



OPENING REMARKS

H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor,

**COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RESOURCES, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

African Forum on Youth Skills and Enterprises in the Digital Age

Tunis, TUNISIA

18th April 2018

**Delivered on her behalf by
Nicholas Ouma – Senior Youth Advisor
Africa Union Commission**

Your Excellency [Mr. Faouzi Abderrahmane](#), Minister of Vocational Training and Employment of Tunisia'

Your Excellency [Mr. Abdoukadi Tidjani Idrissa](#), Minister of Professional and Technical Education of Niger,

Your Excellency Mr. Adoum Dangai Nokour Guet, Minister of Vocational Training and Small trades of Chad,

Your Excellency [Mr. Gaston Musemena Bongala](#), Minister of Primary, Secondary and Professional Education of the Democratic Republic of Congo,

Your Excellency Dr. Ahmed Elgeushey Hassaneen, Deputy Minister of Education for TVET of Egypt,

Your Excellency [Mr. Abdelhafeez Elsadiq Abdel-raheem](#), State Minister in charge of Youth, Ministry of Education of Sudan,

Dr. [Kevit Desai](#), Principal Secretary, Ministry of Education, Kenya

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning.

I bring you warm greetings from the African Union Commission. Special greetings and best wishes from Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor, The Commissioner for Human Resources Science and Technology. Her Excellency the Commissioner was to be here today for this August Forum but unfortunately another urgent commission assignment has made it impossible for her to be here this morning. She sends her most sincere apologies and prays for a very successful forum.

I will now read the speech of the Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology – H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor.

On behalf of the African Union Commission Chairperson H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat and on my own behalf it is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the ***“African Forum on Youth Skills and Enterprises in the Digital Age”***

Allow me to start by expressing profound gratitude to the Government and the people of the Republic of Tunisia, for hosting this important conference on Digital Skills and Entrepreneurship for Youth. A warm welcome to you all gathered here today to discuss and share experiences towards improving digital skills for young people in Africa.

Digital skills are at the heart of the Skills Revolution Agenda for Africa and a trajectory towards a digital economy as envisaged in Africa’s development blueprint **Agenda 2063**.

The Agenda calls for speeding up actions ***“to catalyze education and skills revolution and actively promote science, technology, research and innovation, with the ultimate aim of building knowledge, human resources, capabilities and skills for Africa’s future.”***

It is not lost to us here that digital skills are now recognized as basic skills, along with literacy and numeracy. This is apart from being the bedrock of an effective digital society with the potential of transforming employment landscape across all facets of the economy, including Financial Services, Agriculture, Health, Entertainment among others.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Whereas many young people are often considered “digital savvy”, and use digital products including the internet daily, the reality is that possession of job-relevant digital skills is still a far cry away.

Many young people do not have the requisite skills needed to convert this interest into an actual job. Jobs requiring advanced ICT skills such as Coding; Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Robotics; Cyber Security among others still

face a critical shortage of skilled professionals to fill them up. This digital skills gap has a huge impact on the labour market.

As key players and stakeholders, we should ensure that Africa's youth have the relevant digital skills as they enter the jobs market. For Africa to advance in the digital space, concerted efforts should be made for children to learn and have skills in ICT such as programming at an early age as this helps kids to gain advantages in thinking, processing and communicating. These skills will later help Africa's youth to be innovative, which will translate into critical dividends in nearly any profession.

Our education and training systems should therefore empower learners from a very early age so that as they advance in their education and training and are able to join a cutting-edge community of digital thinkers and eventually become the bedrock of innovation and jobs for the future.

Most jobs in careers such as medicine, engineering, entertainment – particularly film industry, education and many more require an increasing degree of digital skills.

It is also critical that we enhance collaboration with industry and identify where skills gaps exist for all young people and put in place mechanisms to enhance reskilling of those out of school and are already in the labour market.

It is encouraging to note that companies like CISCO systems, who are represented here today, are already deeply involved in bolstering the talent pipeline and enabling the widespread emergence of digital ecosystems among the youth across Africa. It is imperative that tech companies enhance their partnership with training institutions to create relevant, high quality curricula that will provide the much-needed digital skills that industry needs. I am pleased that among these facets of collaboration was the launch of TVET Cluster yesterday.

Digital developments are changing the structure and nature of employment today. We need not lament about potential loss of jobs with technological

advancements because while some jobs are being replaced, thanks to digital technology, new ones are also being created by it.

Africa's youthful workforce needs the skills to match and keep up with these changes. The growth potential of the digital economy presents an opportunity for tackling the youth employment challenge with a strong focus on fostering youth-led digital entrepreneurship.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In addressing these issues, the African Union Commission has developed key strategic frameworks to guide Member states towards a digital skills revolution in Africa. These include the Continental TVET strategy to foster youth employment, Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA16-25) and the Science Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa (STISA 2024).

These three instruments portray a renewed commitment in the transformation of Africa into a knowledge based and innovation led society underpinned by a robust digital skills development ecosystem.

I am pleased to note that in the implementation framework of CESA 16-25 we have a coalition of partners in the ICT in Education Cluster under the coordination of Global E-Schools and Communities Initiative (GESCI) who have also been instrumental in coordinating this conference.

One of AU's flagship projects under Agenda 2063 is the **Pan African Virtual E-University** (PAVEU). It aims at accelerating the development of human capital, Science Technology and Innovation through increasing access to tertiary and continuing education in Africa by **capitalizing on the digital revolution** and global knowledge. It also aims to reach large numbers of students and professionals **in multiple sites simultaneously- anywhere, any time at any place**; and consolidate African initiatives and strategies on accelerated development.

Education in Africa is facing a critical challenge to meet new demands of the 21st century, with its **ever-increasing youthful population** seeking primary, secondary, and tertiary education opportunities. In addition, it is also clear that educational institutions in Africa are not expanding enough to accommodate the increasing numbers of students seeking access to higher education.

There is therefore need to enhance provision of a **more flexible educational system** for students through multi-faceted formats in **Open, Distance and e-Learning** (ODEL). This will provide a viable option for those seeking higher education and continuing learning to be able to enrol and undertake courses anywhere and at any time.

Furthermore, even regular institutions of learning will benefit from upgrading to **technology-enabled and technology-compatible** environments and will require exemplars and models.

In conclusion,

Let me reiterate that digital skills should drive change and be the positive force for social inclusion. As we think about better harnessing digital tools to enhance education, innovation and youth employment, we have to make sure that we leave no one behind. Digital inclusion, in all its dimensions, is something that we also need to consciously work on, plan for and invest in.

As we engage in the next two days, let us remember that digital skills are the starting point to making Africa become competitive, grow and prosper.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your commitment in this endeavor and wish you a successful and productive conference.

Thank you very much for your kind attention!