



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
30 March 2021

Original: English

---

## Committee for Programme and Coordination

Sixty-first session

Organizational session, 15 April 2021

Substantive session, 1–25 June 2021\*

Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda\*\*

**Coordination questions: New Partnership for  
Africa's Development**

## United Nations system support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report provides an overview of the main activities undertaken by the United Nations system in 2020 in support of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In view of the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in African countries and on United Nations action in Africa, the focus of the report is primarily on the comprehensive response of the United Nations system to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report also provides an overview of the implementation of the reform of the United Nations development system in Africa and a summary of African Union-United Nations cooperation.

The report highlights the instrumental role that strengthened coordination, coherence and alignment of United Nations action to the African Union and African Member State priorities has played in enhancing the effectiveness of the United Nations response. In this regard, it is reaffirmed in the report that Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development constitute the framework for assessing United Nations support for Africa's development.

---

\* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

\*\* [E/AC.51/2021/1](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [75/243](#), in which the Assembly endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the United Nations system support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development and requested the Secretary-General to ensure the timely implementation of its recommendations. The report refers to United Nations system activities undertaken during 2020.

2. In the report resulting from its sixtieth session,<sup>1</sup> the Committee for Programme and Coordination encouraged the provision of information of higher quality and addressed to broader audiences. It underscored the importance of youth on the African continent and recommended the endorsement of the proposals of the Secretary-General to conduct a review of United Nations support for the strengthening of health systems in Africa and the continent's preparedness in the light of the detrimental effect of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and a comprehensive review of United Nations support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), with a view to presenting proposals for further engagement.<sup>2</sup>

3. In view of the above-mentioned proposals and recommendations and taking into account that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has represented the most critical collective effort of the United Nations in recent decades, the report focuses on the different aspects of the comprehensive response of the United Nations system to the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa. It highlights efforts taken to strengthen the coordination of United Nations action in Africa, with a particular focus on youth issues, and ends with a summary of the cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union during the reporting period. The comprehensive review with respect to NEPAD is being submitted as an annex to the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the "New Partnership for Africa's Development: progress in the implementation and international support", as requested by the Assembly in its resolution [74/301](#).

## II. United Nations response to the COVID-19 pandemic

4. The reporting period coincided with the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Africa, the pandemic has severely tested countries' social, economic, political and environmental resilience, exacting a significant toll on all segments of the population, and in particular on the poor and most vulnerable, and jeopardizing decades of hard-won development gains. Due to the need for urgent action and the complexity of the crisis, the United Nations response combined a strategic and policy approach with immediate health and humanitarian interventions and socioeconomic responses to protect vulnerable populations and mitigate the impact of the pandemic while ensuring that investments were aligned to the longer-term objective of recovering better.

5. In line with the principles underpinning the partnership between the United Nations and the African Union, the United Nations response was aimed at supporting and complementing the regional response launched by the African Union through operational, policy and advocacy actions. In this regard, the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for the COVID-19 Outbreak, adopted at an extraordinary meeting of African Ministers of Health on 22 February 2020 and approved by the Bureau of the Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government on 26 March, became the main

<sup>1</sup> [A/75/16](#).

<sup>2</sup> [E/AC.51/2020/9/Rev.1](#).

road map for the provision of support, under the lead of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

### **Coordination efforts**

6. Coordination between the African Union, the United Nations and African Member States was the key to success in the strategy to prevent the spread of the pandemic, through awareness, preparedness and a swift response. On 3 February, when no case of COVID-19 had yet been reported in Africa, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention established the African Task Force for Coronavirus, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and African Member States. The Task Force acted as the main coordination body throughout the different phases of the response, promoting consensus on technical and policy issues ranging from surveillance and screening to case management and community engagement, among other things. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) co-chaired with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention a working group on supply chains and the stockpiling of medical commodities.

7. In March, as COVID-19 started to spread across the region, WHO convened two meetings with representatives from the African Union and key United Nations agencies to promote coordination, prevent duplication and ensure that resources would be used in the most effective way possible. A regional partner coordination mechanism was established and a draft joint work plan with an outline of priority actions was published.

8. In April, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) launched weekly coordination meetings on COVID-19 in Africa, bringing together different stakeholders such as the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD, WHO and the African Export-Import Bank, among others. Participants discussed and shared information on the state of the disease, actions being undertaken and mobilization of support for African initiatives and programmes, as well as ways to stem the spread of the pandemic, enhance treatment and control it. During 2020, 36 weekly coordination meetings were held under the auspices of ECA.

9. Simultaneously, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa promoted, at the headquarters level, strengthened strategic-level discussions on the United Nations response to the pandemic in Africa. From April to December 2020, the interdepartmental task force on African affairs organized six technical and three principals-level meetings to facilitate coherent and coordinated United Nations system support for the response of African countries. Follow-up technical meetings were also organized with relevant United Nations entities to ensure close coordination between the strategic and operational levels and minimize duplication of efforts. For example, the interdepartmental task force endorsed the Africa United Nations Knowledge Hub for COVID-19, managed by the Economic Commission for Africa as the platform for information-sharing on United Nations response to COVID-19. The Knowledge Hub is a useful tool, with a wealth of data, information and knowledge on United Nations and national response efforts.

10. During a principals-level meeting held in August 2020, the Secretary-General called on United Nations entities to turn the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic into an opportunity to promote coordination and coherence. In that regard, he called for the interdepartmental task force to be an action- and results-oriented mechanism, aimed at integrating analysis and planning efforts and focused on the delivery of specific objectives to enhance the coordination and coherence of United Nations action in Africa.

