

**AFRICA REGIONAL MECHANISM FOR MAJOR
GROUPS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

(ARMMGOS)

**SECTORAL POSITION PAPER FOR THE HIGH
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Africa Regional Mechanism of the Major
Groups and other Stakeholders

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Introduction

Africa's economy, like other parts of the world, is adversely affected by the COVID-19 global pandemic, disrupting the day-to-day patterns of social and economic activities at all levels of the society. This enormous challenge has led to a dramatic loss of human life, production and distribution of food and fibre, accessibility to essential basic services at community, health sector as well as the work environment levels. To a large extent, the pandemic's socio-economic disruption divested livelihoods of millions of dollars and threatened the continued existence of enterprises - with the small and growing businesses and the informal economy workers affected the most. The pandemic robbed many of their incomes/jobs and drove millions of people into extreme poverty. The closing of air and land borders, trade restrictions and confinement measures inhibited the normal business processes, limited production and distribution of basic and essential products and services.

One aspect that has become apparent is that the pandemic knows no borders, business is no longer as usual and that people regardless of their socioeconomic status must adapt to the 'new normal'. We see clearly how nations, livelihoods, health, and safety are intrinsically and inevitably interconnected – highlighting the fact that the challenges we are facing cannot be dealt with in isolation. We see the need for everyone (rich and poor) and sectors (public, private, academia, civil society organisations) to unite in solidarity to save humanity and our planet. To defeat the fight against the common enemy and build back better, Member States of the United Nations are urged to work with major groups and other stakeholders in preparing and preventing such global health crises as well as closely collaborating towards the achievement of sustainable development goals. In the spirit of SDG 17 partnerships, it is also important to enhance MGoS engagement in voluntary national reviews processes to accelerate the decade of action and advance the implementation, follow ups and review of the 2030 and the Agenda 2063.

We noted that although the pandemic has presented enormous challenges at all levels of the society, it also presents tremendous opportunities for reaching the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. The implementation of the Agenda 2030 will address most, if not all of the challenges the world is facing as the result of the current global crisis – this will provide a stable and prosperous life for every person and ensure the mantra of “leaving no one behind” is achieved on the Africa continent. Advancing towards the realisation of the SDGs will also add greatly to the global solidarity initiatives aimed at building back from the current

crisis and prepare the world to build back better and stronger as the COVID-19 continues to rage in the post-COVID-19 era.

The Corona virus outbreak challenges not only Africa but the world in general to provide rapid and strong responses from all actors including the Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) and the pandemic has intensified the need for accelerated and united action for the Africa and the world we want. MGoS recognised its critical role and has since been actively contributing towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063. To achieve Agenda 2030, we firmly recognised the need to prioritize transformative pathways and genuine partnership to save lives and forge inclusive paths forward in ensuring no one is left behind.

To accelerate the realisation of the 2030 Agenda on the African continent, we believe that this requires international, regional, and national support; mobilisation of resources (financial, human, and institutional); technology transfer and innovation; experience sharing; and strong partnership between all stakeholders. Thus; ARMMGoS calls for a global, regional, and national commitment to:

- a) Forge strong global partnership across all levels and sectors with strong political support at the highest level.
- b) An inclusive process of sustainable development that impacts livelihoods, valuing and empowering local capacity, wisdom, culture and contextualizing/localizing action;
- c) Improve accessibility dissemination of accurate information on COVID-19 to marginalized groups of the communities that live largely in remote areas to curb the spread of the virus
- d) In response to the pandemic, government - diversification of resources should also recognize the need for key social sectors such as education, health, and gender, which if not adequately addressed and distributed would further restrict the civic space and curtail civil society activities
- e) Empower local communities especially disadvantaged children, youth and women with education, training, knowledge, skills and access to rights and opportunities that would lead them to own sustainable development;
- f) Prioritize socioeconomic advancement actions that is holistic, multi-sectoral and cross-disciplinary;
- g) Ensure, in our actions, that all life — human, animal, and biosphere — thrives;
- h) Make systems of support flexible and adaptable to meet complex and evolving situations and needs;

- i) Inspire accountability and transparency, open access to information and data, and improve communication across sectors and actors;
- j) Cooperate and collaborate across and within national borders, with all sectors and on all levels, to create long term solutions and resilience while still supporting immediate needs.

