Outcome Report

APRM Capacity Building Workshop on

Africa's Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) for

the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2021 and African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 Reporting Framework

22 – 23 February 2021

Djibouti

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Djibouti

In partnership with the SDGs Centre for Africa, GIZ, the African Union Commission, UNDESA, and UNDP Regional Centre in Addis Ababa.

The workshop in a nutshell

The third APRM capacity-building Regional workshop on Africa's Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) took place from **February 22 to 23rd, 2021,** in partnership with the GIZ office to the African Union and other strategic partners. Since 2018, the APRM has been committed, under its expanded mandate, to support sharing knowledge and peer-learning on SDGs/Agenda 2063 planning, domestication, and monitoring and evaluation. In 2019, the APRM organized two workshops in Addis (Jan 2019) and Kigali (October 2019), while in 2020, Virtual Regional Dialogues were conducted with representatives from twelve African Union (AU) member-states and civil society on national COVID-19 responses and preparations for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2020. Participation in this third workshop was hybrid as speakers attended both physically and virtually. National experts from over 12 AU member-states (Egypt, Benin, Chad Djibouti, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda, Mauritius, Ghana, and South Africa) actively participated in the workshop to showcase national experiences in VNRs preparations as well as addressing SDGs/Agenda 2063 progress in 2020. Individuals from civil society and International Organizations such as Accountability Lab, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), AU commission, African Development Bank were in attendance.

Key Messages and Recommendations

- Multi-stakeholder *platforms for coordination and implementation of SDGs and Agenda 2063 at Country level matter. Lessons from some countries that dedicated institutional mechanisms i.e. SDGs taskforces and VNRs working groups have contributed to ensuring collaboration among national stakeholders for VNRs preparations despite COVID-19 disruptions.*

- *Acknowledgement that no single country has fully recovered from the pandemic. The recovery scenarios from COVID-19 necessitates further attention to be drawn to SDG 3 on health, well-being and sustainability. COVID-19 has revealed that there are additional layers of institutional fragilities and vulnerabilities in Africa. SDGs Planning and monitoring programs become further challenging with restrictive measures taken in 2020 to curb the pandemic.*

- *UNECA, AUC, SDGCA and APRM are urged to work closely together to come up with an integrated monitoring and evaluation tools to track Agenda 2063 &SDGs. The harmonization of the different monitoring and reporting systems remain important to overcome reporting fatigue before member states*

- *The APRM offers an exceptional regional mechanism to share experiences and peer-learning on VNRs preparations prior to the HLPF occasion on yearly basis. The value-add of these VNRs workshop must be sustained and endured even at national levels if financial resources exist.*

- *Despite various efforts to publicize Agenda 2063 and its flagship projects, a clear disconnection remains between SDGs and Agenda 2063 in some African countries. APRM and AU organs must align efforts to raise awareness on Agenda 2063 and its flagship projects at national levels.*

A. Opening Session

The opening remarks were delivered by Prof. Eddy Maloka, CEO of APRM continental Secretariat, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Barbra Manzi, UN Resident coordinator to Djibouti, Dr. Inge Baumgarten, Director, GIZ Office to the African Union (AU) and Dr. Hala El-Said Minister of Planning and Economic Development (Egypt). An emphasis was paid to the COVID-19 crisis and how it affected the reporting process on VNRs and African countries' resilience practices. The APRM was commended for sustaining the regional meetings on VNRs before the High-level political forum (HLPF) 2021 and the importance of providing an African platform to discuss SDGs progress and challenges given the daunting consequences of COVID-19 on African economies and societies.

