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Webinar for African Parliaments

The impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation in Africa: What role for parliaments?

13 November 2020

Organized jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and
the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

The socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are uncovering stark asymmetries and structural imbalances in our societies, such as the prevalence of poverty, unequal access to health services, weak health-care systems, high unemployment rates, persistent inequalities such as equitable education, and weak regional and global cooperation. This global health crisis has been an unprecedented wake-up call that shows how crucial it is for countries to have policy and legislation ensuring crisis preparedness and prevention. Such policies and legislation are particularly needed for Africa where over 60 per cent of socio-economic activities are weather and climate sensitive and depend heavily on natural resources. The pandemic has created additional economic pressures on African countries that are already facing massive drops in revenues due to the increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather events triggered by climate change. The convergence of the two crises – the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change – has brought to the fore the intrinsic vulnerabilities and structural inequalities of African economies and communities.

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) estimates show that the projected GDP growth could contract between 1.8 per cent and 5.4 per cent in 2020, which measures up to an 8.6 percentage-point decline from the projection made prior to the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, Africa had not been on track to meet most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although the continent recorded some progress on 15 of the 17 SDGs, progress on SDG implementation across the five sub-regions of the continent has been uneven and the current rate of progress is insufficient to achieve all the goals. Already before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty in Africa had declined much more slowly than in the other regions in the world, and the continent was not on track to meet any of the SDG 1 targets in particular. Africa must therefore accelerate efforts if the goals of the 2030 Agenda are to be met and the ambitions of the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 be realized.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also revealed the weakness of many systems including the limits of traditional statistical data collection. Data collection operations have been significantly affected. According to a survey realized by the ECA in March 2020,¹ 25 per cent (42 out of 168) of surveys planned were halted or suspended and a further 29 per cent postponed. Additionally, even where operations were ongoing, higher non-responses rates and low sample coverage were observed. The survey also showed that National Statistical Systems, particularly National Statistics Offices (NSOs), need funding to modernize and use new technologies for efficiency in all circumstances to be able to provide data and statistics to support sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in Africa.²

¹ See: [Quick Assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Africa NSO operations](#).

² This will be at the centre of the celebration of the African Statistics Day 2020 under the theme: "Modernizing National Statistical Systems to provide data and statistics to support sustainable peace and development in Africa", to be held on 18 November 2020.

With 27 of the world's 28 poorest countries being in Africa, the SDGs matter most for the African continent. The COVID-19 pandemic will inevitably have a severe, negative impact on the realization of the SDGs. Not only does it risk hampering or reversing the gains achieved albeit slow, in reducing child and neonatal mortality or improving access to electricity and safe drinking water – it will exacerbate already high levels of inequality within and between countries. According to ECA estimates, Covid-19 risks pushing 5 to 29 million more Africans into extreme poverty. Considering that most financial resources will most likely be absorbed by the emergency response, the realization of the SDGs by 2030 may be in danger if national economic recovery plans are not aligned with the global goals, especially goal 13 of the Climate Action.

Africa does not have the fiscal space for a trillion-dollar stimulus package as it attempts to “build back better” but must instead look for innovative alternatives. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is one such solution. By addressing Africa's tariff and non-tariff barriers, and harmonizing regulatory and standards differentials, the AfCFTA helps to consolidate a \$2.5 trillion-dollar market and generate an estimated 5.6 million jobs. In doing so, the AfCFTA directly contributes to meeting SDG 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth” in the Covid-19 recovery.

As countries are now resetting their priorities and reallocating resources to deal with the pandemic, parliaments should be in a position to influence policies and budgets to ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic responses and recovery strategies embrace and incorporate the SDG framework in its entirety. Parliaments have a central role to play in this effort. Their legislative, representational, oversight and budgetary responsibilities make them key players in, for example, improving the health coverage of the people they represent, combating inequalities, and building peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Parliaments should also monitor policy implementation and ensure that the needs and concerns of the whole society are given due consideration, with no one left behind. The economic downturn due to the crisis has been increasing inequalities and is disproportionately affecting women and the most vulnerable and marginalized segments of society. Now that the world is entering its final decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, parliaments must hold governments accountable for the goals they subscribed to, and for the commitment they reaffirmed in 2019 to accelerate their efforts to reach their common vision by 2030.

Objectives of the webinar

The webinar will provide parliaments with a platform to:

1. Share up-to-date information on the status of SDG implementation in Africa by taking stock of the progress made and the challenges which must be addressed
2. Exchange national experiences on SDG implementation and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic
3. Discuss the prospects for the future with respect to building back better and leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Dates: 13 November 2020

Participation: The webinar is open to parliaments of the following countries: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Languages: The working languages will be Arabic, English and French

Webinar Platform

The proposed platform to be used is Kudo which will provide Arabic, English and French interpretation