



# 12<sup>th</sup> ARFSD

Twelfth Session of the Africa Regional  
Forum on Sustainable Development



LEAD STORY

## Call for urgent action to accelerate SDGs



Launch of SDGs  
report



Cities are key  
players in Africa



Africa needs local  
innovation



Delegates @ Work



Thoughts from  
outgoing Bureau



SDG17



SDG6



# ARFSD closes with call for urgent action to accelerate SDGs

**THE MESSAGE FROM THE FORUM IS CLEAR – AFRICA'S TRAJECTORY WILL BE DETERMINED NOT BY THE CONSTRAINTS ALONE BUT BY HOW DECISIVELY WE ACT**

African stakeholders, including ministers, senior government officials, experts and civil society have adopted the Addis Ababa Declaration on Turning the Tide, calling for urgent, coordinated and transformative action to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063.

The Forum was organised by the ECA, in collaboration with the AU Commission, the African Development Bank and United Nations system entities and

attended by more than 1,500 participants from 48 countries.

Participants noted with deep concern that Africa remains far off track in achieving the SDGs, with progress slow on 12 Goals and regressing on five. The Declaration highlights major gaps, including limited access to safe drinking water and sanitation, energy poverty affecting about 600 million Africans, weak industrialisation, rapid urbanisation, rising debt burdens and an annual SDG financing gap estimated at

between \$670bn and \$848bn.

Through the Declaration, African countries urged scaled-up action in five SDG areas under review in 2026.

## **Unity of purpose**

In the closing session, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed told delegates by video, "Over these past days you have spoken with unity of purpose. You have made one aspect clear – Africa does not lack solutions but the means to deliver them at the speed and

scale this moment demands.

"These three days have led to a clear call for integrated action, drawing on the full potential of renewable energy, green industrialisation, digital innovation and regional value chains.

"Running through every conversation has been the question of financing. African countries are hemmed in by tightening fiscal space precisely when investment in resilience and transformation is needed most.

"This is where the partnership

between the ECA, the African Development Bank, the African Union Commission and the wider UN system becomes so important – translating the forum's priorities into practical pathways for investment implementation and results," she said.

## **Dialogue to action**

Deputy Executive Secretary (Programme) and Chief Economist, ECA, Hanan Morsy, said progress on the SDGs is visible but uneven and, in some areas, reversing.

"While coordination and effectiveness must strengthen to deliver impact, the conclusion is that straightforward incremental progress will not deliver the goals.

"The message from the forum is clear – Africa's trajectory will be determined not by the constraints alone but by how decisively we act.

"Let's move from dialogue to action, from commitments to results and from fragmentation to scale."

# Implementing the agendas requires sensitisation backed by political will and resources

There was robust discussion about issues affecting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 following the launch of the 2026 edition of the Africa Sustainable Report at AFRSD-12.

Stephen Karingji, Director of the Macroeconomic Policy, Finance and Governance Division at the ECA, outlined in the report the progress that Africa has made, what challenges it still faces and offered examples of what countries are doing to implement the two agendas.

Karingji, in an earlier presentation on the report, cautioned that Africa's development remains constrained by external risks including financing gaps, weak institutions, climate shocks, and persistent inequalities.

Opening the session, ECA Executive Secretary Claver Gatete said it was important to note that all countries, including African



countries, had signed up to the agendas under review and had to find ways to implement them.

"There is no problem of vision or strategy. The issue is political will to ensure that what we sign up to can be implemented. Sensitisation is an issue, not just for the government but for the whole country," he said.

## Finding resources

All stakeholders need to understand what the agendas are, what they aim to do and have a role in their implementation.

"This requires coordination across all levels. There has to be

capacity for a multidimensional approach, there has to be technology to support this and, most critically, there have to be resources to be able to do that."

In this regard, Africa's tax-to-GDP ratio at 15%, is the lowest in the world. "What can we do to raise those resources?"

Regional Principal Officer, Climate Change and Green Growth Program, Africa Development Bank, Olufunso Somorin, said there are often assumptions that inadequate capital is driving Africa's financing gaps. "That's not the reality."



The capital exists in global markets. The challenge is distribution. "While there is limited capital in one part of the world there's an abundance of capital in another. That is the entry point for innovation and that starts with looking at our own domestic resources."

