

AFRICAN UNION



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SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,
(STC-EST 3)
Virtual Bureau Meeting
9th April, 2020, Time:15:00 – 16:30 (Addis Ababa time)

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Response to COVID-19

Bureau Report

Ver 1.0

INTRODUCTION

1. The Ministers of the 3rd African Union Bureau of the Specialized Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST 3), held a Virtual Ministerial Meeting on 9th April, 2020 to exchange on Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Response to COVID-19 and agreed on measures to ensure continuity of education on the continent and mitigate the disruptions caused by the disease. The meeting was preceded by preparatory virtual meeting of the experts held on the 7th of April 2020.

PARTICIPANTS

2. The Bureau Virtual Meeting was attended by the following:
 - **Members of the Bureau:** Uganda, Namibia, and Libya
Central African Republic apologised due to earlier commitment, Sénégal (absent)
 - **Regional Economic Communities:** SADC, ECCAS
 - **Development Partners:** UNICEF, UNESCO, VMWARE, AVU, ADEA, AAS and AAU
 - AU Commission, its Technical Offices and AUDA-NEPAD

OPENING SESSION

3. H.E. Prof Sarah Mbi Enow Anyang Agbor, the African Union Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology in her opening statement conveyed the greetings of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission H.E Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, and welcomed all the delegates to the 3rd STC-EST. She thanked and recognized the presence of the STC-EST 3 Chair of the Bureau, other bureau members present and the AU and UN organs for their participation in the virtual meeting of Education, Science and Technology response to COVID-19.
4. She appreciated the response to the pandemic by member states, RECs, development partners and other stakeholders for their efforts to fight COVID-19. She challenged the participants to come up with a coordinated and innovative actions that will unlock concrete actions that will reengineer Education, Science and Technology in Africa. She highlighted that Africa has been hugely affected by school closures and interruptions in learning, with over 400 million learners out of school. She noted that it is the responsibility of science, technology and innovation to provide innovative responses to this situation. In response to school closures, education delivery methods need to evolve and be deployed online. COVID-19 is leading to the re-engineering of the education sector. Most importantly, the Commissioner challenged that closure of schools should not be closure of learning, noting that African Union will work hand in hand with the private partners to Members states to provide African

challenges with African solutions. The Commissioner called on the Ministers to fully engage with the national COVID-19 response processes to ensure that Education, Science and Technology are fully dealt with. She further reminded participants that the objective of the meeting is to exchange views on the way forward on continuation of business in the current challenges of COVID-19.

5. H.E. Dr. Tumwesigye Eliodia, Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation from Uganda the Chairperson of the STC-EST 3 welcome the members of the Bureau and participants. He expressed appreciation to H.E. Prof Sarah Mbi Enow Anyang Agbor for swiftly organising this Bureau meeting. He also thanked Dr. Shamila Nair-Bedoulle the UNESCO ADG for Natural Sciences for organizing the global Ministerial meeting on 30 March 2022, in which Africa was also represented by several Ministers. He briefed the Bureau on the outcomes. He also thanked the experts for holding their meeting virtually, and coming out with detailed recommendations for the Ministerial Session.
6. The Chair 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 noted that many African countries are lacking the essential equipment and facilities for responding to the pandemic. He noted that vulnerable communities in Africa with underlying illnesses such as HIV, tuberculosis, Cancer and pregnant women are even at a huge risk. In conclusion, the Chair urged for practical steps of working together in this period, and mobilising countries to collectively to procure critical medical products, personal protective equipment and other services that are imported. Even more importantly, Member States should consider supporting local production of some of the much need medical products.
7. There was a round of introduction of Members of the Bureau of STC-EST 3 and the participating partners and the AUC commission members.

AGENDA ITEM 1: CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

8. The Agenda for the Ministers' meeting was considered and adopted with amendments to include interventions by Members of the Bureau and Development Partners.

AGENDA ITEM 2: BRIEF PRESENTATION BY DR. JOHN NKENGASONG THE DIRECTOR OF THE AFRICA CDC ON COVID-19 / FACTS ON THE GROUND

9. Dr. John Nkengasong the Director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, briefed the Ministers on the current status of the COVID-19 and efforts being made to fight it throughout the continent, highlighting in particular the following:

- Member States not to be complacent and relaxed in their efforts to combat COVID-19, due the low number of cases and fatalities in the continent as the situation can dramatically change as we have seen in other countries for example the US had less than 1000 cases a month ago, and today they are over 400,000. To date Africa has over 11,400 confirmed cases and the situation is rapidly changing. There is also a rapid increase of local transmissions while initially the reported cases were imported.
- He underscored the critical role of science, technology and innovation particularly in three major health areas: (i) Diagnosis (ii) Treatment and Vaccines and (iii) Therapies to support the fight against COVID-19.
- There is also a need for mapping the hotspots, the evolution and changes of norms across countries, through deploying various available technologies such cell phones and google for mapping.
- Outlined the work the Africa-CDC in the continent such as distribution of testing kits, capacity building and trainings as well as surveillance and monitoring. The current lockdowns and closing od borders by many countries and the grounding of airlines is seriously affecting the ability of Africa-CDC effectively carryout its work across the continent.
- Currently, reliable testing is molecular-based. There are rapid testing methods but majority don't provide accurate results. The Africa CDC is also closing following up local developments such as the efforts of Senegal to expand, and the use of the GeneXpert for increased testing by South Africa. There is a huge demand for testing kits and therefore availability and access is a challenge.
- Africa-CDC was ready to explore the possibility of engaging with UNESCO centre for 3-D printed face shields.

AGENDA ITEM 3: CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORT OF THE EXPERT MEETING ON AU ESTI RESPONSE ON COVID-19

10. Dr. Mahama Ouedraogo, Director, of Human Resources, Science and Technology presented the Expert Report of the Virtual Meeting of 7th April 2020, on behalf of the

Chair of the Expert Meeting Dr. James Kasigwa, Director STI Regulation and Biosafety for the Ministers' consideration (*Report Annexed*) and highlighted the following key issues:

- The Director outlined the objectives of the meeting i.e. to prepare for the Ministerial Session provide Education, science, technology and innovation response to COVID-19 in the continent.
- The meeting was given a brief on the current status of COVID-19 and facts on the ground in Continent by the Africa CDC, and how the ACDC was working with Member States, Regional Institutions and Development Partners strengthen Member States capacity.
- The meeting took note of the disruptions of COVID-19 to learning institutions, schools, colleges and universities and recommended a Continental education sector response comprising continuous learning based on DOTSS¹, a knowledge and learning agenda among AU Member States and putting in place plans to reopen schools and catch up programmes. .
- Recommend science, technology and innovation policy and RD response to COVID-19 building on building on the structures established by the African Medicines Regulatory Harmonization (AMRH) Initiative, with working linkages with the networks of centers established by the Africa CDC and the African Scientific Research and Innovation Council (ASRIC).

11. Ministers noted that there is huge demand for ICT infrastructure, and proposed that an internet-based platform to be set up for countries to sharing best practices and information.

AGENDA ITEM 4: INTERVENTIONS

(A) MEMBER STATES

12. Dr Muhammad Ammari Zaid, Ag. Minister of Education, of Libya shared his country's strategies such as TV broadcast, Online learning among others for supporting continuity of education access despite the closure of schools. The country is also embarking on revamping the internet for the learners to continue their programmes at home.

¹ DOTSS is an acronym for Digital connectivity, Online and offline learning, Teachers as facilitators and motivators of learning, Safety online and offline, Skills focused learning

(B) DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

(b) UNESCO

13. Dr. Shamila Nair-Bedouelle, the UNESCO ADG for Natural Sciences, outlined in her intervention a number of concrete actions in the immediate short term in collaboration with the AUC to support the African Member States which include:

- Enhance the role of opening science and bolstering international scientific cooperation and investment in response to COVID-19.
- Collaborating with the African Union Commission at policy level to support Member States and Youths including the Youth Advisory Board.
- Promote water for COVID-19 as water is crucial to contain the pandemic as lack of basic sanitation is a threat to response.
- Mobilizing UNESCO's Networks of Category I and II Centers and Chairs in Microbiology and Life Sciences and 3D Printing Facility
- Availing tools for modelling and predicting disease spread to assist African countries.
- Support epidemiology and ecology reconstruction because potential zoonotic infections arise from human interference
- Work closely with AUC and other partners to develop and provide science education via webinars across the continent,
- Implement Global Education Coalition for COVID-19 and education through strong collaboration among AUC, Member States and Partners.
- UNESCO is available to support the launch of useful fora and platform.

(c) UNICEF

14. Dr. Edward Addai, director UNICEF representation office AU, observed that even before COVID-19, African education was already challenged, especially in the livelihoods, lifestyles and life in general. He underscored that the closure of schools need not mean an end to learning. UNICEF as a strategic partner in responding to COVID-19 will support countries to reduce human-to-human transmission and mitigate the impact of the pandemic on children, youth and their care providers, especially for the most vulnerable. Specific areas of support pledged included:

- Response planning where governments will be supported in crisis response plans including technical assistance, rapid risk analysis, data collection, and planning for the reopening of schools

- Support risk communication and safe school operation based on safe school guidelines, equipping schools with hygiene packages, circulating critical information on disease prevention, and training teachers and caregivers in psychosocial and mental health support for themselves and students
- Continuity of learning and access to remote learning programs including designing and preparing alternative education programmes through online, radio and television.
- Enhance knowledge sharing and capacity building for the current response and future pandemics through the country offices

(d) African Virtual University (AVU)

