

AFRICAN UNION



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Specialized Technical Committee on
Education, Science and Technology, (STC-EST 3)
Virtual Extra-Ordinary Session
30th April, 2020, Time:14:30 – 18:30 (Addis Ababa time)

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Response to COVID-19

Ministerial Report

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INTRODUCTION

1. The African Union Commission convened the first extraordinary virtual meeting of the Specialized Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST3) on 30th April 2020 from 14:30 to 18:30 (GMT +3). During this high-level ministerial dialogue, the African Ministers considered a comprehensive Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (ESTI) Response for COVID-19, to ensure continuity of education on the continent despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic and to galvanise and accelerate science, technology and innovation actions to quell the pandemic.

PARTICIPANTS

2. The following attended the meeting:

(a) Member States: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Comoros, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

(b) Regional Economic Communities: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

(c) Development Partners: 2iE, African Academy of Sciences (AAS), African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), African Development Bank (ADB), African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS), African Virtual University, ANCEFA, Association of African Universities, Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa [CEMASTEA], Commonwealth Association of Technical Universities and Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA), EU Delegation to AU, Forum for African Women Educationalists, GIZ, Global e-Schools and Communities Initiative, Global Partnership for Education, HP, INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY, International centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), MENAPLN, Norway Permanent Mission to the AU, ONE Campaign, Plan International African Union Liaison Office, Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), Save the Children International, South African National Space Agency (SANSA), The African Early Childhood Network, UNECA, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNFPALO, UNICEF, UNMISS-Juba-UNDP, VMware, WFP.

(d) The African Union Commission: Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology (HRST) with its Technical Offices (CIEFFA, IPED, AOSTI, and STRC); Department of Social Affairs and Africa CDC; Office of the Legal Counsel and DIC.

OPENING SESSION

3. H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, the African Union Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology welcomed the Ministers to the Extraordinary Session of the 3rd Specialized Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology, and conveyed the greetings of the Chairperson, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat. She highlighted the objective of the meeting which is to provide a continent-wide Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Response to COVID-19, and the need for future preparedness. She acknowledged the Bureau of STC-EST 3 that convened its virtual meeting on 9th April 2020, and issued a strong communique for the Education and STI sectors to take concrete actions to ensure continuity of education and research and innovation response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. She further recounted how the coronavirus pandemic and its mitigation measures including border closures and social distancing are negatively impacting the already weak health, education, supply chains, markets and food systems on the continent. She lamented that the longer schools remain closed, the less likely children and young people will be able to catch up on learning and essential life skills that support a healthy transition to adulthood. Children who drop out of school will face not only a higher risk of child marriage, child labour, and teenage pregnancies, but will experience a precipitous fall in their potential lifetime earnings and will be left out of the continent's development. She underlined the urgency to transform Africa's education systems to respond to the ongoing pandemic and beyond, and the Commission in response is inviting Member States to implement the DOTSS initiative to ensure continuity of learning; monitoring, learning lessons and improving on practices; as well as planning for efficient reopening. The Commission has embarked on conducting a joint survey with UNESCO and AfDB on the impact of COVID-19 on education in Africa. She implored Member States to respond to the survey as it will inform and improve the response to COVID-19. Furthermore she outlined the science, technology and innovation interventions that include the creation of the ASRIC Advisory Board on COVID-19, setting-up of various scientific technical working groups to study the impacts of COVID-19 on Africa's food and nutritional security and the socio-economic impacts, Africa's indigenous knowledge on preventing, controlling and measuring infectious diseases in the continent utilizing an Afrocentric response like African traditional medicine. she concluded by calling on Member States to make all efforts to minimise the effects of COVID-19 on the implementation of Agenda 2063.

5. H.E. Dr. Tumwesigye Elioda, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation of Uganda and Chairperson of the STC-EST 3, welcomed members of the STC-EST 3 and all participants to the Extraordinary Session. He said the virtual meeting follows the Bureau meeting which saw the need to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on education, Science and Technology. Dr. Elioda thanked Member States, partners, the African CDC and the continent's health workers for their invaluable contributions in the fight against COVID-19. The STC-EST 3 Chair said COVID-19 underscored the role of Education, Science and Technology, especially research, and innovation as a guiding tool for evidence-based policy-making. The need to increase affordability of access to the internet, to digitalize Africa as highlighted in the previous EST meeting was also underlined by the STC-EST 3 Chair. The demand for key medical supplies and gear and devices has skyrocketed, whilst some producing countries have banned exports of medical supplies creating an opportunity for African countries to innovate and produce these materials locally.
6. With insufficient test kits and materials, the numbers could be deceiving, and vaccines could work differently in different locations. This, according to him, highlights the importance for Africa to participate in vaccine trials and for African countries to invest in STI in order to improve resilience. Whilst appreciating support from the international community, he called upon development partners to increase assistance for the continent and consider debt relief for African countries to strengthen their abilities to fight COVID-19.