11. In pursuing this call, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa conducted an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to assess the effectiveness of the United Nations system response to COVID-19 in Africa and to help identify priority areas for building forward better in 2021. A total of 29 members of the interdepartmental task force participated in the exercise. Several opportunities for reinforcing strategic coherence and coordination among United Nations entities were revealed. These included, among others, leveraging regional and subregional coordination platforms for coordination and preparedness for current and future public health emergencies, providing joint support for Member States in formulating response plans for an inclusive and sustainable recovery and delivering a strong United Nations common position to African Member States on their response to COVID-19.

12. The analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats also revealed areas of strength and weakness in intra-United Nations coordination and collaboration, including potential duplication of efforts as a result of competing priorities among United Nations entities and a siloed approach. They highlighted challenges in the ability of United Nations entities to advise on national policies, especially on balancing COVID-19-related restrictions and other measures with the provision of social protection, respect for human rights and human dignity, particularly with regard to women. The digital divide and its impact (on health, education, governance and social cohesion, among other things), the significant humanitarian funding gap and the impact of existing and new conflicts were highlighted as key challenges that required strategic interventions by the interdepartmental task force.

### **Advocacy efforts**

13. The United Nations increased its advocacy efforts to mobilize international support for Africa. In March, as WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic, the Secretary-General called for “all actors ... to act in solidarity in new, creative and deliberate ways for the common good”,<sup>3</sup> recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic could provide an opportunity for a transformation towards more inclusive, sustainable and resilient development paths. The Secretary-General stressed the impact that the downturn in the oil and commodities markets could have on Africa and the importance of maintaining “the momentum on the African Continental Free Trade Area as a mechanism for building long-term continental resilience and volatility management”. Subsequently, the Secretary-General issued a policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 in Africa, aimed at providing specific recommendations to prevent and mitigate the impact of the pandemic and address the multifaceted crisis in Africa. The policy brief examined the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Africa, highlighted the continent’s swift response and called for strong global solidarity to bolster its efforts, including with regard to long-term post-COVID-19 recovery. During 2020, the Secretary-General issued over 20 policy briefs containing specific policy recommendations on issues such as persons with disabilities, women, children, food security, tourism, education and work.

14. United Nations advocacy efforts also focused on echoing the request of the African Union for special measures to create fiscal space to enable a comprehensive response to the pandemic. In March, the Bureau of the Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government called on the Group of 20 (G20) “to provide an effective economic stimulus package that includes relief and deferred payments” and urged international financial institutions “to help mitigate against the scourge and

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, “Shared responsibility, global solidarity: responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19” (March 2020). Available at <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>.

provide relief to vital sectors of African economies and communities”. In support of this call, the Secretary-General also reached out to G20 countries, urging the launch of a comprehensive stimulus package. Furthermore, during his participation in the two “Mobilizing with Africa” meetings convened by the African Union, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in April and October, the Secretary-General advocated for the issuance of at least \$500 billion in special drawing rights, as well as for a three-phased approach to addressing countries’ vulnerabilities: a debt standstill to create “breathing space”; targeted debt relief to support the recovery; and large-scale debt restructuring. In response to these calls, the G20 and the Paris Club adopted the Debt Service Suspension Initiative in April. The Secretary-General has called for the broadening of the Initiative’s eligibility criteria in order to include highly indebted and vulnerable countries that have been affected by the pandemic, such as many African middle-income countries and small island developing States. Since the Initiative took effect on 1 May 2020, it has delivered about \$5 billion in relief to more than 40 eligible countries, 25 of which are in Africa.

15. In May, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Chair of the African Commission for Human and Peoples’ Rights called in a joint statement for priority to be given to investing more in health, water and sanitation, social protection, employment and sustainable infrastructure to ensure that no one is left behind. In this regard, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) adopted a series of measures<sup>4</sup> to support African countries and other Member States, including the integration of 10 thematic human rights indicators in the response frameworks, in cooperation with the Development Coordination Office. A checklist for a human rights-based approach to the socioeconomic impact assessments was developed in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). OHCHR and the African Union also developed a joint guideline with seven specific actions that African States could take to avoid discrimination against women and girls in their responses to COVID-19.

16. In August, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa called on African countries to seize the opportunity that the COVID-19 pandemic presented to promote systemic change that would lead to the acknowledgement of Africa’s place in the multilateral system and to shift the focus of their policies from poverty management to development management, promoting Africa’s prosperity and empowerment through governance and ownership of its fiscal and natural resources.

17. To support African countries and institutions in achieving this goal, the Special Adviser proposed an initiative to create a new narrative for Africa and from Africa in the United Nations and beyond. Endorsed by the Group of African States and the United Nations leadership, the initiative recognizes Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want as the most ambitious road map for Africa’s prosperity and its adoption as the main guideline for the alignment of United Nations activities in Africa and for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

18. In November, the Deputy Secretary-General led a two-week solidarity mission to West Africa. The mission visited Ghana, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone and was aimed at supporting national efforts, highlighting the participation of women and their leadership in peace, security and development and recognizing the work of the United Nations on the ground. The mission served as an open and participatory stocktaking exercise with Governments, United Nations country teams and civil society. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity to start an open dialogue around recovering better, paying special attention to building strong developmental institutions

<sup>4</sup> See [A/HRC/46/19](#).

to deliver social cohesion and leveraging information and communications technologies towards higher levels of resilience and inclusive, sustainable development.

