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COMMONWEALTH
EDUCATION REPORT 2023

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COMMONWEALTH
EDUCATION REPORT 2023

The Commonwealth, comprising 56 countries and a population of 2.5 billion, is a global network that collaborates to advance prosperity, democracy, and peace. Often referred to as a 'family of nations', it encompasses diverse geographical regions, religions, and cultures. The Commonwealth accounts for over 20 per cent of global trade and represents one-third of the world's population. Consequently, it presents extensive opportunities for commerce and investment, as well as significant challenges for sustainable development on a global scale.

Against this backdrop, Commonwealth Business Communications publishes a series of reference books to help foster sustainable economic, social and environmental development across the Commonwealth. We are delighted to bring to you our latest publication: **The Commonwealth Education Report 2023**.

Education serves as the cornerstone of development and progress. Beyond its role as a fundamental human right, it carries the weight of shaping a better society by instilling values and behaviours that promote positive change. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted the most severe disruption to education systems in recent memory. It has exacerbated existing inequalities in accessing educational programmes and hindered the advancement of global development goals.

The ramifications of the pandemic have propelled our reliance on digital tools and driven innovation within education systems whilst impacting children's and educators' mental health and exposing them to increasing challenges. As a result, individual governments bear a significant responsibility in formulating new strategies to address this unprecedented crisis.

In light of these considerations, it is crucial to encourage educators and policymakers to reassess best practices and promote equal opportunities across the Commonwealth.

As we reshape education in response to emerging technologies and policies, **The Commonwealth Education Report 2023** focuses on solutions that can drive widespread change, equipping young people with the necessary skills to thrive in future crises. This report offers an enlightening perspective on the ongoing educational challenges, featuring contributions from leading experts in the field. Their collective wisdom sheds light on how Commonwealth nations can recover from the pandemic and achieve an inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

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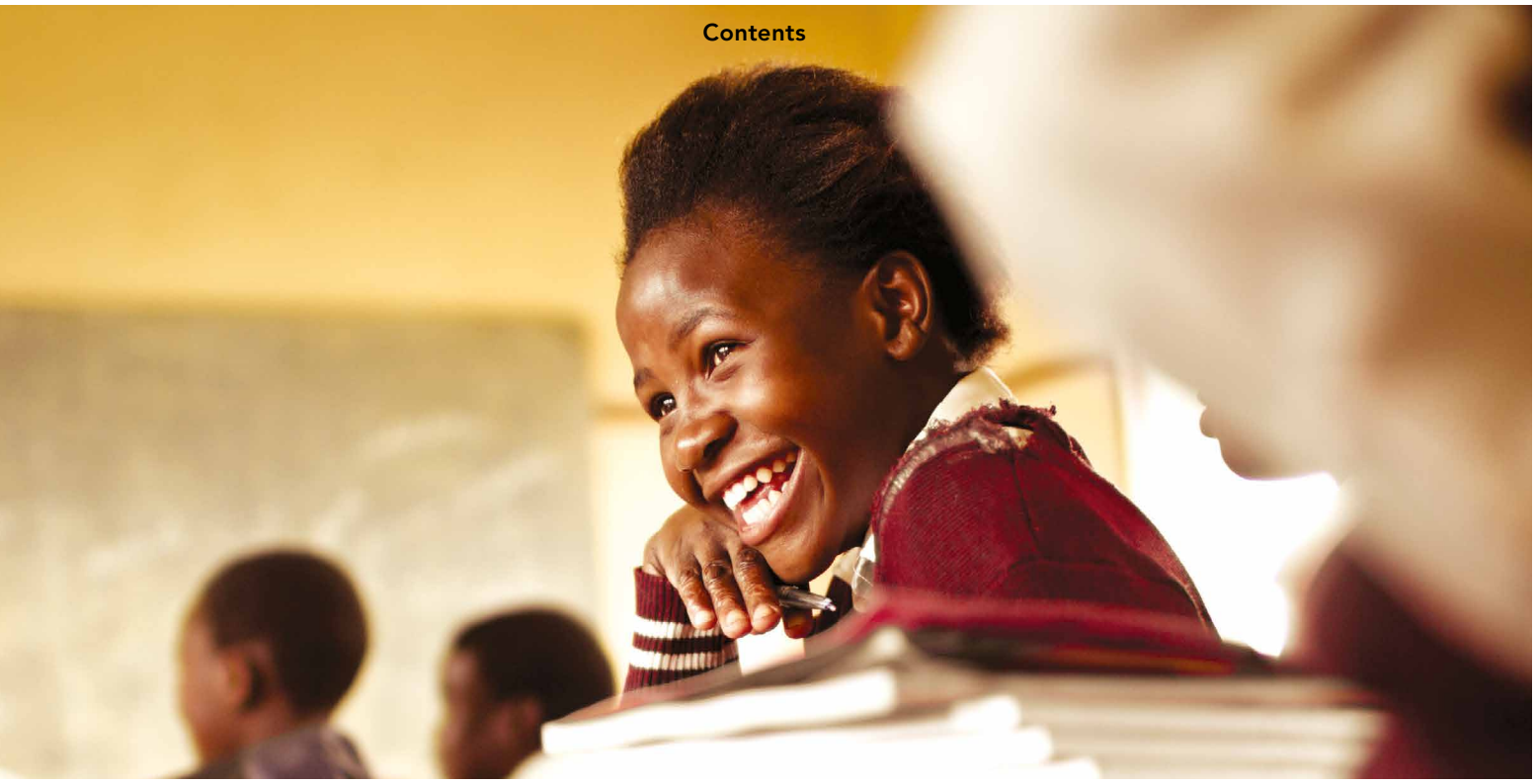

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FUTURE OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL ™

INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

UKZN INSPIRING GREATNESS

Nestled amidst the picturesque landscapes of KwaZulu-Natal, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) stands tall as a beacon of African scholarship. With five sprawling campuses, UKZN has carved a name for itself as one of the top universities in South Africa and, indeed, the African continent.

Since its formation in 2004 through the merger of the University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville, UKZN has grown to become the most transformed university in the country. The student body at UKZN is a true reflection of South Africa's diverse demographics, thanks to the university's steadfast commitment to diversity and inclusiveness.

Despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, UKZN has continued to attract a growing number of international students. In 2022, the university had approximately 1500 international students enrolled, a testament to its reputation as a premier institution of African scholarship.

UKZN's commitment to student success extends beyond academics, as the university is responsive to the needs of its students and the communities around it.

Over the years, UKZN has made a lasting impact on the lives of countless students from underprivileged backgrounds, helping them progress to prominent roles in both the private and public sectors. The university provides comprehensive financial aid and support, including social and psychological assistance, to help these students succeed in their studies.

UKZN is a research-led institution and home to some of the world's leading researchers in various fields. The university's researchers continue to produce groundbreaking work that pushes the boundaries of knowledge and influences the world.

UKZN researchers have been at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19, producing research that has shaped the global response to the pandemic.

The university's research prowess has earned it international recognition.

In the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) research output of 2020, the University outperformed all other South African institutions.

In 2021, UKZN had more than 300 National Research Foundation-rated (NRF-rated) researchers, including three A1 and five A2 NRF-rated researchers and six B1, 19 B2 and 17 B3 NRF-rated researchers. In the C-category,

INSPIRING GREATNESS

the University had 34 C1, 119 C2 and 64 C3 NRF-rated researchers, while there was one P1-rated researcher and 39 Y-rated researchers.

The University's dedication to excellence has not gone unnoticed, as it continued to be ranked among the top four universities in South Africa by prestigious international rankings such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and the Centre for World University Rankings. In 2022, the Times Higher Education rankings placed UKZN fourth in South Africa and among the top 500 universities in the world.

In addition to its academic achievements, UKZN is also committed to community engagement, as it runs several programmes that target underprivileged communities. The university has rolled out over 1200 community outreach projects to date, reaching over 500,000 beneficiaries and inspiring servant citizenry.

UKZN's facilities are second to none, as it boasts world-class research and teaching, including state-of-the-art lecture halls, computer labs, and libraries.

The university's library provides students access to over 1.4 million print and electronic resources, including journals, books, theses, reports, audio-visual materials, and electronic databases.

