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Summary of the work of the Economic Commission for Africa, 2020–2021

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith a summary of the work of the Economic Commission for Africa for the period 2020–2021.



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[Original: Arabic, English and French]

Summary

In the period from April 2020 to March 2021, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) achieved significant milestones in various areas of its work within the context of the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. The present report summarizes notable achievements from that period that demonstrate the Commission's three core functions in action, including evidence-based and context-aware analytical products in support of member States' response to and recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; global advocacy for additional liquidity for the continent; sustained efforts to operationalize the African Continental Free Trade Area; promotion of private sector investment in infrastructure, energy and agriculture; digitalization and the establishment of knowledge hubs and online policy dialogue platforms; the negotiation of mechanisms to alleviate debt-servicing pressure and develop a long-term continental strategy on building forward better; and the delivery of tailored capacity-development programmes for African public officials in policy formulation and implementation. The report also presents highlights of the work of the Commission in mobilizing the means required to implement the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the innovative and value-adding partnerships that it pursued to realize its programme objectives.

I. Introduction

1. The reporting period was marked by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and recession worldwide. The Africa region was faced with disastrous impacts of the pandemic on employment, investment, spending on health care and revenue collection, which were threatening to erase years of development gains. The pandemic has hit hard the continent's most vulnerable countries, groups and communities, pushing millions of vulnerable people below the poverty line and undermining efforts to make the transition from response to recovery.

2. Against this backdrop, the work of the Commission was guided by its five strategic directions, formulated in 2018 in close consultation and dialogue with its member States and key partners. The Commission's work leveraged its core functions of undertaking cutting-edge policy research to call the attention of policymakers to accelerated actions and transformative pathways, convening intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder platforms on the follow-up and review of norms, standards and regional actions; and providing tailored technical assistance, policy advice and capacity-building services. During the reporting period, the ECA work programme was repurposed to respond to emerging priorities of the region, in particular to the threefold crisis facing African countries – a pandemic-induced health crisis, an economic crisis and a climate crisis – and fostering regional action for building forward better.

3. ECA has played an instrumental role in addressing the most pressing challenges confronting African countries resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent contraction of African economies, building on and scaling up previous initiatives in line with the African Union-United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

4. The Commission provided effective support to member States in various areas within the context of the United Nations decade of action and delivery on the Sustainable Development Goals. Notable examples at the continental level include the following:

(a) Timely and ground-breaking analytical work on the social and economic impact of COVID-19 with recommendations informing policy decisions by member States on emergency response and recovery efforts;

(b) Advocacy of coordinated global action in support of the African continent, including the initiation of the debt service suspension initiative, working closely with African finance ministers, for its adoption by the Group of 20;

(c) Support for the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the start of trading;

(d) Development of national competitiveness strategies;

(e) Support in the development of an African green recovery and investment strategy and the updating of the African Strategy on Climate Change, in partnership with the African Union;

(f) Training of some 360 African policymakers on tools to design strategies and policies to harness the economic potential of African cities and rapid urban growth;

(g) Establishment in collaboration with regional United Nations entities of a regional knowledge hub on COVID-19;

(h) Organization of a successful continental coding boot camp, attended by some 2,000 young girls and women, which was held to promote the importance of information and communications technology as a tool for the empowerment of women;

(i) Development of a dashboard to assess the progress of member States and their designated airlines in implementing the initiative on a single African air transport market.

5. At the subregional level, significant milestones of ECA work include its support for the launch of a process to design an all-encompassing Central Africa industrialization and economic diversification master plan, in line with the Douala Consensus; and the updating of the ECA 2019 prospective study on the Sahel,¹ the findings of which aim to build a peaceful, prosperous and resilient region and which will be integrated into the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and in country-level planning tools.

6. The Commission has played a key role in the establishment and launch in December 2020 of the Africa Regional Collaborative Platform, which is already transforming inter-agency cooperation and collaboration among regional United Nations entities to ensure effective delivery at country level. The work of the Platform, undertaken through seven opportunity and issue-based coalitions whose strategic and thematic focus is fully aligned with priority areas of the African Union, is paving the way for the optimal deployment of United Nations regional assets in support of the United Nations resident coordinator system and member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

7. The present report sets out a summary of the work carried out by ECA in the past year in close collaboration with Governments, regional economic communities, the United Nations development system and other stakeholders in the region and beyond towards achieving sustainable development for all.

II. Advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region

A. Supporting the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area alongside private sector and infrastructure development, and innovative financing for a prosperous Africa

8. Operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area – together with innovative financing and the development of the private sector and infrastructure – is expected to contribute to the acceleration of socioeconomic recovery in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era and attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa, through the identification of opportunities and design of operational frameworks and mechanisms aimed at translating these opportunities into job creation, increased investments and improved industrialization, in fulfilment of the continent's development aspirations. Furthermore, ECA has pursued its efforts to operationalize the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024 through the further integration of regional value chains in national and subregional trade policies.

9. ECA has played an instrumental role in speeding up ratification by African countries of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. Following the most recent ratification, by Zambia, the Agreement has now been ratified by 36 member States representing almost three fourths of the continent's gross domestic product (GDP). This endeavour paved the way for the start of the operational implementation of the Agreement on 1 January 2021, a historical milestone and major achievement, given the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The African Continental Free Trade Area constitutes a market of 2.3 trillion United States dollars

¹ Economic Commission for Africa, *Sahel 2043: Towards a Resilient, Inclusive and Prosperous Sahel Region* (Addis Ababa, 2019).

and 1.3 billion people. It has been made possible largely owing to the direct assistance provided by ECA to countries in formulating national strategies aimed at enabling them to harness the full benefits of the Area through the identification of comparative and competitive advantages, and also through key value addition and the creation of trade and investment opportunities to boost production capacities, manufacturing and intraregional trade.

10. Policy recommendations from the second edition of the Africa Regional Integration Index report produced by ECA, in collaboration with the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank, were taken on board during the formulation of national strategies for the African Continental Free Trade Area by 10 member States² in 2020. The recommendations were organized around five dimensions, namely, trade integration; productive integration; free movement of people; macroeconomic integration; and infrastructural integration. In addition, ECA provided technical assistance to these member States to produce and validate their African Continental Free Trade Area strategies and four of them – Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Sierra Leone and Togo – have started implementing their strategies.

11. The Gambia, Mauritania, Senegal and Sierra Leone have benefited from ECA support. In East Africa, African Continental Free Trade Area strategies have been developed for Burundi, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, and a regional strategy prepared for the East African Community, and efforts will be pursued in support of phase II of the African Continental Free Trade Area negotiations, including on investments, regional value chains, services, competition, movement of persons, the blue economy and tourism. Demographic dividends are another important component. In West Africa, ECA developed a public budgeting framework, mainstreaming demographic dynamics for Mali and building the capacity of 15 member States and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through national transfer account methodology.

12. The declaration of the period 2021–2030 as the Decade of Economic Diversification in Central Africa, and the launch of the Central African industrialization and economic diversification master plan, spearheaded by the Central African Economic and Monetary Community and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and building on the comparative advantages of the member States, are key milestones towards the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area in Central Africa. The master plan would enable the subregion to build forward better from the scourges of COVID-19, by producing, transforming, distributing and consuming manufactured goods which resonate with its own needs and preferences.

13. ECA is participating in the elaboration of the second phase of the priority action plan of the African Union-led Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (2021–2030), building on the lessons learned from the first phase of the plan, which had included more than 400 projects in 51 cross-border programmes, under implementation until the end of 2020, and taking into consideration a series of criteria, such as linkages to regional priorities, inclusivity and structural transformation. The priority action plan covers four key infrastructure sectors: transport; energy; information and communications technology; and transboundary water resources.

14. ECA participated with the other four regional economic commissions in a joint United Nations project on transport and trade connectivity in the time of pandemic. During the first phase, concluded at the end of 2020, ECA reviewed related challenges along the African trade and transport corridors and developed appropriate policy

² Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

recommendations. The second phase will focus on smart transport and trade facilitation solutions.

15. As part of its involvement in the Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021–2030), ECA has underscored the need for safer infrastructure, and carried out a road safety performance review for Ethiopia. This report, unveiled in January 2021, could be emulated by other countries in Africa registering a high number of road accident casualties. ECA has also contributed to the development of key performance indicators for implementing an Africa-wide single air transport market.

16. ECA has assisted Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Morocco, Rwanda, South Africa and Zambia in undertaking a regulatory review of their power sector value chains (generation, transmission, distribution and off-grid) in terms of openness (structure and governance), attractiveness (economics) and readiness (maturity). It is expected that related results will be used by the private sector to inform their investment decisions.

17. Operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area requires creative mechanisms to sustain long-term financing. In 2020, ECA focused its flagship Economic Report on Africa on the theme “Innovative finance for private sector development in Africa”, looking at new types of financing as a way to increase the private sector’s resilience to the effects of the global coronavirus pandemic. The report, launched in December 2020, examines the innovative financial instruments, practices and policies required to enable African countries to make a step change in growing businesses that will drive inclusive economic growth and create jobs and pathways to better livelihoods for African people.

