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**New Partnership for Africa's Development: progress in
implementation and international support: causes of
conflict and the promotion of durable peace and
sustainable development in Africa**

**Security Council
Seventy-sixth year**

Promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/302](#) of 3 September 2020, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to monitor and report to the Assembly on an annual basis on persistent and emerging challenges to the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. The title of the report has been adjusted to “Promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa” to reflect its forward-looking orientation.

Across the world, but notably in Africa, instability and conflict continue to generate and exacerbate poverty and institutional fragility, which in turn decrease resilience and the prospects for peace. Conflict has many different causes, drivers and triggers. The present report examines the challenges of conflict prevention and sustaining peace in Africa from a perspective that is often overlooked, namely, the role of weak or failed public service planning and delivery as a source of instability and potential driver or trigger of conflict.

In the report, this challenge is explored through four main fault lines in public service delivery observed in Africa, but which are not unique to the continent, namely, inequality in access to services; planning processes and service delivery that do not promote the inclusion of all segments of the population; corruption in service delivery; and the delivery of services in areas where there are challenges to governance.



The report also contains examples of how the United Nations system makes use of its diverse range of capacities to support prevention-focused development. Measures are proposed to strengthen the collective efforts towards accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union during the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals following a prevention-oriented approach.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution 74/302 of 3 September 2020, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to monitor and report to the Assembly on an annual basis on persistent and emerging challenges to the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, including the root causes of conflict and conditions to promote sustainable development, as well as on the approach and support of the United Nations system.

2. Considerable efforts have been put in place by the United Nations to prioritize conflict prevention and sustaining peace in order to remove the greatest obstacles to the implementation of both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. Progress has been made in ensuring that all the pillars of the United Nations system work together coherently to support Member States in promoting sustainable peace and development.

3. Across the world, but notably in Africa, instability and conflict continue to generate and exacerbate poverty and are a key driver of the fragility of institutions, which in turn decrease resilience and the prospects for peace. Conflict has many different causes, drivers and triggers. The present report examines the challenges of conflict prevention and sustaining peace in Africa by considering the role of weak or failed public service planning and delivery as a source of instability and a potential driver or trigger of conflict. The report also contains examples of how the United Nations system makes use of its diverse range of capacities to support prevention-focused development, and measures are proposed to strengthen collective efforts to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 during the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. In the preparation of the report, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa engaged with Member States, the General Assembly and the Peacebuilding Commission. United Nations system entities were consulted through the interdepartmental task force on African affairs. In particular, the Development Coordination Office, the Africa Divisions of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations, the Peacebuilding Support Office, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), contributed to the desk review. Thirty United Nations country teams based in Africa provided field assessments that constitute the basis for the analysis. Representatives from academia and experts were also consulted.

II. Conditions for durable peace and sustainable development in Africa

5. In the 22 years since the first report of the Secretary-General on causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, the United Nations has gained a deeper understanding of the various factors that fuel conflict in Africa and the complex interrelationships that bind them. Yet, questions still remain concerning how instability, conflict and development intersect and affect each other.

6. African countries have achieved important socioeconomic gains in recent decades. Between 2000 and 2018, Africa recorded an average annual gross domestic

product (GDP) growth of 4.6 per cent, with 11 countries attaining middle-income or higher-income status.¹ In a joint report issued in 2019, the African Union and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlighted the convergence of several positive factors in the region that made this possible, including significant infrastructure improvements, increased foreign investments, capacity strengthening, the mobile phone revolution, growing entrepreneurship and innovation, the progressive empowerment of women and the adoption of regional quality standards.

7. In 2013, the African Union adopted an ambitious initiative entitled “Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020”. The initiative, which has been extended to 2030, was supplemented by the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020, aimed at addressing the multiple factors that define the interrelationship between sustainable development and conflict, such as weak governance and socioeconomic inequities. By focusing on that interrelationship, the initiative recognizes the need to address conflict to realize sustainable development and the vision of Agenda 2063. The African Continental Free Trade Area, a major achievement for Africa that came into operation in January 2021, is expected to create better conditions for sustainable economic growth, job creation and improved living standards, thus contributing to greater stability and peace (see [S/2020/1310](#)). In addition, the General Assembly and the Security Council, in their recently adopted twin resolutions [75/201](#) and [2558 \(2020\)](#), respectively, on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, reaffirmed that effective peacebuilding must involve the entire United Nations system.

8. In view of those developments, the annual report of the Secretary-General on the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa will take a more multidimensional approach based on systematic monitoring and analysis of the dynamic nature of the diverse and interconnected drivers of conflict, drawing on data, research and consultations.

9. The Office of the Special Adviser on Africa will approach the annual report as a series dedicated to the analysis of a taxonomy of drivers of conflict, with each annual report focused on one of the following broad clusters:

(a) Politics and governance, such as the state of democracy, including the role of women, young people and the media; electoral systems; corruption; weak, underperforming, politicized or non-inclusive administrative systems and processes; trust in State institutions; and boundary disputes;

(b) Social issues, such as access to basic services; the status and rights of minorities and discrimination based on ethnicity, language, gender or religion; asylum and migration; and trafficking in drugs, including across State borders;

(c) Justice and security, such as weak judiciary and the state of the rule of law; a lack of effective protection of human rights; the role of the military and the police; a lack of accountability; and external dynamics;

(d) Livelihoods, such as a lack of access to economic opportunities, resources and employment; economic policies; ownership, use and benefits of land, water and extractive resources, including across State borders; and pollution and other environmental factors.

10. The present report is focused on the social issues cluster, and more specifically on the delivery of public services as a factor in the dynamics of conflict and instability.

¹ African Union Commission and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Africa's Development Dynamics 2019: Achieving Productive Transformation* (Addis Ababa; Paris, OECD Publishing, 2019).

