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Economic Commission for Africa
Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
Sixth sessionVictoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 24–27 February 2020
Item 2 of the provisional agenda ***2020–2030: A decade to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063****Concept note****I. Background and mandate of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

1. Regional Forums on Sustainable Development are part of the follow-up and review architecture of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The other follow-up mechanisms are the voluntary national reviews and the high-level political forums on sustainable development. The mandate to establish the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development is derived from United Nations General Assembly resolutions 67/290, 70/1 and 70/299. These resolutions, among other provisions, acknowledge the importance of the regional dimension of sustainable development; invite the United Nations regional commissions to contribute to the work of the high-level political forums on sustainable development, including through annual regional meetings; and encourage member States to identify the most suitable regional forum to contribute to follow-up and review at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

2. In light of the above, the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development has been instituted by resolution 930 (XLVIII) and resolution 939 (XLIX) of the Joint Annual Meetings of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Finance, Monetary Affairs, Economic Planning and Integration, and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development of 2015 and 2016; and resolution 961 (LI) of the ECA Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development of 2018. Through these resolutions, ECA is requested to convene the Forum, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and other partners, on an annual basis, to follow-up and review the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the African Union Agenda 2063, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

* ECA/RFSD/2020/1

3. The aim of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is therefore to advance integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the goals set out in Agenda 2063. To this end, the Regional Forum provides a multi-stakeholder platform for follow-up and review of progress and challenges in the implementation of the goals of the two agendas, while strengthening learning and advocating effective policy measures and actions. The Regional Forum makes important contributions to bolstering multi-stakeholder engagement and synergies, and promoting concerted efforts to implement and achieve the development goals of the two mutually reinforcing agendas. Five sessions of the Forum have been held since 2015.

II. Sixth (2020) session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

4. The sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is designed to be an action-oriented Forum for member States and other stakeholders to explore, gain insight into, share and agree on sets of concrete and workable solutions and actions that will enable the countries to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 within the set time frame.

5. The thrust, format and expected outcome of the Forum are in recognition of and in response to a number of considerations, trends and gaps in implementation, and calls and key recommendations by member States and other stakeholders, notably at both the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Key among those considerations, trends, calls and recommendations are the following:

(a) First, the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is being held only a decade away from the year 2030. That year is a milestone set for countries across the world to realize the commitments for the people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership that are embodied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. Time is therefore of essence if Africa is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, which are aligned with most of the aspirations of Agenda 2063, “the Africa we want”.

(b) Second, in the *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019*,¹ the Secretary-General of the United Nations stated that “despite considerable efforts these past four years, we are not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. We must dramatically step up the pace of implementation as we enter a decisive decade for people and the planet”. Consistent with the Secretary-General’s voice, the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, at its fifth session in 2019 (ECA/RFSD/2019/9), noted with concern that, despite notable progress, countries were not on track to meet most of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and related goals of Agenda 2063. For example, a large population in Africa remained trapped in poverty. Given the high population growth in the region, the absolute number of people living in poverty was rising. Those living in poverty increased from 390 million in 2013 to 420 million in 2015 alone, according to the 2019 Africa Sustainable Development Report (ECA/RFSD/2019/8). Close to 43 per cent of the population, or over 500 million people, in the region did not have access to electricity. Two thirds of the countries in Africa had yet to reach the target of

¹ *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development* (United Nations, New York, 2019). Available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf (accessed on 5 December 2019).

full completion in primary education, according to the background paper on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (ECA/RFSD/2019/2).

6. The 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development (E/HLPF/2019/8) echoed the conclusion of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development that countries are not on track to achieve the goals. For instance, on Sustainable Development Goal 4, the global high-level political forum highlighted that current levels of investment in education and in supporting teachers fell far short of what was needed to achieve this goal. Greater public support for education could improve its quality. Regarding Sustainable Development Goal 8, existing inequality gaps were widening, and efforts were urgently needed to include youth, women and vulnerable groups in the labour market to ensure that no one was left behind. On Sustainable Development Goal 10, inequality was strikingly high and becoming worse in parts of the world, and inaction risked derailing progress in other areas of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The high-level political forum on sustainable development underlined that countries should do more to ensure social inclusion. Moreover, the root causes of inequality must be addressed, and enhanced efforts with new, dynamic strategies should be put in place across all sectors to reach those furthest behind. In Africa, one source of rising inequality is insufficient job creation, with too many of those jobs being created not of a quality that effectively lifts people out of poverty. In this context, job creation remains a primary and urgent priority across all age groups, bearing in mind the need for sustained wealth creation as a permanent solution to poverty and narrowed inequality. Decent jobs are the sine qua non of increased productivity and structural transformation, which in turn will trigger economic growth and underpin a sustained increase in fiscal resources (that is, domestic resource mobilization) needed to invest in all the other Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, the interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goals 1, 8, 10 and 17 clearly require close attention by member States.