18. In advocating on behalf of Africa at the global level, ECA played a critical role in pushing forward a plan, first, to extend the Debt Suspension Service Initiative, endorsed in April 2020 by the Group of 20 and the Paris Club following the outbreak of the COVID-19 economic crisis, until the end of 2021 or possibly the end of 2022; second, to secure more funding through special drawing rights; and, third, to set up a facility to help countries to meet short-term debt payments and to boost lending from development banks. In October 2020, the Group of 20 countries agreed to extend the Debt Suspension Service Initiative freeze on official bilateral debt payments to the first half of 2021, and committed themselves to considering a further six-month extension in April 2021. ECA also called for a fresh liquidity injection of 500 billion in special drawing rights (\$709 billion), which could deliver over \$150 billion in additional reserves to emerging-market economies, including \$20 billion directly to low-income countries.

19. In December 2020, ECA and the French Agency for Development signed a partnership agreement aimed at supporting African Governments in the implementation of the Debt Suspension Service Initiative. ECA will provide technical expertise to support African Governments in the evaluation of their needs under the initiative. The technical assistance will aim to support African countries in closing the \$345 billion financing gap needed to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and attaining a sustainable path for development.

B. Promoting the digital and data revolution in Africa as a foundation for post-pandemic recovery and reinvigorated growth

20. ECA undertook several pioneering activities in support of the African Union Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020–2030), which was developed in collaboration with a number of partners, also building on the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa to create a digital single market. ECA also helped Ethiopia in developing an inclusive digital strategy (Digital Ethiopia 2025 Strategy), endorsed at the highest level in June 2020.

21. African Governments need to seize the opportunities of the global digital economy, which is set to grow from \$11.5 trillion in 2016 to over \$23 trillion by 2025. In a bid to assess how countries are leveraging information technologies for future readiness, ECA and the Portulans Institute teamed up to launch, on 30 November 2020, a report on digital transformation in a post-COVID global economy.³ The report shows that digital innovation and entrepreneurship have increased in Africa, with more than 400 digital hubs in 93 cities, generating collectively more than \$1.1 billion. It also notes that the race to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic stimulated innovation and creativity across Africa. There are numerous challenges in the path of embracing digital technologies, however, including limited access to digital services, inadequate or restrictive policies, and lack of interoperability of platforms.

22. ECA consolidated significant advancements in the digital field within the framework of its Digital Centre for Excellence, in particular on the institution's digital initiative to support African countries in fully harnessing the opportunities of digital identity to facilitate the provision of legal identity for all Africans, and to leverage digital trade in the African Continental Free Trade Area.

23. The work on digital identity is also embedded within the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda (2020–2030), launched in support of member States, building holistic, country-owned, sustainable civil registration, vital statistics and identity managements. Against this backdrop, ECA has assisted Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, the Niger, Sierra Leone and Zambia – in collaboration with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Development Programme – in conducting assessments of their respective civil registration and vital statistics systems. Outcomes included policy and technical recommendations on the redesign of the registration systems; addressing the barriers faced by communities in gaining access to legal identities; building interoperable systems linking civil registration as the foundation to identity management; production of vital statistics reports; and establishment of national population registers. Kenya and Zambia are at an advanced stage of establishing their national population registers.

24. On 6 October 2020, ECA launched the Africa Data Leadership Initiative with Future State and Smart Africa (spearheading a knowledge economy through affordable access to broad band and use of information and communications technologies), creating safe spaces for policymakers, digital rights experts and entrepreneurs to learn together. The initiative is a peer network designed for and by African policymakers, consumer rights advocates and private sector stakeholders to ensure that the data economy drives equitable growth and social progress across the continent. Credible and accurate data are vital for the development of Africa, hence data protection is crucial and should start with the building of secure infrastructure.

25. ECA further promoted its integrated planning and reporting toolkit and macromodelling (with a special focus on assessing the macroeconomic impacts of COVID-19) to improve the alignment of member States' national development plans and planning processes with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and supported several countries in that process, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Namibia, Rwanda and Zambia.

26. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) initiated the conversion of traditional on-site capacity-building programmes and activities into digital learning events (a threefold progression from 2019), while broadening the level of inclusiveness with the increased participation of women.

³ Soumitra Dutta and Bruno Lanvin, eds., *The Network Readiness Index 2020: Accelerating Digital Transformation in a Post-COVID Global Economy* (Washington, D.C., Portulans Institute, 2020).

C. Building forward better for sustainable development, focusing on green recovery, mainstreaming of climate change and the blue economy

27. The Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development is an important milestone in the programme of work of ECA. It aims to advance integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, which are mutually reinforcing.

