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4D – Dialogues on Demographic Diversity and Dividends

Education and Skills Development for Demographic Dividend(s)

Introduction

Lifelong education opportunities are key to unlocking a country's potential for a demographic dividend. They are important drivers of economic growth and women's empowerment. Well-educated youth can contribute to strengthening a country's economy as they enter the labor market. This results in growing productivity and tax revenues, providing countries with the means to invest in their educational systems. Education has the greatest impact on demographic development when girls receive the same opportunities to attend school as boys. It helps girls and women to take control of their own lives, thereby contributing to changing gender norms and greater socioeconomic participation. Better-educated women tend to marry later in life and have smaller families. This leads to changes in the population age structure and increases the potential for a demographic dividend.

Despite progress, many low and middle income countries still face hurdles to cater for the needs of their school-age populations at all educational levels. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, about 258 million children and youth were out of school worldwide. Almost 100 million of them lived in Sub-Saharan Africa, 93 million in Southern Asia, 17 million in Northern Africa and Western Asia. The reasons for that are manifold, ranging from too little financial means to pay for school materials to insufficient educational infrastructure or shortages of well-trained teachers struggling to keep pace with a steadily growing number of students. This affects the quality of teaching: An estimated 387 million children of primary school age lack basic reading skills in Sub-Saharan Africa.

When it comes to access and level of education, more girls are left behind than boys. The widest gender gap is in Central Asia, with 137 girls out-of-school for every 100 boys. The situation is further complicated as many children and adolescents are at risk of leaving school prematurely, especially at secondary school level: Only 38 percent of all secondary school enrollees in Sub-Saharan Africa go on to graduate. For girls, a major reason for dropping out are child marriages and early pregnancies. Conversely, every further year of secondary education reduces the girls' likelihood of being married before the age of 18. Moreover, there is a lack of preparation and support for adolescents to successfully transition from school to work. Graduates often do not receive training in technical and digital skills as well as in social competencies, communications skills or problem-solving attitudes. This leaves them with fewer chances to make a decent living later in life.

These numbers show the challenges ahead in harnessing a demographic dividend through education. Closing the gaps requires large investment. This is particularly important for countries with high birth rates and a fast-rising number of children and youth. Facilitating access to primary and secondary education, especially for girls and young women, improving the quality of teaching and promoting vocational education and training are central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) – particularly SDG4. The Cairo Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development adopted in 1994 and its review conferences, including the Nairobi Commitment in 2019,

highlight the importance of education for population and sustainable development. Also, Aspiration 1, Goal 2 of the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 as well as Pillar 2 of the AU's roadmap on harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth call for well-educated citizens as a prerequisite for a prosperous Africa.

Needs for Action

- **Better qualify teachers**

Delivering quality education requires a sufficient number of teachers with the necessary pedagogical skills. It is therefore important to train teachers according to predefined minimum standards, to select new hires based on their qualifications and personal commitment and to provide opportunities for further learning on the job. At the same time, countries should make use of regular monitoring activities to measure teacher performance and provide incentives through promotions and further career prospects.

- **Address barriers to equal education**

Countries can increase their chances of achieving a demographic dividend through education if girls have the same access to education as boys. Therefore, it is crucial to create a learning environment that is responsive to students' gender as well as social and cultural backgrounds. This includes training of teachers to tackle negative gender stereotypes, gender-sensitive textbooks and materials, and a school infrastructure that meets safety and hygiene needs of girls.

- **Strengthen particularly girls' SRHR**

Young people and particularly girls should be educated early and comprehensively how to make informed decisions about their bodies. Access to youth-friendly information and services concerning puberty and sexuality, contraception and the transmission of sexual diseases such as HIV/AIDS is key. This enables girls and boys to learn how to prevent unintended pregnancies, especially in teenage years, which make particularly girls at secondary school level more vulnerable to exclusion from school.

- **Make use of digital tools and improve learning outcomes**

In the past year, school closures due to Covid-19 have vividly shown the importance of digital tools: New technologies can facilitate access to education for the growing number of school-age children, improve the quality of teaching and open doors for interactive learning approaches. Therefore, where there is a lack of trained teachers, children should be supported with self-explanatory programs to learn by themselves. Teachers should be equipped with adaptive learning software that tracks children's progress and modifies teaching based on each student's individual needs. At the same time, it should be considered whether digital tools can meet the needs of young people to socialize and how that can affect their mental and physical wellbeing. Widening digital divides as a result of the rapid transition to distance learning modalities should also be taken into account.

