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President: Mr. Kapambwe (Zambia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Special policy dialogue of the high-level segment on the theme of “Education challenges in Africa and the least developed countries”

The President said that the theme of the special policy dialogue was particularly timely in light of the adoption at the fourth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, which had been an important step forward for education development. Failure to address education issues would make the task of meeting other challenges in the long term all the more daunting.

Thirty of the world’s 48 LDCs were in Africa and many of them would fail to attain the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. However, significant progress had been made in the past decade towards the provision of primary education for all.

Enrolment rates in sub-Saharan Africa had risen by nearly one third and gender parity had improved. However, the difficulty of retaining pupils, especially girls, in school continued to pose a major challenge. Measures to improve the situation could include: guarantees of safety; the prevention of violence and harassment; better sanitary conditions; and increased relevance of schooling. It was not enough merely to provide more schools, classrooms and teachers.

Progress had been spectacular in countries like Ethiopia, where enrolments had doubled between 1999 and 2008, and the United Republic of Tanzania, which currently enjoyed near universal primary school enrolment. Nevertheless, 31 million children in sub-Saharan Africa, one quarter of the region’s primary school-age population, did not attend school. The rise in enrolments had also led to a higher dropout rate and was no indicator of the quality of education. The mismatch between what was taught, including through technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and the requirements of the labour market was evident in many African countries in which jobs remained unfilled because of a shortage of qualified applicants. At the same time, there was a large pool of educated unemployed. The brain drain from Africa, especially in the area of health care, remained acute.

The time had also come to develop a vision for education that went beyond primary education. The special policy dialogue provided an opportunity to consider innovative approaches and learn from successful strategies.

Mr. Diarra (Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and Special Advisor on Africa), speaking as moderator, said that the quality of education had a direct bearing on health care, labour productivity, economic growth and institutional development. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the Istanbul Programme of Action had identified the development of human resources as a priority. Progress towards universal attendance at primary school in African countries and LDCs had been remarkable and the number of students pursuing secondary, technical, vocational and higher education had grown considerably. Nevertheless, those countries still lagged far behind the rest of the world and many adults in sub-Saharan Africa lacked basic literacy and numeracy skills. Girls in rural areas remained at a distinct disadvantage. The quality of education was adversely affected by insufficient teaching time, overcrowded classrooms, poor incentives for teachers and a lack of suitable textbooks. Dropout and repetition rates were therefore high.

The gaps in access to quality education hampered the economic competitiveness of many African countries and LDCs and limited their ability to move from low-skill and low-value-added sectors to knowledge-based sectors. There was a direct link between access to

quality education and the capacity to reduce poverty, secure broad social development and prevent conflict.

The overall picture for African countries and LDCs masked considerable differences between individual countries. Some had done better than others with, for example, the introduction of school food programmes, conditional cash transfer plans and the elimination of school fees. Local education initiatives and increased support from the donor community had also helped in some cases.

Mr. Onger (Kenya), Minister of Education, noting that the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Mr. Gordon Brown, had appealed for the creation of a global education fund in his statement at the opening of the current substantive session of the Council, said that the time had indeed come for such a fund.

African countries were clearly lagging behind in terms of meeting Education for All (EFA) targets and MDGs. Some progress had been made under the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education for Africa, launched by the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF), as well as under national education plans. In addition, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa had scheduled its Triennale on Education and Training in Africa for late 2011, with the theme of “promoting critical knowledge, skills and qualifications for sustainable development in Africa”.

Progress in enrolments was undeniable but an estimated 10 million children dropped out of primary education in Africa each year. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa were failing to meet EFA goals on early childhood care and education (ECCE). The importance of investing in children’s education at as early an age as possible appeared not to have been fully grasped. Moreover, 195 million children under 5 years of age, a third of the worldwide total, suffered from stunting in Africa. In Kenya alone, one third of children suffered from malnutrition and three quarters of children under 5 suffered from vitamin A deficiency.

