



11th ARFSD

Eleventh Session of the Africa Regional
Forum on Sustainable Development



BULLETIN
#ARFSD2025

Africa must build self sufficiency, value addition

The 11th African Regional Forum for Sustainable Development came to an end with calls for African countries to respond to evolving global circumstances by focusing on local value addition and intra-continental trade.

Delivering his remarks at the closing ceremony, Leonard Zulu, UN Resident Coordinator, Uganda, praised President Yoweri Museveni for highlighting the urgent need for African countries to transform the continent's approach to development, recalling that "his message was clear - we must cease exporting our jobs and raw materials.

"He underlined that instead we must invest in our systems through advanced transportation, affordable greener energy, transformative education and robust financial systems and add intentional value addition to our abundant resources."

Noting the interconnectedness

of the challenges the continent faces, Zulu called for collective and integrated responses. "Durable peace requires sustainable development. Sustainable development requires sustainable financing. Sustainable financing requires control over economic and financial flows and this control requires robust state institutions," he argued.

Zulu further called for investment in science, technology and innovation, as well as a "transformative mindset that prevents the shipping away of jobs through the exporting of raw materials to intentional value addition on them."

For the continent to grow inclusively, Zulu said, gender equality, youth empowerment and social protection must be prioritised. Partnerships must also be strengthened across government, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders. Claver Gatete, ECA

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Executive Secretary, thanked delegates for their hard work and for putting together the Kampala Declaration. “This is not an ECA document. This is not a UN document. It’s your document – it is African-owned, with your own input, and at the end of the day, we all own it together,” he said.

Reflecting on the evolution of the global financial system, Gatete noted that the cracks in the system had become clear since 2002.

“We realized that this financial system is not working for Africa. The Washington Consensus can no longer work for us.” The continent, he said, has since been battered by a series of external shocks, an energy crisis and instability in some countries over the past two decades. Climate impact is more than 5% of GDP, and the continent is under even more pressure. “Africa’s debt now exceeds \$1 trillion; with annual interest payments surpassing \$100bn, the situation is not sustainable. We must seek solutions,” He stressed.

He explained that efforts to apply various innovative financing models, such as green and blue bonds and sustainability bonds, are not enough. Africa must address the high indebtedness and the complexity of the current credit arrangements.

“While the bulk of debt was previously owed to the Paris Club and thus lent itself to easy decision making, there are many more lenders now, including private ones,” he said.

“The combination of factors, including the current geopolitics, makes things difficult. Furthermore, the G20 common framework is not working for Africa; our credit ratings are low.”



The fact that only two African countries have ever achieved investment-grade status since independence, Gatete stressed, is “a signal that we need to do things differently.”

“The world is changing, and we need to change,” he said, reiterating calls for the reform of the global financial architecture, the need for a global digital compact that supports Africa’s development priorities and the reform of the Security Council, for Africa’s voice on the table of global governance.

He pointed out that global processes such as FFD-4, the World Social Summit, COP 30 and the LLDC will require inputs from multi-stakeholders – the Kampala Declaration provides Africa’s responses to these critical global processes.



Progress towards Agendas intensifies

As Africa approaches the midpoint in the implementation of both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union’s Agenda 2063, efforts to assess and accelerate progress have intensified.

In 2025 alone, 10 African countries are presenting Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), among them Angola and South Africa, both of which will be undergoing their second reviews, while seven others are presenting



for the third time.

This increasing engagement reflects a recognition that reviewing sustainable development frameworks is not only a technical exercise but an effective tool to realign priorities, highlight success stories and address areas where progress remains off track.

Speaking on a panel discussion during the 11th African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, Ambassador Kabele Soumah, Permanent Secretary at Guinea’s Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, explained how the review process is helping his country to streamline its efforts to achieve the SDGs.

Guinea, he said, has adopted an “endogenic development

model”, a homegrown and inclusive approach. “Our government has insisted that the beneficiaries of public policies be engaged in the development of such policies so they reflect the reality on the ground,” he explained.

Soumah said Guinea’s most recent review, presented last July, showed tangible progress across several key SDG targets, including maternal mortality and gender representation. “More than half of our cabinet is now composed of women,” he pointed out.

Similarly, the country’s youth are being allowed a greater voice, with the Guinea National Youth Council now embedded in state structures to inform youth employment and development policies.

Tebogo Matlou, International Project Manager, South African Local Government Association, stressed that local governments are central to the implementation and review of the SDGs.

“Eighty percent of the SDGs are linked to services delivered at the local level,” he said According to him, the SALGA has been supporting 14 municipal authorities in South Africa to complete and submit VNRs in 2024, and to further embed the SDGs into their Integrated Development Plans.

Amira Saber, a member of Egypt’s parliament, called for legislators to be fully involved in their review processes. “Leaving no one behind means that the people who are representing people – the parliamentarians – must be central to that story,” she argued.

Presidents urge collaboration to build Africa

The Eleventh Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-11) kicked off in Kampala, Uganda, with a powerful call to action on bold leadership and decisive policies that drive jobs, inclusive growth, science and evidence-based solutions.

