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Report of the Executive Secretary on the activities of the Economic Commission for Africa covering the period April 2021–March 2022

I. Introduction

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, constitute the overarching frameworks for the work undertaken by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to deliver ideas into action for an empowered and transformed Africa. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to impose serious challenges on the realization of the two agendas and has even set back some of the modest gains made. The focus of ECA has essentially been on building forward better from the pandemic through sound economic recovery, and inclusive growth that includes young people, women and other marginalized segments of society, and social safety nets for the majority of people. The work of ECA has been centred, among other things, on ensuring financial liquidity to power recovery; the procurement, distribution and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines; digitization; and technological adaptation, including the use of artificial intelligence to support trade and small enterprises. The Commission has also focused on enhancing the operation of the African Continental Free Trade Area in creating expanded regional markets and increasing investment; strengthening data and statistical capacity in Africa, including for the e-census; tackling the challenges of climate change; improving collaboration within the United Nations system and joint delivery at the regional level through the Regional Collaborative Platform for Africa; and supporting country-level interventions through the reinvigorated resident coordinator system. The goal of ECA is to fulfil the promise of the continent in achieving a peaceful, prosperous, developed and transformed continent with improved living standards for its people.

2. During the reporting period, and despite constraints and limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, ECA 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 financing

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** E/ECA/COE/40/1.



models, support for regional and transboundary issues, and advancing of the continent's position at the global level.

3. The present report contains three chapters. Following the introduction in chapter I, chapter II sets out the key achievements of ECA that have advanced the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, focusing on the following five areas: (a) supporting resilient recovery from the pandemic; (b) supporting the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area; (c) strengthening policy formulation and implementation through the use of macroeconomic models; (d) promoting the digital and data revolution in Africa; and (e) building forward better for sustainable development, focusing on green recovery, the mainstreaming of climate change and the blue economy. In addition, the report contains a discussion on the enhanced operational modalities put in place for a more sustainable and effective implementation of the ECA programme of work. Conclusions are presented in chapter III, highlighting some key trends for the coming cycle.

4. ECA provided technical and policy advisory services at the national, subregional and regional levels aimed at advancing capacity development in Africa. It also built up and sustained platforms for policy dialogue and consensus-building on priority issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and on advancing the capacities of African public officials in policy formulation and implementation. Additional information and targeted actions undertaken by ECA to address the challenges and needs of member States in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic are described in the report on the follow-up by the Economic Commission for Africa to the resolutions of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (E/ECA/COE/40/8). The wide array of activities, including papers and studies on the topic, illustrates the Commission's high level of responsiveness and speedy reaction in times of emergency. Furthermore, the acknowledgement and appreciation received by beneficiaries have consolidated the position of ECA at the forefront of positively influencing decision-making on the continent, as well as its role as a key strategic partner of the African Union and the African Development Bank.

II. Key results achieved

A. Supporting resilient recovery from the pandemic

5. Following the availability of vaccines, and in recognition of its critical role in kick-starting recovery, ECA, as a member of the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust, led continental advocacy efforts and provided technical leadership for the negotiation and acquisition of 35 per cent of the vaccines needed for Africa, the equivalent of approximately 470 million doses, to ensure vaccine availability with a view to reaching herd immunity on the continent. The efforts of member States were supported by a groundbreaking partnership with the World Bank to ensure that countries had access to and finances for the vaccines they needed.

6. On financing the continent's recovery, the Commission's advocacy efforts on the need for additional liquidity for countries resulted in the extension of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative and the historic release of the special drawing rights that cumulatively provided African countries with nearly \$40 billion in additional liquidity.

7. Following the worsening debt situation, ECA worked with member States to launch the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility¹ in 2021, with the goal of saving African Governments \$11 billion in borrowing costs in the coming five years, while fostering greener investment and sustainable development.

¹ Further information is available at

www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/ACPC/UNECAatCOP26/LSF%20Concept%20Note.pdf.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the impact of global supply breakdowns in pharmaceutical trade, inadequate policy attention to supply-side management within countries, insufficient cold chain management and poor procurement procedures in the continent's fiscal space for equitable health expenditures. In response, ECA stepped up its activities on pioneering the African Continental Free Trade Area-anchored pharma initiative, the principles of which underpinned the establishment of the African Medical Supplies Platform, in 10 pilot countries (Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles and the Sudan).

