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ARFSD 2020 Highlights

Monday, 24 February, 2020

The sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD 2020) opened on Monday at the Elephant Hills Resort, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. Pre-event workshops, stakeholder consultations and special sessions took place throughout the day exploring the Forum theme, “2020-2030: A Decade to Deliver a Transformed and Prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.”

Highlights included the 2020 Africa Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Forum, an exchange on country experiences with Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the global and regional agendas, as well as ARFSD 2020 preparatory meetings and capacity development workshops for major groups and other stakeholders in the African region.

A number of special sessions also took place. In the morning, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed participated in a UN Development System (UNDS) mini-retreat that provided African perspectives on the ongoing UN reform process. Convening in the afternoon, the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) for Africa brought together representatives of the UN and African Union to explore strategies for enhanced collaboration in the framework of the African Union’s



L-R: Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, with Kwesi Quartey, Deputy Chairperson, African Union Commission (AUC)

2020 theme of “Silencing the Guns.” It was followed by an engagement session with youth, titled, “The Future is Now: African Youth Engagement for the Decade of Action.”

On the margins of the Forum, diverse side events, exhibitions and networking events took place to showcase innovative solutions and partnerships to accelerate SDG action in Africa.

Regional Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

This workshop focused on strengthening integrated VNRs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the African Union’s Agenda 2063: The Africa We



Delegates attending the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa pose for a family photo at ARFSD 2020



Vera Songwe, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Want (Agenda 2063). Representatives of intergovernmental and regional organizations first provided an overview of the region’s progress in implementing both agendas. Speakers included: Charles Akol, UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA); Oliver Chinganya, African Centre for Statistics; Tonya Vaturi, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Juliet Wasswa-Mugambwa, UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA), Alessandra Casazza UN Development Programme (UNDP); and Amira Elfadil Mohammed Elfadil, African Union Commission (AUC) Commissioner for Social Affairs.

Among other issues, the presentations underscored the need for: a clear roadmap to step up implementation; monitoring the progress of countries that have already presented their VNRs, and those that will present further VNRs; ensuring that all African countries conduct national reviews and continue to keep other countries on track; and strengthening synergies between the global and regional agendas.

Specific areas of attention highlighted in the discussions included the need for addressing weak capacity in accessing and using quality and relevant data; better aligning national development efforts with lessons learned from regional workshops; strengthening local action, and transform it into budget and policy frameworks; and engagement with cities, and stronger alignment with local, regional and national levels.

Country parties then shared specific experiences and challenges. Presentations from Zimbabwe, Niger and Morocco highlighted VNR success stories, and offers to share their experiences with other countries. Other reports, including



Amira El Fadil, Commissioner for Social Affairs, AUC



Sheena Saldanla, Seychelles

Zambia, Uganda, Seychelles, and Nigeria, highlighted national challenges as well as their intention to learn from other countries in achieving effective reporting. Common issues mentioned by countries covered the importance of accessing reliable, evidence-based data, and the need to include all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, in the reporting process, so as to not leave anyone behind.

Tools for integrated planning and reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: Following the country presentations, technical experts from, among others, ECA, OECD, UNDP, AU New Partnership for Africa’s Development Agency (NEPAD), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and OSAA, highlighted lessons learned and tools created to access data and help countries on their national reporting.

The ECA presented on strengthening evaluative thinking and evidence-based reporting in VNRs and local reviews, showing that in order to take stock, evidence is critical to understanding if outcomes are being achieved, the relevance of achievements and how to improve implementation.

The OECD presented on strengthening leadership and institutional capacities for policy coherence in support of the SDGs, an online toolkit created as a one-stop shop portal to knowledge resources on policy coherence.

UNDP presented a guide for integrated planning in Africa, showing how to embed the Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, SDGs, and Agenda 2063, into a national development process, and harmonize progress assessment and reporting.