Perspectives from the African Major Groups and other Stakeholders Key Messages

We recognize the critical importance of the implementation of the SDGs during the COVID-19 pandemic that has brought to the fore overlapping and intertwined issues - human lives, the natural world, and our interconnected ecosystem. Recognizing that Africa is a diverse continent with many socio-economic vulnerabilities and opportunities that could be enhanced through strong partners between all stakeholders that seek to realize the Agenda 2030, we have configured the following recommendations as approaches, mechanisms and systems that have utility in attaining Agenda 2030 in Africa as a region, while maintaining adaptability to the specific circumstances of each African sub-region or country, and complimenting the global SDGs roadmap.

1) On Goals 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being):

Goal 1 (No poverty): Ninety percent of extremely poor people in the world inhabit the continent of Africa and estimates indicate that COVID-19 will push between 5 million and 29 million people below the extreme poverty line¹. If the pandemic curve does not flatten soon, an additional 59 million people are likely to be pushed into extreme poverty. The repercussions of the pandemic hence pose real challenges to the achievement of SDG 1 by 2030, in view of such increases in relative and absolute poverty, with the gap between the rich and poor envisaged to widen in the unfolding years.

Goal 2 (Zero hunger): African economy is agro-based and the COVID-19 outbreak has disrupted the entire agri-food supply chain. The lockdown measures restricting movement and trade across borders contributed to food insecurity across the continent. Africa was already facing food crisis due to conflicts, climate-related shocks and drought, and crop pests, including fall armyworm and desert locusts prior to COVID-19. One in five people in Africa are undernourished; unless COVID-19 is contained, Africa could witness an additional 64.9 million people in this category.

¹ UNECA, 2020 “Economic Report for Africa 2020: Innovative Finance for Private Sector Development in Africa”. Available online at https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/keymessageanddocuments/ERA2020-HIGHLIGHTS_INTERACTIVE-CONSOLIDATED

Goal 3 (Good health and well-being): Health has seen the most immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Africa has experienced proportionally fewer cases than the rest of the world. Considering African nations' multiple challenges with multiple health issues, they have been relatively well equipped to manage them at community levels. Yet, healthcare systems are generally weak across the continent with few exceptions. The continent has the most severe health workforce shortage and on account of the pandemic, health workers have been shifted to COVID-19 care, exacerbating shortages, and severely affecting Africa's already fragile health systems. Therefore, this is a crucial vulnerability that could upset the realization of universal access to health care by 2030. In line and in the light of this; ARMMGoS would like to make the following recommendations:

- a) Ensure that equity, inclusion, and non-discrimination underpin all efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and regularly report on the progress made in reaching the most deprived and marginalized people using disaggregated data.
- b) Promote land tenure security for local and indigenous women to improve their production from agricultural and other related activities and provide support to small farmers in terms of climate-friendly techniques and technologies and access to finance.
- c) Strengthen and progressively increase public investment, in line with agreed targets, and the provision of high-quality, inclusive, accessible, and affordable health and long-term care, nutrition, education and social protection services, along with universal health-care coverage, for all segments of society.
- d) Increase mechanisms for meaningful and inclusive participation of all stakeholders, including children, young people, older persons, workers' organizations, persons with disabilities, women and girls, internally displaced people, refugees, academia, migrants, persons with albinism, indigenous communities, homeless people and other marginalized groups, in decision-making, implementation and accountability processes around the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and COVID-19 response and recovery strategies including the COVID-19 vaccines.
- e) Establish local, national, and regional institutions dedicated to the implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals, integrating the three pillars of sustainable development (social, economic, and environmental) to accelerate the progress of Goals under the "People" sub-theme, which will have positive, synergistic effects with all other Goals and important global and regional public policy processes.
- f) Develop local and national indicators and monitoring and evaluation frameworks and their means of implementation to measure progress against set indicators and publish regular reports.

