "For countries with strong economic fundamentals, there is a need to lift this requirement,"

he proposed.

With donor budgets under strain, N'Sonde also cautioned that "contributions will not be forthcoming" at the levels required to sustain and expand the facility.

More innovative financing approaches are thus required, he said, including reallocating income from the IMF's core lending operations. "We need to think outside the box," he said, suggesting such measures could provide "a stable, predictable way" to finance the RSF over the long term.

N'Sonde also called for reforms to how climate investments are treated in debt sustainability assessments. "We need to recognise the difference between debt used to finance climate resilience and debt used to cover budget shortfalls," he stressed. He described climate-related borrowing as critical, arguing it delivers long-term economic returns while reducing future fiscal risks.

Despite progress in many countries, poverty remains widespread in Africa, uneven and deeply rooted. It is also multidimensional with deprivations in health, education and housing as well as access to basic services.

Hanan Morsy, Deputy Executive Secretary (Programme) and Chief Economist, ECA, said the reality is that more than two-thirds of the world's extreme poverty is in Africa.

She delivered the keynote address at AFRSD-12 on a panel that focused on taking forward the outcomes of the Second World Summit for Social Development.

The WSSD took place in November 2025 in Doha, resulting in a renewed global commitment to social justice, poverty eradication, and decent work.

Morsy said the WSSD reaffirmed three important and reinforcing pillars, which are fully aligned with the work of the ECA – poverty reduction, social protection and employment.

"We need to really shift from the way we have been tackling poverty to a more multidimensional and integrated approach. We need to better align measurable outcomes to this fight against poverty."

She said the WSSD underscores the importance of youth employment and education and the need to invest in digital skills, STEM and vocational training. "Demographic and digital transitions are really critical given the youth bulge we have and the need for economic transformation."

Social protection is critical.

"Only one in five Africans have access to at least one form of social protection. This leaves the majority African population exposed to economic and health shocks as well as climate related risks."

Justine Kasule Lumumba, Minister for General Duties in the Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, said the country has

come up with key commitments to accelerate sustainable development and ensure social inclusion.

Robert Agyarko, Senior Adviser, Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, AU Commission, said, "Doha presents us with an opportunity, but it also gives us a point of reflection because

We must work harder to eradicate poverty – Morsy

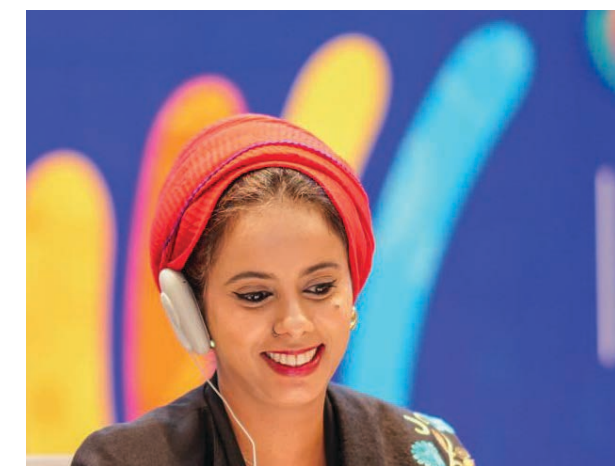


despite the progress made, poverty reduction has slowed and a lot of our indices look like we are not doing very well.

"We cannot work alone. We know the problem and we have plans and strategies and mandates to deliver. But this must be done in concert with other partners."

Ouloufa Ismail Abdo, Minister for Social Affairs and Solidarity, Djibouti, said, "In Djibouti we made a clear choice, we decided not to wait for the fruits of growth to reach the more disadvantaged population. We wanted to be proactive and create effective inclusion. This is a priority in line with our national commitments."

Doris Mpoumou, Special Representative of the UN Entity



for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women to the African Union and ECA, said, "The Doha summit affirmed a fundamental truth. No society can prosper if half its population is left behind."

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