Kenya’s Free Primary Education plan had boosted enrolments immensely, from 5.9 million children at the time of its introduction in 2003 to 8.8 million in 2010. Some 200,000 of those pupils, mostly slum-dwellers, received only informal education, for which a curriculum had been designed and through which it was hoped that they would be encouraged to enter mainstream schools at a later stage. Around 1.5 million children still did not attend primary school. The level of enrolments in secondary education and transition rates to tertiary education in Kenya were above the average for sub-Saharan Africa, which was very low. Free secondary tuition in day schools had been implemented in Kenya in 2008 and enrolments had risen from 1.4 million to 1.7 million children as a result. The transition rate from primary to secondary school in Kenya had exceeded the objective set under the MDGs but that was not so in many other African countries.

Adult literacy seemed to be the most neglected of the six EFA targets. It trapped people in poverty and had a knock-on effect on children, as illiterate parents were less likely to send them to school. At the same time, a shortage of teachers was hampering the provision of quality education throughout Africa.

Gender parity in primary education had been achieved in only 27 African countries by 2010. In arid and semi-arid regions, enrolments were particularly low in general and gender disparities were greater still. In that regard, Kenya faced similar challenges to those encountered elsewhere in Africa. Long distances and difficult transport conditions made it nearly impossible for children living in such areas to get to school. The only solution was to establish low-cost boarding schools in such areas, which could also double as centres of food distribution for pupils and their families. In Kenya, provision had also been made in the budget for the distribution of free sanitary towels to schoolgirls as a means of dissuading them from dropping out.

Increased enrolments brought higher costs, which posed a problem because ministries of finance were generally reluctant to release funds to improve education infrastructure. In Kenya, a recent influx of refugees from Somalia would doubtless increase the strain further by augmenting the need for more classrooms, food and teachers.

The constitutions of most African countries included articles on the rights of children to education and health but a legal framework for the implementation of those rights was generally lacking.

It was imperative to find innovative ways of closing the information and communication technologies gap in Africa and, in the context of corporate social responsibility, to increase the number of public-private partnerships in education. In Kenya, for instance, MasterCard had joined a local bank to fund scholarships for 5,000 young Kenyans.

Mr. Diallo (Senegal), Minister of Education, said that half of the 77 million children around the world who did not attend school were in Africa and those who did tended to drop out earlier than elsewhere. Literacy among people over the age of 15 years in Africa was 61 per cent, compared with a worldwide average of 82 per cent. On average, African adults had enjoyed only three years of schooling.

Gender disparities in terms of school enrolment persisted, particularly, in the case of Senegal, at the secondary and tertiary levels. Worse still was the gap between urban and rural populations, and between rich and poor. Twice as many young people living in rural areas did not attend school as those living in the cities, and three times as many poor people as those who were better off had no access to education. Combating exclusion required strategies targeted at the needs of children living in remote areas, nomads, the poor and orphans.

Properly trained teachers in sufficient numbers, adequate infrastructure and equipment, appropriate textbooks and materials, and children ready to learn should constitute the goals of policies aimed at improving the quality of education, which continued to be a source of great concern. There was a need to decentralize responsibility for education, provide direct funding and promote community involvement. Studies had demonstrated that bilingual education, in which the pupils' mother tongues were used alongside inherited colonial languages, greatly improved pupils' performance. Schools and universities should cultivate close contact with industry and the social sector with a view to tailoring pupils' skills to the development requirements of their communities and countries.

A firm political commitment was required to make education development a priority and deal with related challenges through policies of efficient and sustainable reform, real innovation and the allocation of adequate resources. The capacity to implement, manage and monitor such policies must be developed and strengthened. External aid, in order to be effective, must be coordinated, flexible, predictable and tailored to national policy, target domestic shortcomings and build local capacity.

Ms. Legzim-Balouki (Togo), Minister of Primary and Secondary Education and Literacy, said that the breadth of disparities within a country like Togo were as great as those encountered across Africa.

