

APRM POLICY BRIEF

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APRM Virtual Dialogue with AU Member-States on their response to COVID-19 and progress on Voluntary National Reviews 2020

EAST AFRICA IN FOCUS

- Emmanuel Merissa, Researcher at the APRM Continental Secretariat

On 7 May 2020, the APRM Continental Secretariat organized a Virtual Regional Dialogue on SDGs. This dialogue, the second in the series, was held with representatives from four East African countries, namely Djibouti, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). It is worth noting that Kenya and Uganda presented their VNRs for the second time during the HLPF 2020.



UGANDA

Mr. Hadard Arinaitwe, *Senior Economist in the Department of Evaluation in the Office of the Prime Minister*

Uganda's presentation focused on institutional mechanisms to develop the VNR Report and the country's response to COVID-19. The main parts of the presentation were as follows:

1. Institutional coordinating structures
2. VNR preparations at the national level
3. National responses to the COVID-19 pandemic
4. Monitoring and evaluation strategies

The Ugandan cabinet supports efforts made in fulfilling SDGs. The SDG Taskforce and SDG Advisory Committee have been created, as additional structures, to facilitate the prepara-

tion of VNRs. By opening participation in these structures to non-state actors and United Nations (UN) agencies, private sector foundations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society, Uganda seeks to gather as many inputs as possible and reflect them in its work. The Ministries of Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) and Finance are lending support to the taskforces responsible for the production of VNRs.

The SDG Secretariat - under the Prime Minister supervision- is leading the VNR process at the domestic level. It works closely with the SDG Technical Working Groups, the National SDG Taskforce, and the SDG Advisory Committee. Though the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted physical consultations, additional information and clarifications were obtained through consultative meetings which were held online using the designated e-platform and Zoom meeting discussions. The online consultations targeted and engaged young people through the U-report and other categories, including women, people with disabilities, political and technical leaders.

The VNR draft report would be ready by May 2020. The first report is based on the first consultations, but many preparations were made through virtual consultations via Zoom based on the second draft. The draft report informed

the finalization of key VNR messages. An official submission was made through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Due to the lockdown, an online consultation plan was developed in conformity with the e-platform. An online survey was sent through the e-platform, and significant progress was achieved in terms of responses to the survey. Follow-up engagements are held with the National Governance Council, SDG National Taskforce, SDG Advisory Committee, civil society organizations, local governments, NGO Forum, Parliament, National Council for disabilities, and youth groups.

Four Zoom discussions were organized on 1) leaving no one behind amidst COVID-19, addressing poverty, vulnerability, and inequality for inclusive and resilient communities; 2) accelerating governance and service delivery reforms for SDGs; 3) advancing the human capital development agenda to deliver on the SDGs and 4) accelerating action on climate change mitigation, environmental protection and building resilience to disasters.

Several directives and guidelines have been issued by HE Yoweri Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda, aimed at keeping Ugandans safe from COVID-19. These include the formation of various COVID-19 taskforces, closure of schools, churches, and all crowd-pulling public gatherings, popularization of prevention measures, alternative means of working from home, and implementation of a lockdown except for cargo and health facilities.

Plans are underway to evaluate the current SDG implementation roadmap to identify

gaps, which will be addressed in the next financial year of National Development Plan III.



KENYA

Mr. Peter Kimemia, *Head of the APRM National Secretariat, Kenya*

Kenya’s representative highlighted that the current development blueprint, Vision 2030, focuses on three economic, social, and political pillars that integrate sustainable development. It is implemented through five-year medium-term plans. The first plan covered the period 2008-2012, the second extended across 2013-2018. Currently, Kenya is implementing its third medium-term plan ending in 2022. Kenya follows a devolved system of government since the provision was made for it in its 2010 constitution. Counties’ development plans mirror the development plans of the government. Both plans ensure that SDGs are localized and mainstreamed into development processes at the national level. Medium-term plans include the Big Four Agenda centered on food security, manufacturing, universal healthcare, and affordable housing. The VNR preparation process started in December 2019. Consultations with stakeholders were held. The preparation of the draft report is at an advanced stage. The main message has been finalized and shared with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). Agendas 2030 and 2063 have been mainstreamed into national and subnational planning frameworks through consultative frameworks.

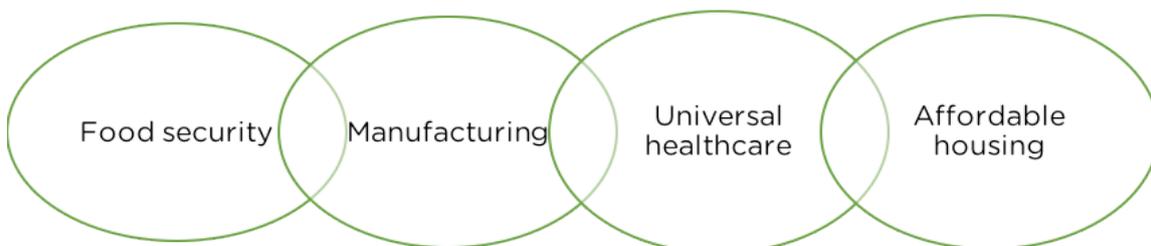


Figure 1 Big Four midterm development Agenda- Kenya

Preparatory processes are guided by SDG departments under the State Department for Planning, which is supported by the Inter-agency Technical Working Committee (TWC). The TWC comprises the national government, Governance Council representing subnational units or counties, the youth, Parliament, the private sector, and a variety of non-state actors. The entry point is through their umbrella bodies except for the national government where key ministries are represented by an SDG contact person. These are the parliamentary caucuses on SDGs and business, Kenya Private Sector Alliance, the Council of Governance for Subnational Governments, SDG Kenya Forum for civil society organizations, and the National Youth Council.