28. The sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development was held from 24 to 27 February 2020, in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, on the theme “2020–2030: a decade to deliver a transformed and prosperous Africa through the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”. The Forum attracted around 3,000 participants from all countries on the continent and took place right at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It called on all African countries urgently to revisit their frameworks for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, align their national development plans with the principles of the two agendas, and set in motion programmes and projects to deliver on those agendas.

29. The Forum reviewed progress and facilitated exchange of experience and lessons learned on voluntary national and local reviews. Member States were urged to focus on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level, through local governance structures; harness diaspora remittances in order to finance the social, health and educational needs of their citizens living in Africa; and adopt a results-based management approach combined with a monitoring and evaluation system in order to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Forum also adopted the continent’s inputs to the 2020 meeting of the high-level political forum to advance the implementation of the two agendas, notably the Victoria Falls Declaration on the United Nations Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development in Africa. During the sixth session, the Africa Regional Coordination Engagement Mechanism was formalized; this body will enhance the contributions of all key stakeholders to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region.

30. ECA also organized the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which was hosted by the Government of the Congo and held from 1 to 4 March 2021, in a hybrid online and face-to-face format, on the theme “Building forward better: towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063”. Taken together, in the wake of the pandemic and the economic and social devastation that it has wreaked, the themes of sixth and the seventh sessions acknowledge the importance of reconstructing the continent’s socioeconomic systems by leveraging opportunities presented by green and low-carbon development trajectories, with a view to building a resilient, inclusive and sustainable Africa. Current growth trajectories suggest, however, that many countries will fail to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by the 2030 deadline. If the goal of “leaving no one behind” is to be achieved, a whole-of-society approach is needed, together with concerted and ambitious efforts to transform the world during the 10-year window provided by the decade of action to deliver on the Goals.

31. Of the Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere), Goal 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture), Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), Goal 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all), Goal 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), Goal 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns), Goal 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), Goal 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective,

accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels) and Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) were the subject of technical papers and policy recommendations.

32. The nexus between the continuing process of climate change and health and economic crises was at the core of the discussions and was of particular importance for the discourse on “building forward better”. The pandemic has highlighted the crucial importance of nature to development, revealing the systemic nature of risk and the cascading impact of disasters across all three dimensions of sustainable development. For Africa, crucially, climate change poses an existential threat, jeopardizing the attainment of the continent’s development agenda. Every year, climate change typically costs African countries between 2 and 5 per cent of their GDP, but may sometimes reduce that GDP by as much as 15 per cent. Although African countries must now tackle the serious economic and health repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that climate action does not fall victim to the colossal economic damage wreaked by the COVID-19 crisis. On the margins of the Forum, the third Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation in Africa was held with the participation of a significant number of youth groups and individuals who showcased their state-of-the-art innovations.

33. In partnership with the African Union Commission, ECA has set out to update the Africa Climate Change Strategy (initially developed in 2014), through consultations with key stakeholders in the region. All parties to the Paris Agreement on climate change are expected to update and enhance their nationally determined contributions. In this regard, the capacity of member States to integrate coherent and cross-sectoral nationally determined contributions into their national development plans was enhanced through training on integrating climate actions across sectors into national development plans. ECA also produced a framework for the revision of nationally determined contributions and provided support for the training and capacity-building measures organized to this end.

34. ECA was very active in conducting e-learning on climate change-related issues. It formulated a course on climate information and services within the online curriculum of the Partnership, which has been completed by more than 100,000 learners from across the world (more than 50 per cent of whom are women).

35. ECA prepared a paper entitled “Climate change and development in Africa post-COVID-19: some critical reflections”, addressing the climate emergency and lessons from the COVID-19 and global warming crises, financing efforts to surmount the twin crises, the required energy transition, climate change perceptions, and whether COVID-19 lessons could benefit climate action. It also argued that a new political economy based on cohesion, equality and environmental sustainability was required to enable drastic climate actions.

36. ECA has also continued to push forward the agenda of science, technology and innovation in Africa in the context of green recovery. Nanotechnology research and development trends and market potential could directly and indirectly contribute to the development aspirations of Africa and its international obligations, in particular those in the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. Egypt is currently the top nanotechnology research country in Africa, while South Africa has filed the most patents and established the most nanotechnology companies and institutions. Overall, however, Africa is lagging behind on this front. ECA and its partners invited researchers, innovators and firms with unique nanotechnology-based or enabled products or research to showcase them during the week of 14–18 December 2020.