The obstacles to primary education for all in Togo were legion, ranging from the lack of properly trained teachers and teaching materials to a high dropout rate and unequal regional distribution of facilities and teachers. To meet those challenges, an education policy had been adopted in 2009 in the wake of a broad process of consultation involving all sectors of society. Its priorities included: primary education for all and improved access to education beyond the primary level; the introduction of free primary tuition (including the cost of textbooks); the provision of textbooks and teaching materials for schools, as well

as reading and arithmetic texts for primary school pupils; the construction of more classrooms; a teacher recruitment drive combined with initial training for new recruits and continued training for teachers already at work; the conversion of non-profit schools that had been set up as a result of local initiatives, or schools for parents, into public schools; and reduction of the repetition rate.

The Government of Togo aimed to reduce the rate of illiteracy to 21 per cent by 2020 through: the development of a partnership between the State and private service providers responsible for literacy programmes; a specific literacy programme targeting women, girls and young people who had left or never attended school; and teacher-training programmes.

The introduction of free primary tuition in 2008 had led to a considerable rise in primary school enrolments and, by 2009, gender parity had reached levels unknown since 1960. There had also been progress in other areas, thanks in part to external technical and financial support: school infrastructure had been upgraded and extended across the country; the repetition and illiteracy rates had fallen; teacher training had been improved and five teacher-training centres had been established; a policy of decentralization of education had been launched; the role of private schools at all levels had grown; and community involvement had been boosted through the introduction in 2011 of the Schools Project.

Mr. Dansinghani (Mauritius), Chief Technical Officer of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, said that the transition from school to work was a major problem in African countries and that 90 per cent of young people received their skills training in the informal sector. On average, it took school leavers three to four years to find a job. That fact, combined with a widespread lack of access to secondary and tertiary education, blocked access to employment for many young people and held back economic development.

Close attention to the specific requirements of the labour market needed to be coupled with dynamic institutional leadership, especially from ministries of education. Such leadership had, for the most part, been lacking and, without it and adequate investment, there was little hope of progress. Domestic difficulties in many African countries were exacerbated by global turbulence, such as the recent financial crisis and oil price shocks, making it difficult for them to maintain macroeconomic stability.

The modern labour market required a shift from occupational skills to so-called “soft” skills and young people who were employable, flexible and adaptable. The idea of a career for life was outmoded and people needed to be prepared to shift from one type of skill to another.

In Mauritius, primary and secondary education was free of charge and mandatory until the age of 16. Since independence in 1968, there had been continuity in long-term education policy, which had always been a high priority regardless of changes in government. The edifice of that policy rested on five pillars that were common concerns in all African countries: broadening access to education; promoting equity; increasing relevance; improving quality; and ensuring learning achievement for all.

A serious gap had opened up between the world of work and education. It was therefore imperative that technical and vocational education and training (TVET) be better integrated into policy thinking. A stigma had long been attached to vocational education, which was commonly associated with menial jobs. In Mauritius, three bodies had been established to improve the administration of TVET. Training was the responsibility of the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development, while the Mauritius Qualifications Authority acted as a regulatory body and the Human Resource Development Council dealt with funding.

Long-term planning was essential and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources had commissioned a study on projected labour market requirements for the coming 50 years. The overall objective in Mauritius was to transform the country into a knowledge economy. To accomplish that, high attrition rates in secondary school had to be overcome and access to tertiary education, currently limited owing to high tuition fees, had to be broadened. The target was to have one graduate per family by 2017.

The education and human resources strategy plan for 2008–2020 had been adopted only after broad consultations with the public and private sectors, civil society, trade unions and parents, and reviews by the World Bank and European Union. The private sector played a growing role in the provision of education. Corporate social responsibility was a key element of planning and national education programmes to which corporate funding should be directed had been identified. Although the ratio of private to public schools was growing, the State retained its regulatory role.

Ms. King (Director of Education, World Bank) said that many of the issues raised by the previous speakers were addressed in the World Bank Education Strategy 2020. Experience had shown that more schooling did not necessarily result in better learning outcomes. Enrolment rates had gone up, but learning deficits persisted. A multi-country study of the performance of 8th grade students conducted in 2007 had revealed considerable gaps between enrolment percentages and students' ability to do basic maths. Education systems should prioritize and measure learning outcomes. It was also important to recognize that only 15 to 18 per cent of learning gaps between or within countries were due to school inputs such as teachers or textbooks.

