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**Regional preparatory workshop for African
voluntary national reviews and voluntary local
reviews**

Niamey (hybrid), 27 February 2023

Report on the regional preparatory workshop for African voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews: strengthening integration and reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

I. Background

1. As signatories to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member States are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels that are country-led and country-driven. These voluntary national reviews are to be undertaken with input from national and local stakeholders, civil society, the private sector, academia and young people and are formally presented during the high-level political forum on sustainable development. The seven African countries presenting a voluntary national review at the high-level political forum in 2023 will be presenting their second such review.
2. To support the review process, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) organizes an annual workshop during the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which coincides with the midpoint of the review process. The Forum and workshop provide a platform to share region-specific best practices, success stories and common challenges and to spur the further involvement of stakeholders in order to enrich the national reviews. ECA also supports linking the review of progress made towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals with that of the progress made towards the achievement of the goals of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union.
3. Member States of ECA have noted the particular benefits of conducting sustainable development reviews at the district, governorate and municipality levels. By engaging with multiple stakeholders on the ground, voluntary local reviews reach a grass-roots audience, which, in turn, can inform and move forward the sustainable development process. To that end, ECA, in partnership with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and United Cities and Local Governments of Africa, developed African regional voluntary local review guidelines, as requested by member States, which are being used to assist local governments in reviewing and embedding sustainable development at the local level.
4. The one-day regional preparatory workshop for voluntary national and local reviews was hosted in Niamey, with the attendance of 75 in-person participants and



100 online participants. It included an opening session, two sessions concerning voluntary national reviews, two sessions concerning voluntary local reviews and a town hall meeting for stakeholders.

II. Session summaries

A. Opening remarks

1. Presentations

5. Opening remarks were given by the Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa, Cristina Duarte; the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECA, Hanan Morsy; the Director of the Regional Office for Africa, UN-Habitat, Oumar Sylla; the Deputy President of the City Council of Niamey and representative of the mayor of Niamey, Habiboulaye Zanga; the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Li Junhua; and the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations and President of the Economic and Social Council, Lachezara Stoeva.

6. Ms. Duarte underscored the catalysing role played by Sustainable Development Goal 17 on partnerships in driving progress towards the implementation of both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in African countries. Internally driven financial resource mobilization, including raising financing beyond aid, sustainably managing debt and building strong institutions for internal finance, was critical for sustainable development.

7. Ms. Morsy noted that the year 2023 marked the midpoint of the implementation period for the 2030 Agenda and that it was therefore a critical moment to take stock of progress. Global shocks had made a negative impact on the continent's financing landscape, and national and local reviews provided an opportunity to assess effective resource utilization.

8. Mr. Sylla underlined the multiple crises, including climate change, facing Africa and threatening its fragile economic systems. Progress had been made in Africa with regard to improving livelihoods, of which resilient and sustainable cities had been an important driver. Partnerships had helped localities to prepare to present voluntary local reviews at the high-level political forum to be held in July 2023.

9. Mr. Zanga recognized that the workshop constituted an opportunity to boost the continent's development, highlighting that progress in the Niger would rely on decentralization, resolutions and actions at the local level.

10. Mr. Li welcomed the way in which African voluntary national reviews demonstrated the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into development policies and local planning, including across a host of vital sectors and areas of public service delivery.

11. Ms. Stoeva noted that African countries were strengthening national institutions and engaging stakeholders to implement inclusive solutions to fulfil both agendas, and she commended the role of national and subnational reviews in those efforts.

2. Key messages

12. Following the opening remarks, the following key messages were identified:

(a) Voluntary national and local reviews are powerful tools to review the efficient and effective utilization of national resources;

(b) Sustainable and resilient cities can play a catalysing role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

B. How to link across multiple reviews – lessons from countries pursuing their second voluntary national review

1. Presentations

13. Juliet Wasswa-Mugambwa, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, and Jack Jones Zulu, Resident Coordinator Office of Eritrea, moderated the session. Presentations were given by Mouhiddine Kaambi, Comoros; Modeste Nyembo Kakanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Hodane Youssouf, Development Coordination Office; Leopold Kouandongui, Resident Coordinator Office, Central African Republic; and Sara Hamouda, African Peer Review Mechanism.

14. Mr. Kaambi presented the experience of the Comoros in working towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which was guided by national priorities and a focus on citizen participation and good governance. The second voluntary national review would focus on the conclusions from the first voluntary national review, including the involvement of the private sector and civil society in the process, the need for technical knowledge and capacity-building, in particular in skill-oriented services, issues of financial absorption and an emphasis on the factors that had affected the implementation of the first voluntary national review.