7. The 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development further notes that progress on Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate change is falling far short of what is needed to meet its targets by 2030; and if the international community does not change course by 2020, it risks disastrous consequences. In this connection, the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*² points out that the most urgent area for action is climate change. The report highlights that, if the record-high greenhouse gas emissions are not cut now, global warming is projected to reach 1.5°C in the coming decades. As already witnessed, “the compounded effects will be catastrophic and irreversible: increasing ocean acidification, coastal erosion, extreme weather conditions, the frequency and severity of natural disasters, continuing land degradation, loss of vital species and the collapse of ecosystems. These effects, which will render many parts of the globe uninhabitable, will affect the poor the most. They will put food production at risk, leading to widespread food shortages and hunger, and potentially displace up to 140 million people by 2050.” The report warns that the clock for taking decisive actions on climate change is ticking. The 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development therefore highlighted the need to accelerate the implementation of existing commitments and to substantially raise the level of ambition to limit global warming to 1.5°C through an overarching unity of purpose.

8. The 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development also addressed the interrelated issue of armed conflicts and rising intercommunal violence across the continent, which exacerbated vulnerabilities and undermined efforts to “silence the guns in Africa by 2020”, as well as promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. That necessitated a greater focus by member States on Sustainable Development Goal 16.

² United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.I.6.

9. In view of these trends, one of the overarching key messages from the 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development is that the international community is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. As such, a deeper, more ambitious, transformative and integrated response is urgently needed. Time is therefore ripe to sound the alarm and accelerate action if the international community is to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. Considering the observations and considerations pointed out above, the decade 2020–2030 presents an opportunity and a window of hope to dramatically speed up the pace and expand the scale of implementation to deliver the regional and global goals. The sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will therefore contribute to fulfilling the pledge of Heads of State and Government at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2019, to make the coming decade one of action and delivery (A/RES/74/4).

(c) Third, the 2019 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development recommended that, in their efforts to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, countries needed to consider the objective set in both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, to make a bold, transformational change to build fairer, more inclusive, healthier, more prosperous, peaceful and more resilient societies that used natural resources sustainably and created opportunity for all. This was a call for transformative action, to deliver results consistent with the quest for shared prosperity and enhanced integrity, productivity and diversity of ecosystem assets.

(d) Fourth, in their evaluation of the high-level political forum on sustainable development after four years, respondents recommended that there was a need for increased focus on Sustainable Development Goal interlinkages, solutions and concrete recommendations. Moreover, 84 per cent of the survey participants agreed that more time for voluntary national reviews would make these reviews more relevant for lessons learned. The sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will therefore offer the opportunity for countries and stakeholders to explore how to ensure synergy, address trade-offs and strengthen interlinkage approaches and partnerships in implementing and reviewing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and related goals of Agenda 2063. As such, it is a timely opportunity for Africa to examine and propose concrete ways to exploit the central entry points to leverage interlinkages and accelerate progress across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, identified in the *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019*. The Regional Forum will also give expanded space for intraregional peer learning on voluntary national reviews.

(e) Fifth, the 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development also highlighted that links among reviews and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national, regional and global levels must be strengthened. Regional forums on sustainable development play a key role in this endeavour by promoting peer reviews, policy exchanges, strengthened collaboration and inclusive engagement. The design of the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development seeks to strengthen this function of the Regional Forum.

11. Against this backdrop, the objective, theme, sub-themes and format of the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development are as outlined in the following sections.

III. Objective of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

12. The overall objective of the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is to conduct a regional follow-up and review of progress made, facilitate peer learning, and advance transformative solutions and actions to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063.

13. The specific objectives of the Forum are to:

(a) Conduct a regional follow-up to, and review of, the implementation of the goals;

(b) Provide a platform for peer learning and sharing experiences, approaches, good practices and lessons learned to accelerate the implementation of the two agendas;

(c) Assess and identify the gaps, lagging areas, challenges and opportunities associated with their implementation;

(d) Identify and articulate transformative actions, commitments, levers, partnerships and other measures that countries need to take to accelerate implementation to achieve the goals of the two agendas within the decade 2020–2030;

(e) Deliberate and agree on the priorities and recommendations of Africa in the form of key messages to accelerate implementation at different levels, and as the region’s collective input to inform the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development (7–17 July 2020, New York), and to inform implementation policies and programmes at various levels.

