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Item 10 of the agenda*
Consideration and adoption of key messages

Seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development: summary, key messages and Brazzaville Declaration

Introduction

1. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), together with the Government of the Congo, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and entities of the United Nations system,¹ convened the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development at the Grand Hotel Kintele, in Brazzaville, in a hybrid format featuring both in-person and online participation, from 1 to 4 March 2021.
2. The Forum was attended by more than 1,800 participants, comprising ministers and high-level representatives of the Governments of all 54 ECA member States, intergovernmental bodies, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, other international organizations, major groups and other stakeholders.
3. A summary of the deliberations, including main issues and key messages emanating from the Forum, may be found in section II below.

*ECA/RFSD/2021/1/Rev.2.

¹ The following entities of the United Nations system were involved as partners in that process: United Nations Development Coordination Office, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, United Nations Office to the African Union, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Volunteers programme, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, World Food Programme and World Trade Organization.



A. Background

4. The Forum was held against the backdrop of the new challenge to global development posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which had exposed severe vulnerabilities and structural inequalities in Africa. Even before the pandemic, Africa was already not on track, and in some cases regressing, in respect of attainment of the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want, of the African Union. The current session of the Forum therefore offered an opportunity for dialogue and a quest for solutions to accelerate and expand the scale of implementation within the narrow window of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

B. Theme and activities of the session

5. The seventh session was held on the theme: “Building forward better towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”. The theme is closely aligned with that of the 2021 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, namely: “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

6. The principal activities carried out during the session were the following:

(a) Regional follow-up and review of progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(b) Peer learning, including sharing approaches, experiences and lessons learned, in the conduct of voluntary national and local reviews and other efforts to advance the integrated implementation of the two agendas;

(c) Identifying and assessing gaps, challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of the two agendas;

(d) Articulating transformative actions, commitments, levers, partnerships and measures that countries should adopt to respond to, and recover from, COVID-19 and to build forward better by accelerating implementation of the two agendas within the decade 2021–2030;

(e) Identifying and articulating African priorities, policy options and recommendations in the form of key messages, to inform and accelerate implementation at various levels, as the region’s collective input to the 2021 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(f) Round-table panel on science, technology, innovation and digital transformation;

(g) Regional dialogue on African food systems.

7. In addition, the proceedings of the main segments of the Forum were enriched by the preparatory and side events held on its margins.

I. Opening of the session [agenda item 1]

8. The session was moderated by the Director of the Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resources Management Division, ECA, Jean-Paul Adam. Gylidas Mayela, a journalist from Congolese television, was the master of ceremonies.

9. The session was officially opened by the President of the Congo, Denis

Sassou Nguesso, who noted the robust and passionate deliberations unfolding in the Forum.

10. Opening statements were delivered by the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, Zimbabwe, and Chair of the outgoing Bureau of the sixth session of the Forum, Paul Mavima; the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Vera Songwe; the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed; the President of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, Munir Akram; the Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Industry and Mining, African Union Commission, Albert Muchanga; the Minister of Tourism and Environment of the Congo, Arlette Soudan-Nonault; and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Congo, Firmin Ayessa, representing the President.

11. Mr. Mavima thanked the President of the Congo for hosting the seventh session of the Forum in a year in which the COVID-19 pandemic had dictated new modalities of engagement. He outlined the work and achievements of the Bureau of the sixth session of the Forum and outlined priorities to be considered by the Bureau of the seventh session.

12. Ms. Songwe thanked the Government and people of the Congo for the excellent hosting of the Forum under the exceptional circumstances necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Outlining the consequences for Africa of the massive and brutal shock produced by the unprecedented health crisis, she reviewed response measures taken by ECA, including its call for a new issue of special drawing rights of some \$25 billion to benefit all African countries. On building forward better, she highlighted in particular the need to preserve the continent's green lung, provided by the Congo River, and to explore nature-based solutions through increasing jobs in the agroforestry sector and ecotourism, while promoting sustainable value chains and investments in renewable energy and nature-based solutions, including through the Blue Fund. She urged the continent to reflect together about the demands to be made at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

13. Ms. Mohammed thanked the President and the people of the Congo for hosting the session and reiterated that COVID-19 was undermining plans to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals, causing the first recession in Africa in 25 years. Noting, however, the opportunity to leverage all the capacities of Africa and the potential of its 226 million young people to chart a new direction, with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 as guides, she outlined directions that the deliberations of the Forum could take and remarked in conclusion that, by harnessing the power of women, young people, cutting-edge technology and innovations, Africans could drive transformative change over the next 10 years.