Executive Director, UN-Habitat,



Anacláudia Rossbach, focused on the integration of informal areas into the cities and their planning. She said that half of Africa's people living in urban areas live in informal settlements, so this is a key area on which to focus the question of resources.

## Country examples of SDG-related initiatives



In his presentation of the report, Stephen Karingji listed examples of initiatives being undertaken by various African countries towards advancing the goals of the SDGs in the five sectors under review.

In terms of water and sanitation for all, he referenced the example of Morocco's national programme to address structural water scarcity. It

includes the construction of more than 140 large dams, seawater desalination and the reuse of wastewater, drip irrigation and leak reduction awareness as well as the development of River Basin Agencies and Water User Associations.

Benin is rehabilitating village water supply systems and improving reliability and year-round functionality of irrigation, pumps and generators.

In terms of ensuring access to affordable and reliable energy, he cited examples of countries that have launched National Clean Cooking Communication Strategies.

Tanzania has a target of getting 80% of its people to adopt clean cooking by 2034.

South Africa elevated clean cooking as a standing G20 agenda item and launched the G20 Clean Cooking Legacy Programme and Voluntary Infrastructure Investment Action Plan.

Malawi is pioneering clean cooking in 13 schools, With current adoption of just 24% there

is a need for resilient locally supported systems.

On SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), Cameroon is improving the enabling environment and diversification of industry while Ghana has launched a One District, One Factory Programme to decentralise and boost manufacturing and rural job creation.

On SDG 11, he spoke about the African Cities for Clean Air Initiative established by C40 Cities in 2022 to empower cities to improve urban air quality management. Participating cities are Addis Ababa, Dakar, Durban & Johannesburg, and Lagos.

On Partnerships, he said Zambia had enacted ambitious fiscal reforms to reduce aid dependency while Burkina Faso has introduced tax digitalisation and anti-corruption measures. Botswana has ratified the AfCFTA and strengthened trade and investment.

Local authorities need to become stronger partners in national and global development, panellists stressed at the high-level roundtable at AFRSD-12 on evidence-based reviews to drive transformation and coordinated actions for the agendas.

Discussions centred on the role of Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) and Voluntary Local Reviews



# Cities at the heart of transformation: Aligning local and national development

(VLRs) in driving sustainable development. VNRs and VLRs are complementary tools used to track progress on the SDGs.

While VNRs capture national-level achievements and challenges, VLRs reflect how cities and municipalities are implementing the same goals on the ground.

“Voluntary national reviews have proven to be a very important tool for strengthening vertical coordination between

national and sub-national levels of government, while also improving evidence based planning,” said Mas’ud Musah Ayarba Thomas, Municipal Chief Executive of the Atebubu-Amantin Municipal Assembly in Ghana.

“However, the achievement of the SDGs depends not only on national commitment, but on how effectively we implement them at a local level. This is where VLRs become important.”

## Cities at the frontline

Wondimu Seta, City Manager of Addis Ababa, noted that cities are at the frontline of sustainable development and called for local governments to be fully empowered to deliver on their mandates.

“Cities are where inequality is felt, where climate shocks are experienced, jobs created, where infrastructure gaps most constrain economic potential, and where solutions succeed or fail.”

Seta highlighted Addis Ababa’s approach, which treats urban transformation as part of an integrated development agenda, avoiding fragmented interventions. “What gets measured in siloes is often implemented in siloes. But sustainable transformation demands integration.”

“Localisation of the SDGs requires empowered cities. Local governments cannot merely be implementers of national aspirations. They must increasingly be partners in shaping, measuring and accelerating them.”

Sara Hamouda, coordinator of the Agenda 2063 and SDG Programme at the African Peer Review Mechanism, said African cities are increasingly financing their own transformation.

“Cities are moving from passive implementers to active financiers and decision makers in Africa’s development landscape.”

## Earning trust at the grassroots

When Eswatini compiled its national review in 2025, it broke new ground by integrating insights from the local level with seven of 15 gazetted municipalities participating in local reviews for the first time, the country’s Housing and Urban Development Minister, Appolo Maphalala, told the roundtable.

Maphalala noted that the localisation process has deepened understanding of the SDGs among officials in the Kingdom’s municipalities. “It really did add a lot of value.”



He acknowledged initial engagements between the central government and local authorities were cautious. “There is often some element of mistrust between central and local governments. But with engagements, that has changed.”