The workshop was organized into eight sessions which discussed the following issues:

1. **VNRs 2020 and lessons learned from COVID-19,**
2. **Institutional mechanisms and means of implementation for domesticating SDGs and Agenda 2063,**
3. **Cross-cutting issues in VNRs and Agenda 2063, such as gender, migration, and civil society empowerment,**
4. **Updated guidelines on VNR reporting - HLPF 2021,**
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of SDGs and Agenda 2063,**
6. **Peer-learning exercise on M&E national frameworks,**
7. **SDGs finance and horizontal partnerships for the governance of SDGs and Agenda 2063,** and
8. **Preparations for the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and the HLPF 2021.**

B. Workshop Presentations and Discussions

I.   **VNRs 2020 and lessons learned from COVID-19**

Kenya

Mr. Saitoti Torome, Principal Secretary of Planning at the State Department of Planning, indicated that his country follows **a two-tier** government structure comprised of the national and 47 counties. The former offers technical support to counties that mainstream SDGs and Agenda 2063 and build capacities. At the national level, SDGs and Agenda 2063 are mainstreamed through Medium Term Plans (MTPs). At the county level, SDGs and Agenda 2063 are mainstreamed through the County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs). Projects and programs are implemented based on priorities that are identified in MTPS and CIDPs. The government has unveiled a **big 4 Agenda** focusing on food and nutrition security, universal health coverage (UHC), manufacturing, and affordable housing.

This Agenda helps to realize SDGs 2 (, 3, 9, and 11. Kenya's capacity to monitor indicators has increased from 128 in 2017 to 136 now out of the 232 SDG indicators. The Inter-Agency Technical Committee (IATC) is the entity responsible for coordinating the SDGs nationally. It is composed of, among other things, ministries, non-state actors, academia, the UNDP, and the National Youth Council (NYC). A whole of government and a total of society approach is used to implement the SDGs.

Regarding COVID-19, the government set up a National Coordination Committee to assess the risks and offer adequate measures to prepare, prevent and respond. A COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund was also established. The VNR process was affected due to the containment measures adopted nation-wide. The HLF 2020, which took place virtually, required online consultations and pre-recorded presentations.

Nigeria

Dr. Bala Yusuf Yunusa, Senior Technical Advisor in the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs, made a presentation on Nigeria's progress on SDGs. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Nigeria acted quickly and created the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs, which has four mandates. Nigeria's first VNR was completed in 2017, one of 44 countries that presented VNRs that year. The VNR was developed as an evidence-based report through a whole society approach involving all society segments. It highlighted areas of progress and challenges in the achievement of SDGs.

A multi-stakeholder core working group on VNRs (CWG-VNR) was established, and seven priority reporting SDGs and five indicators per SDG for in-depth review were identified. A research team used secondary data collection to produce draft summaries for each SDG. The COVID-19 induced lockdown across the country constrained the ability to carry out primary research to access relevant documents. There were strong leadership and institutional backing of the core working group on VNRs in providing technical guidance and valuable feedback on draft deliverables. As we advance, SDGs 1, 2, and 8 will be prioritized as the current administration intends to lift 100 million Nigerians out of poverty over the next ten years.

Seychelles

Mrs. Elizabeth Agathine, Principal Secretary for Economic Planning, recalled that 2019 was when the VNR process was started in Seychelles after approval by the President and Cabinet. The department of Economic Planning led the VNR process assisted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the National Bureau of Statistics. Rounds of consultations were held with representatives from the government, the private sector, civil society, and academia. Seychelles made a virtual presentation on VNRs in July 2020. With the onset of COVID-19, the majority of consultations were conducted virtually. Planned activities with stakeholders to raise awareness of the SDGs and the VNR process had to be postponed or canceled. The lack of understanding of SDGs in some spheres leads to reduced ability to carry out effective SDGs monitoring and evaluation.