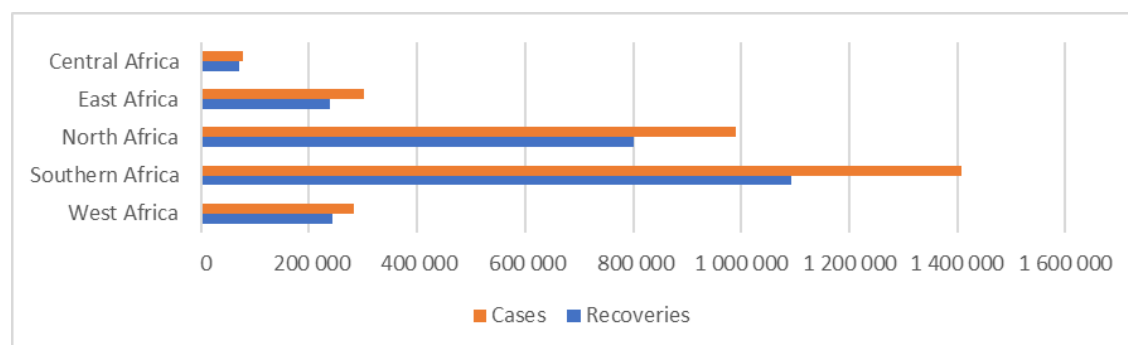
### **Health response**

19. The health response for the African region was based on the COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan of WHO, taking into account the priorities of the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for the COVID-19 Outbreak and the particularities of the continent, most notably the following: (a) the average age of the African population represented a reduced risk of severe illness; (b) the health systems in the African region were nevertheless already overstretched and the continent had a pre-existing high burden of chronic diseases, both of which could be worsened by the impact of COVID-19 in health service provision; and (c) the high season for respiratory pathogens in Southern Africa could lead to a more intense transmission of the pandemic in that subregion.

20. The coordinated African Union-United Nations health response succeeded in rapidly escalating capacities in African countries, thanks to the promotion of synergies between the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and United Nations entities. In April, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention launched the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing: Test, Trace and Treat, an initiative to facilitate the implementation of the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for the COVID-19 Outbreak through coordinated actions of multiple stakeholders. For example, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and WHO conducted training sessions to adapt existing capacities in testing for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, among others, to testing for COVID-19. As a result, only three months after COVID-19 reached the region, the number of countries with laboratory capacity for testing for COVID-19 had increased from 2 to 45 countries. Simultaneously, United Nations entities reoriented part of their cooperation to the provision of necessary supplies and materials. For instance, the International Atomic Energy Agency provided detection equipment (real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) tests and kits), reagents and laboratory consumables, as well as biosafety cabinets and personal protection materials, to 44 African countries. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime provided personal protective equipment to its counterparts in prisons and addiction management institutions. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) worked with local authorities and health sectors to facilitate physical distancing and quarantine management in some countries.

21. One of the pillars of the Partnership to Accelerate COVID-19 Testing, the establishment of warehousing and supply hubs, proved to be instrumental. For example, in April, Central and West African countries were among those most affected by the pandemic. The World Food Programme (WFP), in collaboration with the Government of Ethiopia, established a humanitarian air hub in Addis Ababa to help transport protective equipment, medical supplies and humanitarian workers across Africa. “Solidarity flights” coordinated by WFP and WHO started to provide Central and West African countries with basic supplies, with the support of the Jack Ma Foundation and other donors, and were essential to containing and curbing the outbreak of COVID-19. By the end of the year, the two subregions had the lowest number of cases and the highest recovery rate on the continent (see figure I).

Figure I  
Total confirmed COVID-19 cases and recoveries in Africa, February–December 2020



Source: World Health Organization.

22. Another pillar of the response led by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention was the coordination of pooled procurement of medical commodities. In this regard, ECA supported the conceptualization of the Africa Medical Supplies Platform, a platform expected to facilitate the procurement of cost-effective strategic and certified medical equipment required to battle the COVID-19 pandemic. ECA conducted a series of high-level webinars for ministers of finance and ministers of health to showcase and advocate for the use of the platform. As a result, the orders in the pipeline exceed \$200 million and the African Export-Import Bank has committed \$100 million financing to enable its member States to procure COVID-19-related medical resources through the platform.

23. In May, the African Union Commission, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and WHO, with other public and private partners,<sup>5</sup> launched the Partnership for Evidence-Based Response to COVID-19, an initiative to support the decision-making process through the provision of social, economic, epidemiological, population movement and security data to help determine the acceptability, impact and effectiveness of public health and social measures.

24. A vital step in fighting the pandemic has been the development of tools that enable swift and effective response and recovery. In April 2020, WHO launched the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, a global collaboration effort organized into four pillars: diagnostics, treatment, strengthening of health systems and vaccines. The latter, also known as the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, focuses on supporting vaccine research and manufacturing capacities and procurement in order to ensure the equitable distribution of up to 2 billion doses by the end of 2021.

25. The COVAX Facility allocation mechanism has been structured in two phases. Under phase 1, countries receive doses for up to 20 per cent of their population, depending on their readiness. Once all countries have reached 20 per cent coverage (or less if they so requested), allocations under phase 2 follow a threat and vulnerability assessment. Countries can participate under three modalities: advance market commitment, committed purchase and optional purchase. Countries that participate under the advance market commitment modality have access to COVAX donor funding and can also cost share to fund supplementary doses. UNICEF provides procurement services to countries participating under that modality and may provide them to other countries if requested. Out of the 47 African countries that participate

<sup>5</sup> World Economic Forum, Resolve to Save Lives (an initiative of Vital Strategies), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Public Health Rapid Support Team, Ipsos and Novetta.

in the mechanism, 42 are part of the group participating in the advance market commitment modality and five self-finance their doses.<sup>6</sup> Over 75.5 million doses are expected to be distributed to the participating African countries as part of the first distribution of vaccines through COVAX, representing 30 per cent of the total doses to be distributed and over 6 per cent of Africa's population. The Facility is expected to deliver a further 600 million doses to Africa by the end of 2021.<sup>7</sup>

### Humanitarian response

26. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the United Nations in March 2020 launched the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19,<sup>8</sup> coordinated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The Plan was aimed at responding to the immediate impact of the pandemic on health and other humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations. The Plan identified 53 priority countries that had an ongoing humanitarian response plan, a refugee response plan or a multi-country or subregional response plan, or had requested international assistance, including 22 African countries. In April, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee<sup>9</sup> activated its system-wide scale-up protocols describing the action principles and roles to guide the humanitarian response to the pandemic.

