Sixth Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
24-27 February 2020

The sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD 2020) addressed the theme ‘2020-2030: A Decade to Deliver a Transformed and Prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.’ As Africa’s official preparatory event for the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the Forum theme was aligned to the 2020 HLPF theme, “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.”

The Forum was also the first regional consultation taking place under the UN@75 reform process, and the launch of the UN’s 2020 Decade of Action and Delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The event provided an opportunity for UN Deputy Secretary-General (UNDSG) Amina Mohammed to elicit perspectives from the region on the ongoing UN reform process.

ARFSD 2020 convened on the heels of the 33rd African Union (AU) Summit, which addressed the 2020 AU theme of ‘Silencing the Guns: Creating conducive conditions for Africa’s Development.’ The issue of peace and security as an enabler for all the SDGs was therefore a central theme in the discussions, with frank exchanges taking place on the capacity, as well as commitment of, regional and global institutions to engage with perpetrators of violence, hold governments accountable, and manage the transition to peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Delegates also exchanged experiences on a selection of the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of the SDGs that are currently being conducted by 17 African countries for presentation at the HLPF in July 2020, as well as emerging lessons from voluntary local reviews (VLRs), which featured for the first time at the Forum. The discussions reiterated the urgency of speeding up implementation, in light of a convergence of evidence that, despite some pockets of progress, countries and partners are not on track to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and Africa’s Agenda 2063.

Building on regional data sources – including the Africa Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063, as well as practical experiences at country and regional level – the Forum took an in-depth look at barriers to, and opportunities for, making progress. High-level panels examined performance across all 17 SDGs, clustered into the “five Ps” of the 2030 Agenda: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships. The discussions focused on exploring accelerators to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa, including through leveraging science, technology and innovation (STI), and strengthening partnerships with the UN Development System, major groups, youth, and other stakeholders.

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During discussion, participants called for a new era of a confident Africa, ready to step up its game in proposing African solutions to African problems and mobilizing partnerships at all levels to work in tandem on its priorities. Among them, Zimbabwe’s Minister for Higher and Tertiary Education made an impassioned plea for a paradigm shift from the colonial mindset, designed to produce “clerks and pseudo engineers,” towards an “Education 5.0” that inculcates values such as research, innovation, and community service, and uses African resources to produce the goods and services that the continent needs. The discussions were further energized by the active participation of young people and representatives of excluded groups, particularly people living with disabilities and the elderly.

ARFSD 2020 adopted a ministerial declaration, titled, ‘Victoria Falls Declaration on the UN Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development in Africa,’ as well as an outcome summary report and key messages containing Africa’s priorities and policy measures to speed up implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

ARFSD 2020 took place from 24-27 February 2020 in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. It was co-organized by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Government of Zimbabwe, in collaboration with the AU Commission (AUC), African Development Bank (AfDB) and the UN system. It brought together nearly 3,000 delegates in plenary and parallel sessions over the four days, holding more than 60 preparatory and side events. The special events included the second session of the African Science, Technology and Innovation Forum; a regional workshop to strengthen VNRs for reporting on the 2030 and 2063 agendas; a Youth Forum; and a preparatory and capacity-development workshop for major groups and other stakeholders.

**Brief History of the ARFSD**

ARFSD follows up on and reviews the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Africa, and provides input to the annual sessions of the HLPF under the auspices of the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The five Regional Forums (in Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and Western Asia) were established following General Assembly resolutions 67/290, 70/1 and 70/299, which, inter alia, set out the importance of the regional dimensions of sustainable development, and invited the regional commissions to contribute to the work of the HLPF.

These Forums link national, regional and global discourses on the SDGs and serve as multi-stakeholder platforms to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The ARFSD was mandated by resolutions 930 (XLVIII) and 939 (XLIX) of the Joint Annual Meetings of the AU Specialized Technical Committee on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration, and the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. In Resolution 939 (XLIX), the Conference of Ministers requested the ECA, in collaboration with the AUC, AfDB and other partners, to convene the ARFSD on an annual basis for follow-up and review of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda.

The Forum provides a platform for engaging and mobilizing stakeholders to strengthen their commitment to action and garner international support for efforts to translate the SDGs and Agenda 2063 into measurable and shared gains for the continent. The outcomes of the meeting inform policy reform at national, sub-regional, and regional level, and serve as Africa’s input to the HLPF.

**ARFSD 1:** This meeting convened from 16-18 June 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and focused on preparation of key messages for the HLPF on: integration, implementation and review including shaping the HLPF beyond 2015; new and emerging issues and the science-policy interface; sustainable consumption and production; and small island developing States (SIDS) and other countries in special situations.

**ARFSD 2:** This meeting met from 7-19 May 2016, in Cairo, Egypt, under the theme ‘Ensuring inclusive and integrated implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.’ This regional forum was the first following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015, and therefore focused on integration of this roadmap and Agenda 2063 to ensure their seamless implementation.
ARFSD 3: This meeting met from 18-19 May 2017, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and addressed six SDGs as sub-themes, namely: SDG 1 (eradicating all forms of poverty); SDG 2 (ending hunger and achieving food security); SDG 3 (healthy lives and promoting well-being for all); SDG 5 (gender equality and empowerment of women and girls); SDG 9 (building resilient infrastructure and promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and innovation); and SDG 14 (conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development).

ARFSD 4: This meeting convened from 2-4 May 2018, in Dakar, Senegal, and discussed the following SDGs: SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation); SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy); SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities); SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production); SDG 15 (life on land); and SDG 17 (strengthening means of implementation, and partnerships for sustainable development).