With respect to the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of SDGs, jobs have been lost and businesses closed which resulted in people falling into poverty. Deaths from COVID-19 will annul gains made in the reduction of deaths due to communicable diseases. Resources allocated for the realization of SDGs are now used to tackle COVID-19. Programmes associated with SDGs will now have to be put on hold. Containment measures have been adopted by the Kenyan government. A national coordination committee has been established to provide a whole-of-government and society response. A COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund has been set up to mobilize resources. Engagements which were planned to draft the VNR have been cancelled because of the ban on gatherings. Most Kenyans are working from their homes. Due to COVID-19, the deadline for the submission of VNRs may be missed. In the future, the VNR preparation process and consultations with stakeholders have to commence early to suffuse the process with a sense of ownership.



RWANDA

Mr. Yusuf Murangwa, Director General of the National Institute of Statistics

Mr. Murangwa made a presentation on behalf of Rwanda. He focused on the outcomes and lessons learnt, status of COVID-19 in the country, and COVID-19 responses.

He argued that it is important that countries start early in all aspects of the SDGs (domesticating, costing, resource mobilization, and implementation arrangements). Adopting an

integrated approach for planning, delivering, and monitoring of all interventions is critical. Furthermore, emphasis should be placed on inclusiveness and leaving no one behind, from consultations to implementation and results. Establishing robust statistics and data systems will overcome challenges. In Rwanda, there is a 60% statistics capacity to monitor SDGs. A third National Strategy for the Development of Statistics has been launched to bridge the gap. The integrated approach has also facilitated reporting on Agenda 2063 and its first ten-year implementation plan. The Rwanda report was presented on 6 February 2020 in Addis Ababa on the margins of the AU Summit. Building on the homegrown solutions rooted in the Rwandan culture for resource efficiency and sustainability will continue to drive the realization of the national development agenda and strengthen accountability.

The first case of COVID-19 was identified on 14 March 2020. The government and partners have established and promoted preventive measures as developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and national health systems. A full lockdown went into effect in the middle of March 2020 banning all economic activities except essential services. The government provided food to urban residents. A curfew was also imposed from 8pm to 5am. In May 2020, measures were relaxed. Following the Monetary Policy Committee meeting and guidance on 30 April 2020, the National Bank reduced the Central Bank interest rate to 4.5% from 5% to support commercial banks in financing the economy.



DJIBOUTI

Ms Kadra Hassan, APRM National Secretariat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms Kadra Hassan presented Djibouti's COVID-19 response. She indicated that the country closed its borders since the first case of COVID-19 was identified on 17 March 2020. Schools were also closed, and the country put on lockdown. People were quarantined. Hospital beds were prepared. The three most affected economic sectors have been transportation, education and health. An e-learning platform was made available by the Minister of Education. Sectoral ministries provided food assistance to the most vulnerable. Health personnel were trained to fight COVID-19. An aggressive

campaign to test people was launched. People stood in solidarity with each other and helped those in need.

Small and medium-sized enterprises like hotels and restaurants were given financial support based on a list of affected businesses drawn up by the Ministry of Labour. The government paid 80% of wardens and janitors' salaries after reaching a deal with employers.

On the question will Djibouti submit a VNR in 2021, clarification was sought and given regarding the procedures of submission of VNRs and the country welcomes the APRM's engagement in this process.



IGAD

Mrs Rachel Mbaria, Planning and Programming Expert, IGAD Secretariat

Mrs Rachel Mbaria presented the COVID-19 response from IGAD's perspective which is the regional trade bloc comprising Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. IGAD is monitoring the COVID-19 situation in East Africa using its early warning mechanism. At its recent Heads of State Summit, four priorities were identified: health and social affairs, peace and security, food security, and economic cooperation. As part of the regional response to COVID-19, strategies have been aligned and partnerships leveraged. Digital transformation is emphasized to obtain data for reporting.

General reflections

Following the presentations, comments and reflections were made.

- Dr Enock Twinoburyo, from the Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa (SDGC/A), noted the common theme in all the presentations: COVID-19. The pandemic should serve as a wakeup call to strengthen high-frequency data. He affirmed that due to data constraints, only 101 out of 232 indicators would be used in this year's index to be published by the SDGC/A.
- Mr Hadard Arinaitwe suggested looking at deaths related to diseases other than COVID-19 to strengthen data capacities on the continent.
- Dr Pali Lehohla, former Statistician-General of South Africa, recommended strengthening planning systems and creating planning institutions for better reporting on Covid-19 cases in Africa.
- Mr Peter Kimemia mentioned floods and the locust invasion as severe challenges to Kenya affecting food security and worsening poverty. HE Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, has talked to his peers on how Africa can respond to COVID-19. In addition, the government is mobilizing support from the private sector to alleviate the financial distress brought about by the pandemic.

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