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

9. The implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area, together with innovative financing and the development of the private sector and infrastructure, is expected to contribute to the acceleration of socioeconomic recovery in the post-pandemic period; to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa through the identification of new opportunities and the design of operational frameworks and mechanisms aimed at translating them into job creation; and to increased investment and improved industrialization, ultimately leading to strengthened regional cooperation and integration.

10. Notwithstanding COVID-19 restrictions, ECA pursued its efforts to accelerate the ratification of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area by African countries. A total of 42 member States have now ratified the Agreement, with the United Republic of Tanzania being the most recent country to do so, on 9 September 2021, following sustained awareness-raising and advocacy activities undertaken since 2019.

11. The Commission has been actively assisting member States in developing their national strategies for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area and progress has been made on the diversification of productive capacities and production patterns, thereby contributing to accelerated industrialization. In 2021, seven countries (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia and Niger) formulated national strategies for implementation of the Area with technical support provided by ECA. Two of those national strategies have been validated. In addition, five countries developed the African Continental Free Trade Area country business index to monitor the impact of the Area on the private sector.

12. Given the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the economy, it has become crucial to develop intra-African regional value chains and to unlock the continent's business potential. In this context, ECA has continuously provided support to member States in developing, implementing and monitoring policies and programmes on regional value chains and on issues relating to the second phase of the African Continental Free Trade Area, which covers investment, competition policy and intellectual property rights.

13. The Commission recorded significant achievements in the infrastructure sector in 2021. These achievements are related to the Commission's work on the link between the African Continental Free Trade Area and transport and the liberalization of air transport in Africa. Regarding the African Continental Free Trade Area, ECA carried out research on its implications for the demand for transport infrastructure and services. The method used for the study was to quantify the investment opportunities provided by the Area for the transport sector on the continent, including more than \$400 billion for the acquisition of transport equipment (trucks, rail wagons, maritime vessels and aircraft). The findings from the study formed the basis of the fifth Africa Business Forum, which was held on 7 February 2022 under the theme "Investing in

multimodal transport infrastructure to optimize the benefits of the African Continental Free Trade Area: a focus on air transport and tourism”. The Heads of State of Botswana and Sierra Leone used the findings from the study to showcase investment opportunities in their countries at the Forum.

14. With regard to air transport, ECA developed key performance indicators to assess the implementation by member States of the Yamoussoukro Decision on air transport liberalization and the Single African Air Transport Market. The key performance indicators have been used to develop a performance monitoring dashboard. ECA has handed over the key performance indicators and dashboard to the African Civil Aviation Commission, which is the executing agency for the Yamoussoukro Decision and the Single African Air Transport Market. At present, ECA is providing support to the African Civil Aviation Commission to undertake gap assessments in the implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision and the Single African Air Transport Market in selected African countries (such as Cabo Verde and Cameroon) using the key performance indicators and dashboard.

15. Working in partnership with the International Chamber of Commerce, ECA launched the Centre of Entrepreneurship in Africa on 16 September 2021. The first hubs were announced in Ghana, Kenya, Morocco and Nigeria to inspire innovation and to improve the business environment for small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa. In addition, ECA organized the West African Business Forum, which was held in Lagos, Nigeria, from 21 to 23 September 2021. The Forum provided a platform for sharing business opportunities among women and young people, in particular, and identifying business champions who would promote the interests of women and youth entrepreneurship in West Africa.

C. Strengthened policy formulation and implementation through enhanced macroeconomic models, public finance and governance mechanisms

16. In response to the increase in poverty and vulnerability caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, ECA reoriented its work to generate new data on the economically vulnerable portions of the population and provided support to African countries in improving their economic recovery and resilience. This context led to the production of the Economic Report on Africa 2021 under the theme “Addressing poverty and vulnerability in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic”. A key conclusion of the report is that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role of risk management in poverty reduction in Africa. Although it has caused severe disruption in people’s lives, the pandemic is only one of the numerous risks faced by poor households. The report contains policy recommendations to encourage policymakers not only to reduce immediate poverty (ex post), but also to reduce vulnerability to poverty (ex ante); and not just to expand social assistance, but to build assets and invest in strengthening social infrastructure to promote growth and economic recovery in Africa.