15. Dr Bakary Diallo underscored that policy-makers are facing daunting challenges as learning institutions are closing and questions linger on how to deal with the continuity of teaching and learning on the continent. As a Pan African Intergovernmental organization, AVU's role remains to support its member countries, especially during this challenging period through the following measures:

- AVU member countries are encouraged to consider Open Distance and eLearning (ODEL) as a mitigation strategy.
- AVU has published Policy Briefs which are short documents providing advice on issues related to Open Distance and eLearning. Over sixty (60) briefs are available on: <https://avu.org/avuwweb/publications/>
- AVU assets can assist its partner institutions that benefited from the Multinational projects funded mainly by the African Development Bank. These assets can assist those institutions to implement ODeL programmes; they include more than 1,300 online modules and learning objects developed collaboratively with over 30 African institutions and available website <https://oer.avu.org/handle/123456789/86>

(e) VMware

16. Ms Rachel from VMWare noted that through the virtualize Africa programme, VMWare is ready to deploy e-learning platform for continuation of education incorporating curriculum from Member States to enhance learning. This will be a way of delivering digitized content as designed by MS. This will help in broadening the scope in learning so that young people are employment ready. VMWare is also Committed to bridging the gap when it comes to educational material and content regardless of the challenges

posed by covid-19. She noted that VMWare offers a platform for deploying. VMWare is already supporting the PAVEU and it serves as a model for rolling out these types of platforms.

(f) Association of African Universities (AAU)

17. Prof Etienne Ehouan Ehile Secretary General, underscored that the AAU is the implementing arm of the African union Commission and convener of the Higher Education Cluster of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25). Following the unprecedented coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and its associated impact on the African educational systems, the AAU appealed to African ministers of higher education to:

- Seize this opportunity to strengthen the resilience of African educational systems and institutions, and make them future-ready in the era of uncertainties.
- Improve digital connectivity in African countries, and devolving it to remote areas, and to prioritize the “last-mile” internet infrastructure investments and facilitate connectivity for all the citizens, strengthen the National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) as a starting point.
- Enhance leadership training and development as fundamental prerequisite for building resilient African educational institutions. Such training should be ongoing and targeted at the top leaders of educational institutions, and
- Provide budgets and ongoing training programs for the educational communities in their countries and further calls for building of effective ecosystems to support and continuously improve the African educational institutions.

(g) ADEA

18. Prof. Albert Nsengiyumva, Executive Secretary of ADEA informed the meeting that his institution is collecting data on impact of COVID-19 from countries will be used to provide information and will be stored in a data repository.

19. The Ministers invited ADEA collaborate with the Commission to set up and launch a platform for Member States and Regional institutions to share best practices and, information on education based on its current initiative of COVID-19 data collection.

AGENDA ITEM 5: CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF THE COMMUNIQUE OF THE STC-EST 3 BUREAU

20. Dr. Mahama Ouedraogo, Director, of Human Resources, Science and Technology, presented to the Bureau the draft resolution on behalf of the Chair of the Expert Meeting Dr. James Kasigwa for the Ministers' consideration. He highlighted that the document contained three major sections: a preamble stating the effect of the COVID-19 in Africa and the world and the need for action. A second section with set of actions, directives, and policy measures that could form the basis for the African Union Education Science and Technology Response to the COVID 19, and a third part on coordination and inclusiveness.
21. Dr. Mahama Ouedraogo further proposed to the Ministers that the Commission will draft a communique of the Bureau of STC-EST 3 for releasing while the draft resolution will be shared to all the African ministers of Education, Science and Technology for further input and serve as a working document for their upcoming extraordinary STC-EST 3 virtual ministerial meeting planned for 21 April, 2020 from 14h30-16h30.

CLOSING SESSION

22. In her closing remarks, H.E. Prof Sarah Mbi Enow Anyang Agbor, the African Union Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, thanked Ministers, and Development Partners for a very fruitful meeting. She urged Member States to lobby for increased national budgets for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. Acknowledged the role and welcome the offers by Development Partners to collaborate with African Union to rollout programmes to ensure continuity of learning based on DOTSS and supporting research and innovation on COVID-19. She thanked those partners already responding for the needs of education. She also expressed appreciation to UNESCO for mobilising its centres of excellence in and outside the continent to exchange scientific information, data collective intelligence and collaborate with African researchers.
23. H.E. Dr Tumwesigye Eliodia, Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation from Uganda the Chairperson of the STC-EST also thanked the fellow members of the Bureau of STC-EST 3 and the partners, and outlined a roadmap to the next full STC scheduled for 21 April 2020 at 14:30 to 16:30. He further urged the Commission to engage AfDB on the establishment of the Education, Science and Technology Fund and also to explore possible convening of the Committee of Ten Heads of State and Government as African champions of education, science and technology.
24. The meeting was duly closed.