Common lessons learnt from VNRs preparations in Kenya, Nigeria and Sychelles during COVID-19 times

- ✓ *Early orientation and preparations among national stakeholders are imperative for inclusiveness and delivering the report on time.*
- ✓ *Developing a baseline assessment can be useful in identifying what data is available, aligning SDGs with national development plans and strategies, and raising awareness throughout the process.*
- ✓ *New approaches for the road ahead include addressing ways in which challenges are transformed into opportunities for growth, building and leveraging partnerships and working relationships with all partners,*
- ✓ *working to review and strengthen national statistical systems and capacity for better M&E and reporting*
- ✓ *COVID-19 has impacted Seychelles' resource envelope and shifted priorities towards socio-economic recovery. Therefore, an urgent review of development strategies for achieving national and international commitments such as the SDGs and Agenda 2063 is required.*
- ✓ *ensure inclusivity of youth and women in the SDGs planning*
- ✓ *develop a popular-friendly version of the VNR to disseminate its key messages widely at national level alongside the HLPF.*

Benin

Mr. Todegnon Toussaint, Director of SDGs coordination and policies, Ministry of Planning, indicated that his country participated on three occasions in the HLPF: in 2017 (eradication of poverty and promotion of prosperity), in 2018 (shift towards sustainable societies), and 2020 (focus on the 17 SDGs). The preparation of SDGs comprised five steps with solutions such as adjustment of work agendas,

videoconferences and webinars, and targeting of stakeholders adopted to facilitate the preparation. Benin's lessons learnt are the strengthening of prevention measures against COVID-19 and the strengthening of target integration into development policies and strategies at all levels. COVID-19 tested Benin's systems of implementation of public policies. Therefore, the consolidation of current efforts to expand digitalization in almost all fields (education, health, administration) is indispensable.

II. Institutional Mechanisms and Means of Implementation for domesticating SDGs and Agenda 2063

Uganda

Mr. Hadard Arinaitwe, Senior Economist- Cabinet of the prime minister, displayed SDGs' means of implementation. Indeed, there is an inclusive structure comprised of parliament, cabinet, sector working groups, and others. There have been efforts to align SDGs with the National Development Plan, Vision 2040. The principles for implementing SDGs include operating within existing structures, inclusiveness, mainstreaming, joint planning, and alignment. SDGs are implemented through the National Implementation Modality (NIM), and all actors are expected to implement SDGs through their policies and programmes. The Coordination Framework was developed around five thematic areas: *planning and mainstreaming, financing, data management, coordination, monitoring, reporting and reviews, and communication and popularization*.

Uganda's government implicitly mainstreamed 69% of the SDGs' targets in the National Development Plan II (2015/16-2019/20). The SDGs' institutional delivery is guided by a multi-stakeholder national SDG Coordination Framework anchored within the mainstream government coordination arrangements. Industry, governance, and environment have been identified as accelerators for attaining National Development II targets and, in particular, SDGs. This was guided by a customized Uganda Integrated Sustainable Development Goals (ISDG) model. Online engagements were carried out due to the COVID-19 induced lockdown and allowed for broad participation and cost reduction.

Djibouti

Mr. Abdou-Razak Idriss, Secretary-General and the Ministry of Economy and Finance, presented Djibouti's efforts to implement SDGs. While the country has not submitted any VNR yet, the ministry of Finance has striven to domesticate SDGs in accordance with the country's Vision 2035. Consultation meetings between ministries were organized. A high-level committee led by the Head of State and a strategic committee led by the Minister of Finance has been created.

Also, a delivery unit within the Office of the Prime Minister tasked with coordination efforts to implement SDGs has been put in place. Mr. Idriss expressed his gratitude for the workshop, which served as a good experience-sharing platform.

Ghana

Dr. Felix Addo-Yobo, Director in the Policy Division, National Development Planning Commission, affirmed that the SDGs had been integrated into the planning and budgeting processes at the national and sub-national levels. The policy framework is consistent with the SDGs and Agenda 2063. SDGs have been integrated into the Coordinated Programme, sector and district plans reflect SDGs and Agenda 2063, and national, sector, and district M&E include SDGs and Agenda 2063 indicators. Moreover, there is an SDGs' coordination mechanism that the President co-chairs. At the implementation level, ministries, departments, agencies, metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies are involved while a high-level ministerial committee supervises the overall planning and program implementation.

