

ECA Inputs to the thematic review of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2022.

A. *Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs:*

(i) Overall impact of COVID-19.

- The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted adversely on African countries, pushing an estimated 55 million people into extreme poverty in 2020 and reversing more than two decades of progress. The pandemic has also placed between 30 million to 35 million formal jobs at risk of reductions in wage and working hours because of reduced demand and enforced lockdowns. Africa's growth prospects have therefore been severely affected by the pandemic, leading to a contraction of 3 per cent in 2020, though less than the overall global economy which contracted at 3.4 per cent. The continent's growth is however expected to rebound to 4.7 per cent in 2021 and 4.0 per cent in 2022.¹
- Africa's GDP growth rebounded by growing at 4.7 percent in 2021, from a contraction of 3 per cent in 2020 due to the pandemic. The recovery in growth was supported by pent up demand following the relaxation of the COVID-19 restrictions, better global economic conditions, and the rebound in commodity prices. Compared to other regions, Africa's recovery at a growth rate estimated at 4.7 percent in 2021 was the slowest among global developing regions. The outlook is positive with the economy projected to grow robustly at 4 percent and 3.7 percent in 2022 and 2023 respectively, which is about 2 percentage points below its pre-pandemic levels. Despite the continued recovery, the pandemic is expected to impact on Africa's output for a prolonged period, in part through its adverse effects on human and physical capital accumulation. Africa would need to grow at 6 per cent during 2022-2023 to catchup to its pre-pandemic growth trajectory.²
- Furthermore, the pandemic has exacerbated fiscal deficits and debt levels due to increased spending to cushion the effects of the pandemic. Compared to 2020, African countries have experienced improved fiscal conditions, but their fiscal space remains constrained. The continent's average fiscal balance averaged -4.2 per cent in 2021, much worse than that of 2019 (-2.2 percent), yet better off than the 2020 level of -6.3 percent. Debt on the continent is projected to accelerate quickly from the combined effect of increased public spending and declining revenues due to the pandemic. The average debt-to-GDP ratio in Africa has been revised to 71.1 percent in 2020 and 67.7 percent in 2021. Overall public debt levels are expected to improve slightly in 2022 to 65.8 percent of GDP, but this ratio remains high compared to pre-pandemic level of 61.9 percent. Debt remains a concern in a significant number of countries, especially in the heavily indebted low-income countries. The World Bank-IMF Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) indicates that, as of September 2021,¹⁵ African countries were in high risk of both external debt distress and overall public debt distress, 6 African countries are already in both external debt and overall public debt distress³.
- Monetary policy remains accommodative in Africa as most central banks continue to keep their policy rates in alignment to easing liquidity pressures and stimulate additional credit creation so as to boost output growth. At the same time central banks remain cautious about price stability in ensuring that policy rates are not set in a manner which will further widen negative real interest rate hence exacerbate existing price distortions and consequently fuel inflationary pressures.

1 UN (2022) World Economic Situations and Prospects 2022.

2 UN (2022) World Economic Situations and Prospects 2022.

3 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/debt-toolkit/dsa>

- The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of health and socio-economic systems across the world, including Africa. Governments face the dual challenge of containing the pandemic while responding to its devastating economic and social effects. As countries recover from the pandemic, they need to put in place several measures to ensure sustainable economic recovery and building the resilience of households against future exogenous shocks. Africa needs also scale-up resources to recover from the pandemic, build forward better and regain momentum towards the achievement of the SDGs. Public financing is not at sufficient scale to achieve this objective, hence the need to leverage private funding to achieve the development financing needs of the continent.