UKZN has 68 research centres and units across four colleges: the College of Humanities; College of Law and Management Studies; College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science; and College of Health Sciences. Some of the top research centres and units include the African Centre for Crop Improvement, African Centre for Food Security, Astrophysics Research Centre, National Institute for Theoretical and Computational Science (NITheCS), Aerospace Systems Research Institute, Centre for Water Resources Research, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Research and Development, Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa, African Health Research Institute, Centre for Rural Health, KZN Research Innovation & Sequencing Platform, Centre for Creative Arts, DST-NRF Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Centre for African Literary Studies, Sinomlando Centre for oral history and Memory in Africa, Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research, Health Economics and HIV and AIDS Research Division (HEARD), and the recently established Aerotropolis Institute Africa (AIA). □

"UKZN CONTINUES TO BE RANKED AMONG THE TOP FOUR UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA."

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INTRODUCTION

A Bold Agenda to Transform Education

Stefania Giannini,
Assistant Director-General
for Education,
UNESCO

The nature of crisis today calls for transformative thinking and action on a global scale. The combined impact of climate change, digital technologies, COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine are leading to disruptions on a scale that has not been experienced in such a collective manner in decades. Already insufficient and unequal progress towards the UN's Agenda for Sustainable Development has gone into reverse. There are no quick-fix answers, but in the face of rising uncertainty, the need to strengthen resilience and prioritise what gives individuals the knowledge, mindsets and skills to chart more sustainable futures has taken on heightened urgency.

This conviction was the impetus for the Transforming Education Summit, convened by the UN Secretary-General in September 2022. For the first time, education was brought to the forefront of the political stage, with 133 countries committing to reboot and transform their learning systems. This culmination of national consultations brought together leaders, policy-makers, teachers, students, civil society and other partners to strike a new social contract for education – one that responds to the learning crisis and steers societies in a more sustainable and just direction. Along this journey, UNESCO hosted a pre-Summit attended by 154 education ministers and vice-ministers that provided an inclusive forum to agree on key levers to transform education, bringing youth to the forefront as leading actors in this process.

"The need to strengthen resilience and prioritise what gives individuals the knowledge, mindsets and skills to chart more sustainable futures has taken on heightened urgency."

"Making education fit for purpose involves preparing children and youth to navigate the green and digital transitions."

The result is that we have political capital, national commitments that strike common ground and partnerships for change. Our analysis of national commitments finds that 75 per cent of countries reference measures to offset the costs of education for economically vulnerable communities. Three-quarters underline the importance of gender-sensitive education policies. Some 80 per cent acknowledge in-service training and professional development as key determinants of teacher motivation and retention. Rethinking curricula content and methods, with more emphasis on competency-based and interdisciplinary approaches, was cited in more than 80 per cent of statements. —a third of countries committed to integrating climate-change education into curricula. Finally, digital learning was referenced in 80 per cent of commitments, covering broadband internet connectivity and the extension of open, free, and curriculum-aligned digital resources and platforms.

The international community rallied around six global initiatives that encompass the major educational challenges covered in these national commitments and have the potential to carry transformation to scale. The coalition on foundational learning, led by six partners, including UNESCO, commits to halving the global share of ten-year-old children unable to read and understand a simple text by 2030. Currently, this figure stands at 7 out of 10 globally. To get there, policies focus on enrolling all children and keeping them in school, supporting teachers and increasing access to remedial and catch-up learning as well as to health, nutrition and psycho-social well-being. Such holistic approaches are vital in addressing the learning crisis.

Beyond the foundations, making education fit for purpose involves preparing children and youth to navigate the green and digital transitions. UNESCO's research finds that out of 100 countries, half make no mention of climate change in their national curriculum, while close to 70 per cent of teachers do not feel prepared to teach about climate change. Close to 500 million students found themselves excluded from learning during the COVID-19

"There can be no breakthroughs without investing more, more equitably and more efficiently in education – both through higher domestic spending and increased official development assistance."

pandemic because they lacked access to devices and connectivity. Two specific initiatives seek to respond to these challenges. The Greening Education Partnership initiated by UNESCO aims to make every learner climate-ready, with a set of goals on greening schools, teaching, curricula and communities. It held its inaugural meeting during COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, with strong support from the UK. Expanding on lessons learned during the pandemic, UNESCO is also co-leading the Gateways to Public Digital Learning initiative, which aims to improve access to high-quality curriculum-aligned digital education content through open and accessible national learning platforms.

Commitments were also made to catalyse transformative actions for gender equality and to do justice to the staggering 222 million children and youth affected by the crisis whose education is on the line.

All these calls for action rely on raising the status of the teaching profession, ensuring they have decent working conditions and continuous training opportunities to transform how they teach. No technology can replace them. But the profession is in crisis, failing to attract and keep new recruits. The Secretary-General's vision statement coming out of the Summit recognises teachers as the backbone of all good education systems and highlights the need for fundamental change in how societies view and value them.

There can be no breakthroughs without investing more, more equitably and more efficiently in education – both through higher domestic spending and increased official development assistance. One in three countries spend less than 4 per cent of their GDP and less than 15 per cent of their budget on education. The renewed Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) global co-operation mechanism will focus on improving financing for education, notably by facilitating a dialogue with finance ministries.

To be transformative, education has to be a lifelong societal project. UNESCO spearheaded transformative thinking and commitments through major world conferences in 2022 on higher education, adult learning and early childhood care and education. While higher education is strategic for achieving all the SDGs, investing in the early years is the most effective way to reduce inequalities from the start and get children ready for school. At the World Conference organised in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in November 2022, countries committed to invest at least 10 per cent of total education spending on pre-primary education and to ensure that salaries and working conditions of pre-school personnel are at least on par with those of primary education teachers.

Now success will depend on our ability to rapidly translate these commitments into tangible gains. As an international community, our challenge is to keep education high on the political agenda in the lead-up to the SDG Summit in September 2023 and to ensure it is reflected in the intergovernmental outcome of the 2024 Summit for the Future. The G20 in India will be a decisive milestone for demonstrating the centrality of education for building more sustainable and innovative economies. Connecting all these key moments, we need to support the youth-led global movement for education that played such a forceful role throughout the UN Summit. As the youth stated in their Declaration: "If we are to survive and thrive in planetary peace and righteous equality, then education is our primary source of hope and resolution."

Let us take our cue from this and act together, with and for youth, to fulfil this fundamental human right, the bedrock of more sustainable futures ■

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Did you know that the UFS:

- Is situated on three beautiful, diverse campuses – two in **Bloemfontein** and one near **Qwaqwa** in the Eastern Free State, each with its own unique character and focus areas.
- Empowers vulnerable mountain communities with uplifting environmental, social and economic knowledge through its internationally acclaimed **Afromontane Research Unit**, situated on its Qwaqwa Campus in the Eastern Free State.
- Conducts groundbreaking research in international conflict and terrorism in its **Department of Political Studies and Governance.**
- Hosts a **Crop Research Platform in its Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences** to promote sustainable agriculture and all crop-related research and improve the relationship between scientists, producers and the agriculture sector.
- Is the first and only university in South Africa that has been issued and granted a research permit for the pharmacological assessment of the healing qualities of cannabis as part of its mission to strengthen and expand **Indigenous Knowledge Systems**.

ONE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S **TOP 9 UNIVERSITIES**
(2023 Times Higher Education World University Rankings)

- Is undertaking state-of-the-art robotics research in its **Faculty of Health Sciences**, supplementing the globally acclaimed work in the fields of Cancer Research, Cardiothoracic Surgery and Medical Simulation Technology Training already undertaken in this faculty.
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VISION **130** – ***ushering in a bright future*** *for the University of the Free State*

At the University of the **Free** State we have a clear vision of where we want to be within the next few years, leading up to the year 2034, when the university will be 130 years old. This vision is encapsulated in our **Vision 130**, which expresses our intent and commitment to be acknowledged by our peers and society as a top-tier university in South Africa, ranked among the best in the world.

Equally important to this clear vision is our strategy for how to turn vision into reality. We are focused on consistently renewing and reimagining ourselves in order to effectively impact the communities that surround us. And we aim to do this by building on our enduring strengths and successes, established and honed since our inception in 1904. We are proud of our consistent growth in student success, brought about by a holistic approach to student development, our continued contribution to scarce skills areas in our country and our region, and our increasing curricular relevance and graduate employability. We are consistently improving our research productivity and expanding our number of leading researchers, with distinctive research areas continuously developing.

We are setting our sights and **strategy** high, knowing that our institution possesses the necessary human capital, resilience, and innovation to grow from strength to strength. With our final destination firmly in focus, we are guided by shining beacons – in the form of the values that we as a university community subscribe to and cherish. Excellence, Innovation and Impact, Accountability, Care, Social Justice, and Sustainability will always shape and inform our institutional culture and provide a framework for our actions and decisions.