A. Conflict and instability landscape in Africa

11. While most conflicts in Africa are intra-State in nature, over the past few decades, many have become more complex and regionalized. Increasingly, they involve non-State armed groups with links to criminal interests or terrorist networks that operate across borders, as well as self-defence and militia groups, which are often formed along ethnic lines and fuel intercommunity violence. As a result, peace has become more challenging to sustain and protracted and recurring conflict more difficult to prevent or resolve, often because their underlying causes are not well understood or addressed. Peace agreements, rarely fully implemented, typically cover proximate causes and seldom address the deep-rooted factors that cause or sustain conflict. Furthermore, many countries in Africa continue to face multiple challenges to societal stability and national cohesion, which have been exacerbated by the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

1. Conflict and instability trends

12. Instability and conflict continue to be major challenges in Africa. Data on active conflict, instability and conflict incidents show a clear upward trend across the continent over the past five years.²

13. According to one database, in 2019 there were 27 active conflicts in 19 countries in Africa and 8,855 known fatalities as a result of those conflicts.³ Since 2015, the number of conflicts has slightly increased.⁴ In addition, from 2015 to 2020, the number of incidents related to civil unrest nearly doubled.

14. Despite decreases in Eastern, Northern and Southern Africa, the continent as a whole still experienced a 30 per cent increase in violent wars and conflict from 2015 to 2020,⁵ owing to a large extent to a major rise of conflict events in Central and Western Africa in 2015–2020 and a notable increase in both civil unrest and war in Eastern Africa in 2019–2020 (table 1).

Table 1
Trends in civil unrest and violent conflict-related incidents in African subregions, 2015–2020

<i>Trends in civil unrest incidents</i>							
<i>Region</i>	<i>2015–2016</i>	<i>2016–2017</i>	<i>2017–2018</i>	<i>2018–2019</i>	<i>2019–2020</i>	<i>2015–2020</i>	<i>2020 (Total)</i>
Eastern Africa	203	(237)	(211)	(201)	115	(331)	1 246
Central Africa	20	19	5	572	94	710	1 092
Northern Africa	158	189	66	3 976	(556)	3 833	5 262
Southern Africa	(74)	(453)	91	437	160	161	1 862
Western Africa	(222)	257	(1)	623	1015	1 672	3 014

² Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project database, 2020; Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo Conflict Dataset.

³ Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo Armed Conflict Dataset version 20.1 and Uppsala Conflict Data Program Battle-related Deaths Dataset version 20.1. The fatality indicator used is the Uppsala Conflict Data Program best estimate for battle-related deaths in the given year.

⁴ Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo Armed Conflict Dataset version 20.1.

⁵ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project database, 2020.

Trends in violent conflict and war incidents

<i>Region</i>	<i>2015– 2016</i>	<i>2016– 2017</i>	<i>2017– 2018</i>	<i>2018– 2019</i>	<i>2019– 2020</i>	<i>2015– 2020</i>	<i>2020 (Total)</i>
Eastern Africa	100	284	(212)	(387)	208	(7)	2 578
Central Africa	127	236	359	(93)	439	1 068	1 560
Northern Africa	(251)	(596)	(244)	608	(80)	(563)	1 584
Southern Africa	(17)	7	1	(1)	(9)	(19)	9
Western Africa	(7)	271	195	249	612	1 320	1 949

Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project database, 2020.

2. Conflict and instability drivers

15. While the following elements are not exhaustive and might include some overlaps, they help to illustrate the multidimensional and complex nature of the causes and drivers of instability and violent conflict in Africa:

(a) Disputes over political power and resources among political elites sometimes drive intergroup competition and ethnic, religious or linguistic mobilization. These disputes are frequently exacerbated by flawed and contested political processes, weak institutions, ethno-geographic biases, and the zero-sum nature of political rivalries, wherein the loss of control of power means political marginalization;

(b) The lack of shared visions within ethnically diverse polities and the weaponization of identity for political ends continue to drive instability and conflict on the continent, fuelling fear, mistrust, feelings of exclusion and historical grievances, both real and perceived, which are further amplified through social media;

(c) The lack of access to justice, widespread impunity and the real or perceived partiality of justice systems, nepotism and corruption, combined with the curtailment of freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly, frequently drive social unrest and instability. The absence or weakness of remediation tools, such as formal ombudsperson services, national human rights institutions or complaint and conflict resolution mechanisms can exacerbate the situation;

(d) The scarcity or the unequal distribution of, or the lack of access to, financial resources and assets can result in inequalities in opportunities and livelihoods. Discontented segments of political elites and extremist and terrorist groups often exploit those disparities and reinforce divisive ethno-regional and rural-urban dynamics;

(e) The lack of access to, and competition over, limited and often diminishing natural resources in rural communities, including farming and grazing land and water, combined with weak or unequal land and resource governance, can drive intercommunity tensions aggravated by the impact of climate change on cohabitational arrangements, such as transhumance;

(f) The weak presence of the State, in particular in peripheral regions, can drive conflict and instability. Limited infrastructure, essential services and security weaken the legitimacy of Governments and can create fertile ground for instability, criminal activities, violent extremism and terrorism;

(g) A lack of clarity and inclusivity in peace agreements and their poor implementation, the splintering of signatory parties and the incomplete transformation of conflict economies tend to perpetuate or reignite conflict. The involvement of young people and women is critical to the implementation of peace

agreements, in particular through the youth, peace and security agenda and the women and peace and security agenda, respectively.

3. African Union and United Nations peace and security response

16. Preventing conflict and sustaining peace remain key priorities for African Governments and institutions, the United Nations and other partners. Given the strong recognition of the interdependence between peace and development, there is a clear commitment by both the African Union and the United Nations to tackling the continent's challenges on both fronts.