(ii)SDG4

- Overall, the proportion of out-of-school children has declined over the past 10 years; completion rates have risen in primary and lower secondary education; and access to and participation in technical and vocational education and training have been improved, as has access to pre-primary education, adult literacy classes and lifelong learning.
- Since 2015, with the growing recognition of the role played by early childhood education in school readiness, several countries in Africa have expanded access to such education, through different approaches.
- Progress in school enrolment notwithstanding, the number of out-of-school children in Africa remains substantial. As of 2019, some 100 million children of primary and secondary school age remain out of school on the continent.
- There is low rate of enrolment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In 2019, there were only about 10 million adolescents and young people enrolled in technical and vocational secondary education – a ratio of 762 learners per 100,000 inhabitants, compared to a global average of 801 learners per 100,000 inhabitants.
- The number of children completing basic education that can read and write and have basic proficiency in mathematics remains very low in Africa.
- Countries in Africa face a severe shortage of teachers that is not fully reflected in the average ratio of pupils to teachers on the continent. Moreover, various studies, have shown that, in several African countries, both the administrative and pedagogical management of teachers suffers from serious shortcomings.
- Despite the best efforts by governments across Africa to reach children through remote learning in the context of COVID-19-necessitated restrictions, one out of two pupils, from pre-primary to upper secondary level, could not be reached.
- Education in Africa is constrained by limited financing for education; huge gap in access to and capacity to use digital resources; and lack up-to-date data on education, covering such areas as enrolment, retention, learning assessment, teacher profiles, expenditure, learning impact and others.

(iii)SDG5

- Most Governments in Africa have invested in strengthening or creating independent national institutions for the protection and promotion of women's rights in addition to reviewing national laws, policies and practices in accordance with international human rights law
- African Governments have made considerable progress in adopting legislation, policies and other measures to combat violence against women. However, 45.6 per cent of women in Africa have experienced physical and/or sexual violence
- Successful efforts have been made by African countries in increasing the participation and representation of women in decision-making structures.
- African women continue to play a significant role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including as frontline health-care workers, caregivers at home and community leaders and mobilizers

- Digital technologies are providing women with independent access to predictable income streams and greater control over how money; providing women with information that opens up important economic opportunities; and being leveraged to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.
- Africa has made progress in strengthening the evidence base and raising awareness in respect of the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to environmental degradation and disasters

(iv)SDG14

- African countries have signed or ratified international legal and regulatory frameworks to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.
- Plastic waste, including micro and nano-sized fibres continue to increase in the region and are expected to expand very significantly from 2010 to 2025. To address this challenge, countries have started introducing legislative or tax measures to ban or curb the use of plastics and the generation of plastic waste. Notable such legislative measures include the ban on all single-use plastic bags.
- Eutrophication is quite significant in certain parts of Africa, including in the Gulf of Guinea and along the southern coast of South Africa.
- Ocean acidification is increasing fast. Several African and international organizations have been strengthening their monitoring capacities and governance responses. For example, the OA-Africa Regional Network, was launched in 2015 as a regional hub for scientists in Africa working on ocean acidification to inform policy and adaptive strategies.
- Cross-border collaboration in the sustainable use of marine resources remain s limited.
- Climate change remains the major factor counteracting progress towards Goal 14, with rising ocean acidification, warming, circulation currents and frequent flooding.
- Significant technical and financial support is needed to improve the enforcement of laws and regulations and to scale up the existing plans and actions to manage plastic waste.

(v)SDG15

- In general, the trend is for forest areas to be negative, with a loss rate either stable or increasing for all subregions in Africa. Overall, the proportion of forest area in Africa declined by 2.5 percentage points, to 21.3 per cent, over the period 2000–2020; and the rate of forest loss is higher than the global average (0.6 per cent, compared to 0.12 per cent).
- Many African countries have pledged to restore their forest landscape under the Bonn Challenge of 2011 and AFR100 initiative. As of December 2021, 32 African countries had committed themselves to restoring 128 million hectares, surpassing the target of 100 million set under the Initiative.
- While there is variation among subregions, overall, in Africa there is a positive trend towards increase in the proportion of forest area within legally established protected areas, forests under long-term management plans and certified forest area.
- As of December 2021, 52 African countries were among the 120 countries worldwide that were setting land degradation neutrality targets with support of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.
- 11 countries in the Sahel region are receiving support in their efforts to restore degraded land through the African Union Commission-led Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, aimed at strengthening the resilience of the region’s people and ecosystems
- The average proportion of mountain key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas in Africa has increased notably between 2000 and 2020.
- A number of species in Africa are likely to become extinct. On the Red List Index for sub-Saharan Africa, the subregion’s score dropped from 0.79 in 2000 to 0.72 in 2021.