37. As a follow-up to the successful support provided to member States and intergovernmental organizations – including the Comoros, Seychelles, the Indian Ocean Commission and the African Union Commission – in developing strategic policy

frameworks, including action plans on harnessing the blue economy for sustainable development, using the methodology set out in the policy handbook for the African blue economy,⁴ ECA has embarked on the development of a blue economy valuation toolkit. For the first time, a prototype toolkit tested in different types of countries, such as Djibouti (coastal), Rwanda (landlocked) and Seychelles (island State), has been devised to help member States and regional groupings in conducting in-depth socioeconomic and ecological assessments towards measuring the weight and contributions of the blue economy. The blue economy is expected to play a major boosting role in the socioeconomic and environmental post-COVID-19 recovery in many African countries.

38. In their quest to help strengthen the weak land governance and insecure land rights issues of Africa, which remain major development challenges for the continent, technical experts met online on 21 September 2020, to discuss these concerns and plan ahead on what was needed to achieve the African Union agenda on land. The ECA African Land Policy Centre also facilitated a training session held in Lilongwe on 22 and 23 December 2020, under the theme “Strengthening women’s land tenure security and entrepreneurship in line with the African Union agenda on land”.

39. With a view to articulating strategic priorities for a gender-responsive crisis management and response, in May 2020 ECA convened a webinar on the theme “COVID-19 responses and recovery: a gendered framework”. The webinar was organized in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), under the auspices of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. The aim of the event was to deliberate on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on African women and girls, with the objective of identifying priorities for short-term response and a long-term gender transformative recovery framework. As part of the regional 25-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, ECA also worked with countries to accelerate the implementation of policies and programmes for the empowerment of women and girls and gender equality in Africa. ECA is addressing climate change as a cross-cutting theme in all its programmes.

III. Strengthening the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda

A. Data and statistics

40. Recognizing the critical value of reliable and timely statistics for evidence-based decision-making, in August 2020 ECA launched the Price Watch Centre for Africa, a first-of-its-kind continental tool that offers a unique view of price variations in African countries, regional economic communities and at the continental level. The portal provides updated consumer price index and inflation data for countries and regional economic communities and helps to monitor, analyse and manage economies through informed policy decisions. The platform gathers together the prices and exchange rates of all African countries and will generate monthly, quarterly and annual analyses of inflation. It will also enable a better understanding of macroeconomic convergence or divergence based on timely and reliable data on prices and movements of goods and services.

41. To strengthen integrated civil registration and legal identity management in member States, ECA provided technical assistance on a holistic approach to registration using the life-cycle approach in 10 United Nations Legal Identity Agenda countries: Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya,

⁴ Economic Commission for Africa, *Africa’s Blue Economy: A Policy Handbook* (Addis Ababa, 2016).

Liberia, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Zambia. ECA also developed a framework for the improvement of the civil registration and vital statistics system, which is being applied in Angola, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Lesotho and Malawi, and supported the development of the civil registration and vital statistics legal framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia.

42. Following measures to build the capacity of 30 officials of ECOWAS countries in the development of holistic, interoperable and sustainable civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems, reforms of civil registration and vital statistics systems were undertaken in ECOWAS countries, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, the Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone, accelerating progress in the attainment of target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

43. Integrated civil registration and vital statistics and identity management systems which ensure legal identity from birth to death were also being developed in four countries, namely, Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone. With ECA technical support, the United Nations Legal Identity Initiative was successfully rolled out in the Niger through an action plan agreed upon between the Government and its partners.

B. Finance

44. ECA has been advocating the new issuance and reallocation of special drawing rights that will provide low-income and middle-income African countries with liquidity to respond adequately to the health and economic crisis triggered by the pandemic. The Commission's advocacy efforts were backed up by the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development at its fifty-third session in March 2021. Group of 20 finance ministers and central bank governors also reaffirmed the call for the International Monetary Fund to make a proposal for a new allocation of between \$500 billion and \$650 billion in special drawing rights. This is expected to provide much needed liquidity and investment financing for African countries – low-income and middle-income countries in particular – and to enable a sustainable post-COVID recovery.

45. The Sustainable Development Goal 7 initiative for Africa, launched by ECA in 2019, continued to explore and develop innovative approaches to the leveraging of limited public resources and mobilization of private sector investments with the aim of building resilience to climate change and spurring carbon neutral development through investments in clean energy and green infrastructure. In this context, in 2020 ECA undertook reviews of the energy sector's regulatory environment in 10 countries. This laid a strong foundation for private sector investment in those countries and contributed to the identification of projects in which the private sector could invest. During 2020, ECA supported, through the initiative, project preparation for enhanced bankability, technical and regulatory support for countries, including capacity development (regulators, utilities and project sponsors); and a bankable pipeline of 10,000 MW of clean energy projects to be deployed over five years.

