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**Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)
while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development**

Report of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development on its eighth session

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat hereby transmits, as input to the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development, the report of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development on its eighth session, which was organized by the Economic Commission for Africa, and held from 3 to 5 March 2022.



Report of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development on its eighth session: summary, key messages and the Kigali Declaration on building forward better from the COVID-19 crisis and accelerating delivery of sustainable development in Africa

[Original: English and French]

I. Introduction

1. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), together with the Government of Rwanda and in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and entities of the United Nations system,¹ convened the eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development at the Kigali Conference Centre, in Kigali, in a hybrid format featuring both in-person and online participation, from 3 to 5 March 2022.

2. 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.

3. The Forum was held against the backdrop of the continuing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has resulted in the loss of millions of lives. Recovery efforts to date have been uneven, inequitable and inadequately geared towards achieving sustainable development. COVID-19 continues to threaten to reverse decades of development gains, further delaying the urgent transition to greener, more inclusive economies. Prior to the outbreak, the Sustainable Development Goals were already off track, although some progress had been achieved in poverty reduction, maternal and child health, access to electricity, and gender equality. The eighth session of the Forum hence offered an opportunity to exchange good practices and devise solutions to accelerate and expand the scale of implementation within the narrow window of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

4. The eighth session was held on the theme: “Building forward better: a green, inclusive and resilient Africa poised to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”. This theme is closely aligned with that of the 2022 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, namely: “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

¹ The following entities of the United Nations system were involved as partners in that process: United Nations Development Coordination Office, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Labour Organization, International Organization for Migration, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group, United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, United Nations Office to the African Union, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Volunteers programme, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and the World Food Programme.

II. Opening of the session [agenda item 1]

5. The session was moderated by the journalist, Lerato Mbele, of South Africa. It was officially opened by the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. Opening statements were delivered by the Minister of Environment, Sustainable Development and the Congo Basin of the Congo, and Chair of the seventh session of the Forum, Arlette Soudan-Nonault; the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Vera Songwe; the President of the Economic and Social Council, and Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations, Collen Kelapile; the Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission, Josefa Sacko, and the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Amina Mohammed.

6. Ms. Soudan-Nonault thanked the Government of Rwanda and in particular the President, Paul Kagame, for hosting the Forum and for his commitment to the leadership of Africa in transforming the continent. Noting that Rwanda was a model for the resilience and dignity of Africa, given its success in containing COVID-19, she called for strengthened regional solidarity. She highlighted key achievements of the outgoing Bureau of the Forum and called on the incoming Bureau to focus on a number of priorities, including funding mechanisms for sustainable recovery; the Great Green Wall and the Great Blue Wall for Africa; accelerated achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union; building the capacity of the young people and women of Africa in science, technology and innovation and green business; and gender equality and the empowerment of women and young people to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Ms. Songwe outlined recent positive achievements by Africa, including tremendous progress with vaccine acquisition and establishment of the African Medicines Agency, along with great strides in digital technology and operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area, although much remained to be done to arrest regression on the Sustainable Development Goals. Critical partnerships and intra-African cooperation were already being leveraged to that end. She congratulated African countries, including Kenya and Rwanda, on their critical roles in drafting the landmark resolution on plastics at the 2022 session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme. She called for support for African youth in the areas of intellectual property rights and innovation, which had high potential for job creation and development on the continent. She urged member States to ensure that, at its twenty-seventh session, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change would deliver for Africa, especially with regard to means of implementation and global consensus on carbon pricing, to reward Africa for its custody of global climate goods, such as the carbon sequestered in the Congo basin forest and its peatlands.

8. Mr. Kelapile said that the theme of the Forum perfectly matched the path that Africa should take to recover from the pandemic in a sustainable manner. He outlined five actions to achieve the desired sustainable recovery: first, overcoming COVID-19 by ensuring equitable access to life-saving vaccines; second, ensuring that African countries had adequate fiscal space to finance COVID-19 recovery efforts; third, addressing the climate crisis and supporting Egypt in hosting a strong climate summit that delivered for Africa; fourth, decisively tackling the root causes of persistent inequalities within and between countries; and, fifth, making the African Continental Free Trade Area work for Africa. He reaffirmed the commitment of the Economic and Social Council to support for Africa and informed the Forum of the decision reached by the President of the General Assembly and himself to convene a special event soon on the development of Africa.