17. The Security Council, as the principal organ for the maintenance of international peace and security, has a key role and responsibility in the prevention, control and resolution of conflict. In its resolution 2282 (2016), the Council recognized that development, peace and security, and human rights were interlinked and mutually reinforcing and that sustaining peace should be broadly understood as a goal and a process that includes, inter alia, addressing the root causes of conflict. By working collaboratively with the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and strategically focusing on the root causes of conflict, the Security Council is well placed to mobilize international support to address instability, prevent violent conflict and sustain peace in Africa.

18. The African Union and the United Nations have developed mechanisms for collaboration on both peace and security and sustainable development. The joint frameworks in those areas⁶ have contributed to the growth of coordinated action by both organizations to prevent conflict, sustain peace and strengthen resilience. The Peace and Security Council and the Security Council have met annually since 2007 to consider issues of peace and security in Africa, enabling the two bodies to act jointly and to offer joint recommendations. The Peace and Security Council also meets annually with the Peacebuilding Commission to strengthen African Union-United Nations partnerships for peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa. The two organizations discuss cooperation in peace and security, development and human rights, and review the progress made in the implementation of their joint commitments through the African Union-United Nations annual conference, as well as through annual desk-to-desk meetings between the African Union Commission and the United Nations Secretariat and regular coordination through the United Nations Office to the African Union. As a follow-up to the independent assessment of the African Union-United Nations partnership conducted in 2020, the United Nations is currently conducting a mapping exercise of the existing African Union-United Nations cooperation and coordination mechanisms to determine areas for streamlining and simplification. Additional steps are being taken in line with the agreement by the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on the need to reinforce coordination mechanisms to implement the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 following the fourth African Union-United Nations annual conference, held virtually on 9 December 2020.

19. In 2020, the United Nations had seven Security Council-mandated peacekeeping operations in Africa. Similarly, 12 special political missions, 2 of them regional and 1 with an institutional focus on the African Union, supported political processes across the continent. The missions, some of which are operated jointly with the African Union, constituted approximately half of the United Nations peace operations globally. Similarly, the African Union maintained active peace support operations and

⁶ The Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security; and the African Union-United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

ad hoc security initiatives, and its Peace and Security Council had seven country situations on its agenda in 2020.

20. The agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission in 2020 included discussions on 10 African countries and regions and the Commission has designated 17 African countries as eligible to access the Peacebuilding Fund, out of a total of 24 countries globally. The Joint Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs-UNDP Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention comprised 25 African countries, with dedicated capacity deployed to the Resident Coordinator offices. In addition, the United Nations has developed prevention strategies in the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes and the Lake Chad basin regions, as well as the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

21. In their efforts to ensure a well-grounded understanding of underlying drivers, the United Nations peace and security pillar and the country teams systematically track instability and conflict drivers, including through the common country analyses and the UNDP crisis risk dashboards. Similarly, the African Peace and Security Architecture focuses on the prevention and resolution of crises and conflict, including through the Continental Early Warning System, which undertakes data collection and analysis to advise the Peace and Security Council.

B. Sustainable development landscape in Africa

22. On average, African countries have made steady, albeit limited, progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, as assessed by the United Nations and by the African Union in its first continental report on the implementation of Agenda 2063. The 2020 Africa Sustainable Development Goal Index and Dashboards Report⁷ showed that moderate improvement and stagnation were the most frequently observed trends in the continent's efforts to reach the 17 Goals (table 2). While three quarters of African countries recorded moderate improvements towards Goal 3 (good health and well-being), more than half remain stagnant in their efforts to provide quality education (Goal 4), clean water and sanitation (Goal 6) and sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11). The majority of African countries are on track with respect to climate action (Goal 13), many are making moderate advancement towards achieving zero hunger (Goal 2) and preserving life on land (Goal 15). The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, has hindered progress globally as Governments face declining revenue, shortfalls in development financing and the need to reallocate resources to manage the public health emergency.

23. With respect to Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), there has been limited progress across the continent towards creating peaceful and inclusive development, access to justice and effective institutions, as reflected in the stagnation in two thirds of African countries.

⁷ The database is compiled using various United Nations sources, including from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Labour Organization, the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the World Bank.

Table 2
Number of African countries with different trends in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

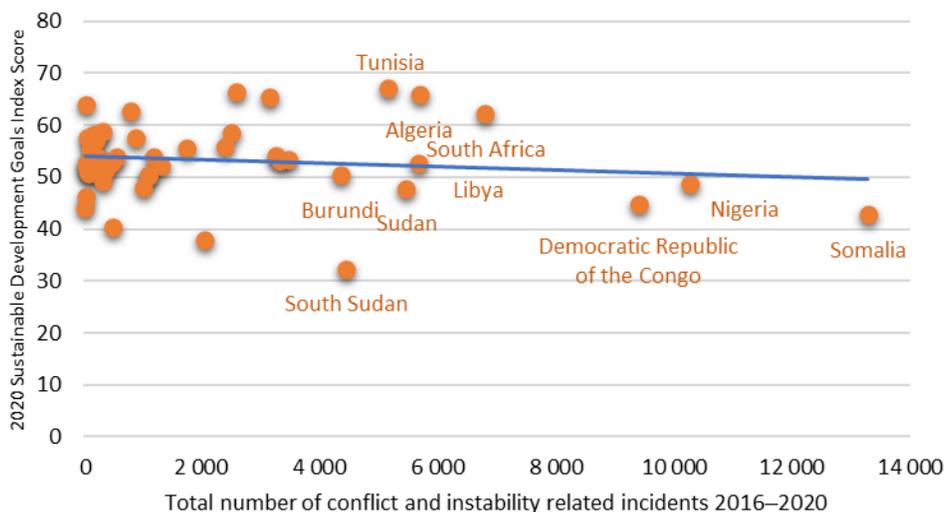
	<i>On track or maintaining achievement</i> ↑	<i>Moderately improving</i> ↗	<i>Stagnating</i> →	<i>Decreasing</i> ↓	<i>Average regional index score</i>
Goal 1: No poverty	13	10	18	7	44.08
Goal 2: Zero hunger	–	23	29	2	43.89
Goal 3: Good health and well-being	–	41	13	–	48.46
Goal 4: Quality education	1	13	33	6	48.35
Goal 5: Gender equality	2	23	28	–	51.82
Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation	5	22	27	–	53.18
Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy	1	22	28	3	46.76
Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth	6	31	13	3	57.21
Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure	1	16	35	2	24.29
Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities		14	26	13	46.49
Goal 13: Climate action	44	6	1	2	91.22
Goal 14: Life below water		15	18	4	63.02
Goal 15: Life on land	13	20	12	9	70.38
Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions	2	13	36	3	53.50
Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals	5	15	16	16	52.51