Dirk Kotzé, Mayor of Mossel Bay in South Africa, highlighted the importance of municipalities building trust not only with national governments, but also with their constituents. “Trust is earned and it can be measured through elections.”



## VNRs are powerful tools

VNRs should be more than just descriptive reports. They are decision-making tools that can drive results, argued Pacome Kossy, Gabon’s Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Rural Development.

“It is important that the VNR moves from being a narrative document and becomes a real tool that will support our national development.”

He called for increased funding for national statistics offices, warning that gaps in data collection and analysis undermine evidence-based policymaking.

“Strengthening our national statistics systems and related programmes is critical. Without those we cannot objectively assess our performance and we will not be able to make any projections.”

“How can we build a country without reliable statistics?” Kossy asked.

Coumba Dieng Sow, the UN Resident Coordinator in Togo, reiterated the need to rethink how VNRs are viewed and used. She stressed that they should be treated as development tools rather than simple reporting tools.

“VNRs are not just descriptive. In Togo they are used like analytic and operational instruments that directly inform public policies, resource allocation, and implementation modalities.”

“With the development of its fifth VNR in 2026, Togo is one of two countries in the world alongside Uruguay to have developed the most number of VNRs. This has been intentional. Every VNR cycle responded to a specific governance need.”

# Women, youth and the private sector key to Africa's SDG success

Africa will only be able to meet the SDGs with the active participation of women, young people, volunteers, and the private sector, said speakers at the high-level roundtable discussion at ARFSD-12 focusing on leveraging the roles of the UN system, young people, private sector, civil society and volunteers.

Opening the discussion, the African Union Commission's Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, Liberata Mulamula, was emphatic that "there is no sustainable development without peace and no durable peace without the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women".

She argued that peace and security are not a parallel policy track but are the "operating system" for development. "Peace and security are not adjacent to the SDGs, they are the precondition upon which their success depends."

Mulamula thus called for predictable financing, institutional reform, and deliberate inclusion



of women at all levels of decision making.

Reflecting on the need for partnerships among stakeholders, Lucy Ndungu, Regional Manager for East and Southern Africa at the UN Volunteers programme, singled out bureaucracy and inertia as the main barriers to progress, along with misaligned interests, organisational culture, top-down decision-making and rigidity of systems that limit collaboration.

For Africa to accelerate progress on the SDGs and

Agenda 2063, she said, more flexible, partnership-driven approaches are needed.

Ndungu said volunteerism is an underutilised development asset, noting that where it is embedded in national priorities, outcomes improve significantly.

She cited Rwanda's Umuganda as an example where volunteerism is integrated into development planning, as well as Zambia and Senegal, where volunteer networks have strengthened last-mile service delivery to communities.



Ruth Wewura Guribie, founder of Sava Shea Company, a Ghanaian based startup, called for institutional support for youth-led businesses to play a greater role in the continent's economy.

"The challenges we face as the private sector is not a lack of capacity, of hardworking people, or of potential. We have the people here. We have the solutions here. What we lack are systems that would enable these potentials to thrive. And that is exactly where Agenda 2063 must deliver differently," she stressed.



## Priorities to drive Africa's agendas

Africa will need to achieve critical breakthroughs in financial reform, stronger continental agency, and most importantly youth empowerment, if it is to meet the ambitions of Agenda 2063 and the fast-approaching 2030 deadline, according to Yacoub El Hillo, Regional Director for Africa, UN Development Coordination Office.

Speaking ahead of the roundtable panel discussion on the role of young people, the private sector and volunteers, El Hillo talked about breakthroughs needed to move forward.

El Hillo said the first is financial momentum. "We must move from managing financing gaps to generating financial momentum."

He called on global partners to stop viewing Africa primarily through the lens of risk and instead recognise it as "the world's most significant return on investment".

The second breakthrough is Africa claiming its agency in the global arena, given that the continent will account for more than a quarter of the global population by 2050. "Africa is no longer joining the conversation; it is the conversation," he said.

His third priority is Africa's youth. "Our greatest strategic asset is our people. And this is the most powerful breakthrough that will determine whether the visions of 2030 and 2063 become reality," he argued.

The continent's leaders must integrate young people fully into its plans, not as beneficiaries, but as executors.

# Delegates @ Work







# African leaders push for homegrown innovation

**A**t a high-level roundtable on science, technology and innovation, Nouredine Ouadah, Algeria's Minister of Knowledge, Economy, Startups and Microenterprises, argued that Africa must invest more of its own resources in its startup ecosystems.