9. Ms. Sacko, representing the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, underlined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the public health and economic advancement of Africa. She observed that those impacts offered an unprecedented opportunity for African countries to build back stronger and greener. She highlighted the African Union Green Recovery Plan, designed to support member States' efforts in key areas, including climate finance, renewable energy, nature-based solutions, resilient agriculture, and green and resilient cities. She outlined plans and progress made by the African Union Commission and its partners in preparation for the next climate summit, along with initiatives for the sustainable management and use of water resources. In conclusion, she called for practicable recommendations from the Forum at the current session and reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to implementing policy recommendations in partnership with ECA and other stakeholders.

10. Ms. Mohammed noted that the pandemic had caused disappointment for global solidarity and African economies, especially in education and health systems, worsened by insufficient access to the Internet and sustainable, affordable energy. She called on member States to focus on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, highlighting five priority areas for action: first, ending the pandemic and building resilience to future shocks; second, scaling up climate resilience, with developed countries honouring their pledges; third, just transitions in energy and food systems; fourth, recovering education losses; and fifth, supporting gender equality actions. She noted that Africa would determine the overall fate of the Goals, as it had the largest gaps. She welcomed the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, which could free up resources to invest in the Goals, and called on member States to prioritize the African Continental Free Trade Area, asking them and development partners to ensure that needed investments were realized.

11. Mr. Kagame noted that, while Africa had made significant socioeconomic progress, the pandemic had slowed development gains and reversed progress. Pandemic responses and recovery could serve as a springboard to accelerate progress and invest in human capital, building a greener, more resilient Africa, using the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 as a blueprint. He outlined three actions for consideration: building partnerships to strengthen African vaccine manufacturing capacity; prioritizing domestic resource mobilization to finance African development, in particular national health systems; and using the African Continental Free Trade Area to promote the adoption of sustainable technologies and infrastructure, supporting green growth. Strong mechanisms to monitor progress and adjust implementation were essential, and he commended the Forum for showcasing the benefits of national and subnational voluntary reviews of implementation. He stressed that building the Africa we want was on Africa, which had to own and lead the process.

III. Summary and key messages

12. The following sections summarize the key messages, comprising priorities, policy options and recommendations for Africa, to accelerate implementation at multiple levels, and the region's collective input to the 2022 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

A. High-level panel on unlocking financing to build forward better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis and accelerate delivery of sustainable development in Africa [agenda item 2]

13. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Given the magnitude of post-pandemic financial needs in such areas as infrastructure and health, and as the pandemic has reversed hard-earned gains over the past two decades, Governments are urged to work in partnership with the private sector and international players, such as the United Nations and multilateral banks, to meet these urgent challenges;

(b) As the opportunity cost of women being sidelined is estimated to be \$60 billion each year, member States should ensure that gender parity goes beyond social fairness and human rights to include ownership of assets;

(c) Member States should make urgent efforts to address the issue of the lack of liquidity crisis, including through domestic resource mobilization, which is critical for sustainable development, and recognizing its multiplier effect in supporting countries' risk profile and boosting their creditworthiness;

(d) Governments should become enablers, not competitors, in creating a conducive environment for the private sector; to that end, empowering the private sector is vital to enable Africa to take ownership of its development;

(e) As commodity dependence is a constraint and a risk, African countries are urged to switch to value addition and manufacturing to build forward better and reduce resource dependence;

(f) Governments are urged to undertake robust reforms in domestic markets to stimulate private sector development and access to finance in an inclusive manner;

(g) Governments and development partners should accelerate efforts to identify and implement de-risking mechanisms to support the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and to lower interest rates;

(h) To reduce the cost of borrowing and to lower the risks to banks and member States, use should be made of innovative schemes, such as movable collateral registers and blended finance, a track record of credit information in support of small and medium-sized enterprises, and the provision of credit guarantees by policymakers;

(i) For small and medium-sized enterprises, there is a need to incentivize the formalization process by providing good external finance to fund current expenditure and a tax grace period;

(j) No promising idea should be allowed to die for lack of funding and no one should be left behind.

