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Statutory issues**Report of the Executive Secretary on the work of the
Economic Commission for Africa covering the period
from April 2020 to March 2021****Foreword**

This annual report covers the period from April 2020 to March 2021, an unprecedented year of challenges, marked by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and recession worldwide. The report highlights some of the keys of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in support of member States' and regional economic communities' sustainable development priorities, in line with its strategic directions and core functions. ECA has played an instrumental role in addressing the most pressing challenges confronting African countries resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent contraction of economies, building on previous initiatives following the compact between the African Union–United Nations Development Framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union.

ECA made significant advances in various areas within the context of the United Nations decade of action and delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals. Some examples at the continental level include (a) the development, digitalization and establishment of knowledge hubs and online policy dialogue platforms; (b) organization of a successful continental coding boot camp, in which 2,000 young girls and women participated, which was held to promote the importance of information and communications technology as a tool for the empowerment of women; (c) support to the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the start of trading; (d) development of a dashboard to assess the progress of member States and their designated airlines in implementing the Single African Air Transport Market; (e) development of national competitiveness strategies; (f) the initiation of the debt service suspension initiative, working closely with African Finance Ministers, for its adoption by the G20; (g) support in the development of an African green recovery and investment strategy, as well as update of the Africa Climate Change Strategy, in close coordination with the African Union; and (h) training of approximately 360 African policymakers on tools to design strategies and policies to harness the economic potential of African cities and rapid urban

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** E/ECA/COE/39/1.



growth. At the subregional level, examples include (a) support to the launch of a process to design an all-encompassing Central Africa industrialization and economic diversification master plan, in line with the Douala Consensus; and (b) the update of the Sahel 2043 Prospective Study, the findings of which aim to build a peaceful, prosperous and resilient region, and which will be integrated into the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and in country level planning tools.

As part of the Beijing+25 agenda, ECA worked with countries to accelerate the implementation of policies and programmes for the empowerment of women and girls, and gender equality, in Africa. ECA is addressing climate change as cutting across all its programmes. In line with the Secretary-General's "Greening the Blue" initiative, measures are being implemented to reduce its carbon footprint progressively. By adopting efficiency measures and using offsets, ECA has been climate-neutral since 2015, is in the process of eliminating single-use plastic, and has also adopted sustainable paper-smart conference practices. A high-level steering group is being established to further drive progress towards sustainability in terms of interventions of ECA and its use of resources. On mainstreaming the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, a Standing Task Force was established to monitor this across ECA activities. Some examples of progress included observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities at ECA, and a fully accessible persons with disability door was installed at the ECA entrance.

Amid the numerous challenges Africa faced in 2020, new opportunities arose. These included leveraging emerging technologies and forging innovative public-private partnerships to address and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Examples include the creation of the African Medical Supply Platform, an online marketplace that provided rapid access to pandemic medicines and supply of critical COVID-19-related medical equipment; and the African Communication and Information Platform, a mobile-based digital public communications platform providing 600 million mobile users across the continent with the latest health information.

ECA also utilized its convening, think tank and operational functions to advance policy dialogues in high-level forums on COVID-19 at the regional level and advancing the position of Africa at the global level, particularly on the issue of liquidity and options for increasing fiscal space for emerging and frontier economies as a response to the crisis, further articulated in the publication *COVID-19 in Africa: Protecting Lives and Economies*.¹

ECA will nurture and build new partnerships, deepen ties with its external partners and enhance its collaboration with other regional economic communities on common areas of interest, such as statistics. ECA will continue to cooperate with the regional teams of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, as well as the United Nations resident coordinator system. ECA will work with the United Nations country teams within the framework of the recently launched Regional Collaborative Platform and through its contributions to the work of the operational opportunity/initiative-based coalitions. With the view towards maximizing the use of resources, capitalizing on synergies and aiming for greater impact, ECA has consciously fortified its internal joint planning and delivery in thematic areas, through interdivisional flagship initiatives and projects, and institutional restructuring.

¹ *COVID-19 in Africa: Protecting Lives and Economies* (Addis Ababa, ECA, 2020).