- New data suggest that Africa is making progress towards introducing measures to prevent alien species invasion. More than 50 per cent of sub-Saharan African countries have received global funding in this regard
- Most African countries have developed, revised and embarked on implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans aligned with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020
- Under the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, a total of 128 countries, 33 of them from Africa, have pledged more than \$20 billion of public and private funds to reverse forest loss by 2030.
- The main challenges in delivering on SDG 15 are: the huge financing gap; debt constraints have restricted spending on nature in many poor African countries (poorer countries, most of them in Africa, spend five times as much on debt repayments as they do on climate action; reducing or redirecting \$500 billion per year, currently provided in such forms as incentives and subsidies that support intensive agriculture, forestry and fishing, thereby causing harm to nature; address the lack of quality data and statistics on biodiversity, forests and land resources; inadequate integration of nature into development frameworks; and shortcomings of land resource tenure regimes, whereby most women neither own nor have control over land resources.

(vi) SDG17

- To respond to the pandemic, most African governments increased their expenditures to boost the capacity of their health-care systems, purchase medical equipment and raise salaries for health personnel.
- According to preliminary figures for 2020, ODA to Africa rose by 4.1 per cent in real terms to \$39 billion, somewhat cushioning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In 2020, all other major external financing flows for developing countries, such as tax revenues, trade, FDI and remittance flows, fell because of the pandemic.
- Technology contributed significantly to the shaping of efforts by governments to curb the spread of COVID-19. Technology and innovative apps are helping to build social resilience during lockdowns and restrictive measures, to keep the world and families connected during the pandemic.
- African trade has been affected in line with the global trend observed during the COVID-19 pandemic mainly because of the disruption of supply chains.
- With the AfCFTA, intra-African trade in 2045¹¹ is projected to rise by 35 per cent, boosting competitiveness to support further industrialization and economic transformation
- COVID-19 had a negative impact on the 2020 round of the censuses, causing postponement in many countries. To date, 11 countries have already participated in this 2020 round while a further 40 are planning to hold their population censuses in the coming years.
- One of the key lessons drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic is the need to make development plans resilient and inclusive.

B. Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "leaving no one behind" against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body:

- The pandemic pushed an additional 55 million into poverty thereby reversing the gains made towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Productive jobs are critical to lifting the 431 million people in Africa out of extreme poverty and protecting those at risk of falling into poverty.
- Africa has the widest digital gender gap in the world with only 22.5 per cent of women using the Internet, compared with 33.8 per cent of men. ECA youth programme called African Girls Can Code offers girls and young women the opportunity to access foundational knowledge, digital tools and platforms to enable

them become innovators, entrepreneurs and tech leaders who develop creative solutions to problems in their communities, while contributing to the SDGs.

- Investment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is missing. As such, there are inadequate skills and infrastructure in Africa to transform raw material into final products for export. This undermines youth employment in the region
- Young girls from the poorest communities, children with disabilities and children on the move experience particular difficulties in achieving their right to learning. They face a high risk of being left even further behind, as countries struggle to maintain the resources allocated to education.
- Children from marginalized communities, refugee children and children with disabilities have been particularly targeted in many countries, in an endeavour to ensure that education services are adapted to different needs, including the equitable distribution of resources. As of 2020, more than half of the countries in Africa have been pursuing inclusive education policies with a focus on children with disabilities.
- While overall gender inequality in school attendance has declined sharply and, on average, has almost been eliminated for children of lower secondary school age or younger, such inequality, when skewed to wealth and residence, is still prevalent.
- The principle of non-discrimination is protected in 89 per cent of countries in Southern Africa, 73 per cent in East Africa, 71 per cent in North Africa, and 43 per cent in Central Africa.
- African countries must take effective action to increase value added and create decent jobs for the 170 million African young people set to enter the job market between 2019 and 2030, and also ensure resilience to future shocks.