46. ECA provided technical assistance to two member States to enhance their capacity on deepening domestic bond markets and mobilizing domestic capital to finance sustainable development. In Angola, ECA collaborated closely with the Ministry of Finance to oversee Angolan domestic debt performance and the management of that debt. ECA also engaged with the South African National Treasury (Domestic Debt Office) to develop a peer-to-peer learning programme for the benefit of a delegation from the Angolan Ministry of Finance (Debt Management Unit), which aimed to learn from the South African experience in developing a deeper and

more liquid domestic currency bond market. For Senegal, ECA engaged with Bloomfield International Cooperation, a regional credit rating agency, to develop an awareness programme on such issues as local currency credit rating assessment, the benefit of credit rating in the process of mobilizing financial resources, and the adoption of innovative solutions for crowding in domestic and foreign investors.

47. In partnership with the African Export Import Bank (Afreximbank), ECA is implementing a trade finance initiative in response to COVID-19, styled the ECA-Afreximbank Pandemic Trade Impact Mitigation Facility. The facility aims to provide finance for the supply of agricultural inputs in Ethiopia and Guinea. The Bank has approved a \$14 million financing facility for Afriland First Bank in Guinea to support the import of strategic agricultural inputs for that country's Chamber of Agriculture. A fast-track documentation process is being carried out for the facility and terms of the letters of credit have been reviewed and agreed upon. In addition, six African airlines are currently in direct contact with Afreximbank to negotiate access to the bank's facility to ease their liquidity crisis.

C. Capacity-building

48. In building the capacities of government ministries and regional economic communities across the continent to formulate and manage effective public sector policies, ECA maintained its partnership with the University of Johannesburg in running the fifth round of the masters programme on industrial policies. In partnership with Turku University in Finland, ECA conducted a joint online programme for African government officials on building African entrepreneurial universities in the context of responsible innovations and sustainable development, which drew content from the ECA framework on building forward together: financing a sustainable recovery for the future of all.

49. In supporting the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 through capacity-building programmes, ECA trained 2,033 policymakers and government officials from 47 countries. Some 80 per cent of these trainees attested to have made use, with tangible evidence, of the knowledge, skills and tools that they had gained from this training in influencing socioeconomic policy in their respective countries.

50. To strengthen the knowledge and skills of local governments to conduct voluntary local reviews, ECA provided support to five localities: Accra, Yaoundé, Harare, Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and the Ngora district of Uganda. This technical support was provided through workshops on voluntary local review methods and approaches; the facilitation of regional and global peer learning and exchange among local governments; coordination and alignment with voluntary national review processes, and technical inputs to the voluntary local review preparatory processes. During the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in March 2020, localities imparted their lessons learned and good practices to a wider audience and these informed further dialogue on the local dimension of monitoring progress on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. As a result, member States, in the Victoria Falls Declaration, the principal outcome of the Forum, underlined the vital role of local governments and voluntary local reviews as critical instruments in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 and requested ECA to scale up its support to localities in Africa, including through the development of regional guidelines and a mechanism for peer review.

D. Science, technology and innovation

51. The second African Regional Science, Technology and Innovation Forum was held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, on 24 and 25 February 2020 and attracted over 800 participants from the public and private sectors. The Forum launched the first Science, Technology and Innovation Forum youth boot camp, attended by some 200 young people, and set up an African research and innovation advisory group on science, technology and innovation. In the area of information and communications technology (ICT), ECA and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) organized a hybrid ICT girls' coding camp, as part of the "United Nations at 75" celebrations, at which more than 3,000 girls from 51 countries across the continent participated. The three-week event empowered girls with technical and entrepreneurial skills in ICT. Efforts to advance entrepreneurial universities commenced with the training of university staff and the first set of countries engaged in this initiative comprised Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa.

IV. Spotlight on ECA integrated support to the response, recovery and post-COVID-19 reset of African economies

52. Since March 2020, ECA has been at the forefront of the continental response to the COVID-19 pandemic, undertaking analytical studies on the impact of COVID-19, convening online meetings of African ministers of finance to build consensus on the policy response and advocating such actions as debt standstill, economic stimulus and protection measures for the private sector. The Commission's work was guided by its strategy for an integrated response to COVID-19 anchored on its continuing work, leveraging its evidence-based policy research, multidimensional policy support and multi-stakeholder platforms. Notable initiatives and achievements of the Commission include the following:

(a) ECA conducted analytical work on the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on Africa, including subregional studies, and provided recommendations to guide policy actions by member States, encompassing emergency response, lockdown exit strategies and economic recovery plans, as demonstrated by the readjustment of national development plans. The reports on this work have made it possible for countries to learn from the experiences and policy responses of their peers;⁵

(b) ECA led global and continental advocacy efforts to mobilize both financial and technical resources to make temporary suspension of debt-service payments a reality. A case in point is the Group of 20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative, which was extended to the end of 2021 and from which 24 African countries have benefited, resulting in savings of some \$5 billion for the continent;

(c) ECA created and launched, in collaboration with the United Nations development system at the regional level, the African United Nations knowledge management hub on COVID-19 (available at <https://knowledge.uneca.org/covid19>). The hub is a digital one-stop-shop for information and knowledge resources on the pandemic in Africa, and for strategies and responses by the United Nations development system and development partners at continental, subregional and national levels, to strengthen the capacities of member States to respond effectively to the pandemic;

(d) ECA played a catalytic role in the conceptualization of the Africa Medical Supplies Platform, under the leadership of the African Union, a unique facility designed to facilitate the procurement of cost-effective strategic and certified medical

⁵ For a complete list of ECA publications on COVID-19, see www.uneca.org/eca-covid-19-response/publications.

equipment required to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. The online marketplace streamlined the supply chain for medical supplies, reduced fragmented purchasing and helped countries to achieve economies of scale by providing vetted medical suppliers to ensure rapid access to affordable COVID-19-related supplies. A total of 149 buyers have been engaged since its launch and 198 shipments have departed. At the time of reporting, orders in the pipeline exceeded \$200 million in global market value;

(e) The African communication and information platform for economic and health action, a first-of-its-kind mobile-based tool for two-way information and communication between citizens and governments, was developed and launched. By making available user-generated survey data and insights, the platform enabled authorities to better analyse pandemic-related problems and implement appropriate policy responses. The platform has the potential to cover more than 80 per cent of African mobile telephony subscribers;

(f) ECA also contributed to the adoption by the African Union ministers of transport of a declaration outlining COVID-19 recovery actions for the aviation industry and calling for tangible recovery measures and actions to improve the liquidity of African airlines. These measures included the mobilization of \$25 billion, mainly from the private sector;

(g) To bolster member States' efforts to forge a way out of the crisis by transforming existing liquidity instruments and easing market access to alleviate the debt burden and provide much needed liquidity for the continent, ECA worked in partnership with the Pacific Investment Management Company, LLC (PIMCO), an asset management corporation, to set up in March 2021 a liquidity and sustainability facility as a vehicle for debt management and fiscal sustainability. The facility is aimed at lowering governments' borrowing costs by increasing the demand for their sovereign bonds. It also makes it possible for existing sovereign bond holders to post such instruments as collateral for low-interest loans financed in part by a new issuance of special drawing rights. The resources mobilized through such repurchase agreements will then be used to finance investments in emerging market sovereigns. The facility was set up in such a manner to ensure that its governance was aligned with the public good mission and that it adhered to the highest standards of transparency. It is estimated that the facility could save African issuers \$11 billion in interest costs over a five-year period.

V. Leveraging partnerships for sustainable development

53. Notwithstanding constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission continued to leverage a number of mutually beneficial partnerships – extending the quality, impact and reach of its regional, subregional and country-level interventions, as evidenced below.

54. Furthermore, innovative partnerships with a wide range of national, regional and global stakeholders remain of vital importance for the implementation of the ECA programme of work. Over the course of 2020, ECA signed a number of framework agreements with a wide range of partners. These included the following:

(a) Omidyar Network, to collaborate with the ECA Digital Centre for Excellence to provide support to member countries in fully harnessing the benefits of digitalization for the continent's development;

(b) United Nations Development Programme, to cooperate in the operational aspects of the joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund in two main areas: first, integrated policy support to advance the Gabonese programme for the Sustainable Development Goals and the project entitled: "Gabon and the Sustainable

Development Goals beyond oil: financing a rapid and sustainable transition from a brown to a green economy”; and, second, integrated policy support to advance the Beninese Sustainable Development Goals programme to support the Goals-based budgeting of Benin through fiscal space and efficiency enhancement;

(c) United Nations Road Safety Fund, which provided support to the Tanzanian project entitled “Ten-step plan for safer road infrastructure”;

(d) Open Society Foundation, to support ECA research and analysis for a project on debt standstill for vulnerable communities in Africa;

(e) Government of Denmark, to cooperate in the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area;

(f) MasterCard Foundation, to make Africa a global pole for technological innovation and entrepreneurship consistent with continental ambitions.

