

Speech of
the Hon. Mrs. Leela Devi DOOKUN-LUCHOOMUN
Minister of Education and Human Resources, Higher Education and Scientific Research,
Mauritius
On the occasion of the
Ceremony for the Launch of the Inter-Country Quality Node on Early Childhood Development

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION POST 2015

Venue: Kigali, Rwanda

9-11 February 2015

Honorable Minister of Rwanda,

Honorable Ministers,

Ms Anne Ndong-Jatta, UNESCO Dakar and Chair of ADEA Working Group on ECD

Ms Oley Dibba Wadda, Executive Secretary, ADEA

Distinguished Representatives of Sub-Saharan African countries

Representatives of Development Partners and local NGOs

Members of the press

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great honour that I stand before you today on behalf of my country as we prepare to officially launch the Inter-Country Quality Node on Early Childhood Development.

Mauritius is an active proponent of Early Childhood Development in ways that make a difference. Our goal is to ensure “A Republic fit for Children”. Allow me to speak just a little about what I mean by this. We have acceded to international protocols that protect and promote the rights and development of children which include the Convention on the rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights of the Child. More importantly, we have put in place national instruments which enforce these protocols and ensure the well-being of our young such as the Child Development Unit.

In recognition of the fact that the early childhood years provide the foundation for all later learning and participation in society we have established numerous other initiatives. Our integrated Child Policy was developed in collaboration with all frontline ministries including the Ministry of Finance. An Early Childhood Care Authority whose mandate falls within the Ministry of Education and Human Resources has been in existence since 2007. This body is responsible for the provision of quality preschool education. The Child Care Accreditation Bureau implements an accreditation system based on principles and standards established for quality childcare including health and nutrition. Since June 2003 the Mauritius Institute of Education, jointly with Mauritius College of the Air has run a distance learning programme on ECD 0-5 years for caregivers of day care centres together with preschool teachers. We also strive to maintain an up to date curricula.

All these and many other initiatives have combined to allow Mauritius to achieve a pre-primary Net Enrolment Ratio of 98.3 through a system of free public preschools and cash transfers to private schools for every child enrolled. Early childhood care is prioritized under the free public healthcare system which includes essential health and nutrition services for pregnant women and young children. While we are proud of our achievements and continue to advance further, we understand that these successes will only be complete when the region can speak with one voice on matters pertaining to ECD. With a combined GER of 18 per cent, Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind the rest of the world in Early Childhood Development and Care. Malnutrition is pervasive with 32 per cent of the world's malnourished young coming from this region. Ensuring continental development will be that much harder if we do not together address the challenge of preparing our children for the future **together**.

The Government of Mauritius has responded to the invitation from the Association for the Development of Education to host an Inter-Country Quality Node, or ICQN in short, on this very pertinent issue. Having already been involved in militating for a North/South-South/South collaborative program since the 2006 ADEA Biennale, and having developed the nation into a Knowledge Hub and Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Care and Education we feel that we can play a catalytic role in promoting and supporting ECD continent wide. The already established Mauritius-Africa Initiative (MAI) on ECD has reinforced the capacity of both institutions and professionals in the field of ECCE. This has been done through appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes as well as building Knowledge Hubs that provide evidence for policy dialogue and development. Given the existing relationship that Mauritius has with ADEA and the catalytic function of Inter-Country Quality Nodes, hosting the ICQN on ECD is an obvious next step.

For those of you here who may not be aware, Inter-Country Quality Nodes serve as agents for the accumulation of information on innovative educational experiences in Africa. They bring representatives of education ministries from different countries together to address issues designated as national priorities that are already included in current programs. By so doing, a network for discussion and sharing is created and a joint problem-solving approach is taken. These networks are supported by one or more specialized national and/or regional institutions allied with a strategic partner such as an ADEA working group or an expert international institution. Our job as Mauritius will be to lead the ICQN through the provision of a secretariat, human resources and coordination. Let me note however, that an ICQN can only be successful if there is a concerted effort on the part of **all** its stakeholders. I now call upon the various Ministers of Education here present and through them, their governments and all education partners working in ECD to support

the activities of the Inter-Country Quality Node on Early Childhood Development, formatively and substantively. There is need for ideas, resources and good will if this initiative is to raise the profile of ECD, contribute to the well-being of Africa's children and ultimately spur the region onto greater heights.

Distinguished Guests, the children of Africa are looking to us to secure their future. We cannot wait a moment longer and every child who loses a life due to a preventable disease, every child who is denied the opportunity to an education, every young person who cannot fully participate in the world of work is our responsibility. We have it in our power to shape these destinies and to change the story of Africa. Mauritius is ready to take on this challenge and as shown by the launch this ICQN, I believe that rest of Africa is too. Allow me to close by saying that I am proud to be a part of this historic occasion. I hope to one day be able look back upon this event and mark it as a turning point in the life of the African child. I hope even more to be able to celebrate with you the even greater successes that I am sure will come out of this initiative.

Ladies and gentleman, please joining me in celebrating this momentous occasion as I officially launch the Inter-Country Quality Node on Early Childhood Development.

Thank you