NEPAD presented an overview of the African Union Data Entry, Analysis and Reporting Tool on Agenda 2063 Implementation, highlighting key steps in preparing the reports and an overview of a data entry template. The APRM presentation provided a comparison of different types of Peer Review Mechanisms, key features, methodology and presented examples of targeted reviews made in Djibouti, Zambia and Namibia.

Finally, OSAA shared lessons learned and tools created to access data and help countries on their national reporting.

African Regional Science, Technology and Innovation Forum

The second African Regional STI Forum convened on the theme, “2020-2030: A decade to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.” This day-long event consisted of an opening session and a series of high-level dialogues in the morning, comprising keynote speakers and presentations. In the afternoon, parallel discussions took place exploring the five SDG sub-themes of: people, prosperity, planet, peace, and partnerships.



Amon Murwira, Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, Zimbabwe

In his opening remarks, F. Tagwira, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science, Innovation and Technology Development, Zimbabwe, highlighted the Forum as an opportunity to share best STI practices, establish networks, identify and examine technology needs and gaps to facilitate development.

Hubert Gijzen, Regional Director, UNESCO, reflected on how to position STI to play a catalytic role in accelerating SDG implementation in Africa. He highlighted several recommendations including: identifying ways to benefit from the second, third and fourth industrial revolution to realize “the Africa we want”; learning from lessons in another regions; and increasing investments in R&D.

Jean-Paul Adam, ECA, called for narrowing the technology gap to embrace innovation and harness technology in Africa to address challenges. He noted the need to consider the most effective approaches and technology options, likely to achieve the SDGs, as well as barriers to their application.

Mukudzei Madzviire, Child President, Zimbabwe, made a plea for greater efforts to implement STI, lauding the meeting as an opportunity to harness untapped potential, network and explore. He signaled that “the youth are ready to be game changers and are taking over.”

In his keynote address, Amon Murwira, Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, Zimbabwe, underscored the need to focus on developing critical pipelines to effectively apply STI. He emphasized the need to redesign education in general, and STI in particular, to achieve industrialization in Africa.



Henry Ngale Foretia, Poultry Farmers Management Systems Platform, Cameroon

Mahama Ouedragoo, AUC, elaborated on harnessing STI to address key challenges in Africa, including climate change.

High-level Policy Dialogue on delivering STI and emerging technologies and the fourth industrial revolution as tools for scaling up: Participants were presented with key takeaways from the UNDESA World Social Report 2020. One of themes included how emerging technologies can be central to resolving trade-offs between scaling up food production and environmental protection. Another presentation made the case for precision agriculture and the need to consider why adoption rates are so low in Africa. Angola’s STI implementation strategy was highlighted, as well as a big data analytics and process model from South Africa, which leverages indigenous knowledge systems. Challenges experienced by the least developed countries despite advances in technology were discussed, with a call made to scale up and pool R&D in the region to overcome this.

Two innovators from Cameroon and Rwanda presented, respectively, technological innovations aimed at addressing critical mortalities and access to markets for livestock; and on measuring the humidity in grains to combat aflatoxins.

Special Sessions

Mini retreat of the UN development system at the regional level in Africa with the Deputy Secretary-General: Co-Chaired by Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General (DSG), and Vera Songwe, ECA Executive Secretary and Regional UNSDG Chair, this interactive session in the morning highlighted regional perspectives on the ongoing UN@75 reform process. The discussions included updates from convenors of six issue-based coalitions highlighting key trends, opportunities and gaps, flagship initiatives, and partnership opportunities under the corresponding SDG sub-themes.

Regional Coordinating Mechanism for Africa: Taking place in the afternoon, this session provided a platform for dialogue between the UNDSG and African stakeholders on how to leverage the UN Decade of Action to accelerate the realization of the SDGs and Agenda 2063, including through the repositioned UNDS.

Hanna Serwaa Tetteh, UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative to the African Union and Head of the UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU), stressed that “we have enough frameworks,” and what is needed is implementation, especially within the context of ongoing UN reform. She highlighted some benefits of a coordinated approach to UN and AU programmes targeting the nexus between peace, security and development, giving the example of the role of special representatives of the AUC Chair in identifying evolving threats.