B. Highlights of progress at the regional and subregional levels in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in the context of the COVID-19 crisis [agenda item 4]

14. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States are urged:

(i) To make efforts to align national development plans with both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and to use the integrated planning and reporting toolkit to facilitate, quantify and deepen the alignment of both frameworks;

(ii) To make the African Continental Free Trade Area work for regional cooperation and use it as a key mechanism for industrialization, enabling them to compete not only at the regional but also at the global level, leveraging the opportunities that the Area provides to pool resources and spread the benefits across the continent;

(iii) To promote nature conservation as one of the continent's greatest assets, with transformative potential, as a source of wealth, in particular through the monetization of carbon sequestration;

(iv) To capitalize on digitalization to unlock the potential of education, health, social protection and trade;

(v) To enhance regional cooperation and domestic resource mobilization and use the special drawing rights recently approved by the International Monetary Fund in innovative ways as development levers that could be catalytic for the attainment of development goals;

(b) Member States, ECA and other development partners, including the African Export-Import Bank and the African Development Bank, are requested to invest in capacity-building and tools in support of implementation, including access to finance, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063.

C. Plenary round-table panel on boosting the generation and use of data and statistics to build forward better and accelerate delivery of sustainable development in Africa [agenda item 5]

15. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States are urged:

(i) To harmonize and integrate their statistical systems; to strengthen partnerships with civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and unofficial data producers; and to ensure that there is constant communication between national statistical offices and the public and private sectors;

(ii) To develop frameworks for quality assurance to be applied to non-official data and to develop legal frameworks for key stakeholders to share data with each other;

(iii) To create an environment that is conducive to young statisticians supporting the modernization of national statistical systems for reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, noting that young statisticians should be at the centre of statistical development strategies through innovation, the development of information and communications technology capabilities, and the creation of a competitive environment that is conducive to their professional development;

(iv) To modernize national statistical systems by leveraging big data and technology to strengthen the production and use of statistics in countries for better reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, as traditional methods of data collection have proven to be inadequate and impractical during the COVID-19 pandemic, while information and communications technologies were instrumental in producing data during the COVID-19 crisis, noting that such efforts are linked with building the capacity of national statistical systems on big data, data science, high-level disaggregated data, technology and spatial data, among other data forms.

D. Plenary round-table panels on national and subnational actions and reviews to build forward better and accelerate delivery of sustainable development in Africa [agenda item 6]

1. Voluntary national reviews and peer learning to strengthen country-level interventions [agenda item 6 (a)]

16. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

- (a) Member States are urged:
 - (i) To collaborate with other countries in the region to build on and learn from best practices;
 - (ii) To put mechanisms in place to reach women, young people and civil society organizations to help ensure that reviews are grounded in real experiences;
 - (iii) To incorporate feedback from stakeholders and communities on previous reviews to improve the implementation of subsequent reviews;
 - (iv) To prioritize reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals that are most relevant to national priorities, and use the reviews to mobilize awareness of and interest in those Goals, while recognizing that other Goals cannot be ignored;
 - (v) To embed accountability by Governments to civil society organizations and other groups within the review process;
 - (vi) To prioritize education as it relates to children, vulnerable persons, social inclusion, human capital and other vital areas;
 - (vii) To assist, in particular, certain groups, such as children, that have fallen further behind owing to the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - (viii) To focus on building capacity to collect accurate and timely data, and build interactive dashboards to display those data;
 - (ix) To build on the reviews to ensure that they do not end with just a one-off report, but serve as a springboard for an ongoing process;
 - (x) To incorporate other important issues, such as governance, into the review process;
 - (xi) To use the reviews as a tool to link national development plan activities to the programmes of the United Nations and other partners in the country, with a view to optimizing the delivery of services;
 - (xii) To use the review process as a tool to mobilize donor support and domestic budgetary resources for specific sectors and activities.