ARFSD 5: This meeting convened from 16-18 April 2019, in Marrakech, Morocco, and addressed the theme ‘Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.’ The session carried out an in-depth review of the following SDGs: SDG 4 (quality education); SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth); SDG 10 (reduced inequalities); SDG 13 (climate action); SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions); and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals).

Report of the Meeting

Pre-Forum Meetings and Events

Regional Workshop on VNRs: On Monday, a workshop on tools for integrated planning and reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 brought together representatives of intergovernmental and regional organizations to assess the region’s progress in implementing both agendas. Speakers included: Charles Akol, ECA; Oliver Chinganya, African Centre for Statistics; Tonya Vaturi, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs; Juliet Wasswa-Mugambwa, UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa; Alessandra Casazza, UN Development Programme (UNDP); and Amira Elfadil Mohammed Elfadil, 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 evidence-based 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 to: address weak capacity in accessing and using quality and relevant data; better align national development efforts with lessons learned from regional workshops; strengthen local action, and transform it into budget and policy frameworks; and engage with cities and better align with local, regional and national levels.

Other issues mentioned were: the importance of involving all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, in the reporting process, so as not to leave anyone behind. The discussions underscored 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. There was also strong agreement on the need to fully include youth, women, and other excluded groups, in both VNRs and VLRs, as well as on the contribution that VLRs can make in articulating the needs of these groups.

African Regional Science, Technology and Innovation Forum: High-level Policy Dialogue on delivering STI and emerging technologies and the fourth industrial revolution as tools for scaling up: This event, officiated by Jean-Paul Adam,
ECA, took place on Monday. It consisted of an opening session and a series of high-level dialogues, comprising keynote speakers and presentations.

Participants reflected on how to position STI to play a catalytic role in accelerating SDG implementation in Africa and called for narrowing the technology gap to embrace innovation and harness technology in Africa to address challenges. Other proposals included the need to consider the most effective approaches and technology options likely to help achieve the SDGs, as well as barriers to their application. A focus on developing critical pipelines to effectively apply STI was identified as paramount for development, as well as the need to redesign education in general, and STI in particular, to achieve industrialization in Africa.

On Thursday, during a plenary session moderated by Jimmy Ocitti, Consultant, Blessed Mathe, Zimbabwe, was invited to report on the ARFSD youth science boot camp. She noted that the boot camp had placed emphasis on innovation and introduced concepts including robotics. She also pointed out that in many schools there were no facilities to conduct experiments, observing that education should be both practical and theoretical.

Jean-Paul Adam, ECA, described the youth boot camp as “an unbelievable success,” adding that it would be replicated and opened up to more participants in the future. He stressed that the future has to be STI driven, the catalytic effect of STI must be recognized, as well as the need to empower women and girls in STI. He further noted the need for: engaging communities to ensure that STI permeates all levels of society; developing coherent STI policies; use STI to address climate change; and to redesign the education pipeline using STI as framework to allow innovation to be embedded in society.

Hubert Gijzen, Regional Director, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), reflected on an “exciting and vibrant STI forum,” highlighting the complexity of the simultaneous transformations required for achieving the SDGs. He noted that science needs to be cleverer to manage these complexities and that universities should be the engines of STI and research and development (R&D) to accelerate implementation.

Amon Murwira, Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, Zimbabwe, then presented the STI Forum recommendations, which the Forum adopted.

**Final outcome:** On STI, the Forum calls on governments to:
- Build capacity in basic sciences and engineering guided by heritage, national priorities and comparative geographical advantage;
- Significantly increase investments in R&D, universities and research centers;
- Align critical skills at country level in order to effectively respond to a future that is increasingly driven by STI;
- Establish innovation hubs, incubators and common equipment centers that serve both industry and academia;
- Develop a strategy that co-implements the second, third, and fourth industrial revolution in order to leap-frog sustainable development in Africa 2063;
- Strengthen collaboration and partnership at a continental and regional level to support regional networks and capacity building initiatives;
- Learn from mistakes in other regions;
- Adopt and promote renewable energy technologies to mitigate the impact of climate change and avoid the unsustainable carbon-dependent economy; and
- Redesign the higher and tertiary education curricula by placing emphasis on an education system that produces good services.

The ensuing discussions centered on: STI in the context of broader competing development challenges; creating partnerships and collaboration amongst African researchers and institutions; making private sector involvement more explicit in the recommendations; classrooms of the future; and blended learning and mobility.

**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 on Monday morning highlighted regional perspectives on the ongoing UN@75 reform process. The discussions included updates from conveners of six issue-based coalitions highlighting
key trends, opportunities and gaps, flagship initiatives, and partnership opportunities under the corresponding SDG sub-themes.

Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa: Held on Monday afternoon, the session was attended by UN and AU leaders, including UNDSG Amina Mohammed, Hanna Serwa Tetteh, UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative to the AU, and Head of the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU), Kwesi Quartey, AUC Deputy Chairperson, and Amira Elfadil Mohammed Elfadil, AUC Commissioner for Social Affairs. The discussions 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 UN Development System (UNDS).

Among other topics, panelists and participants exchanged views on how to enhance the role of the Regional Coordination Mechanism in aligning SDG implementation, from the national to global levels. They highlighted the need for, *inter alia*: 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; and the importance of region-wide and multi-stakeholder responses to critical issues, such as the AU-World Health Organization (WHO) collaboration on the Ebola crisis.