AGENDA ITEM 1: PROCEDURAL CONSIDERATION OF THE VIRTUAL STC-EST3

7. The representative of the AU Office of the Legal Counsel clarified the following on procedural considerations of the virtual meetings of the STC-EST 3: (i) the rules of procedure of the STC apply to the virtual session including the provisions on quorum, participation and decision making and the Ministerial sessions require two thirds majority of Member States for a quorum, amounting to 36 Member State participants and (ii) Member State representatives are required to announce their presence through the online hand raising icon to be counted among the participants forming the quorum.
8. The meeting registered the participation of more than the required quorum with the attendance of 39 Member States.

AGENDA ITEM 2: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DRAFT AFRICAN EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION RESPONSE TO COVID-19

9. His Excellency, **Prof. Mamadou Talla**, the Minister of National Education of Senegal and the Rapporteur of the STC-EST 3, commended the organisation of the virtual meeting under the aegis of the AU to allow Member States to explore the Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He further pointed out the need to take protective measures and actions to fight against the proliferation of the coronavirus, as well as the importance of strengthening research and innovation, and national STI observatories, in Africa to build resilience of communities. He reiterated the need for Africa to use digital media to ensure continuity of education, and mitigation of the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable children and girls. He also encouraged increasing sectoral collaboration between Ministries of Finance and Ministries of Education, including accelerated seed funding for the implementation of response measures. He called on **Prof. Amadou Abdoul Sow** to present the Draft African Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Response to COVID-19 for consideration by the STC-EST 3.
10. In the discussions that ensued, Member States cited the collective and individual challenges being faced by African countries as a result of COVID-19, and mitigation strategies implemented at the national levels, as well as interventions to ensure continuity of education through distance models such as online, radio, and television, among others. They also shared ideas on how to scale-up initiatives with a continental dimension to alleviate the negative consequences of the pandemic; the plans for back to school campaigns and re-opening, including efforts to re-think education beyond COVID-19. They adduced efforts to address the challenges through science, technology and innovation interventions.
11. In the discussions that ensued, Member States embraced the draft ESTI response and expressed appreciation for its timely development. They cited the collective and individual challenges being faced by African countries as result of COVID-19, and mitigation strategies implemented at the national levels, to ensure continuity of education through distance models such as online, radio, television and newspapers, social networks, websites and interactive videoconferences between teachers and students. They also shared ideas on how to scale-up initiatives with a continental dimension to alleviate the negative consequences of the pandemic; the plans for back to school campaigns and re-opening, including efforts to re-think education beyond COVID-19. They adduced efforts to address the challenges through science, technology and innovation interventions including networking and sharing of research infrastructures.
12. The Member States raised the following key issues:
 - (a) Expressed appreciation to H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, the Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology for timely organisation of the virtual STC-

EST 3 meeting to galvanize and harmonize continental efforts towards a comprehensive Education, Science, and Technology Response to COVID-19; welcomed the Draft ESTI Response to COVID-19 document and proposed to hold non-binding informal Ministerial Webinars to share experiences periodically.

- (b) Underscored the critical role of the Africa CDC in strengthening the capacity and capability of Africa's public health institutions, and planning and preparedness of Member States to take the necessary measures in combating outbreak of diseases in the continent.
- (c) Urged Member States to 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.
- (d) Underlined the need to embrace and promote the creation and use of freely available and accessible Open Sources for learning, course and teaching materials, research, publications and information pertaining to the curriculum at schooling and university level in the continent;
- (e) Urged Member States to foster Open Science in the continent and lead on this process, not leaving the task to countries in the global north. African countries need to take initiatives in sharing their scientific research results and data amongst themselves, and boost intra-Africa research collaboration, including South-South, and North-South.
- (f) Called upon African countries to share ideas and best practices in developing alternative methods of assessment drawing from current lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic. Noted that traditional methods of assessment including examinations may need to be reconsidered as it may no longer be feasible to convene large examination sittings which may risk further transmission of the virus. Moving forward alternative methods such as ongoing-assessment may need to be explored through sharing expertise and experiences with online teaching and other methods of learning acceleration.
- (g) Africa to harmonize and adapt school calendars and speak with one voice on assessment and the organization of state examinations to give credence to student degrees; call for a joint African response to address the examination during the on-going school year which is affected by the pandemic and decide jointly on the cancellation or postponement of the school year.