27. In May, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 was updated to include 10 additional countries, including 7 African countries, based on their vulnerability and response capacity. In July, a new update was needed to adjust the response to the evolution of the pandemic. The final humanitarian appeal amounted to \$9.5 billion, of which \$3.87 billion related to identified needs in African countries.

28. The Plan responded to both the direct health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and secondary impacts on people and systems, including other health services, food security, gender-based violence, abuse and neglect of older people and people with disabilities and the delivery of other humanitarian operations. In order to address this multisectoral approach, the Plan was structured around three strategic priorities: (a) contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and decrease morbidity and mortality; (b) decrease the deterioration of human assets and rights, social cohesion and livelihoods; and (c) protect, assist and advocate for refugees, migrants and host communities that are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic. The response approach was guided by humanitarian, inclusivity, gender, protection and community engagement principles and emphasized the importance of using existing national coordination mechanisms and supporting local organizations.

29. Out of the 29 African countries included in the Plan, 15<sup>10</sup> had an ongoing humanitarian response plan. COVID-19-specific response plans and intersectoral

<sup>6</sup> Botswana, Libya, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa.

<sup>7</sup> To Angola, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, the Sudan, Togo and Uganda.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, "Global Humanitarian Response Plan Covid-19: United Nations Coordinated Appeal, April–December 2020".

<sup>9</sup> The Committee comprises the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), other international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and NGO consortiums with a humanitarian mandate.

<sup>10</sup> Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Zimbabwe.



response plans were issued in five<sup>11</sup> and six<sup>12</sup> countries, respectively. Three additional countries<sup>13</sup> were part of a regional refugee response plan.

30. The response plans were aimed at addressing a wide range of challenges identified in African member States, including underfunding; increased insecurity; a shortage of personal protective equipment, testing kits, hospital beds, medicines and laboratories; low capacity of health-care staff; poor water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and hygiene awareness; weak social protection systems; inadequate community engagement; cultural norms that run counter to the need for social distancing; and a lack of coherence between emergency health response and humanitarian response.

31. By February 2021, some \$1.3 billion had been raised, accounting for only 33 per cent of the total financial requirements for the 26 national and 3 regional plans in Africa. The scope of funding coverage varied greatly by country and plan, between 0.8 per cent coverage of the regional migrant and refugee response plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen and 84.6 per cent coverage of the Niger response plan. Only seven response plans in Africa reached more than 50 per cent coverage.

32. The Central Emergency Response Fund and the United Nations country-based pooled funds played a key role in addressing funding requirements by providing substantial resources to ensure a timely and effective response. Over the course of 2020, country-based pooled funds provided \$56.9 million to support pandemic response in seven African countries<sup>14</sup> and \$89.3 million was released from the Central Emergency Response Fund to fund COVID-19 response in 24 African countries.<sup>15</sup> For instance, in the Sudan, \$12.3 million and \$10.9 million from the country-based pooled funds and the Central Emergency Response Fund, respectively, were channelled to support 5.1 million beneficiaries, including 3 million people from host communities, 385,690 refugees and 1,169,128 people with disabilities. In Nigeria, a combined \$23.4 million was used to support nearly 714,000 people.

33. The Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 significantly contributed to efforts to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and decrease morbidity and mortality, particularly by supporting the increase of capacities under the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak, led by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. In Africa, the United Nations distributed some 3 million sample collection kits, over 1.5 million tests kits and face shields, over 8 million gloves, over 53 million medical masks and over 2.5 million respirators. United Nations support was also instrumental in increasing the capacities of health facilities in African countries (see figure II).

<sup>11</sup> Benin, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Togo.

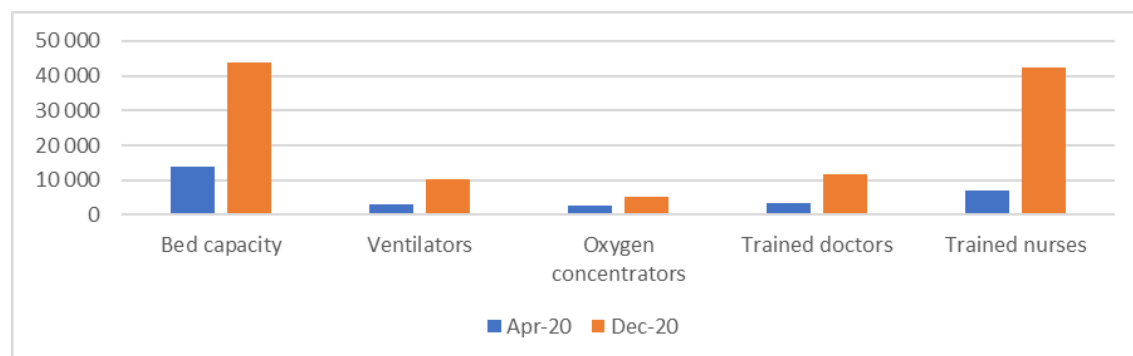
<sup>12</sup> Congo, Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania (United Republic of), Uganda and Zambia.

<sup>13</sup> Angola, Egypt and Rwanda.

<sup>14</sup> Central African Republic (\$8.4 million), Democratic Republic of the Congo (\$10.2 million), Ethiopia (\$5.4 million), Nigeria (\$6.4 million), Somalia (\$3.9 million), South Sudan (\$10.2 million) and Sudan (\$12.3 million).

<sup>15</sup> Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania (United Republic of), Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Figure II  
Evolution of resources to treat COVID-19 in Africa



Source: World Health Organization.

34. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerable groups, including refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants and host communities, to increased risks. During 2020, over 39 million refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants in 61 countries received COVID-19 assistance through the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. Measures included crucial support in regards of food, shelter, childcare, COVID-19 risk communication and preventive measures. For example, in Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and Uganda, handwashing and temperature-screening facilities were put in place in refugee camps, settlements and sites for internally displaced persons. In the Sudan, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees delivered soap to over 260,000 refugees, internally displaced persons and members of the host communities. Awareness campaigns targeting vulnerable populations have also been launched in cooperation with national authorities and community networks and organizations in several African countries, such as Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, South Sudan and the Sudan. In Zambia, the United Nations COVID-19 Emergency Appeal targets 6.2 million vulnerable people and has provided food assistance to 622,000 people in drought-affected areas, supporting small farmers and boosting the supply chain for the Government's food assistance programme.

35. United Nations entities also promoted the use of remote and digital platforms to enable the delivery of support and counselling. For instance, in Nigeria, IOM shifted case management to e-counselling and home-based rehabilitation and direct assistance for returnees and their families, including virtual mental health and psychosocial support. In the context of rising gender-based violence during the pandemic, UNFPA provided support to equip four integrated centres offering services in Kinshasa. In Congo, UNFPA worked with WFP to set up a referral mechanism for free, comprehensive care for victims of gender-based violence that could be accessed during food distributions. In Zambia, the United Nations country team built a shelter to protect survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking with access to health services, especially for pregnant women.

### Socioeconomic response

36. In April 2020, the United Nations launched its socioeconomic response framework<sup>16</sup> establishing the strategy for urgent socioeconomic response within a

<sup>16</sup> United Nations, "A United Nations framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19" (April 2020). Available at <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-framework-immediate-socio-economic-response-covid-19>.

12- to 18-month time frame. The framework consisted of five pillars<sup>17</sup> and included tangible deliverables and activities countries could undertake to address the socioeconomic challenges triggered by the pandemic. Each country team, under the leadership of the resident coordinator, was responsible for developing its COVID-19 response plan against the five pillars.

37. The Secretary-General established the COVID-19 response and recovery trust fund, a multi-partner trust fund focused on the least developed countries, low-middle-income countries and small island developing States not covered by the global humanitarian appeal and aimed at enabling United Nations country teams to respond swiftly to the initial effects of the pandemic. Sixteen African countries benefited from the fund's first call for projects. The Deputy Secretary-General has spearheaded efforts to raise awareness and advocate for a fully funded COVID-19 response and recovery trust fund, including through the Women Rise for All campaign and the Recover Better Together Action Forum.

38. In order to ensure coherence between regular programmatic activities and the new activities launched to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, United Nations country teams were to build the socioeconomic response upon existing structures at the national and subnational levels, in line with the cooperation frameworks, and were expected to repurpose their programmatic portfolio to reorient or scale up support for socioeconomic response efforts, thus integrating response to the COVID-19 pandemic in national development plans and in United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

39. As part of the global United Nations framework, a selection of the most strategic indicators was proposed by United Nations development system entities to provide a minimum coherent monitoring framework. Eleven lead agencies<sup>18</sup> developed the methodologies and performed the data collection at the country level, in coordination with the United Nations country team and the resident coordinator office. The data for each indicator represent the collective work of the United Nations country team. In Africa, 50 country teams provided data for at least one indicator during 2020. This effort represents an unprecedented step for the United Nations development system and yielded many valuable lessons for system-wide reporting.<sup>19</sup>

40. Forty-seven United Nations country teams in Africa finalized their socioeconomic response plans, amounting to \$12.1 billion.<sup>20</sup> As of December 2020, 36 per cent of total funding requirements had been met. United Nations country teams made

<sup>17</sup> The five pillars are as follows:

- (a) Health first: protecting health services and systems during the crisis;
- (b) Protecting people: social protection and basic services;
- (c) Economic response and recovery: protecting jobs, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the informal sector workers;
- (d) Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration;
- (e) Social cohesion and community resilience.

<sup>18</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, International Labour Organization, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNDP, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UNFPA, UN-Habitat, WFP, WHO and UNICEF.

<sup>19</sup> Using global programmatic indicators for country-level results was done for the first time in 2020. In February 2021, the Development Coordination Office conducted a high-level data validation exercise of the programmatic indicators, which highlighted some challenges related to consistent methodological interpretation across all United Nations country teams. Therefore, the current 2020 data offer an indication, but not a full picture, of the true reach of the United Nations development system at the country level. In 2021, the Development Coordination Office and UNDP established new improved processes and governance mechanisms to improve data quality and coverage in future system-wide reporting of results.

<sup>20</sup> Figures include a small number of joint Government-United Nations plans.

significant efforts to reorient existing funding sources towards socioeconomic response, repurposing over 10 per cent of funding needs on average. Four United Nations country teams were particularly successful in reorienting existing funds: those in Somalia (\$400 million, representing 45 per cent of funding needs), Senegal (\$200 million, or 116 per cent of funding needs), Sierra Leone (\$92 million, or 93 per cent) and Ghana (\$91 million, or 69 per cent).