Source: 2020 Africa Sustainable Development Goal Index and Dashboards Report database. Time series data not available for indicators under Goal 10 and Goal 12.

24. In fact, analyses linking the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and recent conflict and instability related incidents⁸ in 48 African States revealed that countries that experienced more conflict-related incidents from 2015 to 2020 scored lower in the 2020 Africa Sustainable Development Goal Index. As illustrated in the figure below, a higher number of conflicts is generally correlated with lower Sustainable Development Goal achievement rates. The OECD “States of Fragility 2020” report also identified clear interrelationships between fragility and sustainable development.

⁸ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project database, 2020.

Sustainable Development Goal Index Score and recent conflict and instability incidents



Note: Analysis does not include the following countries owing to insufficient data: Cabo Verde, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe and Seychelles.

Source: 2020 Africa Sustainable Development Index and Dashboards Report database and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project database, 2020.

25. It is therefore crucial to prioritize conflict prevention and the systematic resolution of the underlying causes and drivers of conflict in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the aspirations of Agenda 2063. This requires a multidimensional perspective to understand what fuels instability and conflict in Africa.

26. The question of instability and conflict in Africa is explored in the following section through the lens of public service delivery, with a focus on how the absence or non-inclusive delivery of public services can drive instability and conflict.

III. Public service delivery as a conflict driver in Africa

27. Service delivery is central to everyday life. People’s basic needs are essentially the same everywhere. They include safe and sufficient housing, access to nutrition, clean water and sanitation, health care and education. These simple needs are universal and embedded throughout the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, every day, hundreds of millions go without having those basic needs met.

28. As highlighted in the joint study by the United Nations and the World Bank *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, while service delivery is not the only determinant of State legitimacy, it is the primary way by which citizens directly encounter the State, thus shaping their overall perception of it. In Africa, where Governments grapple with a myriad of challenges, including resource and capacity constraints, rapidly rising urbanization, corruption and, in some instances, protracted conflict, exclusion from service delivery has been shown to have a clear link to conflict as a driver, trigger or fertile ground for instability.

29. Most often, exclusion from services tracks exclusion from political and economic power, opportunity and security, conditions that negatively affect State legitimacy and create opportunities for mobilizing group grievances and violence. In certain instances, the way in which services are delivered, such as with a lack of

inclusivity or transparency in planning processes or perceptions of unfair or unequal treatment, can result in unrest and possible conflict.⁹

30. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on the fragility of service delivery across Africa, including strained budgets, inadequate or overstretched medical systems, inability to provide economic relief to citizens, and prolonged school and business closures. African Governments are being pressed to provide more at a time when their financial situations have been severely affected by falling exports, lower tax revenues, lower foreign exchange earnings and slow foreign direct investment, among other factors. In many countries, the impact of the pandemic on service delivery has been immediate and exposed and reinforced the major structural inequalities that drive conflict in the first place. Marginalized groups have been disproportionately affected, often aggravating long-held grievances. Women and girls in particular have borne the brunt of poor public service delivery through unpaid care work, which has been further exacerbated by the pandemic.

31. In addressing public service delivery as a driver of conflict, the services listed below are considered among basic human rights.

1. Housing

32. Africa is currently facing a major housing crisis owing to rapid urbanization and to growing slum populations. The majority of African countries still face major challenges in reducing the proportion of urban populations living in slums, a key indicator for Goal 11. Sub-Saharan Africa alone is expected to have as many as 1.2 billion urban dwellers by 2050 and adds 4.5 million new residents in informal settlements each year. The proliferation of slums and informal settlements has had a profound effect on large parts of the continent's population, with conditions characterized by inadequate water supply, a lack of proper sanitation, overcrowded and dilapidated housing, increased incidence of violence against women and vulnerability to health risks. In sub-Saharan Africa, 59 per cent of the urban population resides in such settlements,¹⁰ many of which are known for high crime rates and violence. In recent years, many violent protests and clashes across the African subregions were caused by a lack of adequate housing or by overcrowded housing, as well as crime and overcrowding in slums.

2. Education

33. Few sectors illustrate and perpetuate socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic and other divides as strongly as education. With an estimated 364 million young people between the ages of 15 and 35 years, the continent has the world's youngest population, creating both a challenge and an opportunity for investing in the next generation of African leaders and entrepreneurs. Africa's current primary school enrolment rate is, on average, above 80 per cent;¹¹ the continent must overcome considerable deficiencies in reaching Goal 4 targets related to secondary, tertiary and vocational education, often with marked disparities along gender, ethnic, geographical and linguistic divides. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures have exacerbated previously existing inequalities, in particular the digital divide, which mostly affects children who were already most at risk of being excluded from a high-quality education. Grievances around access to and the quality of education have a tendency to escalate tensions and lead to violence. In 2020, there

⁹ United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, D.C., 2018), pp. 158–159.

¹⁰ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), *Slum Almanac 2015/2016: Tracking Improvement in the Lives of Slum Dwellers* (Nairobi, 2016).