III. **Cross-cutting issues in VNRs and Agenda 2063: Migration, Gender and Civil Society role in SDGs**

IOM-Djibouti: Migration-Development nexus

Mr. Christos Christodoulides, Project Manager at the IOM office in Djibouti, made a presentation on the nexus between migration and development. He started by arguing that Djibouti is a key migration country, and most migrants come from Ethiopia. Recently, migrants returned to Djibouti from Yemen, and support was offered to the National Statistical Institute to create a database tracking migrant floes.

In 2020, the IOM provided assisted voluntary return services to 537 migrants. This figure is lower than that of 2019. Some of the IOM's activities are research and evaluation, development and delivery of border management training, support in the construction and equipment of border posts, border information management system, support for the strengthening of inter-agency and cross-border cooperation. Mr. Christodoulides, in his presentation, emphasized the importance of sustainability of interventions and donor support, inter-institutional collaboration, and bilateral relationships.

UNDP -Djibouti

Mrs. Fatima El Sheikh, UNDP Resident Representative, asserted that gender equality issues are considered in the development strategies for VNRs and beyond. Her presentation highlighted progressive actions taken by the government of Djibouti in the field of gender equality. She indicated that a stand-alone mechanism or observatory that looks at gender was set up. A repository that enables comparisons between Djibouti and Arab countries was also created. The UNDP works with the Ministry of Communication to develop spaces for disadvantaged people. Engagements with women leaders in the public and private sectors have been forged.

Mali

Mr. Moussa Kondo, Director at Accountability Lab, focused on civil society's perspective in his presentation. He argued that governments used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to close civic space, restrict freedom of speech and consolidate corrupt networks. On the other hand, civil society organizations (CSOs) have filled gaps where governments have been slow to respond, through, for example, the delivery of essential services including healthcare provision and psychological support, food, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). In Mali, significant efforts were made to counter misinformation, and fake news and messages were shared on COVID-19 in Bambara and French. Besides political constraints, individuals working for CSOs have struggled with mental health issues. The sector's sustainability requires acknowledging the pressure staff face and the wellness, emotional, physical, and digital support they need to survive. Civil society must be prioritized as an essential component of healthy, democratic societies. When face-to-face interactions are complicated, meaningful and deep engagements with communities are needed to make sure that their voices are heard.

Sierra Leone

Dr. Sheka Bangura, Director of Planning at the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, spoke on **healthcare and institutional resilience in Sierra Leone**. His government took proactive steps before the first case of COVID-19 was recorded on March 30, 2021, 4 months into the pandemic. The strategies employed draw heavily from the country's experience in the fight against Ebola. A National COVID-19 Health Preparedness Response Plan (HPRP) 2020 and a Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme (QAERP) 2020 were adopted. The former aims to adequately prepare to contain the pandemic or limiting local transmission through containment strategies and reduce mortality through effective disease surveillance and case management. In this respect, identifying, isolating, and

caring for patients early and communicating critical risks and events information to all communities, and countering misinformation are some targets. The QAERP is intended to attenuate the economic shocks caused by COVID-19.

Sierra Leone has worked closely with the UN Country Team to undertake a socio-economic impact assessment for COVID-19 and prepare a response and recovery plan around the given UN pillars of health first, protecting people, economic response, and recovery macroeconomic response and multilateral cooperation and social cohesion and community resilience. COVID-19 only strengthens the government of Sierra Leone's resolve to uphold the SDGs and aspiration 7 of Agenda 2063 and will present a VNR at the HLPF in 2021 for the third time.

