

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

H.E Prof. Mohammed Belhocine, Commissioner, ESTI

Opening Remarks

The 7th High Level Dialogue on Gender Equality in Education opening ceremony

Date: :14th February 2023,
AUC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

- *Honorable Ministers of African Union Member States;*
- *Distinguished representatives of the African Union Member States;*
- *Dr. Sihaka Tsemo, Director of UNAIDS to the African Union;*
- *Ms. Laura Frigenti, CEO of GPE;*
- *H.E. Stian Christensen, Ambassador Royal Norwegian Embassy to the AU;*
- *Dear AU Partners, Youth, Civil Society Organizations;*
- *African Union Colleagues and Regional Economic Communities representatives;*
- *Ladies and gentlemen,*
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I would like to welcome you on behalf of H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, to the prestigious city of Addis Ababa for this 7th High Level Dialogue on Gender Equality in Education under the theme: “*Leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to foster girls’ and women’s education and skills development for entrepreneurship opportunities*”.

This meeting is called at an opportune moment when African Union Member States have been requested to take affirmative actions for the acceleration of the AfCFTA; a flagship project of the African Union’s Agenda 2063, aiming at boosting intra-African trade and consequently attaining inclusive and sustainable development across the continent over the next 40 years.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Republic of Sierra Leone and the UNAIDS Liaison Office to the AU for the joint organization of this Event with my Department

through our technical Office the African Union CIEFFA (International Center for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa) located in Burkina Faso.

Excellencies, Ministers of Education, Ministers of gender equality and women empowerment, Ministers of Trade, Partners, Advocates for Gender Equality in, through and for Education, distinguished Guests, I am very pleased for your presence in our side event on the margins of the 36th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union under the theme for the year 2023, "Accelerating the implementation of AfCFTA".

I take this opportunity to appreciate the great support of the Secretariat of the AfCFTA, UNCTAD and UNESCO IICBA for the valuable technical support they provided to establish the link between trade, entrepreneurship and education, particularly for young girls and women's quality education and their lifelong learning.

This side event will be an excellent opportunity to discuss and share your respective countries and organisations' experiences on existing policies promoting skills' development and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics education. Indeed, human capital and skills' developments remain a priority for the Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, in line with Agenda 2063, which envisions well-educated citizens and skills revolution supported by science, technology, and innovation.

Our mission is a collective contribution from our different technical offices such as our International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (CIEFFA), the Pan African Institute for Education for Development (IPED)/African Observatory for Education, the Pan African University (PAU), to name but a few.

Ladies and Gentlemen, As the implementation of the AfCFTA agreement will take place at national level, we are glad to note the commitment of the Member States in complying with their domestic requirements for the ratification of the AfCFTA Agreement. As of today we are told that 54 AU member States have signed the agreement, and 44 have deposited their instruments of ratification.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

We are gathered today to discuss priority investment areas within the AfCFTA framework which will foster girls' and women's education and skills development for entrepreneurship opportunities. In this regard, I wish to highlight some commitments made by the African Union:

The Continental Strategy for Technical and Vocation Education Training, insists on accelerating skills development, particularly for girls and women to increase their

employability rate. Furthermore, STEAM and skills development also represents a key component of the 3rd CIEFFA strategic plan, on grounds that prioritizing 21st century skills development will contribute significantly to inclusive and sustainable business growth and economic transformation of the continent.

TVET sector has a crucial role to play in the development of human resources for future manpower requirements. Ensuring women's full participation in TVET is a key and effective strategy for women's empowerment and for addressing the female youth unemployment and underemployment situation in Africa. We need to enhance women's enrolment in male-dominated opportunities that exist in high-growth sectors.

The AfCFTA agreement remains a great achievement so far and African Union Members States should continue investing in better-trained human capital through STEAM education, TVET and skills development with a focus on vulnerable groups, especially in these times where covid 19's impacts on education are still acute. Indeed the pandemic compounded an already concerning situation.

To the extent that over 250 million children are estimated to be out-of-school in Sub-Saharan Africa, of which more than 50% are girls.

In March 2021, UNESCO estimated that 11 million girls might not return to class after the reopening of schools which signals a significant learning loss and opportunity for Africa's progress and development especially as the continent is in dire need of human capital for digital technology experts, green technology-based service providers, and innovators in a growing African market.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The empowerment of African girls and women should then comprise of education and training systems that carry these as fundamental components to fuel the social, economic and political spheres of human development. It is equally imperative to create equal opportunities for girls and women in economic growth through small and medium enterprises. The AfCFTA offers an important and viable avenue to inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction for the majority of its population, girls and women included, as they are key players in the trade industry in Africa. It is noteworthy that a significant number of women-led enterprises and businesses generate revenue through electronic commerce. This calls for a conversation around digital skills development and the challenges posed by the gender digital gap in Africa and the ways and means to bridge this gap.

During this year, and in preparation of 2024 when Education will be the AU theme of the year, the African Union CIEFFA will continue implementing its capacity building program

for girls and women, as a capable partner with the AfCFTA. This implies mechanisms to ensure adequate acquisition of skills, including in financial literacy and digital technology, to enable young women in their respective businesses to grow, engage in e-commerce, access relevant markets, and engage in regional and global value chains. The collaboration with our member's states, Organs, Development Partners and all of you will be crucial in this endeavor.

Excellencies,

Dear partners,

This 7th High level Dialogue also offers an opportunity to call for the popularization and the implementation of the AU Campaign called #AfricaEducatesHer, launched in September 2020 to rally African Union Member States to safeguard girls' education in Africa and ensure that girls continue learning after the disruptions due to COVID-19.

So far, the Campaign succeeded in bringing together different stakeholders including African governments through the Ministries of Education, Gender and ICT, international development partners, education experts and youth networks. The campaign served as a platform:

- (a) for girls and young women to express their concerns and their recommendations,
- (b) for African governments to share best practices on COVID-19 education response strategies and policies and
- (c) for international development partners to co-organize inter-generational dialogues, to share data and information.

The endorsement of the Dakar Declaration on « Assessing Learning Losses to Embrace Learning Recovery for African Girls» adopted by 33 African Union Member States and 10 International Development Partners in June 2022 is one of the campaign's milestones. The Declaration outlines a set of priorities, including

- the need of a legislative and policy reform to ensure girls and women continued learning,
- and acceleration of digital transformation in education through strengthened efforts in promoting digital literacy for learners and teachers as part of the recovery strategies
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I would like to congratulate all stakeholders (including the youth) who are contributing to the success of the campaign. The Africa Educates Her campaign must go on bigger and wider, and that is why it is time for all of us to renew this commitment and advocate intensely for continuity of learning for African children living in Emergency and Humanitarian Situations, which affects disproportionately girls and women.

As I conclude this speech, I would like to emphasize the importance of synergy and multi-sectoral actions. One such actions should be providing platforms for gender



African Union International
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Education in Africa

mainstreaming experience sharing as part of national strategies for AfCFTA implementation.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

I thank you

Merci beaucoup

shukran jazilan

Muito Obrigado

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