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Parallel meetings for an in-depth review of progress made and peer learning on the sub-themes of the Regional Forum: parallel meeting on the sub-theme of peace, justice and strong institutions

Background paper on peace: transformative actions for peace, justice and strong institutions towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

I. Introduction

1. This paper was prepared by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) with contributions from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Coordination Offices, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the African Peer Review Mechanism. It is complementary to the 2020 Africa Sustainable Development Report, and the Sustainable Development Report 2020.¹

2. Sustainable Development 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) is vital to the inclusive achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals, and establishes a foundation for a human rights and gender analysis of the root causes of poverty, inequality, marginalization, statelessness, forced displacement and deprivation of socioeconomic rights, including the rights to education, health and decent employment.

3. Goal 16 lays a foundation for good governance through the establishment and strengthening of accountable institutions that strive to prevent and respond to conflict and strengthen respect for human rights and the rule of law with a view to sustaining peace and non-violence.² Similarly, a number of aspirations articulated in Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, are contingent on good governance and aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see table), reflecting the influence of the common African position on the post-2015 development agenda.

* ECA/RFSD/2021/12/Rev.1

¹ <https://sdgindex.org/reports/sustainable-development-report-2020/>.

² For further information regarding interactions among the Sustainable Development Goals, see International Science Council, *A Guide to SDG interactions: from Science to Implementation* (Paris, 2017).

Available at: council.science/publications/a-guide-to-sdg-interactions-from-science-toimplementation.



Table
Alignment of Sustainable Development Goal 16 with Agenda 2063

<i>Goal 16</i>	<i>Related goals in Agenda 2063</i>
Peace, justice and strong institutions	Goal 11: Democratic values, practices, universal principles of human rights, justice and rule of law entrenched
	Goal 12: Capable institutions and transformed leadership at all levels
	Goal 13: Peace, security and stability preserved
	Goal 14: A stable and peaceful Africa
	Goal 15: A fully functional and operational African peace and security architecture
	Goal 17: Full gender equality in all spheres of life
	Goal 18: Engaged and empowered youth and children

Source: ECA Strategic Framework 2019: Africa's Development Agenda Side by Side, Addis Ababa, 2019.

4. The year 2020 marked the start of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development that would "leave no one behind". This paper focuses on developments in Africa that support the achievement of Goal 16.

II. Overall objective

5. The overall objective of this paper is to provide an overview of the status of implementation of Goal 16 in Africa and highlight regional efforts to address critical issues related to measurability and reporting progress.

III. Specific objectives

(a) Assess progress, gaps, emerging trends and catalytic actions that can accelerate the achievement of selected Goal 16 targets on peace, justice and institutions.

(b) Examine the impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in addition to strategies for recovery, building forward better, accelerating the pace and scale of implementation of Goal 16, and leveraging human rights commitments, opportunities, transformative levers and strategic partnerships.

IV. Key trends and progress towards achievement of selected targets, including gaps, constraints and emerging issues

6. The most significant challenge impeding African countries' efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals is, in fact, the lack of progress towards the achievement of Goal 16 in four of the continent's five subregions. Although the 12 targets of Goal 16 are measurable, consistent data is available for only 16 of the 23 Goal 16 indicators.³ National statistical offices produce good data on access to justice, but representation in public institutions and political participation are under-captured. Where country-level data are scarce, regional and global indicators produced by non-governmental stakeholders, such as national human rights institutions, are used to monitor progress against the Goal 16 targets.

7. Frequently used regional indicators are based on the Afrobarometer survey and the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, while global indicators draw from a

³ The Sustainable Development Goal indicators for which limited data is available include: 16.1.2, 16.3.3, 16.4.1, 16.4.2, 16.6.2, 16.7.2 and 16.10.1.

number of sources, including the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, the Global Peace Index, the Freedom in the World annual study conducted by Freedom House, the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, and the World Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessment. Twenty-four member States have also used the UNESCO Media Development indicators, which define a framework within which the media can contribute to, and benefit from, good governance and democratic development.⁴

8. Overall, governance in Africa remains on an upward trajectory, but Africa still needs to accelerate progress in that area.⁵ Indeed, progress in Africa towards the establishment of democratic societies is slower than in other continents. Only 10 African countries, home to roughly 133 million people, are categorized as free,⁶ while, according to Freedom House, only 58 per cent of Africans live in countries that are truly democratic.⁷

A. Progress on Peace

9. While peaceful societies are the foundation of economic development, insecurity, terrorism, social strife, political tension and riots remain common on the continent. The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the reluctance of governments to enact reforms to promote transparency and accountability with a view to streamlining efforts to foster sustainable development. Respect for human rights, including economic and social rights, and civil and political rights, will be fundamental to the success of the COVID-19 response.