The future higher education landscape will be characterised by unprecedented change, brought about by technological advancement, increased internationalisation, and a renewed focus on the need to actively and sustainably advance societies around the globe.

It is a future we are boldly and confidently approaching. Because we are preparing for it today.

VISION 130
Renew and Reimagine for 2034

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA
UFS

Transforming Education: The Road Ahead

"We must aim higher, we must reimagine and transform education so that learning effectively empowers individuals and societies to both reshape the present and lead us to a more dynamic, just, sustainable, resilient, and peaceful future."

Leonardo Garnier,
Special Adviser for Transforming Education Summit,
UN Secretary General

Education in the world is facing a triple crisis. It is a crisis of equity and inclusion, as millions are out of school; a crisis of quality, as many of those who are in school are not even learning the basics; and a crisis of relevance, as many educational systems are not equipping the new generations with the values, knowledge, and skills they need to be productive and active citizens in today's complex and rapidly changing world. On top of that, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a terrible blow to educational systems all over the world.

Our first challenge, of course, is that of urgently recovering from the learning losses inflicted by the pandemic, but we cannot just go back to what we had before the pandemic. We must aim higher, we must reimagine and transform education so that learning effectively empowers individuals and societies to both reshape the present and lead us to a more dynamic, just, sustainable, resilient, and peaceful future.

As the Delors Report states, a truly transformative education must prepare learners in four different, but equally important, capacities.

First, they must learn to learn. This implies the ability to read and write, to identify, understand, and communicate clearly and effectively; mathematic, scientific, and digital knowledge and skills; and the curiosity, the creativity, and the capacity for critical and inquisitive thinking.

Second, they must learn to do. As the world of work undergoes a rapid and drastic change, education must prepare learners for the challenges of the future – including the green, the digital and the care economy – offering them life-long learning opportunities.

Third, they must learn to live together. In an increasingly unequal world, with rising tensions, fraying trust and a menacing environmental crisis, students must learn to live better with each other and with nature. This has to do with ethics, equality, and justice; with civic responsibility, democracy, and human rights; with the respect and enjoyment of human diversity and gender equality; with developing emotional skills, empathy, and kindness; and with our commitment as global citizens with the goals of a confronting poverty and inequality and promoting a more sustainable development.

Finally, they must learn to be. The deepest purpose of education is that of instilling in learners the values and capacities to lead a meaningful life, to enjoy that life, and to live it fully and well. Education must expand every learner´s potential for creativity and innovation; their capacity to enjoy and express themselves through the arts; their awareness of history and the diversity of cultures; and their disposition for leading a healthy life, to practice physical activities, games, and sports.

To achieve these higher purposes of education, countries need, of course, to transform both their curricula and the pedagogical strategies. But there is a need for significant transformations in three critical aspects of the education process.

"The deepest purpose of education is that of instilling in learners the values and capacities to lead a meaningful life, to enjoy that life, and to live it fully and well."

"Investing in education is a moral and political imperative but, once we understand that the cost of not financing education is much higher than the cost of financing it, it also becomes an economic imperative."

Schools. Education does not happen in a vacuum. To successfully confront the crisis of equity we face in education, schools must be transformed into safe, healthy, inclusive, and stimulating learning places. Schools must not exclude anybody; they should accept everyone and make them feel welcome, cared for, protected, stimulated, and supported in their learning needs and according to their own capacities. Schools must become the space and time of human integration, of coming together in our rich human diversity, without mockery, abuse, aggression or discrimination of any kind.

Teachers. To transform education, teachers must transform themselves. They must become facilitators and guides in their students' comprehension of complex realities. They need to be trained and empowered to transcend from passive to active, from vertical and unidirectional to collaborative. They must promote learning based on experience, enquiry, and curiosity; develop the capacity, the joy and discipline for problem-solving. In turn, teachers deserve decent working conditions, continuous professional development, enhanced status, and wages comparable with professions requiring similar levels of qualifications.

Learning resources. If harnessed properly, the digital revolution could be one of the most powerful tools for ensuring quality education for all and transforming the way teachers teach, and learners learn. But if not – as we have seen during the pandemic – it could exacerbate inequalities and undermine learning outcomes. We face three difficult challenges: access to adequate internet connectivity and equipment for all teachers and learners; their capacity to use digital resources; and robust and open public digital learning platforms and content so that digital learning resources are effectively treated as global public and common goods.

As obvious as it is, all this requires significant investments, but the fact remains; we are currently not investing enough in education. Educational investment in the world is not only insufficient, but terribly unequal. Almost two-thirds of global investment in education occur in high-income countries, which account for 10 per cent of the world's children. At the same time, lower-middle-income countries account for 8 per cent of global investment in education but must serve 50 per cent of the world's children; and low-income countries try to educate 25 per cent of the world's children with only 0.6 per cent of global investment in education. This translates into the global reproduction of educational inequality. By 2020, per capita spending in education was over $8000 per year in high-income countries, about $1000 in upper-middle-income countries, only $300 in lower-middle-income countries and merely $50 per year in low-income countries. That is one dollar per week per school-age person. You do not have to be an expert to understand what this means.

These inequalities also occur within countries; where resources invested in education do not reach those who need them the most: distant rural areas, marginal urban neighbourhoods, indigenous communities, and other vulnerable sectors.

In low- and lower-middle-income countries, the challenge of educational investment is so large that it can only be solved if the national efforts are substantially complemented by international co-operation. In most countries, however, educational investment must be financed with national resources.

Resources for education cannot be seen as a mere consumption expenditure but as a crucial long-term investment. Investing in education is a moral and political imperative, but once we understand that the cost of not financing education is much higher than the cost of financing it, it also becomes an economic imperative.

Most countries need to protect and increase the portion of GDP and public expenditure they devote to education, but that is not enough; they must also increase the real investment per person. This requires a progressive revamping of existing tax systems, increasing the proportion of taxes to GDP, and protecting the level of educational investment. As outlined in "Our Common Agenda", a New Global Deal is needed to tackle the debt crisis and to allow developing countries to invest more in people, avoiding perverse "race to the bottom" tax strategies.

We must also invest more equitably in education both in geographical terms, as well as along socioeconomic lines, making sure that families living in poverty or in rural areas, as well as all those groups and sectors usually discriminated against in their access to these opportunities, such as women and girls, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, and those in protracted crises, will have access to the opportunities offered by high-quality public education.

Finally, we must invest more efficiently in education, making sure increased resources effectively result in both wider access and better learning outcomes.

This will take vision – long-term vision over short-term restrictions – but, especially, this will require the emergence of a strong and youth-led public movement for the transformation of education. ■

POLICY & FINANCING

Educating Through Covid – a New Zealand Minister's Perspective

Chris Hipkins,
Prime Minister,
Government of New Zealand

I was New Zealand's Minister of Education from 2018 to 2023, and Minister for COVID-19 Response for most of the last two and a half years. In January 2023, I was honoured by my colleagues with being appointed New Zealand's 41st Prime Minister to succeed Jacinda Arden, following her resignation.

I do not need to look up when we had our first COVID-19 case. It was 28 February 2020.

From that date, the life of every New Zealander changed. On 19 March 2020, we closed our borders. On 25 March 2020, the entire nation went into isolation. We did not emerge from various levels of lockdown and restrictions until 2 December 2021, and our borders did not fully reopen until July 2022.

Our education services remained open for online learning during the entire pandemic. In-person learning was also provided at our Alert Level 3 for the children of essential workers and those who could not provide home education.

As an immediate response, we set up Home Learning Papa Kāinga TV to keep learners engaged and to support parents during lockdown. We distributed some 49,000 digital devices, and allocated around 41,000 internet connections, so students could connect to online learning from their school. We also supplied 556,000 education hardpacks so students could continue learning. Over 8000 air cleaners were installed to improve school ventilation, and, at one stage, we were supplying between 20,000- 30,000 masks a week to students and school staff.

We also funded teachers to learn how to conduct classes on Zoom and to help all schools set up online or hybrid learning. We increased relief teacher funding and sick leave entitlements for COVID-19 and winter illness. We supported schools to hire more people

// Our education services remained open for online learning during the entire pandemic."

with subject matter expertise, but who were not qualified teachers, to teach in our classrooms.

Our larger population areas of Waikato and Auckland were the hardest hit by the pandemic and especially through the Delta outbreak in August 2021, but all schools and early learning services were supported throughout with health and safety guidance.