ECA remains committed and determined to accompany and partner with member States and regional economic communities, as well as other intergovernmental organizations, in their journey towards building forward and seizing emerging sustainable development opportunities for a prosperous and thriving Africa in the post COVID-19 recovery.

Vera Songwe
Under-Secretary-General of the
United Nations and Executive
Secretary of the Economic
Commission for Africa

I. Introduction

1. During the reporting period, and despite constraints and limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has continued to deliver its programme of work around its convening, think tank and operational functions, alongside its strategic directions on knowledge-building, formulation of policy options and innovative finance models, supporting regional and transboundary issues, and advancing Africa's position at the global level.

2. The present report focuses on key achievements of ECA that have advanced the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. It is articulated in the following three areas: (a) supporting the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), alongside private sector and infrastructure development, and innovative financing; (b) promoting the digital and data revolution in Africa; and (c) building forward better for sustainable development, focusing on green recovery, mainstreaming of climate change and the blue economy. An additional section will look at the enhanced operational modalities put in place for a more sustainable and impactful implementation of the ECA programme of work. Conclusions will highlight some key trends for the next cycle (2021–2022).

3. ECA provided its expertise through targeted and tailor-made technical and policy advisory services at the national, subregional and regional levels; and provided assistance for technical and capacity development upon the request of member States. ECA has built up and sustained platforms for policy dialogue and consensus-building in discussing COVID-19 pandemic priority issues, and advancing the capacities of African public officials in policy formulation and implementation. Complements of information and additional targeted actions of ECA addressing member States' challenges and needs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic are described in the Report on the follow-up to the resolutions of the fifty-second session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, and the resolutions of the extraordinary meeting of the Bureau of the Conference, held at the ministerial level on 9 April 2020. The wide array of activities, including papers and studies on the topic, illustrates the high level of responsiveness and speedy reaction of ECA in times of emergency. Furthermore, the acknowledgement and appreciation received by beneficiaries have consolidated the positioning of ECA at the forefront of positively influencing decision-making on the continent as well as its role as a key strategic partner with the African Union and the African Development Bank.

4. ECA has facilitated institutional joint planning and delivery by supporting divisions and subregional offices. This strategy is already contributing to improved programmatic interlinkages and integrated multidimensional policy support to beneficiaries, and makes optimal use of limited resources for more impactful contributions to national, subregional and regional priorities. ECA will also be using the Regional Collaborative Platform and the Opportunity/Initiative-Based Coalitions networks to deliver its programme of work.

II. Key results achieved

A. Supporting the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area alongside private sector and infrastructure development, and innovative financing for a prosperous Africa

5. The implementation of AfCFTA – together with innovative financing, as well as the development of the private sector and infrastructure – is expected to contribute to the acceleration of socioeconomic recovery post-COVID-19, and attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa, through the identification of new opportunities and design of operational frameworks and mechanisms aimed at translating them into job creation, increased investments and improved industrialization, ultimately leading to strengthened regional cooperation and integration. Furthermore, ECA has pursued its efforts towards the operationalization of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 through further integration of regional value chains in national and subregional trade policies.

6. ECA has played an instrumental role in accelerating the ratification of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area by African countries, reaching 34 with Nigeria as the most recent ratifying member State, representing almost three quarters of the continent’s gross domestic product (GDP), and paving the way for the start of its operational implementation on 1 January 2021, a historical milestone, and major achievement given the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic. AfCFTA covers a market of \$2.3 trillion and 1.3 billion people. This was made possible thanks to the direct assistance provided to countries in formulating national strategies aimed at enabling them to harness the full benefits of AfCFTA through the identification of comparative and competitive advantages, as well as key value addition, trade and investment opportunities towards boosting production capacities, manufacturing and intraregional trade.

7. The Gambia, Mauritania, Senegal and Sierra Leone have benefitted from ECA’s support. In East Africa, four new strategies for Burundi, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, and a regional strategy for the East African Community, were developed, and efforts will be pursued towards supporting phase II of the AfCFTA negotiations, including on investments, regional value chains, services, competition, movement of persons, the blue economy and tourism. Demographic dividends are another important component. In West Africa, ECA developed a public budgeting framework, mainstreaming demographic dynamics for Mali and improving the capacity of 15 member States and the Economic Community of West African States through national transfer account methodology.