15. Mr. Nyembo Kakanda noted that his Government was engaging stakeholders in its voluntary national review. Ensuring data verification and reliability, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal indicators, was a significant challenge, but a special survey was being disseminated to update the data. The voluntary national review was assisting in the revision of the national development plan and should serve to engage and support communities and vulnerable groups, in particular in the context of the insecurity and conflict that his country faced.

16. Ms. Youssouf described how the system of resident coordinator offices supported countries in undertaking voluntary national reviews. Reforms across the United Nations system were aimed at making the United Nations system more responsive and integrated, including through a platform for all partners to support national priorities. Country cooperation documents were inclusive, were aimed at capturing national realities and challenges, were aligned with national development plans and were linked closely with voluntary national reviews.

17. Mr. Kouandongui noted that the Resident Coordinator Office in the Central African Republic was supporting preparations for the voluntary national review, in particular by identifying gaps, collecting data and hiring experts, in accordance with the agreed timeline for the review. A national exercise had been conducted to identify targets and indicators that could be tracked. The political situation in the country, as reflected in the voluntary national review, had been affected by a resurgence of conflict and violations of human rights in parts of the country.

18. Ms. Hamouda reflected on the support that the African Peer Review Mechanism had given to the African Union-United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through a continental platform to build the capacity of member States in relation to voluntary national reviews, in alignment with governance reviews. Such action helped to address issues of coordination and institutional mechanisms, harmonized planning and implementation, and provided an opportunity for countries to discuss monitoring and evaluation systems and tools. Her organization had partnered with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to advocate the principles of effective governance for sustainable development.

2. Recommendations

19. Following their discussion, session participants agreed on the following recommendations:

(a) Voluntary national reviews should help to assess the socioeconomic situation of a country and assist in developing policies to accelerate progress;

(b) Voluntary national and local reviews should be accurate and relevant to their populations, since awareness and ownership are critical for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national and local levels;

(c) Investment should be made in data collection, and technical and human capacity for data analysis and innovative solutions should be found, because data gaps remain a common challenge in most countries that conduct voluntary national reviews;

(d) Gender must be thoroughly incorporated into and mainstreamed across reporting processes;

(e) Oversight mechanisms should be transparent to ensure the accountability and effectiveness of public service delivery and to guarantee that the policies of member States leave no one behind are underpinned by integrity, accountability, effectiveness and solidarity and that they do not leave anyone behind;

(f) The United Nations system should be more integrated, efficient and responsive in its support for voluntary national reviews, and the African Union and the African Peer Review Mechanism should continue their support, in particular in relation to the implementation of Agenda 2063.

C. Addressing the unique needs of countries pursuing their first voluntary national review

1. Presentations

20. Tonya Vaturi, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and Oliver Maponga, ECA, moderated the session. Presentations were given by Mursali Milanzi, United Republic of Tanzania; Lee Chileshe, Zambia; Bhushan Shrestha, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation; and Marcel Akpovo, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, East Africa Regional Office.

21. Mr. Milanzi described the progress that had been made since the first voluntary national review of the United Republic of Tanzania, noting that, in the national development plan, which had been devised in consultation with a variety of stakeholders, the focus was on leaving no one behind and the Goals were set in a national and local context. The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework was helpful in mapping Goal indicators. The second voluntary national review had a focus on capacity-building and communication concerning the Goals. Financial constraints, data availability and the capacities of staff were challenges. Helpful feedback and peer review had resulted from the twinning of localities in the United Republic of Tanzania with localities in Finland.

22. Mr. Chileshe explained that the first voluntary national review in Zambia had helped to identify and address data gaps, as data had been available for only 4.1 per cent of the Goal indicators. Work had been planned within the national statistical system to further address data gaps to assist with the preparation of the 2023 voluntary national review. Household assessments and surveys had been helpful in that regard. Mainstreaming the Goals should not create parallel channels for implementation. Support from ECA had been vital in the alignment of the two agendas with national priorities.

23. Mr. Shrestha described how the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation supported voluntary national reviews, noting that South-South and triangular cooperation had been increasingly applied in voluntary national reviews. A handbook on those forms of cooperation provided guidance to countries undertaking a voluntary national review on important entry points to strengthen partnerships and cooperation for the reviews, through twinning, peer review and

collaboration through regional and global forums. Resources were available for countries in that regard.