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

On Thursday, a plenary panel moderated by Munyaradzi Chenje, UN Development Coordination Office, comprising representatives of the AU and regional economic commissions, provided perspectives on UN-Africa collaboration. Speaking for the AU, Rosette Nyirinkindi Katungye, AUC, assured the meeting that “we have been walking this walk together,” stating member states, regional institutions, and international partners have endorsed priorities set out in the UN-AU collaboration process.

Sidi Ahmedou, on behalf of the Arab Maghreb Union, thanked regional organizations for playing an important role in stability and peace. He reported that the region has adopted a Plan of Action framework on the SDGs, with a specific track aimed at enhancing collaboration among universities and establishing centers of excellence in science in different countries.

Speaking for the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Joseph Mpunga highlighted interest in collaborating with UN and regional institutions on, among other issues, industrialization policy, agricultural value chains and small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development. He also outlined ongoing economic cooperation initiatives, including a COMESA common investment area to attract more foreign direct investment and cross-border investment, and infrastructure integration such as pooling of energy transmission.

AU-UN Dialogue on Leveraging the Decade for Action to Realize the SDGs and Agenda 2063: This special session on Monday afternoon featured presentations on the AU 2020 theme, and a joint ECA and UNDP tool for integrated planning and reporting of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Initiatives under the “Silencing the Guns” roadmap were highlighted, including an Africa amnesty month, implemented since September 2017, aimed at collecting and surrendering illegally owned weapons. 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 integrated national development plans, better aligned to the global and continental agenda. The ensuing discussions underscored the responsibility of African governments to benchmark their peace initiatives, and emphasized the need to tackle interconnections with organized crime and illicit financial flows, as well as political and economic interests that are the root cause of many African conflicts.

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 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 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.

**Final outcomes:** On support from the UNDS to implement the 2030 and 2063 agendas, the Forum agreed to:
- Advance the integrated implementation of the two agendas, which are at the core of the work of the Regional Coordination Mechanism and show the significance of the AU as a strategic partner of the UN;
- Integrate the work of sub-regional coordination mechanisms with the regional economic communities, within the framework of the two Agendas taking into account the sub-regional specificities;
- Pursue a coherent and coordinated implementation of the various AU-UN frameworks to accelerate the realization of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 aspirations, while addressing the development, peace and security, and human rights nexus.

On “Silencing the Guns,” the outcome document notes the need, *inter alia* to:
• Strengthen the partnership between the AU and the UN in line with relevant resolutions, in particular UNSCR 2457 (2019), and in that regard, establish AU-UN teams to coordinate joint initiatives;
• Obtain UN support to strengthen the capacities of AU blueprint mechanisms for the promotion of peaceful societies, such as the African Governance Architecture, and the African Peace and Security Architecture;
• Mainstream national initiatives on conflict prevention into national development planning processes at all levels and sectors, with support for timely mediation of potential violent conflicts situations, from the village, community and city to the national levels;
• Integrate peace and security issues in VNR reporting processes as a way of addressing the peace, security, human rights and development nexus;
• Mainstream the environment, natural resources and climate change challenges into peace and security initiatives in recognition of the increasing linkage between climate change and conflict;
• Leverage refugee-development nexus in view of the former’s potential and actual contribution to local economies;
• Strengthen cooperation in information sharing aimed at combating, among others, human, drugs and arms trafficking, terrorism and violent extremism, including whistleblowing, and implementing the AU Peace and Security Council decision on naming and shaming;
• Prioritize the combating of terrorism and terrorist groups, these being a major source and factor for irregular migration, including by ensuring timely sharing of intelligence pertaining to terrorism and violent extremism;
• Encourage the international community to support adherence to the implementation of international instruments that prohibit the transfer of weapons into the hands of illegal end users, such as the Arms Trade Treaty, to complement the “Silencing the Guns” project;
• Promote income-generating programmes for young people in Africa to prevent them from joining rebel groups; and
• Establish avenues of communication between the AU and UN with the entities that are providing guns in Africa, in the interests of addressing the root causes of war on the continent.

On leveraging the UN Decade of Action, the outcome document highlights:
• Translating the AU-UN frameworks into action in order to make a difference in people’s lives at regional and country levels in realizing the goals of the 2063 and 2030 agendas;
• Consulting and engaging the AU at the design stage of initiatives to ensure that the region is in the driving seat and facilitate the involvement of member states at the implementation stage;
• Ensuring regional, sub-regional and country level interface in the new evolving collaborative framework between the AU and UN at the regional level and actively engage member states, Resident Coordinators and the UN country teams in the new cooperation architecture; and
• Adopting the integrated planning and reporting tool as a good framework to integrate the SDGs, Agenda 2063, and national development plans.

Official Opening of ARFSD 2020

During the official opening of the Forum on Tuesday, 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 the youth for generating future solutions for sustainable development.
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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 continuing supporting its implementation, she emphasized the need to mobilize funds for this end.

Kwesi Quartey, AUC Deputy Chairperson, 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.

UNSDG Mohammed underscored the need to kickstart the Decade of Action on the SDGs, highlighting progress on: the proportion of people living in poverty reducing 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.

Emmerson Mnangagwa, President of Zimbabwe, underlined the need to act 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.

Organizational Matters

Election of the Bureau and ARFSD 2020 Agenda: On Tuesday, following sub-regional 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).

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

This ministerial session on Tuesday was facilitated by Jimmy Ocitti. The discussions identified four focal areas for accelerating delivery, namely:

- 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 SDG progress and enhanced synergies in reporting at different levels frameworks; and
- Improving communication and advocacy on the SDGs, both internally and externally.