IV.   Updated guidelines on VNR reporting-2021 HLPF

UNDESA

Mrs. Tonya Vaturi, Sustainable Development Officer, Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development, at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), shared the updated guidelines on VNRs as presented by the UN Secretary-General. Poverty eradication and food security, gender equality and gender-based violence, and disruption of trade markets were features in VNRs in 2020. In 2021, emphasis will be placed on Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), new and emerging challenges such as the impact of climate change, and COVID-19 recovery plans. In 2021, a total of 43 countries will present their VNRs, including Angola (for the first time), Cabo Verde, Niger, and Tunisia (for the second time), and Egypt (for the third time). The structure of VNRs in 2021 will include an opening statement, a section on the policy and enabling environment, progress on goals and targets, and conclusions and next steps. The VNR is ready and now available online[1].

Mrs. Saras Jagwanth, Sustainable Development Officer at the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government at the UNDESA, began her presentation on the Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) principles by assuring that the 2030 Agenda is transformative, committing countries and stakeholders to far-reaching and inclusive change. Effective, inclusive, and accountable institutions are critical for managing rapid change in societies. Therefore, the 11 CEPA principles were endorsed by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2018 to assist countries in effective governance of SDGs and subsequently agenda 2063. Eight strategies around sound policymaking were adopted, and

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[1]

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27171SG_Guidelines_2021.final.pdf.

guidance notes were produced. These notes provide a succinct, accessible, and coherent set of guidelines for implementing, reviewing, and evaluating policy challenges that require the implementation of cross-cutting and multifaceted responses.

For example, institutions focusing on integration and coordination, for example, coordinating bodies at the Presidency or in the Prime Minister's Office, are needed for VNRs. The challenges faced by countries are: the integration of the SDGs proceeds in a piecemeal fashion and siloed planning, and implementation, insufficient capacity development for officials in planning commissions and related institutions to manage change processes related to the 2030 Agenda, planning processes do not sufficiently involve stakeholders within government and civil society and the private sector. Recommendations offered are among others: conducting simulation and mapping exercises, arranging multi-stakeholder consultation fora, establishing coordinated institutional mechanisms in which all levels of government are involved.

V. **Day two: session five – Monitoring and evaluation of SDGs and Agenda 2063 tools**

AUC

Mrs. Josephine Etima, M&E Expert, Strategic Planning Division, African Union Commission (AUC), presented the AUC's work on Agenda 2063 and SDGs. The primary basis for M&E of SDGs is the Agenda 2063 M&E framework and core indicator handbook guided by the AU and UN joint framework to implement Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. Both organizations have agreed to promote the following: integrated and coherent reporting by member-states through development frameworks, participation in the HLPF including VNRs, engagement of relevant AU & UN entities in the implementation of and reporting of the two agendas, development of comprehensive and integrated continental and national data platforms and methodologies, covering relevant indicators contained in the two agendas.

Milestones have been achieved, such as the technical working group's approval on the updated core indicators framework in 2020. the AUC/AU technical working group, which APRM is part of, provides technical guidance and oversight on implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting Agenda 2063. Further, the AUC shall continue rolling out the Agenda 2063 M&E framework and reporting tool in 2021.

UNCEA

Dr Bartholomew Armah, Chief Development Planning at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), recalled in his presentation that African member-states have made several continental and global commitments such as the 2030 Agenda for SDGs, the Sendai framework on disaster risk reduction. The UNECA strives to ensure horizontal coherence -identify linkages among multiple development agendas- vertical coherence-assess alignment between international agendas and national/subnational priorities. Synergies can be fostered and trade-offs across sectors minimized if integration is actively pursued. **Dr. Tadele Ferede** demonstrated the UNECA's toolkit and how alignment between national development plans and the SDGs is measured and color-coded.

SDGCA

Ms. Olive Dushime, M&E Advisor at the SDGs Centre for Africa (SDGC/A), asserted in her presentation that Africa is still falling short of the SDGs targets and that alignment of SDGs in national plans is incomplete. Only 41% (96/232) of the SDGs indicators have data. The critical implementation challenges are the lack of adequate dedicated financial resources, lack of sufficient data, lack of capacity in the civil service, lack of political will, lack of public budgeting execution mechanism/corruption, lack of policy coherence and coordination across levels of government. The SDGC/A has created a monitoring and reporting system for SDGs and Agenda 2063, allowing countries to generate country-level reports to assess their development agendas' performance. Its system features are accessibility, customizability, super use administration, security, data functionality, and dashboards.

