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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Concept Note on Education as the AU theme of the Year for 2024

THEME:

Educate an African fit for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa.

1. Rationale for the proposal of Education as AU Theme of the Year 2024

1. It is noteworthy to mention that Education, was never considered before as the AU Theme of the year.
2. From 17 to 19 September 2022, the UN Secretary General, M. Antonio Guterres convened a global Summit on Transforming Education. Amidst so many other serious global matters, this summit was deemed urgent and given priority, on grounds that, globally, education is in deep crisis, and progress towards the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education (SDG4), was badly off track.¹ That is why the SG wanted to impulse “a *one-in-a-generation*” opportunity to address this global education crisis by renewing collective commitment and joint action.
3. Africa weighs heavier than other continents in the gaps towards achievement of SDG4 objectives, which are also reflected in our Continental Education Strategy CESA (16-25).
4. In this context, the ESTI Department, in collaboration with its UN and other partners, notably UNESCO, UNICEF, and WFP meticulously prepared and coordinated the organization of an AU High-level side event, which took place on the 20 September 2022 in New York.
5. The preparatory process started as early as June 2022. HE, the Commissioner for ESTI, set up a task team which was highly inclusive, bringing together AU clusters on Education, technical expertise from the Continent and abroad, development partners, civil society, private sector and youth representatives. The task team engaged in iterative exercises aimed at coming up with a series of concrete, realistic recommendations which served as a basis for a formal declaration submitted to the AU High Level side-event and constituted a roadmap for Member States and the AU Commission to translate the Transforming Education Summit’s recommendations into actions, tailored to the African context.
6. The draft declaration was reviewed and adopted by the 4th session of the Specialised Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST4).
7. On 20 September 2022, the High-level side event on Transforming Education in the specific context of Africa was held in the premises of the AU in New York. It was chaired by HE President Macky Sall, in his capacity as the Chair of the African Union, in the presence of HE Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AUC.
8. Several African Heads of State, Prime Ministers, Ministers of Education attended the event and made bold statements, stressing the progress made in education, but also the challenges and gaps to be taken up, particularly after the Covid 19 pandemic which compounded the status of education systems in the continent.
9. The DG of UNESCO, the Executive Directors of UNICEF and WFP, EU, GPE and other partners’ representatives, including youth representatives, private sector, NGOs, partook to the meeting. They welcomed the organization of the event and reaffirmed their commitment to work with the AUC and Member States to intensify efforts aim at bridging the gaps towards the attainment of the education related objectives in Africa.

¹ Report by UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report on “*Meeting Commitments: Are Countries on Track to Achieving SDG4?*”

10. H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat proposed, in his speech, that, to keep the momentum and impetus given by the UN Secretary General, and by the AU leadership and Member states which attended the side-event, Education should be considered as the AU Theme of the Year 2024.

“The adoption of Education as the theme of AU for 2024 will, I am sure, enshrine the commitments made here in NY as a true credo of mobilization for education in Africa”, he said.

11. Virtually all interveners largely echoed and supported the proposal, from Heads of States to Partners to the representatives of African Youth.

12. After panel discussions, the final declaration was presented and unanimously adopted.

In its “context paragraph”, the declaration recalls that “Education remains a basic human right as outlined in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 28 of the Convention on the rights of the child and article 11 of the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child, all of which emphasizing the need for State parties to provide free and compulsory basic education.” The first two paragraphs, under the “Commitments” section, read as follows:

“We reiterate our commitments and our call for all AU member states:

- 1. To work towards the achievement of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016 to 2025 and education-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 4.*
- 2. To advocate for Education to be the AU theme of the year for 2024 and for the implementation of the call by the UN Secretary General to transform education globally.”*

13. It is against this backdrop that this proposal of choosing Education as the theme of the Year 2024 was submitted for the consideration and adoption by the Assembly summit in its 36th ordinary session of February 2023.

2. A snapshot of Education sector in Africa

Recent reviews of the CESA (16-25) and Education 2030 Framework for Action, the AU-UNESCO continental report of the CESA and SDG4² and a joint AU-UNICEF report on Transforming Education in Africa, point to the fact that over the past ten years, African Governments have undertaken a wide range of programmes and policy-level efforts to ensure that no child is left behind in access to education. There have been substantial efforts on the continent to ensure access, completion, and quality of basic education for all.