Ongoing conflict and the Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative

10. Lack of progress in security could lead to setbacks in building institutions or development-related goals and targets. The incidence of armed conflicts and violence since 2017 has differed in terms of the triggers, actors and overall dynamics. However, those conflicts have similar underlying root causes, linked to structural weaknesses, including poor governance, the failure to uphold human rights standards, horizontal and vertical inequality, and diversity mismanagement. Indicator 16.1.2, on conflict-related deaths,⁸ has shown variation across subregions, with declines in the number of conflict-related deaths recorded in Nigeria and the Central African Republic between 2015 and 2019.⁹

11. Violence and conflict drivers in most societies in Africa are linked to a range of governance and human rights challenges. These include: gender inequality and discrimination; exclusion; corruption; child abuse; and limited access to information, which is both a basic human right and an enabler for the realization of other rights, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the promotion of the rule of law. Moreover, conflict trends in Africa have sharply shifted from traditional

⁴ UNESCO, *Media Development Indicators: A framework for assessing media development* (Paris, 2008). Available at unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000163102.

⁵ For further information see: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *Ibrahim Index of African Governance*. Available at: mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag, and African Peer Review Mechanism and African Union, *The African Governance Report: Promoting African Union Shared Values* (January 2019). Available at: au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36418-doc-eng-the_africa_governance_report_2019_final-1.pdf

⁶ The ten countries are: Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, South Africa, Mauritius and Namibia.

⁷ Jackie Chilliers, *Africa first! Igniting a growth revolution*, pp. 244-246 (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2020).

⁸ Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause.

⁹ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring peace in a complex world* (Sydney, June 2020). Available at www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/GPI_2020_web.pdf

inter-State to mostly intra-State conflicts, providing an alarming indication of just how fragile certain African communities have become.

12. There is significant disparity across the continent in terms of access to information. By July 2020, only 24 African countries had adopted laws on access to information.^{10 11} Despite that legislation, a culture of secrecy still characterizes certain countries and continues to impede investigative reporting. The implementation of anti-terrorism and cybercrime laws has sometimes curtailed media freedom in African countries, even though the right to freedom of expression and access to information are crucial in promoting peaceful coexistence, the engagement of citizens in public affairs and good governance.

13. Violent conflicts today are often more complex and protracted than in the past, often involving a range of non-State groups in addition to regional and international actors.¹² Such conflicts often lead to allegations of human rights abuses and war crimes. Increased efforts from a wide range of stakeholders are therefore required to prevent the occurrence and escalation of violence. Violence is an obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and crime, particularly organized crime, remains a significant challenge, especially for the continent's larger economies. Furthermore, "Incitement to radicalization towards violent extremism" (or "violent radicalization") has grown in recent years.¹³

14. The African Union Master Road Map of Practical Steps for Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020, adopted by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union in November 2017, recognizes the need for structural intermediation in the continent's socioeconomic sphere, and the importance of leveraging issues such as governance, inclusiveness, youth, women and climate change to foster peace in Africa. The Roadmap calls on key stakeholders in Africa to support its implementation at the continental, subregional, national, and cross-cutting levels. The African Peer Review Mechanism has been asked to establish a conflict early warning mechanism across the continent.

15. In the context of the Silencing the Guns by 2020 initiative of the African Union, the African Peer Review Mechanism collaborated with the Economic Community of West African States, the United Nations Development Programme and the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development in preparing the African Peer Review Mechanism Framework on Early Warning and Conflict Prevention, which was endorsed at the 914th meeting of the Peace and Security Council, underscoring the determination of the African Union to transition from operational to structural prevention strategies.

