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SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,  
Virtual Extraordinary STC-EST 3 Ministerial Meeting  
April 21, 2020, 14h30-16h30.

EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION  
RESPONSE TO COVID-19

**DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE**

Ver 1.0\_14/04/20

## **VIRTUAL STC-EST 3 MINISTERIAL MEETING ON COVID-19 RESPSONE**

1. Following the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission working closely with the Specialized Technical Committee on Education Science and Technology (STC-EST 3) Bureau, organised on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020, a Bureau meeting to provide strategic direction on the Education, Science, Technology and Innovation response to the COVID-19. The Bureau issued a communique with several recommendations (annexe 1) among which was to urgently convene a Virtual Extra-Ordinary Session of the STC-3 at the Ministerial level on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2020 from 14:30 to 16:30 (GMT +3) for the continent to have a high-level ministerial dialogue. The objective shall be to facilitate a comprehensive consensus on Education, science, technology and innovation response in the context of STI Policy and R&D interventions required; and to promote and maintain continuity of education on the continent despite the profound disruptions caused by the pandemic .
2. Centres for Disease Control (CDCs) worldwide, at the eve of 2020 were confronted by the coronavirus outbreak and no level of anticipation and preparedness provided the amount of infrastructure, human capital and knowledge on the COVID-19 that was required to urgently respond to the scourge. We may recall that West Africa in 2015, was devastated by Ebola virus outbreak, which highlighted failing health systems in the affected countries, and significant deficits in human, financial and material resources required to provide adequate response to deal with such rapid outbreaks. The role of education, science, technology and innovation in responding to pandemic cannot be over emphasised. Following the adoption of the AU Agenda 2063, the Commission has endeavoured to ensure that this framework is underpinned by education, science, technology and innovation.
3. The current coronavirus outbreak crisis in the whole world, reminds us again and calls upon the scientific community to provide rapid and strong responses from science, technology and innovation and deploy novel approaches to combat this deadly pandemic. The objective is building a strong and sustainable integrated R&D and Innovation Ecosystem for Africa, crucial for unlocking potential solutions that address the continent's development and emerging challenges. The continental STISA-2024 is pivotal in the implementation of Africa's science agenda. It stands ready to promote the deployment of science, technology and innovation in the areas of agriculture, health, infrastructure development, mining, security, water, energy, and environment among others; all of which form the six key priority areas under this strategy. It further explores and identifies opportunities to enable Member States to leapfrog the technology gap using the huge and unparalleled technological advances through mutual partnerships and collaboration

in emerging technologies, space science as well as Africa's biodiversity and indigenous technologies. STISA-2024 calls upon Member States and Regional Economic Communities to strengthen research and innovation infrastructure and facilities; build technical competencies; promote innovation and entrepreneurship; and create an enabling environment. In the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic, African scientific community and policy-makers must vigorously join the entire world in the co-creation of knowledge and generation of cure, vaccines, new treatments, diagnostic tests and medical preventive systems to COVID-19. On the other hand, regional actors must urgently adopt policies that push for the strengthening and promotion of research and innovation on the continent to create in the long run social stability, resilience and security.

4. The response to curb and control COVID-19 has also resulted in the disruptions of economic and social activities and the educational system was severely affected by the closure of learning institutions, schools, colleges and universities by governments. Millions of school children and young people no longer have access to education. Following the declaration by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020 of COVID-19 as a global pandemic, AU Member States, Regional Organizations and the Africa CDC took steps to suppress and control the spread of the Coronavirus in the continent. While school closures are important in mitigating the spread of COVID-19, prolonged closures negatively impact all students and disproportionately affect the most deprived and vulnerable students. This calls for robust action to minimize the effects of the closures, by embarking to alternative models of learning such as distance education technologies, online, and other advanced cloud technologies. It is important that AU Member States evolve innovative approaches to uninterrupted learning at home, similar to working from home. The objective to maintain and sustain the delivery of the curriculum to ensure learning continuity.

### **The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic**

5. The statistics of the coronavirus disease, COVID-19, outbreak on the global dashboard show rapid spreading of the virus by the escalating figures of confirmed human infection cases and exponential rise in the number of deaths worldwide, with dire consequences on the health systems, and the socio-economic outlook of many countries. On 30 January 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared that the outbreak constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and recommended rolling-out a number of unprecedented strategies to curb the spread and contain this pandemic such as total lockdown of countries, quarantining infected people, social distancing and communication.

6. The 2019 novel coronavirus was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China in late December 2019. Now it is widely known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) and COVID-19 is the name of the disease associated with it. The virus is transmitted mainly via small respiratory droplets through sneezing, coughing, or when people interact with each other. The incubation period for COVID-19 is between one and 14 days after exposure. Currently there are no vaccines or specific drugs available for the treatment of COVID-19 and hygiene remains the most accessible measures to reduce the contraction and spread of the disease.
7. While African countries show relatively lower numbers of confirmed cases<sup>1</sup>, there is a significant rise of the cases and death. As a result, COVID-19 could have serious social, economic and political consequences especially given our level preparedness, response capacity and the state of our health systems. It is important to note that the 1.2 billion population of Africa is the aggregate, some countries have very small population which can be heavily upset by the pandemic. Most countries need to be well equipped to detect, test, isolate and treat cases, and identify contacts. This is despite the pressure on our limited resources, and therefore there is a need for strong collaboration among the countries. Thanks to the African CDC who in collaboration with Regional and national CDCs has mobilised a formidable support domestically and international and has been empowering African Member States to deal with this global pandemic, in addition to the local efforts at the Member States level.

### **ONLINE PREPARATION OF THE VIRTUAL EXTRA-ORDINARY SESSION OF STC-3**

8. The Department of Human Resources Science and Technology worked online with the Senior Officials/Experts on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2020 to prepare for the Virtual Ministerial Bureau Meeting that took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2020. The Bureau agreed to urgently convene a Virtual Extra-Ordinary Session of the STC- EST 3 at the Ministerial level on Thursday **30<sup>th</sup> April, 2020 from 14:30 to 16:30 (GMT +3)** to deliberate on a comprehensive consensus on Education, science, technology and innovation response for COVID-19, in the context of STI Policy and R&D interventions required and promotion and maintenance of continuity of education on the continent. The Bureau also agreed on working documents for the virtual STC-EST 3.
9. The Provisional Ministerial Agenda
  - Opening Session

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<sup>1</sup> <https://google.com/covid19-map/>

- Facts on COVID-19 in Africa and worldwide
- Consideration and adoption of the Draft Education Science, Technology and Innovation Response to the COVID-19.
- Closing Session

#### **EXPECTED OUTCOME**

10. The STC-EST 3 will adopt Decisions to facilitate implementation of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation response to COVID-19 in the continent.

#### **LOGISTICS ARRANGEMENT**

11. The Commission will share the meeting link as soon as it is set-up for the participants to connect. Furthermore, the Commission will send out invitation to all participants with all details for the meeting.

#### **SECRETARIAT**

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