As the nature of the pandemic changed, we changed with it. Since 17 November 2021, all students have been able to attend onsite. Under our COVID-19 Protection Framework settings, all schools were open with students and staff on site and the same public health measures remaining in place: good hygiene and cleaning; vaccination requirements for workers (paid and unpaid); maintaining good ventilation; and, of course, people staying at home if they are unwell.

Now that New Zealand's borders are fully open, we have embarked on a NZ$24 million campaign to recruit up to 1000 more teachers from both domestic and international sources.

Reaching our very high (over 90 per cent) vaccination rate gave us the confidence to keep education services open. As did the results of our 'go hard and go early' strategy of total or partial lockdowns, to help stamp out or slow transmission. In fact, our services ended up having one of the lowest number of closure days globally between January 2020 and May 2021.

Responding to the longer-term impacts

We continue to be focused on mitigating the medium and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on our children and young people's education and their futures.

Recently, we announced a NZ$20 million package to provide more support for our middle and senior-level students with additional teaching, mentoring, and tutoring to help them catch up. These measures target schools with students that we know are likely to need help the most. We have also increased summer school places in Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu,[1] our major online learning school, to help students obtain credits missed during the academic year.

Some of our students who have disengaged from education over the last few years have not yet returned. To encourage them to do so, we have targeted NZ$80 million in additional funding to raise attendance and to help children stay in learning. We have also increased places in one of our largest skills training programmes by 1000 people, raised the age limit from 18 to 24, and lowered the entry qualifications. These changes aim to encourage people with few, or no, qualifications back into education, training and employment.

One thing we did not anticipate was the high level of innovation that COVID-19 spurred on in our schools regarding new ways of teaching and learning, student engagement, and school and parent co-operation.

During this period, for example, 70 per cent of our school leaders explicitly prioritised student well-being over academic learning, and over 90 per cent

increased or improved communications to students and whānau.[2]

Some schools set up blogs and mental and physical health activities for staff and students visible anywhere, anytime. Others reframed reporting to parents to better celebrate children and their success. Some allowed parents to provide information on their needs and then contacted food banks or health services to support them. Others redid timetables to allow students to catch up, introduced mindfulness, skill and kindness circles, or reduced lesson times. Some engaged tertiary providers to give their young people a taste of what they could do if they continued with their schooling.

The impact on the international education sector

New Zealand's international education sector took a huge hit from the COVID-19 lockdown. Prior to that, this sector was worth an estimated NZ$5 billion to New Zealand. In 2018, we had around 117,250 international students, including many from the Commonwealth. But, by October 2022, this number had shrunk to around 17,000 such students.

The New Zealand Government remains strongly committed to international education. The benefits of international education accrue widely to societies and the international community in both the short and long term. We recognise the social, cultural, and economic benefits of diverse international students in our classrooms and communities.

We invested over NZD$50 million to stabilise the international sector to help prepare for the return of students. We have also refreshed our International Education Strategy to create a more innovative, resilient and sustainable sector for the future.

International students are beginning to return. They are being enthusiastically welcomed by communities, schools and tertiary providers throughout Aotearoa. Indeed, since August 2022, there have

"We are building an international education sector that is stronger than before the pandemic and learning from our shared experiences."

been over 27,000 visa applications from students seeking to study here. We have a way to go to rebuild the sector. But the early signs are encouraging.

We are very keen to encourage more international students to come to New Zealand, including those from our Commonwealth and Pacific country partners. And, of course, our border opening also means opportunities for New Zealanders to study abroad, live and learn in other countries, and that is an important part of our international education strategy too.

We are building an international education sector that is stronger than before the pandemic and learning from our shared experiences. COVID-19 showed us the importance of having a sustainable and resilient international education sector with a diverse range of innovative products and services. The pandemic also accelerated innovation, which we can now build on together.

Continuing strategic reform in education

One prior decision which helped us through the worst of the pandemic was the mahi (work) we put in to remodel our Ministry of Education to move more support and resources closer to our educators. As a result, the funding of creative ideas happened much faster than before. Post-peak COVID-19, we are working to spread these innovative practices more widely. We want the best to become the norm, so more learners can benefit.

A dilemma we faced during the pandemic was whether to continue with the extensive education change programme we began in 2018.

Our educators and education agency staff were exhausted and under huge strain. But we were all very aware that the pandemic, whilst exacerbating existing inequities in our education system, did not create them. They had been there for some time. The conclusion we came to was that not addressing them would only make them worse.

We did shift some timings but went ahead with many of the most important changes.

So, from 2023, all schools will receive a new form of equity funding, taking into account the extent to which learners' socio-economic and other circumstances indicate their likelihood of achieving. Also, from 2023, for the first time, every student will learn our nation's history. This will include Māori history as the foundational and continuous history of Aotearoa, the diverse histories of those who have made Aotearoa their home, and the colonisation and settlement which have been central to our history for the past 200 years.

The groundwork for these changes, and others such as more advisory support for school leaders, was done during the pandemic.

The pandemic has resulted in a loss of opportunities for some of our most disadvantaged learners in particular. Early indications are most students have lost at least months of learning, while some believe it is greater than that. A few are disconnected and disaffected. Clearly, we will need, as will every nation, to pay close attention to these issues in the coming years.

But I am confident, given what our educators, parents and students achieved at peak pandemic, that we can do this. Despite COVID-19, I am incredibly optimistic and excited for the future of education in Aotearoa New Zealand. ■

1. Formerly known as The Correspondence School, Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu is New Zealand's largest school, providing education programmes to more than 23,000 students every year.

2. "Whanau is often translated as 'family', but its meaning is more complex. It includes extended family (aunts, uncles , cousins, caregivers, grandparents and in-laws, as well as physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions", In Te Ara-The Encyclopedia of New Zealand.

Choose UP to make a difference

As part of the diverse University of Pretoria community, our staff, students and external partners are empowered to make today matter in order to create the future we want.

Research that matters

At UP we dedicate ourselves to research that matters. As an African global university, we take a future-focused approach to research aimed at finding African solutions to global concerns.

Grounded in strong disciplines, the UP approach to research is transdisciplinary, with vibrant research groups working across the traditional disciplinary boundaries to develop new knowledge that translates into innovative answers to the world's most pressing concerns.

Four dedicated transdisciplinary research platforms host and develop research programmes in collaboration with the University, government and industry partners.

These are:

- **Future Africa**, where Pan-African thought leadership is developed around the complex problems represented by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- **The Javett-UP Art Centre**, which drives transdisciplinary research anchored in the art of Africa;
- **Engineering 4.0**, which operates on the frontier of research around smart cities and smart transportation; and
- **Innovation Africa @UP**, which focuses on smart, sustainable and precision agriculture to ensure food security.

Partnership is a fundamental underpinning of the University's approach to research. UP collaborates with over 3,000 institutions and has forged 223 international partnerships across 70 countries and six continents.

The University hosts the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Centre of Excellence in Food Security in collaboration with the University of Ghana, Legon, and the University of Nairobi. We are the only university in Africa that is part of the University Social Responsibility Network. Furthermore, we are an invited member of the prestigious Worldwide Universities Network (WUN), a global higher education network of 24 leading comprehensive research universities.

Thanks to the University's extensive international networks, our scholars are part of the global discourse in their study areas, and are provided with opportunities for stimulating exchanges and collaboration that enhances the impact of their work beyond South Africa and Africa into the larger global arena.



Learning and teaching for the future

At UP, student success is everyone's business. Our hybrid flipped-learning model – what we refer to as teaching and learning THE UP WAY – is built around a definition of success that sees our graduates as future fit and work ready. We have developed a University-wide student success awareness initiative called FLY@UP, which stands for The Finish Line is Yours at the University of Pretoria. FLY@UP (and the equivalent for postgraduate students, FLYHigher@UP) creates awareness among students of the extensive menu of campus resources available to support their success – in fact, 93 per cent of our full-time undergraduate students pass their exams.

Curriculum transformation is an ongoing process at the University of Pretoria to ensure the relevance of our 1,175 academic programmes, but also to ensure a just learning space. Through high-quality teaching and learning and relevant curricula, we aim to produce graduates who are critical thinkers and problem-solvers, team players and collaborators, who are adaptable and resilient, culturally aware and ethical.

Community engagement is an integral part of our programmes, providing students with opportunities to identify real-life problems and apply their knowledge to solving them, thus preparing them to become responsible citizens.

Internationally recognised for excellence

A University's excellence and global impact is demonstrated by how it compares with other universities in the world, as measured by various ranking systems. Performing well in the international rankings is not an end in itself for the University. Rather, it is confirmation that we are on the right track when it comes to pursuing our goals, which include strengthening the University's international profile and having an impact on society.

