JOINT SADC SECRETARIAT - UNESCO STATEMENT ON ENSURING CONTINUITY OF LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat, and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) rally development partners, international organizations, civil society organisations and private sector in a Broad Coalition to ensure #LearningNeverStops

In response to the COVID 19 pandemic, the SADC Secretariat agreed to work with UNESCO, leading a Global Education Coalition1 to support SADC Member States in mitigating the effects of the coronavirus on education, and in ensuring the continuity of education and learning programmes. The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in massive closure of schools, polytechnics, and universities affecting more than 1.5 billion learners and youth across the planet. School closures widen education inequalities and affect vulnerable children and youth disproportionately. We have a responsibility to ensure continuity, inclusion and equity for all learners.

The SADC Secretariat in collaboration with UNESCO (the Global Education Coalition) seek to facilitate inclusive learning opportunities for children, and youth during this period of sudden and unprecedented educational disruption. This is to support countries in scaling up good practices of distance learning solutions, and reaching the most at-risk children and youth. Investment in remote learning should both mitigate the immediate disruption caused by COVID-19, and accelerate the development of more open and flexible quality education systems.

Through this statement, SADC Secretariat and UNESCO commit to work with SADC Member States, and other Global Coalition partners to provide support to SADC Member States to ensure continuity of education under the hashtag #LearningNeverStops. Support will be provided to SADC countries for mobilizing resources and implementing innovative, and context appropriate solutions to provide education and learning remotely, leveraging hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech approaches, and seek equitable solutions and universal access. The partnership will seek equitable solutions, ensure coordinated responses, and avoid overlapping efforts, while facilitating the return of students to school when they reopen to avoid an upsurge in dropout rates.

Strengthening access to innovative distance learning opportunities will ensure the provision of high-quality curricular contents. It also presents an opportunity to strengthen STEM education to ensure learners will develop the right knowledge, skills and creative minds required by productive sectors in member states.

Specifically, the SADC Secretariat - UNESCO partnership will focus on the following areas:

- Making distance learning possible for all learners at all levels (from early childhood to higher education and TVET) - Ensure the continuation of education of all learners and at all levels through distance learning options through locally adapted, technology based, on-line

1 https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition - More information on the Coalition and membership
and off-line solutions for alternative and home-based education.

- **Health and well-being of learners** - Create awareness on the importance of health and hygiene, and on COVID-19 prevention through age-appropriate information about coronavirus and other infectious diseases for teachers and learners.
- **Support teachers and teacher educators** through access and capacity building to use relevant technologies to facilitate and support distance learning.
- **Strengthen capacities and skills for quality STEM education**, to ensure learners develop creative minds, and the knowledge and skills required by productive sectors for the implementation of the SADC Industrialisation Strategy.
- **Improve STI and R&D Response** to COVID-19 through the dissemination of timely and relevant research output, including sharing best practices, information, mutual learning, and upscaling initiatives with regional dimensions, and minimising duplication of efforts on COVID-19.

In crises like the COVID-19 outbreaks, coordination and partnership are key. The current situation calls for solidarity and **collaboration**. SADC Secretariat and UNESCO will work in close **coordination** with SADC Member States, public and private education sector stakeholders to generate evidence on the impact of school closures on education, and develop appropriate solutions, while taking into account unique requirements and circumstances in each of SADC countries. To this effect, support will be provided to SADC Member States to develop and manage their educational response in the short, medium, and long terms.

**Our collective actions can help build more resilient education systems. #LearningNeverStops.**

Dr. Stergomena L. Tax  
SADC EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
FOR THE SADC SECRETARIAT

Prof. Hubert Gijzen  
Regional Director and Representative  
UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa  
FOR UNESCO