On scaling up funding for the SDGs in Africa, it was stressed that domestic resource capacity is underestimated, with average annual Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows to the region of around USD 50 billion being only a fraction of an estimated USD 500 billion dollars that is raised each year through taxation. To address this deficiency, a proposal was made to explore innovative financing arrangements such as diaspora remittances and “SDG levies” on money transfers, more favorable tax regimes and improving compliance.

The SDG landscape in Africa was described as “stark,” with estimates that by 2030, Africa will account for more than 80% of the world’s poor, further exacerbated by weak performance on inclusion, especially for women and youth. While the region has made progress in addressing climate change, and enhancing sustainable consumption and production, natural resources continue to be threatened by international demand for Africa’s fossil fuels.

A need to identify locally-appropriate solutions, including financing, to enable countries to do more with less was noted.
Other recommendations included: awareness raising on the SDGs at the subnational level, which requires building multi-stakeholder partnerships; and the need for ownership among political and other actors for technical solutions to have an impact.

**Progress Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 at the Regional and Sub-regional 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:

On Tuesday, Paul Mpuga, ECA, presented an overview of findings from the Africa Sustainable Development Report 2020, stating that it highlights mixed progress on most SDGs. On poverty reduction, he noted that despite some gains, 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, despite progress on enrolment targets, only 40-45% of schools are connected to an electricity grid. On climate change, it was noted that all African countries have signed the Paris Agreement, and 48 countries have ratified it. It was further shown that while Africa is making good progress in developing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), there is a need to promote appropriate technologies for effective implementation.

Mesfin Tessema, AUC, presented highlights from the inaugural AU Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063. It was 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. Progress on several flagship projects, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), was highlighted.

Participants acknowledged the findings of the first report and expressed interest to receive additional information with respect to the methodology that was used. They also discussed the need for further reporting frameworks at the national level and for uniformity in defining relevant indicators, as well as improving the quality of health care and expanding access to electricity and safe water, which were said to be critical for sustainable development.

**Final outcome:** On Thursday, the Forum adopted the following key messages and recommendations, emanating from the discussions:

- Develop inclusive policies and formulate appropriate policies with sustainable funding mechanisms;
- Address poverty and inequality in tandem by taking measures to expand job creation, increase household incomes, secure property rights, develop infrastructure and enhance human capital and labor productivity;
- Take advantage of the agreement establishing the AfCFTA, which entered into force in May 2019, by investing in areas that support increased production and value addition, trade facilitation and trade-related infrastructure;
- Sign and ratify the legal documents for the establishment of the continental financial institutions and other AU treaties;
- Plan for growing urbanization to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- Design measures to expand fiscal space for equitable spending, adjusting fiscal and tax policies and the management of tax revenue;
- Address the issue of mounting debt, which has adverse implications for the realization of sustainable development.

The outcome document also calls on the AU and UN to work together to produce a continental report that focuses on both Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda in order to reduce the reporting burden on member states, and design a common
monitoring framework for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 so that Africa can speak with one voice.

**Plenary roundtable panels and parallel meetings on in-depth review, peer learning and dialogue on the sub-themes of the Regional Forum**

**VNRs:** This roundtable took place on Tuesday, and was moderated by Edward Kallon, UN Resident Coordinator, Nigeria. The panel 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, and 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 17 African countries will present a second VNR at the 2020 HLPF session. He noted this means that only nine member states are yet to conduct, and participate in, a VNR process.

Issues highlighted in presentations on VNRs from Uganda, Benin, South Africa, Tunisia, Seychelles, Côte d’Ivoire, included the need for: bridging data gaps; pursuing synergies in design and implementation of programmes to advance both agendas; and strengthening social cohesion. Many speakers emphasized that the VNR process was very demanding for most African countries, and called for support from the UN system, and other partners.

During the ensuing discussion, participants agreed that the VNRs play an important role in focusing efforts, including on policy and legislation, as well as strengthening the engagement of all stakeholders. They recognized that VNRs promote reforms in areas such as poverty reduction, health, water and sanitation and renewable energy. Among the challenges countries face, speakers highlighted a lack of disaggregated data and statistics, which affects the review methodology and often contributes to exclusion.

**Final outcome:** In its key messages on VNRs, the Forum encourages member states to, *inter alia:*

- Conduct VNRs, and for those that have not yet done so, to volunteer for the forthcoming cycle;  
- Develop clear mechanisms for, and invest in, generating and using disaggregated data to support evidence-based VNRs and national development frameworks, including investing in information and communications technologies (ICTs) that can contribute to timely collection, dissemination and use of data and information for VNRs and planning;  
- Ensure that VNRs highlight flagship projects and good practices that contribute to transformation and accelerate implementation, particularly in key areas such as poverty eradication, women’s empowerment and job creation;  
- Strengthen resource mobilization for both conducting and implementing the recommendations resulting from VNRs that embody linkages and convergence between the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and national development plans.  
- Ensure follow-up to the reviews, including the building of partnerships that result in meeting the goals of the two Agendas.

The final outcome also calls on the UNDS, and the AUC, to develop a peer review mechanism and a community of practice to promote effective VNRs reviews and implementation of the 2030 and 2063 agendas.

**VLRs:** This second roundtable focused on lessons from the subnational level. Moderated by Maria Ribeiro, UN Resident Coordinator, Zimbabwe, panelists drawn from local governments, technical institutions, and partner agencies, distilled good practices as well as challenges faced in strengthening local and national implementation of the development agendas. Participants welcomed discussion of VLRs for the first time at a Regional Forum, noting, however, that they should also contribute to transformation and accelerate implementation of the SDGs, particularly in key areas such as poverty eradication, women’s empowerment and job creation.

