EIARC RESOLUTION ON THE NEED TO ENSURE QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL DURING AND BEYOND CRISES

The EI Africa Regional Committee, meeting online on 24 and 25 February 2021,

Considering that:

1. The African Region is facing multiple crises, including health, conflict, and climate change, that have a negative impact on the provision of quality education for all;
2. Evidence shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in Africa by excluding marginalised children from receiving quality education;
3. Educators and learners are prey to insecurity due to (i) jihadist attacks in countries like Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, and Nigeria; and (ii) armed conflict and civil unrest in countries like the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, and South Sudan, resulting in school closures whenever attacks occur;
4. The African continent is also a setting for climate crises, including the fast expansion of the Sahara Desert in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal, as well as the cyclones in Southern Africa, which have affected Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, among others;

Concerned that:

5. Many teachers and education support personnel have been infected with and succumbed to COVID-19;
6. The COVID-19 and other crises affecting the continent have jeopardized fundamental human rights, including the right to education;
7. All these crises listed above also constitute a serious threat to the achievement of United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education and the African Union’s Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025 objectives;
8. The adoption of distance learning as a solution to maintain provision of education in times of crises has revealed the “digital poverty” and inequality on the continent affecting educators and learners, particularly the most marginalized;
9. The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and affecting disproportionately vulnerable communities and learners, especially those living in poverty, women and girls and persons with disabilities;
Stressing that:

10. Education and teachers are key agents in fostering peace, non-violence, global citizenship, and sustainable development;
11. School closures and distance learning tend to re-enforce inequalities by excluding the disadvantaged, students with special needs and other students requiring substantial personal attention;
12. Alternative modes of education during the crisis are temporary measures that cannot replace in-school learning and the physical presence of students and educators;
13. Teachers and education support personnel employed on short and fixed-term contracts, especially in private education institutions have become even more vulnerable in times of crises;

Calls on:

14. Governments to ensure that teachers and education support personnel, as frontline workers, are prioritized in accessing COVID-19 vaccines;
15. Governments to consult education unions concerning decisions on school closures, reopening and reclosures, the operation of reduced and modified education provision and teacher professional policy reforms enacted in response to crises;
16. Governments to consult educators, in view of the existing digital divide, in adopting the most suitable way of delivering teaching and learning, as well as assessment of students to ensure no one is disadvantaged;
17. Governments to address the risks associated with digitalisation and artificial intelligence to the school and education community, as well as to democracy as a result of surveillance, violations of privacy, in particular that of educators and students;
18. Governments and employers to recognise that trade unions are an important part of crisis policy processes and that social dialogue is instrumental in resolving conflicts, particularly in times of crisis.
19. Governments and employers to protect the rights of teachers and education support personnel and not to use the pandemic as an excuse to disregard or weaken existing collective bargaining agreements;

Resolves:

20. To intensify its efforts and that of EI member organisations in Africa to defend and promote equitable quality education for all, and the status and working conditions of teachers and education support personnel during and beyond the current crises.