14. Mr. Akram reiterated the importance of the 2030 Agenda as the blueprint for sustainable development regionally and globally and, to that end, outlined priority actions and policy actions for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and accelerated achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

15. Mr. Muchanga conveyed greetings from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat. He reviewed the mixed progress of sustainable development in Africa and outlined strategies to increase domestic resource mobilization and other measures to ensure that no one on the continent was left behind. He called on the Forum to generate recommendations to move towards a resilient and green Africa, and also for accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

16. Ms. Soudan-Nonault highlighted the crucial importance of the Congo basin, the second-largest carbon sink globally, and called upon the international

community to contribute to its preservation, without which the world could not achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. She also noted that the key messages adopted by the Forum would inform the 2021 meeting of the high-level political forum and guide policies and actions to implement the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 at national and regional levels.

17. Mr. Ayessa noted the relevance of the theme of the Forum, “Building forward better towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063” and, in that context, reviewed successive achievements over past decades by the international community in pursuit of sustainable development. As one of the leading countries in the fight against climate change, the Congo had established the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin and undertaken other measures relating to digital economy development. He noted that, given their weak industrial foundations, most African countries had the possibility to promote green industrialization by adopting less polluting technologies.

II. Summary and key messages

18. The following sections set forth the key messages, including policy recommendations, arising from the presentations and deliberations during the seventh session of the Regional Forum. The key messages comprise African priorities, policy options and recommendations to accelerate implementation of the two agendas at various levels, and the region’s collective input to the 2021 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

A. High-level panel on transformative action and investment to build forward better from the COVID-19 crisis towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 [agenda item 2]

1. Background

19. The high-level panel on the theme of the Forum set the scene for subsequent deliberations on the issues outlined in the agenda for the seventh session.

2. Key messages

20. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) As the continent with the second largest carbon sink in the world, a major source of the resources needed to save the global environment, Africa should not alone bear the cost of preserving these important resources for the global commons;

(b) United Nations system entities are urged to campaign for Africa to be rewarded for its contribution to protection of the global commons;

(c) In addition to general support, targeted support should be provided for protecting the Congo basin and for regional and global partnerships focusing on this region;

(d) The African Union Commission and ECA should explore the sources and accessibility of new financial resources, such as through debt relief;

(e) Voluntary development cooperation funding is needed and market mechanisms must be promoted to enable African countries to take full advantage of their carbon sinks, including through international carbon-trading schemes;

(f) The African Union Commission should continue convening

environment ministers and ministers of finance and planning in fulfilment of a sustainable African recovery agenda;

(g) Inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms at the highest level of government are needed to ensure that the health-related targets across all Sustainable Development Goals are being monitored and reported on within national and regional accountability mechanisms;

(h) Innovative financing approaches must be found to boost the domestic resource capacities of countries, to enable them to finance the requirements for attaining Sustainable Development Goal 3;

(i) Climate-resilient health systems are required across humanitarian and development contexts, underscoring the need for urgent investments and prioritizing critical services;

(j) The benefits of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area need to be harnessed to build forward better in Africa;

(k) Megatrends such as digitalization in the health sector must be leveraged, to ensure that digital interventions such as e-health and e-pharma services catalyse results in building forward better;

(l) Plans by African Governments to address current and future demographic conditions are of critical importance in harnessing the demographic, youth and gender dividends in the context of health, education, population, entrepreneurship, employment, job creation and labour migration.

B. Progress report on implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and tackling the COVID-19 crisis at the regional and subregional levels [agenda item 4]

1. Background

21. Every year the Forum engages in an evidence-based review of progress at the regional and subregional levels towards attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. In 2021 that review also took into account the challenges posed by the continuing COVID-19 crisis.

2. Key messages

22. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Investments in key enablers such as reproductive health, mental health, primary health care, education and quality of governance must be boosted to engineer growth, address income inequality and reduce rent-seeking impulses;

(b) State and non-State entities should put in place measures to ensure the sustainable extraction and use of natural resources and to promote investments in digitalization and modern technologies to increase productivity, bridge the digital divide, spur innovation and accelerate growth;

(c) Measures to address governance, peace and security must be applied, following a people-centred approach;

(d) Governments should put in place measures to boost domestic resource mobilization through efforts to expand revenue sources, broaden tax bases and stem corruption and illicit financial flows;

(e) Governments and development partners should foster a more conducive climate and broadened partnerships for science, technology and

innovation in support of sustainable development;

(f) Countries are urged to avail themselves of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, to ensure coherence in tracking progress towards development goals.

C. Plenary round-table panel on meeting data and statistics needs for evidence-based, inclusive and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and to achieve the goals of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development in Africa [agenda item 5]

1. Background

23. The panel focused on the need for improved capacity in the use of data, including big data, in meeting the development aspirations of the continent and ensuring its recovery from the pandemic.