C. *Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review:*

(i) SDG4:

- It is crucial to foster climate change education; build flexible and resilient education and training systems to withstand future pandemics; implement a digital transformation policy and agenda; and strengthen partnerships for education

(ii) SDG5:

- On SDG 5: Gender-sensitive data and statistics are essential for policy analysis and advocacy to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063; and Multisectoral and multi-level partnerships should be strengthened to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

(iii) SDG14:

- Strengthen the institutional capacities of at various levels to enforce laws and regulations and efficiently to govern the use of marine resources.
- Build a Great Blue Wall to facilitate the regional integration of those coastal and marine management plans.
- Strengthen regional and international partnership, including in the surveillance of illegal and criminal activities.
- Open new opportunities for gender-sensitive and inclusive blue entrepreneurship, innovation, finance and value chains.

(iv) SDG 15:

- Countries that have signed up in September 2021 to undertaking urgent actions over the next ten years to put nature and biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030 as part UN Decade of action and delivery for sustainable development should fulfil their commitments.

- Scaleup targeted green investments that have been shown to create the largest multiplier effects, such as an increase in gross value added, more new jobs and a better recovery from the COVID-19 crisis;
- Fully operationalise the Congo Basin Blue Fund.
- Support African countries to leverage the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility; and develop green value chains through ACFTA to promote the sustainable exploitation of forests and biodiversity and the development of ecosystem-friendly agriculture and industrial development in the region.

(v) **SDG17:**

- Use the twenty seventh Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to demand that the developed countries provide at least the annual amount of \$100 billion that they freely pledged to the developing countries for climate action including nature based interventions for the conservation and sustainable management of marine resources, biodiversity, forests and land.

D. *Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda:*

- Address the global vaccine inequity. In this regard it is important to strengthen global, regional and national mechanisms to improve access to COVID-19 vaccines and other material for responding the pandemic.
- Invest in the development of local manufacturing capacity and form partnerships with international producers of vaccines;
- Support and strengthen regional flagship initiatives such as the African Vaccine Acquisition Trust, African Medical Supply Platform and Africa African Business Forum to promote coordinated efforts for access to vaccines, and other medical support and strengthen dialogue and synergies between the African private and public sectors regional priorities and efforts to achieve Agenda 2063, The Africa We Want, of the African Union and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Enhance investments in reliable infrastructure including digital infrastructure to foster inclusive development and building resilience.
- Strengthen regional trade by leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area to boost manufacturing and trade to tackle poverty and inequality and expand the pharmaceutical production and distribution capacity in the region.
- The private sector should sustainably harness green and blue economy strategies and climate-resilient industrialization, recognizing in that process the rapid growth and increasing integration of new and emerging technologies, such as digital technologies, nanotechnologies, biotechnologies and advanced materials, that underpin the fourth industrial revolution.
- African Governments need to invest in creating fully functional legal identity systems, with a foundation and to provide citizens with special probatory instruments that enable them to prove, with unquestionable certainty, the facts relating to a person's existence, identity, and personal and family situation;

E. *Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF:*

(i) **SDG 4**

- It is important to focus on building school inclusion and reduction of the number of schools' dropouts: and strengthen foundational learning from an early stage to raise knowledge and skill levels
- Invest in developing more resilient education systems and prioritize digital connectivity and capacities to achieve learning for all and skills development
- Develop efficient and innovative education and training funding mechanisms
- Invest in improving the production and synergies between education information management systems and labour market data

(ii) SDG 5

- Institutional arrangements, including national gender machinery, need to be strengthened to enhance national ownership and responsibility for effective implementation, monitoring and accountability of programmes to achieve the gender-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in all sectors and at all levels of Government.
- Prioritizing development and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programmes that are aligned specifically with the principles of Goal 5 and more broadly with the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 is critical to addressing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.
- Financing gender equality and women's empowerment in the 2030 Agenda will enable the inclusive and sustainable realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the aspirations of Agenda 2063.
- Strengthening the evidence for gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda will contribute to improved gender data, statistics and analysis to effectively monitor progress for women and girls across all goals and targets.
- Broad-based, inclusive, strengthened and coordinated partnerships are needed as key drivers for sustainable development and the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