President Kaguta Yoweri Museveni, host of the ARFSD 11, stressed the need for Africa to stop exporting raw materials saying, “When you export raw materials and somebody goes and makes more money out of it and creates jobs for their children, it means you are donating money and donating jobs.

“That is what Africans have been doing. I’ve banned the export of unprocessed minerals. No unprocessed mineral leaves Uganda now. I told our people that if we can’t process the minerals, they must stay in the ground. Our grandchildren will process them.”

The forum serves as a critical platform for dialogue and action, based on the theme, “Driving job creation and economic growth through sustainable, inclusive, science-and evidence-based



solutions for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.” President Museveni said Uganda’s agricultural sector employs 3.6 million people, manufacturing and industry 1.4 million people, and the services sector 5 million. The ICT sector is currently employing 46,000 people. “We are just beginning, but you can see jobs can be created,” he

said. Uganda’s internal market is not big enough, he said. “We produce 5.3 billion litres of milk, but the internal market is only 800 million litres. If we didn’t have the East African Community, the dairy sector in Uganda would have collapsed. So it must be emphasised that regional integration provides guaranteed markets for our businesses.

Emmerson Mnangagwa, President of Zimbabwe, also highlighted the need for collaboration. “We cannot have individual countries championing as individual countries. There must be a connectedness of our efforts. We need to share, discuss and interrogate what means we have to achieve our goals.”

He said the SADC recognises the importance of its abundant natural resources, which offer a unique comparative advantage. “Africa’s transformation will not occur by chance. That responsibility lies with us, the leaders, and the people of this great continent. We must take charge of our development and our destiny.

“Let us, therefore, commit ourselves to the guiding objectives of inclusive development.”

“With a youthful population and abundant resources, the potential for economic transformation in Africa is immense.”

First Deputy Prime Minister of Equatorial Guinea, Gaudencio Mohaba Mesu, representing the country’s President, urged countries to use their natural advantages to build economies and enhance regional development.

Let’s turn to science – Kikwete



African countries must embrace innovative, science-based solutions to be able to fully harness the demographic advantage the continent has.

This point was highlighted by Jakaya Kikwete, former president of the United Republic of Tanzania during the presidential panel at the 11th African Regional Forum for Sustainable Development.

Recognising that the foundation for innovation lies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education, Kikwete argued that

“by prioritising investments in these fields, we will be equipping our youth with the skills necessary to thrive in a knowledge-based economy.”

Referencing the African Development Bank’s Information Highway Report, which estimates that STEM jobs will increase well above the overall job rate on the continent, the former president pointed out that “despite this demand and the opportunities, fewer than 30% of African youth are currently enrolled in STEM education programmes.

“It is estimated by 2050, there will be 213 million digital and technology jobs in Africa. If we are able to do this, it will be a wonderful opportunity.”

While SMEs account for about 80% of employment on the continent, they still lack access to finance. Innovations like mobile money, he said, have brought financial inclusion to many millions of Africans.

“Today, millions of Africans use mobile money. It has helped to bring financial services to the underserved, both in urban and rural areas, promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, and creating jobs,” Kikwete said.

Africa stands at a pivotal moment, not only of challenge but of immense opportunity, says Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations.

We must tell a new story of Africa



Speaking at the 11th Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, Mohammed said, “With just five years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the second decade of Agenda 2063 now under way, we must confront the hard truths and match them with bold and courageous solutions. The annual financing gap to

achieve the SDGs stands at a staggering \$200bn and foreign direct investment to Africa declined in 2024 by 1.9%, falling to \$53bn. Over 60% of countries are either in or at a higher risk of debt distress. In 2023, five African countries spent more on external debt servicing than on health and education combined. “This is unacceptable.”

The Abuja Declaration remains a distant ambition. Half of African countries spend less than 6% of national budgets on health and the high cost of digital access, especially in rural areas, continues to exclude millions of people.

“But these figures do not define us. Africa is not standing still. We are standing up. Despite global headwinds, our continent accounted for nine of the world’s fastest-growing economies in 2024. Progress against HIV and AIDS is encouraging, with nearly two dozen countries recording significant declines in new infections.

“Women across the continent are leading change. Today 26% of parliamentary seats in Africa are held by women, up from 19% in 2015. But this does mask some of the inequalities in different countries.

“Now we must turn words into actions. Across these efforts, Africa’s leadership and innovation continues to inspire. From local solutions to global negotiations, African countries are driving forward a bold vision for inclusive sustainable

development. “The stronger connections between regional economic commissions and resident coordinators anchored by the Secretary General’s reforms have allowed new opportunities to align policy and operations and deliver integrated support across Africa on Africa’s priorities. “This has given me great confidence that we can accelerate action on the SDGs and Agenda 2063. This year brings major global milestones – the Fourth International

AFRICA IS NOT STANDING STILL. WE ARE STANDING UP

Conference on Financing for Development, the second World Social Summit, the UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake in Ethiopia and COP30 in Brazil. Africa’s voice must shape every one of these global milestones. “Let’s seize this forum and the Kampala Declaration as a catalyst for regional leadership and global solidarity. “Let’s scale what works, deepen our partnerships and create the enabling conditions for investment and innovation. Let’s tell a new story of African solutions driven by African leadership, especially our young people, powered by African people and anchored in African values. “Let’s turn ambition into action in solidarity with the African Union in service of the Africa we want.”