Overall, the proportion of out-of-school children had decreased until around 2010. The completion rates had improved in primary and lower secondary education, as well as the access to and the participation in TVET. There was also noticeable progress in the access to pre-primary education and in adult literacy and lifelong learning. With regards to School Feeding, low-income countries, have doubled their national budget expenditures to HGSF from 17 percent to 33 percent between 2013 and 2020. In lower middle-income countries, national budgets now account for 88% of school meals financing, up from 55% in 2013.

² Education in Africa- Placing equity at the heart of policy: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384479>

However, despite efforts and progress made, three main indicators ring a warning bell:

- Although the **Out of school rate**, i.e the “proportion of children and young people in the official age range for the given level of education who are not enrolled in *pre-primary, primary, secondary or higher levels of education*” keeps steadily decreasing, especially for the primary level, the absolute number has reached the alarming global estimate of 98 million in Africa³ (see figure 1 below).
- The **learning poverty** rate, i.e “the share of children who cannot read a simple text with comprehension by age 10 was the highest in sub-Saharan Africa before COVID-19 pandemic, at 86%. This rate is likely to have worsened after the pandemic, estimated now at 90%. This means that nine out of ten children cannot read a simple text with comprehension by age 10.⁴ (see figure 2 below)
- Africa will need 17 million additional teachers⁵ in order to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030.

Looking closely at each specific goal in CESA 16-25 or in the SDG4, one realizes the urgency to transform and revitalize the entire education system on the continent, while paying special attention to marginalized groups including girls, children in rural areas, those living with disabilities, and those in the move, including those in fragile countries and contexts.

At the Global level, and within the Global Education Coordination Mechanism framework, led by UNESCO, the African Union has been a key player in the regional coordination of CESA and SDG4 support for and cooperation among countries. This is through convening Member States and partners and making critical contributions to promoting evidence use, priority setting, peer learning and monitoring mechanism.

Similarly, at the Specialized Technical Committee on Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (STC-EST4) held on 1st and 2nd September 2022, Ministers in their Declaration on Education, Science, Technology and Innovation⁶ requested the Commission to facilitate the adoption by the AU of an Education related theme for the year for 2023, to address the burden and disruptions caused by COVID-19 on Education Systems, promote the systematic implementation of transforming education in Africa and for accelerated implementation of CESA 2016-2025 and SDG 4.

³ UIS 2022 : <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382577>

⁴ World Bank: [The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update](#)

⁵ UIS 2016: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/files/fs39-world-needs-almost-69-million-new-teachers-reach-2030-education-goals-2016-en-pdf>

⁶ Declaration on Education, Science, Technology and Innovation adopted by the STC-EST 4 held in September 2022