8. The declaration of the period 2021–2030 as the Decade of Economic Diversification in Central Africa, and the launching of the Central Africa Industrialization and Economic Diversification Masterplan, spearheaded by the Central African Economic and Monetary Community and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), building on the comparative advantages of the member States, are key milestones towards supporting the implementation of AfCFTA in Central Africa. Lastly, ECA led the development of a medium-term strategic plan (2021–2025) for the integration of ECCAS.

9. ECA is participating in the elaboration of the African Union-led Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) Priority Action Plan (PAP) phase II (2021–2030), building on the lessons learned from PAP I (which had included more than 400 projects in 51 cross-border programmes, under implementation until the end of 2020), and taking into consideration a series of criteria, such as linkages to regional priorities, inclusivity and structural

transformation. PAP covers four key infrastructure sectors: transport, energy, information and communications technology, and transboundary water resources.

10. ECA participated with the other four United Nations regional economic communities in a joint United Nations project on transport and trade connectivity in the time of pandemic. During the first phase, concluded at the end of 2020, ECA reviewed related challenges along the African trade and transport corridors, and devised policy recommendations. The second phase will focus on smart transport and trade facilitation solutions.

11. As part of its involvement in the Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021–2030), ECA has underscored the need for safer infrastructure, and carried out a road safety performance review for Ethiopia. This report, unveiled in January 2021, could be emulated in other countries in Africa, registering a high number of casualties. ECA has also contributed to the development of key performance indicators for implementing an Africa-wide single air transport market.

12. ECA has assisted Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Morocco, Rwanda, South Africa and Zambia in undertaking a regulatory review of their power sector value chains (generation, transmission, distribution and off-grid) in terms of openness (structure and governance), attractiveness (economics) and readiness (maturity). It is expected that related results will be used by the private sector to inform their investment decisions.

13. The implementation of AfCFTA also requires creative mechanisms to sustain long-term financing. In 2020, ECA focused its flagship *Economic Report on Africa* on the theme “Innovative Finance for Private Sector Development in Africa”,² looking at new types of financing as a way to increase the private sector’s resilience to the effects of the global coronavirus pandemic. The report launched in December 2020 examines the innovative financial instruments, practices and policies required to enable African countries to make a step-change in growing businesses that will drive inclusive economic growth, and create jobs and pathways to better livelihoods for African people.

14. Recalling the responsibility of all, ECA played a critical role in pushing a plan to (a) extend the Debt Suspension Service Initiative (DSSI), endorsed in April 2020 by the G20 and the Paris Club in the aftermath of the COVID-19 economic crisis until the end of 2021 or possibly the end of 2022; (b) get more funding through Special Drawing Rights (SDR); and set up a facility to help countries meet short-term debt payments and a boost in lending from development banks. In October 2020, G20 officials agreed to extend the DSSI freeze on official bilateral debt payments to the first half of 2021, and said they would consider another six-month extension in April 2021. ECA also called for a fresh liquidity injection of SDR 500 billion (\$ 709 billion), which could deliver over \$150 billion in additional reserves to emerging-market economies, including \$20 billion directly to low-income countries.

15. In December 2020, ECA and the French Agency for Development signed a partnership agreement aiming at supporting African Governments in the implementation of DSSI. ECA will provide technical expertise to support African Governments in the evaluation of their needs under DSSI. The technical assistance will aim to support African countries fill the \$345 billion financing gap needed to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and attain a sustainable path for development.

² *Economic Report on Africa: Innovative Finance for Private Sector Development in Africa* (United Nations publication, sales No. E.20.II.K.2).

B. Promoting the digital and data revolution in Africa as a foundation for post-pandemic recovery and reinvigorated growth

16. ECA undertook several pioneering activities in support of the African Union Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020–2030), developed with its collaboration, also building on PIDA to create a digital single market. ECA helped Ethiopia in developing an inclusive digital strategy (Digital Ethiopia 2025 Strategy), endorsed at the highest level in June 2020.