Uganda takes over Bureau

The new Head of the Bureau for the 11th Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is Justine Lumumba Kasule, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, Uganda. The result of the voting, held on the first day of the forum on Sustainable Development in Uganda, was unanimous, delegates were told. She replaces Sid’ Ahmed Ould Bouh, Minister of the Economy and Finance, Mauritania, who has guided the organisation’s work since the last event in Addis Ababa

in 2024. Mauritius was elected as the First Vice President representing Southern Africa. Cameroon is the Second Vice President representing Central Africa. The Gambia is the Third Vice President representing West Africa. Mauritania is the rapporteur. The venue for the 12th ARFSD is not yet decided. It has been offered to Southern Africa to host and a decision on this and the dates of the meeting will be made in due course.

Bold leadership needed to drive SDGs forward – Gatete

With just five years to go to 2030, the target for meeting the SDG goals, the data is sobering. Out of 144 measurable SDG targets, only 10 are on track, while 106 are progressing too slowly, with 28 regressing, says Claver Gatete, Executive Secretary of the ECA.

Speaking at the opening of the 11th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-11), he said, “We simply cannot afford to continue at this pace. The forum was convened under the theme: Driving job creation and economic growth through sustainable, inclusive, science and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and AU Agenda 2063.

“To reverse this trend, we must move beyond diagnosing our challenges to implementing bold and actionable solutions. “As we speak, structural vulnerabilities, including the lingering effects of Covid-19, climate shocks, conflicts and geopolitical tensions, as well as



mounting debt burdens, continue to stifle Africa’s progress. “Our average GDP growth, since 2019 has hovered around 3%, which is far below the 7% needed to achieve just SDG 8 on work and economic growth. “It is clear now that aid can no longer be considered a reliable or sustainable solution, and traditional financing models are increasingly misaligned with Africa’s development aspirations.” Gatete outlined the many challenges of meeting the five SDGs under the spotlight at the event – Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3), Gender

Equality (SDG 5), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Life Below Water (SDG 14) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17). To reverse the trend on SDGs, “we must move beyond diagnosing our challenges to implementing bold and actionable solutions”. He proposed four strategic pillars to mobilize the resources to achieve the SDGs and AU Agenda 2063. The first is to scale up domestic resource mobilisation. “If we restrain illicit financial flows, estimated at \$89bn annually, alongside harnessing sovereign wealth funds, we can secure billions for our developmental needs.” Remittance-backed bonds could increase the \$53bn FDI that flowed to Africa in 2023. “It is time derisk our economies, elevate capital market development and expand access to affordable finance, he said. He said the African free trade area needs to be properly harnessed to advance Africa’s agenda and more could be done in the digital space. “Investing in digital connectivity, artificial intelligence, blockchain solutions and evidence-based policymaking will drive efficiencies in trade, governance and service delivery. “The clock is ticking. The next five years must be marked by bold leadership, decisive policies and strengthened partnerships that will place Africa on a trajectory of sustainable prosperity.”

Africa must solve its own problems



Robert Rae, President of the Economic and Social Council and Canada’s Permanent Representative to the UN called for African countries to take control of their development agenda. Delivering remarks at ARFSD-11, Rae noted that Africa is “at the centre of the ideas, initiatives and actions that are going to make sure that the SDGs are rescued”. While acknowledging that Africa’s challenges are reflective of wider global challenges, Rae encouraged the continent to pursue self reliance. “We cannot assume that others will solve our problems for us, and we all know that if we help ourselves, we’re more likely to get help from others,” he argued, adding that all high-growth countries had taken difficult decisions and mobilised their resources effectively. Rae also urged countries to allow the private sector to play a greater role in development. “As important as governments are, the world’s economy is driven more by non-governmental money, resources and capital than it is by governments themselves.” “The reality is that the opportunities for Africa are going to be created by Africans. That doesn’t mean the rest of the world doesn’t care, but it does mean that the World Bank and the IMF should work for you; not you work for them.”

Africa must own the Pact for the Future for its own development

Africa played a significant role in the outcomes of the Summit of the Future, which includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations, according to speakers on a panel at ARFSD-11.

The panel weighed in on the global event and its impact on agendas affecting the continent.

Countries helped to mobilise people across the continent to make inputs and included organisations such as the Pan African Youth Union, delegates heard.

“It was Africa that made the adoption of the Pact for the Future possible,” said Guy Ryder, Under-Secretary-General for Policy.

“The ambassadors of Namibia and Zambia provided crucial leadership in the negotiating process. The Cameroonian president of the General Assembly helped to bring down the gavel for adoption. And at the moment of truth it was the African group that intervened

decisively to seal the deal,” said Ryder.

“As we move into the implementation stage, the Secretary General again counts

THE YOUTH IS THE FUTURE AND THE FUTURE IS PREPARED TODAY

on the African continent to lead in promoting and supporting the pact.

“Its adoption was not an end point because the urgent thing now is to act on the vision of the Pact; to translate it into real impact on the lives of people everywhere.”

Marcel Akpovo, Regional Representative for East Africa and to the African Union, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that as the global landscape is changing rapidly, there is a danger of the value of the pact being questioned.