Overreliance on external capital perpetuates a cycle of dependence, forcing Africa to innovate on someone else's terms. "We need more African funding to strengthen local ecosystems that can support innovation," he said.

He pointed to Algeria's efforts to mobilise domestic resources for

innovation. "In 2025 we introduced an 'innovate or pay' tax.

"Today in Algeria all the big companies have the choice of spending 1% of the benefits of funding research and development, startups, or incubators or they will pay this tax to the government."

## Value addition

Monica Musenero Masanza, Uganda's Minister of Science, Technology, and Innovation in the Office of the President, shared her country's experience of repositioning STI as an enabler of economic transformation rather than a stand-alone sector.

"We have had to shift how we look at science, technology, and innovation, taking care not to view it as just another sector, but as a way of approaching the management of the economy.

"When you look at it this way, then it stops being just about projects. This is the mistake we made in the past," she said.

She urged African countries to leverage STI to generate higher-value products and services for both domestic and export markets.

Sarjoh Aziz-Kamara, Deputy Minister of Technical and Higher Education in Sierra Leone, outlined the country's ambitious vision.

"Sierra Leone's strategy in science, technology and innovation is anchored on five pillars: digital public infrastructure as the foundation; ensuring affordable high-speed internet connectivity; embedding AI and data literacy across the board; promoting research excellence through shared digital infrastructure and open science practices; and building the governance architecture," he said.

## Inclusive transformation

Adolphe Nicaise Samafou, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Post and Digital Economy in the Central African Republic, said the government is using digital transformation to drive inclusion.

"We have deployed fibre-optic networks and established digital

community centres that train young people to build their digital skills, enhance productivity in livestock and agriculture, and empower women and marginalised groups."

Jide Okeke, Director of the Regional Programme for Africa at UNDP, urged policymakers to break down silos and adopt a more integrated approach to development.

"We must stop designing solutions in silos. We cannot solve industrialisation without digitalisation, entrepreneurship, or education. Africa's transformation demands systems thinking and a more integrated approach."

Coumba Dieng Sow, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Togo, said the country had considering innovation as a succession of pilot projects and integrated it into national planning systems, financing and public service provision.

## WE MUST STOP DESIGNING SOLUTIONS IN SILOS



# Seizing Africa's digital opportunity

**At a roundtable on harnessing science, innovation and frontier technologies to accelerate Africa's transformation, Mactar Sack, Chief of Emerging and Frontier Technologies at ECA, urged African governments to treat artificial intelligence and digital public infrastructure as public assets.**

**"We need to harness AI and digital public infrastructure as a public asset. Digital sovereignty is very important. Only 1% of Africa's data is hosted in the infrastructure," he said.**

**Sack called for AI governance frameworks rooted in African realities.**

**"AI governance in Africa should be built around global standards but must be fundamentally African-centric and context-sensitive," he said.**

**"We Africans have our own culture. We need this technology to reflect our culture."**

**Sack laid out a series of recommendations to accelerate progress on SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.**

**He urged governments to invest in resilient, sustainable, and integrated systems, particularly in energy, transport, and digital infrastructure, to speed up industrialisation and nurture local technology ecosystems.**

**Sack emphasised the need to strengthen national and regional research and data networks by linking universities, industry, and policymakers. This would help to develop home-grown solutions in areas such as water management, renewable energy, manufacturing, and sustainable cities.**

# Let's scale success to make Africa work



With the target date for the attainment of the SDGs merely four years away, Africa needs to shift its approach from diagnosis to robust implementation of what is already working for the continent, according to the African Development Bank's Director of Regional Integration, Joy Kategekwa.

Kategekwa, who joined the high-level roundtable panel 4 to discuss the continent's post-2030 agenda via video link, said while the continent continues to struggle with the SDGs, there are some positive indicators coming out of the process.

"Beyond that progress report, there is a good story coming out of Africa. This is the story of an Africa starting to manufacture; an Africa with a free trade area [and] value-added content now at 60%."

The priority, she said, must be to coordinate what works.

Kategekwa suggested that the post-2030 agenda must be shaped by priorities including a unified African position, accelerating implementation through scaled financing and the strengthening of data and tracking systems to measure progress effectively.

