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KEYNOTE SPEECH

H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor
Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology and
Innovation (ESTI)

Bridging Africa and Europe:
New Qualifications and Competencies in TVET

Co-hosted by
University of Cape Coast
a UNEVOC Centre

Date: 15 – 16 June 2021

Time: 12:00 (Addis Ababa Time)

Virtual Event

Ms. Soo-Hyang Choi, Director, UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNESCO-UNEVOC) Ms Catrin Hannken Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Germany

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure and indeed quite an honour to have been invited to make some remarks at this conference on Bridging Innovation and Learning in TVET. Let me from the onset congratulate UNESCO-UNEVOC and BIBB together with University of Cape Coast for organizing this virtual event.

This conference comes at a critical time when education systems including TVET are still grappling with the vestiges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to emergence of COVID-19, Africa's education system was already facing crises in learning, ensuring equity, relevance and affordability. COVID 19 pandemic, has greatly exacerbated the situation and threatens to bog down the development efforts made so far.

Bridging Innovation and Learning in TVET conference on new qualifications and competencies, is therefore quite timely as we seek to address these nascent challenges that TVET systems in Africa have faced.

This conference also comes against the backdrop of an increased attention for the need to be concrete in providing results for Africa's youth. One of the critical challenges that we must grapple with and for which our collective

synergies is paramount is on enhancing youth employment in Africa.

Unemployment among youth is remarkably high and the current demographic trends on the continent means that many young people are transitioning from school to the labor market with limited employment options.

The acquisition of employment relevant skills is a pre-requisite for young people to participate meaningfully in the economy. However, access to and quality of job-oriented skills development remains a challenge with gaps where education and training do not often guarantee a better rate of integration of graduates into the labour market.

Africa is also at the cusp of a technological revolution that is fundamentally altering our societies today with automation threatening to replace labour across the entire economy. It is therefore not a surprise that there is a large-scale decline in some roles as jobs become redundant or automated.

As the technological developments create new pressures on labour markets, education reform, lifelong learning including reskilling and up-skilling initiatives are absolutely critical.

This will in turn ensure competitiveness of individuals in emerging world of work with resultant access to new economic opportunities. In addition, businesses will have access to the talent needed for the emerging jobs and jobs of the future.

It is on this note that the focus on new qualifications and competences must gain more traction in Africa. As technological developments increase, it is imperative that TVET systems are also adaptive to these changes.

Education and training systems must therefore effectively and with agility, respond to these profound and rapid changes in the labour market and emerging employment landscape.

Through this conference, we aim at sharing experiences on how best to tackle some of the key constraints that hamper the development of TVET systems in Africa, including among others: (i) insufficient and inequitable access; (ii) poor quality and low market relevance; (iii) weak institutional capacity; (iv) low prestige and attractiveness and (iv) large investment gaps – low financing.

Our objective is to contribute to the improvement and modernization of TVET systems in Africa, as well as reinforce the links between TVET and the labour market. The aim is to improve the skills and competences of teachers, learners and managers, and the occupational prospects of students graduating from these institutions particularly in areas with a high potential for job creation including digital skills.

The African Union has developed policy interventions that we believe when implemented would strengthen outcomes in Education, Science, Technology and Innovation in Africa. The Strategies are anchored in Africa's development blueprint Agenda 2063 that that calls for speeding up actions to *“catalyze an Education and Skills revolution and actively promote science,*

technology, research and innovation, with the ultimate aim of building knowledge, human resources, capabilities and skills for Africa's future.”

These strategies include: The Continental Strategy for Technical, Vocational, Education and Training (TVET) to foster Youth Employment, The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) and The Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA-2024).

We also have a Plan of Action for the African Decade on Technical, Professional Entrepreneurial Training and Youth Employment – (The TVET Decade Plan of Action 2019 - 2028) whose implementation is expected to spur development in TVET systems and contribute to development of Africa's economies.

Implementation of these strategies require a multi sectoral approach and the African Union is working with a coalition of partners in Technical and Vocational Education and Training - the **TVET Cluster**.

The TVET Cluster provides for an inclusive platform for TVET stakeholders in Africa, including industry players in Africa and beyond, to jointly identify solutions on how best to further enhance access, quality and relevance of TVET in Africa, with special emphasis to employment oriented TVET.

The African Union believes that the partnerships we are developing will lead to leveraging on limited resources for value addition, policy making, monitoring & reporting on the efficacy of our interventions towards realizing a Skills Revolution and ultimately Agenda 2063.

Distinguished Participants,

It is also critical that we endeavor to transform TVET into a mainstream activity for African youth development, employment, and human capacity development in Africa. If we are to achieve sustainable economic development, the entire spectrum of skills development ecosystems in Africa must be revitalized, modernized, and harmonized.

Our collective efforts should be aligned towards the development of a workforce that is highly educated, skilled, creative, and innovative in order to be competitive in the 21st Century.

We as stakeholders must strive to make TVET attractive. TVET should be seen as the springboard for employability among youth and ultimately enhanced economic growth in Africa. There is no reason why TVET related careers cannot be first choice professions for youth and new qualifications and competencies must be intricately woven into the tapestry of a modernized TVET curriculum.

To enhance the image and perception of TVET, we must talk to parents, students, and communities on the potentials of TVET. Seamless multiple pathways, sustained public awareness and career guidance will be critical in this. I am aware and happy that we are doing our best, but we must upscale our efforts.

In conclusion,

Allow me to also mention that with the support of the German Government

and the European Union, the African Union is implementing the Skills Initiative for Africa with a view to increasing employment prospects for Africa's youth.

Within this programme, we are in the process of developing the African Continental Qualification Framework (ACQF). This policy instrument is aimed at enhancing comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications from all sub-sectors of education and training; facilitate recognition of diplomas and certificates; and support people's learning outcomes acquired throughout life.

Another facet of this initiative being implemented with technical support from the ILO focuses on labour market forecasting and skills anticipation systems. This intervention is crucial in guiding labour market actors to systematically identify and address future skills needs to avoid potential gaps between skills demand and supply.

The African Union Commission is also in the process of developing the Digital Education Strategy for Africa to provide practical way forward for our governments and other stakeholders for implementing digital learning.

It is therefore enlightening, and I am indeed humbled to be part of this conference that has provided a platform for engagement of distinguished thought leaders seeking solutions to enhance TVET outcomes in Africa.

I want to express my deepest appreciation to all our partners in this journey as we engage on this very ambitious and interesting voyage of experience sharing and learning towards the improvement and modernization of TVET systems in Africa.

Thank you all for your attention.