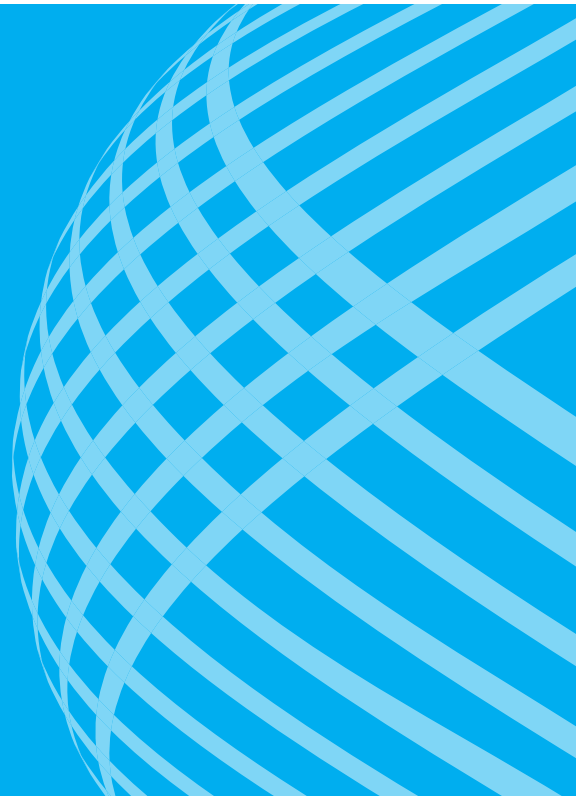


REMARKS

WINNIE BYANYIMA, UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
HIGH-LEVEL EVENT: COMMEMORATING THE AFRICAN UNION YEAR OF
EDUCATION 2024—“INVESTING IN TOMORROW: THE AFRICAN UNION YEAR
OF EDUCATION CATALYZING PROGRESS FOR AFRICA AND THE WORLD”





REMARKS

WINNIE BYANYIMA,
UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MONDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2024

Thank you, Femi [Moderator]

Excellencies, thank you so much for inviting UNAIDS to this important discussion. African Union and GPE, thank you.

I am going to focus on girls and make the case for all children as well and put some home on the table. If all girls complete secondary education by 2030, the GDP for developing countries in Africa, would increase by 10% over the next ten years. I am sure you know this.

Just one additional year of secondary education in our countries can increase a girl's potential earnings by almost 20%. It can reduce her risk of HIV infection by more than 50% in some countries.

And this is important because in Sub-Saharan Africa for girls between the age of 15–24 they are 3 times more likely to be infected with HIV than their male peers. Every week 3100 of our girls and young women in Africa are infected with HIV.

Girls' completion of secondary education protects them not just from HIV, but from child marriage, teenage pregnancy, violence, and discrimination, increases their access to labour markets, earning potential, and all the other economic outcomes for a country.

So, you can't get a higher return on investment.

But yet 60% of our girls are not completing upper secondary school. 34 million girls of secondary school age are not in school. They're out there herding goats, working, trading. And they are vulnerable, their health is vulnerable, their lives are vulnerable. We are leaving girls behind.

It's a serious challenge, a fiscal challenge in Africa, In our countries we are paying 2 to 3 times more to service our debts than to education. Investing in education is crowded out.

But I have hope. Here is the hope.

We have the Education Plus Initiative—15 African governments, the African Union, civil society, girls' networks, UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, all coming together to work for change.



Education Plus is not just about HIV prevention, it's about gender equality. Catalysing progress on health, education, ending poverty, reducing inequalities, and achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

How is that?

They are putting in place the policies and investments that are needed to ensure that every child gets free secondary education. And that education includes sexuality education, appropriate sexual and reproductive rights services, a violence-free environment in schools, addressing toxic masculinities addressed, and school-to-work transitions- vocational skills are critical.

Education Plus is a package that is working cross-sectorally to empower a girl, bringing what will protect a girl's health into the school space, making the school space the primary space where a girl's empowerment begins, but putting in all the other interventions that empower her health wise.

This is critical. Education Plus is not just about HIV prevention, it's about gender equality. Catalysing progress on health, education, ending poverty, reducing inequalities, and achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

We can unite, we can do this. I am a child of school teachers too. I was at Beijing also. I went to Beijing to fight for gender equality. In Beijing we fought for the girl child. We pushed governments to close the gap for children on primary education. And 10 years after Beijing children were in primary school classrooms. The gap between boys and girls closed.

Next year is Beijing Plus 30. Let's make that the year to close the gap of secondary. Let's get every girl and boy to complete a round of secondary education.

Thank you so much.