Figure 1

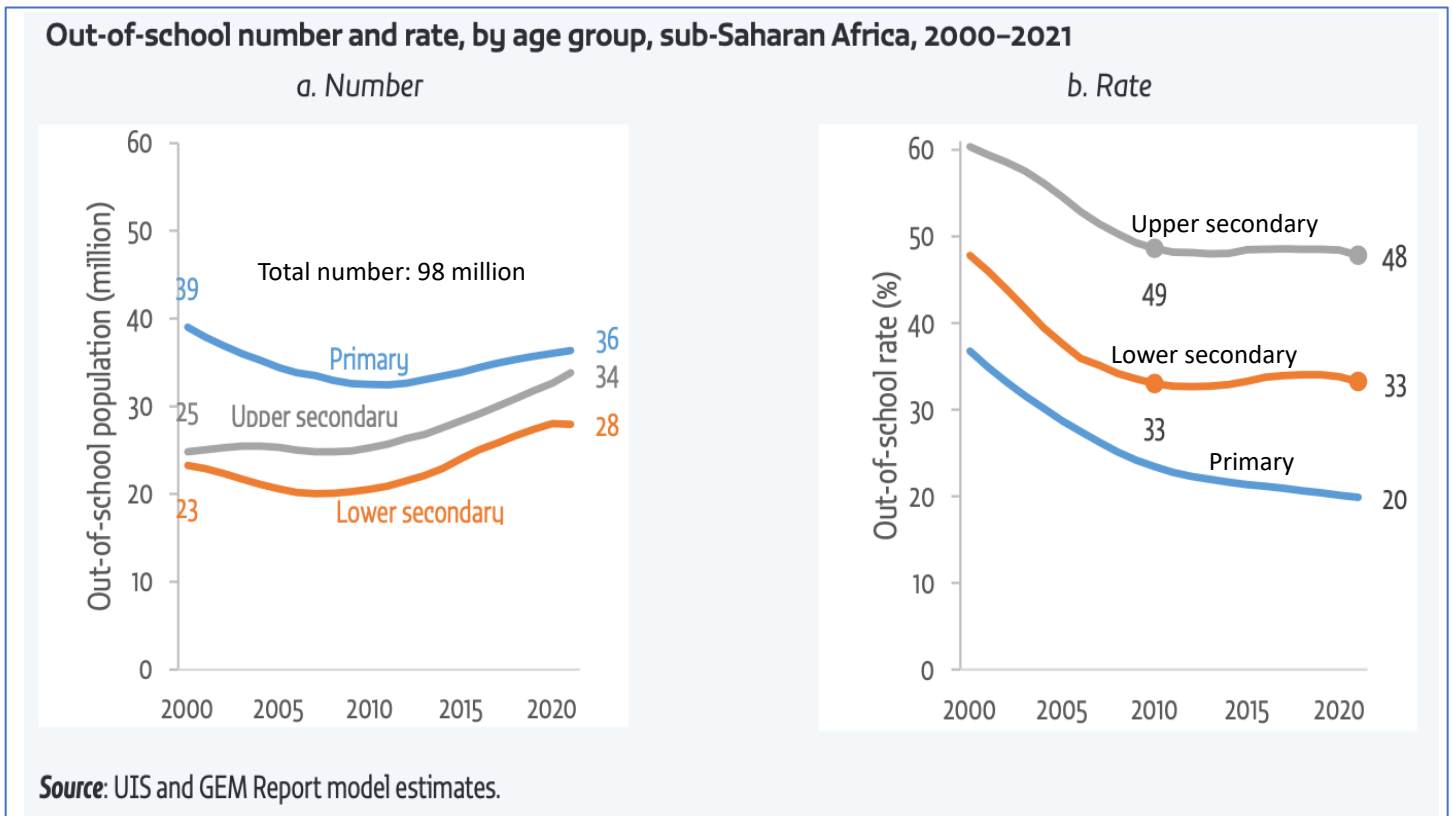
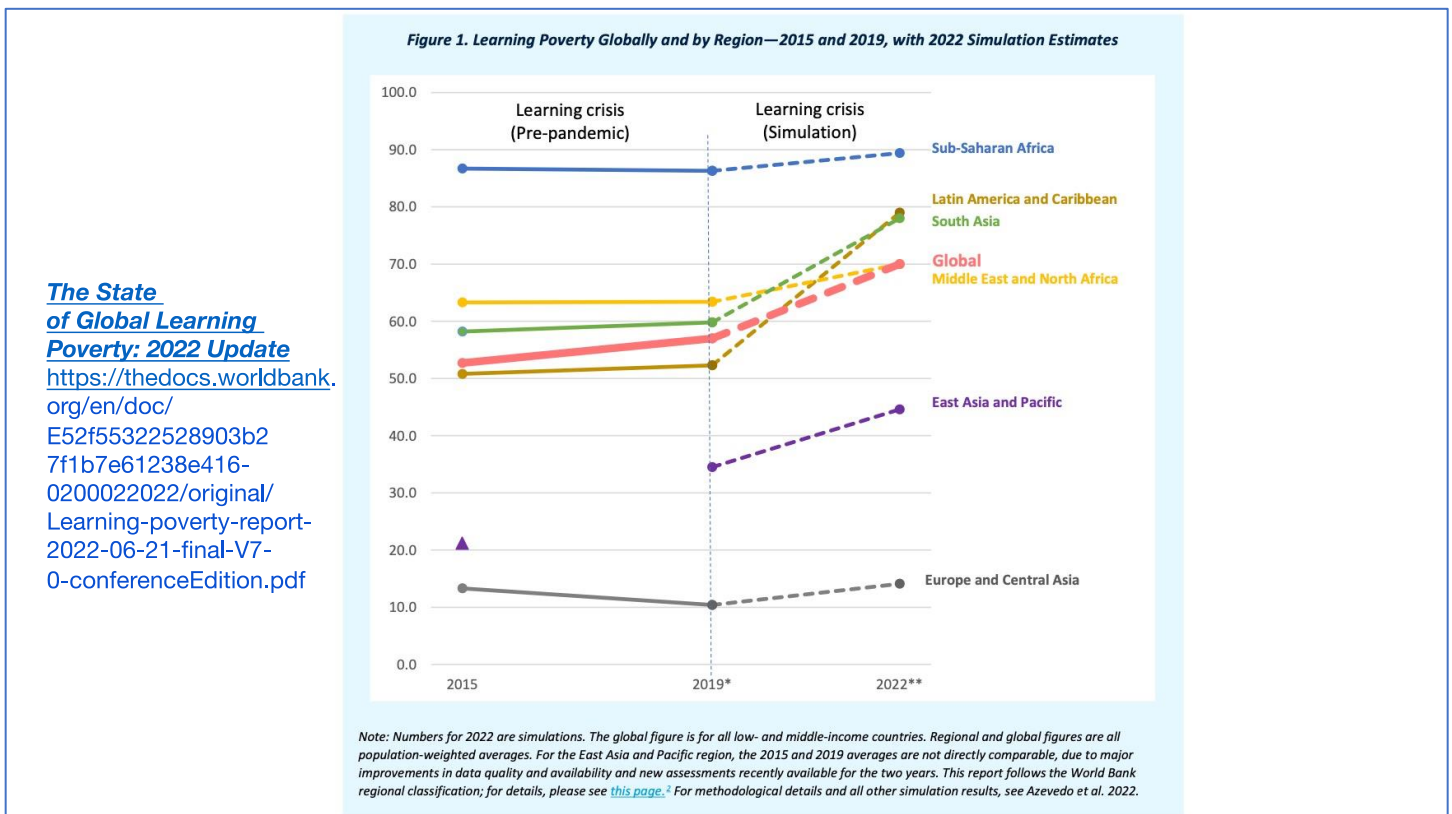