IV. Theme of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

14. The sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will be held under the theme “2020–2030: A decade to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”.

15. The above-stated theme of the Regional Forum is well aligned with that of the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development, namely “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”. Both themes recognize the need for – and rally countries and partners to take urgent and transformative actions to deliver in the coming decade the promise of – a transformed world that is on an inclusive, resilient and sustainable path.

16. The theme of the Regional Forum underlines the need for integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, given that they are synergistic and mutually reinforcing, and together provide the framework for transformation and sustainable development in Africa.

V. Sub-themes of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

17. The forum will undertake a review of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and corresponding goals of Agenda 2063. To promote an interlinkages and integrated approach to the review and deliberations during the Regional

Forum, the 17 goals will be clustered around the five Ps – People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace and Partnerships. A sub-theme will be formulated for each of the Ps (sub-theme areas) and the cluster of Sustainable Development Goals as follows:

<i>Sub-theme area</i>	<i>Sustainable Development Goals³ cluster</i>
People	Goals 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 4 (quality education) and 5 (gender equality)
Prosperity	Goals 7 (affordable and clean energy), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 10 (reduced inequalities) and 11 (sustainable cities and communities)
Planet	Goals 6 (clean water and sanitation), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land)
Peace	Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions)
Partnerships	Goal 17 (partnerships for the goals)

18. A concise analytical report will inform deliberations on each of the sub-themes. Such analysis will encompass the corresponding goals of the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063. Among the critical issues to be covered under each sub-theme are:

(a) Interlinkages among the goals in the cluster: the links between the given cluster of Sustainable Development Goals and other Sustainable Development Goals, and implications for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in general;

(b) Key trends and progress towards achievement of selected targets of the given cluster of Sustainable Development Goals;

(c) Gaps, constraints and emerging issues;

(d) Stepping up the pace and scale of implementation: opportunities and transformative levers, partnerships, commitments, actions and other measures to drastically accelerate implementation.

19. The reports will also take into account the principle of “leaving no one behind” and the importance of integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development/Agenda 2063 goals with other agendas/frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the New Urban Agenda, the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, and the Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020, among others. These reports are a good starting point to propose ways in which African countries can exploit the six central entry points to leverage interlinkages and accelerate progress across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These transformative entry points that are presented in the *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019* are:

(a) Human well-being and capabilities;

(b) Sustainable and just economies;

(c) Food systems and nutrition patterns;

(d) Energy decarbonization and universal access;

(e) Urban and peri-urban development;

(f) Global environmental commons.

³ Each report will cover the corresponding goals of Agenda 2063.

VI. Format of the sixth session of the Forum

20. The Regional Forum will comprise the following pre-Regional Forum meetings and main sessions:

A. Pre-Regional Forum meetings and events

21. The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will be preceded by meetings to bring and synthesize diverse stakeholder perspectives and exchange cutting edge ideas, tools, experiences, good practices and lessons learned in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063. In addition, similar meetings will be organized in the margins of the Regional Forum. The outcomes of these meetings will feed into the deliberations during the Regional Forum. It is foreseen that pre-Forum meetings and events will include the following:

(a) A regional workshop to strengthen the capacity of major groups and other stakeholders – including civil society, academia and the private sector – to engage in the follow-up and review and implementation of the two agendas.

(b) A regional workshop to strengthen integrated voluntary national reviews of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063.

(c) The Science, Technology and Innovation Forum Africa.

(d) Expert workshops and other thematic meetings aligned with the theme and sub-themes of the Regional Forum.

B. Main sessions of the Regional Forum

22. The meeting will comprise the following main sessions:

(a) Opening of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development: A representative of Morocco, the Chair of the 2019 Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, will deliver short remarks and preside over the opening of the event. The Executive Secretary of ECA will deliver the welcome statement on behalf of the agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, followed by statements from special guests and high-level representatives of the African Union Commission and African Development Bank. An official representative of the host country will officially open the 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

(b) High-level panel dialogue on the theme of the Regional Forum: This dialogue will feature interactive discussions by a high-level panel comprised of ministers and other senior dignitaries and special guests. Among the panellists will be ministers of the 2020 and past high-level political forums on sustainable development voluntary national review countries. While setting the scene for subsequent deliberations by the Regional Forum, this segment of the meeting will provide strategic direction, including opportunities and transformative levers, partnerships, commitments, actions and other measures to accelerate implementation.

