

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
13 December 2021

Original: English

Economic Commission for Africa
Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender
Fourth session

Online, 17 and 18 November 2021

**Report of the fourth session of the Committee on
Social Policy, Poverty and Gender****I. Opening of the session****A. Background**

1. The Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender is a statutory body of experts and policymakers, entrusted with providing guidance and advice to the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division through the review of activities implemented during the biennium 2020–2021 and strategic vision and direction for the next plan period, 2021–2023.

2. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), through its Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division, convened the fourth session of the Committee, held online on 17 and 18 November 2021 under the theme “Supporting Member States in building forward better towards an inclusive and resilient future after the COVID-19 pandemic”. The thematic focus was in line with the priorities of Africa and the United Nations in assisting member States to analyse the socioeconomic effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the assistance needed to respond to the pandemic and build resilience.

3. The aim of the session was to review and provide strategic guidance to the work of the Division and to share with member States the Division’s new areas of focus and policy interventions in delivering on its mandate to eradicate extreme poverty and reduce inequality for inclusive and equitable growth, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, Committee members and participants were expected to guide the Division in its work to analyse the interlinkages between growth, poverty and inequality, in the context of social policy, urbanization, gender equality and women’s empowerment; and to identify priority needs as they relate to the Division’s core areas of work.

B. Attendance

4. The session was attended by representatives of the following member States: Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda,



Senegal, Sierra Leone, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

5. The following regional economic communities were also represented at the session: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the League of Arab States.

6. Representatives of the following institutions were also in attendance: Africa Centre for Development Practice and Global Engagement, Cornell University, Danish Institute for International Studies, University of Buenos Aires Research Institute and University of Limpopo. A total of 112 participants attended the meeting.

C. Opening statements

7. Opening the session, Najla Allani, Director General at the Ministry of Social Affairs of Tunisia, Chair-elect of the incoming Bureau, welcomed all participants and thanked the outgoing Bureau and its Chair, the representative of Egypt, for the work that had been done over the previous biennium. She discussed the devastation that COVID-19 has wrought across the region, affecting the implementation of commonly agreed targets.

8. She also observed that, despite its catastrophic consequences, the pandemic presented an opportunity to advance attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. She emphasized that, if future resilience was to be achieved, there must be no further erosion of development gains and progress. She called for identifying solutions for financing recovery and hoped that the Committee's deliberations at the session would result in action that contributed to a more resilient future.

9. In her opening remarks, Vera Songwe, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ECA, provided an overview of the recent work that ECA was doing not only to mitigate the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to promote socioeconomic development in the Africa region. She reiterated that COVID-19 was wreaking havoc on the region, in particular for women and other vulnerable groups, underscoring that COVID-19 was both an economic and a social issue. She called for more deliberate action to tackle the low coverage of social protection in Africa, which disproportionately affected women.

10. Noting the severe impact of the pandemic on local governments and revenues, she highlighted the crucial importance of the partnerships that ECA had been developing with other international organizations to respond to the pandemic. She also drew attention to the importance of information and communications technologies in combating the pandemic and building back better, along with the role of effective domestic resource mobilization, in particular by leveraging urban revenues.

II. Election of the Bureau

11. The following countries were unanimously elected as the Bureau of the Committee:

Chair:	Tunisia
First Vice-Chair:	Somalia
Second Vice-Chair:	Malawi
First Rapporteur:	Mali
Second Rapporteur:	Equatorial Guinea

III. Consideration and adoption of the agenda and programme of work

12. The Committee unanimously adopted the following agenda, based on the preliminary agenda that had been circulated in document E/ECA/ CSPPG/4/1:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of the Bureau.
3. Consideration and adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Reports to the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender: reporting and discussion:
 - (a) Subprogramme 9: poverty, inequality and social policy;
 - (b) Subprogramme 6: gender equality and women's empowerment.
5. Parallel sessions:
 - (a) Harnessing productive jobs: equipping women and girls with skills of tomorrow;
 - (b) Promoting inclusive and resilient youth employment in Africa, now and beyond COVID-19;
 - (c) Inclusive and resilient growth in Africa: the role of spatial planning.
6. General discussion on the theme of the fourth session "Building forward better towards an inclusive and resilient future in the context of COVID19":
 - (a) Presentation of the issues paper;
 - (b) Breakout sessions;
 - (c) Reporting back on the breakout sessions and discussion on the way forward.
7. Consideration and adoption of conclusions and recommendations of the fourth session.
8. Closing of the session.