On challenges, the discussions noted that in some countries VLRs are done by national governments, complemented by local authorities, and stressed that local leadership, as part of devolved partnerships with civil society organizations and special interest groups, reinforces legitimacy. Weak data systems, in part due to fragmentation and lack of organization of available data, was identified as a key challenge for many countries in reporting against the SDG and Agenda 2063 indicators.

**Final outcome:** Among key messages, the Regional Forum underscores the need for local and regional governments to be fully engaged in the ARFSD to accelerate the implementation of the two agendas. Delegates also agree to encourage member states to:

- Integrate VLRs in their VNRs;  
- Assist local authorities to collect reliable, consistent local data and statistics in order to conduct VLRs;  
- Establish voluntary local review mechanisms to improve accountability, transparency and public ownership of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;  

*Final outcome:*

Maria Ribeiro, UN Resident Coordinator, Zimbabwe
• Provide local authorities with adequate resources to enable them to assess their local resources for their local economic development;
• Promote strong partnerships and coordination with local stakeholders for effective VLRs, with particular focus on vulnerable groups;
• Encourage community awareness of the SDGs, in collaboration with the media and traditional communication channels;
• Commit further to ensuring full localization of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 by transforming governance systems through effective devolution of responsibilities and resources;
• Establish peer reviews among local authorities to improve implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;
• Institutionalize the engagement of young people as key stakeholders for the conduct of VLRs, including through young people and child parliaments and councils; and
• Integrate, with the assistance of the UNDS, local development and urban issues in national development, national budgetary instruments and key economic sector policies.

In other messages, ARFSD 2020 participants call on the UN System to:
• Assist in the development of a common template for VLRs for ease of integration and standardization of procedures; and
• Design a template for peer-reviewed VLRs in Africa in order to better standardize key principles.

Plenary roundtable panels and parallel meetings on in-depth review, peer learning and dialogue on the sub-themes of the Regional Forum

Plenary roundtable on the sub-theme of People: This plenary roundtable on Wednesday was moderated by Ann-Therese Ndong-Jatta, Regional Director for Eastern Africa, UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Panelists included: Humphrey Karamagi, WHO; Julitta Onabanjo, Regional Director, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Eastern and Southern Africa; Abebe Haile-Gabriel, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO); Parfait Eloundou-Enyegue, Cornell University; Margaret Agama-Anyetei, AUC; Fatou Kinteh, Minister of Women’s Affairs, Children, and Social Welfare, the Gambia; Amon Murwira, Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development, Zimbabwe; Gertrude Gatsi, Deaf Zimbabwe Trust; and Joshua Malinga, Special Advisor to the President on Disability, Zimbabwe.

Issues raised in the discussions included the need to: “re-educate” African leaders to address the continent’s governance problems in order to leave no one behind; develop a purpose-built data ecosystem for Africa that can address local specificities, while also responding to fast moving changes; and creating new, Afrocentric, knowledge models that build on indigenous knowledge. Existing AU protocols on inclusion of persons living with disability, as well as older persons, were also highlighted.

Final outcome: On Thursday, Forum participants adopted final messages on these sub-themes, calling on African member states to, among other actions:
• Invest in data, research and new knowledge, while being cognizant of social norms and practices; address issues of adaptation and resilience; and revisit new technologies with a view to using them to solve the problems of the people of the continent;
• Create new knowledge and avoid being consumers of wrong knowledge in order to maintain the dignity of their people and generate prosperity and peace for the continent;
• Revisit educational programmes and focus especially on education in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), while paying attention to secondary education of the girl child to bridge the wide gender gap in science and mathematics gap;
• Improve management of climate change, including through the management of underground water resources;
- Take a position on gas energy as a transitional energy source for the continent in preparation for the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 26);
- Put in place the policies necessary to promote agriculture, including by building capital and increasing resilience in order to stimulate economic activity;
- Shift from a single service delivery approach to multiple targeted service delivery approaches;
- Engage the sectors that are driving inequalities among the population, notably security, as highlighted by the AU’s theme for 2020, “Silencing the guns”, and also address the various sociocultural constraints, especially issues related to gender inequality; and
- Explore innovative financing, especially with regard to how to work effectively with the financing that is available on the continent.

**Plenary roundtable on the sub-theme of Partnerships:**

The roundtable took place on Wednesday and was moderated by Alexander Trepelkov, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It focused on how to strengthen partnerships to secure the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

Participants underscored the importance of innovative approaches to resource mobilization to reorient funding towards priority actions, and reforms to increase local funding. Challenges highlighted included the high ratio of public debt to GDP, as well the negative impact of corruption, and illicit financial flows. Partnerships were underlined as one of the most important SDGs, being a driver for implementation.

The need to revitalize partnerships was emphasized in order to bring together all actors to mobilize all available resources. Cooperation and innovation in science and technology to facilitate trade was advocated. Examples were provided of South-South partnerships, including a tourism cooperative agreement between Morocco and other African countries; as well as favorable import duty levies and preferential rates for the least developed countries and SIDS.

Issues raised in the ensuing discussion emphasized the importance of interagency coordination, strengthening domestic resource mobilization, and putting in place effective monitoring mechanisms, to harness the full impact of SDG actions.