Civil unrest

16. Civil unrest has increased sharply over the last decade, with over 96 countries globally experiencing at least one violent demonstration in 2019. Civil unrest in Africa rose by more than 800 per cent from 32 riots and protests in 2011 to 292 in 2018, mostly as a result of events occurring after 2015. The region had the highest

¹⁰ UNESCO, *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Regional overview of Africa 2017/2018* (Paris, 2018). Available at: unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000266191

¹¹ UNESCO, *From Promise to Practice: Access to Information for Sustainable Development: 2020 UNESCO Report on the Monitoring and Reporting of SDG Indicator 16.10.2 (Public Access to Information)*, UNESCO, 2020 (Paris, 2020). Available at: ifap.ru/pr/2020/n201207b.pdf

¹² United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict: Executive Summary booklet* (Washington, D.C., 2018). Available at: olc.worldbank.org/system/files/Pathways%20for%20Peace%20Executive%20Summary.pdf

¹³ Séraphin Alvara, Divina Frau-Meigs and Ghayda Hassan, *Youth and violent extremism on social media: Mapping the research* (Paris, UNESCO, 2017). Available at www.gcedclearinghouse.org/resources/youth-and-violent-extremism-social-media-mapping-research-0

proportion of violent demonstrations, with riots making up 42.6 per cent of total events.¹⁴

17. In 2019, sustained demonstrations in the Sudan demanding a democratic transition led to a coup d'état and the removal of President Omar al-Bashir. In response to protestors' demands, the Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned, ending his 20-year presidency.¹⁵ Meanwhile, weeks of protests across Egypt calling for President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to step down were met with force and mass arrests.^{16 17}

18. Nigeria had the largest number of demonstrations, rising from 6 to 79 in 2018. Perhaps the most prominent issue was the imprisonment of Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, whose supporters held numerous demonstrations in which they called for his release from prison, where he has been held since 2015.¹⁸

19. In 2017 as emergency restrictions to contain protests expired in Ethiopia, citizens returned to the streets, with riots and demonstrations rising by 500 per cent between 2015 and 2018. Much of the unrest occurred in Oromia state, which surrounds the capital, Addis Ababa, reflecting long-standing tensions between the province and the federal Government. Demonstrations and ensuing violence led to the resignation of then-Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in February 2018.¹⁹ The ongoing Tigray crisis and mass arrests of civilians has caused further friction within Ethiopian society.

20. In Guinea, protestors and government forces clashed frequently, with violence reported in 65 per cent of the demonstrations. Most events took place in 2018, as teacher-led protests eventually secured a promised pay increase from the Government,²⁰ while local political parties marched to demand the release of municipal elections results, alleging ruling party fraud. Protests and riots have continued since 2018. Furthermore, President Alpha Conde held a referendum on 22 March 2020 to change the constitution and allow himself a third term, sparking further protests and resulting in more than 30 deaths.²¹

Refugees and internally displaced

21. Internally displaced persons constitute a large proportion of the population of many African countries. The countries with the highest proportion of internally displaced persons within their borders include Somalia (20 per cent), the Central African Republic (20 per cent) and South Sudan (37 per cent) and there are 15 African countries in which at least 5 per cent of the population are either refugees or internally displaced persons.²² The Tigray crisis has compelled 30,000 Ethiopian

¹⁴ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring peace in a complex world*.

¹⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation, "Abdelaziz Bouteflika: Algerian leader resigns amid protests", 3 April 2019. Available at: www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47795108

¹⁶ Al Jazeera, "Protests break out across Egypt demanding el-Sisi's resignation", 27 September 2019. Available at: www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/27/protests-break-out-across-egypt-demanding-el-sisis-resignation

¹⁷ Amnesty International, "Egypt: Rare protests met with unlawful force and mass arrests", 2 October 2020. Available at: www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/10/egypt-rare-protests-met-with-unlawful-force-and-mass-arrests/

¹⁸ Stanford University Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, "Analysis of an October 2020 Facebook Takedown Linked to the Islamic Movement in Nigeria", 8 October 2020. Available at: fsi.stanford.edu/news/islamic-movement-nigeria

¹⁹ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring peace in a complex world*

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ DefenceWeb, "Civil unrest on the rise globally", 14 July 2020. Available at: www.defenceweb.co.za/feature/civil-unrest-on-the-rise-globally/

²² Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring peace in a complex world*

citizens to flee as refugees to the Sudan,²³ where the number of Ethiopian refugees is projected to reach 100,000 persons by first quarter of 2021.²⁴

Economic impact of violence

22. The economic impact of violence in Africa has been highest in South Sudan, where it reduced GDP by some 57 per cent in 2019. In the ten countries whose economies have been most affected by violence, GDP has fallen by an average of 41 per cent.²⁵

Terrorism

23. Globally, deaths from terrorism fell for the fifth consecutive year in 2019 to 13,826. It should be noted, however, that Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has become increasingly active in sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of people killed by that group increased by 67 percent.²⁶ The largest decreases in terrorism-related deaths occurred in Afghanistan and Nigeria, the only two countries to have recently experienced more than 1,000 deaths from terrorism per year. Conflict remains the primary driver of terrorism, with over 96 per cent of terrorism-related deaths in 2019 occurring in countries already affected by conflict.

