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2016 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

Progress report: achievements, main outcomes and way forward

I. Introduction

1. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), together with the Government of Egypt, the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank, in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), convened the second session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Cairo from 17 to 19 May 2016. Under the theme “Ensuring inclusive and integrated implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063”, the Forum was held in preparation for the 2016 session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which was scheduled to take place in New York from 11 to 20 July 2016.

2. The forum had more than 200 participants, comprising high-level representatives of Governments, major groups and other stakeholders, United Nations bodies and other international organizations.

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3. The session was attended by representatives of the following ECA member States: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Swaziland, Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

II. Context, objectives and format of the Forum

4. The following developments framed the organization of the 2016 session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development:

(a) African countries are transitioning to Agenda 2063 and its first 10-year implementation plan, which was adopted by African Heads of State and Government in January 2015;

(b) In January 2016, all countries around the world embarked on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted in September 2015;

(c) In July 2015, the Third International Conference on Financing for Development adopted the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which is a global framework for financing sustainable development;

(d) In April 2016, the ninth Joint Annual Meetings of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration and the Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development was held under the theme “Towards an integrated and coherent approach for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals”;

(e) The countries of Africa are committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Agenda 2063 guided by the following:

(i) The unique and dual obligation of countries in the region to implement and, therefore, follow up on both agendas;

(ii) The intricate relationship and synergies between the two agendas and their relevance to sustainable development in the region;

(iii) The importance of giving equal attention to the two agendas;

(iv) The need to support and operationalize an effective integrated implementation and follow-up and review of the two agendas.

5. This backdrop informed the adoption of the theme for the 2016 Regional Forum, namely “Ensuring inclusive and integrated implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063”. The theme was also well-aligned with that of the 2016 session of the High-level Political Forum, which was “Ensuring that no one is left behind”.

6. The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development was organized with the objective to deliberate and agree on collective input from Africa in the form of key messages to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at its 2016 session.

7. The Forum, which was held over three days, consisted of a pre-event on the first day followed by two days of main sessions. The pre-event was jointly organized by ECA and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social

Affairs to strengthen the capacity of major groups and other stakeholders to effectively participate in the Forum and in the High-level Political Forum. The participants of the pre-event adopted a joint statement that was presented and informed the deliberations of the Forum. During the two days of the main sessions, the Forum elected a Bureau¹ to guide its deliberations. The main features of the sessions were as follows:

(a) The opening session: The Forum was officially opened by Ashraf El Arab, Minister of Planning and Administrative Reform, Egypt. Addresses were delivered by: Angelique Ngoma, Deputy Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development representative of Gabon to the Bureau of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development Bureau; Abdalla Hamdok, ECA Deputy Executive Secretary (Knowledge Generation) and Chief Economist; Anthony Mothae Maruping, African Union Commissioner for Economic Affairs; and Boly Amadou, Principal Research Economist, African Development Bank;

(b) High-level panel discussion: During the panel discussion, opportunities and challenges in achieving an inclusive and integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 were highlighted. The panellists included: Abdalla Hamdok; Anthony Mothae Maruping; Macharia Kamau, Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations; Ashraf El Arabi; and Pali Lehohla, Statistician General of South Africa. The High-level panel discussions were moderated by Fatima Denton, Director, Special Initiatives Division, ECA;

(c) Plenary presentations and discussions on the four sub-themes of the Forum: The presentations were drawn from the background reports on the Forum sub-themes, namely: the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals; inclusive transformation and sustainable development; an integrated results framework and integrated implementation, including means of implementation, for both agendas; and integrated follow-up and review of both agendas;

(d) Exchange of experiences on incorporating the two agenda: The discussion was centred on progress and lessons learned in incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 in policies of African countries for voluntary review at the 2016 session of the High-level Political Forum. Representatives of Egypt and Morocco showcased their experiences;

(e) Presentation of the statement of the major groups and other stakeholders: This was based on the outcome of the pre-event, which was held for representatives of major groups and stakeholders;

(f) Breakout discussions and feedback: These sessions included further presentations by the African Union Commission; clarifications from the authors of background papers; in-depth discussions; and reaching agreement on the main issues; and key messages on the four sub-themes of the Forum and the demographic dividend road map for 2017 sponsored and presented by UNFPA;

(g) Consideration and adoption of the key messages of the 2016 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. During this session, the Forum adopted key messages, which constitute the input from Africa to the 2016 session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development;

(h) Closing of the meeting: Ashraf El Arabi and Abdalla Hamdok gave brief closing remarks.

