



Speech by Ana-Beatriz Martins
Ambassador, EU Delegation to Namibia

Launch Event

“EU-Namibia Early Childhood Development Sector Reform Launch”

Harmony ECD Centre Mix Settlement, 17 April 2024

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Honorable Doreen Sioka, Minister of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare,

Honorable Ester Anna Nghipondoka, Minister of Education Arts and Culture,

Mr Samuel Ocran, UNICEF Representative

Representatives of the local authorities and the community,

Dear Educarers, dear teachers,

Distinguished invited guests and partners,

Representatives of the media,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Today, we come together to celebrate a **new milestone** in our partnership with Namibia in the Education sector: we are launching a new **EU Sector Budget support programme in Early Childhood Education** that will run for the next three years, and the renewal of project partnership with UNICEF.

- The presence of the Honourable Doreen Sioka, Minister of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare and Honourable Ester Anna Nghipondoka, Minister of Education Arts and Culture are a **statement of the government's commitment to Education** and to a fruitful partnership in promoting access and quality education.
- Our partnership with Namibia in Education goes back over 15 years. This very premise, the **Harmony ECD Centre in the Mix Settlement**, established in xxx, is a tangible result of this long standing commitment of the EU.
- With today's project, we take a further step in enhancing **access** for pre-primary children to Early Childhood **facilities and services**, to **expand the number of pre-primary classes across the country** and above all, to **boost the quality of care and teaching** for pre-primary children.
- As decades of academic studies have shown, many **crucial stages of human development** occur in early childhood. Lack of opportunities, poor quality education, cognitive and emotional support during early years of childhood can significantly disadvantage young children and reduce their potential for success. Early Childhood Development and Pre-Primary Education lay the **foundations for basic literacy, numeracy skills** and the very start for a successful school career.

- The Namibian government has shown great commitment towards the wellbeing of children. It is signatory to the UN **Convention on Children's Rights**, it ratified several international conventions on the wellbeing of children and scores highly on public Education budget, with **approximately 20% of** resources going to the sector.
- The Government's increased focus on ECD is a demonstration of this commitment. In fact there is a direct link between improving ECD conditions and reducing dropout rates in primary education, in increasing retention in grade 1 and in improve overall learners' academic performance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Let me say a few words on the New ECD Budget Support programme. It endowed with a budget of around NAD 320 million, of which 262 million NAD will go directly to the Namibian Treasury and 60 million NAD for Technical Assistance, including support actions implemented by our partners **UNICEF and WFP**.
- With the first disbursement of an initial NAD 100 million in December 2023, the project is running and fully in the hands of the Ministries of Gender and Education. Subsequent disbursements will follow as the jointly agreed result indicators and benchmarks in terms of **access, quality and equity in ECD** and pre-primary education are achieved.

- Today we are also celebrating the signature of an agreement with our long standing partners **UNICEF and WFP** who will provide technical assistance to the MGEPEWS and MEAC in areas covered by the programme.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Let me emphasise that while this new programme builds on results of previous experience, in this new phase we want to put a special emphasis on **inclusiveness and equity of children from disadvantaged households**. We all know that far too many children have no access to ECD and Pre Primary education - in fact less than 25% of the children 3 to 4. That is why we want to reach to the most vulnerable children for whom access is even more challenging, so that they have equal chances for a good start in life and the opportunity to develop their full potential.
- For small children to thrive, a number of complementary support measures need to come together in ECD: infrastructure that meets quality standards, a place where children feel protected, crucially the supply of a decent meal - and this is where our **WFP assist us as a newcomer** to our partnership.
- For an integrated strategy and efficient management of resources, it is critical to create effective linkages between the Government, local authorities and communities. It also means the reinforcing capacities at each level. The challenges of the sector will not be overcome without a strong and diverse partnership, joint planning and concerted initiatives.

- In fact, we need partnership at all levels:
 - Partnership with the **Government which** is setting the vision and is steering the sector transformation.
 - Partnerships with **development partners like UNICEF and WFP that** can provide expertise and policy advice.
 - Partnership with *Civil Society organizations* who provide formal and informal education and health services, parent associations, teachers unions, women organizations advocating for equality of access to education;
- The 2022 **Transforming Education Summit** highlighted the gaps deficits in education outcome. The Government of Namibia played an active role in pointing at these gaps during the discussions that preceded the recommendations made at this occasion. So much is relying on the quality of the interaction between the teachers, educarers and the child and the pedagogy adopted. The **transfer of ECD from the ministry** of Gender Equality Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare to the ministry of Education, Arts and Culture will be a significant step in enhancing linkages and closing gaps.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Let me close by stressing how central the sector of Education, **SDG 4, inclusive and equitable quality education for all**, is in our work with partner countries. It is no coincidence that 12% of the EU's cooperation

budget is earmarked for the Education sector. The initial target defined by our International Cooperation Commissioner Urpilainen was 10%.

- Africa has a special place in this commitment, with a 2 bn NAD programme **we just launched called ‘Regional Teacher Programme for Africa’**, to improve working conditions and quality of teaching for the teaching profession, including pre-primary teachers. It will promote innovation, equity as well as digital and green integration in teaching.

Dear friends,

- Today, we are here **back at Harmony ECD Centre**, slightly more than one year after the visit paid by our EU Commissioner Urpilainen. The ECD centre is not only hosting the kindergarten, but a Pre Primary Education classroom, a primary school is operating 100 meter away, and a high school is also in construction.
- I am pleased to witness such concrete steps of progress thanks to the dedication and hard work of all staff at the centre. I hope it will be an inspiration for the next centres to come. Much success with the project and in the construction of a bright future for the young generation of Namibians.