“But despite this new reality the



objectives and aim of the pact have not changed.”

Themba Kalua, Director for Pact of the Future Implementation, Executive Office of the Secretary General, said it is important that Africa speaks with one voice in advancing the commitments in the pact.

“But for the pact for the future to truly deliver transformational change, implementation must happen at a country level,” he said.

Kalua added that it was encouraging to engage with parliamentarians at ARFSD because they play a key role in translating these global ambitions into national legislation and were therefore critical to the process of implementation.

Albert Byamugisha, Senior Technical Adviser and Head,



IT WAS AFRICA THAT MADE THE ADOPTION OF THE PACT FOR THE FUTURE POSSIBLE



SDG Secretariat, Office of the Prime Minister, Uganda, spoke about how the government was mainstreaming outcomes from the event into national planning.

“In a workshop we came up with five key priorities. The first was on leadership and advocacy.

The second was alignment with our national development plans and Vision 2040, the third was promotion of green growth and sustainable development, the fourth was engagement with the global digital compact, and the fifth is safeguarding the rights of future generations.

Speakers emphasised the importance of the youth in rolling out the pact.

“With over 70% of Sub-Saharan Africa’s population under the age of 30, Africa is home to the world’s youngest population. This is where transformation must begin and where its success will be most deeply felt,” said Felipe Paullier, Assistant Secretary General for Youth Affairs; Head,



UN Youth Office
Dialla Moumouni, President, Pan African Youth Union, summed it up. “The youth is the future and the future is prepared today. So if we invest in the youth today, we will have a bright future for all.”

Delegates@Work



Mobilising revenues to meet SDGs and Agenda 2063 aspirations

Ahead of the 11th ARFSD Forum in Kampala, more than 70 participants engaged in over five panel sessions to propose solutions that would lead Africa towards sustainable financing options for development.

Stephen Adyeeri, Board Member of the National Planning Authority in Uganda, presented the outputs and recommendations from the meeting at a high-level panel on revenue mobilisation.

Key topics under the spotlight were:

- Optimizing current sources of financing through tax policy and administration and addressing IFFs, international tax cooperation, and debt governance to finance inclusive sustainable development;
- Leveraging under-utilized African member states’



financial resources for productive long-term projects for sustainable development;

- Enhancing public expenditure and financial accountability for sustainable development; and
- Leveraging climate finance and natural capital accounting for sustainable development.

Suggestions for boosting domestic revenue included improving tax administration and systems as well as public financial management, enhancing the fiscal space, addressing illicit financial flows and limiting tax exemptions to strategic investments.

Expanding capital markets and accessing innovative sources of finance were topics

addressed in detail. Suggestions included:

- Enhancing access to private capital and blended finance, developing mechanisms to de-risk investments and enhance credit guarantee facilities, and leveraging partnerships, pension funds, and diaspora bonds.
- Promoting investment in sustainable development and building domestic capital markets.
- Improving access to funding for climate adaptation and leveraging green bonds and innovative climate financing instruments to support sustainable development.
- Creating national PPP units to originate pension-friendly projects with sovereign guarantees.
- Establishing monetary policy frameworks to incentivise commercial bank lending to priority sectors.
- Introducing tax incentives for institutional investors in municipal/development bonds.
- Establishing an African credit rating institution to provide an alternative to unfair rating systems used on Africa that have pushed up capital costs and created an unsustainable debt-repayment burden.
- Prioritising natural resource accounting should be prioritized in Africa, which can also be used to better value natural endowments to access other innovative financing instruments.



- Exploring the use of blended finance for sovereign affordable debt, deepening and broadening financial markets, and investing in agriculture and SMEs.
- It was also suggested that the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) needs to be fast-tracked by removing trade barriers and promoting value addition, while institutional mechanisms for financial management need to be improved.

Potential is not enough for Africa

With only five years to go, African countries will have to dramatically recalibrate their economies in order achieve the SDGs.

Speakers at a high-level panel discussion noted that, especially in the light of evolving global conditions, the continent will have to rely on itself and leverage its vast potential to deliver on the SDG targets.

Hailemariam Desalegn, former Prime Minister of Ethiopia, noted that the global financing model that underpinned expectations for the implementation of the SDGs no longer applies.

The promise by wealthy nations to allocate 0.7% of GDP to Overseas Development Assistance, for example, remains unfulfilled, and is unlikely to be

realised in the remaining time frame.

Antonio Pedro, the ECA’s Deputy Executive Secretary, stressed that while Africa has great potential, that is not enough. “Potential will not enable us to meet the SDGs. Potential will not create the jobs that we need.”

“It’s critical for us to be able to address our structural problems and make our comparative advantage a competitive advantage.”

Ahunna Eziakonwa, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Africa, called for more support for entrepreneurs. “They are the most neglected, yet they have the best chance of creating not just jobs, but meaningful and sustainable livelihoods.”