¹¹ UNICEF, Primary education data (2019).

were over 1,300 incidents of protests, violent demonstrations, abductions and attacks in Africa related to educational institutions, educators and students, with more than 100 education-related cases of violent demonstrations and mob violence.¹²

3. Health care

34. Achieving equitable and sustainable health outcomes impacts virtually all the Sustainable Development Goals. African countries are still faced with moderate to significant hurdles in reducing mortality from non-communicable diseases (target 3.4) and realizing universal health coverage (target 3.8). In addition, health expenditure as percentage of GDP (target 3.c) averaged only 5.6 per cent across the continent as at 2017. Health outcomes are also significantly influenced by the economic, social and environmental determinants that shape the conditions of people's lives. Inadequacies in health care most heavily burden the vulnerable in society, in particular women and girls, who are often the most affected by the demands of unpaid care work. Given the essential nature of health care for the preservation of life, the lack of access to health-care services can engender powerful grievances and tensions, in particular during health crises. In 2019, there were approximately 230 protests by health-care workers in 13 African countries, centred around poor working conditions, shortage of qualified staff, violence against health-care workers and payment arrears.¹³ In 2020, the number of protests by health-care workers increased to approximately 400 in 22 African countries, a 78 per cent increase compared with 2019, with more than 15 resulting in violence or requiring police interventions.¹⁴ The increase was mostly related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Water and sanitation

35. Access to safe water and sanitation is essential for life, health and nutrition, as well as for quality of life, economic growth and productivity. As at 2017, however, only 27 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa had access to safe drinking water (target 6.1) and only 18 per cent had access to a safely-managed sanitation service, and the inadequate delivery of those services often borne most heavily by women and girls (target 6.2). In 2020, approximately 500 protests related to water and sanitation took place in 28 African countries, including protests over the lack, interruption, poor provision or price increase of potable water, often alongside the lack of access to electricity.¹⁵ Approximately a quarter of the protests were violent. Conflict over access and ownership of water points was also prevalent.

36. A review of service delivery challenges in Africa reveals several factors to be associated with the resulting conflict and destabilization, namely: (a) inequality in access to services; (b) exclusionary planning processes; (c) corruption; and (d) delivery of services in areas where there are challenges to governance.

A. Inequality in access to services

37. Non-inclusion (both vertical and horizontal) in service delivery has been a significant source of inequality on the continent. Vertical non-inclusion centres around differences between individuals and largely manifests in socioeconomic disparities between households. Horizontal non-inclusion involves grievances that are linked to group allegiances, such as race, ethnicity, religion, language, regional identities, gender identity, age and other affiliations. The latter type of non-inclusion

¹² Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project database, 2020.

¹³ Ibid., 2019.

¹⁴ Ibid., 2020.

¹⁵ Ibid.

is linked to a significantly higher risk of armed conflict, as violent conflict is typically fought between groups – either between an organized group and the State or between organized identity groups.¹⁶

1. Exclusion based on vertical factors

38. Exclusion based on vertical factors exists primarily along socioeconomic lines, often set against a broader context of socioeconomic marginalization. This type of exclusion has generated discontent among disadvantaged populations in Africa, giving rise to protests that have occasionally escalated to violence. For example, in 2020, protests over housing grievances took place in Namibia, South Africa and Uganda, where disadvantaged communities took to the streets to demand permanent housing and improved living conditions.¹⁷ In South Africa, there have been a number of protests and riots in recent years related to service delivery as an increasing number of rural residents move to urban areas, placing greater service delivery pressures on already overstretched local government capacities.¹⁸ In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, several protests were organized after the presidential elections in 2018 to demand improvements in the provision of public and private services and better working conditions.

39. In the past five years, there have also been multiple violent student protests related to service delivery on the continent, forcing some universities to suspend classes. The protests generally share similar underlying causes, namely, economic inequalities and government deficiencies, compounded by rising tuition costs and costs of living that outpace students' ability to pay, in particular those from marginalized communities. In Senegal, for example, protests driven by education funding issues made up more than one-third of protests in 2014 and 2015, and more than half of protests in 2018.¹⁹

40. In many countries, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has increased tensions over access to resources, and recently implemented policies have worsened instability. In 2020, pandemic-related demonstrations were reported in countries across Africa, some of which were violent.²⁰

41. In Sierra Leone, the pandemic has exacerbated poverty, which, coupled with underlying inequality, has heightened grievances, in particular among young people. There has also been an increase in violence between local communities, young people and security forces. In 2020, several incidents of water-related conflict were reported, as a large part of the population in marginal urban areas lacked access to water as a result of the COVID-19-related lockdown.

42. In several instances, conflict-related disruptions of basic services, such as health care and water and electricity supply, have generated significant emergency humanitarian needs and further exacerbated conditions for conflict-affected populations. In 2020, for example, there were conflict-related disruptions to water and electricity supply in Ethiopia and Libya, placing great strains on people's coping capacities during the pandemic, while also affecting the operations of health-care facilities and the ability of communities to follow COVID-19 preventative protocols. In the case of Libya, the lack of service delivery and resulting deterioration of living conditions triggered thousands of Libyans to take to the streets during the second half of 2020.

¹⁶ *Leaving No One Behind: The Imperative of Inclusive Development – Report on the World Social Situation 2016* (United Nations publication, 2016).

¹⁷ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 2020.

¹⁸ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, "South Africa: service delivery at the centre of violent protests", 4 June 2018.

¹⁹ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, "Senegal education protests", 25 May 2018.

²⁰ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 2020.

