



Statement by H.E. Prof. Mohamed Belhocine, the African Union Commission, Commissioner of Education Science, Technology, and Innovation (ESTI) on the THEME PAPER OF THE YEAR during the Fifth Ordinary Session on Health Nutrition Population and Drug Control (STC-HNPDC-5)

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Honorable Ministers of Health (Here with us physically and online) ; Member States Experts gathered here and online, Embassies Representatives present ; Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor to be with you today as the commissioner for Education , Science , Technology and Innovation Department at the African Union Commission . Our gathering signifies a shared commitment to the vital sectors that shape the well-being and future of our continent mainly through Education and Health.

The African Union theme of the year 2024 is dedicated to Education specifically: *"Educate an African fit for the 21st Century - Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa.*

Let me reiterate points starting with Education, then Health and Conclude linking our efforts on the same.

Education

Over the past ten years, African governments have undertaken a wide range of programmes and policy-level efforts to ensure that no child is left behind in access to education. Overall, the proportion of out-of-school children had decreased until around 2010 with some disruptions during COVID19 . The completion rates had improved in primary and lower secondary education, as well as the access to and the participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). There was also noticeable progress in the access to pre-primary education and in adult literacy and lifelong learning.

Also Excellencies note that school feeding has been a key initiative on our continent to retain students in schools and mostly low-income countries have doubled their national budget expenditures to Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) from 17 percent to 33 percent between 2013 and 2020.

Investing in Education (for young children, youth and adolescents in particular) is thus, the most effective investment in the fight against poverty, reducing gender inequalities, enabling people to survive and thrive and helping to improve socioeconomic development, thus human capital development on our continent.

There is an urgent need to transform and revitalize the entire education system on the continent, while paying special attention to marginalized groups including girls, children in rural areas, those living with disabilities, and those in the move, including those in fragile countries and contexts. Additionally, the entire education system from early childhood education and development through to tertiary and vocational education and life-long learning, can be used as a platform to reinforce health, nutrition, population, drug control and crime prevention.

Health

Excellencies, I want to also bring us to the attention of Health being the cornerstone of sustainable development. As we strive towards achieving the African Union's Agenda 2063, we must prioritize the health of our citizens. This involves not only addressing the immediate challenges posed by diseases but also strengthening our healthcare systems to be resilient, inclusive, and adaptive to future needs therefore noting that health and education remains a basic human right as outlined in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 28 of the Convention on the rights of the child and article 11 of the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child, all of which emphasizing the need for State parties to provide free and compulsory basic education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, The link between the two (health and education) is well established and influential ; In addition Research has consistently shown that individuals with higher levels of education tend to have better health outcomes, because they are likely to have access to accurate health information understand health risks and adopt healthier behaviours. Furthermore, education empowers individuals with knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to make informed decisions regarding their health, nutrition and avoid drug abuse and crime.

Let us reaffirm our commitment to these vital sectors and work together towards a brighter, healthier, and more resilient Africa. Thank you.