Strengthening national learning systems towards SDG4-Education 2030 and CESA

Key messages of the Education Systems' Strengthening Task Team (SYSTeam) for the Pan-African Conference on Education (PACE)

Context and objectives:

Progressing towards SDG4-Education 2030, central to the achievement of all SDGs, requires careful planning and monitoring of national education systems. Efforts to develop sound education sector policies and strategies is key as it enables countries to engage in productive dialogue with education stakeholders.

The Education 2030 Framework for Action calls for well-resourced, efficient, inclusive, equitable, responsive, resilient, and effectively governed education systems that can meet the diverse learning needs of all children, youth, and adults in a lifelong learning perspective.

In this context, SYSTeam's objective is to support the development of national capacities in planning and managing education systems in sub-Saharan African countries.

"Education systems must be relevant and respond to rapidly changing labour markets, technological advances, urbanization, migration, political instability, environmental degradation, natural hazards and disasters, competition for natural resources, demographic challenges, increasing global unemployment, persistent poverty, widening inequality and expanding threats to peace and safety".
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We support countries in strengthening their education systems for improved learning and equity

KEY MESSAGES

- **Strengthening national and institutional capacities in education planning through sector dialogue**

National planning cycles and effective sector dialogue mechanisms at the country level present important opportunities to rethink the purpose of education and the organization of learning. Inclusive and participatory sector dialogue needs to be strengthened at all stages of national education policy and planning cycles, from data collection to systems' analysis and the definition of nationally-contextualized strategies and corresponding indicators. The holistic SDG4 agenda covering all areas of education and learning must be integrated within national education sector plans through prioritizing and using a progressive approach centred around the strengthening of national capacities.

A mapping of policies and capacities through concerted and inclusive sector dialogue using existing mechanisms such as Local Education Groups, may be conducted in order to analyze current situations, identify policy options and trade-

offs, and map out the progressive [integration of SDG4-Education 2030 targets and commitments into education sector policies and strategies](#) and their costed action plans. This process requires serious reflection at country level around the meaning of the new global and continental education agendas and presents an opportunity to build on the vision of education and learning systems that are inclusive, relevant, and lifelong. Continental and sub-regional education frameworks, notably the African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25), should be taken into consideration.

- ## Strengthening country data systems and M&E frameworks for enhanced monitoring and reporting

Important data, policy and capacity gaps need to be addressed in meeting the new vision of quality education and learning for all. Building on existing systems to progressively integrate CESA and SDG4 targets and relevant strategies and indicators into national education sector plans and their M&E frameworks is of critical importance.

Recommended actions for improving national data availability in sub-Saharan Africa include: Strengthening and adapting education management information systems (EMIS) to SDG4; Developing education modules in household surveys; Improving capacities in production of finance and expenditure data; Reporting information on learning assessments; Strengthening dialogue among national education statistics actors.

Monitoring is essential throughout the process: Central to the effective implementation of CESA and SDG4-Education 2030 are robust national M&E frameworks. The quality, availability and relevance of existing data to monitor progress towards the targets and commitments must be assessed, with particular focus on areas that are hard to measure such as equity and the quality and relevance of learning. Countries may also reflect on additional indicators to more comprehensively measure among others the adequacy of learning environments, the relevance of learning outcomes, and the acquisition of adequate skills and values, disaggregated and at sub-national level.

Efforts need to be strengthened towards alignment and harmonization between the CESA 16-25 and SDG4 Indicator Frameworks in order to support harmonized coordination and reporting between the national, regional, continental and global levels.

- ## Promoting alternative education models and facilitating flexible pathways through recognition and certification

Recent data linking learning outcomes with school exposure show that over two third of the 387 million primary school-age children unable to read proficiently worldwide are in school. The same goes for about 137 million adolescents of lower secondary school age (UIS 2017). In this context, it is key to not only render schools more relevant and of better quality, but also provide alternative and innovative learning models to ensure that all learners acquire knowledge, skills and values relevant to the world of work, their personal development and social and civic life.