Figure 2



In summary,

Despite the significant progress made in Africa over the past two decades in terms of access, completion and quality of basic education, disparities persist within and between countries. Learning achievement remains low in many parts of Africa. Girls, children from the poorest backgrounds, children with disabilities and children on the move such as forcibly displaced, face difficulties in realizing their right to education. Limitations also continue to exist in the teacher development in Africa with recurrent teacher shortages coupled with lack of professional development opportunities and low status and working conditions. Multiple, protracted emergencies have gravely impacted on educational provision, including increased attacks on schools. There is an urgent need to strengthen peace education and cultivate a culture of peace and tolerance at all levels of education - formal, informal and non-formal.

These systemic challenges range from early childhood education, through primary and secondary education, technical and vocational education, and training to tertiary and higher education levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the limitations of the current education models at all levels, compounding inequalities in education and squarely threatening to set back decades of progress, albeit insufficient, in Africa.

In this context, if nothing is done to transform and revitalize education in Africa, the achievement of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA⁷ 2016-2025), SDG 2030 and the AU Agenda 2063 is compromised. Without swift, well-coordinated remedial action, the targets for reducing learning poverty in Africa will not be met. The consequences for children and society will be devastating, with long-term negative effects on children's life outcomes, including their learning, health (physical and mental), nutrition and socioeconomic development. Business as usual focus is simply no longer viable.

Progress in Education has a far-reaching impact on all the other aspects of human capital development. The large population of young people in Africa is a powerful source of economic growth and progress, provided it receives quality education and skills for the 21st century job opportunities. Investing in Education is thus, the most effective investment in the fight against poverty, reducing gender inequalities, enabling people to survive and thrive and helping to improve socioeconomic development. Education is also associated with more peaceful communities, greater civic engagement, and stronger democracies.

3. Prospects of Education as the AU Theme of the Year for 2024

Year 2024 dedicated to Education in Africa will be a single opportunity for the African Union to re-galvanize Member States towards the achievement of CESA and SDG4 targets. Importantly, this will come as a follow-up to the STC-EST4, AU-HLSE Declarations, the Urgent Call for Action by the SDG4 High-level Steering Committee⁸ and the UN Secretary General's Vision Statement on Transforming

⁷ The CESA aims at "Reorienting Africa's education and training systems to meet the knowledge, competencies, skills, innovation and creativity required to nurture African core values and promote sustainable development at the national, sub-regional and continental levels"

⁸ The High-Level Steering Committee is the apex body for global coordination and monitoring of SDG 4

Education⁹. It will engage the AU Commission to mobilize Governments and Development partners to rethink the models of education and skill development needed for the Africa we want in the 21st century.