- **Prepare students for working life**

Applied teaching should be encouraged early on at the primary and secondary school level. Supported by internships or other hands-on experiences it should make the benefits of education clear to children and inform them of their future career prospects. Governments can support schools by identifying gaps in applied teaching and by providing schools with a list of high-demand occupations. Getting a growing and increasingly well-educated young workforce into jobs also requires a greater focus on technical and vocational training. This brings both young people in contact with relevant enterprises as well as employers with the skilled workers they seek.

- **Measure progress and results**

To identify problems within the education sector and to learn from the past shortfalls, it is necessary to regularly evaluate the effects of education. Many countries already have national and, in some cases, regional comparative tests. These should be expanded with the long-term goal of being able to participate in international comparative studies such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

- **Ensure sufficient financing of the education sector**

Countries should follow the recommendations of UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action. It calls for governments to allocate at least 15 to 20 percent of public expenditure as well as 4 to 6 percent of the gross domestic product to education.

Best practices

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to improve education and skills development, and each country should decide for itself which approaches best meet its needs and demands. Sharing best practices from different countries to improve education can support countries in finding adequate policies, thereby providing a foundation for a demographic dividend.

- **Electronic database to remove ghost teachers from Liberia's payroll**

The Ministry of Education in Liberia has created an electronic database for the country's three most populous counties, registering all teachers and school principals with their photo, fingerprint, ID card and certificates. The goal is to gather information on the location and qualifications of the 19,000 public school teachers in the country. With this assessment, the Ministry of Education has been able to identify more than 2,000 absent, retired or under-qualified so-called "ghost-teachers". By dismissing and replacing them with more than 1,000 better-qualified teachers, Liberia has been able to save more than 2.3 million US dollars per year and improve education opportunities for pupils.

- **Keeping girls in school conference – engaging religious leaders for girls' education**

The Sultan of Sokoto from Nigeria engages imams and other religious leaders to raise awareness for the importance of girls' education. In 2019, he initiated the *Keeping Girls in School Conference* in Abuja, Nigeria, together with a traditional leader from Uganda to foster cross-regional dialogue on this topic. Christian, Muslim and traditional leaders as well as government representatives, civil

society and international organizations from the region came together to discuss the state of girls' education, share their approaches to improving schooling for girls and discuss next steps. Sokoto urged his religious counterparts to take on responsibility and work actively with their communities to ensure that all girls can complete secondary education. As an outcome of the conference, participants decided to build national and local networks in which they share successful strategies from their communities and continuously work together.

- ***Siyavula* – free access to online tutorials in South Africa**

Siyavula is a free online-learning program for math and natural sciences for higher secondary education. Students use it to learn and teachers to improve their teaching. *Siyavula* uses an algorithm which increases the level of difficulty according to the student's level of knowledge. The software can thereby assess where students' gaps are and what they still have to learn to reach a certain teaching goal. This has the advantage that students neither get easily bored nor frustrated with their learning outcomes. In turn, *Siyavula* tells teachers where they can intervene and with which tasks children need support. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of *Siyavula* users increased considerably as an effective form of distance learning.

- ***Educate!* Learning to be an entrepreneur in Uganda**

Since 2009, the NGO *Educate!* has offered an 18-month training program to young people in the last two years of secondary school to equip them with basic knowledge in fields such as accounting, business planning and management. Students participate in the courses in addition to their school classes and afterwards usually start a small business - for example to produce soap, or recycle raw materials such as glass and paper, or to sell agricultural products. Students in the program are supervised by teachers and mentors specifically trained for this purpose or with personal experience as entrepreneurs. Mentors, in turn, receive scholarships or loans to open up or expand their own businesses. Between 2009 and 2016, the program reached over 120,000 students. In 2016, the program was also rolled out in Rwanda.

- **Education to Employability (E2E) – transitions from school to work in West Bengal, India**

The E2E project tackles the issue of graduate unemployment in West Bengal, India. By providing students in their final year in school with training in communicative English, soft skills, information technology and career awareness, the project aims to enhance their life and employability skills. This includes career counseling to support students to set their career expectations as well as job-oriented training programs that help participants identify their preferred career paths. The project was conceptualized in 2008 by the Vikramshila Education Resource Society and started off with 10 schools in Kolkata. It gradually evolved and covers more than 200 schools across all 21 districts of West Bengal. An impact assessment has shown that the project generates career awareness among the students. By 2016, more than 200 students were placed in entry level jobs.