The Green Recovery: Renewable Energy, Digitalization and Nature-based Solutions for Inclusion and Resilience in Africa

Africa Day at the HLPF

Side Event during the 2021 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Virtual Meeting

Date: Thursday, 15 July 2021
Time: 8:00 AM - 11:00 AM New York time

Background

In July 2018, at the margins of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (UN-OSAA), African Union Commission (AUC), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched the first "Africa Day at the HLPF", an annual Ministerial event designed to share good practices and lessons learned in meeting challenges facing African countries, focusing on a specific theme, in their efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the AU Agenda 2063.

The annual Africa Day at the HLPF aims to popularize and promote the outcomes of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD), which was established to follow up on and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Africa and feed into to the work of the HLPF. The Seventh Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-7) was held from 1 to 4 March 2021 in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, on the theme "Building forward better: towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063".

Key messages from the ARFSD-7

Discussions held during ARFSD-7 took place against the backdrop of unprecedented challenges to global development due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had exposed severe vulnerabilities and structural inequities in Africa that had been prevailing even prior to the pandemic. For instance, even before the pandemic, Africa was already not on track, and in some cases regressing, in respect to attaining some the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want.[1] ARFSD-7 therefore offered an opportunity for regional dialogue and a platform for discussing the ways and means of accelerating implementation within the narrow window of the Decade of Action and delivery for sustainable development.

Against that backdrop, ARFSD-7 focused on economic growth, poverty and hunger alleviation, inequality, climate change and environmental degradation, sustainable financing and other related issues. The Forum came up with a set of key messages drawing attention to Africa's major contributions to the global commons as the continent with the second largest carbon sink in the world and calling for more coordinated development cooperation, including by exploring new sources of finance, including carbon trading and debt relief, as well as for more coordinated action in health related targets (SDG3) by leveraging digitalization and making health systems more climate-resilient. The key messages also highlighted the urgency of harnessing the benefits of the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area and of harnessing the continent's demographic dividend by unleashing the full potential of the continent's women and youth. The Forum issued the Brazzaville Declaration with policy

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[1] For a snapshot of Africa's progress in SDG implementation from an aggregate perspective, please see the accompanying information note (Details TBC).

recommendations for a diverse set of stakeholders, including African Member States, local governments and stakeholders and external partners.[2]

Focus of Africa Day at the HLPF 2021

Besides reviewing SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17, the HLPF 2021 will focus on the path forward for a sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19 through or during the Decade of Action. Against this backdrop, it is worth recalling that the Brazzaville Declaration called upon all African countries:

> *"to redefine and develop economic models that incorporate the protection of natural resources, the promotion of renewable energies, the development of green and resilient infrastructure and inclusive digitization, informed by an awareness of the value of our human capital."*

This recommendation will serve as the starting point of the deliberations at the Africa Day at the HLPF 2021. The event will also highlight the imperative to empower women and youth with digital skills and enhanced training in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, capitalizing on the opportunities afforded by the fourth industrial revolution and bringing them to the centre of the Decade of Action for implementation.

According to the International Telecommunications Union, as COVID-19 "reshapes the way in which we work, keep in touch, go to school and shop for essentials", it has never been more important to bridge the digital divide for the 3.6 billion people who remain off-line.[3] Despite the many challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique and timely opportunity to step up **digitalization** and the digital transformation of African countries. The emerging lessons learnt from the current experience can help make African countries build resilience and be well equipped to cope with future crises and shocks.

Africa's population is one of the youngest and fastest growing in the world. This trend will drive a greater demand for energy as an input to the production of goods and services, requiring significant bridging of physical and technological infrastructure gaps to meet the needs of the bulging population. The role of energy in general, and **renewable energy** in particular, as a key enabler of SDG implementation given its multiplier effect as well as a crucial ingredient of a green recovery from the worst and deepest economic crisis in the last 90 years, will also be a critical part of the discussions at the HLPF 2021. Positive spillovers from renewable energy to the entire socio-economic and environmental spectrum that underpins the implementation of the SDGs and the achievement of the goals and aspirations of Agenda 2063 will enrich the discussions in this platform.

As was highlighted during ARFSD-7 on building forward better, while there are no quick technical solutions to solve the climate emergency and the over-exploitation of natural resources, there is a particular

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[2] For more details on the ARFSD outcomes, key messages and the full text of the Brazzaville Declaration, please see "Seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development: summary, key messages and Brazzaville Declaration" (ECA/RFSD/2021/5).