- (h) Implored Member States to consider establishing accelerators for innovation in support of remote learning which is different from online learning. Other ways of facilitating access to learning material also need to be explored particularly for learners, students and vulnerable groups that may not have access to material provided online. Governments need to take steps in making municipal buildings and public libraries available for learners that may not have access to online connectivity and remote learning.
- (i) Called upon Member States to build capabilities of advanced methods and improve capacity for (statistical) data collection and analysis as well as establish repositories which in light of COVID-19, and other outbreaks can assist governments' and other relevant regional institutions in making important decisions and response interventions.
- (j) Underscored the need to streamline Africa's strategic research and innovation response on the epidemiology of COVID-19 and to focus on (a) Scientific Understanding of Corona Virus and COVID19; (b) Pharmaceutical and Biopharmaceutical Engineering; (c) Biomedical Engineering; (d) Clinical Understanding of Corona Viruses and COVID19 and (e) Formulation of National Health Strategies in Member States on COVID-19 and other epidemics.
- (k) Called upon the public and private actors, technical and financial partners, development partners, civil society, elected officials and local communities to support and accompany the educational continuity policies implemented in the various countries to maximise impact and ownership and take into account the concerns of private schools.
- (l) Emphasised the need for an exchange platform for African experts, scientists and researchers under the aegis of the African Union and the World Health Organization to evaluate and promote treatment protocols and other experiences by African researchers in line with the demographic and climatic realities of the continent.
- (m) Stressed the need to rapidly improve and develop productive capacity in Africa for supportive medical, supplies and personal protective equipment (PPEs) on a commercial scale, including ventilators, masks and gloves to support frontline workers in the fight against COVID-19. In the process promote the development of African technologies and solutions to respond to the crisis and minimise over-dependence on countries outside Africa.
- (n) Called upon the Member States to exploit current space technologies such as earth observation systems and geographic information systems (GIS) to monitor any

diseases at national, regional and continental level and publish annual regional reports on science, technology and innovation including the country health status for policy and decision-making.

- (o) Highlighted the importance of prioritising funding for education across Africa, deliberate investment in research and innovation and recalled on-going efforts to establish and operationalize the African Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Fund (ESTIF) and requested the Commission, the African Development Bank and ADEA to take appropriate action to expedite the process.
- (p) The ministers were appreciative of the virtual meeting as it provided them the opportunity for information exchange and they resolved to hold non-binding informal webinar between ministers to share their experience once every month or until the pandemic is over.

AGENDA ITEM 3: CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION OF THE DECISIONS AND REPORT OF THE STC - EST 3

- 13. The Ministers considered the Draft African Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Response to COVID-19 and their Report, and adopted them with the amendments and contributions from Members States.

CLOSING SESSION

- 14. H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, the African Union Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, thanked the Ministers, and development Partners for a very fruitful meeting. She also commended the efforts that Members States are deploying in their respective countries as STI response to COVID-19. She called for more investment in virtual education in Africa without compromising the quality of Education, with particular focus on vulnerable populations. She requested the Ministers to avail themselves for a meeting with partners to present their contributions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She reiterated the need for Africa to revisit its education systems, and requested the Ministers to invest in the Pan African Virtual E-University (PAVEU) for comprehensive e-learning to realize the future of education in the continent.
- 15. H.E. Dr. Tumwesigye Elioda, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation of Uganda and the Chairperson of the STC-EST 3, on behalf of the Bureau, appreciated the Ministers for attending the first ever virtual STC-EST. He also applauded countries that have considered debt relief for least developed countries. The STC-EST 3 encouraged the continuation of efforts on drug and vaccine research as well as the

safety of people. He expressed gratitude to researchers working on vaccines, commended the contribution from partners and called for the implementation of the recommendations adopted at the meeting. Dr. Elioda proposed a follow up meeting in the next 3 weeks which will focus on partners, and to come up with a clear action plan for ESTI.