24. Despite the overall reduction in its impact, terrorism remains a significant and serious threat in many countries, particularly in Burkina Faso, where deaths rose by 590 per cent and in Mozambique, Mali and the Niger, where the number of people killed in terrorist attacks increased substantially. Indeed, 7 of the 10 countries with the largest increases in terrorism deaths are in sub-Saharan Africa, where ISIL affiliates were mainly responsible for the increase.

25. Since March 2020, when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, preliminary data suggests that there has been a decline in the number of terrorist incidents and terrorist-related deaths worldwide. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic presents new and distinct counter-terrorism challenges. It is, for example, crucial that counter-terrorism initiatives are not curtailed because of decreases in government expenditure due to the economic downturn. Furthermore, reductions in international assistance for counter-terrorism operations in Africa could prove counter-productive.²⁷

B. Progress on Justice

26. Justice can be a means to deal with discriminatory laws, practices, or crimes that undermine the enjoyment of human rights. Measures to ensure access to justice and effective remedies and strengthen accountability are important prerequisites for the consolidation of peace and the creation of peaceful societies. An analysis of current trends reveals that a significant number of people continue to live under oppressive laws that fail to comply with international human rights standards. Factors such as poverty, conflict, corruption, the lack of legal identity and inadequate legal safeguards exacerbate exclusion, socioeconomic inequalities and social deprivation, thus curtailing the enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. Individuals subject to oppressive legal frameworks continue to

²³Khaled Abdelaziz and El Tayeb Siddig (Reuters) "Fleeing Tigray war, Ethiopians cross river into Sudan", 14 November 2020. Available at: www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-conflict-refugees/fleeing-tigray-war-ethiopians-cross-river-into-sudan-idUSKBN27U0L2

²⁴ Interview with senior Sudanese police officer, November 2020.

²⁵ Vision of Humanity, "Global cost of violence continues to decline" (2020). Available at: www.visionofhumanity.org/global-cost-of-violence-continues-to-decline/

²⁶ Institute for Economics and Peace, "2020 Global Terrorism Index: Deaths from terrorism reach five-year low, but new risks emerge", 25 November 2020. Available at: www.visionofhumanity.org/global-terrorism-index-2020-deaths-from-terrorism-reach-five-year-low-but-new-risks-emerge/

²⁷ Ibid.

face challenges in terms of accessing public services and are at high risk of being left behind.

27. Access to justice and the enjoyment of rights is denied when laws deviate from key international standards and exclude certain groups. Refugees for example, are often denied access to education. For those with legal identity, seeking justice is often prohibitively expensive and/or legal proceedings are excessively lengthy. Across Africa, legal needs far exceed the provision of legal aid and more than 5 billion people worldwide fall into a “justice gap” because they cannot access legal services to resolve their problems.²⁸

28. Almost half the continent’s population of 1.2 billion lack official identification, a challenge that is exacerbated by weak civil registration and vital statistics systems and further contributes to the marginalization and exclusion of many Africans. Africa has the lowest levels of registration for children less than 5 years of age and only 46 per cent of African children have an official identity. The situation is particularly grave in Chad, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Somalia and Zambia, while Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia have achieved almost universal registration at birth.

29. There is concern about the high number of imprisoned journalists, shutdowns of social media, and severe restrictions placed on civic and democratic engagement, United Nations and African Union normative frameworks notwithstanding. Impunity for crimes against journalists remains high, in spite of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. In 2006–2018, UNESCO recorded 1,109 killings of journalists, with only 131 cases of journalists’ killings reported by member States as being resolved since 2006 – an 88 per cent impunity rate.²⁹

30. However, there are positive improvements in several rules of law indicators, including access to justice and judicial independence, and, increasing numbers of Africans have indicated that the courts have the right to make decisions that people must abide by, reflecting the growing legitimacy of the judiciary.