17. In 2021, the African Economic Conference was held in Sal, Cabo Verde, from 2 to 4 December, under the theme “Financing Africa’s post-COVID-19 development”. The conference was jointly organized by ECA, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. It provided a platform for valuable discussions, debate and useful insights, bringing together more than 200 participants consisting of representatives of Governments, academia, civil society and the private sector from Africa and the rest of the world, who shared their experiences and innovative ideas on economic and policy issues relating to specific development financing policies, strategies and practices for successful development transformation in Africa. Researchers at the conference presented their latest findings on the theme and identified three critical areas of attention: human capital, institutions and infrastructure. Participants proposed far-reaching policy options for tackling the continent’s development financing needs, including the need to assess the rules of

international finance and the need to reform the continent's financial system to better support development on the continent. In addition, participants proposed that the structural macroeconomic trends of African economies be reassessed to better reflect the impact that COVID-19 has had on the continent.

18. The integrated planning and reporting toolkit was developed in response to a request made during the 2016 Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development to ECA and the African Union Commission to create tools and an integrated monitoring and evaluation framework to align the 2030 Agenda with Agenda 2063 for ease of adaptation and reporting. Since its creation, the toolkit has been improved and tested. In 2021, four countries graduated from deployment to adoption of the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, mainstreaming it into their national development plans. A financing module has been added to the initial four modules (agendas, national development plan, continental view and reporting) in the integrated planning and reporting toolkit, and efforts are under way to have an integrated approach to macro modelling, planning and financing to maximize impact and optimize resource use and the status of integrated planning and reporting toolkit model development in member States, as well as intradivisional collaboration on countries undertaking macro modelling.

19. The low level of taxation and the challenge of illicit financial flows continue to define access to development financing in Africa. Accordingly, ECA developed a framework to support countries in strengthening their taxation policy and in the launching of a pilot project to track and measure illicit financial flows. In order to support countries' pilot calculation of illicit financial flow estimates, ECA, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific organized an interregional training workshop on the statistical measurement of tax and commercial illicit financial flows. The purpose of the workshop was to provide in-depth training on six selected statistical methodologies proposed in the methodological guidelines being refined by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, to share case studies and experiences, and to discuss challenges experienced in the data review and use of identified methods.

D. Promoting the digital and data revolution in Africa

20. Over the past four decades, population and housing censuses and other surveys have been the main sources of data for policy formulation, monitoring, evaluation and decision-making in Africa for national and regional development programmes. In this context, and within its mandate to promote the continent's sustainable development, ECA has been committed to assisting member States in building their statistical capacities and in working with development partners to strengthen national statistical systems by enhancing national strategies for the development of statistics. Its latest contribution was through the development of the implementation guidelines for the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework in Africa.

21. In 2021, ECA supported Ghana and Sierra Leone in conducting digital censuses as a continuation of the 2020 round of censuses in Africa. It resulted in the availability of timely, high-quality data by improving the monitoring of content and coverage errors. The technical assistance provided included digital cartographic work to identify bounded structures and delineate enumeration areas, census design and planning work to migrate data from paper to a digital system, the development and use of an operational dashboard for quality control and the development and use of a census tracking system. In addition, training was provided to the national statistics office staff in digital cartography and the use of digital tracking systems and tools. The work of ECA on digital censuses has increased the demand for support in this area. Other countries being supported by ECA on e-census issues include Botswana, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia and Togo.

22. The Commission played a major role in developing the Africa UN Data for Development Platform through the opportunity/issue-based coalition on data and statistics, and it was among the 17 regional entities of the United Nations system under the Regional Collaborative Platform for Africa that took part in its launch on 13 September 2021. The common data platform for the United Nations system on Africa caters to the growing demand for data on the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. The Platform serves as a one-stop-shop repository capturing high-quality data and evidence on the Sustainable Development Goals from all the African countries.

23. As part of a programme on migration statistics and skills recognition in Africa, ECA conducted a study on the recognition of African migrants' skills in Morocco. With Morocco as the pilot country, the resulting analysis report on migration statistics is an initiative taken as part of its efforts to increase the capacity of African countries to design evidence-based migration policies and programmes that are consistent with international and African protocols and frameworks. The project is aimed at strengthening African national policies and programmes on migration, and is being carried out in six African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe) by ECA, in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration.