The University of Pretoria was ranked joint second in South Africa and joint third in Africa among 1,406 universities that participated in the 2022 Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings. The Impact Rankings are a way to gauge a higher education institution's performance on the international stage in terms of the widely adopted SDGs. According to the recently released 2023 QS World University Rankings by Subject, the University of Pretoria ranks among the top 500 worldwide in all five broad subject areas in which institutions were ranked, namely Arts & Humanities, Engineering & Technology, Life Sciences & Medicine, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences & Management. In two of these, namely Engineering & Technology and Social Sciences & Management, the University of Pretoria was ranked among the top 300 universities in the world.

As far as specific disciplines are concerned, UP was ranked first in South Africa for Chemical, Electrical & Electronic as well as Mechanical Engineering, Veterinary Sciences, Mathematics, Accounting & Finance, Economics & Econometrics, and Law.

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Can the Education Sector Fiddle while the Planet Burns?

Professor Asha Kanwar,
President and CEO,
Commonwealth of Learning

Four of the top carbon-emitting countries in the world are Commonwealth Member States, and some of the world's lowest emitters, the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), are also in the Commonwealth. But unprecedented floods, droughts, heatwaves and natural disasters are common to all. However, many small states are the most vulnerable, facing an existential threat. The urgency of the crisis requires urgent action from all stakeholders, including the education sector.

The climate crisis has a major impact on education. The recent cyclone in Mozambique and Malawi disrupted education, destroying entire schools, leading to thousands of displaced students. Critical data and student records were wiped out entirely, leading to the collapse of systems.

The education sector also contributes to both direct and indirect emissions, causing environmental degradation. Komatsu and Rappleye (2018)[1] observed that countries with "better" education tended to have more detrimental impacts on climate change. While education can lead to development, we must remember that economic development tends to be associated with higher rates of construction, consumption, and energy use. As Bill Gates (2021)[2] points out, cement, steel and plastic, which are essential for construction, are the biggest emitters of carbon. More brick-and-mortar institutions could add to the growing carbon footprint of the education sector.

Few countries are preparing present and future generations with the knowledge, skills and behaviours

"While education can lead to development, we must remember that economic development tends to be associated with higher rates of construction, consumption, and energy use."

required to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. How can the education sector play a more proactive role, and what do the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) indicate? The NDC is a country's strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and is prepared every five years by environment ministries. While 79 per cent of the Commonwealth countries reference education in their NDC, only 29 per cent refer to climate change education as a strategy. (COL, 2022, pp. 9-10)[3]. Some Commonwealth countries have taken specific actions: Antigua and Barbuda, the Maldives and St. Lucia have 'green school' initiatives, the UK and Vanuatu propose to develop green skills through climate change education (COL, 2022, p. 11) and Guyana Environmental Protection Agency seeks to mainstream climate change education into the country's technical and vocational training institutions. (COL, 2022, pp. 10-11).

In the past three decades, several initiatives have emerged to promote sustainability in higher education. As Caird and Roy (2019)[4] sum up, these are related to greening the campus, greening the curriculum and using distance and online learning. For example, the Australian National University has strategies in place to green up the campus and reduce emissions through adopting renewable energy and promoting resource conservation. Canada's public colleges and institutes have pledged to contribute to the country's aspiration of achieving Net Zero emissions by 2050. They will achieve this by reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing the reliability of on-campus systems and providing opportunities for community leadership and integration with teaching and learning (Colleges and Institutes Canada, 2021).[5]

How can distance and online learning contribute to reducing emissions? The Open University assessed the environmental impacts of different modes of delivery in higher education in the UK. The findings showed that online and blended ICT-enhanced distance teaching models had significantly lower environmental impacts than face-to-face teaching modes (Caird et al. 2013;[6] Caird et al. 2015).[7] The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) conducted a similar study in Botswana, which found that the average carbon footprint of distance learning students is nearly three times lower than that of their campus counterparts. Within the overall carbon footprint, emissions from travel were by far the greatest contributor to this disparity. This suggests that distance or blended modes can decrease emissions by reducing face-to-face contact hours.

COL's experience shows that by leveraging technology for learning, we can reach larger numbers at speed, scale and lower costs. In addition to increasing distance learning, technology is known to address issues of equity by reaching the most marginalised, remote and rural communities, persons with disabilities as well as women and girls.

It is estimated that more than 11 million girls will not return to school following the pandemic. For example,

"Climate change education needs to affect a paradigm shift from prioritising individual achievement to accomplishment that contributes to the prosperity of people and the planet."

four out of every five people displaced by climate change are female. Girls with education can help families handle climate-related risks, and in Nepal and India, women's involvement in forest management yielded better forest results. There is evidence that providing 12 years of quality education to each girl leads to development outcomes. Open schooling is a flexible and cost-effective means of ensuring access to secondary schooling.

Climate change education needs to affect a paradigm shift from prioritising individual achievements to accomplishments that contribute to the prosperity of people and the planet. Studies have shown that countries with stronger individualist orientations tend to have higher per capita CO2 emissions. Adger et al. (2013)[8] and Chuang et al. (2016)[9] reported that people having "interdependent selves" were more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours than "independent selves". Sharing resources and working collaboratively can help build the resilience of institutions. COL's Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) facilitates collaboration amongst all 32 small states of the Commonwealth. Several needs-based programmes, such as sustainable tourism and disaster preparedness, have been developed. Leafaitulagi Vaaelua is one of the graduates of the VUSSC diploma in sustainable agriculture from the National University of Samoa and is contributing to national development. COL's Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) on Business for Sustainable Development and the Blue Economy were offered in partnership with universities in Mauritius and Seychelles to raise awareness and build skills in these fields.

The skills sector recognises the need to develop a 'transition-ready workforce' for careers in environmental sustainability. The green skills required relate to clean technologies and soft skills for the changing world of work. In Western Canada, where the fossil fuel industry is one of the region's major sources of employment, there has been a push to develop policies and plans to re-skill or 'upskill' workers in emerging green technologies. Teachers can be key champions of climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. Over three-fourths of the teachers surveyed expressed a strong desire to teach climate change, and many believed they did not have the appropriate training to do so (UNESCO & Education International, 2021).[10] COL supported the development of a Green Teacher programme in Nigeria which has helped thousands of teachers to inculcate environmental concerns among learners from a very early age.

Political will is critical to addressing issues of climate change. COL (2022) presented a report to the Commonwealth Ministers of Education entitled Transforming Education for Climate Action. This report provides a road map for how ministers of education can climate-proof education systems, implement a green learning agenda that builds skills for blue and

green economies that would help make the transition to a low-carbon economy, and promote education for climate action. The recommendations also focus on the important issues of quality, equity, and justice. Ministries can mainstream education for climate action through policy, strategies and finance. To achieve impact, there needs to be better coordination between education, environment and finance ministries for a 'whole of government approach'. Institutions can strengthen their resilience by promoting research and climate literacy, and building the capacity of staff to implement a green learning agenda. Individuals need to be empowered at every level of education to change their behaviours and become powerful champions of environmental conservation and climate justice. Harnessing the potential of our youth would be key as "on any given day, more than a billion children are enrolled in primary or secondary schools. Imagine if these children could understand the main causes and consequences of climate change and what they, their families and communities can do to be better prepared for climate change and embrace a low carbon lifestyle. Today's children are tomorrow's business leaders, decision makers and consumers. Therefore, education plays a key role in responding to climate change." (UN CC: Learn, 2013).[11]

This untapped potential remains unrealised. The education sector cannot fiddle while the planet burns. It is the time for action, and the time is now. ■

Credit: Abir Abdullah Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha

"The skills sector recognises the need to develop a 'transition-ready workforce' for careers in environmental sustainability."

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BAYERO UNIVERSITY, KANO

AND ABOVE EVERY POSSESSOR OF KNOWLEDGE, THERE IS THE ONE MORE LEARNED

VISION

To lead in research and education in Africa.

MISSION

Committed to addressing African Developmental challenges through cutting-edge research, knowledge transfer and training of high-quality graduates.

HIGH CORE VALUES

- Humanity and Sacrifice
- Discipline and Commitment
- Integration and Active Learning
- Professionalism and Good Governance
- Innovation and Creativity

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

Responding to Needs, meeting aspirations, Leading in Research and Innovations, Achieving best practices in University Governance, meeting infrastructural and municipal requirements, becoming a leader in ICT research and services, taking the university to the community, maintaining highly motivated personnel, expanding funding base producing leaders, influencing development.

