



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

OPENING REMARKS

BY

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**DURING THE JOINT MEETING OF THE SADC
MINISTERS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING,
AND SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND
INNOVATION**

17 JUNE 2022

BICC, LILONGWE, MALAWI

- Your Excellencies, Ministers of Education and Training, and Science, Technology, and Innovation,
- Deputy Executive Secretary and all SADC Secretariat staff,
- Permanent Secretaries of Education and Training, and Science, Technology and Innovation, and all Senior Government Officials from all member states present here in the audience and virtually,
- All development partners; local, regional, and international,
- Vice Chancellors of Universities and your staff members,
- Civil Society Organizations and industry partners,
- Organizers of this Joint Meeting,
- The media,
- Distinguished, Ladies, and Gentlemen.

Good morning

1. Today marks a memorable day in the history of our country, Malawi. This is not only because we are hosting a SADC Joint Ministers Meeting, but also because this gathering will transact business that will respond to the urgent and dynamic needs of the Education and Training, and Science, Technology and Innovation sectors of SADC Member States at a critical time when we are responding to multiple challenges. This is also a time, however, when we have an opportunity to combine our efforts and link with national, regional and global partnership efforts that are beginning to see Education, Training, Science Technology and Innovation as a central pillar to meet our national, regional and global challenges.
2. The last several years have seen our economies, and particularly our education systems, badly hit by the twin effects of Covid-19 and climate change. All Ministers present here today will have their own horrific stories of lost schooling due to Covid-19. They will also have stories relating to climate change. These

may include the disastrous rising of sea levels being experienced by island states or the devastation due to the tropical storms of the Indian Ocean and associated flooding that have demolished communities and the school systems within them.

3. The dire impact of these crises on education has turned global attention to African education. What is apparent, and what we in SADC all know and have known for many years, has been made plain for all to see. These disasters have been suffered by, and have impacted on, education systems that were already fragile. For example, in Malawi, as in many of your countries, our completion rates at primary education are low, at 52%; only 15% of our secondary school age children enroll in secondary education and less than 1% of our young adults enroll in tertiary education. This is set against a backdrop where there is:
 - i. inadequate school infrastructure, including many schools with inadequate

numbers of desks, few textbooks and extremely limited access to science and technology labs and equipment;

ii. a backdrop where many rural communities lack schools of any kind and where children have to walk many kilometers to school;

iii. a backdrop of low electrification and internet access;

iv. and a teaching profession that needs more effective continuous professional development and welfare support to keep it motivated.

4. While building resilience to Covid and Climate Change we have to also build resilience to address these fundamental challenges affecting our education, training, science technology and innovation systems. We can only build green and resilient education systems if we first have the schools and the teachers and the teaching and learning

materials in place to meet the Foundational Skills which unfortunately, have been eroded to the extent that only 10% of our 10-year old children in low-income countries are able to read and understand simple text.

5. The good news in all of this is that the sheer scale of the challenges being faced and the urgency with which they need to be met, are opening up new opportunities for finance. We must use gatherings such as this SADC ministerial meeting to embrace and identify opportunities and to make the case for massive investment in education and training and in science, technology and innovation for the future.
6. Education, through its emphasis on human capital and skills development, is a prerequisite to address many of the ills affecting other sectors of society:
 - i. Pre-primary, primary and secondary education, especially of the girl child, leads to reduced population growth.

- ii. Education, especially of the girl child, leads to improved family healthcare.
 - iii. Education leads to a reduction in child labour.
 - iv. Pre-primary, primary and secondary education, combined with Technical and Vocational Training and Higher Education can lead to a scientific and technically literate population that can participate in and develop a knowledge-based economy.
7. We need to be making the economic case for these home truths both within our own countries and regionally and globally in order to generate large scale investment in education training, science technology and innovation systems.
8. The current Chair of the SADC, our own President, His Excellency **Dr Lazarus McCarthy Chakwera**, maintains [and I take the liberty to paraphrase] that SADC has to claim its space

in the world by awakening to its true identity of what it can optimally achieve if we all agreed to root out the vices that have plagued us and poisoned our confidence over the centuries. We need to embrace the synergy in our varied beauty and abundance of both human and natural resources.

9. In particular, we can take advantage of our demographic dividend arising from our dynamic youthful population. We have the opportunity to help our young population become dynamos for growth and development if we provide them with meaningful and inclusively accessible quality education, including quality digitalized education, through well-trained teachers armed with good curricula, good teaching and learning materials, and good infrastructure. As the populations of the global north are aging, Africa stands poised to be the world's go-to place for the human capital not just for our own economies but for world

economies – but only if we educate all our children!