24. The Commission made progress in building the capacity of member States to design and implement initiatives to harness frontier technologies and innovation through the finalization of a report on science, technology and innovation policy design and implementation, a survey of universities on entrepreneurship and advancing entrepreneurial universities in Ethiopia and Ghana, and the development of curricula for pharmaceutical chemistry and manufacturing, among other things.

25. Through the hybrid Connected African Girls Coding Camp initiative, carried out by ECA in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the International Telecommunication Union and host African Governments, coding camps were held for girls and young women between 12 and 25 years of age, both in person and online. The initiative has now reached more than 15,000 girls in 52 countries. The coding camps provide girls and young women with the knowledge, tools and platforms they need to develop as entrepreneurs, innovators and technology leaders, while contributing to their communities. The girls are trained in the following areas: (a) technical skills in animation, gaming and web development, Turtlestitch, robotics and the Internet of things, fashion, design thinking, computational thinking, computer science, cybersecurity and 3D printing; and (b) soft skills in leadership, public speaking, gender issues, Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals, climate change, women's empowerment and gender equality.

26. Through its advisory services, ECA supported seven countries (Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal and Zimbabwe) in developing their national digital transformation strategy based on the African Digital Transformation Strategy, and in developing young people's innovations in information and communications technology. Consultative meetings were also organized with partners to assess, design and roll out a digital identification pilot in several African countries, including Botswana and Togo.

27. The Commission provided technical assistance to several member States (Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Senegal, Zambia and Zimbabwe) to establish the African Communications and Information Platform for Health and Economic Action, which was developed to enhance the capability of African Governments to communicate and interact with their citizens in mitigating and managing the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

28. Other key initiatives that ECA worked on in 2021 include the Africa Data Leadership Initiative, launched in partnership with Smart Africa and Future States as a peer learning and engagement platform for data economy stakeholders across Africa. The first phase (February–June 2021) was focused on the five key factors for effective and trusted data sharing, while the second phase (July–September 2021) was focused on data use cases through four round-table discussions on geolocation, digital payments, mobile phones and health data.

E. Sustainable development issues

29. The seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development was held in Brazzaville from 1 to 4 March 2021 under the theme “Building forward better: towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”. The Forum is an intergovernmental platform convened by ECA in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and other entities of the United Nations system to review progress, share experiences and lessons learned, and build consensus on policy options and actions in the form of key messages to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The Forum was held against the backdrop of the new challenge to global development posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had exposed severe vulnerabilities and structural inequalities in Africa. Accordingly, it was 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. From that session, an important consensus was reached on the continent’s priorities and policy options for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in the context of COVID-19.

30. The Commission, together with the Government of Rwanda and in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and other entities of the United Nations system, convened the eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Kigali from 3 to 5 March 2022 in a hybrid format featuring both in-person and online participation. The Forum was attended by more than 1,800 participants, comprising ministers and high-level representatives of the Governments of 54 ECA member States, intergovernmental bodies, United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, other international organizations, major groups and other stakeholders. Given the magnitude of post-pandemic financial needs in such areas as infrastructure and health, and as the pandemic has reversed the hard-earned gains made over the past two decades, Governments need to work in partnership with the private sector and international players, such as the United Nations and multilateral banks, to meet these urgent challenges. The event ended with the adoption of the Kigali Declaration on building forward better from the COVID-19 crisis and accelerating delivery of sustainable development in Africa (ECA/RFSD/2022/11, annex).

31. The Ninth Conference on Climate Change and Development in Africa was organized by ECA as a milestone for the African continent on the road to the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The event was held in Santa Maria, Sal Island, Cabo Verde, from 13 to 17 September 2021, under the theme “Towards a just transition that delivers jobs, prosperity and climate resilience in Africa: leveraging the green and blue economy”. It concluded with an outcome statement that summarized the continent’s positions on the main issues under negotiation and puts forward the continent’s expectations of what a successful twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties should deliver.

