The Third Seminar Series on The Future of the Teaching Profession in Africa 2020

'Teacher Professionalism & Curriculum in an Age of Disruption:
The Impact of Pandemics and Other Crises on Education Systems'

Consensus Document

We, the participants in the *Third Seminar Series on The Future of the Teaching Profession in Africa*, engaged in robust discussions about the effects of COVID-19 and other disruptions on education and teacher professionalism on September 15, 22, and 29, 2020. We met for a final high level discussion on October 6 during the week of World Teachers' Day 2020 to reflect on the way forward and agree to this consensus document. Participants included more than 60 senior representatives of teacher unions and Ministries of Education, international organizations and other stakeholders. The teacher union and ministry officials represented eight countries: Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, South Africa, and Uganda.

This seminar series contributed to the global commitment to equitable and quality education agreed by all countries as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. It also supported the realisation of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa developed by the African Union Commission, and our national commitments to quality education and qualified, motivated and well-supported teachers. The seminar series underscores our commitment to social dialogue and collaboration between governments and teacher unions.

The 2020 seminar on teacher professionalism in Africa builds on the discussions at the 2018 seminar in Soweto, South Africa, on professional standards and the 2019 seminar in Cape Coast, Ghana, on curriculum and teacher professional development. This year's seminar discussed the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and how they have exacerbated inequalities. To alleviate the adverse effects of the pandemic, as part of a renewed vision of equitable quality education, the seminar expressed the need for collaboration in the areas of teacher professional development, curriculum and assessment, and psycho-social support.

We believe that teachers, teaching and teacher professionalism are key to enable equitable and quality education that can help achieve peaceful, sustainable and inclusive development as embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals. Our deliberations underscored the need for effective teacher professional development, meaningful social dialogue

and collaboration with teachers and their representative organizations in Africa.

We recognize that as well as significantly disrupting education globally, including across Africa, the pandemic exacerbates existing crises, inequality, inequity and vulnerability, hindering high-quality learning in Africa.

We also recognise that the pandemic affords us an opportunity to re-examine how education systems can respond to such systemic disruptions in future. We deliberated on how we can support and build resilient education systems across Africa by developing teacher policy and the teaching profession, including curriculum, assessment, teachers' professional autonomy, modes of education delivery (including blended learning), emerging tools and skills for teaching, teacher status and motivation, and psychosocial support.

We reached consensus on the following principles, actions and strategies that governments should adopt, in partnership with teachers and their representative organisations, supported by international, continental and regional organisations, to build more resilient education systems.

A. We believe that all education systems must be underpinned by the following principles:

Partnership and collaboration

- Recognize that a collaborative and sustained working relationship among governments, teacher unions, and regional, continental, and international organizations is much needed. Such collaboration accords importance to the contribution the teaching profession makes in protecting education from

the adverse effects of disruptions like COVID-19, conflict, environmental degradation, political unrest and natural disasters. Such a relationship is based on recognition of the need for social dialogue with teachers and their representative organisations and a commitment to building the capacity of teachers as professionals to enhance their strategic response to such disruptions.

- Acknowledge the importance of jointly establishing a framework of collaboration between governments, teachers and their representative organizations. This framework is to be founded on the principle of mutual trust and a commitment to:
  - increasing the available financial and other resources,
  - strengthening the effectiveness of consultations and actions, and
  - guaranteeing robust, efficient and sustainable support for teachers.

- Facilitate communication among different ministries in dealing with pandemics such as COVID 19 and other disruptions, as they require inter-sectoral government coordination. Work with other stakeholders in meeting intersectional challenges and commitments, including but not limited to school safety, gender equality and health education.

Teacher involvement in policy development

- Provide effective platforms to make teachers' voices heard and ensure teachers are adequately consulted on education policy formulation and implementation, particularly during moments of crises and disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Ensure that teachers and their representative organisations are sufficiently informed and enabled to engage in meaningful discussions at all stages of teacher policy formation and implementation.

Equity

- Recognize education as a global public good, and that access to an equitable and quality education is a basic right for all learners, irrespective of location, wealth, gender, disability, race, religion, status or socio-economic situation.

- Support a renewed vision of an education system committed to equity and social justice for all, particularly the marginalized.

- Underline the importance of sustaining effective education management information systems and of monitoring the effects of crises and disruptions, such as the COVID-19 crisis on teachers and the effectiveness of different interventions, as part of a more equitable, inclusive, participatory and sustainable decision-making process.

B. Based on these principles we reached consensus on the following actions:

Review curriculum and assessment

- Review current curriculum frameworks and assessment approaches to ensure that in responding to future disruptions, education systems can take advantage of the opportunity the crisis has provided to rethink teaching and learning. Such a review should be part of the process of building resilient responses to disruptions without burdening teachers.

Provide conditions for distance learning

- To promote access to education for all through distance learning:
  - improve infrastructure to ensure equitable coverage of Internet connectivity, television and radio, especially in remote areas; and
  - enable all teachers and learners to access affordable data and devices.

- Continue to develop relevant, contextualised distance learning approaches through a mix of media such as online platforms, mobile phones, radio, television, and print-based resources, and establish a systematic plan for blended learning.

- Ensure that learning opportunities take into account the specific needs of marginalized groups, including those with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and those in remote locations, as part of a commitment to inclusive education.

Prepare teachers for the future

- Ensure that teachers are provided with adequate and well-resourced professional development for the use of blended teaching and learning approaches, including the use of information and communication technologies in the delivery of distance and blended education, where necessary.

- Provide teachers with the professional development they need to deal with the trauma and difficulties that learners experience resulting from crises and disruptions.

- Provide teachers with opportunities to develop skills, attitudes and values needed to support the holistic education

of learners, and make informed decisions for their benefit and that of learners and communities

- Empower school leaders to support teachers in crises and in their professional development.
- Increase teachers' autonomy over decisions that affect teaching, learning and assessment for learning, and the direction of the future of education.

Enhance teacher motivation and well-being, and create conducive working environments for teachers

- Protect the rights and well-being of teachers, in particular during crises, in order to promote equitable and quality education for all.
- Improve teachers' socio-economic status and motivation as a matter of urgency. Undervalued, underpaid, and unmotivated teachers hinder equitable and quality teaching and learning.
- Nurture and encourage teachers' professional development and practices developed and directed by teachers themselves and school leaders. Support teacher learning and mutual collaboration, including through communities of practice.
- Ensure conducive teaching and learning environments by guaranteeing running water, food security, safety, sanitation, adequate teaching and learning resources and other conditions in schools and communities, to protect the safety and health of teachers and learners and promote effective teaching and learning.

Increase psycho-social support

- Recognizing that psychosocial support for teachers and students has been inadequate in educational systems, design and implement a comprehensive framework for psychosocial support to teachers as part of a holistic framework of teacher support.

C. Our principles and actions above can be realized if we agree to:

- continue dialogue at national and local levels between representatives of government and teachers through their representative organizations;
- include teachers and their representative organizations at all stages of policy development and implementation in preparation for national responses to future crises.
- Align the work of regional, continental and international bodies and structures in support of national dialogue and policy processes.

We recognize the commitment and participation of the representatives of governments and teacher unions during the seminar series. We also acknowledge with thanks the contributions of Education International, the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, the Open Society Foundations, and the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa for co-organizing this event.