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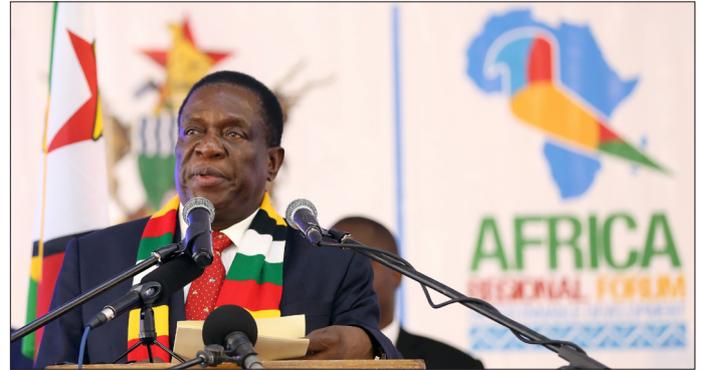
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## ARFSD 2020 Highlights: Tuesday, 25 February 2020

The official opening session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD 2020) took place on Wednesday morning, with opening statements by Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, and Emmerson Mnangagwa, President of Zimbabwe, among other high-level speakers. A ministerial panel then convened to reflect on Africa's progress as well as priorities and entry points for accelerating implementation of the SDGs.

In the afternoon, following a presentation of regional progress reports on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 at the regional and subregional levels, participants held discussions in two plenary roundtables to reflect on country progress and lessons learned from the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) as well as voluntary local reviews (VLRs).

Various events also took place on the margins of the meeting, including: the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) Launch and Dialogue, coordinated by UN Women; a UN interagency event, 'The Food Security-Nutrition-Poverty Nexus: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities to Achieve SDGs of 2030 Agenda and Commitments of Agenda 2063/ Malabo Declaration'; an event convened by TrustAfrica on, 'Ending Discrimination and Changing the Terms of Inclusion: Making the SDGs Meaningful for all in Africa'; and



Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, President of Zimbabwe

'Accelerating the Promise to Leave No One Behind: Enhancing Partnerships to Advance Population and Development in Africa,' convened by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), African Union Commission (AUC) and UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

### Official opening

**Opening Statements:** In her opening remarks, Vera Songwe, ECA Executive Secretary, highlighted factors impeding Africa's growth including, climate change, trade wars and terrorism. Emphasizing the need for "collective wisdom," she pointed to a willingness "to go faster and higher" in Africa, and lauded youth for generating future solutions for sustainable development.



L-R: Chair of the outgoing Bureau of the fifth session of the ARFSD, **Nezha El Ouafi**, Morocco; **Kwesi Quartey**, Deputy Chairperson, African Union Commission (AUC); **Amina Mohammed**, Deputy Secretary-General of the UN; **Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa**, President of Zimbabwe; **Paul Mavima**, Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, Zimbabwe; and **Vera Songwe**, Under Secretary-General, and Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)



**Vera Songwe**, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, ECA

Recalling impacts of drought on his community, Nkosilathi Nyathi, Climate Change Champion, Zimbabwe, stressed that climate change is a reality, and underscored the need to involve young people in policy-making and relevant decisions.

Nezha El Ouafi, Chair of the outgoing ARFSD Bureau, reflected on the success of ARFSD 2019, and the adoption of the Marrakesh Declaration on Sustainable Development. Pledging to continue supporting its implementation, she emphasized the need to mobilize funds for this end.

Kwesi Quartey, Deputy Chairperson, African Union Commission, (AUC), hailed 2020 as “an important milestone for Agenda 2030 and its twin sister Agenda 2063.” He emphasized that without peace and security, it would not be possible to achieve the SDGs.

UNDSG Mohammed called for kickstarting the Decade of Action on the SDGs, highlighting progress on: the proportion of people living in poverty declining in 10 African countries; strides in peace and security; and gains in health outcomes. However, with 428 million Africans still living in poverty, she noted that success would only be possible if: ambition is increased through budgets and policies; the general public is mobilized for sustainable development; and solutions are channeled through international investment, climate smart infrastructure and expanded access to clean and renewable energy.