2. Voluntary subnational reviews and peer learning to bolster local action [agenda item 6 (b)]

17. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

- (a) Member States are requested:
 - (i) To scale up efforts to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 to foster a sense of ownership at all levels of society, including through community institutions;

- (ii) To institutionalize national-local partnerships and multi-stakeholder dialogue in voluntary local reviews, engaging, in particular, with national associations of local government;
- (iii) To strengthen institutional mechanisms to engage local governments in regional and global agendas and to take note of recommendations made by the advisory group on local and regional governments that the Secretary-General has planned to establish as part of the common agenda of the United Nations system;
- (iv) To prioritize the involvement of women, young people and other stakeholders at all stages of voluntary local reviews to deepen ownership, integration and delivery on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;
- (v) To leverage voluntary local review processes to identify, implement and accelerate interventions for local development and inform the design and revision of existing strategies and plans;
- (vi) To enhance the knowledge, skills and financial capacities of local and regional governments, including in terms of the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and voluntary local reviews;
- (vii) To strengthen the disaggregation of data relating to Sustainable Development Goal indicators at the subnational level to facilitate local progress reviews and the targeting of interventions and investments required to accelerate progress;
- (viii) To take urgent action to plan and manage urbanization and human settlements for sustainability as part of the New Urban Agenda, taking advantage of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, to be held on 28 April 2022, to galvanize momentum and action;
- (ix) To strengthen engagement in the high-level political forum on sustainable development and put forward strong arguments regarding the importance of urban and human settlement as key elements for the overall implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the critical role of voluntary local reviews in that regard;
- (x) To place housing and basic services at the core of the implementation of global and regional commitments and to mobilize the power of cities to accelerate implementation of the Paris Agreement;
- (b) The United Nations system is requested:
 - (i) To disseminate its regional guidelines for voluntary local reviews at the local and national levels to support subnational authorities in conducting such reviews and to ensure common reporting across all localities while ensuring strong linkages to voluntary national reporting;
 - (ii) To scale up support for subnational reviews by promoting the uptake of the guidelines for voluntary local reviews in Africa, including among smaller localities and those with resource constraints.

E. Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made and peer learning on the sub-themes of the Regional Forum [agenda item 7]

1. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of quality education [agenda item 7 (a)]

18. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

- (a) Member States are urged:
 - (i) To improve inclusive quality education, with a focus on learning outcomes, including in early childhood education;
 - (ii) To strengthen the relevance of training programmes to reduce the mismatch between training and the labour market, including through public-private partnerships;
 - (iii) To improve the information system used to formulate education policies and to integrate a labour management information system into education;
 - (iv) To leverage digital transformation to accelerate the achievement of Goal 4.

2. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of gender equality [agenda item 7 (b)]

19. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

- (a) Member States are urged:
 - (i) To strengthen institutional arrangements to enhance the implementation of commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment;
 - (ii) To align gender-responsive policies and programmes with Sustainable Development Goal 5 and with aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063;
 - (iii) To ensure that there is sustainable financing available for gender-responsive climate adaptation measures and that the commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment set out in the Goals are fulfilled;
 - (iv) To accompany the political will at different levels with a larger-scale, coordinated financing mechanism to support the implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment priorities at all levels;
 - (v) To strengthen the evidence for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda through better gender data, statistics and analysis to effectively monitor progress among women and girls across all goals and targets, and to enhance the role of national statistical offices in generating and applying research-based information and gender- and sex-disaggregated data to support the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;
 - (vi) To strengthen partnerships that are broad-based, inclusive and coordinated and that are key drivers of sustainable development and the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, which will require the strategic engagement of member States, the African Union, regional economic communities, civil society organizations, traditional and community leaders, and the United Nations development system;
 - (vii) To ensure policy coherence at all levels so that women and girls are protected from the shocks of climate change;
 - (viii) To support the perspectives of young people, especially women, which are essential to strengthening accountability and outcomes relating to implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

- (ix) To ensure that women are effectively involved in decision-making on climate change at the local, national and international levels;
- (x) To continue to prioritize gender as a cross-cutting consideration in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

3. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of life below water [agenda item 7 (c)]

20. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

- (a) Member States and development partners are urged:
 - (i) To build capacity to mobilize sustainable finance, including through debt-for-nature swaps and the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, to support the implementation of a sustainable and inclusive blue economy;
 - (ii) To strengthen partnerships to embrace and fund implementation of the Great Blue Wall in support of coastal and marine restoration and protection;
 - (iii) To push for developed countries to honour the promise of providing \$100 billion per year for climate action to be taken by the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and dedicate a significant amount of those resources to supporting coastal adaptation, protection and resilience plans;
 - (iv) To increase investment in marine data, science, technologies and youth entrepreneurship.

4. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of life on land [agenda item 7 (d)]

21. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

- (a) Governments and partners should strengthen and scale up the valuation of natural capital and the mainstreaming of biodiversity, nature-based solutions and climate-friendly agriculture and disaster risk reduction in voluntary national reviews and development plans and budgets;
- (b) Governments and the private sector need to increase investments to combat land degradation and enhance the productivity and sustainability of land, forests and biodiversity resources for inclusive green growth;
- (c) ECA and the United Nations system as a whole should help to establish a truly developmental carbon market on the continent to contribute to increasing job creation, while also contributing to attainment of the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the sustainable management of forests and biodiversity;
- (d) Member States should strengthen public and private partnerships and coordination, and effectively implement policies, national plans and legislative frameworks for the sustainable management of land, forests and biodiversity at scale;
- (e) Governments and partners need to strengthen their capacity to mobilize funding for the sustainable management of land, forests and biodiversity conservation and for COVID-19 recovery by exploring new and innovative sources, such as the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility designed by ECA and its partners, debt swaps for biodiversity and sustainability, and green and blue bonds;
- (f) Governments are urged to strengthen national One Health approaches to attain optimal health for people, animals and ecosystems and better contain future pandemics;
- (g) Governments, the private sector and other partners need to fully implement the Nairobi Declaration adopted at the seventh High-level Meeting on Disaster Risk

Reduction, held in November 2021, to reduce disaster risk and build resilience, including through biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions;

(h) Member States should endeavour to empower women, young people, indigenous peoples and local communities by strengthening and enforcing resource tenure rights and enhancing access to finance, to achieve inclusive wealth creation and the sustainable management of forest and biodiversity resources, and also to manage natural resource-based conflicts and disputes;

(i) Governments should strengthen research, development and innovation and better integrate environmental data and statistics into national statistical systems.

5. Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of partnerships [agenda item 7 (e)]

22. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States are urged:

(i) To foster enhanced partnerships premised on peace and development and also on a shared understanding of the vision and aspirations of Africa enshrined in Agenda 2063, anchored on institutional trust, ethics and ownership;

(ii) To accelerate efforts on debt management, the removal of intellectual property rights to essential assets, such as vaccines, and the lifting of barriers obstructing the free movement of people;

(iii) To reassess partnerships established thus far to ensure that all partners are well aligned and moving towards the same goals;

(iv) To invest in data-based evidence on the effectiveness of partnerships and evaluation of Governments' levels of accountability;

(v) To analyse data and trends on migration to get a better sense of its social, economic and environmental impacts;

(vi) To promote appropriate and innovative tools and frameworks, including integrated national financing frameworks, for greater efficiency and efficacy in resource management and the allocation of financing for the Sustainable Development Goals;

(vii) To strengthen domestic resource mobilization by accelerating digitalization and closing loopholes in tax policy and administration, combating illicit financial flows and formulating governance and inclusive policies aimed at enhancing accountability and transparency, combating corruption, supporting participation and putting in place enabling legal and judicial regulatory frameworks;

(b) ECA, the African Development Bank, the African Union Commission and their partners are urged to support African countries in building their capacity in the areas of early warning systems, disaster risk reduction and the management of national and global health risks.

