

**STATEMENT BY DR ITAH KANDJII- MURANGI, MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA ON THE UNESCO - AFRICA - CHINA HIGH LEVEL DIALOGUE FOR PRIORITY AFRICA IN THE COVID 19 AND POST COVID 19 CONTEXT.**

**Introduction:**

Allow me, on behalf of my country, Namibia, to congratulate the UNESCO Priority Africa Division and the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO for organizing and hosting this important virtual dialogue. We are indeed thankful for the opportunity availed to us to be part of this noble High Level engagement - where sharing of COVID 19 experiences, and exploring possible areas of collaboration, joint research, technological development and transfer and innovations, post - COVID 19, areas are to be discussed. UNESCO has in so many ways before and now, during this Coronavirus pandemic, demonstrated that, it is indeed an effective laboratory of ideas and a clearing house. I therefore join others who spoke before me to applaud the efforts of UNESCO on COVID 19.

Namibia has excellent relations with both the People's Republic of China and UNESCO. These are our development partners, at different levels, whose technical, financial and expert support over the years, have made it possible for our country to realize some programs of our development agenda.

## **The Pandemic and Africa:**

The COVID 19 pandemic has invoked desperation by upending the accepted visions and norms, and pushed humanity into a survival mode. This pandemic has changed the way we live and forced us to reshape our daily routines, such as: work, learning, health, healthcare and others. It is now imperative to reconsider the drivers of every aspect of life.

Furthermore, this pandemic has consequently placed tremendous imperatives on global economies, and more so, on national economies of developing African countries, with their startling inequality emanating from colonial times, to learn to cope and balance the act of saving lives and livelihoods of citizens.

Despite Africa's rich natural resources, COVID 19 has shown the vulnerability of African economies. African countries' dependence on the extractive sector, without robust benefaction strategies, impede skills' development, technology transfer and delay transitioning to knowledge -based societies.

With the advent of the Coronavirus, it is evident that African countries are at the mercy of societies that are more prolific and efficient in producing new knowledge, new products and new services, all which are imported at a high cost to Africa, without empowering Africans through education, industrial development, employment, import and export balances, and foreign exchange earnings.

## **COVID 19 and Namibia:**

Akin to other countries globally, Namibia is adversely affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. The state of emergency and the subsequent lockdowns gravely affected industries, the economy, tourism, education, health and livelihoods. The lockdowns disrupted the informal economic sector, the main provider of livelihoods for the majority in Namibia.

As more people could not go to work, the availability of food at household level dwindled, more and more companies suffered revenue losses, which translated into job losses. Protracted closure of the country's borders negatively affected trade and tourism. An Emergency Income Grant regime was rolled out to cushion the severity of job losses and poor livelihoods.

The indefinite closure of universities and tertiary institutions, on the account of curbing the spread of COVID 19, caused unprecedented disruptions to the academic calendars. This almost immediately, led to exploration of other effective methods of teaching and learning that could be employed to ensure continued access to education by students.

The Namibian Government, through the two ministries of education (Basic and Higher) resolved to encourage all schools, colleges and universities to migrate their lessons and programs to the ONLINE mode, and to continue teaching during the lockdowns. The

disparities of the IT infrastructure, broadband, internet connectivity, servers, staff capacity, lack of laptop and data for students, are great challenges that limit the impact of the Online mode of teaching.

### **Areas of Partnerships:**

Namibia is keen to learn effective coping strategies from other countries of the world. China's proactiveness, use of high technologies in fighting the pandemic and quick response made a difference and turned the tide of COVID 19. The deployment of drones to transport medical supplies to different hospitals and localities where such supplies were acutely required during the pick of the pandemic, made a huge difference in the equation of health service delivery, to where and when it was needed.

Unlike many countries whose academic calendars are disrupted by the COVID 19 pandemic, access to the Online teaching and learning mode in the People's Republic of China, went unhindered. And therefore, nations of the world stand to benefit from China's experiences in this regard. The China-In-Trust (CFIT project), is one good vehicle that can further widen the reach and impact of Chinese expertise on the e-Learning mode to parts of the world with the least know-how, for example.

### **Needs for Namibia:**

1. The revival of industries, tourism and the economy and to address unemployment, particularly amongst the youth;
2. Strengthen the health system through new technologies and funding of relevant and responsive research for COVID19;
3. Develop a robust IT infrastructure throughout the different levels of the country's education system for provision of Online education at all levels, going forward;
4. Technology transfer and targeted innovations, leading to homegrown solutions to the current and future pandemics;
5. Research capacity development in diverse areas and strengthening research institutions in the country.