31. Building just societies contributes to preventing violence and conflict, and people are increasingly turning to informal, traditional and customary justice systems to seek quick, accessible, inexpensive resolution of disputes. This tends to happen more frequently in areas outside the reach of State authority, although these systems may not be aligned with the human rights protections afforded under international law, particularly in cases of gender-related crimes.³⁰ Countries are searching for efficient and effective ways to deliver justice, including alternative dispute resolution forums, mobile courts and legal aid provision.³¹ They are also looking into community-based legal services and paralegals that can advise and assist people through the justice system, focusing on those most at risk of being left behind.

²⁸ World Justice Project, Task Force on Justice, *Measuring the Justice Gap*, (6 February 2019). Available at: worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/Measuring%20the%20Justice%20Gap_Feb_2019.pdf

²⁹ UNESCO, *Intensified attacks, new defenses: developments in the fight to protect journalists and end impunity* (Paris, 2019). Available at: unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371487

³⁰ International Development Law Organization, “Customary and Informal Justice”. Available at: www.idlo.int/what-we-do/access-justice/customary-informal-justice

³¹ Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, *Enabling the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through SDG 16+: Anchoring peace, justice and inclusion* (New York, 2019). Available at: www.sdg16hub.org UNDP, 2019. *Global Alliance Report on SDG16.*”

Just societies, illicit financial flows, corruption and bribery

32. A just society, free of corruption and bribery and with high levels of trust in public institutions, can make significant contributions to accelerating Sustainable Development Goal targets in the economic domain (Goal 8). Corruption continues to weaken good governance, and the leakages and bottlenecks it causes increases the cost of development by exacerbating inequalities, the number and frequency of human rights violations, discrimination and other forms of injustice.

33. While many African countries are making progress towards the establishment of a democratic, prosperous, and peaceful continent, in line with Goal 16 and the goals, aspirations and targets of Agenda 2063, those gains are threatened by high levels of corruption. Alongside the problem of petty bribery, which is extensive in certain African countries, the interrelated phenomena of fragility, crony capitalism, and poor governance have resulted in shocking forms of corruption, including most notably state capture. In response, countries have enacted various anti-corruption legal instruments, which are complemented by anti-corruption efforts by regional organizations, civil society, and the media.

34. As a continent, Africa ranked lowest on the 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index, published by Transparency International, with an average score of 32 out of 100.³² Global governance indices suggest that the public sector in Africa is more corrupt than the public sector in any other continent. Corrupt practices are deeply intertwined with ongoing conflicts and with State fragility in certain African countries, notably in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

35. Political corruption is common and takes many forms, such as state capture, patronage networks, opaque political party financing, vote buying and unresolved conflicts of interests. Land-based corruption is prevalent in the region, with women being particularly vulnerable. Regional legal instruments have been adopted but with mixed results, and there is a growing number of regional organizations and civil society and media groups working to combat corruption in Africa.

36. To fight the COVID-19 pandemic, critical financial resources and supplies have been mobilized in Africa, but legacies of corruption continue to compromise response efforts at a time when countries are economically vulnerable^{33 34 35}. The critical question of how African policymakers can prevent and highlight incidences of corruption and implement systemic reform remains unanswered.

37. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that Africa loses some \$88.6 billion annually through illicit capital flight. This undermines the impact of foreign direct investment and aid flows and threatens the continent's development. Illicit financial flows³⁶ drain vital revenues from Africa, undermining stability and hindering implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.³⁷ To tackle that challenge, UNODC and the United Nations

³² Jorum Duri, "Sub-Saharan Africa: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption" (Transparency International, 20 March 2020). Available at: www.u4.no/publications/sub-saharan-africa-overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption.pdf

³³ Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Covid corruption", podcast, 2020. Available at: www.csis.org/podcasts/africa/covid-corruption

³⁴ The Independent, Uganda, "Africa's Covid-19 corruption", 21 September 2020. Available at: www.independent.co.ug/africas-covid-19-corruption/

³⁵ UNODC, "Covid-19 Emergency Support Packages in West and Central Africa: An overview and analysis of fraud and corruption risks". Available at: www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/covid-19-emergency-support-packages-in-west-and-central-africa.html

³⁶ The term "illicit financial flows" refers to activities considered to be criminal offences but also to certain behaviours that drain vital financial resources from the continent through tax and commercial activities, corruption, theft-type activities, the financing of crime and terrorism, and illegal markets.

³⁷ UNODC, "UNODC Counters Illicit Financial Flows in Africa", 4 November 2020.

Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) have developed frameworks for conceptualizing, detecting, tracking, measuring and curbing illicit financial flows.³⁸

C. Progress on strong and inclusive institutions

38. Strong institutions that are effective, accountable and transparent are the mechanism through which State parties execute their human rights obligations and ensure good governance in the implementation of their commitments under regional and international human rights instruments. The COVID-19 pandemic in Africa has shown that, without capable, accountable, inclusive and participatory governments and institutions, it is extremely difficult to address pandemics and other contemporary and emerging challenges in an effective manner.³⁹

39. To enhance governance, States should start by addressing governance deficits⁴⁰ and enablers, redefine and give priority attention to the improvement of State-society relations, and revitalize the social contract. Those steps should be taken in tandem with measures to combat impunity, corruption and accountability deficits. All steps taken should be based on human rights principles and should focus on the most marginalized segments of the population. Effective State governance requires strong institutions and the solidarity, cooperation and collaboration of regional and global stakeholders.

40. African countries have adopted a wide range of measures to combat and address the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, including disease prevention and containment measures and the provision of social, humanitarian and fiscal support.⁴¹ The pandemic has highlighted significant capacity, legal and institutional deficits in the delivery of essential public goods and services in Africa.

41. The ongoing pandemic has resulted in a sharp global economic downturn and significant job losses. This has deepened inequality and undermined education and critical skills training programmes in most countries. To address COVID-19-related skills gaps, capacity deficits and job losses, and the growing digital divide, States must, first and foremost, adopt an innovative approach to governance and seek to leverage innovative technologies, including technologies that facilitate e-governance, with a view to enhancing the delivery of public services and goods.⁴² To achieve those objectives, States will need to collaborate with the private sector and international development partners.

42. In 2019, there were mixed results on the extent to which the continent's institutions were inclusive. While participation has improved, driven by pseudo-democratic elections, that improvement has taken place alongside a shrinking civil society space and worsening trends in freedom of association and assembly, civil rights and liberties, and freedom of expression. In 2020, the African Peer Review

Available at: www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2020/November/unodc-counters-illicit-financial-flows-in-africa.html

³⁸ UNCTAD and UNODC, *Conceptual framework for the statistical measurement of illicit financial flows*, October 2020. Available at: www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/IFF/IFF_Conceptual_Framework_for_publication_15Oct.pdf

³⁹ George Wachira, "COVID-19 reaffirms the importance of good governance and effective states in Africa", *ECDPM Great Insights*, vol. 9, issue 3. Available at: ecdpm.org/great-insights/navigating-eu-au-post-covid/covid-19-good-governance-africa/

⁴⁰ African Peer Review Mechanism, *Africa's Governance Response to COVID-19: Preliminary Report 2020*. (Johannesburg, 6 June 2020). Available at: www.aprm-au.org/publications/africas-governance-report-to-covid-19/

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Kartik Jayaram and others, "Finding Africa's path: Shaping bold solutions to save lives and livelihoods in the COVID -19 crisis" McKinsey & Company, 17 April 2020. Available at: www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/finding-africas-path-shaping-bold-solutions-to-save-lives-and-livelihoods-in-the-COVID-19-crisis#

Mechanism and the Committee of Experts on Public Administration, established by the Economic and Social Council, concluded an assessment of efforts by 15 African countries to uphold the Committee's principles of effective governance for sustainable development, namely effectiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness.⁴³ The assessment revealed a lack of awareness of the principles and the strategies that can be adopted to ensure that they are upheld, despite the stated commitment of those countries to comply with African Union instruments and declarations on strengthening public administration and fighting corruption.

43. Although many countries have adopted mechanisms to ensure that public officials are held accountable for their actions, penalties imposed and prosecutions for misconduct or abuse of office have become increasingly rare. While corruption in the form of bribes is less prevalent in executive branches than in the public and private sectors, favouritism, the worst performing corruption-related measure, is on the rise in both government and the private sector. Lack of transparency can act as an obstacle to enforcing accountability.⁴⁴

44. The right to information held by public authorities is an integral aspect of freedom of expression and serves as a mechanism to support government openness and accountability as well as enhanced empowerment and equality among all social groups. Progress is being made in ensuring this right through constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information, in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.10.2. Such guarantees have now been adopted by 24 African countries.⁴⁵

45. Despite progress achieved by many African countries in terms of their adoption of relevant legislative frameworks, much needs to be done to ensure that laws are implemented effectively. Of the 10 African countries with access to information guarantees that responded to a UNESCO survey in 2020, only 4 provided statistics on the number of requests for information and appeals filed by the public. This highlights the fact that there are challenges regarding the reliability, accuracy and completeness of information about the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries. It also underscores the importance of good record-keeping by public authorities and access to information oversight bodies. Without adequate and reliable records of the requests and appeals received and how they are processed, it is difficult to generate data, measure progress and facilitate social governance.