Focus will be on development and implementation of effective, long-lasting, system-wide transformational strategies for education in Africa, and recovery from COVID-19, building resilience and transformation, riding on the global momentum. It is also expected to spur implementation of the declarations emanating from the key continental and global education moments including the fourth ordinary session of the Specialized Technical Committee on Education, Science and Technology (STC-EST4), the declarations from both the UN Transforming Education Summit, the High-level Side Event on Transforming Education in Africa as well as the Youth Manifesto on Transforming Education in Africa which resulted from youth consultations in 2023 and was presented at the HLSE in New York.

4. Proposed Theme

Educate an African fit for the 21st Century - Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa.

Above is the proposed theme of the year 2024. It will be structured around sub-themes encompassing the entire education and skills development spectrum from early childhood education and development through to tertiary and vocational education and life-long learning. Focus will be on development and implementation of effective, long-lasting, system-wide transformational strategies for education in Africa, and addressing the constrained education financing landscape. The role of teachers as key agents of transformation will be emphasized, as teachers need to be adequately supported and empowered to play their part for this transformation to take place.

To celebrate the theme of the year, a variety of activities are proposed to be implemented at national, regional, continental, and global levels. Activities envisaged are expected to foster the implementation of the Declaration of the STC-EST4, the Declaration of the High-Level Side event on Transforming Education in Africa and the UN Transforming Education Summit thematic action tracks towards building responsive and resilient education systems in Africa. Implementation shall be under the technical leadership and coordination of the Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of the AU Commission in close collaboration with the Committee of Ten Head of States (C10) on Education in Africa. The Department will work closely with the AU Member States (including through the STC), RECs, Development partners, UN Agencies and all Education Stakeholders including the private sector and the youth.

Having Education as the theme of the year 2024 will further drive momentum generated at Transforming Education Summit (TES) and, working with Member States and partners, place a continental spotlight on recovery from COVID-19 and building resilient systems for increased access to inclusive, quality and relevant Education in Africa. This shall be through concrete impactful actions implemented in African Union Member States towards the transformation of education in Africa.

⁹ The UN Secretary General Vision Statement was informed by extensive and inclusive preparatory process

Annex 1. Roadmap for AU Theme of Year 2024

National, regional, continental and global activities will be implemented throughout the year in commemoration of the AU theme of the year 2024. These commemorative actions will serve as an opportunity to reaffirm the political commitment of African governments to Education. Among these moments will include:

No	Objectives	Action Areas/expected results	Lead / collaborating partners
1	To encourage the teaching profession reform through comprehensive, quality teacher development programmes.	Advocacy for Implementation of Teacher Development Instruments	AFTRA, ATUPA, VVOB, Ashoka, AfECN, AUC, UNESCO-IICBA, RUFORUM, UNICEF, Plan International, IRC, ADEA, GEM Report, FAWE, ANCEFA, GPE, AfDB and CESA Teacher Development Cluster, EU, World Bank.
		Policies to foster teacher development developed and implemented	
		Forums for Peer to Peer learning on teacher development facilitated, including the implementation of Continental Teacher Award	
		Capacity building activities for teachers and institutions undertaken to enhance quality teaching and learning at all levels	
		Knowledge and learning products and evidence to enhance teaching generated.	
2	To emphasize investments in STEM and Foundational Learning through, among others, integration of technology and co-curricular activities.	Toolkits for improved STEM education and Teaching Standards developed and implemented.	African Curriculum Association, AUC, UNICEF, African Early Childhood Network, UNESCO- IICBA, BMGF, AFTRA, ADEA, ICQN on Mathematics and Science Education, VVOB, TaRL Africa, GEM Report, CESA Curriculum Development, ECED, and STEM Clusters, World Bank.
		Teaching Methods including strengthening play-based STEM education at the basic learning level in Africa.	
		School infrastructure developed with relevant STEM support provisions/teaching and learning resources.	
		A continental campaign strategy on “Ending Learning Poverty” aiming at sensitizing governments and education stakeholders to invest in Foundational Learning developed and rolled out.	
		Policy and relevant legislative frameworks including a common continental approach on learning assessment developed and implemented.	
		Learning Products and evidence to enhance STEM and Foundational Learning generated.	