¹ Chair, Egypt (North Africa); First Vice-Chair, Liberia (West Africa); Second-Vice Chair, South Sudan (Eastern Africa); Third Vice-Chair, Zambia (Southern Africa); and Rapporteur, Burundi (Central Africa).

III. Main achievements

8. The Forum has accomplished the following:

(a) Achieved a multi-stakeholder dialogue, which enhanced the participants' understanding of the importance of reaching agreement on key recommendations for national, regional and global engagement to ensure an inclusive and integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

(b) Strengthened the capacity of member States to articulate the priorities of Africa during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Contributing to the strengthening of member States' capacity was the well-articulated key message adopted by the Regional Forum and technical backstopping, including support to member States by ECA at the 2016 session of the High-level Political Forum, which was held in New York from 11 to 20 July 2016. Consequently the Ministerial Declaration of the 2016 session of the High-level Political Forum, among other things, reaffirmed the importance of supporting Agenda 2063 and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) programme, to ensure that no one was left behind;

(c) Generated policy reports on the various sub-themes of the forum, which are available from www.uneca.org/arfsd2016/pages/event-documents;

(d) Featured web-based news, advocacy messages and infographics on the theme and outcomes of the Forum;

(e) Strengthened intra-ECA understanding of and involvement in the 2016 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the follow-ups of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063. This entailed substantive engagement of most of the ECA divisions and subregional offices and the Office of the ECA Deputy Executive Secretary. Specifically, the subregional offices played an important role in contacting member States to secure confirmation of the participants. The Publications and Documentation Section was instrumental in the timely processing of the Forum documents;

(f) Strengthened collaboration between ECA and 2016 partner organizers, namely the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank.

IV. Main outcomes and result (key messages) of the Forum

9. At its 2016 session, the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development adopted important recommendations in the form of key messages to ensure inclusive and integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063. While the key messages adopted were to be fed into the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, they are also intended to contribute and spur relevant implementation and follow-up actions at regional, subregional and national level.

10. The detailed key messages are available from www.uneca.org/arfsd2016.

11. Some of the key messages grouped under each of the sub-themes are set out in the following sections.

A. Transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals

12. It is important that Africa make a seamless transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals at all levels, and that unfinished business with regard to the Millennium Development Goals are dealt with.

13. The High-level Political Forum should ensure the revitalization of global, regional and national partnerships, including South-South and tripartite cooperation and the involvement of the private sector, civil society organizations and other non-State actors to accelerate sustainable development in Africa. Specific efforts should be directed towards curbing illicit financial flows and promoting technology transfer and the data revolution.

14. The High-level Political Forum should ensure that development partners meet their overseas development assistance (ODA) commitments to African countries, especially to the least developed countries, and that ODA is aligned with national priorities. According to the 2016 transition report, ODA to Africa is trending downward, with most donor countries not fulfilling their commitments to provide 0.7 per cent of their gross national income in ODA to developing countries. Particularly worrisome is that the share of total ODA received by African least developed countries is declining.

B. Inclusive transformation and sustainable development

15. Higher levels of social investments and greater mobilization of resources at global, regional and national levels are needed to improve skills and capacity-building through the provision of education, apprenticeships, trainings, adequate infrastructure and health care, along with food and other things required for achieving nutrition security. This is especially urgent with regard to young people and women, whose employment is concentrated in lower-skilled jobs, mostly in the informal sector. Harnessing the demographic dividend entails focusing on quality education, skills and health, particularly for women and youth, to enhance their capacity to obtain decent jobs generated through structural transformation.

16. The High-level Political Forum must mobilize the necessary resources and assistance to support member States in addressing inequality and implementing, where appropriate, redistributive policies that reduce disparities in wealth, income and access to public services. Related policies should target the following areas: modernization of agriculture; ensuring food security; resilience of communities; emergency preparedness; and rural development. A key policy priority in this respect is social protection, which can be accomplished by providing universal access to quality basic services. Social protection can enhance productivity and incomes of vulnerable groups, including the elderly, people with disabilities and pregnant women, among others, to reduce inequalities and eradicate stigma, and ultimately contribute to sustained economic growth.