55. In the area of trade and regional integration, ECA worked in partnership with the University of Ibadan on the formulation of a vision document for the African Cotton and Textile Industry Federation, given that the clothing and textile supply chain is a strategic sector that can contribute to the post-COVID-19 recovery. Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius and South Africa have stepped up the production of personal protective apparel and aim to become self-sufficient in that regard in the near future. More broadly, the COVID-19 crisis has generated an opportunity for the scaling up of African production in the sector as a whole, as important markets seek to diversify their sourcing, which is currently over-dependent on China. The sector is repeatedly identified in national strategies for the operationalization of the African Continental Free Trade Area prepared with ECA technical assistance as critical for regional value chain development and a pathway for better integration into world markets.

56. ECA also built partnerships on modelling and forecasting with institutions such as the Policy Studies Institute of Ethiopia and the University of Namibia, thanks to which its modelling work has strengthened evidence-based policymaking by providing quantitative estimates of policy impacts and of the impacts of external shock such as the pandemic.

57. In addition to the capacity-building measures described in paragraph 49 above, in the area of knowledge generation, ECA collaborated with the Centre for Transport and Logistics of the University of Rome, to carry out a joint study on transport and the African Continental Free Trade Area, to determine the requirements for transport infrastructure and services to meet the ambitions of that initiative. In supporting investment climate reforms in the energy sector, in particular to attract private sector investment, ECA joined hands with the Italian initiative Renewable Energy Solutions for the Mediterranean and Africa (RES4Africa), to develop a tool for assessing the effectiveness of regulatory regimes to attract private sector participation in the power sector of Africa. The regulatory tool, which was implemented in 10 African countries, identified weaknesses in regulations in the electricity transmission and distribution and off-grid systems in those countries.

58. In partnership with the multinational corporation Pfizer Inc. and the London School of Economics, ECA launched a project to assess the economic impact of infectious diseases in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania and to conduct high-level policy dialogues on measures to reduce health costs and improve labour productivity.

59. ECA continued its partnerships with the African Academy of Sciences on the climate research for development initiative, with a view to strengthening capacity for climate research through the provision of grants to universities for linking climate

research to development; and with the Institute for Natural Resources in Africa of the United Nations University on climate change and stranded assets.

VI. Conclusions

60. The economic outlook for Africa is positive, with economic growth projected to rebound by between 0.4 and 3.1 per cent in 2021, despite COVID-19 constraints and the debt burden. COVID-19 has already pushed millions of vulnerable people in Africa below the poverty line, where they will languish for long periods unless fiscal responses are put in place to scale up social protection responses. This points to the need for additional liquidity not just for social protection but also for investments in technology for job creation and poverty reduction. Equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines is vital for the continent to recover at the same speed as the rest of the world. In this regard, the need for the continent to come together urgently to develop a comprehensive package for building forward better cannot be overemphasized. These efforts need to take full advantage of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, under which trading began in January 2021, as a springboard for green recovery.

61. The work carried out by ECA in 2020 and 2021 has prioritized support aimed at strengthening the region's response to and recovery from the impacts of COVID-19. During the reporting period, ECA was able to position itself as an influential facilitator and negotiator in the international and continental arenas, leading to extensive and beneficial policy changes. ECA will pursue its pioneering interventions and continue to play its brokering role, with the aim of assisting member States, regional economic communities, intergovernmental organizations and other stakeholders in their efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing challenges. It will spearhead the campaign to secure innovative financing through the implementation of key policy recommendations and proposed mechanisms put forward in the Economic Report on Africa and the strategy on building forward together: financing a sustainable recovery for the future of all.

62. In the year ahead, ECA will pursue the threefold aim of response, recovery and reset, helping countries to secure the financing that they need to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, identifying investments for job creation and recovery and upholding the African position in global forums as the international community redesigns and resets the multilateral agenda. ECA will also focus on strengthening capacity for building forward for green recovery, with a view to boosting income, jobs and growth. It will support member States in their efforts to mitigate and recover from the macroeconomic impacts of the pandemic by advocating short-term and long-term structural reforms, stronger multilateral cooperation and prioritizing investments in innovative green infrastructure and energy. Deepening the Commission's work on poverty and vulnerability, gender, economic diversification and industrialization, and advancing the regional integration agenda with a focus on women and cross-border trade will also remain key focuses of its work. In all these efforts, nurturing and leveraging value-adding partnerships that can amplify the impact of the Commission's interventions will remain of critical importance. A focus will also be maintained on ensuring effective leadership of and participation in the work of the opportunity and issue-based coalitions and collaboration with United Nations resident coordinators and country teams to ensure more relevant and effective delivery at the country level.