17. African Governments need to seize on the opportunities of the global digital economy, which is set to grow from \$11.5 trillion in 2016 to over \$23 trillion by 2025. In a bid to assess how countries are leveraging information technologies for future readiness, ECA and the Portulans Institute teamed up to launch, on 30 November 2020, a report titled, “Accelerating Digital Transformation in a Post-COVID Global Economy”. The analysis shows that digital innovation and entrepreneurship have increased in Africa, with more than 400 digital hubs in 93 cities, generating collectively more than \$1.1 billion. It also notes that the race to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic stimulated innovation and creativity across Africa. However, the digital technology terrain’s challenges are numerous, including limited access to digital services, inadequate and/or restrictive policies, and lack of interoperability of platforms.

18. ECA consolidated significant advancements in the digital field within the framework of its Digital Centre of Excellence for digital identity, trade and economy, in particular on the institution’s Digital Initiative to support African countries in fully harnessing the opportunities of digital identity to facilitate the provision of legal identity for all Africans, and to leverage digital trade in AfCFTA.

19. The work on digital identity is also embedded within the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda (2020–2030), launched in support of member States, building holistic, country-owned, sustainable civil registration, vital statistics and identity managements. Against this backdrop, ECA has assisted Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, the Niger, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Zambia – in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the United Nations Development Programme – in conducting assessments of their respective civil registration and vital statistics systems. Outcomes included policy and technical recommendations towards the redesign of the registration systems; addressing the barriers faced by communities in accessing legal identities; building interoperable systems linking civil registration as the foundation to identity management; production of vital statistics reports; and establishment of national population registers. Kenya and Zambia are at an advanced stage of establishing their national population registers.

20. On 6 October 2020, ECA launched the Africa Data Leadership Initiative with Future State and Smart Africa (spearheading a knowledge economy through affordable access to broadband and usage of information and communications technologies), creating safe space for policymakers, digital rights experts and entrepreneurs to learn together. The Initiative is a peer network designed for and by African policymakers, consumer rights advocates and private sector stakeholders to ensure the data economy drives equitable growth and social progress across the continent. Trustworthy and accurate data are vital for the development of Africa, hence data protection is crucial and should start with the building of secure infrastructure.

21. ECA further promoted its Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit and macromodelling (with a special focus on assessing the macroeconomic impacts of COVID-19) to improve member States’ alignment of their national development plans and planning processes with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and

supported several countries, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Namibia, Rwanda and Zambia.

22. Additionally, on 11 August 2020, ECA launched the Price Watch Centre for Africa, a first-of-its-kind continental tool that offers a unique view of price variations in African countries, regional economic communities and at the continental level. It is expected that it will help to monitor, analyse and manage economies through informed policy decisions. The platform brings the prices and exchange rates of all African countries into one place, and will generate monthly, quarterly and annual analyses of inflation. It will also enable a better understanding of macroeconomic convergence or divergence based on timely and reliable data on prices and movements of goods and services.

23. In the face of COVID-19, the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning initiated the conversion of in situ/traditional capacity-building programmes and activities into digital events (a threefold progression from 2019), while broadening the level of inclusiveness with increased participation of women.

24. ECA created and launched the Africa Knowledge Management Hub on COVID-19 and Africa Dashboard³ in April 2020 as a digital/online one-stop shop for information and knowledge resources, as well as strategies and responses by the regional United Nations Development System and Development Partners to strengthen capacities of member States to effectively respond to the pandemic in Africa.

25. ECA played a catalyst role in the conceptualization of the Africa Medical Supplies Platform under the leadership of the African Union, a unique platform aimed at facilitating the procurement of cost-effective strategic and certified medical equipment required to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. The orders in the pipeline exceed \$200 million global market value.

C. Building forward better for sustainable development, focusing on green recovery, mainstreaming of climate change and the blue economy

26. The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is an important milestone in the programme of work of ECA. It aims to advance integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, which are mutually reinforcing.

27. The sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development was held 24–27 February 2020, in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, on the theme “2020–2030: a decade to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”. It gathered around 3,000 participants from all countries on the continent. The meeting, which intervened right at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, called on all African countries to urgently revisit their frameworks for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, align their national development plans with the principles of the two Agendas, and set in motion programmes and projects to deliver on those Agendas.