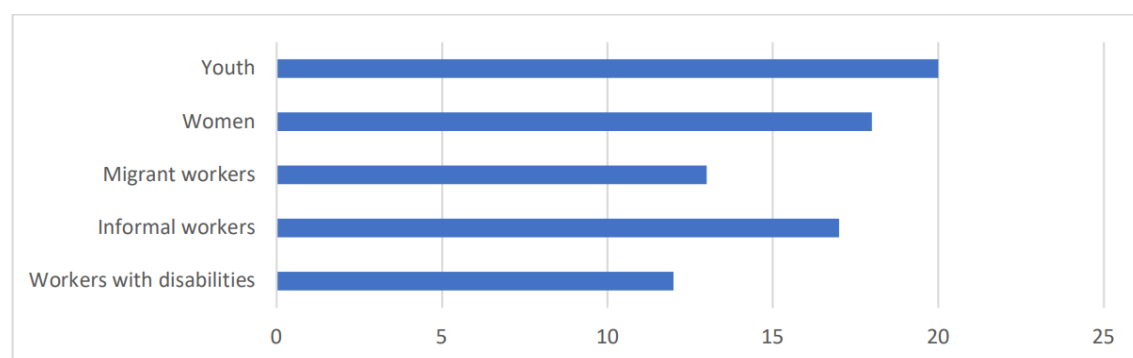
41. Under pillar 1 (Health first), United Nations country teams provided support to maintain essential health services by providing analytical and policy support, implementing programmes and technical cooperation and tracking and reaching vulnerable populations. In Africa, over 100 million people benefited from support for essential services, including over 41 million women and girls who received maternal health services and over 33 million and 18 million children, respectively, who benefited from vaccination and nutrition programmes. Support was provided to over 250,000 health-care workers based at health-care facilities and over 100,000 community health workers across the continent.

42. Under pillar 2 (Protecting people), efforts were deployed to scale up and expand social protection systems, maintain education, food and nutrition services and ensure the continuity and quality of water, sanitation and hygiene services, among others. For example, in Africa, over 10 million people benefited from food and nutrition support, 70 million people benefited from distance learning and over 17 million people received water, sanitation and hygiene supplies.

43. Pillar 3 (Economic response and recovery) was aimed at ensuring decent work and protecting jobs, workers and productive assets, units and networks. Programmatic activities of United Nations country teams in Africa supported approximately 60,000 enterprises, of which over 50,000 were micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and over 120,000 workers. Furthermore, support was provided to African countries to develop specific policies targeting special groups (see figure III).

Figure III

**Number of African countries that reinforced United Nations-supported employment policies and a regulatory environment conducive to economic recovery and decent work, April–December 2020**



Source: Development Coordination Office COVID-19 data portal.

44. Pillar 4 (Macroeconomic response and multilateral collaboration) focused on the macroeconomic response through assessments of the expected economic impact of the crisis, the fiscal space, policy priorities and policy availability. For example, in October 2020, the African Peer Review Mechanism, ECA and the African Development Bank launched the first African sovereign credit rating review report, which examined the risk drivers that led to different downgrading in the face of the

COVID-19 pandemic, assessed their impact and made recommendations to African countries on how to avoid negative rating actions and improve future ratings.

45. The United Nations also provided technical support and advice in the development of evidence-based policies and the monitoring of social expenditure, as well as through the conduct of context-specific socioeconomic impact assessments. During 2020, more than a third of countries in Africa implemented policies informed by United Nations socioeconomic impact assessments that focused on at-risk populations (19 on employment, 16 on the labour market, 14 on fiscal policy, 17 on social protection and 15 on the empowerment of women).

46. Under pillar 5 (Social cohesion and community resilience), the United Nations system promoted inclusive social dialogue, advocacy, political engagement, governance, participation and equitable service delivery, among other things. In Africa, United Nations country teams facilitated over 200 advocacy and political engagement spaces and over 1,000 social dialogue spaces at the national level. Furthermore, the United Nations system provided capacity support to over 1,000 community organizations in Africa, to respond to and mitigate the pandemic, combat COVID-19-related domestic violence, racism, xenophobia, stigmatization and other forms of discrimination, prevent and remedy human rights abuses and ensure longer-term recovery. For example, in Kenya, UNDP and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS supported a consortium of civil society organizations in developing and disseminating a human rights-based framework for the COVID-19 response of Kenya.

### **Peacekeeping response**

47. In March, against the background of the African Union “Silencing the Guns” initiative, the Chair of the African Union Commission and the Secretary-General issued parallel and reinforcing calls for a ceasefire to create opportunities for life-saving aid and diplomacy. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the Security Council endorsed these calls in June and July, respectively.<sup>21</sup>

48. Through 2020, the seven United Nations peacekeeping operations in Africa<sup>22</sup> demonstrated remarkable resilience in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The missions continued their vital work with regard to protection of civilians, support for peace and political processes, disarmament and promotion of human rights and the rule of law, all while applying critical prevention and mitigation measures to curb and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

49. As a key preventive early measure, rotations, repatriations and new deployments of troops and police in all peacekeeping missions were suspended from 4 April to 30 June 2020. To ensure a partial resumption of military and police rotations in July 2020, a transitional rotation framework was introduced, with precautionary measures and robust quarantine and isolation guidelines. Most missions also reduced military patrolling.

50. Missions implemented preventive measures such as undertaking systematic temperature checks and setting up water and soap stations at the entrances to mission bases, establishing work-from-home policies for civilian staff in missions and

<sup>21</sup> African Union communiqué PSC/PR/COMM.(CMXXIX) and Security Council resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#).

<sup>22</sup> African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

headquarters personnel, suspending training sessions that involved physical contact and proximity, creating quarantine spaces for peacekeepers with COVID-19 symptoms and any personnel arriving from overseas and ensuring that peacekeepers were able to continue their work by practising social distancing and through the implementation of other mitigation measures.

51. In order to maintain supply chains during the pandemic, missions developed business continuity plans for life-support needs while ensuring the timely planning, provision and distribution of goods and services critical for the implementation of peace mandates. Personal protective and essential health equipment was made available in all missions, including respiratory ventilators to ensure that the capacity of intensive care units and supplies were sufficient. Medical evacuation capabilities were also strengthened. The COVID-19 Field Support Group was established by the Department of Operational Support, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs to support the missions' response and a task group on outbreak response and prevention monitoring in the peacekeeping missions was created to report on and prevent infections among military and police personnel.

52. Peacekeeping operations supported national authorities in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in the Central African Republic, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and relevant United Nations agencies participated in the crisis committee chaired by the President. In Darfur, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) distributed hygiene materials and dignity kits to internally displaced women, girls and other vulnerable persons as part of its support for the response of the transitional Government of the Sudan. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, the respective missions supported the efforts of national authorities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in prisons.

