

**STATEMENT BY THE SENIOR SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT ON SDGs AT THE HIGH LEVEL EVENT ON SOUTH SOUTH COOPERATION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AS A TOOL TO ACHIEVE THE SDGs**

**VENUE: CONFERENCE ROOM 5, UN HEADQUARTERS**

**DATE: 22<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER 2017.**

Protocols.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let me on behalf of the President of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari GCFR, the Government and People of Nigeria welcome you and also express Nigeria's sincere appreciation to the South South Cooperation for organizing this all important event.

The adoption of Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicates that early childhood development (ECD) will be a priority focus in the life span of the Post 2015 Agenda. The commitment to ECD was aptly and explicitly captured in SDG Target 4.2 which states that by 2030 countries should: 'ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early

childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education’.

The Targets of the Goal and other commitments of the SDGs underscore the fact that strengthening early childhood development is key to achieving at least seven of the SDGs, on poverty, hunger, health (including child mortality), education, gender, water and sanitation and inequality.

As have been roundly stated, accessible, inclusive, quality early childhood development for all young girls and boys have the potential to address challenges of early deprivation, which affects the growth and changing structure and function of the brain; and inequalities, which are best prevented early in life.

While the emphasis on ‘quality’ in Target 4.2 is crucial, the potential of ECD will more evidently be demonstrated in well-planned and well-resourced programmes that are ‘developmentally appropriate’ respecting children’s rights, needs, capacities, interests and ways of learning at each

stage of their early lives, as well as in programmes that recognise the interdependencies between nutrition, health, care and education.

A common challenge is that many children around the world today do not get quality education where they can learn and develop. Doing everything and anything necessary to meet this need and advance learning for our children is therefore a task that we must all commit to achieve.

As countries strive to attain the SDGs, we must encourage ourselves to continue to build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

We must at all times remind ourselves that education remains the sure route for children to navigate through in the quest to reach their full potential in life and secure a better future that we want.

On our part, Nigeria's affirmation of the SDGs Declaration has been backed with action as our Government is providing the leadership required to ensure that the Agenda delivers the intended impact. This is in view of the fact that the SDGs align with our development priorities. It is the considered view of the government that a conscientious approach to implementation will lead to substantial benefits for our people.

In this light, we have consciously been implementing carefully designed policies and programmes targeted at addressing inequalities and challenges that further limit the poor among us. The school feeding programme by the Buhari Administration is one of the notable examples in this regard.

We believe that success with the implementation of the SDGs will affect the number of our children who are unable to mark their fifth birthday as well as reduce the number of our children who are out of school and increase the proportion of those who complete a cycle of basic education. We can make the same case for those who have adequate nutrition and

shelter as well as for those whose livelihoods have been severely affected by the damage to our environment.

As reports have shown over the past decades, South-South cooperation has increasingly demonstrated their contribution to development results through a variety of flexible cooperation modalities, including knowledge exchanges, technology transfers, financing, peer support, and neighbourhood initiatives, as well as countries forming common development agendas and seeking collective solutions. These have remained best practices and worthy of note.

In the current quest to achieve the SDGs, we must continue to abide by the tenets of the Cooperation and demonstrate strong commitments. ***The onus is on us and we cannot afford to fail.***

I thank you all for your kind attention.

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Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs.**