



## CALL TO ACTION STATEMENT

# Early childhood education **FOR ALL**

**It is time for a world ready to learn, where all children have access to quality early childhood education and enter school equipped with the skills they need to learn, succeed and prosper.**

The learning crisis the world is facing today has its roots in children's earliest years, when failure to invest in quality early childhood education results in children starting school not ready to learn and succeed. Millions of children are entering education systems already behind in a host of critical skills they need to succeed in primary school.

Investing in the foundations of learning, in quality early childhood education for all, is a proven solution to closing learning gaps, strengthening education systems, providing a solid foundation for human capital development and supporting a country's goals for economic growth and development. Despite the lifelong benefits of early learning, more than 175 million children – nearly half of all pre-primary-age children globally – are not enrolled in pre-primary education.<sup>1</sup> In low-income countries, only 1 in 5 young children is enrolled.<sup>2</sup> In Africa, alone, the continental average gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education stands at 33% and more than 57 million pre-primary-age children are missing out on early learning opportunities.

Today, we take stock to agree on the urgent need for joint advocacy and action to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal for universal access to quality pre-primary education by 2030 (target 4.2). We acknowledge that much progress has been made in the past decade to make the case for early childhood education and that champion governments have shown what is possible to achieve for children when political commitment is backed by smart policies and investments.

The global momentum on early childhood education is growing. In 2018, the African Union launched the Early Childhood Development and Education Cluster with the Government of Mauritius to support early learning in the context of Agenda 2063 and the Continental Education Strategy of Africa (CESA) 2016–2025. In 2019, UNICEF's global report on pre-primary education, 'A World Ready to Learn', set out a road map for reaching the goal of universal access. In response to country demand, many partners are increasing investments and promoting knowledge and innovation to support the scale-up of early childhood education programmes. The World Bank is financing 50 projects in early childhood education, totalling more than \$1 billion. This year's G20 Development Working Group highlighted early childhood education as an important part of human capital investment.

Although these efforts are crucial, they are not enough. Domestic budgets and international aid have not recognized the potential returns on investment in early learning. Only 0.7% of international aid to education is allocated to pre-primary education. Across Africa, pre-primary education receives the smallest share of the education budget, averaging 3.3% overall and only 2% in low-income countries. Worldwide, this underinvestment means that less than a quarter of all countries have achieved or nearly achieved 100% enrolment.<sup>3</sup>

**We call on the global community to take collective and complementary action on five interlinked areas that are crucial to achieve transformational and cost-effective change for young children and nations:**

- 1 POLITICAL WILL FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION** – Raise the profile of early childhood education at high-level global, continental, regional and national events and support policy dialogues that prioritize this subsector.
- 2 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PRIORITIZED IN SECTOR PLANS** – Urge and support leadership by Ministries of Education to prioritize at least one year of quality pre-primary education in sector planning, budgeting and implementation.
- 3 MORE AND BETTER DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL FINANCING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION** – Significantly increase the share of domestic finance and international education aid directed towards pre-primary education.
- 4 COMMITMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND QUALITY** – Invest in strong and sustainable systems for quality early childhood education, with a focus on setting and meeting quality standards, and mobilizing resources to massively increase the supply of capable and effective pre-primary teachers.
- 5 TARGETED AND ALIGNED INVESTMENTS** – Jointly galvanize political support and resources and align our efforts to deliver on SDG 4.2 and CESA commitments to early childhood education.

We are united in a vision of a world where all children enter school with the skills to learn, succeed and prosper. This can only be achieved if early childhood education is a priority for governments and global partners and recognized as a prerequisite for the actualization of the Continental Education Strategy of Africa 2016–2025 and Sustainable Development Goal 4, quality education for all children towards *the Africa We Want* as aspired by Agenda 2063.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education – Global report*, UNICEF, New York, April 2019, p. 26, available at <<https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-world-ready-to-learn-report>>.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) global database, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *A World Ready to Learn*, UNICEF, New York, April 2019.