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Communiqué marking the African Union Conference on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and the Official Launch of THE END LEARNING POVERTY FOR ALL IN AFRICA (ELPAF) CAMPAIGN.

The following Communiqué has been Drafted and Endorsed by Delegates at the African Union Conference on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and the Official Launch of THE END LEARNING POVERTY FOR ALL IN AFRICA (ELPAF) CAMPAIGN:

On 5th and 6th of September 2024, representatives from 25 African Union (AU) Member States, Policymakers, Educators, Civil Society Organizations, and development partners, convened at the African Union Commission Headquarters, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the African Union Conference on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and the Official Launch of the THE END LEARNING POVERTY FOR ALL IN AFRICA (ELPAF) CAMPAIGN, organized by the African Union Commission in collaboration with UNICEF.

The Conference sought to address the critical challenges and opportunities surrounding Foundational Literacy and Numeracy for children and young people across Africa.

The event aligned with the African Union's designation of 2024 as the 'Year of Education', underscoring the continent's commitment to transforming its educational systems and outcomes.

Context:

Despite considerable progress in increasing access to primary and lower secondary education over the past two decades, many African countries continue to face a deep learning crisis:

Millions of children are not acquiring the foundational literacy and numeracy skills necessary for their educational and personal development. This crisis has been exacerbated by school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to widespread learning losses, particularly among marginalized groups such as children with disabilities, those affected by conflict, and those living in fragile contexts.

9 out of 10 learners in Africa, aged 10, are unable to read a simple text, or undertake basic mathematical tasks. These learners are impacted by 'Learning Poverty'.

Conference:

The Conference convened key technical experts and stakeholders to share learning on evidence of effective, strategies, good practice, and practical approaches drawn from on-the-ground implementation, for addressing the pressing challenge of 'Learning Poverty' impacting learners in Africa.

The Conference opened with an address by the UNICEF Representative to the African Union, Dr. Laila Gad, followed by supporting remarks from Dr. Benjamin Piper, Director, Global Education Program, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and an opening address by H.E. Professor Mohamed Belhocine, Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (ESTI). All highlighted the stark crisis of Learning

Poverty in Africa, and the need to proactively strengthen Foundational Learning, with a focus on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, if this is to be addressed. Speakers also highlighted the need to ensure increased financing for Foundational Learning, and spending proportionate to enrolment in relation to primary and pre-primary provision.

Following a series of Technical Discussions, including presentations by international experts on foundational learning, participants reiterated their commitment to inclusive education that ensures every child, regardless of their socio-economic status, geographic location, gender, or disability has access to quality Foundational Learning.

Recognizing that learning poverty constitutes a significant crisis which undermines Africa's potential for benefiting from its demographic dividend, participants expressed commitment to prioritizing efforts to reduce learning poverty as a critical component national and continental education initiatives.

ELPAF Launch: During the conference, 'THE END LEARNING POVERTY FOR ALL IN AFRICA (ELPAF) CAMPAIGN' was officially Launched by H.E. Professor Mohamed Belhocine, Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (ESTI), with expressions of support from member countries, key development partners, technical partners, and civil society organizations.

The campaign is continent-wide initiative aimed at mobilizing resources, expertise, and political will to address the learning crisis, by strengthening FLN provision in Africa. The campaign will focus on strengthening foundational learning to ensure all children, including those with disabilities, and other marginalised groups, have access to quality foundational learning and numeracy education.

Commitments:

The launched campaign was endorsed by participants and commitments to providing supports towards the initiative were made by key partners in attendance, especially on the need to improve financing, strengthen early Childhood Educational provision, to continue to expand provision of quality, evidenceinformed, foundational literacy and numeracy; enhancing teacher accountability and capacity by developing and implementing a robust teacher training, supervision, and mentoring programs to equip educators with the skills to teach foundational literacy and numeracy effectively, particularly in inclusive setting; on promoting including education by ensuring educational policies and practices are inclusive and equitable, with a special focus on children with disabilities and other marginalized groups; and on mobilizing resources by advocating for increased investment in education, with particular emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy, from AU Member States, international donors, and private sector partners. The important role of non-government (parents, teachers, civil society, faith-based, and private) educational providers in addressing Learning Poverty was also recognized.

Delegates committed the following key activities under the newly launched campaign:

- To raise public awareness of foundational literacy and numeracy, especially for those most in need;
- To provide opportunities for south-south cooperation;
- To encourage collaborations among key partners, to accelerate the scale up and amplification of approaches that are demonstrably workable and are responding effectively to the learning crisis.
- To share guidance on policy to support decision-makers in taking effective action;
- To monitor and report on the implementation of global and continental initiatives on foundational learning;
- To advocate for increased spending on Foundational Learning;

- To collate and use effective assessment data on Foundational Learning, to inform resourcing, and planning, and classroom practice;
- To address teachers' issues: training, mentoring, support, and resources to mitigate the gap in provision, accountability, absenteeism, and capacity;
- To promote innovation within the sector, identifying new solutions to significant challenges.

Call to Action:

A call was made to all Africa Union Member States, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Development Partners, Teachers organisations, parents, Civil Society Organizations, and the Private Sector to join the Commission in supporting these critical efforts to end learning poverty in Africa, and to align their efforts with the objectives of the 'End Learning Poverty in Africa' Campaign, working collaboratively to ensure that no child is left behind.

Actions Agreed:

Participants agreed a set of key deliverables to be implemented in the 12 months following the launch of the campaign.

Closing Statement:

The **African Union Conference on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) and the Launch of the THE END LEARNING POVERTY FOR ALL IN AFRICA (ELPAF) CAMPAIGN** mark a significant step forward, and demonstrate a renewed purpose and determination to tackle the learning crisis in Africa. The commitments made to strengthen FLN provision, demonstrated reflect a collective determination on the continent to work collaboratively to transform the educational landscape in Africa, ensuring that every child can acquire the essential literacy and numeracy skills needed for their educational success and personal development. As the continent moves forward, the commitments made at this conference will play a crucial role in shaping the future of education in Africa, contributing to the achievement of the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

This Communiqué is endorsed by participants, including:

1. Republic of Algeria
2. Republic of Burundi
3. Republic of Cameroon
4. Central African Republic
5. Democratic Rep. of Congo
6. Republic of Ghana
7. Republic of Namibia
8. Republic of Zambia
9. Republic of Zimbabwe