2. Exclusion based on horizontal factors

43. In many African countries, significant inequalities exist between groups in terms of political power, wealth and social status, a situation made more perilous when group affiliation is seen to determine access to social, economic or political goods, including the delivery of services.²¹ In Ethiopia, for example, a wave of protests from 2016 to 2018 was prompted by claims of unequal access to resources and services, as well as claims of political exclusion. While initially articulated around local grievances, many of the protests soon took on an ethnic nature, leading to tension and violence and resulting in an increased number of internally displaced persons. In Cameroon, the perceived marginalization of the English education system spiralled into localized violence and, ultimately, armed conflict. Although there were efforts to address grievances through decentralization, the conflict has resulted in civilian casualties, displacement, damage to infrastructure and reduced access to education affecting hundreds of thousands of children.

44. Protests triggered by linguistic, racial and ethnic inequalities in education have also occurred in countries across the continent. In South Africa, demonstrations over the escalating cost of university education in recent years have highlighted frustration at enduring racial inequalities.²² In its voluntary national review in 2019, the country identified the challenge of having “the most unequal school system in the world” owing to the historic impact of apartheid.²³

45. Horizontal non-inclusion can also arise along situational lines in contexts such as those involving refugees or internally displaced persons and cohabitation with host communities, and the scarce availability of resources and facilities. In Uganda, over 1.5 million refugees share educational facilities with host communities, leading to rising tensions due to overcrowded classrooms and the insufficient availability of teachers and learning materials. Similarly, in the Hodh ech Chargui region of Mauritania, the presence of refugees has affected scarce water resources, leading to tensions with the host communities. Such situations are increasingly common on the continent and their impact could be significant, given that Africa hosts over 25 per cent of the world’s refugee population, despite its resource constraints.

46. Recognizing the role of inequality in fuelling conflict and hampering development, the United Nations system continues to support African Governments in their efforts to ensure adequate provision of services to poor and underserved communities. The African Union and the United Nations have coordinated positions on the north-west and south-west regions of Cameroon and have called for an inclusive dialogue process to forge consensus around long-term governance solutions and contribute to addressing grievances.

47. In the Republic of the Congo, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund have supported the Government in expanding health-care services to underserved and conflict-affected communities, helping to reduce related grievances. To ease growing tensions between refugees and host communities over refugees’ access to subsidized health-care services, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has subsidized health-care services for both groups. Similar interventions have been implemented in Rwanda, where the United Nations has supported refugees from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as their host communities, with comprehensive free reproductive health and HIV services.

²¹ Background paper on Sustainable Development Goal 10: reduced inequality within and among countries (ECA/RFSD/2019/4).

²² Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, “South Africa: 2015 update”, 11 December 2015.

²³ South Africa, *South Africa’s Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Solving Complex Challenges Together – Voluntary National Review Report 2019* (2019).

48. In northern Mali, the Peacebuilding Fund has funded initiatives by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to support State authorities in providing access to quality education to vulnerable children in remote areas of Gao and Timbuktu, as well as promoting inclusive community dialogues to support social cohesion.

49. In Mauritania, where competition over scarce natural resources has led to tensions between the host communities and refugees, the Peacebuilding Fund has funded initiatives by UNDP, UNICEF, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and OHCHR to prevent conflict by strengthening local governance and community engagement processes. The United Nations country team also continues to work with the Government to promote social inclusion through programmes that directly address housing issues for vulnerable groups, in particular the Haratine, who are among the most vulnerable ethnic groups in the country.

B. Exclusionary planning processes

50. The process through which services are planned and delivered, including transparency and meaningful inclusion in decision-making, the availability and effectiveness of oversight and accountability mechanisms, and the existence of grievance redress mechanisms, has a significant impact on perceptions of government legitimacy and fairness.

51. Non-inclusive or non-responsive governance, combined with a lack of accountable institutions, can create major obstacles to effective public service delivery and a negative perception of Governments.²⁴

52. The lack of transparency, for example, has not only enabled corruption in service delivery but also created perceptions of unfairness or corruption, which have a destabilizing effect. In Guinea, for instance, the level of teacher salaries and the irregularity of service bonuses in remote rural areas, coupled with a perceived lack of transparency in the management of the country's education resources, led to teacher strikes and demonstrations in 2019 and early 2020 over wages.

53. A lack of transparency also led to the looting of warehouses storing COVID-19 palliatives in Nigeria in October 2020. The warehouses were a source of criticism owing to a belief that local governments were storing relief items that should have been distributed. The ensuing controversy reinforced the polarization between the Government and the public, worsening the overall security situation.

54. The United Nations has worked to promote stronger inclusion of communities in service delivery processes, both by African Governments and development partners, with a focus on several mutually reinforcing entry points, including: (a) direct participation in public budget cycles, including planning, formulation, monitoring and analysis; (b) performance monitoring, whereby citizens can monitor and evaluate public service planning, delivery and reform; and (c) public engagement in the enforcement of the rules that govern public services, including grievance redress mechanisms.

55. In Burundi, for example, UNDP is supporting the country's efforts to address housing issues and reduce related conflict by promoting public access to administrative documents and conflict resolution mechanisms. In Nigeria, UNICEF is facilitating an inclusive decision-making process in the design and deployment of water systems and sanitation infrastructure, including through the creation of community-led committees. In Sierra Leone, the United Nations country team and development partners, in collaboration with the Government, have adopted a conflict-

²⁴ United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*, pp. 160–161.

sensitive approach in the development of projects, with the aim of ensuring equal ethno-regional participation.

56. In Somalia, the Peacebuilding Fund funded the Pilot Project to Strengthen Service Delivery through Federal Government Systems, which selects pilot projects through community consultations. In Madagascar, the Fund has supported the adoption of new transparency and accountability measures within public services. In Mali, UNDP and UNICEF are supporting a project aimed at improving State performance in the delivery of high-quality basic social services through enhanced transparency, efficiency and accountability in budget management, including by supporting the participation of citizens in budget processes .