The vision of the Education 2030 Agenda expands beyond a focus on schooling towards learning: education systems are called upon to leverage all means and modes of formal and alternative learning to ensure that the diverse learning needs of all children, youth and adults are addressed through multiple and open learning systems and with flexible pathways between them. The recognition and certification of non-formally acquired knowledge and skills is crucial to make this approach successful and integrate alternative education into a flexible and inclusive learning system.

- ## Enhancing collaboration across sub-sectors/ministries

Inter-ministerial coordination may pose a challenge: over 50% of SSA countries (and over 70% in WCA) have between 2-4 ministries, with varying patterns from country to country. This points to possible challenges in ensuring system-wide coherence and inter-ministerial collaboration to develop and implement integrated policies. Even where there is one ministry covering the entire sector, cross-sector collaboration required for SDG4 may still come with important challenges to tackle.

Linking SDG4 with wider national SDG agenda: An integrated approach will be required calling for more systematic inter-sectoral and intra-governmental collaboration to respond to areas of sustainable lifestyles and life skills, cultural

diversity, health and wellbeing education, as well as bringing on board other sectors which are critical to the achievement of the education goal such as labour and environment. Moreover, the centrality of education in contributing to the achievement of all SDGs must be recognized. Strengthened and diversified multistakeholder partnerships including with governments, civil society organisations, UN and bi/multi-lateral agencies, academia, youth organizations, private sector and foundations among others, all play a key role for effective implementation.

- ## Developing inclusive education sector policies and plans

SDG4-Education 2030 provides an opportunity for countries to rethink their education systems to make them more relevant to the needs of societies and individuals including vulnerable groups such as refugees and IDPs, and for partners to rethink their type of support and strengthening of capacities. Through the Education 2030 Framework for Action, countries have committed to "developing more inclusive, responsive and resilient education systems to meet the needs of children, youth and adults in these contexts, including internally displaced persons and refugees." The Framework for Action also includes as an 'indicative strategy' under Target 4.5: "Ensure that education policies, sector plans and budget planning include risk assessment, preparedness and response to emergency situations for education, and initiatives that respond to the education needs of children, youth and adults affected by disaster, conflict, displacement and epidemics, including IDPs and refugees". While education systems need to become more resilient, responsive in the face of conflict, social unrest and natural hazards and able to provide learning during emergencies, conflict and post-conflict situations, they also serve a critical role in preventing and mitigating conflict and in promoting social cohesion and peace.

- ## Improving education financing

Whereas States in Africa are making important budgetary efforts towards the improvement of their education systems, serious funding gaps are still looming and improvements in efficient spending and equitable allocation are necessary. External aid for education has been declining in the region. These funding gaps translate into an increasing share of education expenditure borne by households – close to 50% in some countries – and imperil the provision of equitable access and relevant learning outcomes for all. Particularly challenging in WCA is the financing of education in humanitarian contexts.

As the primary responsibility for education provision rests with national governments, it will be crucial not only to mobilize increased domestic resources but to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. Ensuring an equitable distribution of these resources to benefit first and foremost the most at risk of not learning is equally critical. Innovative funding mechanisms, for example through Public Private Partnership in TVET and Higher education, need to be envisioned and the effectiveness of international financing needs to be enhanced through harmonization, better coordination and building new alliances, while supporting the capacity of countries to disburse funds.

Mobilizing resources for adequate education financing, the regular production and reporting of financial data and indicators, and the transparent tracking of all financial flows will help ensure greater equity, more efficient use of resources, more effective planning, and better monitoring of domestic and external commitments towards SDG4. Gathering education financing sources into a common framework, National Education Accounts can be used for better targeting of educational resources and improved policy decisions.

Members of the Regional Coordination Group on SDG4-Education 2030 in West and Central Africa (RCG4) who support areas related to education policy, planning, management, and financing have joined forces in view of supporting the integration of SDG4-Education 2030 into National Education Planning, centered on the strengthening of national and institutional capacities. Activities of the Systems' strengthening Task Team (SYSTeam) focus on the development of support tools and frameworks, sharing of best practices and support to the strengthening of national capacities in sector planning and country data systems in the context of SDG4-Education 2030, including in fragile states affected by conflict.

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