17. The High-level Political Forum should assist member States in setting adequate public policies; promoting good governance and accountability; and adopting legislative and financing measures to ensure inclusive growth and transformation. Inclusive outcomes cannot be achieved as by-products of economic growth. A targeted action backed by resources is required. This action must be intrinsic to overall development planning at national and regional levels. It is critical to align with and direct public expenditure towards targets for social and economic inclusion.

C. Integrated results framework and integrated implementation, including means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

18. To ensure inclusive and participatory processes, multi-stakeholder bodies and platforms at the national and subnational levels are necessary to enable African countries to effectively integrate the two agendas into national and subnational strategic frameworks. Such bodies, which should comprise gender-responsive representation of government, private sector agencies, major groups and other stakeholders, will enable countries to effectively consult with various interest groups and take into account inputs from them. Moreover, the bodies would enhance multi-actor and multi-sectoral involvement and coordination in the implementation of the agendas within the framework of national development priorities.

19. Africa needs to mobilize an unprecedented amount of domestic resources to implement the two agendas. Strengthening the capacities of African countries to mobilize domestic resources is critical and should, therefore, be fast-tracked and well-supported. The mobilization effort should focus on the following: fiscal resources; harnessing the continent's natural capital; leveraging the pool of African institutional savings; raising the level of retail savings through financial inclusion; curbing illicit financial flows; reducing inefficiency; and governance and corruption-based financial leakages and wastages.

20. To ensure that science, technology and innovation take a leading role in the drive to transform Africa, boost economic growth and achieve sustainable development, Governments of African countries need to increase investment in the development of endogenous technological capabilities, receive support through the transfer of technology on mutually agreed terms and support green industrialization initiatives. To do this, they must increase spending (including in the private sector) on research and development to at least 1 per cent of GDP with the objective to improve the performance of national innovation systems and productivity competitiveness in the global market. A large portion of these resources should be devoted to environmentally friendly technologies.

D. Integrated follow-up and review of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda

21. The 2030 Agenda calls for follow-ups and reviews at the global, regional and national levels, while for Agenda 2063, they are required at the regional, subregional and national levels. The shared end goal of the follow-up and review processes is to ensure that countries stay on track and achieve the goals and targets in a timely fashion. The follow-up and review processes for both agendas also include accountability to the citizens. To enhance effectiveness, linkages between the follow-up and review processes at the various levels, based on the principle of subsidiarity, can be explored.

22. Africa needs to pursue a unified track to follow up and review the implementation of the two agendas to avoid dual reporting obligations for member States and partners. A common regional-level set of indicators based on the integrated results framework would be indispensable to foster integrated follow-up and review at the regional level.

23. Global-level commitments and support is needed for the integrated implementation and follow-up of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda in Africa. During the review process, the High-level Political Forum should recognize the significant synergies and relationships between the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and their importance in achieving sustainable development in Africa. It is for this reason that the two agendas are being implemented and the follow-up is being carried out at the regional, subregional and national levels through

integrated approaches. The High-level Political Forum should, therefore, promote processes and propose policy actions and recommendations, including on the provision of means of implementation that takes into account both agendas.

24. A unified follow-up platform at the regional level is essential for realizing the integrated follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Coordinated follow-ups and reviews at the regional level will serve as the basis for Africa to interact with the High-level Political Forum and other relevant global-level follow-up processes with a unified and strong voice, and a view to enhancing the integrated implementation and follow-up of the two agendas.

25. High-quality, disaggregated and timely data are required to ensure evidence and results-based inclusive regional and national follow-ups and reviews. Countries need to be supported in their efforts to strengthen their national statistical systems to meet the data requirements for carrying out integrated follow-ups and reviews of the two agendas. Such systems, which are driven by technology and adequate resources, are critical to ensure data readiness and underpin the measurement of progress, monitoring and evaluation, reporting and the overall follow-up processes.

E. Demographic dividend road map for 2017

26. The strategic importance of the demographic dividend to Africa should be exploited in the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda. Given the demographic composition and projections for Africa, it is evident that making the right investments would strategically position the continent towards achieving Agenda 2063 and meeting the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, which is central to creating a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.