24. Mr. Akpovo discussed the importance of ensuring that human rights mechanisms were people-centred, gender sensitive and based on the principle of leaving no one behind. Governments should take relevant regional and international human rights mechanisms into account in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and when reporting on progress achieved through the voluntary national review process.

2. Recommendations

25. Following their discussion, session participants agreed on the following recommendations:

(a) A second voluntary national review must be aligned with and be based on the process that led to the first national review;

(b) Voluntary national reviews should reflect human rights-based approaches, including by identifying vulnerable populations and addressing their needs through the national implementation of the two agendas, in order to ensure that no one is left behind;

(c) Parliamentarians should continue to play a strong role in voluntary national and local reviews;

(d) South-South and triangular cooperation should be promoted, including through support from the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, while recognizing that cross-border issues are relevant in voluntary national reviews and that the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development have a role to play in the review process;

(e) Systems in data institutions should be aligned, artificial intelligence and machine learning should be harnessed and reporting frequency could be increased in order to address data gaps;

(f) Lessons that have been learned from first voluntary national reviews must be applied to improve data disaggregation.

D. Voluntary local reviews as accelerators for the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals

1. Presentations

26. Martino Miraglia, UN-Habitat, moderated the session. Presentations were given by Kodjo Esseim Mensah-Abrampa, Ghana; Adama Bojang, Gambia; Pedro Laice, Mozambique; Hugues Gervais Ondaye, the Congo; and Luchembe Chilufya, Alliance for Accountability Advocates Zambia.

27. Mr. Mensah-Abrampa highlighted how the production of the voluntary local review of Accra had helped to identify the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the city. Voluntary local reviews were critical tools for an in-depth assessment of the important elements needed to mobilize minds, capacities and resources, including the engagement of multiple stakeholders.

28. Ms. Bojang highlighted the challenges faced in pursuing the voluntary local review, such as capacity gaps and a lack of awareness of the Goals. Given that voluntary local reviews were critical tools and were central to the core principle of leaving no one behind, it was vital to replicate the effort in more localities and build the capacities of stakeholders at all levels.

29. Mr. Laice noted the importance of organizing awareness and communication campaigns to facilitate voluntary local reviews and the achievement of the Goals. Moreover, replicating good practices in other localities, optimizing revenue

collection and identifying alternative funding sources enhanced the process of achieving the Goals.

30. Mr. Ondaye highlighted the importance of a multilevel governance approach, which supported exchanges between local authorities and the Ministry of Planning, Statistics and Regional Integration of the Congo and created collaborative mechanisms for the voluntary local review process. Capacity-building workshops, the localization of the Goals, the enhancement of decentralization and the strengthening of the urban observatory to support monitoring were important for the acceleration of the attainment of the Goals at the local level.

31. Mr. Chilufya underscored the importance of ensuring that local communities understood their roles in the implementation of global agendas and of strengthening the capacities of local communities in that regard, which helped to ensure decentralization and the prioritization of the achievement of the Goals.

2. Recommendations

32. Following their discussion, session participants agreed on the following recommendations:

(a) Multilevel governance systems should be enhanced to strengthen the links between local and national governments, in order to localize and attain the Goals;

(b) Voluntary local reviews should be better informed through greater investment in data capacity and the availability of disaggregated data at the local level;

(c) Capacity-building workshops for stakeholders should be held to improve the availability of data for the review process.

E. Linkages between voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews

1. Presentations

33. John Sloan, ECA, moderated the session. Presentations were given by Magloire Aguessy, Benin; Pascal Byarugaba, Uganda; Amin Abdallah, Mwanza, United Republic of Tanzania, and Sanna Mari Huikuri, Tampere, Finland; Amson Sibanda, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and Nana Haoua, United Nations Volunteers, Niger.

34. Mr. Aguessy highlighted that the institutional framework in Benin for voluntary national reviews had been adjusted to assess reporting processes at the local level. The framework included a technical committee that coordinated activities related to the Goals at the national level, with focal points from localities, involving all local partners, leaders and stakeholders.

35. Mr. Byarugaba underscored the strong cooperation between local and national governments in reporting on the Goals. Involving local governments in the national review process was crucial, because they were responsible for the ultimate achievement of the Goals and the provision of public services. A local platform to enhance awareness of the Goals among local leaders and a community of good practice to pool expertise and knowledge-sharing at the national and local levels had been established in his country. A training-of-trainers session was planned with ECA and would be based on the African regional voluntary local review guidelines.