Jobs crisis needs scalable solutions



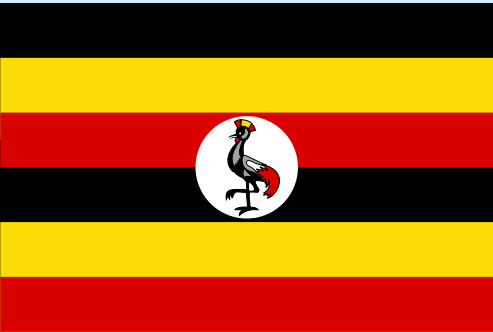
With a growing and youthful population, Africa requires urgent, scalable, and innovative solutions to address its employment crisis and provide more avenues to the millions who enter the job market every year. Currently, it is estimated that 83% of workers in Africa remain in the informal economy, while some 23.3% of young people are not in education, employment,

or training. Of those who are employed, 72% are in jobs that are insecure. In the face of these dire statistics, Caroline Mugalla, Director of the International Labour Organisation's Country Office for Tanzania, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, said the UN agency is trying to help governments to close the gaps across several relevant areas, such as skills development, youth

employment, enterprise creation and social protection. Mugalla, who was speaking on a panel at the ARFSD-11, said the ILO had assisted 26 African countries to build national systems in 2024 alone. "At the country level, our work focuses on issues like quality apprenticeship and developing apprenticeship programmes that speak to the skills needed by the private sector. It has also provided technical assistance to 37 out of 54 African countries to develop national youth employment policies under the AU-ILO Youth Employment Strategy for Africa (YES Africa). Betty Amongi, Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Uganda, said that through a parish development model, Uganda has made funding available to local communities to support entrepreneurs, particularly women, with an allocation of 30%. Similarly, young people are entitled to 30% with 10% each reserved for the physically challenged and the elderly. "Research has shown that women are accessing more of this money. About 53% of it went to support them in their agriculture businesses," she said.



Sennen Hounton, UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa called for data-driven governance, equitable global systems to enable long-term planning. "The issues that we are discussing, particularly employment, is not for one government in four years' time. So we need to be looking at predictive analysis. And for that, you need data."

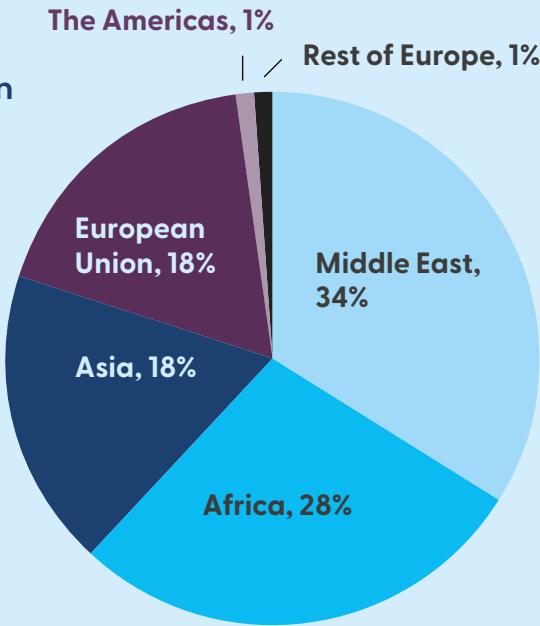


Uganda Economic Snapshot

Uganda's economic growth has remained resilient and has exceeded the African average since the COVID-19 recovery period. According to the Bank of Uganda (2025) economic growth is projected to remain within the range of 6.0% to 6.5% for FY2024/25 and is expected to reach 7.0% in the next 2-3 years, driven by: a stable macroeconomic environment, foreign direct investment in mining and oil, strategic government interventions, increased agricultural production and expected oil revenues. However, a slowdown in government spending due to fiscal consolidation has moderated growth in some sectors, notably construction and public works. In 2024, GDP growth was largely driven by the industry sector (8.4%), followed by agriculture, forestry & fishing (7.2%), while the services sector recorded a modest growth of 2.0%. The mining and quarrying

sector has shown standout growth of 28.4% on the back of renewed investor interest and government support to mining-related projects, including the Mineral Resource Infrastructure Development Project. Uganda's economic recovery maintained solid momentum in 2023 and 2024, driven by robust agricultural production and industrial growth. Growth has further been supported by improved revenue mobilization, fiscal consolidation efforts, and increased foreign investment, particularly in the oil sector. In trade terms, Uganda is one of the most integrated African economies - intra-regional trade accounted for over 59% of total exports in 2022, though this has declined subsequently due to a rising share of gold in total exports, which are exported to outside the continent.

UGANDA'S EXPORT MARKETS



Investing in digital skills will foster inclusive growth in Africa, experts say

Science, technology and innovation (STI) are poised to play a pivotal role in helping Africa accelerate the realisation of the ambitious goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, according to experts who spoke on a panel at the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.



They emphasised the need for increased investments in higher education to equip young Africans with the skills required to be competitive in the modern tech-driven economy. Barnabas Nawangwe, Vice-Chancellor, Makerere University, Uganda, who moderated the session, expressed concern over the continent’s low enrollment. “We have the lowest enrollment in



higher education in Africa at 6% versus just 32% globally. This is a big challenge,” he said. Robert Lisinge, Director, Technology, Innovation, Connectivity and Infrastructure Development Division, ECA, pointed out that unequal access to digital technologies continues to be a major impediment to inclusive growth in Africa. “Africa is grappling with a significant digital divide, marked by disparities in access to technology, connectivity, and digital literacy. To bridge this divide it is essential to adopt global strategies to meet local needs in a secure, safe and inclusive way, aligned with the SDGs and the Global Digital

VOICES

It is important to attract young Africans from the diaspora, to show them that you can actually compensate for the skills and experience they have acquired abroad. You must also see how to improve the working environment for their professional and social wellbeing.