V. Stepping up the pace and scale of implementation: opportunities for transformative leadership, partnerships, commitments and actions to accelerate implementation

46. With less than a decade remaining before the 2030 deadline for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is imperative to strengthen the implementation of actions that feed into the 12 targets and 23 indicators of Sustainable Development Goal 16 and address limitations in that regard. This will require strong multi-stakeholder engagement, commitment and collaboration at the national, regional and global levels and the use of standardized and reliable data.

⁴³ For further info, see: publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/CEPA/Principles-of-Effective-Governance

⁴⁴ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance: Key Findings* (25 November 2020). Available at: mo.ibrahim.foundation/news/2020/2020-ibrahim-index-african-governance-key-findings

⁴⁵ See UNESCO, *From Promise to Practice: Access to Information for Sustainable Development: 2020 UNESCO Report on the Monitoring and Reporting of SDG Indicator 16.10.2 (Public Access to Information)*. Under UNESCO groupings, 21 of these countries are categorized under "Africa" and the remaining 3 countries, namely Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia, are categorized under "Arab States".

A. Implementation requires a “whole of government” and “whole of society” approach

47. African Governments should adopt a “whole of government” approach in localizing and achieving the full implementation of both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, by involving national governmental agencies and State institutions, and integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into local government and institutional work plans. A “whole of society” approach with broad and meaningful engagement and consultation with stakeholders across society is key to ensuring that no one is left behind. This approach is most effective when it is institutionalized within formal structures and at different levels of government. Multi-stakeholder partnerships and platforms involving international organizations, including the African Union and the United Nations, and actors from government, civil society, youth organizations, academic institutions and the private sector are critical to the achievement of Goal 16 and building back stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic.

B. Political will and financial investment are needed to accelerate progress on Sustainable Development Goal 16

48. The achievement of Goal 16 can facilitate the achievement of other Goals if governments embrace full ownership of the process and invest in initiatives to accelerate its implementation. Visionary and committed national leadership is essential to accelerate progress on Goal 16 and to transform societies to prevent conflict, address inequalities, reduce injustices and be more inclusive. Failure to invest in Goal 16 could worsen violence, injustice and exclusion, reversing development gains across all Sustainable Development Goals, including in areas such as education, health and climate action. Increased public sector financing for the Goals can be attained through progressive taxation, curbing illicit financial flows, institutional capacity development and meaningful civic participation.

C. Fundamental freedoms and rights need to be protected, for inclusion, peace and justice

49. A human rights-based approach to development based on international human rights standards and environmental, social and political rights can support the effective implementation of Goal 16. Despite global commitments, including the Secretary-General’s “Sustaining Peace Resolutions”, peacebuilding processes continue to exclude the participation and perspectives of those most affected by conflict and war. The inclusion of all groups in fragile and conflict-affected societies, including women and young people, at all levels of policy development and peacebuilding processes, in local mediation and conflict resolution, and in planning and decision-making is critical for sustaining peace.

D. Multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaboration are accelerators and enablers for the means of implementation towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16, fully leveraging the comparative advantage of each partner

50. Such partnerships include joint planning and resource-pooling in targeted geographical areas, building databases for monitoring and evaluating Goal 16, and acquiring needed expertise and financing. South-South and triangular cooperation could be used to promote knowledge and technology sharing among countries. Structured engagement between governments, the media and other partners can help address press freedom violations and barriers impeding access to information. Inclusive multi-stakeholder platforms and mechanisms can help to ensure accountability, accessibility and transparency through information sharing, data-

gathering, bottom-up progress reporting, and facilitate reviews of funding allocation and spending on the basis of international standards.