2. Key messages

24. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Data and information are major assets to Africa's development process, since high-quality data are prerequisites to good policy;

(b) High-quality data should be disaggregated by location, gender, age, disability and other population characteristics, with a view to closing the digital divide and leaving no one behind, in particular minorities and other vulnerable groups, and should include labour market information systems, thereby enabling the accurate assessment of and response to labour market trends;

(c) The provision of timely and disaggregated data by national statistical systems is critical to informing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the two agendas;

(d) Despite having sound statistical institutions, data collection in many African countries remains poor and scattered across multiple jurisdictions and between silos;

(e) Sound development decision-making requires robust data foundations, with timely, accurate and disaggregated information on development metrics. Given the importance of political will to the data-collection process, there is an urgent need for African Governments to invest in digital data infrastructure and capacity development.

D. Plenary round-table panels on national and local action and reviews for sustainable recovery and building forward better from the COVID-19 crisis, and to review the implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: voluntary national reviews and peer learning to strengthen recovery from COVID-19 and implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 [agenda item 6 (a)]

1. Background

25. Under this agenda item, the Forum considered the role of voluntary national reviews in measuring and fostering inclusive, sustainable development and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa. Prior to the seventh session, 45 African member States had conducted and submitted their voluntary

national reviews while a further 10 planned to submit theirs in 2021.

2. Key messages

26. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

- (a) Member States are urged:
 - (i) To continue in their commitments to the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and in their commendable progress on voluntary national reviews;
 - (ii) To draw on lessons from past voluntary national reviews when engaging in their second, third and even fourth voluntary national reviews;
 - (iii) To maintain their focus on policies for long-term sustainable socioeconomic development and embed this focus in COVID-19 response packages;
 - (iv) To engage with initiatives linked to the high-level political forum and voluntary national review labs, facilitating the exchange of ideas;
 - (v) To bring the case for international cooperation on COVID-19 relief, financing for sustainable development and other multilateral processes to the high-level political forum;
 - (vi) To empower citizens to participate in voluntary national reviews and build the capacities of civil society to contribute to the review processes;
 - (vii) More directly to address child protection in the voluntary national reviews and promote child-led initiatives in designing and implementing policies for sustainable development;
 - (viii) To close the digital divide, to ensure that no one is left behind;
 - (ix) To incorporate the African Continental Free Trade Area and other regional initiatives into their national plans and activities;
 - (x) To incorporate forward-looking next steps in their voluntary national reviews, which may be included in the Sustainable Development Goals Moment to be held at the General Assembly in September 2021;
- (b) The United Nations system is urged:
 - (i) To ensure that the global, regional and national pandemic response is a central element discussed at the 2021 high-level political forum;
 - (ii) To elevate advocacy and multilateralism for the rights and protection of children;
 - (iii) To promote peer learning, building new partnerships and addressing the specific challenges and opportunities of Africa at the 2021 high-level political forum;
 - (iv) To continue taking the lead on support and socioeconomic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic provided by the United Nations system;
 - (v) To continue the convening of forums by ECA and others to build capacities and share best practices in pursuing voluntary national reviews.

E. Plenary round-table panels on national and local action and reviews for sustainable recovery and building forward better from the COVID-19 crisis, and to review the implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: voluntary local reviews and peer learning to bolster local action to recover and build forward better from the COVID-19 crisis, and to review progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 [agenda item 6 (b)]

1. Background

27. Under this agenda item, the Forum considered the role of voluntary local reviews in accelerating the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in Africa and ensuring ownership, accountability and the commitment of all stakeholders at all levels. The 2030 Agenda encouraged United Nations Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels that were country-led and country-driven.

2. Key messages

28. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States are urged:

(i) To integrate voluntary local reviews in the regional and national monitoring and review of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 to foster local ownership, commitment, and action;

(ii) To promote coherence and coordination between voluntary national and voluntary local reviews;

(iii) To strengthen public and private sector partnership through voluntary local reviews, with a view to leveraging finance and investments;

(iv) To tackle the digital divide in Africa in order to harness the untapped potential of youth innovation and creativity;

(v) To reinforce and rebuild local fiscal space, in particular in the context of COVID-19, so that local authorities have the means to implement the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2036

(vi) To improve the planning and management of the urban transition of Africa;

(b) The United Nations is requested:

(i) To support member States in the local disaggregation of data and statistics for effective planning, investments and implementation relating to the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063;

(ii) To compile best practices on the response and recovery measures taken by local authorities to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular in support of the informal sector;

(c) The United Nations system, in partnership with the Africa Section of United Cities and Local Governments (UNLG-Africa), is requested to promote more local reviews informed by the Africa voluntary local reviews guidelines, and facilitate peer reviews informed by the experience in the use of the African Peer Review Mechanism.

F. Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made and peer learning on the sub-themes of the Regional Forum: parallel meeting on the sub-theme of no poverty [agenda item 7 (a)]

1. Background

29. The sub-theme of no poverty covered Sustainable Development Goal 1 on ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063 and the means of implementation needed to deliver the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 over the decade 2020–2030.

2. Key messages

30. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) It should be recognized that the slight progress of Africa towards the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 has been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which reversed some of the gains made, and therefore Africa is not on track to reduce and end poverty by 2030 and 2063, respectively;

(b) Data generation should be strengthened for poverty measurement and for overarching and empirically grounded policy formulation;

(c) Partnerships among public, private and other non-State entities should be strengthened, to accelerate progress and reassess international solidarity as an economic principle;

(d) International cooperation mechanisms should be strengthened, to improve market access for African products and leverage the African Continental Free Trade Area to add value to trade, improve welfare and reduce poverty;

(e) Public and private investment should be focused on poverty reduction and job creation through a combination of labour-intensive manufacturing and technological innovation.

G. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of zero hunger [agenda item 7 (b)]

1. Background

31. The sub-theme of zero hunger covered Sustainable Development Goal 2, on ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture, and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

2. Key messages

32. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States need to scale up investment and political commitment to make progress towards Goal 2 and the aspirations for 2025 and 2063, by focusing on three priority areas:

(i) Linking of rural actors to markets, financial services and innovation to transform rural areas;

(ii) Sustainable development of food systems, climate adaptation and preparedness infrastructure;

(iii) Human capital development, in particular childhood learning, healthy diets and social protection;

(b) The transformation of food systems should focus on food safety,

expanding early warning systems, and building resilient ecosystems using holistic, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches;

(c) Member States need to improve the forest-product value chains, in order to diversify food and income sources, using food commodities that are abundantly available in ecosystems for rural communities that are largely poor and food insecure;

(d) In addressing the impact of COVID-19, it is crucial to save lives and livelihoods through humanitarian and nutrition assistance, to support and enhance social protection, and to invest in resilient and sustainable food systems to avert climate change.

H. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of good health and well-being [agenda item 7 (c)]

1. Background

33. The sub-theme of good health and well-being covered Sustainable Development Goal 3, on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages, and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

2. Key messages

34. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States need to pay particular attention to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on mental health and ensure access to good-quality community-based mental health care services and facilities, and take the lead in ending stigma associated with mental health conditions;

(b) A comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health services, and measures to prevent and offer protection from sexual and gender-based violence must be prioritized at all times, including during crises, pandemics and other emergency situations;

(c) Intersectoral structures coordinated at the highest level of government are needed to ensure that health-related targets across all Goals are being monitored and reported on within accountability mechanisms, such as the domestic financing scorecard of the African Union;

(d) Health-care systems, in particular at the primary level, must be improved to deliver integrated, people-centred, non-discriminatory, equitable and high-quality care over the course of the lifecycle, in particular for rural communities and disadvantaged groups;

(e) Urgent investments are required at all levels to ensure resilient health systems across humanitarian, development and peace contexts;

(f) Accelerated policy interventions are required, to ensure the scale and pace of delivery needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3, to leverage innovation and the digitalization of supply chains, delivery models, measurement, monitoring and accountability within the health system;

(g) Sufficient resources must be allocated to expedite civil registration and collect the vital statistics necessary for health-related decision-making;

(h) Improved diagnostic capacity and awareness-raising measures are needed to redress the rising burden of non-communicable diseases and their role in exacerbating the impact of COVID-19.

I. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of decent work and economic growth [agenda item 7 (d)]

1. Background

35. The sub-theme of decent work and economic growth covered Sustainable Development Goal 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063. While the pandemic had further exacerbated economic and labour market challenges in Africa, it had also provided an opportunity to craft job-rich, inclusive and sustainable growth to build back better

2. Key messages

36. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States must adopt decisive public policies based on social dialogue, to build forward better from the pandemic, focusing on:

(i) Furthering employment-intensive structural transformation that builds the capacity of the labour market to employ young people;

(ii) Accelerating the transition to formality based on the International Labour Organization (ILO) Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204);

(iii) Building the continent's long-term productive capacities;

(iv) Fostering a rights-based approach anchored on labour standards and freedom of association, gender equality, and protection against harassment and violence at the workplace;

(v) Leveraging opportunities for a just transition to environmental sustainability;

(vi) Implementing a social protection strategy designed to increase coverage to 40 per cent by 2025;

(b) Member States should undertake a proactive, concerted policy effort:

(i) To leverage financial policies, including preferential lending to agriculture and other key sectors for improved access to finance to the private sector;

(ii) To deploy pro-employment monetary exchange rate and fiscal policies that can bolster the economy and employment creation, in particular in times of crisis;

(iii) To expand the tax base while facilitating tax compliance;

(iv) To foster public investments, in order to drive economic transformation and build the long-term productive potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area;

(v) To shape trade and investment policies to harness the job creation potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area;

(vi) To strengthen education and training, while aligning skills supply with business and labour market needs;

(vii) To establish progressive taxation, lifting wages and extending social protection systems;

(viii) To strengthen labour market institutions, in particular social dialogue, and also labour market data and information systems.

J. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of reduced inequalities

[agenda item 7 (e)]

1. Background

37. The sub-theme of reduced inequalities covered Sustainable Development Goal 10, on reducing inequality within and among countries, and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

2. Key messages

38. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States are urged:

(i) To promote an enabling legal and policy framework and encourage the participation of all in national and local, social and economic development;

(ii) To ensure implementation of United Nations and African Union instruments, including the Protocol relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, that support social protection of vulnerable populations in order to reduce inequalities among and within countries;

(iii) To improve socioeconomic data collection and analysis, and build a repository of evidence to inform decisions and efforts;

(iv) To engage with the private sector, which has the potential to drive interventions that address inequalities in access to information technologies;

(v) To invest in research and innovation to increase local productive capacities and reduce reliance of developed regions of the world, including in the production of COVID-19 vaccines and personal protective equipment;

(vi) To ensure that intersectoral structures are coordinated at the highest level of government to monitor and report on inequality-related targets across all Sustainable Development Goals, in a multi-sectoral response that takes into account the nexus between education, health, peace and security, and climate change challenges;

(vii) To invest more actively in human development, in particular public health and education, with a focus on women and girls, and to undertake comprehensive socioeconomic impact assessments of COVID-19, highlighting the differential gender impacts that drive inequality and determining the immediate, medium and long-term measures needed to support efforts to build forward better;

(viii) To forge effective multi-stakeholder partnerships to ensure that education and health care are available across the entire life cycle, accessible, acceptable and adaptable, including digital education and e-health;

(ix) To ensure multi-sectoral policy and programme implementation to facilitate increased productive capacities for all African countries, enabling them to leverage the regional trade

and integration opportunities presented by the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area;

(x) To place a stronger focus on the nexus between inequalities, resilience, peace, security, governance and the rule of law and to ensure that development strategies are risk-informed, with a view to preventing conflicts that exacerbate inequalities.

K. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of responsible consumption and production [agenda item 7 (f)]

1. Background

39. The sub-theme of responsible consumption and production covered Sustainable Development Goal 12, on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

2. Key messages

40. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States should scale up measures to achieve inclusive green economies and sustainable consumption and production;

(b) Circularity in the blue economy and access to green financing will boost the innovative capacities of small and medium-sized enterprises and accelerate the just transition to green and circular economies;

(c) Advocacy and educational measures should be stepped up to encourage young people to follow sustainable lifestyles;

(d) Resource-efficient, cleaner production and other circular economy practices such as reuse, repair and recycling should be promoted, including green business development, with a view to promoting productivity and competitiveness in Africa;

(e) ECA should strengthen its collaboration with the African Union Commission, thereby fostering engagement between the African Union Commission and other United Nations entities;

(f) Stepped up efforts should be made to harness the potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area;

(g) Member States should promote sustainable production and consumption by connecting smallholder farmers to markets, increasing diversification of production systems, promoting secure land tenure rights and other measures;

(h) With the support of development partners, member States should take all necessary steps to achieve sustainable ocean economies.

L. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of climate action [agenda item 7 (g)]

1. Background

41. The sub-theme of climate action covered Sustainable Development Goal 13, on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

2. Key messages

42. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) The continent needs to invest in climate risk information and digital solutions, to enhance the use of technologies in the production of tailored and integrated climate information services for uptake and use by end-user communities;

(b) Governments must promote a whole-of-society approach that will ensure coherent development and implementation of adequately financed disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies;

(c) Local communities and young people need to be meaningfully involved in the design and implementation of climate action;

(d) Nature-based solutions, including reforestation and protection of peatlands, should be prioritized, in recognition of the environmental, social and economic benefits of this approach, and to help build resilience, and good practices, such as the example of the Congo basin, should be shared across Africa;

(e) Swapping debt for nature and climate protection will provide a bridge to greater debt sustainability, potentially benefiting both agendas;

(f) Young people have been rendered more vulnerable by the COVID-19 pandemic and should be included in planning and policy formulation.

M. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of peace, justice and strong institutions [agenda item 7 (h)]

1. Background

43. The sub-theme of peace, justice and strong institutions covered Sustainable Development Goal 16, on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, and the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

2. Key messages

44. In the light of that discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) African countries must foster political leadership and meaningful stakeholder participation in the planning, decision-making, monitoring and reporting processes pertaining to the Sustainable Development Goals;

(b) In order to leave no one behind, member States must provide adequate resources to strengthen their human resources and disaggregated data collection, monitoring and evaluation systems and must be accountable for the resources deployed ostensibly in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) African member States, together with United Nations agencies and development partners, should strengthen the capacity of their institutions to adopt a human rights-based approach to development and to integrate international and regional human rights norms and standards;

(d) African member States should work with partners such as the African Union Commission, ECA and others to protect the financial security of Africa through curbing illicit financial flows, including corruption, to increase availability of domestic resources;

(e) In order to build back and forward better towards a resilient and green Africa, strong institutions are required to ensure human rights obligations and good governance, embracing innovative approaches and technologies that facilitate e-governance.

N. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of partnerships [agenda item 7 (i)]

1. Background

45. The sub-theme of partnerships covered Sustainable Development Goal 17, on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development, with a view to promoting post-pandemic recovery by building back better and accelerating sustainable development.

2. Key messages

46. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) International development partners should strengthen multilateral cooperation mechanisms, ensure the full and timely disbursement of their financial pledges and meet their official development assistance commitments;

(b) Efforts should be made to strengthen countries' domestic resource mobilization and public expenditure oversight mechanisms;

(c) African countries should mobilize tax revenues in a way that does not affect investment and growth, including a review of tax concessions, excise taxes, and measures to enhance tax administration;

(d) African economies should strengthen domestic resource mobilization by promoting capital market development, addressing administrative and tax policy loopholes and combating illicit financial flows.

(e) Africa must invest more in research and development, infrastructure and human capital development;

(f) By boosting intra-African trade, promoting industrialization and facilitating African countries' integration into the world economy, the African Continental Free Trade Area will facilitate efforts by African countries to recover from COVID-19 and build forward better in a post-pandemic world;

(g) The African Union, United Nations system, regional economic communities and member States should all take action to strengthen national capacities to make effective use of innovative technologies and big data when drawing up development policies and priorities;

(h) The United Nations development system should forge stronger partnerships across Africa and beyond so as to leverage the expertise and capabilities of relevant sustainable development stakeholders;

(i) African countries should promote women's professional networks and ensure women's full and active participation in working towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

O. Plenary round-table panel on leveraging science, technology, innovation and digital transformation for a resilient and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and to achieve the goals of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development in Africa [agenda item 8]

1. Background

47. Under this agenda item, the Forum considered the leveraging of science, technology, innovation and digital transformation for a resilient and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and to achieve the goals of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development in Africa. The panel reviewed

ways in which Africa could recover better from the COVID-19 pandemic by harnessing science, technology and innovation.

2. Key messages

48. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Africa needs to prioritize low carbon development strategies, leveraging its natural resources and building value chains by adopting appropriate technologies and skills to optimize economic opportunities;

(b) Countries should increase funds available for science, technology and innovation, by allocating more finance for development, reducing illicit financial flows and other measures;

(c) Countries should step up their investment in human capital development, the importance of which has been evidenced by the global COVID-19 pandemic;

(d) Strategies should be developed to use key assets such as energy and information and communications technology as catalysts for technological development and industrialization, capitalizing on the opportunities afforded by the African Continental Free Trade Area;

(e) There is need to leverage and build partnerships by strengthening digital and energy infrastructure, to enable people to learn and work anywhere;

(f) Countries and the private sector should work together to develop innovative and inclusive financing models for science, technology and innovation that will drive entrepreneurship and promote innovations and industrial development;

(g) Countries should implement science, technology and innovation policies to accelerate attainment of the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

P. Regional dialogue: African food systems [agenda item 9]

1. Background

49. Under this agenda item, the Forum engaged in a regional dialogue on the issue of African food systems. Discussion were carried out in three segments, namely a high-level policy round table on leveraging regional action for sustainable food systems, followed by two breakout meetings, the first on building sustainable resilient food systems in Africa and the second on promoting sustainable inclusive food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition.

