

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General  
14 October 2019

Original: English

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

Third session

Addis Ababa, 14 and 15 November 2019

Item 6 of the provisional agenda\*

**General discussion on the theme of the third session “Accelerating Africa’s Progress in Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Reducing Inequality”****Aide-memoire****Theme: “Accelerating Africa’s progress in eradicating poverty and reducing inequality”****I. Context**

1. The third session of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender will be held 14 and 15 November 2019 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with the theme “Accelerating Africa’s progress in eradicating poverty and reducing inequality”.
2. The Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender is a statutory intergovernmental body of experts and policymakers that provides guidance and advises the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division on its work and engagement with member States. Details of the role of the Committee are provided in an annex to this document.
3. In May 2018, the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development endorsed the reforms proposed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to enable the Commission to better respond to the continent’s evolving needs, further build on its body of work, and take advantage of emerging opportunities to implement the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union’s Agenda 2063.
4. On completion of the reforms in February 2019, the Social Development Policy Division was restructured to enhance its focus on poverty and inequality, and renamed the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division.
5. The Division, organized in three sections – Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, Social Policy, and Urbanization and Development – works with member States to support the design and implementation of appropriate national and subregional policies, programmes and strategies to achieve inclusive and equitable sustainable human and social development. It generates knowledge products, tools and approaches as a think tank, to enhance the capacity of member States to develop, implement and

\* E/ECA/CSPPG/3/1.

monitor policies to reduce poverty and inequality, promote social development, and harness urbanization, for inclusive and equitable growth.

6. In line with the new divisional structure, its intergovernmental body, the Committee for Gender and Social Development, has been renamed the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender. The Division's last session of the Committee was organized in 2017 as the second session of the Committee for Gender and Social Development.

## **II. Theme of the third session of the Committee**

7. The third session of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender will discuss the Division's vision, perspective and areas of focus in support of African countries, to accelerate progress on eradicating extreme poverty and reducing inequality, and achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development.

8. Globally, there has been extraordinary progress in reducing extreme poverty since the 1990s. Nearly 1.2 billion people were lifted out of extreme poverty, as poverty declined from 35.9 per cent in 1990 to 10 per cent in 2015. Much of the progress came from East and South-east Asia, with China's economic rise responsible for most of the decline in poverty. More recently, South Asia has made impressive inroads against extreme poverty, helping to reduce the global rate further.

9. In contrast, poverty in Africa increased, from 54.3 per cent in 1990 to 55.6 per cent in 2002. However, in the period 2002–2015, poverty in Africa declined at a faster pace (at 1.4 percentage points per year) than the global average of 1.2 percentage points. Yet, the encouraging rate of economic growth in Africa since the early 2000s has had only a limited impact on poverty reduction, and an estimated 36 per cent of the population was still below the international poverty line in 2016.

10. While the share of the African population in extreme food and income poverty has been reduced since 2002, the number of people in extreme poverty has increased, from an estimated 276 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015. Of the world's 28 least developed countries, 27 are in Africa, all with poverty rates above 30 per cent.

11. Global poverty is now concentrated in Africa. From less than 15 per cent in 1990, Africa made up 56 per cent of the world's poor people in 2015. Under current trends, 86 per cent of the extreme poor people in the world in 2030 will be in Africa, and the top 10 poorest countries in the world will be in Africa, both in terms of absolute numbers and share of extreme poor as a percentage of the total population.

12. At the same time, income inequality in Africa remains high, with an unweighted average Gini coefficient of 0.43. A high level of inequality undermines the poverty-reducing effect of growth, even as it matters in its own right. While there is a strong, and widely accepted ethical basis for being concerned at the high level of inequality in society, inequality is often a significant factor behind crime, social unrest or violent conflict.

13. Despite faster growth in many countries since the early 2000s, and the recent uptick in the poverty reduction rate, extreme poverty is declining much too slowly for Africa to meet Sustainable Development Goal 1 by 2030. Progress on the continent is enormously varied and many countries are making progress towards ending extreme poverty. Four countries already have poverty rates of below 3 per cent. It is important to understand why this is so and design suitable measures to accelerate progress.

14. Key analytical and policy questions arise:

(a) What factors are responsible for the slow decline of poverty and inequality in Africa?

(b) What can member States do to make economic growth more inclusive and sustained in order to accelerate progress in eradicating extreme poverty and reducing inequality?

(c) How can ECA support member States to rapidly reduce poverty and inequality?

15. The theme provides a framework for ECA and the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division, in particular, to advance policy discussions with member States on these issues, and agree on what is required to accelerate achievement of the interlinked goals of eradicating poverty in all its forms, and reducing inequality between and among countries.

### **Poverty reduction and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

16. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a blueprint for shared prosperity in a sustainable world to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Recognizing the multidimensional nature of poverty, Sustainable Development Goal 1 aims to “end extreme poverty in all its forms everywhere”. Similarly, Goal 10 aims to “reduce inequality within and among countries”.

17. Countries in Africa are unlikely to meet these targets unless action is accelerated. Business as usual is insufficient, and urgent actions are required by countries and development partners, especially United Nations agencies, to accelerate progress on eradicating extreme poverty and reducing inequality to improve the well-being of the African people.

18. The Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender is being organized in the context of several ongoing planning processes to implement regional and global development frameworks. Specifically, the Committee will take note of the policy recommendations of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, held in April 2019 in Marrakech, Morocco; the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, held in July 2019 in New York; and the programme of action of the 25-year global review and appraisal of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in April 2019 in New York. It also will take account of the national Beijing+25 Review reports that will feed into the Africa Regional Beijing+25 Report and the regional review meeting, to be held in November 2019 in Addis Ababa.