[3] https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063272

need to explore nature-based and cost-effective solutions by investing in conservation and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems. **Nature-based solutions** often have positive and sustainable spillover effects, for instance reforestation projects help against land degradation and contribute to adaptation to climate change. Consequently, increased decent jobs in the agroforestry and ecotourism sectors support sustainable value chains and sustainable production and consumption patterns, and could lead to further investments in renewable energy and nature-based solutions – thereby creating a virtuous cycle.

In short, a comprehensive approach with local specificities building on digitalization, renewable energy and nature-based solution to provide the backbone of inclusive and resilient societies will be the key to a green recovery after the pandemic. Against this background, Africa Day at the HLPF 2021 is being organized under the theme, **"The Green Recovery: Renewable Energy, Digitalization and Nature-based Solutions for Inclusion and Resilience in Africa**".

Objectives

Africa Day at the HLPF will provide a global platform for African Member States to:

(1) share ARFSD-7 key messages and good practices, and opportunities, in particular on leveraging renewable energy, digital technology and other nature-based solutions towards the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063;

(2) put a spotlight on the challenges that African countries face in the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063, and propose action-oriented solutions;

(3) highlight the role of women and the growing youth population in supporting the implementation of both Agendas;

(4) exchange lessons on best practices in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 and share country experiences on the VNR process, including successes, challenges and lessons learned;

(5) mobilize greater support and partnerships for accelerated implementation of the two Agendas during the Decade of Action; and

(6) establish new partnerships with Africa's development partners to support African Member States address some of the challenges identified above.

Furthermore, with its focus on renewable energy, Africa Day at the HLPF will also provide a substantive link between key events in the United Nations calendar drawing a parallel from the HLPF in July to the General Assembly's High-level Dialogue on Energy, which will be held in September 2021. As such, the Africa at the HLPF event will draw on the work of the Inter-Departmental Task Force on African Affairs (IDTFAA) with its focus on SDG 7 as well as the preparatory processes of the High-level Dialogue on Energy.

Africa Day at the HLPF will provide a platform to examine the ways in which renewable energy and digital technologies can be utilized to accelerate progress on the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063, especially with a view to ensuring greater inclusivity, health, resilience and peace in Africa.

Expected Outcomes

- Strengthened dialogue among African policy makers and stakeholders at the continental, regional and national levels, the UN system entities and Africa's development partners on common challenges and successful implementation strategies towards leveraging Africa's digital revolution and renewable energy;
- Increased awareness on key areas requiring accelerated action to bridge the digital divide in Africa and promote greater equality and inclusion using renewable energy and other nature-based solutions;
- Enhanced sharing of strategies amongst African countries and development partners on addressing and leveraging the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic with a view to ensuring a green recovery; and
- Discussions at the technical level among experts to drive at forward-looking conclusions and policy recommendations on the chosen themes of the event.

Key Outputs

- A web-based report of the event, including key policy recommendations, will be produced and disseminated among participants, policy makers and stakeholders.

Format

The event will be held virtually with a high-level opening segment including addresses by the Chair of the ARDSF-7 Bureau, and the Vice-President of the 75th Session of the ECOSOC, as well as a keynote address by the AU Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Industry and Mining. This will be followed by a high-level interactive segment for sharing experiences and best practices among African Member States and development partners. The event will conclude with a technical panel of experts and interactive Q&A with the audience.

Participants

The virtual Africa Day event held during the 2021 HLPF will be open to all participants, including high-level government officials from all UN Member States, as well as representatives from African regional institutions, the UN system, bilateral and multilateral partners, representatives from women and youth groups, civil society, the private sector, academia and the media.

Co-organizers

The co-organizers of the annual Africa Day at the HLPF are: UN-OSAA, ECA, AUC, UNDP, and UNIDEP.

Annex: African Member States' VNR History

- **2016:** Egypt**, Madagascar, Morocco*, Sierra Leone**, Togo*, Uganda*

- **2017:** Benin**, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya*, Nigeria*, Togo*, Zimbabwe*

- **2018:** Benin**, Cabo Verde*, Congo, Egypt**, Guinea, Mali, Namibia*, Niger**, Senegal, Sudan, Togo*

- **2019:** Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad*, Congo*, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Lesotho, Mauritania, Mauritius, Sierra Leone**, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tunisia*

- **2020**: Benin**, Burundi, Comoros, DRC, The Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Morocco*, Mozambique, Niger**, Nigeria, Seychelles, Uganda*, Zambia

- **2021**: Angola, Cabo Verde*, Chad*, Egypt**, Madagascar*, Namibia*, Niger**, Sierra Leone**, Tunisia*, Zimbabwe*

* for Member States participating in VNRs twice; and
** for Member States participating in VNRs three times by the respective year.