**Final outcome:** In their final messages, Forum participants call on African governments to:

- Design and implement innovative financing policies, and undertake reforms to broaden their tax bases, eliminate loopholes that permit tax avoidance and prioritize expenditure with the greatest impact on the less privileged, and monitor the reach of public spending and combat illicit financial flows.
- Operationalize AfCFTA, and develop national strategies and plans of action in that regard;
- Support multi-sectoral partnerships to promote human and institutional capacity-building and modernize national statistical offices and other institutions, agencies and civil society organizations;
- Undertake capacity needs assessments with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and develop related capacity-building strategies and plans; and
- Design and implement digital transformation policies and strategies by 2025, and strive to ensure that at least 40% of their populations have access to digital financing.

The Forum also calls on development partners and UN agencies to support South-South and North-South cooperation to accelerate capacity-building for the realization of the SDGs and the implementation of Agenda 2063.

**Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of Prosperity:** This session took place on Wednesday afternoon. This discussion chaired by Professor Byeragi Georges, Bureau Member, ARFSD, and co-chaired by Charles Kwenin, Regional Director for Southern Africa, International Organization for Migration, focused on key messages, actions and opportunities on prosperity to inform the HLPF.

The need to put people at the center of prosperity by focusing on inequality, decent work and social protection was framed as a key issue, as well as the need for a migration governance system
where skills can easily move across borders. The AfCFTA was identified as a catalyst for industrial transformation.

The AfCFTA, the fourth industrial revolution and digitalization, were underscored as key to implementing the SDGs, as well as good governance and policies that create enabling environments. A proposal was made to benchmark the best performing countries, with Ethiopia given as an example of a country making great strides in this regard.

Other issues highlighted in the discussion included the need for: transformative policy shifts to create growth; human rights-based approaches to implementing the SDGs; the role of education and innovation in prosperity; and the prohibitive cost of data.

**Final outcome:** On Thursday, the Forum adopted key messages from this sub-theme, including that member states should:

- Strengthen financing architecture through domestic resource mobilization, including “crowding in” of the private sector;
- Redefine the concept of prosperity to resonate with ordinary citizens and adopt a people and human-rights approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- Adopt social protection systems to address extreme poverty;
- Accelerate structural transformation leveraging agricultural and mineral endowments to support sustainable and innovation-based industrialization and draw on opportunities arising from the AfCFTA and the strengthening of governance frameworks;
- Integrate a spatial perspective and urban approach to achieving the SDGs;
- Scale up polices for inclusive and good quality education, skills enhancement and health services;
- Create and reinforce regional innovation systems as incubators for innovation and technology;
- Consider migration governance as an integral part of development efforts;
- Engage young people and consider the needs of persons living with disabilities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063; and

- Generate reliable and timely data and develop statistical systems to address current gaps.

**Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of the Planet:** This session took place on Wednesday and began with a presentation by Samba Thiam, UNEP, on opportunities and challenges relating to several SDGs targets and indicators. He showed data demonstrating that Africa has 20% of global land cover and 65% of the world’s arable land, but unfortunately desertification is affecting 45% of Africa’s land.

Panelists explained that despite the high coverage of access to clean water in some countries, challenges remain in providing access in rural areas, with sparse populations. Meanwhile, in other countries, most electricity is generated using coal, and flash floods end up wetting stockpiles, affecting electricity production. They further noted that, in a best-case scenario, climate change has an effect of 3% on GDP. Resource mobilization and increasing the amount of money available for adaptation is therefore a key element to tackle climate change and also achieving the SDGs.

The importance of science and information necessary for tackling the challenges Africa faces as a very vulnerable continent to disasters, severe weather and extreme climatic events, was also highlighted, and therefore the need to strengthen resource mobilization to build resilience and institutions that generate data was considered paramount.

In the ensuing discussion, interventions mentioned the lack of transparency of domestic public financing, the high dependency of Africa on fossil fuels, the need to build partnerships to tackle climate change, and Africa’s role in the intergovernmental climate change process.

**Final outcome:** In final recommendations on this sub-theme, the Regional Forum encourages member states to:

- Develop just transition strategies using a new climate economy approach that guarantees social, economic and environmental benefits;
- Facilitate innovative financing mechanisms for the SDGs, including enhanced domestic resource mobilization, the use of green and blue bonds and the creation of an enabling environment for direct private sector finance in delivering the 2030 Agenda;
- Ensure a whole-of-society approach in their efforts to deliver on sustainable development, with particular emphasis on the engagement of indigenous people, women, young people, children, persons with disabilities and local communities, capitalizing on indigenous knowledge systems;
- Expedite the national implementation of Africa’s Blue Economy Strategy through the development of policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks;
- Implement an integrated and coherent approach to disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, and to water management and sanitation plans. In addition, they should increase resource allocation to national and regional hydrological and meteorological institutions and

Online at: https://enb.iisd.org/uneca/arfsd2020/
and put in place or strengthen the legal and institutional frameworks for improved production and delivery of weather and climate information services, including for multi-hazard and integrated early warning systems; and

- Collaborate and strengthen partnerships to invest in data generation, including from remote sensing and other geospatial sources, big data and various observational networks and infrastructures.

Among recommendations addressed to the UN System and multilateral environmental negotiations, the Forum calls for:

- UN system support for Africa’s Blue Economy Strategy, which complements the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway;
- Parties to COP 15 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity to ensure that the new deal for nature and people includes tangible actions and targets and the means for their implementation;
- Provision of technical assistance to the African transformative initiatives, including the Great Green Wall Initiative, the Congo Basin Climate Commission, the Sahel Region Climate Commission, and the Climate Commission for Small Island States. In this regard, States are encouraged to support the establishment of a committee on climate governance at the regional level; and
- Parties to the UNFCCC to take a more ambitious approach and accelerate actions to meet their commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, the Doha Amendment and the Paris Agreement.