3	To enhance/build the teachers' capacity to teach African History, and support the inclusion of AU charter on democracy, elections and governance in school curricula.	General History of Africa (GHA) Flagship Programme Launched and implemented	UNESCO (ED, IBE, IICBA, PAX), African Union, UNESCO National Commissions, ATUPA, ANCEFA, PAPS, ACERWC, AU ECOSOCC, and Save the Children
		AU strategy for the inclusion and the mainstreaming of the African charter on democracy, elections and governance in the school curricula implemented.	
4	Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education space is strengthened through accelerated implementation of TVET and Higher Education Strategies.	Policy and Legislative frameworks for Higher Education developed and implemented	The International Network for Higher Education in Africa (INHEA) with Association of African Universities (AAU), ACBF, AUC, AUDA-NEPAD, UNIDO, UNECA, ATUPA, CAFOR, UNESCO (ED), Ethiopian Water Technology Institute & Grundfos, ADEA, UNICEF; ETF, GIZ, UNICEF, AU CIEFFA; GAN, ILO, GIZ, Higher Education and TVET Clusters, ANCEFA, VVOB, UNAIDS, UNESCO (ED, PAX), UNESCO National Commissions, AfDB, UNESCO UNEVOC, EU, World Bank.
		Accelerated implementation of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) strategies to ensure inclusive and sustainable economies	
		Strengthened communication and advocacy for implementation of TVET Strategy and Plan of Action	
		Learning Products and evidence generation to enhance skills development for employment	
		Strengthen Capacity of member states to implement TVET and skills development policies	
		Quality of TVET provision through modernization of Infrastructure & Teaching and Learning Resources enhanced	
5	The implementation of evidence-based innovative, feasible and sustainable digital solutions is upscaled.	Education solutions in emergency-affected and fragile settings deployed and strengthened, to enhance equity and access.	ADEA, AU ESTI/ AfECN and National Advocacy partners, AfECN/ WHO/UNICEF/EVAC/PLH, IED/ EU+ITU, UNICEF in collaboration with Airtel, EU, Microsoft, Google, AUDA-NEPAD, SIFA FC & TC, Save the Children, UNESCO-IICBA, UNESCO, AfDB, Microsoft Philanthropies, AOSTI, ATUPA
		Learning products developed and evidence generated on innovative and sustainable digital solutions	