2. Key messages

50. In the light of their discussions under the three segments, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) A comprehensive continental strategy must be devised for the broader modernization and sustainable, technology-driven industrialization of food production systems based on each member State's comparative advantage;

(b) For their part, member States are urged:

(i) To adopt evidence-based policies and strategies to transform their food systems in a way that supports more diverse, affordable, sustainable and healthy diets with strong food safety and resilient ecosystem considerations;

(ii) To invest in innovative technologies and the digitalization

of agriculture for a transformative food system

- (iii) To invest in resilient food systems, facilitating sustained access to affordable and nutritious foods, essential nutrition services and positive nutrition practices in all settings;
- (iv) To apply opportunities and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (v) To align their national strategies with the African Continental Free Trade Area process and develop regional agricultural value chains that focus on value addition;
- (vi) To ensure the free flow of food, at regional and continental levels, through the African Continental Free Trade Area;
- (vii) To identify policy and fiscal measures across ministries to support food affordability;
- (viii) To involve young people as the cornerstone of all strategies;
- (ix) To strengthen land tenure security in the continent, in particular for women;
- (x) To empower women in key roles in African food systems.

Q. Presentation and discussions on sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: presentation by the major groups and other stakeholders [agenda item 10 (a)]

a. Background

51. Under this agenda item, the Forum considered the perspectives of major groups and stakeholders on sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

b. Key messages

52. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) In respect of Goal 1, on no poverty, Goal 2, on zero hunger, and Goal 3, on good health and well-being, member States are urged:

- (i) To ensure that equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination underpin all efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and to report regularly, with disaggregated data, on the progress made in reaching the most deprived and marginalized people;
- (ii) To promote land tenure security for local and indigenous women and provide support to small farmers;
- (iii) To strengthen public investment, in line with agreed targets, and the provision of high-quality, inclusive, accessible and affordable health and long-term care, nutrition, education and social protection services;
- (iv) To increase mechanisms for meaningful and inclusive participation of all stakeholders in decision-making, implementation and accountability processes around the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and COVID-19 response and recovery strategies, including the COVID-19 vaccines;

(b) In respect of Goal 8, on decent work and economic growth, and Goal 10, on reduced inequalities, member States are urged:

- (i) To implement inclusive and gender-responsive economic policies;
 - (ii) To design and implement employment and macroeconomic policies and strategies that create decent jobs for young people and women;
 - (iii) To strengthen national labour laws and policies to ensure that vulnerable and marginalized groups are protected;
 - (iv) To align national legislation and policies with international standards and norms, ensuring that all forms of exploitation are criminalized and that penalties are sufficiently stringent and commensurate with the penalties imposed for other serious offences;
- (c) In respect of Goal 12, on responsible consumption and production, and Goal 13, on climate action, member States are urged:
- (i) To strengthen environmental laws in line with international environmental law frameworks and build the capacity of national institutions to monitor adherence to those laws;
 - (ii) To accelerate climate action by integrating climate measures in COVID-19 recovery plans, policies and strategies;
 - (iii) To strengthen waste management mechanisms, including waste from COVID-19-related products;
 - (iv) To strengthen national disaster management systems to deal with emerging climate change-related and natural disasters;
 - (v) To strengthen and promote indigenous knowledge systems;
 - (vi) To ensure a just transition to low-carbon, circular production models;
- (d) In respect of Goal 16, on peace, justice and strong institutions, member States are urged:
- (i) To strengthen existing or establish new multi-stakeholder mechanisms at all levels to ensure full representation, equality and leadership of all categories of citizens;
 - (ii) To uphold democracy, the rule of law and human rights;
 - (iii) To ensure independent, transparent and peaceful elections in conformity with international human rights and democratic standards;
 - (iv) To strengthen regional collective efforts to resolve violent conflict within and between African countries and combat terrorism, insurgencies and armed groups;
 - (v) To ensure human security, in particular in humanitarian settings, and invest in proactive government systems that minimize crises;
- (e) In respect of Goal 17, on partnerships for the Goals, member States are urged:
- (i) To design and implement a multi-stakeholder approach that harmonizes the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, fosters the participation and contribution of all sectors, major groups and other stakeholders and ensures that no one is left behind;
 - (ii) To invest in data-gathering and processing institutions and to recognize citizen-generated data and research, in order to

resolve the data-paucity problem and to benchmark and monitor progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(iii) To adopt clear financing mechanisms for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and to fulfil the research and development commitments of the African Union;

(iv) To resolve the issue of shrinking civic space and the overregulation of civil society organizations and trade unions;

(v) To build the capacity of African civil society to deliver on structured partnerships based on win-win engagements;

(vi) To mobilize funding in support of local communities, including rural women, to ensure their effective and direct participation in efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals, the preparation of voluntary national reviews and shadow reporting.