Ferdinand Manirakiza,
Deputy Minister of Communication, Information Technology and Media, Burundi

Africa accounts for less than 1% of global generative AI activity and only 2% of data used to train systems comes from our continent. There is a clear risk of excluding our African voices and needs from the technology that is shaping our futures. If this continues, we risk reinforcing digital dependency rather than building digital sovereignty

Mehdi Snene,
Special Advisor, United Nations Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies

Compact,” Lisinge remarked. Monica Musenero, Uganda’s Minister for Science Technology and Innovation, highlighted the need for technological solutions that address Africa’s core developmental challenges, particularly poverty reduction. “The biggest policy shift

needed is to ensure that science goes from being philosophical and it becomes a science that builds industries,” she said. Mehdi Snene, Special Advisor, United Nations Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies, underlined the significant potential of artificial intelligence (AI) for Africa, but warned about the substantial gap in training AI systems using African data and African languages. Jacqueline Amongin, East African Legislative Assembly, called for robust data governance and protection laws to ensure the safe and secure deployment of artificial intelligence. “At a regional level we’re already working on a data governance protection law, which will help harmonise laws across our eight member states in the East African Community,” she said.

Data Governance

Collin Babirukamu, Executive Director of IT, Bank of Uganda, highlighted the urgent need for a comprehensive strategy to address not only skills development, but also the persistent infrastructure gaps hindering the growth of Africa’s digital economy. “We must reduce the digital divide, increase internet penetration, and power access. Even smartphone access in the hands of the youth is a key economic driver. We must make sure that our policies leave no one behind” Babirukamu stressed.

Delegates@Work



Plastics, chemicals dangerous for Blue Economy



Population growth and lack of understanding of the Blue Economy are leading to serious exploitation and degradation of Africa's oceans and inland waterways.

Speakers at a session on SDG 14 – Life Under the Water – said the sector offers huge potential for job creation and growth, particularly given that there are 38 coastal states, but it also faces

many hazards. “We need to have a deliberate effort throughout Africa to make sure the issue of plastic pollution is addressed before it suffocates the fish and before it affects our marine species,” said Moses Vilakati, Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Development, African Union Commission. One of the issues is overfishing as well as loss of aquatic biodiversity through pollution,

mostly plastic waste. Callist Tindimugaya, Acting Director for Water Resources Management, Ministry of Water and Environment, Uganda, said population growth is causing over-overexploitation of Africa's resources. “The resources we are dealing with are not well understood and you can't easily manage something you don't understand,” he said. SDG 14 is also the least financed SDG, having received only 3.5% of total funding at the

SDG midpoint. African countries need to continue exploring ocean-linked innovative financing instruments, such as blue bonds, debt swaps, blue carbon credit schemes, speakers said. Patricia Portela de Souza, Resident Coordinator, Cabo Verde, said Small Island Developing States are particularly vulnerable given the proportion of the country surrounded by water. “You need to look at their peculiarities and vulnerabilities, including financing. Cabo Verde is a small market and highly affected by climate change.” Viriato Luis Soares Cassama, Minister of the Environment and Biodiversity, Guinea Bissau, highlighted the country's issues. “Our challenges in terms of our Blue Economy include inadequate human resources, weak inter-ministerial coordination and a lack of national financing dedicated to our marine areas, as well as a lack of research.” “An issue we have found in Kenya is that of policy disconnect, which kills a lot of our Blue Economy development plans,” said Nancy Karigithu, Blue Economy Advisor at the Executive Office of the President of Kenya. “You find maritime activities are



interconnected and a lack of awareness in one area can affect a decision in another.” Luther Bois Anukur, Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO), IUCN, said science and research are critical. “But it is also very expensive for African countries so we need to take a regional approach to this.” Rose Mwebaza, Regional Director and Representative, Regional Office for Africa, UNEP, voiced concern about plastics pollution. “How do we come together to make sure we are bringing our respective efforts together to protect the Blue Economy. The ocean is one; we are many.”

Life Under Water

FACT FILE

- Africa's Blue Economy could grow from \$296bn in 2018 to \$576bn by 2063.
- In 2018, it supported 49 million jobs, which could reach 56 million by 2030
- Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing costs Africa about \$10bn annually.
- The continent accounts for 8% of plastic pollution, despite producing only 5% of global plastic and despite single-use plastic ban in 34 countries.
- Over 2 million tons of litter entered the beach in 2022, a rise from 1.7 million tons in 2017.
- 46.7% of key marine biodiversity areas in Africa were protected in 2023, slightly above the global average of 45.5%.
- Increased marine pollution with over 2 million tonnes of litter entering African beaches in 2022, is up from 1.7 million in 2017, with 79% of beach litter originating from land-based sources.
- Only 18 African countries have ratified the 2022 WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies which aims to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and overfishing.