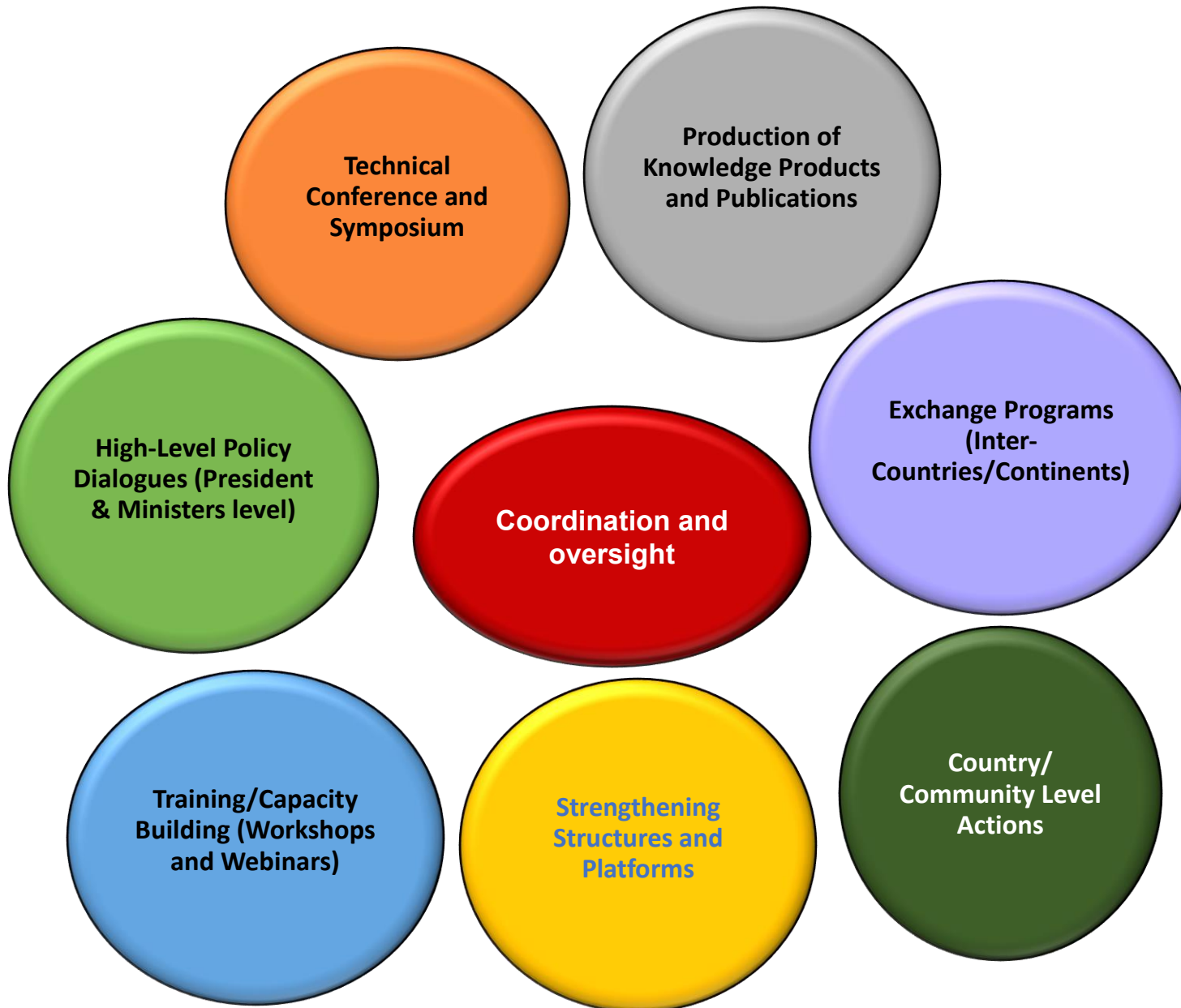
		<p>Platforms for research and development and knowledge exchange on digital education solutions established</p> <p>Development of digital solutions promoted; visibility, incubation and peer learning activities enhanced.</p> <p>Capacity Building Initiatives on digital education at all levels strengthened</p> <p>Public awareness campaign around Africa: Safer Internet Day for Women, Youth and Children in accordance with the AU Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy</p>	AfroChampions Initiative, AfCFTA Secretariat, Africa CDC, UNESCO (ED)/ IFEF, IDEP, EU, World Bank.
6	<p>Healthy and conducive learning environment for improved learning outcomes is created by strengthening HomeGrown School Feeding, Peace Education and Health Education</p>	<p>Implementation of cost effective comprehensive Home Grown school feeding programs through monitoring, evidence generation and peer learning strengthened</p> <p>Communication and Advocacy in favor of initiatives for healthy and conducive learning environment strengthened</p> <p>Knowledge products on home grown school feeding, peace education and education for health and well being developed and disseminated</p> <p>The Continental Strategy on Education for Health and Well Being is disseminated and implemented.</p> <p>Operationalization of the Adolescent Health Component of the Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) supported</p> <p>Implementation of Safe Schools Declaration and the revised 1974 Recommendation on Education for International Understanding, Co-operation, and Peace and Education promoted</p>	<p>WFP, Plan International, AU/HHS, WHO , FAO, Nutritional International, GPE, AfECN, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO/ UNFPA, UNAIDS, IPPF, ANCEFA, Save the Children, UNESCO-IICBA/JET Ed. & School Feeding Cluster, Peace Education Cluster, Health & Well being and Career Guidance Cluster</p>

		Advocacy and dialogue on addressing the impact of climate change on Education and accelerating climate change action in and through Education promoted	
7	Enhanced equitable access to quality education for girls and women, youth, people with disabilities and children especially in emergencies and conflict contexts are protected.	<p>Gender Equality in Education promoted. Protection of girls, youth and children in emergency and conflict contexts in compliance with the African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child. enhanced</p> <p>Advocacy messages on the implementation of the #AfricaEducatesHer campaign at national level, ensuring learning for crisis affected children and on building preparedness and resilience of education systems to future shocks developed</p> <p>The AU Youth Manifesto Roadmap development and implementation supported. Products for inclusion in the AU Youth Empowerment Toolbox for use in Capacity Building Trainings developed/curated.</p> <p>Dialogues, including hosting a Pan Africa Children's Parliament for the children to meet and discuss the theme of the year facilitated</p> <p>Public awareness campaign around Africa: Safer Internet Day for Women, Youth and Children in accordance with the AU Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy</p>	ANCEFA, AU/CIEFFA, UNICEF, IGAD, SCI, ACERWC, Joining Forces Alliance, CSO Forum, UNAIDS, UNESCO, Save the Children, UNGEI, ECED Cluster, IED/ITU/EU/WB, Plan International UNHCR, Council of Europe, Norway, Italy, AUC Youth Division, UNESCO-IICBA, JICA
8	The production and synergies between education management information systems and	Synergies between education management information systems and labor market data collection, management, analysis and usage improved.	ADEA, UNICEF, SADC/RUFORUM, AUDA-NEPAD, ILO, UNESCO, AUC-IPED, GEM Report, Education.org, ANCEFA, UNICEF, AfECN, UNESCO, IF, AfDB, UNECA, AU