The Ahmadu Bello College was established in 1960 and housed within the School for Arabic Studies (SAS) in Kano's old city, which served as the foundation for Bayero University Kano (BUK), the first university in Kano State.

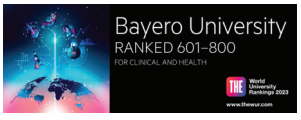
The University became fully independent in 1980. Dr. Mahmus Tutur, the former principal of the University College, later served as its first Vice-Chancellor and oversaw the group that laid the groundwork and started the process that led to the creation of the university's permanent location and helped mould it into what it is today.

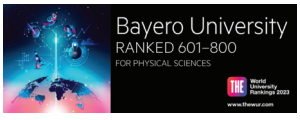
Bayero University has evolved from a small college running Advanced Level training programmes to one of the most respected Nigerian Universities recognised beyond the borders of the country. In 2023, within the 17 Faculties are over 80 departments running more than 90 undergraduate degree programmes and a further 120 postgraduate programmes, encouraging alumni to realise their full potential and pursue their academic goals.

Ranked fourth best university in Nigeria by Times Higher Education World Ranking 2023, Bayero University is Nigeria's leading academic institution for Cultural studies with over 30,000 students and 4,000 staff across three campuses.

At BUK, you have the power to shape your education and build your foundations for a brighter future.

Professor Sagir Adamu Abbas, Vice Chancellor





FACULTIES IN BAYERO UNIVERSITY

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- Communications
- Computer Science and Information Technology
- Dentistry
- Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Education
- Engineering
- Law
- Life Sciences
- Pharmaceutical Sciences
- Physical Science
- Social and Management Sciences

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Building Resilience: Transforming and Financing Education after the COVID-19 Pandemic

H.E. Jakaya Kikwete,
Board Chair, Global Partnership for Education and former President of Tanzania

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a massive emergency in global education, threatening the futures of millions of girls and boys. World leaders and international organisations have sounded alarms over steep learning losses, increased drop-out rates and children missing out on what is often their only meal of the day because their schools were shut.

Sadly, the crisis existed well before the pandemic; countries were not spending enough on education and low- and middle-income countries faced a severe learning crisis, with more than half of all 10-year-olds unable to read and understand a simple story.

The pandemic then dramatically exposed the vulnerability of education systems worldwide. It also revealed the central role schools play in their communities, well beyond learning itself. More than 370 million children globally missed out on school meals during the months of closures. For other children, isolation at home also left them exposed to physical violence. And for too many girls, the crisis brought early marriage that will deny them a chance of ever resuming their education.

Transforming education systems so that they are fully inclusive and resilient to crisis should be the foremost priority for all governments across the Commonwealth and the world. True change demands that we prioritise education as being crucial to recovery and development, matching that commitment with increased domestic funding that will deliver real transformation, beginning with our most vulnerable children.

In Commonwealth countries, as with other parts of the world, teachers and school administrations were unprepared when hit by the abrupt and sweeping impacts of COVID-19 and were forced to quickly devise learning alternatives. For its part, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) quickly mobilised more than $500

"The international community should be redoubling its efforts to provide support to education in low-income countries, rather than redirecting it elsewhere."

million to support partner countries with planning and implementing their responses to the pandemic. This funding is helping governments sustain learning for up to 355 million children in 66 countries, while also building the resilience of education systems to cope with future shocks.

But with COVID-19 waning, such emergency assistance is also nearing an end. The international community should be redoubling its efforts to provide support to education in low-income countries rather than redirecting it elsewhere.

Ultimately, however, education depends on domestic funding. Even amid crisis, governments must put education among their highest priorities when allocating domestic resources and deliver on every child's fundamental right to 12 years of quality schooling.

Before the pandemic, GPE partner countries in 2019 directed just 18 per cent of total government expenditure to education. However, around one-third of these expenditures was judged to be inefficient. This is why GPE uses incentives and results-based financing to support governments in both increasing domestic spending and ensuring that it is spent equitably and efficiently.

In recognising the need to attract more and better financing to education, GPE offers innovative and catalytic financial tools such as the GPE Multiplier. Partner countries can use the promise of matching funds from the Multiplier to mobilise new and additional investment in education programmes. Since 2018, GPE has allocated $458 million in Multiplier grants to 39 countries, unlocking more than $1.9 billion in additional co-financing from a range of partners, including foundations and multilateral development banks.

Amid rising economic uncertainty, debt sustainability is rapidly becoming more challenging for many low- and middle-income countries. The global community needs to be doing more to ensure that education budgets are not sacrificed as fiscal belts tighten. The Multiplier's Debt2Ed feature allows partner countries to leverage debt restructuring into additional resources that are applied directly to education.

Tools like these give GPE partner countries the ability to expand their fiscal space significantly in ways that

do not drive up their debt burden. What is needed now is the political determination to recognise and overcome the barriers that deny an education to children most at risk: girls, children living in poverty or with disabilities and those forced to flee conflict or climate change.

There are some positive signs. In the past year, 20 GPE partner countries signed on to the Heads of State Declaration on Education Finance, a statement of intent to allocate at least 20 per cent of national spending to education. More countries need to join their ranks.

The COVID-19 pandemic created the largest education calamity in our lifetime. Recovery will depend on determined local leadership and investment, strengthened by coordinated, sustained and innovative international support. But recovery is not sufficient. Driving education system transformation is at the heart of how we work and GPE will continue to leverage our global, and national relationships in support of our partner countries in ensuring that all their children learn and learn well. ■

// Driving education system transformation is at the heart of how we work and GPE will continue to leverage our global and national relationships in support of our partner countries in ensuring that all their children learn and learn well."

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Commonwealth Educational Report 2023

University of Venda, South Africa

Dr. Bernard Nthambeleni,
Vice-Chancellor and Principal,
University of Venda

In commemoration of its 40th anniversary, UNIVEN shares success stories and contributes to shaping the future. Over its four decades of existence, the University has produced many graduates who hold positions of responsibility and influence in politics, business, and society in general.

VISION

University Leading in Engaged Scholarship

MISSION

The University of Venda produces graduates that are locally relevant and globally competitive

University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

University of Venda
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UNIVEN 2021-2025 Strategy

University of Venda (UNIVEN) seeks to achieve its vision of being a university leading in engaged scholarship and its mission of producing graduates that are locally relevant and globally competitive.

This strategic plan is anchored on four inter-related Strategic Thrusts; ST 1: Student centeredness and engaged scholarship, ST 2: Entrepreneurial university, ST 3: Governance for outstanding scholarship and ST 4: Linkages, partnerships and internationalisation.

International Curricula

UNIVEN, through its strategic direction, aims to improve student wellbeing and success, improve curriculum, enhance graduate quality, and increase student staff engagement and community actors.

The university also seeks to improve support for teaching and learning, research outcomes for innovation and impact through scholarship. The administration of special scholarships for outstanding scholarship enhances this process and promotes an efficient institutional governance and management system which strengthens UNIVEN's collaborative identity.

Parliamentarians Hold the Key to Turning Around the Education Crisis

Joseph Nhan-O'Reilly,
Co-founder and
Executive Director,
International Parliamentary
Network for Education

Every child should have the opportunity to go to school, and every citizen of the world should be able to read and count.

These statements feel like very basic, universally accepted aspirations. However, 23 years into the 21st century, and at the halfway point following the adoption in 2015 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), at current rates of global progress we are many decades away from achieving them. In fact, education is in a deep crisis: a crisis of equity, quality, and relevance. Hundreds of millions of the most vulnerable children, young people, and adults remain excluded from education. Millions more are in school but not learning. And as our societies, economies, and environment undergo fundamental change, contemporary education systems are struggling to respond.

Together, these crises have left the education-related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda severely off track and risk leaving learners and societies ill-equipped to navigate uncertain futures.

Whilst the learning crisis is a global one, it has deep roots in the Commonwealth. Around the world, there are 244 million out-of-school children and young people. More than 40 million of those children live in two Commonwealth member states, Nigeria and Pakistan. Of the 763 million young people and adults who lack basic literacy skills, more than half live in the Commonwealth, and the majority are women.

One of the central causes of exclusion from education and poor learning levels, even for those with access to school, is the chronic underfunding of education. Pakistan is a case in point. The share of its government budget allocated to

"As our societies, economies and environment undergo fundamental change, contemporary education systems are struggling to respond."