2) On Goals 8 (Decent work and economic growth) and 10 (Reduced inequalities):

Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth): Before the COVID-19 crisis, economic growth had remained below the SDG target, and now the possibility of recession translates to moving further away from the target. GDP growth predicted is likely to fall below that prior to the pandemic. Tens of millions of jobs were axed thereby increasing the unemployment rate in the region – worsening the already delicate and unstable situation in the job market. In addition, more than 60% of African men and almost 75% in employment are in informal jobs. The economic impact has been felt more harshly in urban areas. The expected rise in the cost of living in African cities will see the price of basic items rise drastically. Further, the per capita expenditure of African local governments is the lowest in the world and as a result, numerous local authorities are inadequately resourced, which also leads to the inability of coping with the COVID-19 crisis.

Goal 10 (Reduced inequalities): The socio-economic shocks from COVID-19 have aggravated inequalities in all countries around the globe, and more acutely in Africa. Vulnerable groups, including refugees and migrants, have faced disproportionate negative health and economic impacts. Because of weak or non-existent social safety nets for lower income brackets in most African nations, lockdowns and travel restrictions have affected virtually everyone.

On the issues of prosperity, we would like to make the following to the member States:

- a) Implement inclusive and gender-responsive economic policies, foster sustainable development, embrace the digital economy, transition from informal to formal economies, and foster social investments and reduce inequality.
- b) Design and implement pro-decent employment and demand-driven macroeconomic policies and strategies that create decent jobs for young people and women and promote.
- c) Strengthen national labour laws and policies to ensure that vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women, people with disability, migrant workers, older persons, informal workers, children, and women at risk of being left behind, are protected.
- d) Invest in universal sustainable social protection measures and schemes that reduce inequalities among citizens across their life course.
- e) Align national legislation and policies with international standards and norms, ensuring that all forms of exploitation are criminalised and that penalties are sufficiently stringent and commensurate to the penalties ascribed to other serious crimes.

3) On Goals 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 13 (Climate Action)

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Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production): COVID-19 has disrupted global supply chains, and therefore various targets under this specific goal have been elusive. For instance, the increase in single-use plastics continues unrelentingly. On the positive side, such disruptions have led to the enhancement of locally sourced production resulting in responsible consumption to a certain degree. Another positive development that bodes well for climate change has been the reduction in emissions from transportation. A decline in fossil fuel subsidies has also been witnessed.

Goal 13 (Climate action): The pandemic has caused a drastic reduction in human activity as nations went into lockdown particularly in the early months, leading to a decrease in carbon emissions in 2020. Yet, this has only marginally slowed the overall rise in atmospheric concentration of CO₂. Such a reduction premised on the global response to COVID-19 illustrates what is achievable. Although efforts to meet the climate commitments agreed upon at Paris in 2015 are threatened by economic recession, the climate emergency demands more sustained and ambitious climate action by leveraging green and low carbon development pathways as countries look to build their economies towards resiliency and sustainability.

Considering this, we recommend the following:

- a) Strengthen environmental laws in line with international environmental law frameworks, including but not limited to the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and strengthen national institutions to monitor adherence to the national environmental law.
- b) Accelerate climate action by integrating climate measures in COVID-19 recovery plans, policies, and strategies.
- c) Strengthen waste management mechanisms, including increasing resource mobilization for managing waste from COVID-19-related products.
- d) Accelerate climate action by mobilizing resources to increase renewable energy technologies and financially supporting commitments in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- e) Strengthen national disaster management systems to deal with emerging climate change-related and natural disasters, including floods, cyclones, and droughts.
- f) Strengthen and promote indigenous knowledge systems as alternative means of addressing humanity's many challenges, including climate change adaptation.
- g) Ensure a just transition to low-carbon, circular production models based on research, data collection and innovation in line with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition Towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies

Societies for All. In this regard, member States should prioritize social dialogue with affected workers and their organizations and communities in developing and implementing the Just Transition policies and strategies.