If learning gaps were to be reduced, education systems had to be seen as complex human organizations. Education reform should involve changing the behaviour of actors and stakeholders in education, namely central and local government, public and private schools, private providers (including business), communities, families and the students themselves. Quality policy frameworks, enabling environments, policy implementation and investments were all crucial to learning outcomes. Other key aspects included a readiness of pupils to learn, early childhood education within the broader framework of early childhood development, better nutrition, prevention of neglect and abuse, and children's health. Finally education was also conditioned by family and social constraints, including poverty, ethno-linguistic affiliation and social values affecting in particular schooling for girls, among others.

The World Bank Education Strategy 2020 was based on early investment in education, recognizing that malnourished, stunted, abused or neglected children were not ready to learn. Studies had shown that early interventions at the preschool stage yielded the highest returns. Smart investment meant going beyond traditional investments by strengthening education systems through improved management and governance, through the development of a knowledge base for effective and informed policymaking and through investment to address the multiple sources of disadvantage, including poverty, gender, ethno-linguistic affiliation, disability or location. Those were the challenges that must be met if learning for all was to become a reality.

Mr. Sahay (India), referring to the presentation by the Minister of Education of Kenya, said that experience in his own country had shown that legislative and constitutional provision was vital to shifting from a welfare to a rights approach to education. In India, children who had dropped out of school were readmitted to a class appropriate for their age and given special training for a period of six months to one year to bring them up to the level of their peers. The main cause of dropout was not so much child labour as hostile education environments. The main challenge for governments and society was therefore the creation of an enabling environment, especially for first-generation learners and including free education, school meals and other types of incentives.

With regard to the problem of teacher shortages, India had made a distinction between academic and professional qualifications. Persons with minimum academic qualifications were allowed to teach and were trained on the job for another three to five years so they could eventually obtain a professional qualification. All teachers also had to undergo a teacher eligibility test, focused on pedagogical aptitude.

Financial commitment was likewise crucial to improving education. One approach adopted by India — which African States might consider following — was to levy an additional 3 per cent tax earmarked specifically for elementary education.

Mr. Acharya (Nepal), speaking also as chair of the Global Bureau of LDCs, said that the greatest asset of LDCs in Africa was human capital: building productive capacity was crucial to sustainable and inclusive growth. Despite overall progress, some 25 per cent of children in sub-Saharan Africa remained out of school. The need was for: a comprehensive approach to education; technical and vocational training, with employability as a key goal; both formal and non-formal education; strengthened social protection, particularly in the context of economic crisis; and strong national mechanisms and comprehensive international support. In the light of stagnating education funding post-2007, vital concerns included the abolition of school fees, improvement of teaching infrastructures and resources, readmission to school, access in remote areas, school meals and the establishment of an enabling legal framework. That would require solid international support for national-level programmes as well as the cooperation of the private sector and civil society organizations.

Mr. Hansen (Denmark) asked in what way access to education for disabled children was being measured in Africa. With regard to learning outputs, he wished to learn more about teaching methods, teacher accountability and the involvement of the local community in decentralized education systems.

Ms. Ratsifandriamanana (FAO) said that special emphasis must be placed on education in rural areas. Eighty per cent of out-of-school children lived in rural areas, and there was a direct correlation between education and food security. Specific challenges in rural areas included inadequate financing, remoteness, insecurity, poor teacher motivation, lack of pedagogical support to teachers, inadequate access to new technologies and school dropout. In 2002, FAO, together with UNESCO, had launched the Education for Rural People (ERP) partnership programme, which focused among other things on the development of local services, food programmes and vocational training in agriculture. Education in rural areas must draw on innovative approaches such as mobile libraries and laboratories, novel forms of access to social media, and new technologies.

Ms. Ndong Jatta (UNESCO) said that identifying capacity gaps, technical gaps, quality gaps and technology gaps was crucial to improving the quality of education. Africa had inherited a Western model of education that did not necessarily facilitate universal access. UNESCO supported African member States in the training of curriculum developers and policy analysts. Together with other partners, UNESCO also conducted country-level diagnostics to inform the discussion on teacher's professional development. Most African governments spent 80 per cent of their education budget on salaries so that there was little room to invest in improving the system. Education could not be delivered exclusively through school. Instead, multiple learning pathways must be explored. Innovative approaches to improving education such as the one-laptop-a-child projects in Uruguay and Venezuela were initiatives to be emulated.