Tepid, if any, progress around SDG 8



A report by the International Labour Organisation reviewing progress over the last decade around SDG8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, painted a somewhat gloomy picture.

There have been reversals across many countries and the outlook is “sluggish, according to Allieu, Senior Economist at the ILO. This is despite some encouraging GDP growth numbers for the continent.

“And job creation is the main tool for poverty reduction. But the industries in Africa are not job creating.”

Informal employment still dominates many economies, which also has repercussions for other issues such as tax collection and poor working conditions.

There are wide regional variations. Central Africa scores the least well in this SDG, whilst the countries in North Africa do, relatively speaking, much better.

The lack of productive and decent employment remains a critical challenge. Even for those with jobs, for many the situation is precarious, or they are in a situation of under-employment, contributing to a lack of certainty amongst the majority of the working age population.

A staggering 83% of African workers were in informal employment in 2024.

The situation is not due to a lack of effort from government. Many deliberate policies and initiatives have been instigated to close the gender gap when it comes to employment as well as support the youth bulge that should be a demographic dividend.

It is estimated that the continent needs to create upwards of 18 million jobs annually, or 1.5m per month. But these initiatives still lack sufficient financial firepower to make a significant dent.

Despite reductions in poverty levels, there still exist some challenges such as child labour.

There are some reasons

for optimism. Technology and the growth of the financial services sector have provided greater financial inclusion and solutions to support the start-up ecosystem. It was said that every dollar invested in ICT can create a \$20 increase in GDP. But investing in digital skills will also be critical.

Waleed El-Zomor an International Trade Consultant from Egypt called for a greater focus on SMEs. The first phase, he said, was to encourage a culture of ideas.

He called for an environment where innovation was encouraged, adding that innovation does not necessarily mean invention. It relates rather to product, process and market innovation.

How can you improve the innovation ecosystem? First the quality of education, encouraging creative and critical thinking and technical training. And creating an ideas bank at national level.

The second phase is turning



- Despite hosting nine of the 20 fastest growing economies in 2024, productivity in Africa is still lower than the global average.
- The informal sector occupies 83% of the workforce, 29% of whom are living in extreme poverty.
- The number of youth not in employment, education and training at 22.5% is largely unchanged since 2015.
- One in five (21.6%) of African children are in child labour, with 41.4 million in hazardous work.

an idea into a [sustainable] business. This requires financial literacy, technical know-how, mentorship.

The third phase is then making it an actual working business, said El-Zomor. Here more support is needed in terms of financial and market access.

The ILO report calls for greater economic diversification and placing job creation at the centre of government policy. Businesses also need to comply with international standards.

Health experts lead calls for resources to achieve SDG 3



Notable progress has been made in health outcomes in Africa, but significant disparities in healthcare access and progress towards SDG 3 remain, according to a report presented at the breakaway session on health at the ARFSD-11.

There have been notable achievements – average life expectancy improved from 62 in 2015 to 64 in 2021, for example. From 2000 to 2020 the median maternal mortality ratio in Africa decreased by 51% but nevertheless remained alarmingly high in some countries.

Under- 5s child mortality reduced by 53% from 139 in 2000 to 65 in 2022, although progress remains insufficient to meet the SDGs targets. The number of new HIV infections decreased by 68% from 199,0000 to 633,660 in 2023.

The report found enduring barriers to health and well-



being in Africa, including inadequate funding, health personnel shortages, political instability, and the high burden of diseases like malaria, HIV/ Aids and tuberculosis. They are exacerbated by emerging threats from non-communicable diseases, mental health issues and climate change.

Dr Raji Tajudeen, Acting Deputy Director General and Head, Division of Public Health Institutes and Research at Africa CDC, said progress needs to be much more rapid.

“We have five years to go as far as Agenda 2030 is concerned and

around child and infant mortality.”

Parker pointed out that children in SSA continue to have the highest mortality rates globally, with children in Sub-Saharan Africa 18% more likely to die before their fifth birthday compared to wealthier nations like Australia. Africa is home to over 7 million “zero dose” children who have not had a single vaccine.

Dr Jane Aceng, Minister of Health, Uganda, said that the country has stepped up its primary care offering and upgraded hundreds of facilities to be able to offer maternal services and deliveries.

NEW HIV INFECTIONS DECREASED BY 68%

yet we are nowhere near to where we need to be. As of today, eight out of 10 countries that are not on track to attaining the targets and goals are in Africa,” he said.

Funding resources

Tajudeen said the tough funding environment means that support from external donors can no longer be taken for granted.

The call for greater domestic financing was echoed by UNICEF Deputy Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa, Alison Parker.

“There is an important need for targeted and intentional investment in primary health care...If we don’t invest with a coordinated and intentional investment we lose small gains

UNDER- 5s CHILD MORTALITY REDUCED BY 53%

“Over 3000 frontline workers have been trained in newborn resuscitation to work towards making sure we reduce neonatal mortality.”

Phil Elks, Team Leader for Humanitarian and Human Development at the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, admitted that cash is tight but said domestic mobilisation can help. “Reports show it would have enormous impact if we could put just 1% more of GDP into health sector.”