IV. Reports to the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender: reporting and discussion

13. The representative of the secretariat recalled the ECA mandate to promote the economic and social development of its member States, foster intra-regional integration, and promote international cooperation for the development of Africa. She further highlighted that, as the regional arm of the United Nations serving 54 African member States and a key component of the African institutional landscape, ECA was well positioned to make an exceptional contribution to tackling the continent's development challenges.

14. She also drew attention to the multisectoral research and analysis conducted by the Commission that nurtured the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development and promoted peer learning, innovative thinking and the advocacy of public policies while fostering intersectoral linkages and synergies. She pointed out that ECA provided policy advice at the country level through direct demand-based support to member States in areas related to its normative and analytical work and in collaboration with the United Nations system at the country level.

A. Subprogramme 9: poverty, inequality and social policy

1. Presentation

15. Representatives of the secretariat presented the report of subprogramme 9 on poverty, inequality and social policy, providing an overview of the ongoing and planned activities for the following two years, and also outlined key planned areas of work for 2022–2023.

16. In their presentations they reviewed such areas as poverty reduction, migration, youth employment and urbanization, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work in those areas.

17. They noted that poverty reduction was proceeding at a pace much slower than that required to meet the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. With regard to migration, they reviewed the support provided by ECA, in collaboration with the African Union and the International Organization on Migration, to 23 member States in monitoring progress in the implementation of the Global Compact on Migration. They gave details of work by ECA in concert with member States to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on urban economies, through the formulation of economic recovery and resilience plans.

2. Discussion

18. In the ensuing discussion, the Committee urged ECA to scale up its technical assistance to member States for the development and implementation of social policies, and encouraged member States to take full advantage of the range of technical support offered by ECA. It also encouraged the Commission to contribute to the sharing of good practices for possible adoption and adaptation by other member States.

3. Recommendations

19. In the light of the discussion, the Committee put forward the following recommendations:

(a) Member States should:

(i) Take advantage of technical assistance from ECA, which is readily available, by sending an official letter of request to the Executive Secretary;

(ii) Collaborate with ECA in the dissemination and policy uptake of its knowledge products and tools;

(b) ECA should:

(i) Better clarify and share the means through which member States can seek technical support from ECA;

(ii) Better convey the criteria under which member States are being selected to receive technical support;

(iii) Track national programmes more consistently and use and disseminate good practices and examples to reduce the required resources and increase efficiency;

(iv) Scale up its support to member States to tackle extreme poverty, which remains persistent despite decades of intervention;

(v) Scale up technical assistance to member States for the development of social policies and their implementation.

B. Subprogramme 6: gender equality and women's empowerment

1. Presentation

20. The representative of the secretariat presented the work of subprogramme 6 on gender equality and women's empowerment, underscored that the mandate of the subprogramme was to enhance the capacity of member States and regional economic communities to design, implement and monitor policies that promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to strengthen the capacity of member States to mainstream gender into macroeconomic and sectoral policies and programmes.

21. In that context, she highlighted knowledge products under the subprogramme in such areas as the gender aspects of climate change, demographic dividend, digital finance, entrepreneurship, and small and artisanal mining during the period 2020–2021. In particular, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a Development Account project had been launched under the subprogramme to support member States in integrating the care economy into social protection policies and other public policies.

2. Discussion

22. In the ensuing discussion, participants sought clarification of the criteria used by ECA to ensure inclusiveness in its selection of countries for its interventions, in particular on the African Gender and Development Index. The need for continued support for member States in developing tools to remedy gender inequalities was also discussed. Participants also highlighted the need to critically assess current policies and programmes in member States designed to address gender inequalities and to develop tailored support, while capitalizing on good practices for possible adoption by other member States. The role of ECA in assisting member States to implement and monitor the Gender Action Plan under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was also emphasized.