**Nkosilathi Nyathi**, Climate advocate and youth representative, Zimbabwe



**Amina Mohammed**, Deputy Secretary-General of the UN

President Emmerson Mnangagwa, Zimbabwe, underlined the need for acting together in pursuit of the optimal development path, stating that “if one country in Africa is left behind then we are all left behind.” He highlighted his government’s efforts aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda, and aspirations to achieve upper-middle income status by 2030. He called for leveraging Africa’s comparative advantages to improve life on the continent, noting that reforms could not be undertaken without the required financial support.

**High-Level Panel on Accelerators to Deliver a Transformed and Prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 within the UN Decade of Action:**

This ministerial session was facilitated by Jimmy Ocitti, ECA

In opening remarks, Mthuli Ncube, Minister of Finance, Zimbabwe, lamented that “we are not incubating the SDGs fast enough,” and proposed four focal areas for accelerating delivery:

- Strengthening financing architecture through domestic resource mobilization, including “crowding in” of the private sector;
- Strengthening the policy and institutional architecture through increased alignment of national development plans with the 2030 and 2063 agendas;
- Strengthening results-based analysis of speed of SDG progress and enhanced synergies in reporting at different levels frameworks; and
- Improving communication and advocacy on the SDGs, both internally and externally.

Elaborating on how to scale up funding for the SDGs in Africa, Ncube stressed that domestic resource capacity is underestimated, stating that average annual Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows of around USD 50 billion are a fraction of an estimated USD 500 billion dollars that is raised each year through taxation. He added that “we could do even better” by exploring innovative financing arrangements such as diaspora remittances and “SDG levies” on money transfers, more favorable tax regimes and improving compliance.

In a scene-setting presentation, Bartholomew Armah, ECA, summarized the SDG landscape in Africa as “stark.” He cited estimates that by 2030, Africa will account for more than 80% of world’s poor, further exacerbated by weak



Vannesa Chivhizhe, Junior Parliament Member, Zimbabwe

performance on inclusion, especially for women and youth. He further noted that while the region had made progress on addressing climate change, and enhancing sustainable consumption and production, natural resources continue to be threatened by international demand for Africa's fossil fuels.

High-level representatives from Zambia, Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Angola subsequently outlined various SDG initiatives in their countries, identifying gaps in implementation and strategies for scaling up action. Among insights gained, panelists noted that:

- Closing entrenched data gaps requires investing in data disaggregation. The example of Zambia was cited, where only 35% of 200 relevant SDG indicators adopted in national policy frameworks can be sufficiently monitored;
- There is need to identify locally-appropriate solutions, including financing, to enable countries to do more with less;
- Awareness raising on the SDGs needs to extend to the subnational level, which requires building multi-stakeholder partnerships;
- Good technical solutions can only achieve impact if there is ownership among political and other actors, hence the need for extensive consultations at national and subnational levels.



L-R: Priscila Asio, Representative of Ngora District Local Government, Uganda, and Manuel de Araujo, Mayor of Quelimane, Mozambique

Offering a youth perspective, a representative of Zimbabwe's Youth Parliament reflected on how her participation at the ARFSD 2020 ICT bootcamp has opened her eyes to the value of involving more women in science.

### **Organizational Matters**

Following subregional consultations, the Forum approved the election of Zimbabwe as Chair of the ARFSD 2020 Bureau. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Benin were elected as Vice-Chairs, with Morocco serving as Rapporteur.

The meeting then adopted the agenda and draft programme of work for the session (ECA/RFSD/2020/1.rev1 and ECA/RFSD/2020/3.rev1).