C. Corruption

57. In several African countries, weak institutions, fragile governance and weak accountability mechanisms continue to provide fertile ground for corruption. Countries with the highest levels of corruption generally rank among the most fragile States.²⁵ With respect to service delivery, the Global Corruption Barometer – Africa 2019 found that more than one in four people had paid a bribe for public services, including water and electricity supply, health care and education. This is equivalent to approximately 130 million citizens in the 35 countries surveyed.²⁶

58. In Kenya, residents of informal housing settlements are often forced to rely on small-scale private water vendors who often do not adhere to the formal tariff structure and charge higher prices. In Nigeria, two experience-based corruption surveys conducted in 2019 by the National Bureau of Statistics with support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime revealed that recurring requests for bribes across a range of services, including water and electricity supply, sanitation, health care and education, significantly reduced access to public services, eroding the confidence that citizens have in the State and its institutions.

59. Corrupt practices are deeply intertwined with conflict and State fragility. Corruption has been found to worsen poverty and impede peacebuilding efforts. In general, the worst consequences of corruption on the continent have been borne by poor, marginalized and vulnerable populations, exacerbating inequitable wealth distribution and social, gender and identity-related divisions.²⁷ For example, service delivery in Africa has increasingly been marred by “sextortion”, which manifests itself in various forms, such as the solicitation of sex in exchange for good grades for female students, the sexual exploitation of women seeking medical care or school placement for their children and the solicitation of sex in exchange for basic services in the context of humanitarian emergencies.²⁸

60. While corruption related to service delivery might not directly cause conflict, it frequently creates the conditions for criminality and widespread public disaffection to thrive, with the potential for protests and even uprisings. According to the

²⁵ Fund for Peace, Fragile States Index database and Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo Conflict Dataset.

²⁶ Coralie Pring and Jon Vrushi, *Global Corruption Barometer – Africa 2019: Citizens’ Views and Experiences of Corruption* (Berlin, Transparency International, 2019).

²⁷ United Nations, “The United Nations common position to address global corruption challenges – towards UNGASS 2021”, August 2021.

²⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *The Time is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption* (Vienna, 2020); Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2021* (Geneva, 2021), p. 51; Hazel Feigenblatt, *Breaking the Silence around Sextortion: The Links between Power, Sex and Corruption* (Berlin, Transparency International, 2020).

Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, corruption in the country in service delivery and other areas, alongside political competition, has fuelled human rights abuses and is a major driver of ethnic conflict, depriving millions of South Sudanese civilians of access to basic services. In areas of high instability, proceeds from criminal activities can be channelled to armed or extremist groups and militias, further fuelling instability.

D. Challenges to governance

61. Service delivery, like all areas of governance, exists not as a static constant, but more as a spectrum. The challenges that hinder Governments from providing services, such as lack of resources and capacity, corruption and conflict, are often the same factors that hamper the fulfilment of other core governmental duties. In more extreme cases, Governments may fail to provide any governance in certain locations, owing to circumstantial, geographical, demographic, infrastructural, security or other factors. It is precisely in those areas that violent extremism and criminality can take root.²⁹

62. Violent extremism in Africa typically burgeons not in major cities but in remote areas, often in borderlands connecting two or more States, that have experienced political, economic and social marginalization. Northern Mali, north-eastern Nigeria and the Kenyan coastal region, for example, all exhibit conditions of insecurity and underdevelopment, which are exploited by extremist groups to target such undergoverned regions through compelling narratives that speak to the grievances of the communities.³⁰

63. Similar scenarios play out elsewhere on the continent, in areas where underdevelopment and neglect, manifested in a lack of access to basic services, livelihood opportunities, personal safety and security, and trust in authorities, provide opportunities for criminal and extremist groups to take root and gradually gain influence.

1. Non-State armed groups as service providers

64. Non-State armed groups in Africa often exploit fragility to further their political goals, frequently providing “security”, “justice” and services, such as health care, electricity, water and sanitation, education and infrastructure in the territories under their control in order to gain legitimacy, build credibility and recruit members.³¹

65. In the Lake Chad basin, the lack of public service delivery and the weak connection between the populations of the basin and their respective Governments have helped extremist groups such as Boko Haram and the so-called “Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP)” to recruit and grow. Both groups have exploited the shortcomings of the regional States in dealing with their peripheral areas and intercommunal conflict over limited resources, such as water. For example, the so-called “Islamic State in West Africa Province” has reportedly filled gaps in

²⁹ United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*, pp. 160–161; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Regional Bureau for Africa, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment* (New York, 2017); UNODC, Urban Safety and Good Governance Initiative, *Safety Governance Approach in Urban Environments for Safe, Inclusive and Resilient Cities*, (Nairobi, 2016).

³⁰ UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa*.

³¹ United Nations, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism”, June 2020; Mthuli Ncube and Basil Jones, “Drivers and dynamics of fragility in Africa”, *African Economic Brief*, vol. 4, No. 5 (2013).

governance and service delivery, including digging wells and providing basic health care and Islamic education.³²

66. In Somalia, mutually reinforcing factors, such as chronic State fragility, a challenged central authority, fragile governance and political violence, have provided conditions for Al-Shabaab, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other groups to flourish by filling the governance gaps. The groups exploit local (clan) grievances and take advantage of the authorities' inability to provide basic services and enforce the rule of law in areas under their control, thus strengthening their influence and credibility.³³

67. In a study conducted in 2017 on the dynamics of recruitment of violent extremist groups in Africa, UNDP found that a sense of grievance towards, and limited confidence in, Government are widespread in the regions of Africa associated with the highest incidence of recruitment into violent extremism, with a strong correlation between negative experiences of service provision and the likelihood of individuals voluntarily joining a violent extremist group. For example, respondents who thought that the provision of education by their Government was either "excellent" or "improving" were between 16 and 26 per cent less likely to join an extremist group voluntarily.³⁴

68. Non-State armed groups have also used the provision of services as a means of generating income to support their activities. In some communities in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Mali and the Niger, for example, such groups are collecting "taxes" and fees from communities in exchange for services. For example, in the north-east of the Central African Republic, the Front Populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique has continued to provide "security services", including those deemed essential for the delivery of health and education services, while also imposing illegal taxes and economic activities, depriving the State of much needed revenue (see [S/2017/639](#) and [S/2019/608](#)).