F. Plenary round-table panel on leveraging science, technology, innovation and digital transformation to build forward better from the COVID-19 crisis and accelerate delivery of sustainable development in Africa [agenda item 8]

23. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Member States and their partners are urged:

- (i) To work closely to strengthen or establish national councils (or equivalent institutions) on science, technology and innovation that are chaired at the highest levels of Government for continuous, time-bound and realistic science, technology and innovation dialogues, leadership, support, monitoring and evaluation, as it is recognized that countries that made significant strides in exploiting science, technology and innovation for development had such institutions, which enabled them to position these areas as key enablers for sustainable development;
- (ii) To enhance the effectiveness of the science, technology and innovation policy formulation and implementation processes by establishing mechanisms for stronger partnerships and engagement with academia, industry and government, and a rigorous and verifiable monitoring and evaluation framework to achieve African aspirations and the goals of the 2030 Agenda;
- (iii) To raise the expenditure on research and development to a minimum of 1 per cent of gross domestic product, which will require countries to invest in and attract knowledge-intensive firms that are likely to perform research and development to remain competitive and innovative; Rwanda seeks to meet this target by 2024;
- (iv) To strengthen science, technology, engineering and mathematics approaches in education and attract more young people to such fields in order to significantly raise the number of scientists, researchers and engineers who will drive the required innovation and creativity on the continent, and create more opportunities for young people to develop in the tech industry and to contribute to science, technology and innovation policy formulation;
- (v) To increase women's access to science, technology and innovation to break down gender barriers, including gender stereotyping and discriminatory biases that are transferred into artificial intelligence systems;
- (vi) To support research to understand and design measures to mitigate the impact of climate change and human activities on oceans and water bodies, given the importance of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) and noting the need for member States to support the implementation of the Africa Blue Economy Strategy and the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy, as Africa will reap economic benefits from the ocean;
- (vii) To operationalize the relevant international frameworks of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, notably the Recommendation on Open Science, the Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers and the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, to enhance the efficiency, inclusivity, reliability, responsiveness and human rights approach to science to address societal challenges in Africa and to increase the early access of researchers so that they are able to publish in indigenous languages;
- (viii) To harness new forms of advanced materials, biosciences and intelligent systems to restore and improve land productivity, recognizing the importance of land and the numerous ecosystems in Africa.

G. Presentations and discussions on sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 [agenda item 9]

24. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Development partners and the United Nations should boost international cooperation to enable African countries to vaccinate their entire population by the end of July 2022;

(b) The United Nations and other development partners are urged to advocate the lifting of all restrictions in order to allow equal access to vaccines on the continent by leveraging endogenous initiatives and solutions;

(c) Member States must put in place budgetary policies that are sensitive to the green economy and climate effects to ensure a sustainable post-pandemic socioeconomic recovery;

(d) With a view to enabling the continent to participate actively in the next meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held in July 2022, the meeting should be held in hybrid mode and sufficient time should be allowed for interventions.

H. Presentations of commitments and actions to accelerate delivery of sustainable development [agenda item 10]

25. In the light of the discussion, the Forum agreed on the following key messages:

(a) Countries are encouraged to ensure widespread private sector participation to make the most of concerted efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals;

(b) Member States should continue their efforts for the joint monitoring, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and the alignment of national development plans with the two agendas to ensure a single planning process;

(c) Member States should accelerate efforts to mobilize domestic resources for the implementation of the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and link them with existing projects that are financed through external sources;

(d) Given the importance of natural capital in Africa, countries that are developing frameworks for the sustainable use of natural resources should be supported;

(e) Young people and persons with disabilities should be included in the planning and implementation of actions and initiatives to deliver on the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 to ensure equity and inclusion;

(f) All stakeholders are urged to share ideas and information on transformative initiatives and accelerators using dedicated platforms;

(g) African countries are urged to ensure that African issues are on the agenda of the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to take the lead on innovations on climate finance, including through the development of African carbon markets and a global mechanism for carbon pricing.

I. Appreciation

26. The ministers, high-level officials and participants expressed their appreciation to the President of Rwanda and to the Government and people of Rwanda for hosting the eighth session of the Forum and for the warm hospitality extended to them. They also conveyed their gratitude for the arrangements made to enable both in-person and online participation in the session and for ensuring that persons with disabilities were able to fully participate in the Forum. They also expressed their appreciation to the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, the President of the Economic and Social Council, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa and the representatives of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and the President of the African Development Bank for their attendance and contributions to the Forum.