53. United Nations peacekeeping operations reprioritized programme funding to support host authorities and communities to undertake, in partnership with other United Nations actors, non-governmental organizations and African Union institutions, quick-impact projects that would assist them in responding to the pandemic. For instance, in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, missions scaled up support for local mask production by women's groups.<sup>23</sup>

### **Community outreach**

54. During 2020, United Nations-African Union cooperation also focused on fighting disinformation and addressing misinformation regarding COVID-19. Such efforts culminated, in December, with the launch of the Africa Infodemic Response Alliance by the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, WHO, the United Nations Verified initiative, UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization, the United Nations Global Pulse initiative and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, to coordinate actions and pool resources in combating misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic and other health emergencies in Africa.

55. Furthermore, throughout the year, United Nations entities and peacekeeping operations launched multiple community outreach and awareness initiatives. For example, MINUSCA supported and trained the National Youth Council of the Central African Republic on COVID-19 response, including youth with speech and hearing impairments, and organized an awareness-raising workshop for 19 influential women

<sup>23</sup> Cedric de Coning, "The impact of COVID-19 on peace operations in Africa", *Conflict Trends*, special edition, 2020.

community leaders in Birao, in which participants were encouraged to promote preventive measures in their communities. UNAMID organized awareness-raising workshops in North Darfur on the importance of taking precautionary measures to control the spread of the virus. In Nigeria, WHO trained Nigerian journalists, focusing on accuracy of information, data sourcing and verification as the key principles for public health reporting.

56. Using digital outreach, United Nations missions supported communities, including access by women to digital platforms, and continued to use social media to disseminate information on the prevention of COVID-19 and to monitor disinformation and correct misinformation. For instance, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) cooperated with local journalists and civil society actors to dispel myths through Facebook, monitor and fight misinformation, provide validated and timely information, counter hate speech and remove incendiary posts as appropriate. At the global level, WHO also partnered with Twitter, Facebook, Tencent and TikTok to try to ensure that content on their respective platforms was accurate and helpful.

57. United Nations entities also produced posters, flashcards, billboards, leaflets and other materials to disseminate within local communities, detailing clear and accessible messages in local languages and using easy-to-understand infographics and cartoons to reach a wider audience, including children and audiences with low literacy rates. For example, UNMISS organized a major education campaign and distributed informational flashcards and posters to community members explaining the symptoms of COVID-19 and ways to prevent it. Similarly, MINUSCA developed billboards, posters and a wide range of visual materials with WHO in support of the Ministry of Health of the Central African Republic.

58. The United Nations also harnessed local communication channels, including radio and social media, among others, to support awareness-raising efforts. In Somalia, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations developed radio broadcasts targeting farmers and pastoralists in remote areas to promote awareness of the risk of transmission and prevention measures. United Nations peacekeeping operation radio stations such as Radio Guira in the Central African Republic, Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Radio Mikado in Mali and Radio Miraya in South Sudan continued their crucial work throughout the pandemic by informing the local population about COVID-19 in local languages, providing education on mitigation measures and working to dispel rumours and counter misinformation.

### **III. Strengthened coordination of the United Nations system in support to Africa's development**

59. The United Nations response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa promoted a strengthened coordination of the United Nations system and, at the same time, benefited from the implementation of new structures developed in line with the mandate given to the Secretary-General through General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) and Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/23](#). In this regard, during the reporting period, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in Africa took a fundamental step in improving country-level coordination and providing tailored integrated policy support to Governments in line with their national development plans through the new generation of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. As noted in the report on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review,<sup>24</sup> the Cooperation Framework is the primary instrument

<sup>24</sup> [A/75/79–E/2020/55](#).

that will drive the work of the new generation of United Nations country teams in supporting Member States in accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development throughout the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

60. Moreover, as shown above, United Nations country teams, under the overall leadership of the resident coordinators and under the technical lead of UNDP, played a critical role in providing an integrated response to the sustainable development emergencies posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, utilizing an “emergency in development mode” approach alongside the health and humanitarian responses. This was done through the design of socioeconomic response plans to support national Governments in their efforts to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. A key thrust of these plans has been to ensure that recovery and building forward better from the pandemic contributes to the acceleration of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. These plans integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women, poverty eradication, food security, health and vaccines, climate change mitigation and social protection as core elements aimed at ensuring the transition from COVID-19 recovery to sustainable development pathways.

61. At the regional level, and in line with Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/23](#), the United Nations development system has moved ahead with the roll-out of the new regional architecture through the establishment of regional collaborative platforms. The regional collaborative platform for Africa is set up to facilitate the provision of integrated policy advice, normative support and technical capacity to regional and subregional organizations, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams. It does so by integrating the previous regional mechanisms (the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group) into a single platform, ensuring an agile internal collaboration mechanism for the United Nations system at the regional level. The programme of work for the regional collaborative platform is implemented through issue-based coalitions that work to advance thematic priorities of the region and serve as vehicles for collaborative delivery. The regional collaborative platform is chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, with the Executive Secretary of ECA and the Regional Director of UNDP serving as vice-chairs. It is supported by a joint secretariat consisting of the Development Coordination Office, ECA and UNDP.

62. In parallel, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa initiated a process to revitalize the interdepartmental task force on African affairs and transform it into an action-oriented body promoting impactful and coherent United Nations action. A key component of the revitalization of the task force has been to promote complementarities with the strengthened coordination efforts at the national and regional levels. In this regard, in December, members of the task force agreed that the task force should remain a mechanism for strategic coordination that provides a common strategic framework for the operational coordination promoted by the United Nations country teams and the regional collaborative platform for Africa at the national and regional levels, respectively. Furthermore, in order to promote an effective role for the task force in bolstering results-oriented initiatives anchored in the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, it was suggested to broaden its cooperation with non-United Nations entities and civil society actors.

