

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Press Release No: ____/2024

Date: 18 November 2024

Venue: Kigali, Rwanda

Enhancing School Meal Programs for Better Nutrition and Education: Paving the Way for Africa's Future



Kigali, Rwanda, November 11-12, 2024 – The African Union Commission’s Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI), in collaboration with key partners, hosted impactful sessions during the Africa Foundational Learning Exchange (FLEX) conference in Kigali, Rwanda. These events emphasized the critical connections between foundational literacy, numeracy, and nutrition in addressing Africa's education and development challenges under the AU’s 2024 Year of Education, themed *“Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century.”*

Advancing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy to End Learning Poverty

On November 11, a transformative session titled *“Empowering Africa's Future: Advancing Foundational Literacy and Numeracy to End Learning Poverty”* brought together Ministers of Education from Malawi, Sierra Leone, and Mali alongside other high-level stakeholders. The session highlighted that 89% of African children cannot read or perform basic arithmetic by the age of 10, underscoring the urgent need for action.

The AU-led “*End Learning Poverty for All in Africa*” (ELPAf) campaign, launched in collaboration with UNICEF and partners, served as a focal point for the discussions. Dr. Obiageli Ezekwesili, Founder of Human Capital Africa, emphasized the transformative potential of foundational literacy and numeracy, linking it to economic growth and inclusive development as outlined in Agenda 2063.

Ministers shared progress, announced national campaigns, and reaffirmed their commitment to embedding foundational learning within national education systems. The session delivered actionable strategies, highlighting scalable programs that address learning poverty through innovation, partnerships, and evidence-based interventions.

Enhancing School Meal Programs for Better Education Outcomes

On November 12, discussions turned to the pivotal role of school meal programs in enhancing foundational learning outcomes. Co-organized with the World Bank, WFP, Oxfam, GPE, and FAWE, this session examined how school feeding programs improve attendance and performance, while addressing malnutrition.

Ministers of Education from Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and The Gambia shared successes in scaling national school feeding programs, particularly in rural areas. Delegates from Kenya and Guinea highlighted sustainable models leveraging public-private partnerships.

Roundtable discussions explored the intersection of health, nutrition, and educational outcomes, proposing strategies to ensure the continuity of school feeding initiatives during financial constraints. Sophia Ashipala, Head of ESTI, reaffirmed the AU’s commitment, stating, “*School meals and nutrition programs are among the most valuable investments we can make. They are essential for combating malnutrition, improving health, and driving educational success.*”

The AU and its partners remain committed to addressing learning poverty and malnutrition through comprehensive, collaborative approaches. By integrating foundational literacy, numeracy, and sustainable nutrition programs into national strategies, Africa can unlock the potential of its young generation and pave the way for a prosperous future.

For further information, please contact:

1. **Ms. Esther Azaa Tankou** | Head, Media and Information Division, Communication Adviser, Permanent Observer Mission to the UN | Information and Communications Directorate | E-mail: yamboue@africa-union.org, Tel: +251911361185 / +1 3478127195 (WhatsApp)
2. **Ms. Hiba Mohamed** | Advocacy Officer | Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation | African Union Commission | E-mail: hibae@africa-union.org | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
3. **Mr. Maqhawe Freedom Thwala** | Digital Communications Officer | Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation | African Union Commission | E-mail: ThwalaM@africa-union.org | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
4. **Mr. Gamal Eldin Ahmed A. Karrar** | Senior Communication Officer | Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | E-mail: GamalK@africa-union.org

Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | E-mail: DIC@africa-union.org
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