

Remarks by His Excellency Sidya Elhadj, Ambassador of Mauritania at the roundtable on education

27 August 2024

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

First, I would like to thank The Association of African Economy and Development and its president His Excellency Mr. Tetsuro Yano for inviting me to this important roundtable. It is a privilege for me to address the present roundtable and share some of my thoughts on the crucial issue of education, the cornerstone of progress, social cohesion, growth and prosperity.

Africa has designated this year 2024, the Year of Education, the theme of which is to educate an African fit for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive lifelong quality and relevant learning in Africa.

The education sector in Africa faces many challenges: Too many children are still out of school, many children drop out of school, not enough children complete school, too many children are unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10, not enough qualified teachers, poorly paid teachers, outdated curricula unfit for the digital age, little access to technical and

vocational training, not enough schools and lack of basic services such as water and sanitation at schools and I am sure that I forget other challenges facing the education sector in Africa. Suffice it to say that the education sector in Africa is in need of fundamental reform and transformation to allow for the creation of a skilled labour population capable of taking Africa to the prosperity it wants to achieve in the future : The Africa we want and which we envision in our Agenda 2063.

These challenges affect countries differently. They also affect different categories of population differently within the countries themselves. The rural areas tend to suffer more from the deficiencies of the education sector than the urban areas. Girls and displaced children tend to face a lot more difficulties in accessing and completing a quality education than most other children. Also, the gap between rich and poor within the countries plays an important role in the uneven access to education in Africa.

it is an undeniable fact, however, that Africa has made significant progress in the field of education addressing many of the challenges mentioned previously. enrollment rates and completion rates in all education levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) have all improved significantly, there have been decreases in drop out rates and the number of children out of school have gone down.

These achievements have been possible thanks to the priority which has always been given to education by African countries. This priority not only meant the elaboration of policies and strategies to develop the sector of

education further and respond to its many challenges but also the allocation of significant parts of public expenditures to education and that, more often than not in a limited fiscal space marked by budgetary constraints required for macroeconomic stability.

The progress made by Africa in the education sector remains fragile, a fragility which is compounded by the rapid increase of the school age population of the continent, an increase which is estimated to continue in the foreseeable future. This evolving situation is not short of what is referred to sometimes as a crisis of education, albeit a low intensity crisis.

Being well aware of the difficult challenges they face in the area of education, African countries have elaborated a collective response in the forms of agenda 2063 and the continental education strategy for Africa (2016 - 2025). The policies and programmes pursued by African countries to achieve SDG 4 is another testimony of their commitments to transform the education system with the objective of turning it into an education system fit for 21st Century and fit for the emerging knowledge based and digital economy.

Education needs to be financed and it is an expensive endeavour but it should not only be seen as an expenditure but as an investment with very high returns some even say that its returns are better than those of the stock market as it is one of the main drivers of economic and social development and the key to making life better for the population. The financing of education is not only related to the construction of schools, the training of teachers, the elaboration of school curricula but also to nutrition, the

provision of energy, water, sanitation facilities, access roads etc... It is a comprehensive system which needs to be in place at the same time to allow for learning to take place successfully.

African countries devote a substantial part of their budget to the education sector, some countries devote more than the 15% of their public expenditure and 4% of their GDP to the sector, percentages which are estimated to be necessary for financing a well functioning education system.

Despite issues of efficiency in education expenditure in Africa, it is clear that the countries have gone to a great length to provide the necessary funding for their education sector to function properly and play its vital role in the development process of the countries. It should also be noted that African households contribute a great deal to the financing of education in their respective countries.

However, these financing efforts by African government and African households are far from sufficient and there is clear need for international financing. It is worth reminding that the international community has subscribed to many commitments related to education notably the World declaration for education for all Jomtien, 1990, the Dakar framework for action, education for all, meeting our collective commitments, 2000 and the commitment to three sustainable development goals including SDG 4 in 2015.

Many countries including Japan and many international organisations including the Global partnership for Education, Unesco, Unicef, Unhcr, the

African development bank and World bank and others have contributed significantly to the financing and development of education in Africa. Japan has been a major player in the development of school infrastructure in Africa allowing many children to attend school. However, it is regrettable to note that the international financing of education seems to have stagnated or even decreased in some cases over recent years. For example such financing for sub Saharan Africa has decreased from 5.6 billions US dollars in 2020 to 4.5 billions in 2021. Although this decrease may be due to the reorientation of public expenditures towards the urgent needs created by the Covid epidemic, the drop of financing mentioned previously is rather worrying and there is no doubt that there is an urgent need to increase massively the financing of education in Africa.

The financing gap for education in Africa and the achievement of SDG 4 have been estimated at approximately 40 billions US dollars a year. It is clear that we are nowhere near that level of financing for education in Africa.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Global Partnership for Education for their constant support for the development of education in Africa despite the difficulties which they have encountered, on many occasions, in the periodic replenishments of their funds.

Levels of education in a country determine to a large extent that country's participation in world development and its ability to benefit from the advancement of knowledge and science and technology developments. Africa

needs to transform its education system to participate fully into the peaceful and prosperous world that we all want.

This year, the year of education for Africa is the beginning of renewed efforts by the continent, and I would like to believe by its international partners, to transform its education sector on the way to achieving SDG 4 and creating an education fit for the 21st century.

Thank you