69. In the Lake Chad basin, UNDP has established the Regional Stabilization Facility for Lake Chad to scale up the range of stabilization interventions in Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria. The facility will serve as a rapid response mechanism to support government efforts to curtail the Boko Haram insurgency by, inter alia, improving the delivery of basic services, with the aim of reducing poverty and combating the radicalization and recruitment of young people. In parallel, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel have provided support for the implementation of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region of the Lake Chad Basin Commission.

2. Criminal groups as service providers

70. Africa, which is the continent urbanizing at the highest rate in the world, faces an increasing prevalence of slums and informal housing settlements, which present threats to its urban stability and, by extension, to overall political stability. The less developed regions of East Asia, South Asia and Africa are estimated to concentrate 96 per cent of future urban growth. Cities are faced with poverty, as well as new and

³² African Union Commission and UNDP, "The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on governance, peace and security in the Sahel", Regional Brief (November 2020); International Crisis Group, "Facing the challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa province", Africa Report No. 273 (May 2019); Malik Samuel, "Economics of terrorism in Lake Chad basin", Institute for Security Studies, 10 July 2019.

³³ United Nations Somalia, *Progress Towards the 2030 Agenda in Somalia: A Companion to the United Nations Common Country Analysis 2020* (September 2020), pp. 113, 116–117, 121.

³⁴ UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa*.

pervasive risks, including terrorism, violence, crime, different forms of conflict, urban warfare, heightened securitization and the spread of diseases, all of which challenge the ability of local governments to deliver.³⁵

71. As a result of the unmet challenge of providing essential services, many slums have seen alternative forms of governance taking root. In Kenya, for instance, more than 60 per cent of the country's urban population resides in slums.³⁶ As local governments struggle to provide basic services for those rapidly growing populations, slums in the country have experienced a growing trend of urban-based criminal groups profiteering from the provision of public services, leading to increased criminality and, in some instances, violent conflict.

72. The ability of Governments to fill service delivery gaps in slums and informal settlements will be vital for improving the lives of residents and reducing the influence of criminal groups in those areas. In that context, the UN-Habitat Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme addresses the living conditions of millions of slum and informal settlement dwellers worldwide, including in major urban centres in Africa, by focusing on the biggest deprivations for slum communities: a lack of adequate and safe housing conditions, clean water supply, sanitation and secure land tenure.

IV. Conclusions

73. The present report contains examples illustrating how exclusion in service delivery may reinforce underlying structural inequalities, with the potential to aggravate grievances and even trigger conflict. Exclusion from vital, everyday services, such as access to water and sanitation, education, health care and housing, amplifies disparities and can exacerbate the sense of hopelessness generated by poverty and marginalization. Given the upward trend in conflict and instability in Africa, the collective efforts of the United Nations, the African Union, subregional organizations, international partners and civil society are more pertinent and needed than ever for effective conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

74. Failure to address those issues in Africa risks sowing seeds of further divisions, frustrations and instability. The United Nations will support efforts towards enhanced service delivery and distribution across the continent, anchored in the accelerated implementation of the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, guided by the principles of people-centred approaches and of leaving no one behind. The United Nations will also continue to encourage innovation in cross-pillar activities addressing the interrelationship between development and instability, in line with its commitment to enhancing the delivery of more integrated and multidimensional analysis across the three pillars of the United Nations system, of which the present report is an example.

75. The Secretary-General will continue to advocate inclusive and sustainable development in Africa with the support of Member States in strengthening capacities in order to ensure the prevention-oriented planning and delivery of development outcomes and a better understanding of the linkages between socioeconomic dynamics and the aspiration for sustained peace in Africa. In that regard, the Secretary-General invites Member States to join efforts to:

(a) Include all sectors of society at all stages of the planning and service delivery process with increased transparency and accountability in public service delivery;

³⁵ UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2020: The Value of Sustainable Urbanization* (United Nations publication, 2020); Marcella Guarneri and others, *UN-Habitat: Sub-Saharan Africa Atlas* (Nairobi, UN-Habitat, Regional Office for Africa, 2020).

³⁶ World Bank, *Kenya Economic Update: Housing – Unavailable and Unaffordable*, No. 15 (April 2017).

(b) Ensure that planning and service delivery are organized on the basis of robust and disaggregated data;

(c) Promote equitable access to functioning, impartial and responsive grievance redress mechanisms to empower all segments of the population, in particular those in vulnerable or traditionally marginalized groups; expand the coverage of services to those groups to prevent criminal groups from taking advantage of the lack of service delivery;

(d) Empower and strengthen local governments and administrations to play a critical role in ensuring that services are delivered in a just, inclusive and effective way, including during conflict and heightened instabilities. As Africa continues to urbanize rapidly, active measures are also needed to prevent a deepening of the urban-rural divide and the widening of inequalities;

(e) Ensure that sustained COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, including vaccine distribution, in the short term, are fair, inclusive and transparent.

76. The decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals and the efforts of Africa in realizing the aspirations of Agenda 2063 will require concrete and bold actions to reduce inequalities. Sustained, equitable and inclusive service delivery is a key element for reducing various forms of inequalities that requires adequate and predictable financial resources for implementation. Localized understanding of interrelationships between inclusive service delivery and threats to sustained peace will also guide strengthened multisectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships, under strong coordination and prioritization, to realize the vision of “the Africa we want”.
