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## Concept Note

Extraordinary Bureau Meeting of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Public Service, Local Government, Urban Development and Decentralization (AU-STC No. 8) on COVID 19 **(by Videoconference)**

9-10 June 2020 **(by Videoconference)**

## I. Background:

The novel Coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19 that has caught the world and the African continent unaware, has rapidly swept across the globe with impact of an unprecedented scale. The impact of COVID-19 has been felt across the globe in a wide range of countries and very different environments. The pandemic has already affected countries in every region, including Africa, making this a truly global situation where every country must take steps to prepare and respond. Since then the African Union declared an emergency situation due to the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus in Africa with many African countries on the continent being hit by this disease.

The enormity of the situation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic invites – or rather forces – countries to reflect on the nature and effectiveness of their governance systems.

Cities and towns due to their characteristics will be more affected. This is already the case since the beginning of the pandemic. While AU Member States are taking measures to respond to the pandemic at the continental level, the central governance issue at national level involves getting people to divert from their normal routines in the name of public health goals. In some cases, they are even asked to forego engaging in the activities that provide daily sustenance. City governments also play an important role in these responses. Therefore, special attention is needed to focus on the following three sectors that make up the African Union Specialized Technical Committee (AU-STC N0.8), namely the Public Service and Administration, Decentralisation and Local Governments, Human settlements and Urban Development.

- a. **On the Public Service and Administration:** While some public services may have been closed due to the restrictions, some public services are very critical to the survival of the masses. Like in many other countries the pandemic is revealing institutional weaknesses and providing opportunity to review and strengthen institutional infrastructure, for example in matters of public health and social protection especially of the vulnerable. Governments must be proactive to adequately meet demands of the pressure that may arise in the near future. As per the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 outbreak, public health practice for surveillance, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and control of COVID-19 is a priority. In this regard, there must be reinforcements of qualified standby and readily available medical personnel to support in health sectors if there are overwhelming numbers of cases. Again, hospital supplies and other medicines needed should be adequately provided. Moreover, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) must be provided for the safety of the frontline health workers. If applicable, health workers must be motivated with incentives that will make them wholeheartedly work to support the system. Again, services such as provision of water, electricity, security and others must be effectively produced to meet demands considering that majority of populations will be at home either for isolation purposes or reducing social contact. Social services should be extended to the most vulnerable and marginalized in societies. Where applicable, governments must ensure that public servants get their monthly salaries and benefits that they deserve in order to safeguard their families.
- b. **On Local Governments and Decentralisation:** City governments/municipalities play a critical role in COVID-19 responses, yet they face considerable capacity gaps to better cope with preventive measures at local level and dramatically reduced revenues due to reduced economic activity arising from lockdowns and restrictions. They should be supported as well as the urban poor as frontline responders, without losing the importance of the national/central government dimension especially in terms of policy advice. City governments/municipalities

also should be provided with technical advice in their lead role in managing and dealing with crisis preparedness and response, e.g. support to continuity of basic services (especially WASH, waste management and energy), health care, food distribution and other critical operations. Again, evidence-based information flow on the virus, mode of transmission, prevention and seeking of medical help should be decentralized through all available information channels including local traditional leaders and information centers so that no one is left out.

- c. **On Human Settlements and Urban Development:** Urban areas are the hotspots for COVID-19 in Africa concentrating infected populations and posing considerable challenges for responses due to the dominance of informal settlements and the drastic reduction in employment, productivity and revenues. Challenges in access to basic infrastructure and services, including housing, are likely to be accentuated. Where applicable, governments can provide temporary shelter through redundant facilities, schools dormitories and hostels, churches and hotels which are currently vacant among others. It is only through acknowledging these challenges that governments can foster solutions to housing challenges to avoid such difficulties in future occurrences. There should be a provision of technical recommendations on how to integrate the urban dimension into emergency response/preparedness instructions issued by central governments, with special focus on informal settlements, WASH, urban mobility and connectivity and marketplaces to curb the spread of the virus (in collaboration with WHO, UNICEF, private sector and others). Through participatory planning approach, design of a basic street layout to improve the connectivity within the neighbourhood to create “minimum distancing” between the different parts of the targeted informal settlement and to lay down the main infrastructure (water pipes, electricity network, etc.). And access to better health care services in targeted informal settlements (in collaboration with WHO) is key.

In view of the above, and given the current global situation, the bureau of the Specialized Technical Committee (STC) on Public Service, Local Government, Urban Development and Decentralization (AU-STC No. 8) is planning to meet in order to discuss and propose a AU-STC8 COVID 19 response framework to support member States on how to respond to the COVID 19 and plan for recovery and resilience focused on sectors covered under the Committee as well as also deliberate on pending issues of concern to the Committee.