3. Recommendations

23. In the light of that discussion, the Committee put forward the following recommendations:

- (a) Member States should:
 - (i) Take full advantage of the technical support and advisory facilities offered by the Division;
 - (ii) Use the findings from the research carried out on gender issues by the Division to inform their national programmes.
- (b) ECA should:
 - (i) Extend technical support and advisory services to countries that are not covered by current activities;
 - (ii) Expand the implementation of the revised African Gender and Development Index beyond the two countries that have been included;
 - (iii) Place more emphasis on sharing good practices in addressing gender inequities for possible adoption and adaptation by member States;
 - (iv) Support member States in the implementation and monitoring of the gender action plan under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

V. Parallel sessions

A. Harnessing productive jobs: equipping women and girls with the skills of tomorrow

1. Presentation

24. The representative of the secretariat presented the key findings of the 2021 African Women's Report on the theme "Digital finance ecosystems: pathways to women's economic empowerment in Africa". The presentation underscored that the future job market was heavily based on the fourth industrial revolution, and that digital connectivity and access to digital connectivity were key to accessing and harnessing such emerging technologies. The lack of access to the Internet would further exacerbate inequalities, including gender inequalities, in particular in rural areas, where Internet services and Internet devices were more costly than in urban areas. The low levels of technology usage among women and girls was mainly attributable to their lack of digital literacy and education.

2. Discussion

25. In the ensuing discussions, participants acknowledged that cultural practices and stereotypes posed a major challenge to tackling digital literacy and education among women and girls. Even though girls scored higher in science and mathematics than boys at primary and secondary levels, that did not translate into adequate levels of tertiary enrolment of girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. The predominance of boys in STEM fields further discouraged girls from pursuing STEM career pathways. In addition, the high burden of unpaid care meant that women and girls lacked the time and opportunity to pursue productive learning and training opportunities in STEM.

3. Recommendations

26. In the light of that discussion, the Committee put forward the following recommendations:

- (a) Member States and partners should:
 - (i) Promote the collection of gender disaggregated data on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and digital technology usage to identify gender gaps for evidence-based policy action;
 - (ii) Develop an educational strategy for STEM that promotes gender equity;
 - (iii) Consider the use of quotas and affirmative action in recruitment and hiring practices to enhance job prospects and opportunities for girls studying STEM subjects;
 - (iv) Encourage the provision of subsidies and grants, including the award of bursaries, to reduce the financial barriers to STEM education and training;
 - (v) Tackle the use of gender-biased language in the fields of STEM education, training, recruitment and career development through capacity-building programmes for targeted stakeholders, in particular the media and advertising entities;
 - (vi) Promote the adoption of STEM education in schools at an early age, in national curricula and in extracurricular opportunities;

- (vii) Strengthen existing monitoring and evaluation programmes in order to monitor progress in the implementation of STEM initiatives and programmes;
- (b) ECA should:
 - (i) Support member States through mentorship programmes for women and girls in STEM education and training, including through engagement with STEM-related organizations and institutions, learning visits and short-term work simulation and experience;
 - (ii) Mobilize women leaders in STEM fields as mentors for girls that are still in school;
 - (iii) Advocate and promote historical women pioneers in STEM fields as role models to motivate women and girls to pursue similar career choices;
 - (iv) Consider the introduction of STEM-related awards for recognition of excellence and contributions to science;
 - (v) Support the development of policies and strategies to assist member States in promoting STEM education, training and job opportunities for women, focusing on digital literacy and the use of technology;
 - (vi) Promote the use of safe, responsible, high-quality and productive technology platforms among girls, emphasizing online learning opportunities;
 - (vii) Advocate greater recognition of unpaid work and time poverty as barriers to women's empowerment and their productive use of time.

B. Promoting inclusive and resilient youth employment in Africa, now and beyond COVID-19

1. Presentation

27. The representative of the secretariat presented the different approaches to youth employment in Africa, outlining the principal impediments to job growth. Those differed systematically from country to country, depending on their economy, geography and political situation. The current demographic transitions in higher fertility nations could be harnessed to spark accelerated economic growth, improve human capital and reduce inequality.

2. Recommendations

28. Following that presentation, the Committee put forward the following recommendations:

- (a) Member States should promote inclusive and sustainable employment for youth both during and after the pandemic;
- (b) ECA should:
 - (i) Advocate a universal region-wide definition of young people;
 - (ii) Develop knowledge products and policy tools to guide member States in how to effectively create decent jobs, while addressing rising aspirations and reducing inequality as young people transition to adulthood;
 - (iii) Provide technical policy guidance on how to effectively support young people during their transitions into adulthood, including in coordination with such institutions as the family, schools,

businesses, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and communities;

(iv) Provide technical support for the development of policies and tools that address both early training and community service and also the transition from school to work.