	labor market data is improved.	Capacities of MS in the application of Skills Anticipation methodologies for Trade, Economic Diversification and Industrialisation to harness the prospects for jobs created through the adoption of the AFCTFA strengthened/developed.	AU and GPE (inviting heads of UN Agencies, donor missions, regional orgs/banks), WFP, UNAIDS, AUC-CIEFFA, Save the Children, ATUPA, UNESCO-IICBA, ADEA and GEM Report CESA Education Planning Cluster, IPED, UIS
		Support the first cohort of African Union Member states to improve the production, reporting, and use of quality data on education and skills for planning, monitoring and assessment.	
9	Multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships for education have been established and strengthened.	<p>CESA clusters to deliver on CESA objectives further operationalised and strengthened</p> <p>Capacity building initiatives carried out to strengthen civil society voice and collective action as a key pillar in the multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships for education, at country, regional, and continental levels.</p> <p>The potential of the African diaspora in the development of Education in Africa harnessed</p> <p>Strengthened advocacy for multi sectoral and multi- stakeholder partneships in education.</p>	All CESA Clusters, ADEA and GEM Report MoE/VVOB, AfDB, UNAIDS, AUC-CIEFFA, GPE, ASHOKA, AU/UNICEF/EU and partners, UNICEF, ANCEFA, UNESCO, GPE, EU, AfECN/National Advocacy Partners, ECCAS, EAC, ECOWAS, UNESCO, IF, World Bank.
10	Increased sustainable financing and systematic investment in Education.	Resource mobilisation undertaken through donor engagement and advocacy, including a roundtable and High Level event on financing education transformation in Africa and on strengthening continental leadership on Education.	ANCEFA, UNICEF, AfECN, UNESCO, IF, AfDB, UNECA, AU and GPE (inviting heads of UN Agencies, donor missions, regional orgs/banks), WFP, UNAIDS, AUC-CIEFFA, Save the Children, ATUPA, UNESCO-IICBA, ADEA and GEM Report,

		<p>Launch and operationalization of the African Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Fund (AESTIF)</p>	<p>Plan International, CESA Education Planning Cluster, IPED, UIS, World Bank.</p>
<p>Analysis of teacher wages' competitiveness in comparison to other professions, job satisfaction levels depending on pay levels, and public spending to education sector, developed through evidence based data, to inform policy priorities.</p>			
<p>Advocacy for equitable, gender-responsive, inclusive and efficient budget allocation and utilization, resulting in Head of States statements launching Year of Education including a renewed commitment to allocate 20% of budget to education.</p>			
<p>Country Investment cases on promoting girls' access to secondary education through Education Plus Initiative developed and launched</p>			
<p>UNECA Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development: Roundtable discussion with MoF and MoE convened, on how to finance education systems and skills for a just transition and resilient to global shocks.</p>			
<p>A high-level monitoring/tracking mechanism on budget allocation to education/ECE with discussion of results at High Level events including AU summit, developed</p>			

Annex 2. Proposed Year of Education (YOE 2024) Spotlight Activities' categories



Preferably

- Joint continental, regional or multi-country.
- Pilot in-country projects with potential for high impact, replication and scale.

Annex 3. Continental and Global Commemorative Events

Title/Name of event	LEAD	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
International Day of Education	UNESCO												
African Union Summit	AUC												
International Day for Women and Girls in Science	UNESCO & UN WOMEN												
Africa Day of School Feeding	AU & WFP												
Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning & Economic Development	UNECA												
Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development	UNECA												
Girls in ICT Day	ITU												
Africa Day	AU												
Day of the African Child	AUC												
International Labour Conference	ILO												
World Youth Skills Day	UNESCO												
International Youth Day	UN												
WorldSkills International Lyon	WSI												
International Day to Protect Education from Attack	UNESCO/UNICEF												
UN Summit of the Future	UN												
International Literacy Day	UNESCO												
World Teachers Day	UNESCO												
International Day of the Girl Child	UN & AUC												
Africa Youth Day	AUC												