32. ECA research efforts aimed at building intellectual leadership on climate science in Africa led to a number of initiatives. Covering themes in foundational climate science, climate impacts and climate policy, some 21 research outputs were produced by engaging an equal number of postdoctoral researchers from Benin,

Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The Commission also supported Burkina Faso and Cameroon in the process of revising their nationally determined contributions and integrating climate resilience into national development plans and programmes. At present, four initiatives are under way to harness green and blue economies, assisting countries in building forward better from COVID-19.

33. ECA has continued to work with the African Development Bank over the past two years to produce the Africa Gender Index report and to organize a virtual global dissemination event, held in December 2020. The event was attended by more than 150 participants, comprising representatives of Governments, development institutions, the private sector and civil society, who discussed how to accelerate progress for women and girls in Africa. Representatives of member States requested support from ECA and the African Development Bank in analysing the gender gaps detected, identifying the bottlenecks causing the gaps and prioritizing policy interventions to close them. To help disseminate the findings of the report, ECA and the Bank worked with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to run high-level policy dialogues in 2021 that charted action-oriented road maps that would tackle gender-based discrimination in East, Southern and West Africa.

34. A project is being implemented to support African countries in assessing the cost of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 and to strengthen the capacity of African policymakers to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment objectives into national planning processes and budgets. The main deliverables are: a situation analysis of costing interventions to promote gender equality; case studies documenting how African countries have costed gender equality interventions; a review and assessment of existing methodologies and approaches for costing gender equality interventions; a conceptual framework for costing gender equality interventions in African countries; and an estimate of the cost of interventions to achieve gender equality in the education sector in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in selected African countries. In addition, ECA contributed to strengthening the knowledge and capacity of five countries (Burundi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles and Zimbabwe) to determine the costing needs of the member States and to provide critical pointers for financing gender equality.

F. Implementation of regional reforms and working with resident coordinators

35. ECA continues to work with other agencies of the United Nations system in facilitating the implementation of regional reforms in Africa through the newly established Regional Collaborative Platform for Africa, in which the Executive Secretary of ECA serves as co-vice chair. ECA is part of the joint secretariat of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Africa, together with the United Nations Development Programme and the Development Coordination Office. Eight opportunity/issue-based coalitions and task forces on knowledge management, regional reporting and back offices have been established and serve as accelerators for the agenda of the Platform. The Commission serves as co-convenor in two opportunity/issue-based coalitions and in the three task forces. The first meeting of the Platform was held on 5 February 2021, and the second was held on 28 February 2022. The latter took stock of the progress made since the first meeting, and participants discussed the work programme for 2022 and identified four areas of focus for the Platform for 2022, namely, data, macroeconomic framework and debt, climate action and digitalization, and digital transformation and energy.

36. The Commission continues to support the reinvigorated resident coordinator system and the United Nations country teams. Support is provided through two channels. The first is through the Regional Collaborative Platform for Africa, in which the resident coordinators request support through the joint secretariat of the Regional

Collaborative Platform and the relevant opportunity/issue-based coalition is deployed to provide the support needed. Such countries as Eritrea, Ethiopia and Malawi have requested and received such support. The second is through the ECA subregional offices that serve as non-resident members of the United Nations country teams in their respective regions. The subregional offices contribute to the work of the country teams, including on the development of common country assessments, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, and technical advisory services on macroeconomic and social policies, and development planning.

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

37. Throughout 2021, ECA operations were guided by emergency preparedness and business continuity activities, owing to the general election in Ethiopia that was held on 21 June 2021. Some of the key initiatives undertaken included the issuance of a common approved business continuity plan for ECA and the United Nations in Ethiopia and an approved work plan on a common back offices strategy, specifically, to change globally to the local service share centre and to form a local enterprise risk management committee.

38. With regard to the COVID-19 response and vaccination work, key initiatives included establishing an inter-agency local vaccination deployment team and setting up 19 vaccination sites throughout Ethiopia. In addition, the United Nations Health Care Centre administered COVID-19 vaccines, distributed emergency rations and face masks to staff, organized skills training for adolescents and undertook stress counselling sessions.