AUDA-NEPAD

Mr. Simon Kisira, Senior Expert on Agenda 2063 at the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD), indicated in his presentation that the AUDA-NEPAD, together with the AUC, the APRM, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), developed the Agenda 2063 M&E framework and the Agenda 2063 indicators' handbook. The AUDA-NEPAD provides technical support to member-states on Agenda 2063 domestication and M&E integration into their National Development Plans (NDPs). The Agenda 2063 M&E framework is the instrument for assessing and reporting on performance, and countries can produce their reports using the existing AUDA-NEPAD template.

Djibouti

Mrs. Mariam Hamadou Ali, Director of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, raised the national Vision 2035 in her presentation. This vision seeks to turn

Djibouti into the region's economic and financial hub in East Africa. Mrs. Ali went on to say that Djibouti received several AU mission teams with which it was agreed to align Agenda 2063 with the NDP. Also, the Head of State has pledged to implement SDGs in 2015. 90% of the NDP's *objectives have been aligned with SDGs. However, challenges remain. These are the lack of sectoral policies in some departments, the lack of data, and resource mobilization insufficiency. Despite the existence of a coordination committee, it has weaknesses and did not yield the expected results.* Djibouti, as she explained, has already begun preparations for the first VNR in 2020, but it might be submitted during the HLPF 2021.

VI. Peer-learning exercise on M&E national frameworks

South Africa

Mr. Lusanda Batala, Senior Sector Expert at the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, South Africa, argued in his expose that the COVID-19 outbreak is a grim reminder that ours is a global village. M&E processes assist in evaluating performance and identifying factors that contribute to the delivery of outcomes. M&E helps to provide evidence-based public resource allocation decisions and helps to determine how challenges should be addressed and successes replicated. Also, M&E should be transparent, rights-based, development-oriented nationally, institutionally, and locally. In South Africa, the monitoring of development agendas happens through the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and the established institutional coordination mechanism that ensures that all stakeholders are involved in the review of implementation and progress. Furthermore, through Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), an Integrated Indicator Framework (IIF) has been developed, and an integrated monitoring system called Goal Tracker is being established to track progress on all the various development agendas – National Development Plan (NDP), SADC RISDP, AU A2063, and UN SDGs.

VII. SDGs finance and horizontal partnerships for the governance of SDGs and Agenda 2063

UNDP Regional Bureau - Ethiopia

Mr. David Ozomuafoh made a presentation on behalf of **Mrs. Roselyn Akombe**, Head of Governance at the UNDP Regional Bureau in Ethiopia. The UNDP, he said, wants to catalyze tangible progress on eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions and keeping people out of poverty. Support for countries is available and is organized around six strategic impact areas: natural resource governance, youth employment and empowerment, structural economic transformation,

sustainable energy, climate change, and peace and security. This strategic offer is grounded in the UNDP's strategic plan (2018-2021). Also, it is closely aligned with continent-wide initiatives such as the Agenda 2063 and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

SDGCA - Rwanda

Dr. Enock Nyorekwa Twinoburyo, Senior Economist at the SDGC/A in Rwanda, presented Africa's progress and financing challenges vis the SDGs. Having been hit by the first recession in over 30 years in 2020, Africa is at a crossroads and came out of a twin crisis (health and economic). The health crisis is heading into another one which is a debt crisis. Dr. Twinoburyo remarked that 20 African countries collect only 13% of the tax (the minimum threshold for meeting basic needs). Resource mobilization needs to be increased dramatically as SDGs' financing gap is between USD 500 billion to 1.2 trillion (over 20% of GDP). Other notable trends, since the COVID-19 outbreak, are a decline of Official Development Assistance (ODA), Remittances, and Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) while at the same time capital flight (arguably also IFFS) are on the rise.