Parallel meeting on the sub-theme of Peace: Discussions under this sub-theme focused on transformative actions for peace, justice and strong institutions towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The session was co-chaired by Albert Chikondo, Office of the President and Cabinet, Zimbabwe, and Mahamane Cisse-Gouro, Regional Representative, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), West Africa.

Panelists included: Eunice Ajambo, UN Resident Coordinator Office, Namibia; Umaru Koroma, Deputy Minister of Justice, Sierra Leone; Hagar Monsif, African Affairs and SDGs Unit, Egypt; Emily Chweya, Ministry of Justice, Kenya; Gilles Fabrice Zoh Ondo, Ministry of Justice, Cameroon; and Sara Hamouda, African Peer Review Mechanism.

Drawing on data showing that the continent is off-track on achieving this SDG, with only four countries reducing conflict and conflict having escalated in 22 countries, the discussions underscored that SDG 16 is a key enabler for achieving all the other Goals. Participants emphasized, inter alia: the importance of an “EU style” regional mechanism that can “silence the killers” and protect the rights of citizens; developing frameworks to enhance mineral resources governance by African states; and protecting women and girls who are often the first casualties of conflict.

Final outcome: The Regional Forum adopted recommendations from the session calling on member states to, inter alia:

- Adopt a human rights-based approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which would ensure increased awareness of its populations and that all people have access to justice, that their rights are protected, that the resource represented by volunteers is harnessed, that all forms of discrimination of marginalized people are eliminated and that people from all sectors of society have access to decent livelihoods;
- Practice transformative leadership that commits to “silencing the guns” that kill and destroy livelihoods, leaving many people destitute;
- Prevent and manage conflicts such as those in the Great Lakes region, the Horn of Arica and the Sahel, responsibly in a timely fashion, and allocate adequate resources to support the mandate in the resolution; and
- Mainstream the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 into national development plans and planning processes at the local levels of government, and ensure that the planning, implementation and monitoring development processes are genuinely inclusive of all stakeholders from all sectors of society.

The Forum also calls on the UN and the AUC to reinforce their governance mechanisms, hold member states accountable, and banish the contradictions inherent in respecting the sovereignty of nations while they may be violating the aspirations of the peace goals.

Outcomes and proposed key messages, including policy recommendations from the parallel meetings

During a plenary session on Thursday, representatives of different stakeholder groups reported on work in parallel as well as pre-Forum meetings, and presented final declarations for adoption in the Forum report. Presentations from pre-event sessions on the STI Forum, VNR workshops and the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa also took place. For final outcomes on these sessions, please see the respective sections in the “Pre-Events” section of this report.
Presentations by Major Groups and other stakeholders:
In their report, Major Groups and Stakeholders called for, inter alia: progressively increased funding to ensure that no one is left behind; investing in a 100% transition to renewable energy and climate resilient infrastructure; and ensuring the structural transformation of economies through commodity-based industrialization, transfer of technical skills, and investment in active labor market policies. The report also underscored the need for enhanced understanding of the interconnections between political decisions and scientific knowledge in environmental processes; active engagement of all excluded groups in global peace-building processes; supporting local initiatives on conflict resolution; and protecting all human rights defenders and media workers and respecting international conventions on human rights. The presentation also touched on the need to foster social dialogue among all interest groups and vulnerable populations, and strengthen indigenous knowledge systems as alternative interventions to many challenges facing society.

Providing an overview of discussions at the Youth Forum, a representative highlighted the importance of youth agency in development processes, reiterating that voice, power, and participation, must be accorded to young people.

In the interactive discussion that followed, speakers highlighted interlinkages between poverty, lack of access to education, and armed violence, and called for implementation of the regional peace and security initiative established at UNFCCC COP 24 in Marrakesh. On “Silencing the Guns” several participants called for a robust approach, including by “engaging those who are producing the guns that Africans are using to fight.” Related views were raised on the links between exploitation of natural resources and conflict, with calls for ensuring thorough environmental and social impact assessments and requiring mining to contribute to improved livelihood opportunities in local communities.

Noting that the ARFSD paper smart portal is not accessible for the visually impaired, a representative of people living with disabilities underscored the need to fully optimize digital platforms as it is the only way such communities can participate meaningfully.

Other issues highlighted in the discussions included: the importance of providing comprehensive education, including on sexual and reproductive health, as well as special programmes to encourage young girls to participate in STEM disciplines.

Stressing the importance of human capital development in Africa, one speaker stressed the need to urgently address brain drain, stating, “Africa has become a training ground for rich countries while our own people wallow in poverty.” Among solutions, she proposed a “brain tax” to compensate for all Africans working in the diaspora, crafting systematic skills export programmes, and providing incentives for Africans in the diaspora to return to the continent. The low representation of the private sector was also highlighted by several speakers with calls for more concerted efforts to involve this group at future Forums.

