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Review Report on Progress towards Sustainable Development in Southern Africa

Key messages¹



¹ Prepared in collaboration with the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

1.1 Introduction

This is the summary of a report prepared as part of the regional preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) to be held in Brazil in 2012. It is based on findings and analysis of literature review, consultations with stakeholders in the subregion and focal points in such selected countries as Botswana, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia.

The report covers:

- Priority sustainable development issues in the subregion;
- Progress made, achievements, including best practices, constraints and challenges; and lessons learned and provides well-articulated recommendations on the way forward to enhance implementation progress;
- The inter-linkages between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development;
- The institutional and strategic frameworks for sustainable development and recommended ways of enhancing them with a view to making them responsive to the requirements of sustainable development;
- Transition to a Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction in the subregion;
- New and emerging challenges for the subregion and recommendations on the way forward.

1.2 Priority sustainable development issues and trends

Regional sustainable development priorities in the Southern Africa region are in two main frameworks: the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), to which most of the subregional countries belong, and the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) and national development plans. In the context of the Rio Process, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) outlines Africa's priorities including Southern Africa subregional priorities. Although 10 years have passed since the adoption of the JPOI, all the challenges outlined therein are still as relevant today as they were then. The greatest challenges and priorities are poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS, creating opportunities and fighting marginalization in a globalized world. In addition, creating conducive environment to attract investments is critical for economic growth. Other priorities relate to the need to create market access and address the supply side constraints to trade, addressing the persistent debt burden in some countries, and having to cushion the development agenda from the declining levels of ODA, as well as exploring domestic resource mobilization, industrial diversification and value

addition to the subregion's resources. All countries have national development plans whose priorities vary in focus and emphasis, but the above priorities are generic in the subregion.

While efforts are being made at country and subregional levels to address the set development targets, some challenges such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and inequality, persist. These are exacerbated by the new and emerging challenges, which are constraining efforts towards sustainable development. While the concept of sustainable development has been fully embraced as expressed in various policy documents, the implementation of these policies for full benefit remains a challenge for a number of reasons, such as financial constraints, institutional misalignment and inadequate capacity.

1.3 Concrete actions taken, highlighting best practices, progress made and achievements

Most countries are making modest progress in the implementation of aspects of sustainable development, particularly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), even though it has already been concluded that none of the subregional countries will meet all the MDG targets by 2015. Progress is being made in establishing free trade areas/zones, implementing trans-frontier conservation and tourism and in carrying forward infrastructure programmes. Some projects are also being implemented under continental frameworks such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). National successes have been recorded in the implementation of programmes aimed at attaining the MDGs, for example in Malawi, Mauritius and Zambia. Progress is also being made in the area of governance, as demonstrated by the number of countries that have acceded to the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), with Mauritius judged the best governed country in Africa. Overall, there is, however, increasing environmental degradation as shown by the ecosystems assessment in South Africa. The impacts of climate change as well as the effects of financial, fuel and food crises are being felt in the subregion. The gap between policy intentions and their implementation remains significantly wide.

1.4 Implementation challenges and constraints

The subregion and its member States face a number of implementation challenges, including: lack of funding for development projects, multiplicity of policy frameworks meant to guide development, but which have become a source of implementation confusion and paralysis, institutional weaknesses due to lack of capacity and skills to effectively plan and implement programmes, and overlap and duplication of mandates in some instances. The major challenges and constraints to implementation relate to perceived lack of political will, leadership and decisiveness to implement relevant commitments. In addition, the role of the private sector has not been fully explored and/or profitably used to partner with Governments in achieving some of the development targets. Fundamentally, there is a challenge of lack of long-term visioning and planning, which results in the implementation of short-term and unsustainable projects. This also includes focusing on hard-core implementation challenges instead of balancing these with soft self-analysis, determination and visioning for the long term.