28. ECA will hold the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, on “Building forward better: towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”, 1–4 March 2021, hosted by the Congo. This theme is aligned with that of the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development, “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”. In the wake of the pandemic and the

³ Available at <https://knowledge.uneca.org/covid19/>.

economic and social devastation it has wrought, both themes acknowledge the importance of reconstructing our socioeconomic systems by leveraging opportunities presented by green and low-carbon development trajectories, with a view to building a resilient, inclusive and sustainable Africa. Current growth trajectories suggest, however, that many countries will fail to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by the 2030 deadline. If we are to “leave no one behind”, a whole-of-society approach is needed, together with concerted and ambitious efforts to transform our world during the 10-year window provided by the decade of action to deliver on the Goals.

29. Sustainable Development Goals 1 (end extreme poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (partnerships for sustainable development) will be the subject of technical papers and lead to policy recommendations. The meeting will also include the third Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation in Africa. The second forum, held during the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, proved very popular, with the participation of a significant number of youth groups and individuals who rivalled in demonstrating top-notch innovations.

30. Very importantly for the discourse on “building forward better”, the nexus between the ongoing climate change, health and economic crises will be at the core of the discussions. The pandemic has highlighted the centrality of nature to development, revealing the systemic nature of risk and the cascading impact of disasters across all three dimensions of sustainable development. For Africa, crucially, climate change poses an existential threat, jeopardizing the attainment of the continent’s development agenda. Annually, climate change typically costs African countries between 2 and 5 per cent of GDP, but may sometimes reduce GDP by as much as 15 per cent. Though African nations must now address the serious economic and health repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that climate action does not fall victim to the colossal economic damage wrought by the COVID-19 crisis.

31. In partnership with the African Union Commission, ECA has set out to update the Africa Climate Change Strategy (initially developed in 2014), through consultations with key stakeholders in the region. All parties to the Paris Agreement are expected to update and enhance their nationally determined contributions. A global greenhouse gas stocktaking is planned for 2023. The first biennial transparency reports using the enhanced transparency framework will be due by 31 December 2024 for developing countries.

32. The African Climate Policy Centre was very active in conducting e-learning on climate change-related issues. It contributed to the milestone championing climate literacy week around the globe, celebrated in September 2020 by the One UN Climate Change Learning Partnership at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. It also formulated a course on climate information and services within the online curricula of the United Nations Climate Change Learning Partnership (UN CC:Learn), which was completed by more than 100,000 learners (more than 50 per cent of whom were women).

33. The African Climate Policy Centre prepared a paper on “Climate Change and Development in Africa Post-COVID-19: Some Critical Reflections”, addressing the climate emergency and lessons from COVID-19, global warming, financing the twin crises, the required energy transition, climate change perceptions, and whether COVID-19 lessons could benefit climate action. It also argued that a new political economy based on cohesion, equality and environmental sustainability is required to enable drastic climate actions.

34. ECA has also continued to push the agenda of science, technology and innovation in Africa in the context of green recovery. Nanotechnology research and development trends and market potential could directly and indirectly contribute to the development aspirations of Africa and its international obligations, especially

those in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. Egypt is currently the top nanotechnology research country in Africa, while South Africa is the African country which has filed the most patents and established the most nanotechnology companies and institutions. Overall, however, Africa is lagging. ECA and its partners invited researchers, innovators and firms or teams with unique nanotechnology-based or enabled products or research, to showcase them on 14–18 December 2020.

35. As a follow-up to the successful support provided to member States and intergovernmental organizations – including the Comoros, Seychelles, the Indian Ocean Commission and the African Union Commission – in developing strategic policy frameworks, including action plans on harnessing the blue economy for sustainable development, using the methodology of the Africa Blue Economy Policy Handbook, ECA has embarked on the development of a blue economy valuation toolkit. For the first time, a prototype toolkit tested in different types of countries, such as Djibouti (coastal), Rwanda (landlocked) and Seychelles (island State) has been devised to help member States and regional groupings in conducting in-depth socioeconomic and ecological assessments towards measuring the weight and contributions of the blue economy. The blue economy is expected to play a major boosting role in the socioeconomic and environmental post-COVID-19 recovery in many African countries.