4) On Goal 16 (Peace, justice, and institutions)

COVID-19 threatens the intensification and exploitation of fragilities. There has been an increase in political tension and a heightened risk of conflict in some countries, whilst disruption to free press and information has also transpired. Peaceful and inclusive societies remain a vital prerequisite to sustainable and inclusive development. On promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels), we recommend member States to:

- a) Strengthen existing or/and establishing multi-stakeholder mechanism from regional, sub-regional, national and local levels to avoid all forms of discrimination and inequality to ensure full representation, equity, equality and leadership of all categories of citizens (children, people with disabilities, older persons, indigenous groups, young people, women or geographical location or status) in decision-making processes to guarantee that all policy and legal actions and decisions are sensitive to all citizens regardless of their gender, age, abilities or geographical location to facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and realization of the “leave no one behind” mantra.
- b) Uphold democracy, the rule of law and human rights to ensure freedom of expression, access to information, access to justice, access to social services including vaccines, prioritizing anti-corruption measures; put an end to restrictive civic space laws and harassment of journalists and activists while giving more attention to ending modern slavery, human trafficking, restricting traditional custodial sentences to more serious crimes, inequality, gender-based violence, etc.
- c) Ensure independent and transparent elections in conformity with international human rights and democratic standards and work with the civil society and other stakeholders to prevent election violence, affecting the following groups: political leaders, women, indigenous groups, older persons, children, and young people.
- d) Strengthen regional collective efforts to resolve violent conflict within and between African countries and combat terrorism insurgencies and armed groups to protect civilians and restore stability.
- e) Ensure human security, particularly in humanitarian situations, and invest in proactive governmental systems that minimize crises.

- f) Ratify, integrate into national legal frameworks, implement, and periodically report on regional and international conventions and protocols that promote human rights, good governance, and the rule of law.

5) On Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals):

As the pandemic wreaked havoc in Africa, numerous nations and organizations made commitments of support and assistance. Notwithstanding these notable efforts, the current financing gap stands at approximately USD44 billion out of the estimated USD114 billion that will be required in the fight against COVID-19 for 2020 in Africa.² A challenge in this respect is that most of these resources are not new or additional funds; they are simply reallocations from other programs.³ Yet, the unprecedented and concerted international action by the scientific community, policymakers, business, and civil society has been remarkable on this global partnership goal. Such mobilization holds potential to accelerate solutions and contribute to building stronger international and multi-sectoral partnerships.

On Partnerships for the Goals, we recommend member States to:

- a) Design and implement a multi-stakeholder approach that harmonises the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063 and fosters the participation and contribution of all sectors, major groups and other stakeholders and all citizens and ensure that no one is left behind.
- b) Invest in institutions that generate data and recognize citizen-generated data, research and civil society developed data to resolve the data-paucity problem and to benchmark and monitor progress in the implementation of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 and be disseminated in a user-friendly and accessible manner, ensuring disaggregated by gender, age, and disability among other aspects.
- c) Adopt clear Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 financing mechanisms and compliance with the research and development commitments of the African Union, emphasizing domestic resource mobilization, curbing illicit financial flows, and promoting private sector involvement.
- d) Resolve the issue of shrinking civic space and the over-regulation of civil society organizations and trade unions and recognize them as legitimate actors in sustainable development.

² International Monetary Fund, 17 April 2020, “World Bank Group and IMF mobilize partners in the fight against COVID-19 in Africa.” Press release, available online: www.imf.org/en/News

³ European Commission, 8 April 2020, “Q&A: Global EU response to the coronavirus pandemic.” Press release, available online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_606

- e) Build capacity of African civil society to deliver on structured partnerships which are based on win-win engagements
- f) Mobilize funding to civil society for their support to local communities, including rural women in their effective and direct participation in implementing SDGs and Voluntary National Reviews and monitoring and shadow reporting.

Conclusions

Humanity is facing a unique opportunity in its history. The international community has 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in place to solve the very system failures, pre-existing inequalities and disparities that the global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed. The driving motivation for the 2030 Agenda is the fact that no single entity, country, or region of the globe can solve these challenges alone. The pandemic has presented to us an opportunity to unite, to develop strong partnerships and to engage in mutually benefiting collaborations. The MGoS are ready to work with each other to support member states' processes as we face this crisis together in breaking the silos that separate and limit us. This global outbreak highlighted the need for accelerated and united action from all stakeholders with each actor playing its own role in different ways – leaving no one behind as we seek for solution out of this crisis and prepare humanity for the post COVID-19 pandemic.