"Universal endorsement across the Commonwealth would affirm the principle that access to a quality educational opportunity is at the heart of the Commonwealth project and that we are committed to putting the principle into practice."

education had been stagnant for many years at around just 2 per cent of GDP, far short of the international benchmarks of at least 4 to 6 per cent of GDP, or 15 to 20 per cent of total public expenditure.

More than 30 Commonwealth member states are currently developing country partners of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). This means these countries have been identified as having the highest rates of out-of-school children and the lowest levels of learning, but lack the resources to sustainably build their education systems. Of these 31 countries, only six currently allocate at least 20 per cent of their total government expenditure to education (the globally agreed benchmark). The four that spend between 17 and 20 per cent are sadly the exceptions.

The remainder of Commonwealth developing country partners spend either less than 17 per cent of their total budget on education or have limited, or no available data. This is a major issue in itself because, without timely and accurate data on how much is being allocated, it is difficult to track overall levels of financing over time and impossible to determine whether it is being spent effectively.

The urgent task of increasing public spending on education poses a huge challenge. National budgets in low and lower-middle-income countries are under significant pressure – COVID-19's negative impact on growth, together with the increased costs of responding to the pandemic, and high population growth all mean there is less money to meet growing educational needs.

Educational needs are also growing due to crises caused by climate change, conflicts and hunger. To make matters worse, external support for low-income countries is in decline. Shrinking economies and the cost of the war in Ukraine have contributed to significant reductions in development assistance. The United Kingdom, the Commonwealth's largest donor government, reduced its development spending by more than 20 per cent between 2020 and 2021.

There are, however, some promising developments that deserve support.

In July 2021, world leaders met in London for the Global Education Summit hosted by two Commonwealth leaders: Kenya's then-President Uhuru Kenyatta and the UK's then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

At the Summit, 19 heads of state and government, 12 of which are members of the Commonwealth, endorsed the heads of state's call to action on education finance – the "Kenyatta

"We can and must close these gaps and spread the opportunity and benefits of education across our Commonwealth of nations."

Declaration" – with a focus on domestic public expenditure (domestic financing), committing to work towards spending at least 20 per cent of national budgets on education over the next five years – which translates to $196 billion for their own education systems.

Originally championed by President Kenyatta, the Declaration is now being upheld by Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo, who will also host the global meeting of Commonwealth parliamentarians later this year.

My hope is that the heads of government in all 35 of GPE's Commonwealth developing country partners endorse the call to action on education financing. Universal endorsement across the Commonwealth would affirm the principle, that access to a quality educational opportunity is at the heart of the Commonwealth project and that we are committed to putting the principle into practice.

Parliamentarians were instrumental in a number of countries in securing endorsement of the call to action and now hold the keys to ensuring that the commitments made by national governments are not only fulfilled but leveraged to supercharge the investment that is needed to fund and deliver a quality education for every child, no matter who they are or where they live.

The International Parliamentary Network for Education will be supporting our members in parliaments across the Commonwealth to call on their government to endorse the call to action or, if they already have, to implement it.

We will also be working with members of parliament in the Commonwealth's donor states, namely Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK, to ensure they all play their part in increasing the volume and improving the quality of their country's aid to education.

Collectively these commitments have the potential to transform the financing of education across lower-income countries and lay the foundation for the investment in education that is required to address the global learning crisis.

Across the Commonwealth, we have some of the biggest education donors and universally recognised education leaders, like Singapore, alongside countries with the highest out-of-school populations and biggest rates of learning poverty. We can and must close these gaps and spread the opportunity and benefits of education across our Commonwealth of Nations. ■

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY LOKOJA

A fast-growing and leading Nigerian University situated
in the heart of the confluence of Rivers Niger and Benue

CORE VALUES

Respect · Innovation · Integrity · Dedication · Diligence

The Federal University Lokoja (FUL) is a federal government-owned tertiary institution located in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria. It was established in 2011 as one of the nine new federal universities established by the Nigerian government. The aim was not only to accelerate equitable access to higher education in Nigeria, but also to build institutions that can support Nigeria's drive for rapid development through the availability of quality manpower and a knowledge base to drive competitiveness. Since its establishment, the University strived to uphold academic excellence, produce well-rounded graduates, and contribute to national development through education and research.

In December 2021, FUL's Vision, which is ***"To be the best among the nine newly established Federal universities in Nigeria in 2011 and one of the top 10 ranking universities in Africa,"*** was partly achieved when the Nigerian University Systems (NUS) Ranking report was released by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and our University emerged as first among the 12 Federal Universities established around the same period. In July 2021, FUL was ranked 35th in Nigeria by the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities, positioning itself ahead of older Universities despite being a relatively young institution. The Mission of the University is ***"To train employable graduates through competency-based teaching, applied research and practical community service to the catchment area, Africa and the world."*** The University is situated in Lokoja, the capital and confluence city of Kogi State, Nigeria (where the two great rivers Niger and Benue meet). Lokoja is a city drenched in history being the first settlement of the British in Nigeria.

Our Top-rated Undergraduate Programmes

FACULTY OF ARTS
1. B.A. Archaeology
2. B.A. Linguistics
3. B.A. Arabic Studies
4. B.A. Christian Religious Studies
5. B.A. Islamic Studies
6. B.A. Philosophy
7. B.A. Music
8. B.A. Theatre Arts
9. B.A. History and Int'l Studies
10. B.A. English and Literary Studies
11. B.A. Modern European Languages (German, French, Chinese)
12. B.A. Linguistics & African Languages

FACULTY OF SCIENCE
1. B.Sc. Biochemistry
2. B.Sc. Biology
3. B.Sc. Biotechnology
4. B.Sc. Botany
5. B.Sc. Microbiology
6. B.Sc. Zoology
7. B.Sc. Chemistry
8. B.Sc. Computer Science
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7. B.Ed. Guidance & Counseling
8. B.Ed. Social Studies
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10. B.Sc. (Ed.) Biology
11. B.Sc. (Ed.) Chemistry
12. B.Sc. (Ed.) Computer Sci.
13. B.Sc. (Ed.) Mathematics
14. B.Sc. (Ed.) Physics
15. BLIS Library & Info. Sci.

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PhD, FHSN, AvHF, FNAL
Professor of History,
3rd Vice-Chancellor

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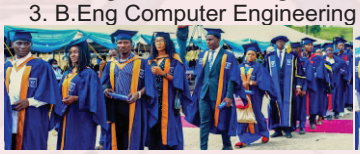

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The sky is the limit (ad astra)

Developing Collective Leadership to Improve Education Systems

Wendy Kopp,
CEO and Co-founder,
Teach For All

The findings of Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE), the 10-year research project looking at education systems in low- and low-middle-income countries, point the way for policymakers interested in promoting large-scale change.

The findings make clear that systems do not improve unless a commitment towards ensuring students learn is deeply held throughout the education system, political system, and society. The authors say that education systems can, and often have, many different purposes other than students learning and developing; for example, they could be about maximising enrollment or about the employment of the adults in the system. The RISE conclusions do not point to particular pedagogical strategies or solutions but rather show that the key to improving systems is committing to student learning, measuring progress, aligning all actions towards the purpose, supporting good teaching, and adapting solutions to local context and culture.

These findings resonate with anyone who has spent time in schools with transformational outcomes or in communities where aggregate learning outcomes are improving. These buildings and communities are always full of people on a shared mission.

The implication is that we need to rethink the prevailing solutions-led international development paradigm for improving educational outcomes. Currently, this paradigm is largely about spreading discreet solutions – policies, programmes, technologies, classroom practices – that are proven

"The key to improving systems is committing to the purpose of student learning, measuring progress, aligning all actions towards the purpose, supporting good teaching, and adapting solutions to local context and culture."

"We need to achieve a better balance between investing in these solutions and investing in developing the people who will be responsible for adapting them and continuously improving over time."

to work in one context, typically within a short time frame. Instead, we need to achieve a better balance between investing in these solutions and investing in developing the people who will be responsible for adapting them and continuously improving them over time. We need to shift more of our actions and investments towards developing purpose-driven leadership.

Across the Teach For All network, we are seeing the impact of developing "collective leadership" – a critical mass of change agents within communities and countries who have a shared purpose and the networks to collaborate with and learn from each other. The organisations in our network – including those in the Commonwealth, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, and the UK – share an approach for developing collective leadership that they have adapted to their contexts. These organisations recruit and develop promising leaders who commit at least two years to teach marginalised students and become lifelong equity-centred advocates of the systemic changes needed to enable all children to fulfil their potential.