"This is not the time to ask what Africa's interest is; we know it. We have it very clearly in Agenda 2063," she stressed. "If the SDGs were a 15-year sprint, Agenda 2063 is a 50-year marathon. We have done 12 of those years so at least we know where we want to go."

Kategekwa said the AfDB remains committed to supporting the continent's transformation.

## Integrated approach

"We will be looking at investing in an integrated approach that has industrialisation at its core. The Lobito Corridor, for example, is not just about the



rail, but about economic zones, manufacturing and logistics hubs, power interconnectors and trade finance for SMEs."

Another initiative, the New African Financial Architecture for Development, will address the \$400bn financing gap by leveraging domestic assets and savings, estimated to be in excess of \$4 trillion. "Africa is not capital poor, it is mobilisation weak."

A former deputy minister of finance in Namibia, Maureen Hinda, suggested that Africa

should seek a structural reset that goes beyond incremental progress.

"We are at the tipping point," she said, stressing that future frameworks must be grounded in the continent's "harsh quantitative realities".

Hinda said African countries must boost domestic resource mobilisation by, in particular, stemming the flow of financial leakages, with illicit financial flows amounting to between \$50bn and \$80bn annually.



Addressing this will require stronger global coordination.

Brian Kagoro, Director of the programme support division at the Open Society Foundations' Africa regional office, argued that Africa's post-2030 trajectory depends on rethinking the role of the state, markets, and social policy integration.

"Governance [must move] beyond the ticking of boxes to real wealth redistribution that benefits Africans."

## Pact for the Future offers hope for new global engagement

The adoption of the Pact for the Future in 2024 presents a critical opportunity to reset global cooperation but its success will hinge on whether commitments can be translated into tangible results on the ground, according to UN Under-Secretary-General, Guy Ryder.

Addressing the high-level panel via video, Ryder described the pact as a renewed framework for multilateral action, structured sustainable development and financing, peace and security, science and digital cooperation, youth and future generations, and global governance.

He said the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations reflect a growing recognition that "today's challenges are interconnected and our responses must be equally coherent and ambitious". The priority now, he stressed, is delivery.

Delivering on the pact, Ryder said, will require



transformational change in how the global system operates, particularly in financing and coordination.

"That means advancing reforms of the international financial architecture, unlocking scaled up and affordable financing and strengthening support for countries facing systemic vulnerabilities."

In addition to this, Ryder said the UN is undertaking reforms to improve delivery by simplifying how it works and reducing fragmentation across the system.

Ryder was hopeful that Africa's youth, already shaping its future, can guarantee its success. "They're not just asking for a future, they're building it," he said.

"Our responsibility is to match their ambition with opportunities in quality education, decent work opportunities, social protection and a meaningful seat at the table."



**AS WE MEET TODAY, WE HAVE LESS THAN FIVE YEARS REMAINING TO REACH 2030. PROGRESS TOWARDS ATTAINING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN AFRICA REMAINS TOO SLOW, TOO UNEVEN, AND IN SOME CASES, IS REVERSING**

## Outgoing Bureau shares its thoughts on focus areas

**E**CA Executive Secretary Claver Gatete reminded delegates of the reality of Africa’s situation in his opening remarks at a special event for the outgoing Bureau of the 11th session of the ARFSD on the theme “From commitment and planning to delivery, results and impact”.

However, he highlighted the fact that Africa has a strategic data plan, as outlined

in the Agenda 2030, national development plans and regional frameworks, to help the continent drive positive change.

He praised Uganda for its proactive role as the Chair of the Bureau since the 11th session was hosted in that country, saying the country had demonstrated that regional outcomes can and must be aligned with national programmes and delivery mechanisms.

“This is the kind of follow through that converts commitments into measurable progress and builds public trust.”

Minister for General Duties, Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, Justine Kasule Lumumba, said in Uganda, over 98% of SDG targets are aligned with the national development plan ensuring that global commitments are embedded in a national planning framework.

She it had been a privilege for Uganda to chair the Bureau over the past year and serve the continent at this critical moment when urgent delivery on sustainability was needed.

### Development priorities

The newly elected Bureau Chair for the 12th session of the ARFSD, Junior Minister, Ministry of Agro-Industry, Food Security, Blue Economy and Fisheries, Mauritius, Gilles Fabrice David, kicked off the session saying that since 2015, Mauritius had been strongly committed to achieving the SDGs. “These are fully integrated into our national development priorities.”