C. Inclusive and resilient growth in Africa: the role of spatial planning

1. Presentation

29. The representative of the secretariat reviewed the important role of urban and spatial planning in enabling inclusive and economic growth in Africa, highlighting the rapid urban transition of the continent and its related socioeconomic and spatial transformations. The presentation noted that, while spatial planning was of importance for development outcomes in Africa, it remained insufficiently integrated into national economic policy processes.

30. The presentation further highlighted the importance of linking spatial planning with economic planning, in view of the economic ramifications of cities and national spatial systems. Currently, however, economic considerations tended to overlook spatial planning components at regional and urban scales and strategic investments were made without spatially sound investment decisions, underlining the need to integrate a strong urban and spatial lens in national development planning along with policies for industrialization, regional trade integration and domestic resource mobilization. COVID-19 recovery and resilience plans should also integrate urban dimensions.

2. Discussion

31. Following that presentation, participants recognized the critical need to link spatial planning with economic and development planning, a practice lacking in many of their countries. They also noted the need to prioritize urbanization in national development agendas, thereby creating the potential to secure funds from the central government and other sources. At the same time, challenges associated with urbanization were also highlighted, including unplanned urban sprawl; governance deficits; and inadequate implementation and enforcement of urban plans and regulations, exacerbated by deficits in human and financial resources.

32. Participants also conceded that African countries were not adequately leveraging the full benefits of urbanization, highlighting the urgent need, in that regard, to link urban planning with industrial development to meet the growing need for urban jobs. They called on countries and ECA to focus on ways of integrating the needs of people coming to cities from rural areas in urban planning and urban policies to provide them with opportunities for decent jobs and lifestyles.

33. Participants also noted the importance of a fuller understanding of the role played by ECA in supporting member States and the specific areas of such support, the framework and procedures for collaboration between ECA and member States and the ways in which ECA research work could assist member States. The observed that, in providing support to member States, ECA should consider the specific situation of each country in determining what kind of support should be provided and under what circumstances

34. Lastly, participants stressed the importance of harmonizing planning and budgeting relating to commitments to improve spatial planning and development.

3. Recommendations

35. In the light of that discussion, the Committee put forward the following recommendations:

- (a) Member States should:
 - (i) Strengthen linkages between urban and industrial policies and strategies to ensure that urbanization takes place alongside adequate productive job creation;
 - (ii) Prioritize urbanization in national development plans also as a means of mobilizing actors and resources;
 - (iii) Convey requests for technical assistance to ECA in the field of spatial planning and urbanization;
 - (iv) Integrate spatial planning into economic planning for spatially sound investment decisions and dedicate appropriate financial and human resources for implementation;
 - (v) Strengthen the enforcement of urban legislation and building codes, given current inconsistencies in that area;
 - (vi) Promote local economic development in rural areas to provide opportunities and services in response to rural-urban migration;
 - (vii) Ensure that spatial planning precedes economic and physical developments and investments to avoid unplanned sprawl and settlements;
- (b) ECA should:
 - (i) Tailor its technical support in line with the specificities of regions and countries;
 - (ii) Facilitate the sharing of experience on spatial and economic planning among member States;
 - (iii) Communicate its work on urbanization to member States better and more systematically, given growing demand for support;
 - (iv) Collaborate better with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to provide combined technical support on improved urban policies and strategies;
 - (v) Ensure that climate considerations are adequately reflected in technical assistance on urbanization.

VI. General discussion on the theme of the fourth session “Building forward better towards an inclusive and resilient future in the context of COVID19”

A. Presentation of the issues paper

1. Presentation

36. Presenting the thematic paper, the representative of the secretariat highlighted key messages relating to COVID-19, including the significant effect that the pandemic had had on development and the manner in which it had exposed previous vulnerabilities; and also the opportunities that it had created for recalibrating poverty-reduction efforts. He reviewed the support provided by ECA to member States during the pandemic, noting, in particular that workers in the informal sector and vulnerable employment were most at risk of falling into poverty. He detailed the response by African countries to the poverty effects of COVID-19, including expansionary fiscal and monetary

policies to maintain consumption and demand, prevent job losses and mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

37. He observed that ECA had set an immediate response to COVID-19 as a priority and had aligned its programmatic work accordingly, launching specific analytical work and operationalization efforts to support demand-driven requests from member States on the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. In addition, ECA had helped member States to leverage the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) to increase their fiscal space. ECA had also spearheaded a liquidity and sustainability facility which enabled investors to use African debt issued in foreign currencies such as dollars and euros in repurchase – or “repo” – transactions. The facility was predicted by ECA to expand to \$30 billion.