E. Sustained investment is required in reliable data to address persistent data gaps, including disaggregated data, to ensure that policies and programs reach marginalized and vulnerable groups, and others who are left behind

51. Goal 16 remains a challenge to measure because relevant indicators have only recently been developed and have not yet been standardized across countries. This continues to impede the development of methodologies for data collection and tracking and monitoring progress. Data collection systems are weak and systematic data disaggregation at the local level is still a challenge. The inadequacy of official statistics impedes any reliable comparison of the status of implementation at the regional and subregional levels. African countries have innovated and committed to measuring and reporting on the governance goal but few countries have allocated funding specifically for the generation of Goal 16 statistics.⁴⁶ Moreover, monitoring frameworks, methodologies and national practices are State- and citizen-centred, and therefore leave out people without citizen status, including refugees and stateless individuals. It is essential to expand the use of different data sources, including people-generated data, and explore new partnerships between data actors in order to further develop national capacities for data collection, analysis and dissemination.

VI. Key messages

52. The following messages focus on opportunities and transformative actions, commitments, levers, partnerships, and other measures to accelerate implementation.

(a) **It is vital to establish effective disaggregated data collection, monitoring and evaluation systems to accelerate the achievement of Goal 16.** Weaknesses in data collection systems, and the lack of systematic coverage and data-disaggregation methodologies at local, national and regional levels has impeded responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. If not addressed, methodological issues, political challenges, and practical and implementation issues related to data collection and statistical capacity may undermine efforts to monitor progress on Goal 16. It is, moreover, important to strengthen institutional collaboration between national human rights institutions and national statistical offices in order to integrate human rights concepts into national Sustainable Development Goal agendas, specifically in disaggregated data collection. Although they should be exploited in a responsible manner, the data revolution, big data and artificial intelligence have significant potential for accelerating progress on Goal 16.

(b) **Country-level action on Goal 16 remains critical, especially during emergencies such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.** The so-called COVID-19 “disinfectant”, namely the huge amount of misinformation that has accompanied the pandemic has proven how misinformation and disinformation is a threat to a climate of peace in Africa. Country-level action is required to ensure the adoption of human rights-based and conflict- and gender-sensitive approaches in development planning, implementation and monitoring, in partnership with civil society. Goal 16 should be incorporated into subnational and national development plans so that tangible development dividends are enjoyed by local communities, households and

⁴⁶ Marie Laberge, *Is Africa Measuring Up to Its Goal 16 Commitments? The Road to HLPF 2019 and Beyond* (South African Institute of International Affairs and UNDP, 2019).

Available at: www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Global%20Policy%20Centres/OGC/SAIIA%20UNDP%20SDG%2016%20Africa%20Report.pdf

individuals, especially those who are, vulnerable, marginalized and risk being left behind.

(c) **Policy, practice and process are required for advancing peaceful and inclusive societies in the region.** This entails addressing locally-, nationally-, regionally- and globally-based drivers of violence; ending and preventing abuse, exploitation, trafficking, torture and all forms of violence, in particular among vulnerable populations, by advancing peace and sustainable development as mutually reinforcing processes; accelerating progress on peaceful, just and inclusive societies in conflict and crisis situations; and promoting dialogue and reducing insecurity by enhancing legal identity for all, including birth registration. Governments and international organizations should fight impunity for crimes against journalists by supporting capacity-building activities for judicial officials, including judges and prosecutors, on freedom of expression and the role of journalists in promoting peace and the rule of law. Moreover, access to information oversight and appeals bodies are fundamental to ensure access to information. Although 24 United Nations Member States having adopted laws guaranteeing access to information, further efforts are needed to ensure that those laws are implemented effectively. Governments in Africa without access to information laws should adopt such laws at the earliest opportunities in order to promote freedom of expression and peace in Africa.

(d) **Access to meaningful justice is key to sustaining peace and accelerating inclusive sustainable development.** A people-centred approach to justice prioritizes inclusivity, innovation and accessibility to address inequality. Such an approach involves promoting the rule of law, strengthening respect for fundamental freedoms, and leveraging non-discriminatory laws and policies to combat corruption, illicit financial flows and organized crime, in accordance with domestic legislation and relevant international conventions.

(e) **Transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions are central to the effective achievement, monitoring and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals at local, national, regional and global levels.** It is important to foster enabling environments for participation and public access to information, and the protection of fundamental freedoms, leveraging national human rights institutions to monitor human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Enhanced democratic participation includes a representative role of parliaments, opening up civic space further in accordance with United Nations and African Union human rights mechanisms, and leveraging innovative technologies alongside principles that govern information and communications technology to ensure prudent participatory economic governance that promotes the efficient use of public resources in order to achieve planned objectives.