Consequently, public debt and associated risks are more heightened than ever, pushing some countries to request and benefiting from debt service relief. He further emphasized strengthening the governance reforms for revenue efficiency and public expenditure, increasing ODA for revenue forms while focusing on prudent economic reforms to restore resilient growth.   Africa must improve its bankability to attract enormous resources of nearly half a trillion US dollars in low earning assets.

AfDB

Mr. Paul Mpuga, Chief Country Economist at the African Development Bank (AfDB) -Addis office, drew attention to the very low tax mobilization capacity (17% on average) in Africa. He mentioned that COVID-19 had an impact on the health sector and economic growth. For SDGs to be implemented, leakages must be eliminated from public coffers. Also, it is vital to bring the private sector on board to finance development projects as the scope for financing them is large. Recently, the AfDB issued a 3 billion USD bond which was oversubscribed. Remittances and FDI need to be leveraged to expand development. The AfCFTA, Mr. Mpuga believes, is an engine for growth on the continent.

Mauritius

Mrs. Praateema Kutwoaroo, Senior Analyst at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, painted a picture of Mauritius'

progress on the 2030 Agenda. The country presented its first VNR report on July 18, 2019. An inclusive, collaborative, and whole of society approach was followed to complete it. Before COVID-19, the goals were reported as having been achieved. However, they are threatened with the pandemic's onset as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracted by 15.2%. In terms of managing COVID-19, Mauritius has not registered any new cases since April 2020. India's government has donated the first batch of 100,000 Oxford Astra-Zeneca vaccines in January 2021, and a second batch arrived on February 21, 2021. The UNDP has assisted Mauritius in PPE procurement, supported the construction of a flu clinic, and contributed 2 million USD to purchase COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX facility. Mauritius has a Marshall Plan of sorts against poverty with a well-established welfare state, free education, free healthcare services, a social protection system, universal entitlement to the non-contributory old-age pension. A minimum wage, negative income tax, social housing, child allowances, school material, free examination fees, training, placement, and nursery allowance are elements of Mauritius's welfare state.

VIII.   Preparations for Africa Sustainable Development Forum and & HLPF 2021

UNECA

Mr. Charles Akol, Environmental Affairs at the UNECA, shed light on the preparations for the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD) and the 2021 HLPF. Having received a mandate from the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the ARFSD is organized annually as a Conference of Ministers with participation from the AUC, the AfDB, and the UN system. It provides a multi-stakeholder platform for follow-up and review of progress and challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The 2021 ARFSD recognizes the slow pace of implementation and identifies actions and measures to ensure that African countries build forward better and greener from COVID-19 and in a resilient manner.

It will seek to strengthen VNRs and VLRs and ensure effective linkages between the two. The 7th session of the ARFSD shall facilitate learning, including sharing approaches, tools, and experiences and identify ambitious actions and sustainable recovery from COVID-19, and dramatically scale up the implementation to achieve the SDGs by 2030. This year's theme is "building forward better: towards a resilient and green Africa to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063", the venue is Brazzaville, Congo, and the dates: March 1-4, 2021. Participation will be in-person and online.

Experiences from African countries:

African Union

Egypt

Ms. Amira Ismail, Associate Minister for Sustainable Development at the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Egypt, offered her country's perspective on the SDGs. In 2016 and 2018, Egypt submitted VNRs. And in 2021, it is preparing to produce its third VNR. Challenges faced are data accessibility, financing, governance, and high population growth; Data is not categorized based on geographical location, gender, age, or disability. To overcome this, a national statistical strategy has been developed, the technical capabilities of employees have been strengthened, and a project called mainstreaming, acceleration, and policy support has been unveiled.