However, despite notable progress, the country still faces challenges, particularly with SDG 13 on climate action and 17 on partnerships and financing, partly due to limited access to concessional finance because of ineligibility based on income levels.

Public debt pressures and high debt servicing costs in Mauritius

have also lowered the capacity of government to invest in key sectors.

National Assembly of Cameroon MP Oliver Bamenju Agho talked about how his country is tackling its serious security issues.

For example, he said, “Given persistent threat of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, the Central African sub-region came together to put in place a unified technology-driven approach to maritime security and the protection of the blue economy.”

Development Adviser, Office of the Vice-President of The Gambia, Sering Falu Njie, said his country has made progress with establishing warning systems for human security. “We want to ensure we have real-time data and policies to enhance timely interventions.”

UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Uganda, Leonard Zulu, talked about the impact budget cuts are having on UN programmes, saying new plans are in place to seek alternative financing for development. This includes mobilising patient capital, in particular, pension funds.

The president of the Emergence Institute, Moubarak Lo, focused on building institutions to drive policy execution. “My advice for the next round of the SDGs after 2030 would be to put execution at the centre because if you do not solve the institutional issues, nothing will happen.”



### Climate Talks

Delegates at the 7th Africa Climate Talks on the margins of ARFSD-12, which focused on positioning COP32 for success in three priority areas: strengthening Africa’s negotiating capacity; building broader coalitions around implementable outcomes; and advancing measures outside the formal convention process to support the goals of COP32.



# Speak with one voice and boost homegrown development, experts urge



Africa must speak with a combined voice in interactions with development partners if it is to get the most out of its relationships, argues Lisa Sachs, Director of the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment.

Speaking at a session on SDG 17 at ARFSD-12, Sachs said that “fragmentation” was thwarting Africa’s development plans.

“One thing that Africa can really do is work with a more unified voice: fragmentation and not working together collectively to say what needs to be done is a main constraint.

“Africa should really embrace regional cooperation on the many areas of common interest. Regional integration and cooperation are critical for so

many reasons, critical because most of the areas of investment of the future are regional in nature, including energy and industrial chains. You have more in common on challenges than differences.”

Sachs also said African countries should be supported by development partners to engage in “long-term scenario planning”.

“Right now development programmes are so fragmented and siloed – led by sectoral or industrial strategies. That’s not what makes capital flow and achievement of integrated sustainable development plans. We should have properly designed plans as preparations for all other activities.”

That concern was echoed by Amara Kallon, minister of public administration and political affairs for Sierra Leone,



who said that plans were often too fragmented even within countries.

“We must fully integrate planning and budgeting systems – in many of our African countries, national development plans sit aside from budget and expenditure frameworks – this slows implementation.”

“There is a pressing need to reform public service institutions – we have many with duplicated functions. If we want to see



## IF WE WANT TO SEE REAL OUTCOMES, WE MUST BUILD INSTITUTIONS WHICH ARE AGILE, DATA DRIVEN AND RESPONSIVE

real outcomes, we must build institutions which are agile, data driven and responsive.”

Domestic reform to better align national development plans, budgets and frameworks would help to provide certainty to partners, he said.

Shuhei Ueno, Deputy Director General of the Africa Department at the Japan International Cooperation Agency, said Africa’s partners were looking to the continent to advance its own

development, with JAICA and others helping to scale up and adapt global strategies to local contexts.

“We work with many African governments, we often say ownership, but in other words we’d like to see development coming from the country itself. And it requires people, infrastructure, and a certain capacity as a country. We should all aim for this homegrown development.”



# Water must be treated as an economic issue rather than social sector



At the Twelfth Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-12), world leaders, commissioners, and ministers gathered to address one of the continent's most pressing and important challenges of SDG 6 - ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

The discussions made clear that while progress has been

made, Africa still faces significant access issues. In Africa, more than 400 million people lack access to drinking water while 650 million people are without basic access to sanitation.

Moses Vilakati, Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment at the African Union Commission, set the tone by acknowledging both gains and gaps.

He noted that "Africa has expanded access to improve drinking water services,

particularly in urban areas. However, challenges still persist in safely managing water supply, especially in rural areas and informal settlements."

His remarks underscored a disparity in African development, headline progress that masks deep inequalities between urban and rural populations.

