

**Economic Commission for Africa  
Committee on Social Policy, Poverty and Gender**  
Fifth session

Addis Ababa, 2 and 3 November 2023  
Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda\*  
Parallel sessions

**Reducing poverty through skills development:  
concept note****I. Background**

In spite of the considerable progress made over the past two decades, poverty in Africa remains unacceptably high. Based on estimates by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), 555 million people still live below the international poverty line, and most of them live in countries where access to education is limited. Although it has long been recognized that skills training plays an important role in reducing poverty and driving growth, evidence shows that there is a sustained education and skills development crisis in Africa. In 2020, nearly 64 million children were not attending primary school, including 34 million girls. Africa has the highest rates of educational exclusion in the world. More than a fifth of children of primary school age and almost 60 per cent of children aged 15–17 do not attend school.

With low levels of skills development, Africa is not industrializing quickly enough. The share of manufacturing in gross domestic product is about 11 per cent, the same level as was recorded in the 1970s. Similarly, since 1970, Africa has never contributed more than 2 per cent to global manufacturing. Furthermore, growth in the manufacturing sector is not fast enough to absorb the large number of semi-skilled workers. As a result, the informal sector is the sole alternative for the growing working-age population.

Most of the labour force in Africa works in the informal economy. It is estimated that as many as 9 in 10 rural and urban workers have informal jobs. Owing to the low skills base, most people, especially young people and women, have no choice but to join the informal economy to earn a living. Workers in the informal sector, however, earn less than workers performing the same jobs in the formal sector, a situation that directly contributes to the slow decline in poverty on the continent. Low wages and job insecurity place most of the non-poor in Africa at a high risk of slipping into poverty when shocks occur.

There is considerable international evidence demonstrating that a lack of skills leads to poverty, which in turn leads to low skills development. Skills development is essential to break the vicious circle of intergenerational transmission of poverty. Providing young people with a good foundational education and employable skills to raise productivity will enhance their

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\* E/ECA/CSPPG/5/1.



resilience to shocks and enable them to sustain the gains and prevent a relapse into poverty.

## II. Objectives

The purpose of the parallel session is to develop a common and improved understanding of the critical role that skills development can play in reducing poverty in Africa. Participants will have the opportunity to:

- (a) Develop a shared understanding of the relevance of skills development in reducing poverty;
- (b) Share good practices in skills development from their respective countries;
- (c) Discuss potential policies to enhance skills development.

## III. Structure

The provisional structure of the session is as follows:

2–2.10 p.m.	Welcome and opening remarks by the chair of the parallel session
2.10–2.25 p.m.	Presentation by a representative of the Social Policy Section of ECA
2.25–2.55 p.m.	Open discussion; question and answer session
2.55–3 p.m.	Closing remarks

## IV. Participants

Government participants from ministries responsible for education, poverty and economic planning, and also other officials and experts involved in developing policies to reduce poverty and improve skills development, will participate in the parallel session. Representatives from 20 countries are expected to attend.

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