36. Mr. Abdallah and Ms. Huikuri highlighted the strong collaboration between their two cities, which was aimed at facilitating the development of the voluntary local review of Mwanza. The review was ongoing, and workshops were being conducted with political leaders and different community members to collect data. The process involved the continuous exchange of ideas with representatives of the national Government and the team responsible for the voluntary local review of

Mwanza, which would inform the development of a national localization strategy for the Goals.

37. Mr. Sibanda underscored the increasing recognition of localizing the sustainable development agenda through voluntary local reviews to fulfil the commitment of leaving no one behind. His department was supporting voluntary local reviews in Africa in that regard. Voluntary local reviews helped to inform policymaking, but the participation of local governments in national reviews remained weak. It was important to link voluntary local reviews with voluntary national reviews in order to break silos, promote coherence and manage cross-policy domains.

38. Ms. Haoua highlighted the contribution of her organization to the attainment of the Goals and the promotion of good governance. She described work programmes and initiatives and called upon countries to promote and expand the United Nations Volunteers programme.

2. Recommendations

39. Following their discussion, session participants agreed on the following recommendations:

(a) A community of good practice should be established to help share knowledge and experiences;

(b) National political and implementing bodies and local governments should be closely coordinated in order to ensure that policies are harmonized so as to enable efficient government interventions that address the needs of local communities;

(c) Countries should consider setting up integrated mechanisms and strategies that structurally include local and regional governments in implementation plans and strategies for the Goals;

(d) Multi-stakeholder consultations should be used, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups should be promoted in order to improve the understanding of existing complex problems and to ensure that no one is left behind;

(e) Countries should develop integrated strategies that involve local governments to achieve the Goals.

F. Stakeholder town hall meeting on voluntary national and local reviews

1. Presentations

40. Julie Kofeod, United Nations Foundation, and Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, moderated the town hall meeting. They explained that informal spaces, such as the current town hall meeting, were places where stakeholders and partners could exchange experiences, best practices and challenges in sustainable development reporting, in an open and collaborative environment. Presentations were given by John Gilroy, Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations; Kelechi Achinonu, United Nations Foundation; Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Committee of Development Policy; and Wezzie Chimwala, Voluntary Service Overseas, Malawi.

41. Mr. Gilroy noted that voluntary national and local reviews had been identified as “bright spots” in the process of achieving the Goals. Small island developing States that carried out peer learning for the benefit of voluntary national reviews had demonstrated good practices. The forthcoming Global Sustainable Development Report would provide a snapshot of the attainment of the Goals at the global level, but national and regional data on the Goals needed to be consolidated more

meaningfully, including by finding synergies between the Goals. Countries were reminded that there was limited time for the presentation of voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum and that, therefore, the reviews must focus on specific messages.

42. Ms. Achinonu described the importance of bringing in perspectives of young people at all stages, such as the decision-making and impact measurement stages, including at the community level. The engagement of civil society organizations was critical to the review process. Such organizations required support beyond grant and donor funding. A framework and a plan on how they could be self-sufficient in the long term was needed.

43. Ms. Fukuda-Parr discussed the need at the high-level political forum for exchange and mutual learning, which were the central purposes of voluntary national and local reviews. The Committee had reviewed the voluntary national reviews that had been undertaken and had concluded that they could be more useful for mutual learning if the reports were more analytical and less descriptive. Ensuring the meaningful participation of civil society organizations in country processes and at the high-level political forum, including through the presentation of shadow reports, would also facilitate mutual learning. Of all the Goals, those relating to the environment, inequality and marginalized groups were the most neglected.

44. Ms. Chimwala noted that capacity had been built among youth networks in Malawi, which had helped to reach young people and vulnerable communities, empowering them to use social accountability frameworks and generate data relating to the localization of the Goals. Inception mapping sessions should be conducted in communities before voluntary national reviews began in order to identify priorities and guide the review process.

2. Recommendations

45. Following their discussion, session participants agreed on the following recommendations :

(a) More frequent and more structured peer engagement on voluntary national reviews and on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, at earlier rather than later stages of the review process, should be encouraged;

(b) Country-twinning and town hall events should be promoted in order to enhance mutual learning through voluntary national reviews;

(c) Civil society organizations and local partners should be more closely engaged in the processes of voluntary national reviews;

(d) The implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the monitoring of the attainment of the Goals should be strengthened and should be led by science and evidence;

(e) Consideration should be given to the incorporation of non-electronic data that are collected at the community level;

(f) Presentations at the high-level political forum should be focused and streamlined to highlight progress achieved and challenges faced.