2. Discussion

38. In the ensuing discussion, participants heard details of a poverty impact study carried out by ECA in one member State and of the policies implemented in various social sectors to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, involving the provision of government assistance to low-income families. An economic recovery plan had been put in place, in concert with actions to put the mitigation measures into effect.

39. In response to that information, the representative of the secretariat recalled that ECA had developed a risk and vulnerability index including climate change, health, gender and other risk factors. The index was currently being converted into a toolkit and would extend support to all African countries. Although official unemployment was relatively low in Africa owing to the high levels of informality, disruptions in the supply chain of the informal sector had led to an increase in vulnerability and poverty, recovery from which, as demonstrated by past experience, would take an average of seven years.

3. Recommendations

40. In the light of that discussion, the Committee put forward the following recommendations:

(a) Member States should build resilience by integrating gender issues and the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises into recovery plans and by rendering assistance to vulnerable and poor households;

(b) ECA should:

(i) Disseminate its technical report on risk and vulnerability and the corresponding index for engagement and uptake by member States;

(ii) Participate in country platforms and programmes on poverty to ensure improved buy-in and coherence of technical advice provided by ECA;

(iii) Deliver consistent and sustained rather than ad hoc technical support to member States.

B. Breakout session 1: leveraging urbanization for inclusion and resilience

1. Discussion

41. Participants reviewed the challenges faced by countries with relatively few primary cities, such as Malawi. Those cities continued to attract large numbers of migrants from rural areas, and local governments were often unable to plan for that influx, leading to the continued growth of informal settlements and exacerbation of other related challenges. It was concluded that member States should consider the identification and development of secondary cities guided by the use of spatial frameworks, with a view to creating more productive jobs and other income-generating activities.

42. Participants recognized that the multifaceted nature of urbanization was often forgotten and stressed the need to approach the issue with consideration for related processes such as industrialization, as highlighted by the ECA *Economic Report on Africa 2017: Urbanization and Industrialization for Africa's Transformation*. Given the work already being done on the subject by various member States, the possibility of sharing experience in tackling common challenges was welcomed. It was agreed that greater attention should be given to how climate action could be harmonized with efforts to leverage urbanization for inclusion and resilience.

2. Recommendations

43. In the light of that discussion, the Committee put forward the following recommendations:

- (a) Member States and partners should:
 - (i) Align economic plans with financing and planning for sustainable urbanization;
 - (ii) Better link urban and rural development and recognize the interdependence between the two;
- (b) ECA should:
 - (i) Provide technical assistance to member States to put urbanization at the core of national development planning;
 - (ii) Facilitate high-level political dialogue, including with various stakeholders at the national level, to raise awareness of the importance of urbanization in overall growth and transformation for improved awareness among decision-makers;
 - (iii) Scale up the dissemination and sharing of its knowledge products and tools related to the importance of urbanization as a cross-cutting issue in national economic planning;
 - (iv) Undertake multisectoral assessments of urbanization, focused not only on urban policies but also on national development planning and industrial policies;
 - (v) Identify and work with country-level focal points for urbanization in the relevant ministries in member States, ensuring coherence with partners and stakeholders;
 - (vi) Facilitate learning processes and the sharing of experience among countries facing common challenges and regarding urbanization;
 - (vii) Take into account the effects of climate change in African cities and the related policy implications.

C. Breakout session 2: gender equality, women's empowerment and resilience

1. Discussion

44. Participants highlighted the need to look at the repercussions of COVID-19 from an equity perspective, observing that, while women were more affected in terms of livelihoods and impact at the household level, men too had been adversely affected. The increase in gender-based violence during the pandemic, and the need to address its root causes were also underscored. A number of countries shared their experience of gender-sensitive interventions in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Kenya, the Government had extended cash transfers to vulnerable groups, including women and children, elderly and the poor. Tunisia had provided financial support to domestic

workers, as many families had not used their services during lockdown periods. In Mauritius, government bodies had provided training for women entrepreneurs in the use of social media and online platforms to market their products online. In Côte d'Ivoire, funds had been set up to support women working in the informal sector.