### **III. Objectives of the third session of the Committee**

19. The overall objective of the third session of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender is to review and provide strategic orientation to the work of the Division, in line with its overarching framework on ending poverty in all its forms, and reducing inequality within and among countries.

20. The specific objectives are to:

(a) Analyse the interlinkages between growth, poverty and inequality, in the context of social policy, urbanization, and gender equality and women’s empowerment;

(b) Share with member States on the Division’s new areas of focus and policy interventions in delivering on its mandate – through the generation of knowledge, think pieces, tools and approaches to enhance the capacity of

member States to develop, implement and monitor policies to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality for inclusive and equitable growth;

(c) Present the Division's current and future work to the Committee, as well as its policy relevance to member States' priorities; and

(d) Identify priority needs on poverty and inequality as they relate to the Division's core areas of work in gender equality and women's empowerment, social policy and urbanization.

#### **IV. Expected outputs and outcomes**

21. A number of outputs and outcomes are expected from the third session of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender. The main expected output is a comprehensive report of the Committee, capturing the deliberations of the meeting, including member States' feedback on ECA's new strategic direction. Specifically, the report will synthesize feedback from member States on issues relating to poverty, inequality, gender equality, and women's empowerment and urbanization. The proposed actionable recommendations from the Committee will form the basis for the Division's work for the period 2020–2021. In keeping with the statutory requirements of the Commission, the report will be tabled and presented at the next Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in March 2020.

22. The following specific outcomes are also expected:

(a) Member States' increased understanding and endorsement of the Division's perspectives and approaches on poverty eradication and inequality reduction, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063, and in the context of the thematic areas of work of the Division;

(b) Enhanced understanding, among countries, of the correlations between the various dimensions of poverty and inequality in the context of the Division's work, and how to unlock countries' and the continent's many potentials to tackle them; and

(c) Increased commitment of member States to respond in a timely manner to the Division's requests for information and data, and to implement policy recommendations.

#### **V. Format of the session**

23. The session will comprise structured plenary and parallel sessions where delegates and invited experts will actively participate in thematic discussions in order to provide feedback to the Division. A presentation on the theme of the Committee – Accelerating Africa's progress in eradicating poverty and reducing inequality – and the accompanying discussions will be the main anchor of the plenary session to elicit feedback from delegates.

24. In addition, three independent parallel sessions will be organized on thematic areas related to the overall mandate of the Division – namely population and social policy dimensions of poverty, gender equality and women's empowerment, and urbanization and development.

## **VI. Documentation**

25. The third session of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender will be informed by several reports on the work implemented by the Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division. Knowledge products and publications, as well as technical materials, will be distributed for the participants' information during the meeting.

## **VII. Participation**

26. The Committee is comprised of experts from ECA member States drawn from ministries responsible for gender, social development, national planning and urbanization. Representatives from the African Regional Economic Communities, the African Union Commission, the United Nations system, civil society organizations and academia will attend as observers.

27. The Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division of ECA serves as convener and secretariat of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender.

## **VIII. Language**

28. The session will be conducted in English and French, with simultaneous interpretation.

## Annex

### **Role of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender**

The role of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender, formerly Committee on Gender and Social Development, is contained in para. 18A.45 of the United Nations General Assembly (2013), Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015, Part V, Regional cooperation for development, Section 18, Economic and social development in Africa, A/68/6 (Sect. 18), which reads as follows:

#### **2. Functional and sectoral subsidiary organs of the Commission**

##### *Committee on Gender and Social Development Social*

18A.45 The role of the Committee on Social Development, as an advisory forum of experts and policymakers, is to provide guidance to the Commission in its work of promoting equitable and inclusive human and social development in Africa, with particular focus on gender, employment, population and youth development, social protection and urbanization. The Committee reviews follow-up activities pertaining to global conferences and regional action programmes in the areas of social development, including the global and regional platforms for action on the advancement of women. It also reviews major trends and issues of regional interest regarding human and social development. The Committee meets biennially.

More specifically, the Committee:

- (a) Provides guidance and expert opinion on the Division's priorities and activities;
- (b) Reviews past activities and future programmes;
- (c) Provides recommendations for strengthening ECA programmes to better serve member States and Regional Economic Communities;
- (d) Provides policy guidance to ensure relevance of activities for meeting Africa's development needs and addressing development challenges in the continent;
- (e) Supports implementation and review of the regional and international policy agenda in relation to the areas of work of the Division;
- (f) Supports ECA's partnership with the African Union Commission and African Development Bank, and with the development partners.

#### **Election of the Bureau**

The Committee shall elect a Bureau consisting of a Chairperson, two Vice-Chairpersons and two Rapporteurs for a two-year term (2020–2021). The election of the Bureau will be held before the third session of the Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender commences. The election of the officers will be based on three criteria: geography (one representative from each ECA subregion), language and gender.

The Bureau will be elected following consultations with the diplomatic corps deans, the members of the Committee, the Bureau and the secretariat of the Committee (ECA), bearing in mind composition of the outgoing Bureau, which stands as follows:

Chair:	Madagascar (Southern Africa)
First Vice-Chair:	Burkina Faso (West Africa)
Second Vice-Chair:	Mozambique (Eastern Africa)
Rapporteurs:	Chad (Central Africa)
	Tunisia (North Africa)

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