Egypt is improving its business and investment environment, encouraging public-private partnerships to establish a Sovereign Fund, and implementing a green economy transformation strategy. Furthermore, to address governance shortcomings, a comprehensive plan to reform the administrative apparatus has been launched, and a shift towards digitalization has been encouraged. Egypt's population has passed 100 million people, but 65% are under 30. Investments in education, health, and social security programs such as the "Decent life initiative" are meant to reap demographic dividends. On COVID-19 mitigation, the government of Egypt strove to strike a balance between ensuring people's health and sustaining economic activity. A three-dimensional approach to ease the burden on the most affected sectors such as tourism, aviation, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, to support irregular workers through the disbursement of monthly cash grants for six months, and to rearrange priorities with an increased focus on flexible and resilient sectors and activities-education, health, logistics, manufacturing, green economy- was adopted.

Chad

Mr. Ngomina Bramingar, Technical Coordinator at the SDGs Monitoring Platform, Chad, shared his country's efforts to implement SDGs. Chad presented its first VNR in 2019 and has been granted permission to submit its second VNR in 2021. A *technical and inter-ministerial committee* tasked with preparing the 2021 HLPF has been put in place. Such a structure works closely with the Ministry of Economic, Planning and International Cooperation, the Permanent Commission responsible for monitoring SDGs, the SDGs monitoring Platform, and the Unit that monitors SDGs' indicators. A roadmap with detailed activities was prepared for the VNR in 2021.

 A budget has also been approved, and financing gaps, it is hoped, will be filled by the UNDP, the AfDB, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), among other things. COVID-19 has delayed planned activities in Chad as regards VNR preparations. Challenges observed are resource redirection, postponement of the official launch of the development of the VNR and NDP 2022-2026, weak resource mobilization for 2017-2021 NDP financing, and SDGs implementation. In the

future, Chad intends to mobilize domestic and foreign resources to finance its current NDP, improve data availability and capacity to monitor SDGs, and mobilize innovative financing to implement international agendas.
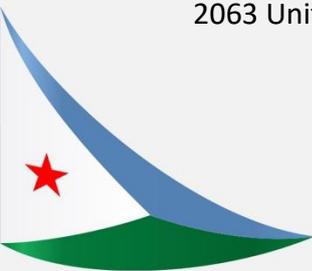
Tunisia

Mr. Belgacem Ayed, SDGs Focal Point at the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Support for Investment, Tunisia, presented his country's experience in fulfilling the Agenda 2030. In Tunisia, SDGs coordination is led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which offers diplomatic leadership, and the Ministry of Economy, Finance, and Support for Investment leads to technical aspects and facilitates coordination between partners. Every SDGs group is led by a technical ministry, includes all stakeholders, both state and non-state, involves agencies such as the UNDP, the FAO, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). An electronic SDGs portal in Arabic, French, and English was launched end of 2020. It seeks to offer reliable information and updates on sustainable development achievements and indicators. Work to assess the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Tunisian households and lockdown measures on child poverty has been commissioned. Preparations are underway to submit a VNR later this year. Tunisia's challenges are stakeholders' involvement in the process, the integration, localization, and ownership of SDGs.

C. Conclusion Remarks[2]

- On behalf of Djibouti's minister of foreign affairs, Mr. Moussa Omar, assistant to the Minister and APRM Focal point to Djibouti, expressed appreciation to the APRM Continental Secretariat for organizing such a workshop in Djibouti in a perfect timing period as Djibouti is working on the VNR this year. National experts also alluded to the need to sustain such regional platforms to learn from each other and assess both agendas' congruence and implementation at national levels.

- The durability of the process and continuity of the implementation of such regional activity is highly encouraged. Countries also expressed readiness to collaborate to leverage partnerships with GIZ and other emerging donors from the global south to tackle SDGs' persistent challenges in Africa, including financing SDGs programs, strengthening statistical capacities, incorporating resilient practices into national development planning, and M&E tools.

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[2] The outcome report is prepared by Mr. Emmanuel Merissa & Ms. Sara Hamouda – Agenda 2063 Unit, APRM