63. In 2020, the United Nations system also undertook efforts to enhance joint programming and reporting with respect to youth programmes. In this regard, the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth identified 10 United Nations country teams, five of which are in Africa,<sup>25</sup> as “fast-track” implementers for the rollout of Youth 2030: The United Nations Strategy on Youth, aimed at: (a) addressing the needs,

<sup>25</sup> Ethiopia, Ghana, Niger, Sierra Leone and Uganda.



building the agency and advancing the rights of young people; (b) promoting young people's engagement and participation in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda; and (c) ensuring that the work of the United Nations on youth affairs is pursued in a coordinated, coherent and holistic manner with youth participation. The selected United Nations country teams tested the implementation guidance and tools, and showcased results through models of joint United Nations work and partnerships with youth.

64. Moreover, Ethiopia and Uganda are in the process of establishing youth focal point functions in the resident coordinator offices to strengthen the United Nations country team coordination mechanism for coherent action on youth. In July, the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth held a virtual briefing on Youth 2030 for the Government of Namibia and the United Nations country team with the aim of taking the strategy closer to the country level. In September, the Envoy presented the results of the field validation of the Youth 2030 scorecard, a 19-indicator tool that will support the mainstreaming of the youth strategy in the strategic planning, performance measurement and accountability frameworks of United Nations country teams.

#### **IV. Enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union**

65. Cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union continued to be strengthened in other areas beyond the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the African Union-United Nations Joint Framework on Human Rights was finalized and is ready to be signed at the fifth United Nations-African Union Annual Conference, to be held in 2021. The framework will reaffirm the shared objectives and long-standing commitment of the African Union and the United Nations towards enhancing respect for and promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights. The new framework will help facilitate regular consultations, coordination and joint actions between the two organizations, building on existing cooperation. For example, in October 2020, the second phase of a joint project between the African Union, OHCHR and the World Bank was launched, aimed at mainstreaming human rights into the African Union Continental Early Warning System conflict prevention mandate. Furthermore, OHCHR and the African Union Commission, in close collaboration with the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, are working to develop a joint project proposal to support the enhancement and operationalization of the African Union compliance framework on international human rights law, international humanitarian law and conduct and discipline standards for African Union peace support operations.

66. During 2020, the United Nations took steps to enhance its collaboration with the African Union in the area of peace and security, in line with the findings and recommendations of the assessment of United Nations-African Union cooperation requested by the Security Council in its resolution [2320 \(2016\)](#).<sup>26</sup> In February, the African Union Commission and the United Nations Office to the African Union, with the support of Norway, launched the publication *She Stands for Peace: 20 Years, 20 Journeys*, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#). Regular horizon-scanning meetings between the two organizations continued to be held, including virtual meetings following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Cooperation efforts between the two organizations on peace and security also addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in

<sup>26</sup> Further details on operational United Nations-African Union cooperation on peace and security can be found in [S/2020/860](#).

May the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa organized its Africa Dialogue Series, with the participation of senior officials of the United Nations, the African Union Commission and other key stakeholders. Discussions focused on the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic posed to the African Union's goal of silencing the guns, but also on the opportunities that it could create.

67. In December 2020, the fourth United Nations-African Union Annual Conference was held virtually. The Secretary-General and the Chair of the African Union Commission agreed on the need to reinforce coordination mechanisms to implement the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. As a first step toward this goal, the Deputy Secretary-General has established, at the Secretary-General's request, a core team composed of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the United Nations Office to the African Union, ECA, UNDP, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations to advise on key strategic and action-oriented issues for the strengthening of African Union-United Nations cooperation.

## V. Conclusions and recommendations

68. The adoption of lockdown measures aimed at curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has had profound socioeconomic implications across Africa, pushing the continent to even higher levels of vulnerability, fragility and instability. Governments and civil society have come together to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in a context characterized by adversity, with strong support from the United Nations system, particularly at the country level.

69. During 2020, the United Nations strove to mobilize the collective effort of the international community in support of Africa based on the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility. The COVID-19 pandemic has been the greatest challenge of the past few decades, but it has also been an opportunity to showcase a dynamic United Nations system that reacts swiftly and nimbly to emerging threats, to promote a revitalized multilateralism and to regain people's trust in public institutions.

70. The United Nations response to the COVID-19 crisis has helped address some of the major challenges that the pandemic created for Africa, thanks to the coordination in the planning and implementation of the three main operational plans that have boosted complementarities and synergies among United Nations entities and other stakeholders. In particular, coordination with African Union institutions and the alignment of United Nations action to the priorities identified by the African Union through the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for the COVID-19 Outbreak have been instrumental to ensuring the strengthening of regional structures and enhancing preparedness for future crises.

71. Coordination efforts in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic have paved the way towards a more structured coordination at the national, regional and global levels between the United Nations and the African Union. Consequently, coordination, coherence and alignment of United Nations action with the priorities of the African Union and African Member States need to be the cornerstone of our efforts for building forward better towards the Africa we want. In this regard, I call upon the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Development Programme and the Development Coordination Office to continue promoting the synergies and complementarities among the interdepartmental task force on African affairs, the regional collaborative platform for Africa and the United Nations country teams, and between these mechanisms and African Union institutions.

72. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored that all areas of development, from human capital to governance, are interlinked. As a result, sustainable development can be achieved only through an inclusive and integrated approach. Agenda 2063 of the African Union, the successor to NEPAD, is the most comprehensive plan for Africa's development and a pertinent translation of the goals of Agenda 2030 into the African context and reality. In this regard, I reaffirm Agenda 2063 as the framework for assessing United Nations support for Africa's development and call on the Committee for Programme and Coordination to introduce in the agenda for its sixty-second session an item on United Nations support for Agenda 2063.

---