In his opening address, Kwesi Quartey, AUC Deputy Chairperson, said the objective of the special session was to feed into the institutional principles for better working relations between the UN and AU. He observed that more than two-thirds of the issues at the security council are “avoidable” African related—conflicts, including Boko Haram, the Central Africa Republic, and Libya, with its attendant effects of uncontrolled and illegal migrations to Europe. Against this backdrop, he emphasized, the 2020 AU theme of is not only about peace and security but also requires achieving inclusive and sustainable development to address the root causes of conflict.

UNDSG Mohammed underscored the significance of the AU as strategic partner, noting the renewed commitment by the UN Secretary-General and African leaders to a strengthened

partnership at the just-concluded 33rd AU Summit. Recalling that the 2019 SDG review found the continent off-track on the 2030 and 2063 targets, she said that one of the reasons for holding the RCM back-to-back with ARFSD is to facilitate integrated approaches to deliver on the global and regional agendas.

Panelists and participants then engaged in an exchange on how to enhance the role of the RCM in aligning SDG implementation, from the national to global levels. Issues noted included the need for: better focus to leverage the resources needed in a timely manner so as to achieve sufficient impact; and ensuring a “genuine transition” to the younger generation.

Discussing good practice in integrated implementation, AUC Commissioner Elfadil cited collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) on a region-wide response to the Ebola crisis, and stressed the importance of an equal partnership through all stages of the policy development, programme design, implementation and monitoring cycle. She also underscored the importance of listening to member states to avoid promoting one-size-fits-all solutions.

Reflecting on the exchange, UNDSG Mohammed emphasized the need for coherence and alignment, pointing out that the AU member states are also members of the UN, and that the 2030 agenda is an AU agenda. She also noted that “resources from partners are becoming a curse in the way they fragment us,” calling for money to disbursed more collectively “so that we can get the job done together.”

AU-UN Dialogue on Leveraging the Decade for Action to Realize the SDGs and Agenda 2063: This session featured presentations on the AU 2020 theme, and a joint UNECA and UNDP tool for integrated planning and reporting of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Participants heard about key initiatives undertaken since the adoption of “silencing the guns” roadmap, including an Africa amnesty month, implemented since September 2017, aimed at collecting and surrendering illegally owned weapons. Implementation of roadmap at country level was also underscored with the need

for political will and seed funding. Recommendations included establishing a joint AU-UN team to coordinate initiatives in line with relevant UN resolutions.

A joint ECA-UNDP online tool for planning and reporting was presented as a one-stop solution for Africa to implement the new generation integrated national development plans, better aligned to the global and continental agenda.

Several issues were raised on the AU peace and security initiative, including on: mechanisms and framework at the AU to put the responsibility on African governments to benchmark efforts on silencing guns; how organized crime and illicit financial flows are reflected in the initiative; political and economic interests being the root cause of many African conflicts; and conflict prevention.

Questions on the integrated planning tool centered on: the relationship to other sectoral plans; links to human rights in the tool, the need for a disclaimer, as well as political sensitivities associated with using the tool; and other inherent risks associated with data gateways.

“UN@75 - The Future is Now: African Youth Engagement for the Decade of Action”: Aya Chebbi, UN Special Envoy on Youth for Africa, highlighted youth perspectives on UN-AU collaboration. While welcoming the UN-AU Framework on peace and security and other collaborative mechanisms, she called for a more visible youth component “to guide our work.”

In the ensuing discussion, speakers highlighted, *inter alia*, the importance of institutionalizing “generational co-leadership” to ensure a genuine transition to the younger generation, as well including young people in the issue-based coalitions. Other issues highlighted in the discussions included: examples of youth solutions to development challenges; opportunities for AU and UN collaboration in the post-Ebola transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and a voluntary continent structural vulnerability resilience assessment aimed at facilitating a response and support network.



Family photo of STI participants at ARFSD 2020