



**KEYNOTE STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY,
DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE AT THE HIGH-
LEVEL SIDE EVENT TO LAUNCH UNESCO'S
AND AU REPORT ON "PLACING EQUITY AT
THE HEART OF EDUCATION POLICY" AS SET
OUT BY THE CONTINENTAL EDUCATION
STRATEGY FOR AFRICA (CESA) 2016-2025
AND SDG 4
- 18TH FEBRUARY 2023**

Excellencies Heads of State and Government, Ladies and Gentlemen

1. The African Union launched the 2016-2025 Continental Education Strategy to create a new African citizen who would be an effective change agent and a citizen who would help get the continent on the sustainable development track, as envisioned by our 2063 Agenda.
2. Our efforts are therefore geared towards teaching fit-for-purpose knowledge, competencies, skills, and promoting innovation and creativity required to developing Africa's human capital.
3. Today's formative new report is a joint product of the African Union and UNESCO. Learning losses occasioned and intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and other global events have set the continent back even further. The report seemingly shows that our vision to develop competitive educational systems in Africa is still out of reach.
4. In spite of our best efforts, African countries are still situated at the bottom of education tables. On one hand, this tells us that our countries may have started with a disadvantage. On the other hand, there is a perceived risk that we may not meet our ambitions to achieve SDG 4.
5. We should however be careful to avoid reading this report as a blanket assessment. The new SDG 4 scorecard proposes a way to evaluate progress by how likely each country is to achieve the benchmarks it has set for itself, rather often unrealistic targets that were externally imposed.
6. This new assessment report therefore gives credit to countries for their progress, regardless of their starting point. It allows us to pinpoint countries that are cutting through challenges to achieve progress. It does not look at how countries are ranked on a global scale. We should therefore identify the policies that are helping to make the difference.
7. Sierra Leone, for instance, is pleased to appear on the SDG 4 Scorecard. Our country's Free Quality School Education programme has prioritised and increased education spending and investments, introduced inclusive policies, and expanded access to education to over one million new learners especially from the early childhood education level. Through our national integrated early childhood development

policy, we have made great progress in giving children the best start in life. In addition to political support and commitment at the highest levels, we believe that the right progressive policies will afford us the opportunity to achieve the goals we set.

8. It is in linking progress to policies that we welcome efforts such as the African Union's Born to Learn annual Spotlight report with UNESCO and ADEA. With a focus on the foundation of our education systems, the Spotlight series collaboratively engages countries to analyse their policies and see where improvements can be made. I was therefore hugely pleased to see the DRC, Ghana, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal join this effort.
9. Sierra Leone believes strongly that foundational learning is the place to start. We can meet our CESA objectives if we focus on getting foundational learning right.
10. We should not take foundational literacy and computational skills for granted. We should also be mindful that African children are less likely to learn the basics than children from elsewhere. Without these foundational skills, we will not achieve our broader objective of creating the stronger, more prosperous, more inclusive future we all desire for our children.
11. We must collaborate among our various countries, learn from one another, and build one our experiences to tackle similar challenges.
12. This desire for greater collaboration led the African Union to launch, at the end of last year, LEARN -- a peer-learning mechanism to support our technical experts in CESA clusters to find new solutions to improve foundational learning on our continent. I would like to congratulate the AU Commissioner for this initiative.
13. Addressing learning loss and learning poverty is not just a matter of national and continental concern. As President, I co-chaired the Transforming Education Summit convened by the United Nations Secretary-General in New York in September and I also sit as co-chair of the SDG 4 High Level Steering Committee convened by UNESCO.
14. At all these levels, I add my voice to a strong global movement to address three critical factors for change: political commitment, data, and evidence-based policy recommendations. The more we learn from

one another's experiences and the more we collaborate, the better it is for our children to learn as well.

15. Let me once again to thank our hosts for convening us here today. We should use every opportunity to share lessons and build partnerships across the continent. Our citizens look up to us find the solutions to our shared education challenges.

16. There is real strength to be found in solidarity and unity of purpose in Africa – the founding pillars of our union that bring us to this summit today. This summit is just the start of what we can achieve as a committed group. The opportunity is here now. Let us not waste it.

Thank you for your attention.