(iii) SDG 14:

- Increase the share of the disbursed amounts that are allocated to the implementation of national plans on coastal adaptation and resilience, including the processes of acidification and eutrophication, and on the social and economic development of ocean-dependent communities, primarily in small island developing States and least developed countries.
- Capacity should be strengthened for countries to mobilize on fair and reasonable conditions the necessary sustainable finance and other intangible assets and to make efficient use of such finance to translate commitment on blue economy and sustainable development of marine resources into transformative actions and results.
- Strengthen collaboration with the private sector to provide technical and policy guidance to African countries to build vibrant blue economies based on renewed and efficient government models, guided by the Sustainable Development Goals
- Promote: the competitive and efficient markets aligned with the African Continental Free Trade Area rules that attract private and public investment, including venture capitalists and institutional investors; cross - border production-sharing, innovation, blue value chains, entrepreneurship among youth and women, including small-scale fishers, and other processes;
- Mobilize resources both internally and externally to increase gross domestic expenditure on research and development to at least the target of 1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) recommended by the African Union.
- Raise the share of expenditure devoted to marine science and technology, with a view to ensuring use of the rich and untapped Africa's indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage

(iv) SDG 15

- Governments and businesses need substantially to increase investment in efforts to combat land degradation and enhance the productivity and stability of diverse land, forests and biodiversity resources in Africa. And given the huge financing needs for nature and existing gaps in such financing, governments and their partners need to strengthen their capacity to mobilize funding by exploring new and innovate sources such the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, debt swaps for biodiversity and sustainability; and green and blue bonds.
- Governments and their partners should ramp up efforts to strengthen the integration of natural capital, nature-based solutions, and climate-friendly agriculture in voluntary national reviews and voluntary

subnational reviews, in plans and programmes, and in budgets to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063.

- African governments and their partners should adopt and implement green strategies and spending plans for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Systems following the One Health approach are needed and should be strengthened in national governments.
- Governments, the private sector and their partners need to ensure full implementation of Nairobi Declaration adopted at the seventh High-Level Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction in November 2021, to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 15 and the outcome, goal and targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- It is crucial to strengthen land rights, tenure systems and access to forest and biodiversity resources and participative decision-making in the management of those resources, in particular for women, indigenous people and local communities.

(v) **SDG 17:**

- Member states and their partners should strengthen capacity for early warning, risk reduction and the management of national and global health risks;
- Member States need to urgently innovate, modernize and transform their national statistical systems, thereby augmenting their resilience to possible future shocks and facilitating the production of data and preparation of reports on the development agendas.
- It is crucial to address high levels of debt among African countries.
- The African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) offers a major opportunity for African countries to cushion the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and is a vehicle for continued recovery to boost growth, reduce poverty, and broaden economic inclusion
- African governments need to expand the tax base by tackling illicit financial flows and reducing the mounting debt burden to overcome the challenges of COVID-19.
- African economies are increasingly feeling the crunch of the pandemic on public finances. The unprecedented issuance of \$650 billion equivalent SDRs presents a unique opportunity to improve the fiscal buffers in most countries. Some of the SDR should be on-lent to low and vulnerable middle-income countries to support, among other priorities, access to vaccines
- It is important to fulfil previous promises of mobilising the USD 100 billion per year for climate action
- Africa calls for more financial innovations to facilitate access to critical resources needed to invest in strengthening green and inclusive trade and a green recovery. This includes supporting African countries' ability to issue green and blue bonds.
- Green and blue investments opportunities offer Africa opportunities for economic recovery and creating an enabling environment for job creation and the realization of sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the achievement of the Paris Agreements targets.
- Member States and their partners should strengthen capacity to develop clear policies on emerging bioscientific, digital, renewable energy and advance material (nano) technologies to build the sound scientific, technological and industrial base needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030;