Final outcome: In its final report, Regional Forum calls on member states to:

- Invest in institutions that generate data and also recognize citizen-generated data to resolve the data paucity problem. It further calls for these data to be disaggregated, in order to understand intersectionality of group-based inequalities, and accessible to all stakeholders such as civil society organizations, media and citizens;
- Guarantee civic space for civil society organizations and trade unions, as well as protect all human rights defenders and media workers to protect and promote freedom of expression.
- Achieve the meaningful and inclusive participation of all stakeholders, including children, young people, older persons, people with disabilities, women, internally displaced persons, refugees, indigenous communities, smallholder farmers, and other marginalized groups, in all stages of decision-making processes. This dynamic should also prevail in peace processes and conflict resolution processes by through support for local initiatives to combat terrorism, violence, extremism and xenophobia;
- Integrate the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in national development plans for joint implementation and monitoring, including reflecting them in national budgets.
- Adopt clear financing mechanisms for the SDGs with an emphasis on domestic resource mobilization by engaging the private sector, curbing illicit financial flows, and progressively increasing public investments;
- Undertake structural transformation through quality public education in STEM, technology skills transfer, and revaluation of indigenous knowledge to tackle the many challenges facing humanity; and
- Through subnational governments and the private sector, invest in climate-resilient infrastructure as well as the transition towards 100 per cent renewable energy.

Final outcome: The final ARFSD 2020 outcome recognizes that:
• Youth agency is important in development processes, and as such, voice, power and participation should be accorded to young people;
• To harness the youth demographic dividend, there is need for significant investment in the youth, particularly in relation to innovation, technology, and skills development;
• More efforts should be made to involve Africa’s young people from the design stage of development, to peace and security policies and solutions;
• There is need for expanded access to quality and inclusive education for persons with disabilities; and national-level budgeting to address the practical needs and strategic interests of persons with disabilities.
• The UN should promote inclusion by promoting and strengthening the participation of people with disabilities since their participation in the society is also important; and
• Education for young girls should be promoted and should include sexual education and STEM education.

Closing of the Forum

Consideration and adoption of key messages: During the closing panel on Thursday, ARFSD rapporteurs presented an outcome document containing key messages to be forwarded to the HLPF. The Forum also adopted the ministerial declaration, ‘Victoria Falls Declaration on the UN Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development in Africa,’ that is annexed to the report.

The Victoria Falls Declaration calls on African Member States to:
• Urgently revisit frameworks for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and align their national development plans with the principles of the two agendas. It also calls on African stakeholders to set in motion programmes and projects to deliver on the 10 commitments for action outlined in the political declaration of the SDGs Summit, which convened under the auspices of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, US, from 24-25 September 2019.
• Develop and implement people-centered and inclusive national strategies to support the UN Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development, strengthen mechanisms for the mobilization of resources at the national level, and make efficient use of funding for the two agendas; and
• Implement the key messages of the Regional Forum.

The Declaration also calls upon the UNDS, and other partners, to scale up their support of member states’ capacity development for the implementation of the two agendas, and establish and implement a regional strategy to support the UN Decade of Action through targeted interventions and capacity development in transformational areas, including: climate action; youth education, entrepreneurship and innovation; women’s empowerment; food systems; data and statistics; trade; evidence-based voluntary national and local reviews and integrated planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting tools; science, technology and innovation; and stakeholder engagement.

Theme, dates and venue of ARFSD 2021: Delegates approved an offer from the Republic of Congo to host the next session of the ARFSD in 2021.

Closing Statements: During the final plenary on Thursday afternoon, Oliver Chinganya made closing remarks on behalf of the ECA Executive Secretary, describing the Forum as “highly, engaging, informative and proactive,” and expressing thanks to delegates for their participation. He observed that with a record-breaking 3000 participants, the Forum has evolved into the single largest platform where Africa’s voices are heard, and it also informs and shapes global discourse.

Reflecting on a “watershed moment for the continent,” Chinganya noted that challenges and opportunities are interlinked and interrelated, and integrated approaches that address conservation, diversification of renewable energy sources and alternative and efficient production processes could be part of the solution. Turning to the Victoria Falls Declaration, he called on participants to “walk the talk” by implementing the actions agreed therein, noting that the outcomes of the Forum would be
conveyed to the HLPF and inform the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

Paul Mavima, Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, Zimbabwe, thanked African member states for the opportunity to host the meeting, emphasizing that the Forum provided a firm launching pad for a decade of action for accelerating implementation of the SDGs. He noted that the Victoria Falls Declaration and ambitious work plan should find traction in sustainable development processes and expressed willingness to work to realize the commitments made in the Victoria Falls. Calling on Africa to rise and shine, he closed the meeting at 6:35pm.

**Upcoming Meetings**

53rd session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development: Addressing the theme, ‘Africa’s sustainable industrialization and diversification in the digital era,’ the meeting will explore how digitization is opening up opportunities in agriculture, services and clean energy, and how these can help spur the processes of industrialization and diversification, while providing options for adapting to climate change, including methods to ensure resilience. **dates:** 18-24 March 2020 **location:** ECA, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  

[https://www.uneca.org/cfm2020](https://www.uneca.org/cfm2020)

HLPF 2020: Convened by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the 2020 session of the HLPF will address the theme, ‘Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.’ **dates:** 7-16 July 2020 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York, US  


UN@75th Anniversary Celebrations: The UN will mark its 75th anniversary with a one-day high-level meeting of the UNGA on the theme, “The Future We Want, the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism.” **date:** 21 September 2020 **location:** New York City, US  

[https://sdg.iisd.org/events/75th-session-of-the-un-general-assembly-unga-75/](https://sdg.iisd.org/events/75th-session-of-the-un-general-assembly-unga-75/)

**9th AfriCities Summit:** At least 8,500 delegates are expected to attend the ninth edition of the Summit, which is convened by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)-Africa with the aim of building partnerships with a wide range of state and non-state actors. **dates:** 16-20 November 2021 **location:** Kisumu, Kenya  

[https://www.uclga.org](https://www.uclga.org)

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