### **Progress Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 at the Regional and Subregional Levels**

#### **Highlights of the Africa Sustainable Development Report 2020: Progress, achievements and measures to scale up implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the goals identified in Agenda 2063:**

Paul Mpuga, ECA, presented an overview of findings in the Africa Sustainable Development Report 2020, stating that it found mixed progress on most SDGs. On poverty reduction, he noted that despite some gains on poverty reduction, absolute numbers of people living in poverty are on the rise due to population growth, with 14 countries accounting for around 78% of poverty in the continent. On education, he noted that despite progress on enrolment targets, only 40-45% of schools are connected to an electricity grid. On climate change, Mpuga pointed out that all African countries have signed the Paris Agreement, and 48 countries have ratified it. He further reported that while Africa is making good progress in developing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), there is a need to promote appropriate technologies for effective implementation.

**Overview of the support provided by UN entities and the AUC to implement the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063:** Mesfin Tesse Tessema, AUC, presented highlights from the inaugural African Union Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063. He reported that the most progress was achieved in the area of peace and security, while a goal on modernizing agriculture for increased productivity was poorly implemented. He also highlighted progress on several flagship projects including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), noting it has been ratified by a significant number of countries.

The ensuing discussion centered on: the need for common reporting framework indicators; free movement of goods and services in the context of the AfCFTA; and implications of high levels of indebtedness in some African states.

### **Plenary Roundtable Panels on VNRs and VLRs**

**VNRs, Peer Learning on Implementation, and Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063:** This roundtable comprised senior experts and policymakers from a sample of countries involved in VNRs in 2018, 2019 and 2020, as well as front-runners in the implementation of Agenda 2063, as well as representatives of major groups and the donor community.

Opening the session, Moderator Paul Mavima, Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, Zimbabwe, said the discussions would highlight solutions and good practices, recalling that since 2016, 35 African countries have conducted VNRs, and 16 African countries will present a second VNR at the 2020 HLPF session.

Panelists from Uganda, Benin, South Africa, Tunisia, Seychelles, Côte d'Ivoire, highlights from their VNR processes. They noted the need for, *inter alia*: bridging data gaps; pursuing synergies in design and implementation of programmes to advance both agendas, including awareness raising efforts; and strengthening social cohesion.

**Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs):** This second roundtable focused on lessons learned at the subnational level. Moderated by Maria Ribeiro, UN Resident Coordinator, Zimbabwe, panelists drawn from local governments, technical institutions, and partner agencies, distilled some good practices as well as challenges faced in strengthening local and national implementation of the development agendas.

The representative from Zimbabwe explained that implementation was done by national governments, complemented by local authorities and that the VLRs was linked to ongoing VNRs. Mozambique noted that implementation at the local level reinforces legitimacy and that VLRs were conducted in line with the NDCs under the Paris Agreement, in addition to a natural assets analysis.

Uganda highlighted a partnership approach to devolvement with civil society organizations and special interest groups. Drawing attention to a lack of awareness of the SDGs at the community level, she identified media engagement as one of the catalysts for successful implementation.

The representative from Ghana, said the process of elaborating Accra's VLR had been an "eye opener" in terms of resource rationalization.

UN Habitat noted that involving local authorities will accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and make these authorities accountable for their achievement. He pointed out that most local governments have weak data systems, which hinders voluntary reporting, and while there is a lot of data, it is not organized and so it cannot be reported against the indicators.

Emphasizing the importance devolved governance, the representative from United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in southern Africa, maintained that the continent has yet to localize the global development agendas, and that government systems do not allow local authorities to fully implement these agendas.

In the ensuing discussion, participants stressed that accelerating implementation of the SDGs is dependent on systematic approaches to conducting VNRs and VLRs, and noted the need to involve local authorities as key stakeholders. One speaker made a strong call on African governments and other actors to strengthen their accountability, stating that "we cannot succeed unless corruption is nipped in the bud."

During a closing round of responses to questions from participants, panelists concurred that VLRs are an important source of information for VNRs and stressed the importance of developing a template for VLRs as one of the concrete outcomes of ARFSD 2020. They emphasized the need to mainstream the VLR process as a priority, noting VLRs provide essential information on what is happening at the local levels. There was also strong agreement on the need to fully include youth and women in VNRs and VLRs, as well as on the contribution that VLRs can make in articulating the needs of these excluded groups.



Lee Chileshe, Zambia