36. In their quest to help strengthen the weak land governance and insecure land rights issues of Africa, which remain major development challenges for the continent, technical experts met in a virtual meeting on 21 September 2020, to discuss these concerns and plan ahead on what was needed to achieve the African Union agenda on land. African Land Policy Center also facilitated a training held in Lilongwe, Malawi, 22–23 December 2020, under the theme “Strengthening women’s land tenure security and entrepreneurship in line with the African Union agenda on land”.

D. Operational modalities for enhanced delivery of the Economic Commission for Africa programme of work

37. ECA conducted a new generation of Accountability and Programme Performance Review (APPR) meetings, with a special focus on joint delivery and planning. In 2020, four APPR meetings were held, with new approaches and innovation in promoting a culture of accountability and better programme performance. The last two review meetings led to very constructive internal discussions feeding back into the preparation of the 2021 Annual Business Plan and the 2022 Programme Plan. The first one, covering the third quarter of 2020, was held on “Promoting joint programme delivery for focused and impactful results” (27–29 October 2020). The third quarter APPR meeting was held, for the very first time, in a hybrid format, in which both thematic group and individual subprogrammes’ presentations were made.

38. Pursuing the same pathway, the 2020 fourth quarter APPR meeting was held on “Stocktaking of Programme Delivery and Forward Planning in a Challenging COVID-19 Context” (16–18 and 21 December 2020) in combination with discussions on the preparation of the 2021 annual business plan. For the first time, the meeting juxtaposed the reporting and planning dimensions in an innovative way, and as per the guiding principles of results-based management. The meeting was highly successful in leading to fruitful discussions, including on potential joint flagship initiatives on sustainable financing in the post-COVID-19 recovery era.

39. With a view to better and consistently streamline and guide its interventions, ECA has prepared two key strategic papers within the context of the United Nations reforms and the COVID-19 pandemic. The first one, on “ECA Collaboration with Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams: Towards a Strategic Approach”, highlights an approach aimed to provide direction and focus to ECA cooperation and collaboration with resident coordinators of United Nations Country

Teams, with a view to strengthening tailor-made support to country-level United Nations action, and thereby enhancing impact and visibility. At the heart of this strategic approach is the ECA “Menu of Services” to resident coordinators of United Nations Country Teams, covering a broad array of cross-sectoral analytical, advisory and capacity development services that can be tapped to deepen support to member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

40. The other framework, titled “Strategy for an integrated response to COVID-19: scope and objectives” defines the integrated response of ECA to the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences in Africa. The strategy seeks to create focus, synergy and coherence in ongoing COVID-19 interventions across thematic and programmatic areas in ECA, define areas of comparative advantage for ECA in its work on COVID-19, and map partnerships accordingly.

41. Furthermore, innovative partnerships with a wide range of national, regional and global stakeholders remain of vital importance for the implementation of the ECA programme of work. Over the course of 2020, ECA signed a number of framework agreements with a wide range of partners. These included the Omidyar Network to support the Digital Centre of Excellence on Digital ID and Data Protection, and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office of the United Nations Development Programme, to cooperate in the operational aspects of the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund in two main areas: (a) the integrated policy support to advance the Sustainable Development Goals – Gabon Programme and the Sustainable Development Goals “Beyond Oil”: Financing a Rapid and Sustainable Transition from a “Brown” to a “Green” Economy; and (b) the integrated policy support to advance the Sustainable Development Goals’ Benin programme to support its Sustainable Development Goals-based budgeting through fiscal space and efficiency enhancement. The United Nations Road Safety Trust Fund provided support to the United Republic of Tanzania Project Ten-Step Plan for Safer Road Infrastructure; the Open Society Foundation, to support ECA research and analysis for a project on debt standstill for vulnerable communities in Africa; the Government of Denmark, to cooperate in the operationalizing of AfCFTA; and the MasterCard Foundation, to make Africa a global pole for technological innovation and entrepreneurship consistent with continental ambitions.