Vilakati stressed the importance of political leadership. "When heads of state in government take ownership of the water agenda, it moves beyond a sectoral concern to



become a national development priority, central to health, food security, energy, climate resilience, and economic growth and peace."

This framing positions water as a foundation for broader national development, not a standalone environmental issue. But political will is required. For too long it has been treated as a social sector, not an economic one.

## Undervaluing water

Claver Gatete, Executive Secretary of the ECA, warned that the core problem is not just scarcity but the chronic undervaluing of water in policy and investment decisions. He highlighted that Africa requires about \$64bn annually to achieve water security and universal sanitation, a target well short of current investment levels.

On the strategic front, Bashir Mohamed Jama, Somalia's

Minister of Environment and Climate Change, outlined three key approaches needed to future-proof water systems across the continent.

These are: strengthening policy and governance frameworks, adopting Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), and shifting from reactive disaster response to proactive, anticipatory water resource planning, particularly in the context of accelerating climate change.

Across all contributions, a common thread emerged: Africa's water crisis is solvable, but only with political will, significantly scaled investment, and governance systems that treat water as a national and continental priority.



million people still lack electricity, and over 940 million do not have access to clean cooking,” contributing to widespread health and social impacts.

Similarly, businesses are also constrained by uneven power supply. “In sub-Saharan Africa, 72.1% of businesses experience power cuts, costing average income of 8.6%.”

Meddeb stressed the data and statistics need to be adequately leveraged to make investments visible and measurable. “We cannot deliver what we cannot track.”

The challenge for African countries, Meddeb argued, is not the availability of capital but the ability of the continent’s project managers to structure projects to attract the attention and confidence of investors.

James Bot, UN Resident Coordinator in Comoros, emphasised the need to move from fragmented national efforts to continental-scale collaboration and aggregation of contributions.

“The continental power system master plan, for example, shows that if countries work together, we can create a new ecosystem,” he said, pointing to the Trans-Saharan pipeline as an example of a continental plan that is moving forward.

Bot also stressed the importance of integrated planning, noting that energy “touches virtually every aspect” of development and requires coordinated policy design.



## Coordination is key, says Seck

Africa must urgently strengthen coordination, scale investment, and prioritise innovation if it is to meet energy and development goals, according to Mactar Seck, Chief of the Emerging and Frontier Technologies, Innovation and Digital Transformation Section at the ECA.

Presenting an assessment of the continent’s efforts to meet SDG 7, Seck stressed that “coordination is the key” and called for stronger regional infrastructure planning alongside policies that “target productivity and innovation to achieve highest economic impact”.

Four years away from the target date, Africa faces steep

challenges in its efforts to meet the goals, Seck said.

“Energy is vital in Africa because it is a powerful enabler of our economic growth, poverty reduction, as well as climate resilience,” he said. Yet access, reliability and affordability remain major constraints.

About 600 million Africans still lack electricity, with four countries alone accounting for 257 million people without access. About 50% of health facilities also have no electricity.

Despite abundant renewable resources, Africa continues to underutilise its potential. “We have 60 % of the world’s solar resources, [but] we use only 1%,” he pointed out.

# Path to SDG 7 remains uneven



While Africa has made some progress towards achieving the 7th SDG of clean and affordable energy,

progress remains uneven and the continent needs to scale up investment.

Riad Meddeb, Director of the UNDP’s Sustainable Energy Hub, called for a data-led approach to address generation and distribution challenges in the continent’s energy systems.

Speaking at the report back on SDG 7 at ARFSD-12, Meddeb said there had been notable gains, with electrification rising from 51% in 2017 to 61% in 2023 and 120 million more Africans gaining access in recent years.

But, he said, “more than 560

**THE CONTINENTAL POWER SYSTEM MASTER PLAN, FOR EXAMPLE, SHOWS THAT IF COUNTRIES WORK TOGETHER, WE CAN CREATE A NEW ECOSYSTEM**



# Closing the gap: Achieving Africa's industrial ambitions



A high-level panel at ARFSD-12 delved into strategies to accelerate progress on SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. It acknowledged that progress has been slow and called for coordinated action to close the gaps.

Wenyan Yang, the UN Resident Coordinator for Botswana, underscored the UN system's role as a strategic partner for governments seeking to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda more broadly and SDG 9 in particular.

She, however, drew a clear line around national ownership, arguing that the UN's interventions are most effective when they help governments manage risk rather than take over delivery.