2. Recommendations

45. In the light of that discussion, the Committee put forward the following recommendations:

- (a) Member States should:
 - (i) Establish formal permanent support structures and investment plans to support women in the informal sector;
 - (ii) Establish research structures, entities and bodies that provide scientific information on gender-related issues in order to support gender-transformative evidence-based policy interventions at the national level;
 - (iii) Consider the promulgation and enforcement of legislation to protect victims of gender-based violence;
 - (iv) Provide support for existing national and local structures working on gender-related challenges, in particular those providing services for women;
 - (v) Under the leadership of national statistical offices, promote field data collection, especially in collaboration with civil society organizations, in order to improve the availability of gender-disaggregated data at the national level;
 - (vi) Ensure that gender equity and women's empowerment are central to national pandemic recovery plans and priorities;
 - (vii) Adopt and strengthen initiatives to promote female entrepreneurship, in particular in the area of sustainable development;
 - (viii) Establish national women's funds to encourage women's participation in decision-making, with a focus on mentoring programmes for young women in politics;
 - (ix) Establish academies to strengthen young people's capacities to engage in politics, including academies that focus on other skills and career pathways, including arts, science, technology, engineering and mathematics;
 - (x) Promote the use of digital tools by women working in the informal sector to present and sell their products on online platforms and for their businesses and economic activities;
 - (xi) Provide financial support to women affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, through funds, cash transfers and other relevant social protection initiatives;
 - (xii) Support women by leveraging clusters of value chains to enable wealth creation and therefore poverty eradication, through value addition and the sharing of good practices;
 - (xiii) Acknowledge and support the livelihoods of families, as women may be inadvertently affected by the pandemic through impacts faced by male family members who provide for the household;
 - (xiv) Promote a culture of positive masculinity and engage men and boys in national efforts to empower women and achieve gender equality;

- (b) ECA should:
- (i) Compile and disseminate a list of good practices across Africa, in terms of support structures and legislation on gender-related issues;
 - (ii) Support the dissemination of research and good practices on gender equity and women's empowerment through capacity development and technical assistance, and also by mainstreaming gender perspectives across different sectors;
 - (iii) Develop a platform for women entrepreneurs to share information and good practices, complementing other efforts taking place across the region;
 - (iv) Promote financial inclusion and digital literacy as a means of addressing women's empowerment.

D. Breakout session 3: poverty, vulnerability and the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area

1. Discussion

46. Participants reviewed the various challenges that member States had faced during the COVID-19 era, including security issues that had persisted in several member States. Substantial progress had, however, been achieved in providing social safety nets and instituting policies to improve the livelihoods of the population, in particular women and children.

47. They urged ECA to continue providing member States with technical support in designing policies and programmes to address poverty and minimize risks of falling into poverty. They called on ECA to circulate reports in a timelier fashion, so that member States could more effectively participate in and contribute to Committee discussions.

2. Recommendations

48. In the light of that discussion, the Committee put forward the following recommendations:

- (a) ECA should continuously provide member States with technical support in designing policies and programmes to address poverty and minimize vulnerability to falling into poverty;
- (b) ECA should disseminate its reports earlier to enable member States to participate more effectively in and contribute to the discussions of the Committee.
- (c) ECA should undertake an evaluation of the progress made in achieving the recommendations contained in the report.

VII. Consideration and adoption of conclusions and recommendations of the fourth session

49. The Committee adopted its conclusions and recommendations, as set out under the respective agenda items above, for the purpose of guiding the Division in its work to analyse the interlinkages between growth, poverty and inequality, in the context of social policy, urbanization, gender equality and women's empowerment.

VIII. Closing of the session

50. In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked ECA for organizing the event, and all participants for their active participation and contributions to the discussions. She highlighted the achievements of the meeting, focusing in

particular on the development of a common understanding of the correlations among the various dimensions of poverty and inequality in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

51. She also emphasized certain critical policy priorities for an inclusive and resilient future in Africa in the context of COVID-19, including poverty and vulnerability, gender equality, youth issues and sustainable urbanization, and posited that there were untapped opportunities for collaboration between ECA and member States in an array of areas.

52. She declared the meeting closed at 8.30 p.m. on Thursday, 18 November 2021.