42. In addition, ECA also formed partnerships with a number of think tanks – such as International Economics Consulting Ltd.; Microsoft East Africa Limited; AUDA–Continental Business Network; African Finance Corporation; African Centre for Economic Transformation; Union for Global Health; Tony Blair Institute; Bloomfield Investment Corporation; Policy Studies Institute; Standard Bank of South Africa Limited; StanLIB; MiDA Advisors International, LLC; and the Heritage Management Organization – with a view to assessing the impacts of economic integration and diversification policies on African economies.

43. Additionally, with a view to ensuring accountability towards its constituents, transparency in the use of resources, as well as critical learnings feeding back into the overall programme cycle, ECA pursued its evaluations focusing on the third joint financing agreement (JFA III), social protection and African trade integration. These evaluations noted that ECA knowledge products, advisory services and capacity-building initiatives, supported by JFA III funding, provided the resources ECA divisions and subregional offices needed to play the roles and functions of convener and think tank, as well as the operational capacity to carry forward the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The publications were deemed instrumental in influencing the debate on structural transformation in Africa.

44. Evaluations also revealed that the donor agencies appreciated the added value of the work of ECA, but raised some concern about its absorption capacity. It was noted that requests for no-cost extensions created the impression of a lack of proper planning and inability for timely delivery of results. On AfCFTA, the treaty recognizes the regional economic communities as the building blocks for its implementation. However, more could have been done to actively include regional economic communities. Furthermore, national AfCFTA strategies might not be implemented, given the lack of financial resources, and perhaps because they are

viewed as competing with existing national strategies. ECA would need to further work with Governments and partners to ensure this risk is adequately mitigated.

E. Forward-looking conclusions

45. The past complex cycle revealed itself as a unique opportunity for ECA to position itself as a front-level influential facilitator and negotiator in the international and continental arenas, leading to impactful and beneficial policy changes. In this vein, ECA will pursue its pioneering interventions and continue to play its broker role, with the view of assisting member States, regional economic communities, intergovernmental organizations and other stakeholders in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing challenges. It will spearhead concretization of innovative financing through the implementation of key policy recommendations and proposed mechanisms contained in the *Economic Report on Africa*⁴ and the strategy on building forward together: financing a sustainable recovery for the future of all.

46. ECA will strengthen its interventions around the following four pillars: (a) sustainable financing and debt management through mobilization of domestic and external public and private resources; (b) sustainable and inclusive growth and development through support for the implementation of AfCFTA, and resilient and fiscally sustainable social nets for inclusive recovery; (c) fostering an African green diversification agenda; and (d) promoting sustainable fiscal policy reforms through fiscal accountability and transparency, innovative approaches to tracking of public expenditures, and illicit financial flows and assessment of COVID-19 response plans.

47. Through its think tank function, ECA will deepen and conduct new cutting-edge multisectoral policy research and analysis on key development priorities within the context of post-COVID-19 recovery. Through its convening function, ECA will facilitate regional intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder platforms for debating, discussing and initiating concrete Africa-driven strategies for African development. ECA will extend the number of consultations and policy dialogues with regional economic communities and other regional groupings in delivering its programme of work. Through its operational function, ECA will continue to provide policy advice and technical support to member States to implement innovative sustainable solutions. It will also reinforce its active involvement as a key partner of the Regional Collaborative Platform and collaborate with fellow United Nations agencies and programmes through the opportunity/initiative-based coalitions. ECA will also pursue the development and offering of tailored capacity development programmes at regional, subregional and country levels, through the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning.

48. ECA will endeavour to accelerate the implementation of cross-cutting frameworks, such as the disability inclusion strategy, and mainstream related principles and activities throughout its programme of work. It will also look at how to operationalize similar mainstreaming of climate change. Emphasis on joint planning and delivery, as well as on further coherence in terms of resource mobilization and programme delivery, will be exerted with a view to encouraging optimization of human and financial resources through further streamlining of common areas of intervention and related activities. This will become even more relevant and needed during 2021, a year full of uncertainty, but also of promising breakouts and opportunities.

⁴ *Economic Report on Africa: Innovative Finance for Private Sector Development in Africa* (United Nations publication, sales No. E.20.II.K.2).