

**Launch ceremony for the Inter-Country Quality Node on Early
Childhood Development (ICQN-ECD)**

on the occasion of the African Regional Conference on Education Post-2015

Kigali, Rwanda, February 9, 2015

Speech by Peter Materu

Chair of the Executive Committee of ADEA

- Honorable ministers,
- Hon. Mrs Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomum, Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research of Mauritius
- Ms. Ann-Thérèse Ndong-Jatta, Director of the UNESCO Office in Dakar and Chair of the ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood Development,
- Ms. Oley-Dibba Wadda, Executive Secretary of ADEA,
- Distinguished representatives of African countries,
- Distinguished representatives of development partners and local NGOs,
- Members of the press,
- Distinguished guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, **nearly half of all children who die before the age of 5** are African, as well as **one third of all malnourished children**. Our children also have **the least well educated mothers in the world**: 30% of African women from 15 to 24 years of age and 50% of those over 25 years are illiterate. The children of these mothers have less chance of attending school, and even when they do, they perform less well than their peers. African children are also **those with the lowest enrollment rates and highest dropout rates in the world**¹.

For all of these reasons, it is a great honor for me to join you today for a ceremony that will rest in our minds, I hope, as a historic turning point for African children: the launch of the Inter-Country Quality Node on Early Childhood Development (ICQN-ECD).

Ensuring that a child will receive proper nutrition, appropriate care and sufficient stimulation in the first thousand days of its life and those that follow – **these are the fundamentals** that give children a good start in life and increase their chances of succeeding in school, because they enter school with the social, emotional and preschool capabilities needed for learning. With these early foundations, they also have a better chance of becoming productive and socially well integrated citizens.

¹ According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2014, the percentage of children in school in sub-Saharan Africa was 56% in 2011

This is why the ADEA Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD) has been struggling for nearly 18 years to make our decision-makers aware of the importance of ECD.

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) is first and foremost a forum for policy dialogue. In this role, ADEA influences the process of transforming education and training systems, which in turn influence the process of social and economic transformation. It would be correct to say that ECD is one of the issues which ADEA has spearheaded on the African continent.

Today, Africa has greater ambitions. The continent wants to see what I have called the **fundamentals** – those already acquired in the middle-income countries, because these countries have realized the value of this investment, both for individuals and for society – become concrete realities for African children, **particularly the most disadvantaged children, because studies show that they are the ones who derive the greatest benefit from ECD programs.**

There is great variation in the provision of ECD programs, ranging from preschool models run by the community to universal pre-primary classes in the public education sector. The most expensive programs, it should be noted, are not necessarily the most effective. The development of cost-effective programs that are suitable for African countries and communities will require the sharing of knowledge and experience on the best strategies, policies and programs that have been tried and tested.

For this reason, the Working Group on Early Childhood Development is passing the torch to the Inter-Country Quality Node on ECD (ICQN-ECD), which will be guided by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Higher Education and Scientific Research of Mauritius.

ADEA's inter-country quality nodes serve as platforms for dialogue and collaboration between countries to share knowledge and experience on issues that these countries consider to be national priorities.

The Inter-Country Quality Node on Early Childhood Development (ICQN-ECD) joins four other ADEA quality nodes: the ICQNs on Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD), Literacy and Local Languages, Peace Education, and Mathematics and Science Education.

These ICQNs are demonstrating concrete results on the ground: Recently for instance, Kenya, which is leading the ICQN on Peace Education has produced the first African education policy on peace education and will no doubt be followed by others; the ICQN on TVSD has brought to the fore national strategies aiming at training and providing jobs for the youth from some 20 African countries with the objective of learning from and improving TVSD policies and practices.

ADEA is excited about the creation of an ICQN on ECD! On behalf of ADEA, I would like to assure countries that ADEA will remain committed to advancing ECD on the continent and that it will accompany the ICQN as it develops and strives.