She asked what type of policies or strategies existed in Africa to guarantee education as a right to children who were excluded from school, had dropped out or failed to succeed. She also enquired in what way governments could promote the use of new technologies as a vehicle for enhancing young peoples' opportunities.

Ms. Khaketla (Lesotho) supported the call for the establishment of a global fund for education. It was worth noting that much of the education budget in African countries went to non-core issues, especially school meals and support for vulnerable children, yet education providers were ultimately judged by pass rates and other academic evaluation criteria. The number of children fed or immunized in school was not factored in. Consideration should be given to establishing separate budgets to fund essential non-core actions so as to free up resources to improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes.

Mr. Barton (United States of America) enquired about the situation in Africa with regard to children's readiness to learn. He asked about the extent of family or parental participation in adult literacy campaigns and other relevant initiatives. He would also welcome information on positive examples of improvements in the quality of teaching and teacher recruitment in Africa.

Mr. Majudmer (Bangladesh) asked whether early childhood education existed in rural Africa and, if so, how it was being implemented. He would also like information about teacher recruitment procedures and potential problems with teacher assignment to remote areas.

Ms. Schmitt (Germany) said that it might be useful to explore ways of promoting cooperation between ministries of education, finance and labour in order to enhance efforts to improve the quality of education.

Mr. Mazinga (Malawi) said that Malawi had greatly benefited from the WFP school meals programme. Adequate nutrition was a major prerequisite for learning. Poor households often had to choose between sending their children to school or getting them to work in the fields. School meals were an important incentive for parents to send their children to school and had reduced the incidence of child labour in Africa. Many African countries supported the WFP Home Grown School Feeding Programme, and she appealed to governments to scale up those programmes by developing policies to mainstream nutrition into the education sector. In Malawi, enrolment of girls had increased by 41 per cent in those schools where meals were provided, which illustrated the value of the programme. Procuring the food for school meals from local farmers also supported sustainable local development.

Ms. Bratten (Norway) said that, according to the UNESCO 2011 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, education accounted for only 2 per cent of humanitarian aid. Her delegation would welcome thoughts from the panellists on ways to implement resolution A/RES/64/290 on the right to education in emergency situations.

Ms. El Midaoui (Morocco) said that education was the second largest household expense after food security in Africa. In that connection, she wished to know how privatization of education could be reconciled with maintaining free educational provision.

Mr. Diallo (Senegal) said that in his country early childhood education had increased from 2 per cent in 2000 to 9 per cent currently. Senegal had established community-based centres (*Cases des Touts Petits*) for 0–6 year-olds and their mothers. Private sector involvement had contributed significantly to enhancing the quality of education. The State funded 85 per cent of education, but well-to-do parents often chose to send their children to privately-run schools. Currently, 70 per cent of teachers were recruited among holders of the baccalaureate, 25 per cent held a certificate of general education. Candidates participated in a national competition and were subsequently trained in one of the country's 11 teacher-training institutions.

Ms. Legzim-Balouki (Togo) said that most early childhood education establishments in Togo were located in urban areas. Adult literacy campaigns in rural areas focused on women. Teachers were recruited nationally by the ministry responsible for the

civil service, in cooperation with the ministry responsible for primary and secondary education and literacy. The assignment of teachers to remote areas was a problem, and a policy on incentives for postings to remote areas had been drafted and was currently before the Council of Ministers.

In urban areas, parents of children with learning difficulties often hired private tutors after school. In poor rural areas, after-school tutoring was mostly provided by the teachers themselves. Togo faced significant problems in the implementation of foreign aid, and a special management unit had been set up to handle the question, including the allocation of humanitarian aid for education.

