

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY****16TH RUFORUM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING****20 November 2020****HRST COMMISSIONER TALKING POINTS**

1. Since 11 March 2020 when the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 pandemic, AU Member States have taken steps to suppress and control the spread of the Coronavirus in Africa, including closing of schools, universities and training institutions. While closing educational institutions are important in mitigating the spread of COVID-19, prolonged closures negatively impact all students, especially those that are deprived and vulnerable. This situation therefore calls for creating opportunities for learning at home for millions of young people whose education have been affected.
2. The Specialised Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST 3) therefore held its Virtual Extraordinary session on 30 April 2020 to address pressing challenges that have been created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the key recommendations of Ministers were the prioritization of the following areas to mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on the Education Sector.
 - Take advantage of the opportunity for online teaching and learning to ensure continuity of education on the continent; improvement of education systems and robust e-learning infrastructure; ensuring quality and integrating lessons learnt and good practices from COVID-19 response as espoused by the DOTSS approach; and conceiving a model roadmap for post COVID-19 which integrates continuity of education in the different regional and national responses.
 - Plan for re-opening schools with appropriate strategies to catch-up on lost period of learning by identifying time periods for catching-up on work and implement back to school campaigns and measures to curb further infections in educational institutions including schools,

universities and colleges. To this end, Ministries of Education should work closely with ministries of finance to safeguard the education sector funding including establishing a Contingency Fund for Education in emergencies.

- Document the impact of school closures on children, girls, disabled persons and vulnerable populations, including those living in vulnerable conditions such as refugees, migrants, IDPs and asylum seekers. Member states should also document good practices, and monitor learning engagement with support from local and international partners, and with the view of sharing information with AUC to facilitate inter-country learning and up scaling of good practices.

3. Furthermore, the AU Survey of Member States on their Education Sector response has shown that there are several innovations being implemented across 34 ministries in 23 Countries to ensure that education reaches the unreached. This survey revealed that:

- 90–100% of learning institution have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 88.2% of the respondents declared to have a COVID-19 response plan in place at their Ministries of education.
- 0-9 percent of learning institutions are offering distance learning.
- 67.6% of respondents are providing distance learning facilities via interaction through WhatsApp/Telegram or other social messaging applications between students and teachers and online lessons via government owned e-learning portals.
- 96.2% face internet connectivity as a challenge.

4. The African Union Education Sector Response to COVID-19 is based on the DOTSS framework i.e.

- Digital connectivity of schools: Advocate for schools and other learning institutions to be connected to the internet and to become hubs for providing internet access in deprived communities.
- Online learning: Provide distance learning content, deploying radio, TV, podcast and online/e-learning.
- Teachers as facilitators and motivators of learning: Teachers should deploy relevant technologies such as webinars, to continue to engage and motivate learners to learn. All Ministries to provide guidelines and support to parents for home schooling.

- Safety online and offline. As more children use the internet for learning, they become increasingly vulnerable to online sexual exploitation and abuse. Ministries should provide guidelines and tools for online safety.
 - Skills focused learning. The curriculum should embrace the 360 degrees approach to skills development combining foundational, digital, 21st century, entrepreneurial and job specific skills.
5. In implementing the decisions of the Ministers, the African Union Commission is embarking on the Continue Learning Initiative, which focuses on four key elements—each with several activities carried out since the onset of the pandemic.
- Joint social media campaigns have been held with HP and ProFuturo Foundation on Digital Skills Courses and Open Educational Resources. Furthermore, a Webinar on Opportunities for Online Learning was held on 7 May 2020 as part of a series being organised on COVID-19. A Virtual Dialogue on Building Innovative Education and Training Ecosystems will be held on 24 November 2020. Please register at www.edu-au.org/dialogue.
 - In collaboration with HP and ProFuturo, Member States are being offered a free of charge online and offline based Learning Management Systems, with the requisite technical support to support the continuity of learning while schools are closed.
 - On 30 March 2020, a joint AUC-UNICEF statement to Member States was issued targeting the education sector response. Furthermore, the Virtual Extraordinary session of the Specialised Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST 3) was held on 30 April 2020. The Commission is currently in the process of developing a guidance for reopening of schools.
 - A Knowledge and Learning Platform has been developed to facilitate sharing of experiences of Member States, Development Partner Initiatives, and Innovations—accessible at www.edu-au.org/covid. We are currently gathering experiences of Member States on the reopening of educational institutions to be published on the platform in addition to a rich store of information which is available on the interventions while educational institutions were largely closed.
6. At the African Union, we are fully aware that Education is the most important tool for equipping African people with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to be able to drive these aspirations that

make up the AU vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own competent citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena. Quality education is imperative if Africa has to attain this vision, generate home grown solutions to African challenges, and participate fully in, and influence the global knowledge economy.

7. The African Union has therefore made several technical and policy level incursions into realising the opportunity and challenge presented by digitisation across sectors, including in education and skills development for children and youth. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa identifies ICT in education as a major lever for promoting access, quality, impact and inclusion, as well as a skill set for life, work and further education. The Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020-2030), provides a roadmap for leveraging partnerships and resources to increase connectivity on the continent as a backbone for innovations in delivery and management of education.

8. At the higher education level, the AU established the Pan African Virtual and E-University (PAVEU) as a strategy to expand access, while focusing on critical areas such as IT and Entrepreneurship.
 - The AU-EU partnership on Higher Education is aimed at providing the framework and mechanisms for harmonisation of higher education quality assurance and accreditation in Africa. Under this partnership, the African Union Commission implementing several programmes including: The African Continental Qualification Framework (ACQF), Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA), Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme, and the African Students and Alumni Forum (ASAF).
 - The African Continental Qualification Framework (ACQF) is a policy instrument whose implementation is intended to enhance comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications from all subsectors and levels of education and training in Africa. ACQF is part of the larger Skills Initiative For Africa programme with the AUC and European Training Foundation providing technical lead for its development. The focus areas of the ACQF development are the Mapping Study, the Feasibility Study and the development of ACQF policy and technical document and a plan of action.

- The Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA Initiative) aims to improve quality and harmonization of African Higher Education and support students' employability and mobility across the continent. It also aims at strengthening the capacities of quality assurance agencies to implement the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and cross-regional cooperation to implement the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF). Other priorities include promotion of African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) as an African tool for institutional quality assessment and improvement, and setup of the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency and the implementation of transversal actions including training, media campaigns and synergies and coordination with other donors and partners.
 - The Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme's general objective is to provide mobility scholarships to post graduate students and staff and enhance intra-African collaboration of Higher Education institutions. Among the key priorities are building of partnerships of 4 – 6 African Higher Education institutions, organize mobility flows within Africa and offer scholarships to Masters and Doctoral candidates, teaching and administrative staff.
 - Finally, the African Students and Alumni Forum (ASAF) has also been established to promote young people's participation in educational processes and increase synergies between students and alumni networks as an informal platform for engagement. ASAF is a developing platform offering opportunities for exchange, collaboration and capacity building to African beneficiaries of international mobility scholarships funded by the European Union.
9. Ladies and Gentlemen, Innovations in Education is needed to radically improve the efficiency and quality of teaching and learning, including administration and management, and to enable all children and young people to access education irrespective of ability, location or socio-economic status. As we go through the various presentations and discussions at this meeting, may we all strive to discuss approaches that will revitalize and ensure quality, inclusive Higher Education Systems that will provide the lever for quality employment and inclusive prosperity for harnessing the demographic dividend and the attainment of Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want.

I thank you all for your attention.