R. Support delivery modalities of the United Nations development system [agenda item 10 (b)]

1. Background

53. Under this agenda item, the Forum considered the support and delivery modalities of the regional United Nations development system for sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

2. Key messages

54. In the light of the ensuing discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) To expand the reach and enhance the effectiveness of the work by the United Nations to support Governments in localizing and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and accelerating progress in the decade of action and delivery, the United Nations system should identify and strengthen inclusive approaches that also encompass effective engagement of the civil society;

(b) The Regional Collaborative Platform should initiate a dialogue with the African Union on the implementation of health-related undertakings by African Governments, including the allocation of at least 15 per cent of their annual budgets to improving the health sector, pledged by Heads of State in the 2001 Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases;

(c) Domestic resource mobilization, taking advantage of the African Continental Free Trade Area and through such measures as the greening of taxation and procurement and the implementation of the African Green Stimulus Programme, will be of critical importance.

S. Country-level perspectives and regional strategy to support the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development in Africa [agenda item 10 (c)]

1. Background

55. Under this agenda item, the Forum considered country-level perspectives and the regional strategy to support the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development in Africa, sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

2. Key messages

56. In the light of that discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) African member States must present a unified front at global forums such as the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and others, to ensure that African voices are heard and the continent's concerns are heeded;

(b) Member States are called upon to observe the United Nations decade of action and delivery on sustainable development through the implementation of the regional strategy in support of the decade;

(c) Political will for sustainable development must continue, as it is crucial to ensuring that the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 are placed front and centre in national development plans in Africa;

(d) The United Nations system should make further efforts under the United Nations reform process to ensure "Delivering as one" through an integrated approach, including support for member States by coordinating among the many national and global developmental partners and continued work through the Regional Collaborative Platform;

(e) The ECA regional strategy will be an important means of harmonizing the continent's many overlapping mandates and commitments to global, regional, subregional and national development agendas;

(f) This strategy must reflect three major groups of stakeholders: governing authorities, civil society and development partners, and should identify and enhance synergies conducive to progress towards multiple goals and targets across different agendas, including by strengthening the focus on cross-cutting issues.

T. Submission of the key messages to the high-level political forum and their presentation by the Chair

57. The Forum requested the secretariat to submit its key messages to the high-level political forum through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, by 21 April 2021. The Forum further requested the Chair to make a presentation of its key messages to the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council at its meeting in New York from 7 to 15 July 2021, during the session on the reports of the regional forums for sustainable development.

U. Appreciation

58. The ministers, high-level officials and participants expressed their appreciation to the President of the Republic of the Congo and to the Government and people of the Congo for hosting the seventh session of the

Regional Forum and for the warm hospitality extended to them and conveyed their gratitude for the arrangements to enable online participation in the session for those attending from their home countries. They also expressed their appreciation to the President and the Deputy Prime Minister, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, the President of the Economic and Social Council, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa and the Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Industry and Mining of the African Union Commission for their attendance at the Forum.

Annex

[Original: French]

Brazzaville Declaration

We, African ministers and senior officials responsible for environment and sustainable development, finance, economic and social development, agriculture, education, justice, statistics, the digital economy, science and technology, heads and members of delegations of the parliaments of African Union member States and experts representing Governments and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and civil society,

Gathered online and face-to-face in Brazzaville from 1 to 4 March 2021, on the occasion of the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, held under the theme “Building forward better: towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063” and placed under the high patronage of the President of the Republic of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso,

Expressing our appreciation and gratitude to the Government for having kindly hosted this Forum, ensuring all the necessary conditions for the success of its work, which was marked by fruitful and high-quality discussions on the monitoring and evaluation of the progress achieved, exchanges of experience in the field of sustainable development in Africa, and the formulation of key messages aimed at accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union,

Considering that the health and socioeconomic impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic could compromise the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular in the least developed countries,

Considering also the crucial role played by Africa in general and Central Africa in particular in regulating the global climate, thanks to the Congo basin forest, which constitutes the world's second largest ecological lung,

1. *Invite* development partners to mobilize the necessary financing for the operationalization of the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin, in order to support the member countries of the Congo Basin Climate Commission in reconciling efforts to combat climate change with economic development;

2. *Urge* the international community to support initiatives for the conservation and preservation of the peatlands of the central basin of the Congo River, which, by sequestering nearly 30 billion tons of carbon, help to maintain the global climate balance;

3. *Call upon* all African countries to redefine and develop economic models that incorporate the protection of natural resources, the promotion of renewable energies, the development of green and resilient infrastructure and inclusive digitization, informed by an awareness of the value of our human capital;

4. *Also call upon* all African countries to harness science, innovation and emerging cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain systems, to drive the transformative change needed over the next 10 years to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals;

5. *Call upon* all countries to implement the key messages of the Forum;

6. *Request* the Government of the Congo to present the key messages on behalf of Africa to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council at its meeting in New York from 6 to 15 July 2021, at the twenty-sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Conference

on Climate Change, and at various global, regional and subregional forums, with a view to urging the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.