27. It is important to identify and monitor indicators linked to the demographic dividend, including those from existing and emerging indicator frameworks, such as the integrated results framework for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant thematic frameworks, such as the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development. This is critical for measuring the impact of policies and strategies aimed at harnessing the demographic dividend and monitoring progress related to it.

F. Moving forward: strengthening the form and work of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

28. Sharing lessons learned and best practices among United Nations Member States, as well as with regional and subregional forums, major groups and organizations is essential in accelerating the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda. The Forum should establish platforms for sharing lessons learned and best practices. It is, therefore, important that countries volunteering for peer review during sessions of the High-level Political Forum share their experiences and lessons learned with the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. In addition, case studies should be conducted to support learning and exchange. Countries in Africa should be encouraged to participate in and contribute to the various learning and sharing platforms.

V. Moving forward

29. To ensure that the Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development remains efficient and effective as it strengthens its role to ensure inclusive and integrated implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, a number of recommendations were made with regard to moving forward. These are summarized in the following paragraphs.

30. All of the United Nations regional commissions have convened a forum on sustainable development, as mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 67/29 and reiterated in its resolution 70/1, which contains the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In Africa, this forum has been established as the Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development with a mandate that has been widened and strengthened by the joint ECA-African Union Commission Conference of Ministers.

31. In 2016, the Conference adopted resolution 939 (XLIX). In that resolution, ECA was requested, in collaboration with the African Union Commission and other partners, to convene on an annual basis the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for follow-up to and review of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

32. The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is a multi-stakeholder body that brings together senior policymakers and experts from the ministries responsible for at least the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environment), regional organizations (African Union Commission and regional economic communities), representatives of major groups, including the private sector and civil society organizations and academia, United Nations agencies and other partner organizations. It provides a platform to assess progress; share experiences; identify obstacles and provide concrete policy actions and other measures, and mobilize national efforts and global support to advance the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063.

33. By its nature, the Forum is a wider body that places ECA in a vantage position to validate and advocate policy options arising from almost all the areas of work of the Commission. It raises the profile of ECA as a convener on issues of strategic importance regionally and globally.

34. Consequently, ECA needs to ensure that the convening of the Forum is an integral priority in its programme of work, including in the allocation of the required financial and human resources, and should actively pursue the proposed plan to the United Nations Secretariat in New York, specifically with regard to the budget implications associated with implementing the 2030 Agenda.

35. Going forward, ECA should strengthen its collaboration with the African Union Commission and other partners on the organization of the Forum and harmonize activities. This would entail identifying focal points in the respective institutions and designating well-defined roles in the organization of the Forum. In addition, ECA should pursue the recommendations of the Conference of Ministers to avoid the establishment of multiple regional review forums. In that regard, as recommended by the Conference of Ministers, “all necessary steps” should be taken to do the following: designate the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development as the platform for reviewing progress in implementing Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda and the respective follow-ups; to align the consultations of the Africa Regional Forum with the annual reporting cycle of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda; and to expand the mandate of the Africa Regional Forum to include a review of progress,

challenges and gaps in meeting the commitments outlined in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

36. ECA should be involved in all facets of the work related to the Africa Regional Forum on an ongoing basis, instead of just organizing the annual meetings of the Forum. In this connection, ECA needs to engage and update partners, member States and the High-level Political Forum on the work of the Forum and advocate activities of the Forum regularly. Also, the Bureau of the Forum should be updated on and even participate in the activities of the Forum. Such engagement would enhance the Bureau's ability to perform its review and advocacy functions.

37. It is important that the Forum and the Conference of Ministers work more in tandem with each other to ensure that work related to the priorities of Africa benefit from feedback extended by these two strategic platforms. Moreover, the Forum should provide a platform for discussing issues and evaluating and contesting results relating to the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda.

38. ECA should also be actively involved in other work streams related to follow-up to the 2030 Agenda and the monitoring of progress in achieving sustainable development that will shape the outcomes of the High-level Political Forum. In that regard, the Commission needs to formulate and structure arrangements for engagement with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the following: the Global Sustainable Development Report, the global report on the Sustainable Development Goals, and African countries volunteering for peer review at sessions of the High-level Political Forum. Harmonizing the inputs to those two reports through the peer review and the Africa Regional Forum would enable Africa to have a coordinated and strong position at the High-level Political Forum.