10. **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**, the technical discussions at this SADC Ministers Meeting and indeed previous Meetings, demonstrate clearly that we know what is needed to deliver a strong education and training, and strong science technology and innovation system and infrastructure. We also have the skills within SADC and across Africa to develop and drive an agenda to deliver on our long held objectives. What we lack are large scale resources to implement.
11. The main challenge we have is how to best organize ourselves and partner with each other to develop common messaging that can generate large scale investment in education, training, science, technology and innovation. As we discuss the outputs and recommendations of the technical working groups that are striving to meet our goals and aspirations I would like to place several

thoughts and perspectives in front of us that are increasingly being taken forward in some of our SADC countries and may help in our drive to convert our ideals, work and dreams into reality. These are:

- i. Education as a driver of socio-economic resilience, including most importantly, resilience to crises such as pandemics and climate change.
- ii. Systems thinking beyond individual projects.
- iii. Innovative and large scale financing of education, training, science technology and innovation.
- iv. The need to respect local context within our national, regional and global education and development frameworks and to generate evidence through research that can inform local action.

- v. The need to prioritise reaching the hard to reach.

I will cover each of these in more detail.

Education as a driver of resilience

12. We need to address 'Learning Poverty' and link this through appropriate curricula and actions, including an emphasis on science technology and innovation, to the future well-being of our planet and our societies. By doing this we will be laying the foundation of societal resilience for our children and our children's children. We must place education at the centre of the climate change debate.

Systems thinking

13. We need a systems approach to enhance policy coherence, coordination and implementation. We often work too much within our own silos. We need to be promoting more cross-ministerial policy coordination. For example, none of us working alone as ministers or ministries can ensure an appropriate policy

on education and its cross-interaction with climate change without involving numerous other ministries, sectors and stakeholders.

Innovative Financing

14. We must integrate such a systems approach into our financing mechanisms. If we are to transform our education and science technology and innovation systems, we need predictability of finance and we need financing at scale. One such approach may be to argue for the incorporation of education amongst the pillars of global climate change financing, where trillion dollar funds are available. Another may be to place support for teachers at the forefront of disaster and emergency financing.
15. We need to argue for a return to financial support that is less project-based and more systems support based, and with fewer conditionalities attached. We need systems whereby we are not spending more on debt repayments than we are on the education of

our children. In response we need to improve our own management and utilization of resources and limit waste and corruption.

Contextualisation

16. We need more **contextualized and focused research** to provide evidence to inform our policies and their implementation. There are a lot of national, regional and global frameworks that have helped define the issues we face and have provided basic data from which we can move forward, for example the SDGs and Agenda 2063. However, what is often missing is targeted local, contextualized data.
17. We need more local policy driven research and analysis to inform implementation and to effectively monitor the impact of policy implementation. The work must be country-driven.

Reaching the hard to reach

18. We have been reminded over the recent days that despite many efforts to develop some

aspects of education, attainment of foundation skills is very low, with only 10% of our 10 year-old children being able to read and understand simple text. This 90% learning poverty is worrisome and calls for urgent and collaborative action.

19. Such a figure is of course an average of higher and lower figures associated with different parts of a country. An evidence-driven approach that targets first and foremost the most challenging areas with respect to big issues such as foundational skills, may yield the best long term results. If our systems are successful in addressing these hard to reach areas, then they may automatically succeed in areas of lesser need.
20. **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**, we need in our Ministries, our Universities our schools, leaders that are driven by the need to make education, training, and science, technology and innovation work for our countries, for our SADC region and for Africa.

21. I call upon us, **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**, to seriously consider how we may help coach and mentor such leaders in our respective countries, who will carry forward the decisions we are to take today and make a difference for all our children.
22. **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**, I would like to sincerely thank my team at the Ministry of Education, working hand in hand with other Ministries and Departments, and with the superb guidance of the SADC Secretariat, for producing a wonderful meeting. A round of applause for them!!!
23. Special thanks to all Member States who decided to attend this Joint Ministers Meeting, the majority doing so physically. This kind of commitment should continue with the implementation of the decisions to be made here today.
24. A great many thanks to our development partners who continue to collaborate with us in shaping and realizing the shared vision of

transforming education and training, and building and sustaining strong science, technology and innovation-led economies.

25. Many thanks to the previous Chair, Mozambique, and welcome the new Chair, The Democratic Republic of Congo. In this troika, we will strive together to keep the SADC Secretariat on its toes, to remind Member States to be on course with the implementation of the past and today's decisions.

26. With these remarks, **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**, I would like to wish all of us wonderful deliberations and declare the SADC Joint Ministers of Education and Training, and Science, Technology and Innovation, officially opened.

27. I thank you all for your attention.