

Communique of the Bureau of the Specialized Technical Committee on Education Science and Technology of the African Union

1. The STC-EST 3 convened a virtual bureau meeting on 9th April 2020 to discuss the Education, Science and Technology responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye, the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Uganda and chair of the STC. The following members of the STC Bureau participated in the virtual meeting: Hon. Dr Itah Kandji-Murangi, Minister of Higher Education, Training and Innovation, Namibia, and Dr Muhammad Ammari Zaid, Ag. Minister of Education, Libya. Also in attendance was Hon Ester Anna Nghipondoka, Deputy Minister of Education, Arts and Culture, Namibia. The Commissioner HRST, H.E. Prof Sarah Anyang Agbor hosted the virtual meeting and Dr John Nkengasong, Director of Africa CDC also participated.
2. In her welcome address, the Commissioner highlighted the current interruption of learning and academic activities across Africa that will set our young population back even further, widening the gap unless we act fast and innovatively. She challenged the meeting to identify cutting-edge modern technologies for the delivery of relevant education, training and certification. She underscored the role of science and technology and innovation to provide research solutions and innovative services and products to address COVID-19 challenges.
3. The Chair of STC-EST 3 emphasized that COVID-19 is challenging the research community to evolve and innovate solutions. As countries around the world are launching packages and financial instruments to support innovation, Africa should also earmark funds for research and innovation in response to the pandemic. The Chair urged Member States to consider supporting local production of some of the much needed medical products.
4. **The Director Africa CDC** indicated that STI are needed for development of diagnostic tool, vaccines and therapeutics for the control of diseases. He also added that although African cases of corona virus are lower compared to other parts of the world, they will rise if appropriate measures are not put in place. He further indicated that schools are closed in most African countries, thus making relevant the issues to be addressed in the meeting of the STC-EST3.
5. **The bureau expressed appreciation** to the director of Africa CDC, for the presentation on the Coronavirus status and the role it is playing to mobilize and

empower Member States. **The bureau expressed deep concern** with the spread of COVID-19, globally and in Africa, and the serious wider, education, health, gender, food security, water, economic and political consequences especially given the level of preparedness, response capacity and existing disease burden on health systems on the continent. **The bureau acknowledged** the actions taken by AU, Member States, RECs and other stakeholders including development partners to curb and contain the spread of COVID-19 at the national, regional and continental levels.

6. **The bureau took note** of the need to close learning institutions, schools, colleges and universities by governments to protect the population and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. However, this is worsening existing weaknesses in Africa's Education systems including disruptions of the education calendar, and social safety nets such as school feeding programmes. **The bureau recognized** that the longer children and young people stay away from school the less likely they are ever to return to school and that closure of schools should not be an end to learning and that the COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate existing inequalities and risks facing young women, girls, and other vulnerable populations. **The bureau acknowledged** that unless we collectively act now to protect Education systems by providing alternative learning platforms and complementary programmes, societies and economies will feel the burden long after COVID-19.
7. **The bureau strongly underscored** that the COVID-19 pandemic challenges our continent to deploy rapid and strong responses in science, technology and innovation and to join the global community in co-creating new knowledge, vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostic tests and medical preventive systems among others.
8. **The bureau reiterated** the need to effectively implement (a) the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), and (b) the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2024), to create strong education and science, technology and innovation systems, drawing on the lessons of Ebola and other humanitarian responses on the continent.
9. **The Bureau agreed** to convene a Virtual Extraordinary Session of the 3rd Specialized Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST 3), on 21 April, 2020 from 14h30 to 16h30 to discuss the African Union Education Science and technology response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

10. **The Bureau reaffirmed** their resolution to operationalize **the African education science and technology and innovation fund** and requested the Commission, the African Development Bank and the ADEA to take appropriate action to that effect.
11. **The Bureau expressed** appreciation to UNESCO for the commitment to support the African Union in: water purification, provision in collaboration with the ACDC of facial protective shields obtained from 3D printing; and mobilizing **UNESCO's Networks- Category I and II Centers and Chairs in Microbiology and Life Sciences- opening sciences** and outside Africa to exchange scientific information, data, and collective intelligence, and to pool ideas for African scientists, with a view to finding solutions to the current COVID-19 outbreak.
12. **The Bureau appreciated** the commitment from partners such as UNICEF, UNESCO, AAU, ADEA, VMWARE, GPE and AVU to collaborate closely with the African Union and provide appropriate support to AU Member States to ensure that education continues through online and distance learning.
13. **The Bureau also acknowledged** the commitment of the AAS, AUDA-NEPAD, ASRIC networks for their support to the coordinated African Union ESTI response to COVID-19.