Nobuya Haraguchi, Chief of UNIDO's Industrial Policy Research Unit, warned that while manufacturing employment has

grown over the years, productivity has not kept pace.

"Even though employment in manufacturing has increased in recent years, the share of GDP has decreased slightly and labour productivity has declined," Haraguchi said. "This suggests that new workers have been absorbed in relatively low-productivity roles."

He called for a holistic assessment of the state of industrialisation in Africa, adapted to local contexts.

"When thinking of African industrialisation, what is important is competitiveness of industries, local value addition, and linkages with upstream and downstream industries," he said.

He also emphasised the need for policymakers to prioritise skills development, warning that Africa's growing young population needs to be shaped for opportunities in a globalised, digital-first economy.

For Ropafadzo Sandra Shoko,

Team Lead for Elevate Trust, African governments could do more to support startups and catalyse innovation. She argued that state funding in the startup ecosystem remains limited, sending the wrong signal to investors and eroding confidence in African startups.

"We need government funding to serve as patient capital and help de-risk startups. How can you expect other people to invest in your startups when you yourself are not?"

She also challenged entrepreneurs to focus on products and services that have clear linkages to the real economy to allow scale and commercial success.



## Tanzania's mining boom

Mining currently contributes around 10% of Tanzania's GDP, driven largely by gold exports. That figure is expected to rise as new projects attract global interest.

Steven Lemomo Kiruswa, Deputy Minister of Minerals, said the government is intensifying efforts to draw investment into promising sites. Despite the progress made over the years, only 16% of Tanzania's mineral-rich landscapes have been surveyed in detail.

As global demand shifts toward green minerals, Kiruswa said Tanzania is courting investment in exploration. "We currently have more than 16 exploration projects for different minerals under way."

One of the most promising developments, he said, is the discovery of helium gas. Kiruswa described it as a milestone for Tanzania's industrial future.



# Cities need high-level vision to become engines of growth



Urbanisation needs to be treated as a high-level national priority as cities increasingly become not just urban areas to be managed but engines of growth.

Speakers at a session held on the margins of ARFSD-12 to discuss issues related to SDG11 said top level political leadership is starting to bring housing, finance and other issues under a single vision.

This shift is imperative as cities across Africa grapple with rapid urbanisation and increasing urban sprawl and the

mushrooming of slums.

In her opening statement, Executive Director, UN-Habitat, Anacláudia Rossbach said almost half of the urban population in Africa live in slums or informal settlements. “The question before us is not whether African cities will grow but whether they will be engines of prosperity or monuments to missed opportunities.”

In a presentation, Atkeyelsh Persson, Chief of Section, Regional Integration and African Continental Free Trade Area, Subregional Office for Eastern Africa, ECA, said Central Africa,



where 43 million people currently live in slums, is the worst affected region.

In other statistics, she said just 29.3% of the urban population lives within walking distance of public transport versus the global average of 51.6% while basic service delivery lags demographic growth.

In Africa, 49 countries have established National Urban Policies, 31 have adopted Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies while 70% lack transparency tools or performance indicators for local governments, crippling civil society participation, she said.

## THE QUESTION BEFORE US IS NOT WHETHER AFRICAN CITIES WILL GROW BUT WHETHER THEY WILL BE ENGINES OF PROSPERITY OR MONUMENTS TO MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

### Data management

Speaker said these are not just statistics but outcomes of poor choices over time.

A key way to improve city management is to ensure proper, detailed data is captured and used for urban policy planning, speakers said.

Director of Cities for Africa, World Resources Institute, Aklilu Fikresilassie, said having the right data can help to manage current challenges, such as the size and growth of informal areas, as well as ensure better outcomes in the future.

“Most of the cities or entrepreneurial projects proposed by African cities are not data driven or grounded on robust data. If there is no data, no investor will come and invest in African cities. They will move to cities where this exists.”

Policy Director and Cities Programme Lead, Ministry of Urban Development and Infrastructure, Ethiopia, Yared Teshome Geneti, said a change in government policy to prioritise cities as engines of growth had been key to successful urban development.

“As a result, the policy became more pragmatic, adaptive and transformative.”

Director, Regional Office for Africa, UN-Habitat, Oumar Sylla, highlighted the urgent need for capacity building. “We have to get back to basics. We are going so fast, but most cities lack capacity to even execute basic tasks. We need the foundation before we seek sophisticated systems to deal with issues.”