(c) Overview of the progress report on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: This segment of the Forum will include a presentation of the summary of the 2020 Africa Sustainable Development Report, prepared by ECA and partners. The presentation will include a snapshot of progress in the implementation of the two agendas and key messages from the report. This segment will hear the perspectives of regional economic communities in the implementation of the two agendas.

(d) Round table on voluntary national review: This round table will be expanded and allocated more time compared with the previous sessions of the Regional Forum, and will provide an opportunity for peer learning and experience sharing on the following:

(i) Conducting and presenting voluntary national reviews, including lessons and good practices in integrating both the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 goals into the voluntary national review processes;

(ii) Follow-up of the voluntary national reviews: good practices, witnessed impacts on strengthening implementation frameworks and role of development partners;

(iii) Progress in the implementation and achievements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, and what works;

(iv) Perspectives of diverse stakeholders – including civil society, the private sector, academia and development partners – on strengthening voluntary national reviews and scaling up implementation.

(e) Plenary and parallel round tables for in-depth review and dialogue on the sub-themes of the Regional Forum: During each of these round tables, highlights from the background report of the respective sub-theme will be presented to stimulate interactive dialogue on progress and gaps in implementation and transformative actions, commitments, levers, partnerships and other measures that countries need to take to accelerate implementation. Each round table will also agree on key messages on the respective sub-themes to be presented to the plenary.

(f) Report back to plenary from the breakout groups: The parallel round tables will report back to the plenary. The presentations will highlight the key messages, focusing on transformative actions, commitments, levers and partnerships for accelerating implementation.

(g) From review to strengthened support by the regional coordination mechanism/regional collaborative platform: This segment of the Forum will feature discussions and agreement of concrete plans by the United Nations system to take forward the outcomes of the Regional Forum and support member States, regional economic communities and the African Union to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, goals of Agenda 2063 and other priorities of the African Union.

(h) Review and adoption of key messages of the Forum: During this part of the Forum, member States and other stakeholders will review, propose amendments to and adopt the key messages aimed at accelerating implementation, which are to be submitted to the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development as the regional inputs of Africa.

VII. Expected outputs

23. The meeting will generate the following outputs, which will be disseminated widely:

(a) Policy reports on the sub-themes of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;

(b) An outcome document of the sixth session of the Forum – containing agreed priorities, policy options and recommendations of Africa – in the form of key messages to accelerate implementation of the two agendas and to serve as the region’s collective input to the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(c) A report of the proceedings of the Forum, including salient issues and priorities, and recommendations pertaining to the theme and sub-themes of the 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

VIII. Expected outcomes

24. The 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is expected to contribute to:

(a) Strengthened capacity of the 2020 voluntary national review countries to undertake their reviews and present the review reports at the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(b) Member States, civil society, private sector, academia and development, with increased knowledge and skills, equipped with tools to act and widen the reach of Forum outcomes;

(c) Enhanced commitment, momentum and expansion of partnerships to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063;

(d) A clear articulation of and consensus on the priorities, policy options and recommendations of Africa in the form of key messages, to accelerate implementation at different levels, and as the region's collective input to the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development (7–17 July 2020, New York).

IX. Documentation

25. The documents for the 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development include:

Pre-session documentation:

(a) The concept note for the Forum;

(b) Africa regional report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063;

(c) Report on ECA and African Union support to the implementation, follow-up and review of the two agendas;

(d) Concise analytical reports covering the sub-themes of the meeting;

(e) Reports and outcome documents of relevant past meetings and events.

Post-session documentation:

(a) Agreed key messages of the 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development to the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(b) Final report on the meeting deliberations, including on salient issues, priorities and recommendations pertaining to the theme of the 2020 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;

(c) Report of the Science, Technology and Innovation Forum Africa;

(d) Report of the Regional Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews;

(e) Report of the Regional Workshop for Major Groups and Other Stakeholders.

X. Participants

26. The meeting will be attended by representatives of:

(a) All 54 member States of ECA (high-level policymakers and experts from ministries and agencies in charge of economic planning, finance, environment and natural/mineral resources, social affairs, energy, agriculture, justice, statistics and science and technology);

(b) Major groups and other stakeholders, including civil society, business and industry organizations, academia and research institutions;

(c) The African Union Commission, Development Agency and Africa Peer Review Mechanism;

(d) The African Development Bank;

(e) Regional economic communities;

(f) Agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, and other international agencies and organizations;

(g) Development partners.

XI. Working languages

27. The meeting will be conducted in English and French, with simultaneous interpretation in both languages.

XII. Dates and venue

28. The sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will be held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, from 24 to 27 February 2020.

XIII. Contacts

Enquiries on the organization of the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development should be directed to:

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