Mr. Onger (Kenya), responding to the comments by the representative of India, said that a special task force had been set up to study the implementation of the new Constitution. Since Kenya had a devolved system of government, special attention would be given to reconciling national and local education requirements. The Teacher Service Commission had been given a constitutional mandate to hire, dismiss and discipline teachers. The development of an enabling legal framework for the Commission to carry out its mandate was pending. To implement the new Constitution establishing education as a universal right, the Education Act and legislation governing the Kenya Institute of Education and the Kenya National Examination Council would need to be amended.

With regard to measuring learning outcomes, he said that many Kenyans were of the view that primary school examinations should be eliminated. Discussion on that issue was ongoing.

Different options for education financing, including for infrastructure and non-core items, were currently being explored, and he thanked the representative of India for his input. In response to the question from the representative of Denmark, he said that Kenya's 23 investment programmes included provisions for children with special needs. They were being incorporated into normal schools and provided with additional facilities and support. Incentives were given to parents to enrol children with disabilities in school.

All education-related management had been devolved to the local level. Government funds were transferred directly to the local schools and local school management committees had been set up. Efforts must now focus on building local capacity to assume the relevant tasks, including by extending the one-year office term for members of school management committees. The committees represented parents and other local stakeholders, and their aim was to create a sense of local ownership of education. Central government provided support among other things for curriculum development and infrastructures. In the light of the challenges, he agreed that the establishment of a global education fund might be useful.

Replying to the representative of the United States of America, he said that children and parents in Kenya had a keen interest in learning, the only impediment being socio-economic circumstances. The 59 per cent increase in primary school enrolment over five years following the abolition of school fees in 2003 illustrated the fact.

Initiatives to expand early-childhood education services had so far been undermined by difficulties in obtaining resources, but efforts were being pursued. Kenya was examining the possibility of introducing Home Grown School Feeding programmes. Parents growing food to supply their children's schools would certainly cement the sense of community ownership. However, local production shortages due to drought, and escalating food prices due to exchange rate and import-export fluctuations, had had a highly detrimental impact on developing Africa.

He agreed with the representative of Germany that the only way to meet the challenges in education was through cooperation among governments, relevant ministries

and civil society organizations. Once access had been guaranteed, the next challenge was quality. Kenya had well-trained teachers, but opposition by teachers unions to the employment of contractual teachers called for careful negotiation if it were not to paralyse the education system.

Mr. Dansinghani (Mauritius) said that there was often a gap between the instruction provided in teacher-training institutions and the skills required in real classroom situations. Teacher training on its own was insufficient to improve the quality of education.

In Mauritius, education for children with disabilities was mostly delivered by private providers. To date, there was one school for the blind and one for the deaf. Work on increasing access for children with disabilities had commenced in 2008, in close cooperation with Norway, which had a strong track record in special needs education. Early identification of children with special needs was also part of the teacher-training curriculum.

Education for under 3-year-olds did not fall within the remit of the Ministry of Education, early childhood education being mainly delivered by private providers. However, all new State-run primary schools had a preschool unit.

He agreed with the representative of Germany that synergies between different ministries were crucial to better education. His Ministry cooperated with the Ministry of Finance in programme-based budgeting.

In reply to the question by the representative of Morocco, he said that it was for parents to choose the right education establishment for their children. Private schools placed special emphasis on innovative teaching techniques and tools, whereas public schools took a more traditional approach. If private providers failed to meet quality standards, parents would opt for public schools.

Ms. King (World Bank) said that examples from a number of countries showed that private education and public funding were not necessarily mutually exclusive. With regard to assessing children's readiness to learn, Brazil, Jamaica and the Philippines had programmes to measure such readiness. It might also be useful to use extension workers to connect families and children to providers, as had been done to encourage the use of health services in some countries.

Age 0 to 3 was crucial for brain development. Abuse and neglect at that age could cause serious damage. Ministries of education could lead the way in promoting a better understanding of early childhood development beyond preschool attendance. The greater objective was the acquisition of knowledge and skills writ large, in and outside school. Education could be instrumental in taking care of cognitive and overall development of the young generation. She agreed with the representative of UNESCO on the need for multiple learning pathways to ensure that the large number of young persons not in school could acquire essential knowledge and skills.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.