### **I. Justification:**

The urgent need to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and the critical role of AU Member States should play in building resilient public service institutional capacities including systems able to deliver essential public services during disruptive crises like the current pandemic.

### **II. Objectives of the AU-STC8 Bureau Meeting:**

- a. Main objective

The overall objective of the AU-STC No. 8 Bureau Meeting is to inform the Bureau Members about the state of activities undertaken at the STC8 secretariat during the emergency period caused by COVID 19 as well as to provide a platform for

discussion to the members of the AU-STC8 Bureau on the role of the STC in supporting member States efforts to respond, recover and rebuild in light of COVID 19..

b. Specific Objectives

- Present key trends, conditions and policy implications of COVID-19 impacts on Public Sector and Administration, Decentralisation and Local Governments, Human settlements and Urban Development;
- Inform the Bureau, about the state of activities undertaken by STC8 secretariat during the period of COVID 19;
- Seek Bureau member views, recommendations and guidance on the STC8 framework on how to share information and support member States in their response, recovery and rebuilding efforts in light of COVID 19;

**III. Expected results**

At the end of the AU-STC No 8-bureau meeting, the following outcomes are envisaged:

- The Bureau is well informed on activities undertaken through STC8 secretariat during the period of COVID 19, and the implications of the pandemic for Public Sector and Administration, Decentralisation and Local Governments, Housing and Human settlement
- The Bureau agrees on an approach of how STC8 will support the member States in response, recovery and rebuilding strategies for COVID 19,
- The Bureau takes decisions on pending issues of concern to the Committee.

**IV. Structure of the meeting**

The AU-STC No 8 Bureau meeting will be structured as follows:

- **9 June 2020: experts meeting**
- **10 June2020: meeting of ministers**

**V. Working languages**

The working languages of the AU-STC No 8 Bureau meeting shall be done in Arabic, English, and French.

**VI. Format of the Meeting**

The AU-STC No 8 Bureau meeting will be a virtual meeting through online meeting tools such as ZOOM, BLUEJEANS.

a. Experts from the Member Countries of the AU STC no 8 Bureau

Five (5) experts from countries members of the STC8 Bureau and the AUC mentioned below will take part in the technical meeting:

- Ms. Kabelo Lethunya (Kingdom of Lesotho) Chairperson of the STC8 Experts meeting;
- Mr. BOUGGAR Samir (Kingdom of Morocco)
- Mr. Apollinaire NKESHIMANA, (Republic of Burundi);
- M. BenjaminiMwesiga (Republic of Tanzania);
- Dr Mounkaila Ali (Republic of Niger);

AUC (Department of Political Affairs/STC No. 8 Secretariat)

- Dr. KhabeleMatlosa, Director of Political Affairs;
- Mr. Calixte A. MBARI, Head of Division, DGHRE;
- Mr. Issaka GARBA ABDOU, Senior Political Officer, Secretariat of AU STC No. 8;
- Mr. Kevin TCHATCHO, Governance Assistant, AU STC No. 8 Secretariat;
- MsHiwot DEBEBE, Secretary, AU STC No. 8 Secretariat;
- Representative(s) of the Office of the Legal Adviser;

Thematic experts:

- Mr. Tom Ogutu,
- Ms. Nora Matindi
- Mr. Joseph Mbonglyawa

Partners:

- Ms. Thokozile Ruzvidzo, Director, Gender, Poverty and Social Policy Division, ECA
- Ms.EdlamYemeru, Chief, Urbanizationand Development Section, ECA
- Ms.Sandra Zawedde, Social Affairs Officer, Urbanization and Development Section, ECA
- Mr. Marios Pournaris, Associate Social Affairs Officer, Urbanization and Development Section, ECA
- Mr. Oumar Sylla, Director UN-HABITAT-ROA Mr. Claude Albert Meutchehe Ngomsi, Liaison Officer, UN-HABITAT-ROA
- Lucia Kiwala, Chief, Partner and Relation Unit, UN-Habitat
- Ms OmoayenaOdunbaku, Human Settlements Office, UN-Habitat

MINISTERIAL LEVEL

- a. The Five (5) Ministers members of the Bureau of the STC No. 8:
  - President: Minister of Local Government and Chieftainship (Kingdom of Lesotho);
  - 1st Vice-President: Minister in Charge of Administration Reform and Civil Service of the Kingdom of Morocco;
  - 2nd Vice-President: Minister of State, President's Office Public Service, Management and Good Governance (United Republic of Tanzania);
  - 3rd Vice President: Minister of Transport, Public Works Equipment and Urban Planning (Republic of Burundi);
  - Rapporteur: Minister in charge of Public Service and Administration Reform (Republic of Niger).

b. African Union Commission

- SE. Mrs. Minata Samate CESSOUMA, Commissioner for Political Affairs/ African Union Commission

**VII. Documentation**

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