39. Insights about the gender dimension at ECA were provided through four key documents: the ECA gender policy, its accompanying strategic plan, the annual performance review reports, and a Commission-wide gender mainstreaming report. The ECA gender policy for the period 2021–2026 and the accompanying strategic plan for its implementation are aimed at strengthening the accountability of all ECA management and staff to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment and to spell out clear roles and responsibilities, with targets and timelines for completion. The annual performance review reports for the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women provide a synthesis of how planning, policy initiatives and financial arrangements have been aligned with targets under Goal 5 to improve results on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Finally, the Commission-wide gender mainstreaming report provides a synthesis of reports from divisions, subregional offices and the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning on the gender-related work delivered through the ECA subprogrammes to support member States.

40. Other key achievements relating to ECA operations included applying the standard that specifies the requirements for an environmental management system that an organization can use to enhance its environmental performance – International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001:2015 – and holding online and hybrid conferences that met the standard, as well as the publication of the updated ECA calendar of meetings, facility upgrades, the provision of user-friendly information technology services and high-performance intelligent communication. The Commission managed to achieve resource savings from the reduced use of paper (90.5 per cent of events were organized through online and hybrid meeting formats and were paper-free), and from the reduced use of electricity, water and chemicals. In addition, some 24,324 records were digitized, and 25,203 records were made available online. It was reported that the Commission’s information assets were safeguarded, with the exception of one cyberattack.

41. The accountability and programme performance review is primarily an accountability mechanism put in place by ECA, in which subprogrammes are required to report against the planned activities reflected in their annual business plans. The meetings are organized on quarterly basis, and four meetings were held in 2021. The meetings serve as a forum for representatives of the subprogrammes to showcase their performance and share experiences. They facilitate conversation around programme reviews, bringing to light the opportunities and challenges faced during programme implementation, while drawing lessons in order to improve programme delivery across the Commission. They also provide an opportunity for participants to apprise the institution and the senior leadership team of the challenges faced that may require support and intervention, while also receiving quality feedback. The financial performance of each subprogramme and the performance of the programme support divisions are also presented during the course of the meeting.

III. Conclusions

42. The Commission has a critical role to play in providing innovative solutions, as well as demand-driven and tailor-made policy and technical advice, to member States, the African Union and regional economic communities, with a view to accelerating recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic and fostering the emergence of more prosperous and inclusive societies. The Commission's interventions have included cutting-edge research and related integrated policy and capacity support geared towards economic diversification, with a special focus on the design of innovative financial instruments for increased resource mobilization; the development of national and subregional strategies; support for the process of the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area; and digital transformation.

43. The COVID-19 pandemic has had the effect of reinforcing the long-term vision of ECA and its strategic positioning as a first-class think tank, catalyst and facilitator within the framework of international negotiations involving Africa. Looking ahead in 2022, ECA will continue to focus its interventions on building forward better by harnessing, among other assets, the multiple opportunities offered by the digital revolution; continuing the implementation of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, the green recovery and the blue economy, and, to that end, amplifying its pioneering role in producing and disseminating quality knowledge products; and providing tailor-made policy and technical advice and convening policy dialogues on emerging sustainable development issues in line with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

44. The Commission will also continue its groundbreaking work in the following areas: (a) support for African citizens in attaining access to vaccines through enhanced and pool procurement and the manufacturing of vaccines in Africa; (b) development financing to assist African countries in generating the resources they need to finance their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; (c) identification of sustainable solutions to the emerging debt problem that may slow down the continent's development process through high debt servicing ratios for member States; (d) macroeconomic policy formulation; (e) support for development planning; (f) climate change, especially in the preparations for the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and (g) climate financing. Other areas of work include: (a) promoting trade and regional integration in Africa through the African Continental Free Trade Area; (b) strengthening the data and statistical capacity of African countries; (c) enhancing the work relationship between the African Union and the regional economic communities; and (d) promoting economic diversification through agro-allied industrial development and the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises. The Commission will also scale up its work on promoting gender equality and empowerment in Africa.

45. With regard to ECA operational activities, integrating a gender perspective into its activities will strengthen deliverables and results. It will also strengthen the system-wide United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, in terms of further advancing disability inclusion, which will include mitigating measures to overcome any challenges while operationalizing the strategy. The strategy covers programme design, implementation and evaluation, and policies on operational aspects, including the reasonable accommodation of related requests and consultations for persons with disabilities.