Annex

Kigali Declaration on building forward better from the COVID-19 crisis and accelerating delivery of sustainable development in Africa

We, African ministers, and senior officials responsible for environment and sustainable development, finance, planning, economic and social development, agriculture, education, justice, statistics, the digital economy, science and technology, heads and members of delegations of the parliaments of African Union member States and experts representing Governments and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and civil society,

Gathered online and in person in Kigali from 3 to 5 March 2022 at the eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, held under the theme “Building forward better: a green, inclusive and resilient Africa poised to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063” and placed under the high patronage of the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame,

Expressing our gratitude to the President and Government of Rwanda for having hosted the Forum and having ensured that all the necessary conditions were in place for the successful completion of its work, which was marked by fruitful and high-quality discussions on the monitoring and evaluation of the progress achieved, the exchange of experiences in the area of sustainable development in Africa, and the formulation of key messages aimed at accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union,

Considering that the health and socioeconomic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic rolled back efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in developing countries, and that the diverging paths to recovery from the pandemic between developed and developing countries could mean longer periods of recovery for developing countries,

Considering also the disproportionate impact of climate change on the African continent given its low-carbon footprint, the role of the continent in capturing greenhouse gases, and its need to mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change,

Recalling the Gaborone Declaration for Sustainability in Africa, taking note of and congratulating Rwanda on the adoption of its natural capital accounting programme, and calling on member States to consider the adoption of similar programmes and the inclusion of “green gross domestic product” in reporting economic indicators,

Recalling and reaffirming the Brazzaville Declaration, adopted at the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on sustainable Development,

Noting the need for scaled-up and sustainable finance for an inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and accelerated delivery of sustainable development in Africa,

Welcoming the establishment of the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility as a mechanism for improving market access for African countries and, in particular, for crowding in private sector investment in the green recovery of the continent,

Welcoming the launch of the Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities in Africa and the African Technology Development and Transfer Network, which have been

established to facilitate the sharing of experiences and best practices among academic and research institutions across the continent,

Expressing support for the ongoing process, under the Convention on Biological Diversity, of developing a post-2020 global biodiversity framework as a global policy framework for achieving accelerated action and transformative pathways for biodiversity and sustainable development,

Reaffirming the inclusive nature of the Forum and the rights of persons with disabilities, and noting that an approach to sustainable development anchored in human rights and strengthened national human rights institutions is essential for the acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063,

Reaffirming that gender equality and youth empowerment are cross-cutting pillars on inclusion that should be taken into account in the implementation of all of the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and calling for special measures to support women and young people, including through public procurement quota allocations, to accelerate inclusion and empowerment,

Reaffirming the commitment of African countries to silence the guns across the continent, and emphasizing that all forms of conflict and violence represent obstacles to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063,

Recognizing the importance of social dialogues and legal identity for addressing the inclusion of all sectors of society, such as the informal sector, to ensure that no one is left behind,

Recognizing the importance of the institutional infrastructure investment allocation agenda of the African Union, known as the “5 per cent Agenda”, and the African Green Infrastructure Investment Bank initiative, which is supported by ECA as one of the fundamental private and public capital initiatives to mobilize African pension and sovereign wealth funds in support of the continent’s post-pandemic infrastructure investment and green growth recovery plans,

1. *Reiterate* our commitment to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including by ensuring a green and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic on the continent, aligned with the objectives of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development;

2. *Demand* that developed countries facilitate equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines to enable African countries to recover faster from the COVID-19 pandemic through, among other things, a moratorium on the application to developing countries of articles 65 and 66 of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, on transitional arrangements and least-developed country members, respectively, as well as technical assistance to improve supply chain efficiency, technology transfer and manufacturing capacity;

3. *Urge* African countries to link mutually reinforcing policies for sustainable development with COVID-19 recovery to ensure an inclusive emergence from the pandemic, in line with the tenets of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;

4. *Call upon* African countries, pan-African institutions, the United Nations and development partners to invest more in the generation of statistics that are relevant and timely to inform national, regional and global development agendas, leveraging opportunities provided by new data sources and technologies, geospatial technologies and the United Nations global platform on big data for official statistics and regional data hubs in Africa to facilitate capacity development and the modernization of the national statistical systems of countries in Africa, involving young people in the decision-making processes relating to the sustainable development agenda;

