

Statement by Honourable Poloko Nuggert Ntshwarang, Special Rapporteur on Education of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)

On this International Education Day being commemorated with a theme “The Power of Youth in Co-creating Education”, on behalf of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), I would like to emphasise the need to reform the educational landscape in Africa. Children and youth are often placed in the receiving end of the process of education where States and educational institutions craft what they believe is necessary without considering their views. For example, Curricula and pedagogy are designed without taking into account the views and perspectives of children and youth.

Member states of the African Union are commended for efforts put in place to involve children and young persons in economic, political, and social platforms affecting their lives. Child participation is one of the key principles of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Our Committee’s General Comment No 9 on Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on the right to education has analysed the nexus between the right to education and child participation. The General Comment outlines the importance of the right of children to participate in curricula development such as extracurricular or recreational activities, school governance, teaching methods, school safety, safeguarding and disciplinary measures. Moreover, the General Comment highlights that education must be available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable. The concept of adaptable education demands an educational system that evolves to meet the changing needs of students and societies, and most importantly to actively involve learners in the process. Co-creation is the operational heart of child participation and adaptable education. Therefore, given that childhood is a spectrum with varying ages and capacities, I invite Member States and stakeholders to link participation to the evolving capacity of children and young persons.

Today, I wish to amplify three pillars to co-create a more inclusive, relevant, and empowering educational future for Africa.

First, Member States are encouraged to ensure child participation in curriculum design and governance. We must move beyond tokenistic child participation and enable children and youth to participate in shaping curricula through participation in reviews and reforms to ensure that content is culturally relevant. A culturally relevant curricula ensures that curricula is in line with emerging technological advancements, addresses contemporary issues such as climate change, peacebuilding, entrepreneurship, and enhances critical thinking. Children and youth should also have a substantive voice in pedagogy, school policies, disciplinary codes, and resource allocation, creating safer and more supportive

learning environments. In addition, peer-to-peer learning initiatives should be implemented to empower child and youth-led clubs and projects that foster innovation, mental health support, and digital literacy. To achieve that, we must recognize our children and youth as key contributors in dismantling stereotypes against their capacity to meaningfully influence education.

Second, emphasis must be placed in digital inclusion as a prerequisite for co-creation. In this 21st century, we have to deliver our promise for our children and youth by delivering education that is fit for the young generation. The digital divide is the new frontier of educational inequality. We cannot speak of co-creating the future while millions of African youths are locked out of the digital world. Therefore, efforts should be galvanized to ensure universal access to affordable internet connectivity and devices as part of the learning needs. Such access should be purposed beyond consumption by equipping children and youth with digital literacy to solve contextual African problems and challenges. Moreover, Member States and stakeholders should leverage on technology for inclusive participation by developing digital platforms for participation and ensure that children in marginalised areas and disadvantaged such as those with disabilities contribute in national education dialogues.

Finally, I would like to underscore the need to address all challenges that hinder access to education. Barriers such as discrimination and exclusion based on gender and disability among others, conflict, poverty, and marginalisation hinder access to education. To ensure full participation, I call on Member States to address the barriers and facilitate co-creation.

Therefore, I call for the integration of structured child and youth participation mechanisms in the education sector; investment in digital infrastructure, and creation of a culture of listening and partnering with children. Harnessing “The Power of Youth in Co-creating Education” is the most strategic investment we can make for the Africa We Want. It is the path to an education that is geared towards promoting the agency and leadership of every African child and to unlock the continent’s unlimited potential.

I thank you.

Note: To know more about the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Education visit the www.acerwc.africa

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