It is not just resources that Africa should mobilise but also its enormous talent reserves, said Charles Esimone, Professor of Biopharmaceutics and Pharmaceutical Microbiology at Nnamdi Azikiwe University.

Gender parity is still a long way off



While there has been progress across the continent in achieving SDG 5, a lot more needs to be done for Africa to meet the benchmarks on gender equality before the target date of 2030.

Indeed, says the ECA's Economic Affairs Officer Judith Odoul, only one African country appears to be on course to achieve this milestone.

In a presentation to a breakout session during the ARFSD-II, Odoul noted that while most countries have enacted enabling legislation to this end, "there's still an interplay between gender norms and the actual enforcement".

Family laws and religious customs often clash with national legislation. "On workplace equality, for example, while 80% of countries have enacted anti-employment discrimination laws, progress on issues like equal pay and parental leave remains inadequate.

Odoul said while there has



been a slight reduction in child marriage, the practice remains rampant in several countries and is often unreported. She highlighted improvements in women's participation in leadership. "We have seen some countries where women account for more than 50% of the parliament." However, there are still countries where women make up less than 10% of the political leadership. Anna Mutavati, Regional

VOICES

As we have been reminded over and over again, women actually constitute more than 52% of the population in most countries. So whatever we do, inclusive growth cannot happen if we leave women and girls out.

Judith Odoul,
Economic Affairs Officer, ECA

It's crucial that policies do not just tackle gender equality but also economic barriers that disproportionately affect women.

Prudence Ngwenya, *Director, Gender, Women and Youth Directorate, African Union*

We see the persistent gender gap in labour force participation, which has stagnated for the past two decades. We are also seeing increasing poverty rates among women and girls, which really limits their ability to participate and develop themselves, their families, their communities and their societies.

Anna Mutavati, *Regional Director, East and Southern Africa, UN-Women*

I believe we must invest in girls' education. None of us would be here if we hadn't gone to school.

Josephine Kulea, *Founder and Executive Director, Samburu Girls Foundation*

Director, East and Southern Africa for the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, pointed to persistent economic inequality, gender-based violence, and climate vulnerability as the major intersecting barriers to women's progress in Africa. She stressed that unpaid care work remains a major obstacle to economic empowerment. "Women in sub-Saharan Africa still perform three times more



unpaid care work than men." This limits their access to income and resources.

Empowerment

Without a change in course, Mutavati said 220 million women and girls in Africa could be pushed into extreme poverty by 2030.

One way to address this looming danger is to fund public infrastructure such as childcare services and access to clean water, Mutavati, argued, citing examples from Tanzania and Nigeria where such interventions lifted women out of poverty.



Regional partnerships and innovation key to realising SDG 17



With Africa facing a \$200bn SDG financing gap, partly due to declining Official Development Assistance (ODA) and rising external debt, partnerships have become imperative.

Addressing the core issues, panellists at the SDG17 session

at the 11th Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development spoke about the primacy of partnerships in achieving the goals, especially in a world reacting to geo-political turbulence.

Oliver Chingaya, Chairperson of the Board, Zambia Statistics Agency, in his intervention noted that "investment in digital data

and analytics plays a crucial role in enhancing evidence-based planning, increasing efficiency and supporting more effective decision making".

Bakary Dosso, Head Training and Research Division, African Institute for Economics Development, ECA, told delegates, "We need transparency in reporting development milestones and indices. There is a skills mismatch between our workforce and the evolving labour market.

"Member states and partners must take bold action to align training with Agenda 2023 and 2063."

Claudio Pasqualucci, Manager of the Italian Trade Office, Addis Ababa, urged the opening up of African markets. "We need to collaborate and find ways to make African products more competitive in the European market because trade invites foreign investment."

Mohammed Malick Fall,

Resident Coordinator, Nigeria said his country offers an example of using the creative industries to fast track achievement of the SDGs. "Nollywood generates \$1bn annually and employs a million people and has attracted investments from streaming platforms like Netflix and others."

He said the UN could leverage the capacity of the creative sector to generate compelling stories that address the SDGs.

In Uganda, partnerships have proven to be successful in driving progress in SDGs, according to Stephan Kasangaki. The country has also institutionalised platforms like the National Partnership Forum to enhance coordination and accountability.

Kasangaki, representing Amos Lugoloobi, Minister of State for Planning, said partnerships with the UNDP and others have led to an uptick in FDI from \$1.4bn in 2023 to \$2.3bn in 2024, underscoring the country's growing appeal as a regional

investment hub.

Cecile Ndjebet, Founder of the African Women Network, said partnerships should be inclusive because women have a key role to play in achieving the SDG targets. She however identified constraints, including patriarchal systems, that limit gender equality and women's access to justice.

Phillip Schonrock, Director of the Centre for International Strategic Thinking (CEPEI) in Bogota, spoke about partnerships in the area of policymaking.

Pointing out that "policy making is under-resourced in the global south" he noted that think tanks are helping provide capacity and governments are more likely to engage with institutions that work in those areas.

He said that for research institutions and think tanks to be effective in Africa, they need to be inclusive, co-created and participatory, transparent and accountable as well as flexible and adaptable.

THERE IS A SKILLS MISMATCH BETWEEN OUR WORKFORCE AND THE EVOLVING LABOUR MARKET