5. *Call upon* African countries to leverage new tools, innovative solutions and technology, including through enhanced partnerships with the private sector, academia, non-governmental and civil society organizations and others, to build strong, agile, sustainable and resilient national statistical systems;

6. *Invite* African countries to invest in the development of more resilient education systems and to adopt resilient and risk-informed approaches to planning in the education sector and to prioritize digital connectivity and capacities to achieve learning for all and skills development, and urge member States to commit to guaranteeing at least 12 years of free education for every child on the continent;

7. *Call upon* African countries to strengthen institutional arrangements, including gender-inclusive national strategies, to enhance national ownership and responsibility for the effective implementation, monitoring and accountability of the gender-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in all sectors and at all levels of government;

8. *Also call upon* African countries to strengthen their institutional capacities to enforce laws and regulations on the sustainable use of marine resources, to open up new opportunities for gender-sensitive and inclusive blue entrepreneurship, innovation, financing, value chains and trade, and to support the Great Blue Wall initiative to build climate-resilient societies and economies;

9. *Call upon* the entities of the United Nations system, the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and other partners to strengthen the capacity of African countries to leverage the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility and other innovative financing mechanisms, including green and blue bonds and debt swaps for biodiversity and sustainable development;

10. *Call upon* African countries and their development partners to strengthen the capacity of the region to incorporate and increase investment in sustainable biodiversity and land management within national, subregional and regional development frameworks;

11. *Call upon* all parties to the Glasgow Climate Pact to establish an ambitious and reasonable price for carbon, aligned with the objectives of the Paris Agreement, to allow developing countries in Africa and elsewhere to mobilize adequate financial resources to meet their climate commitments, including those made through nationally determined contributions and the Paris Agreement, while accelerating progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and allowing African countries to fully benefit from their natural heritage;

12. *Call upon* the entities of the United Nations system to build the capacity of the countries of the Congo basin to deliver funding for sustainable development through the Blue Fund for the Congo Basin to support the implementation by these countries of their nationally determined contributions, to estimate their capacity for carbon sequestration and to develop livelihoods that are linked to the subregion's unique natural capital;

13. *Call for* the adoption of reforms to the international financial architecture that integrate innovative financing mechanisms that are initiated and led by African countries to ensure African debt sustainability and to support the development of nature-based solutions and a green and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic;

14. *Also call for* renewed vigour on the part of African Governments, the entities of the United Nations system and development partners in the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, including with regard to strengthening opportunities to

improve domestic resource mobilization through sustainable budgeting principles that are aligned with the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and the Paris Agreement, and for renewed global solidarity in respect of public investment in the implementation of these agendas, on the basis of the principle of leaving no one behind;

15. *Reaffirm* that developed countries must honour their commitment to pay \$100 billion annually to help developing countries respond to the cascading threats associated with climate change and to mitigate their impact on African economic growth and on the livelihoods of African people, and demand that developed countries reinforce support for African countries to access climate finance for investment in sustainable development;

16. *Call on* all African countries to ratify the protocol on the free movement of people to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area so that young people can travel freely across the continent, demonstrating full regional integration;

17. *Urge* African countries to leverage the potential of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area to support the development of regional value chains, especially those for minerals used in the production of batteries and electric vehicles, to enable African countries to capture more value along global value chains;

18. *Also urge* African countries to increase their investment in research and development to at least 1 per cent of gross domestic product, as recommended by the African Union, to boost their capacity to generate technologies and innovations in the marine and digital domains, to support the sustainable use of land and water ecosystems, and to build climate- and disaster-resilient economies and societies, including through research and development in the medical and health sectors, to reduce their vulnerability, foster the economic transformation of their economies and improve the lives and livelihoods of their peoples;

19. *Further urge* African countries to increase investment in the building of foundational skills for education in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and the arts, and to establish centres of excellence to facilitate the sharing of experiences and best practices;

20. *Call upon* all countries to implement the key messages adopted at the eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;

21. *Request* the Government of Rwanda to present the key messages on behalf of Africa at the meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council from 5 to 15 July 2022 in New York, at the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and at various subregional, regional and global forums convened to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.
