Like the rest of the world, Madagascar has been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts of which have been felt at both the economic and social levels. Indeed, the country's economic situation has become more challenging as a result of this global health crisis, with poverty rising sharply, public investments contracting significantly, and economic activity declining in key sectors, including tourism, transport, and textiles. The economic downturn has led to job losses and to declining incomes for workers in both the formal and informal sectors.

The job losses have further weakened the already limited financial capacity of parents and guardians to provide for the education of their children. This, in turn, exacerbates the crises in the learning sector that had already been reeling from the effects of prolonged school closures. If Madagascar is to meet the minimum requirements in reading and mathematics, reforms will have to be implemented as a matter of urgency. These challenges have been further exacerbated by the pandemic and need to be met with a special commitment to the efficient implementation of sector policies and with a determination to strengthen the resilience of the system to respond to the increasing need for access to quality education for all children.

Given the economic and social consequences of the health crisis, the Government of Madagascar has defined a number of urgent response strategies through its Emergency Multisectoral Plan, which provides for targeted timely measures to preserve jobs, reduce the most pressing financial burdens on businesses, and attract and increase private investments in strategic areas.

Furthermore, each year Madagascar is buffeted by recurring hazards that serve only to heighten the impact of the pandemic. A Post-Cyclone Recovery Plan has therefore been developed to provide short-term responses, including support for innovative projects that generate direct benefits for the sectors, especially those involved in social activities, that have been seriously affected (over 438,000 victims, more than 424,000 students out of school, over 650,000 people deprived of health care, and more than 400,000 hectares of crops flooded, etc.).

Strengthening human capital is one of the main pillars of Madagascar's development strategy and is included among the State's commitments in the implementation of the Madagascar Emergency Plan. Indeed, while economic development has always been predicated on the production of material goods, the importance of the knowledge economy has become a linchpin of the global economy.

Because of its essential role in the development of skills and talents, let alone in income generation and

economic growth, education is of the utmost importance. By allocating a significant share of its budget to education, Madagascar demonstrates its alignment with this vision. Based on the Global Education Policy Dashboard (GEPD), which assesses education financing on a five-point scale, Madagascar's education expenditure of over 5 percent of its GDP earns the country a score of 4.3.

The road ahead still seems long but as a group and with the support of all stakeholders, we will take up the challenge together!