1.5 Inter-linkages between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development

The linkages between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development are well understood within the region. Policies that support the concept have been developed and relevant institutions set up. However, there is no implementation of sustainable development programmes as shown by lack of an integrated approach to development in practice. Some of the new and emerging challenges mentioned above have led to over-exploitation of the environment in a bid to address poverty reduction ideals. Examples of a balanced (environment, economic and social) approach to sustainable development include the CAMPFIRE programme in Zimbabwe.

1.6 Institutional framework for sustainable development

Institutional frameworks in most countries of the Southern Africa subregion are weak and, therefore unable to meet sustainable development needs. The fact that in many countries, environmental issues are governed by various ministries and/or departments is a cause for concern. For example, in some countries there are ministries of water, energy, environment, agriculture, trade and industry, and others all of which, in one way or the other, handle aspects of sustainable development. Yet, there are no mechanisms to ensure that the ministries of trade, which issue mining licenses, work with the ministries of environment, which deal with environmental impact assessments (EIAs). Such institutional set ups also promote duplication and institutional rivalry, and hinder implementation. At the subregional level, the linkages between national and subregional institutions dealing with environment and sustainable development are weak, and so is coordination. Weak coordination also applies to the subregional and regional institutions for sustainable development.

1.7 Transition towards a green economy within the context of poverty reduction and sustainable development

The concept of the green economy is still not well understood within the region because the concept is still new. In addition, the few stakeholders that understand the concept perceive the concept as externally driven, and not much different from previous failed development paradigms such as the structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank. There is therefore a need to set up regional processes to explore the concept of a transition to a green economy further, with a view to making it applicable to the needs and priorities of the region, in a way that encompasses pro-poor economic growth. In addition, the subregion is weary of having to embrace externally conceptualized and driven projects. In this regard, there is a call to ensure that the subregion is fully involved in unpacking the meaning and applicability of the green economy to the subregion, including its long-term implications and impacts, in the context of the overall climate change/development nexus.

1.8 New and emerging challenges

When the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in 2002, new and emerging challenges at the time were HIV/AIDS, the advent of information and communication technologies and the impacts of globalization, particularly on developing countries. While these challenges still persist, new and emerging challenges pose new threats to the attainment of

sustainable development goals. These challenges are: the global financial crisis, the food, fuel and fertilizer crises. The impacts of climate change are already being felt in the subregion and contribute to food shortages. While these challenges are also potential opportunities (for example, innovations and applications of ICTs for development), lack of capacity for the subregion to respond in an innovative, creative and sustainable way means that the impacts of these challenges will be felt for a very long time.

1.9 Conclusion, recommendations and the way forward

Efforts are being made at the regional and country levels to eradicate poverty and attain the MDGs as well as the global and continental commitments made by Heads of State and Government. The subregion and the region have good examples of commitment to sustainable development. However, the impact of these efforts is insufficient for net poverty reduction. This is due to the multiplicity of development programmes, institutional weaknesses and lack of capacity among other factors. The constraints to implementation include financial, technological and human resources. The over-reliance of the subregion and individual countries on donor funds makes predictable and long-term implementation difficult.

Looking forward, the following recommendations need to be considered:

- Undertaking a systematic review of the region's overall long-term approach to sustainable development, based on experiences to date;
- Developing and implementing domestic resource-mobilization programmes for self-sustained funding for development;
- Diversifying the country and subregional economies;
- Establishing a multi-stakeholder mechanism for monitoring and mobilizing stakeholders and resources for sustainable development in the subregion;
- Ensuring multi-stakeholder participation at the national and subregional levels beyond policymaking;
- Creating space and time for further exploration of the applicability and impacts of transition to a green economy in the context of ongoing debates on climate change, among others;
- Building mechanisms for institutional coherence at and between national, subregional and continental institutions for sustainable development;
- Ensuring that in future, national consultations commence before subregional and regional ones in order to obtain a true picture from the ground;
- Developing institutional capacities for sustainable development at all levels;

- Ensuring political commitment to and leadership in sustainable development at all levels; and
- Ensuring institutional coherence of United Nations agencies working in the subregion.