For example, over the last five years, Teach For Uganda has recruited 230 of Uganda's most promising young leaders from its most selective universities to teach in the country's rural communities in the Kayunga, Luwero, Mayuge, and Namutumba districts in Central and Eastern Uganda. They were drawn by their passion and commitment from diverse backgrounds, having trained as chemical engineers, lawyers, and educators and having worked as university lecturers and accountants.

The teaching commitment proves to be foundational for a lifetime of leadership – fostering the sense of purpose, mindsets, beliefs, priorities, relationships and networks necessary to reshape systems. A growing body of research shows that participants grow in their belief in their own ability to make a difference and in the potential of students and families in low-income communities to thrive; developing their

understanding of educational inequity as a deeply systemic problem requiring adaptive solutions.

In Teach For Nigeria's most recent survey of the alumni of its fellowship, 100 per cent of alumni said they believed they have a role to play in ensuring all children attain an excellent education, and 92 per cent attested they believe it is possible to achieve this in Nigeria. These mindsets and commitments are spurring most of their alumni to continue to work to address the issues they encountered as Fellows.

Alumni of the fellowships attest to the transformation of their priorities. One alum from Teach For Pakistan's 2020 cohort shared: "In this work, I saw my biases being removed. I realised that irrespective of the background I am coming from, I am also a part of this system and have the competency to change it. Challenges shifted my identity. Previously I was someone who would feel helpless seeing injustice or in times of challenges. But in these two years, I was being prompt in taking action and solving the problems. I remained adaptive and my strengths have magnified. I am more sensitive now – in a good way which can push someone to take action and not to feel helpless."

Syed Asaad Ayub, the CEO of Pakistan's Citizens Foundation, who has enlisted Teach For Pakistan's alumni in leading all their flagship programmes, attests to this transformative impact: "I believe there is a certain level of purity, passion, sense of purpose, and the understanding that comes from their experience with Teach For Pakistan (TFP). The TFP experience really adds fuel to the fire."

Beyond the teachers' two-year commitments, these organisations continue to foster their learning and leadership, networks, career advancement, and collective leadership as "alumni" who work together with allies within their communities and countries.

Since its launch in 2009, for example, Teach For India has developed more than 4,700 leaders. A full 77 per cent of alumni continue to work in the social sector – leading classrooms and schools, working in non-profits, leading organisations, training teachers, designing policy, and working in government. Teach For India alumni are reaching 33 million children from various levels of the system – that is one in 10 of India's children. Collectively, they have founded more than 150 organisations.

Over time, developing a critical mass of change agents with shared purpose and networks contributes to improving systems. The UK's Teach First – which has recruited almost 15,000 teachers for schools in cities and towns across England and Wales over the last 20 years –provides evidence of the ultimate impact of the network's approach.

In London alone, Teach First has developed and placed over 6,500 teachers who have served as an impactful leadership force during and beyond their two-year commitments. For years, London was among the worst-performing areas in England in terms of outcomes for pupils from low-income communities. Today, the city's schools have become the highest performing in the country, and independent research identified Teach First as one of four key factors in this transformation. Today, one in 14 teachers working in schools serving London's low-income communities are Teach First teachers and alumni, with over 1,000 alumni serving in middle or senior leadership positions in London schools. Teach First alumni serve as head teachers at almost 100 schools, having either founded new schools or overtaken existing ones. Beyond the classroom, hundreds of alumni work in non-profit organisations that seek to fill gaps and influence system change. Forty have founded and lead social enterprises, including organisations that focus on training and developing teachers and school leaders, expanding the focus of schools to ensure students are developing holistically, and providing mentoring and support to facilitate first-generation college students in attending selective universities. About 50 alumni are working at every level of policy.

As governments across the Commonwealth consider how to transform their education systems and achieve the excellence and equity envisioned by SDG4, they must prioritise investing in developing the leadership necessary to shift systems and continuously improve over time. This is the foundational investment that will ensure all our other investments pay off. ■

"Over time, developing a critical mass of change agents with shared purpose and networks contributes to improving systems."

INCLUSION & EQUITY

Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum View of the Progress Necessary to Include All Disabled Young People in Education

Richard Rieser,
General Secretary,
Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum

CDPF supports a Social Model/Human Rights approach to disability and full implementation of inclusive education across the Commonwealth.[1]

What is inclusive education?

The right to inclusive education encompasses a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all formal and informal educational environments, to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers impeding that possibility. It involves strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It focuses on the full and effective participation, accessibility, attendance and achievement of all students, especially those who, for different reasons, are excluded or at risk of being marginalised. Inclusion involves access to and progress in high-quality formal and informal education without discrimination. It seeks to enable communities, systems and structures to combat discrimination, including harmful stereotypes, recognises diversity, promotes participation and overcomes barriers to learning and participation for all by focusing on the well-being and success of disabled students. It requires an in-depth transformation of education systems in

"The right to inclusive education encompasses a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all formal and informal educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers impeding that possibility."

legislation, policy, and the mechanisms for financing, administration, design, delivery and monitoring of education.[2]

Inclusive education

This is now broadened and seen as a core principle of education to ensure that all children are reached under the assumption that every learner matters equally and has the right to receive effective educational opportunities. However, this paper aims to make a strong case for ensuring access to quality inclusive education specifically for disabled people, as one of many groups who are vulnerable to exclusion. For disabled people of all ages, the main challenge remains to be able to attend and achieve at schools and educational institutions in the communities where they live and with their peers. This is important, first and foremost, because it provides learners with the fullest realisation of their right to education, but also because it is the most efficient and cost-effective means of ensuring the fulfilment of this right. In low-income countries, large-scale exclusion of disabled children remains the order of the day and is not often high on government agendas. In middle and high-income countries, far too many are segregated in special schools or units. The UN's 2018 Disability and Development Report said: "Among the countries with data, persons with disabilities [...] are less likely to attend school, they are more likely to be out of school, they are less likely to complete primary or secondary education, they have fewer years of schooling and they are less likely to possess basic literacy skills."

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN, 2006)[3] and the subsequent General Comment 4 on Article 24 (2016)[4] were the most critical milestones since the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994)[5] to affirm the right of disabled people to access inclusive education. In 2015 this right was further embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) committing all countries to ensure equal

opportunity in access to quality learning opportunities at all levels of education from a lifelong perspective. There is also a new focus on the relevance of **learning outcomes** both for the world of work, as well as for citizenship in a global and interconnected world. This is particularly explicit in target 4.5, which aims to **eliminate gender disparities and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for those at risk of exclusion, including disabled people, indigenous peoples and children in risk situations**.

The language we use

Why do we still choose to call ourselves disabled people? In the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), we call ourselves **'disabled people'** because of the development of the **'social model of disability'**. In the nineteenth and twentieth-century, a disabled person's medical condition was thought to be the root cause of their exclusion from society, an approach now referred to as the **'medical or individual model'** of disability. We use the **'social model of disability'**. We also view ourselves as united by a common oppression, so we are proud to identify as 'disabled people' rather than 'people with disabilities'.

Inclusive education has become problematic, as, despite international exhortations to implement it, little real progress is occurring around the world. Roger Slee, in an essay to generate input to the 2020 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, puts this down to a number of causes but **especially the confusion between special education (as a medical model response to impairment) and inclusion, which requires wholesale transformation addressing barriers to disabled learners so they can thrive**.[6]

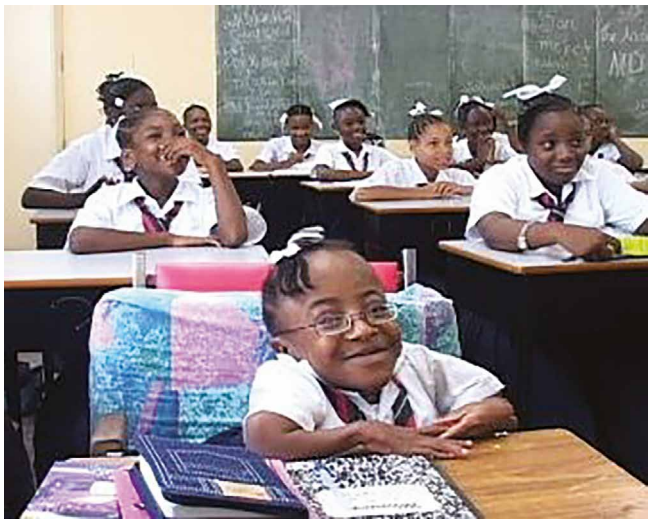
Across the Commonwealth, understanding of what is required to make inclusive education a reality is poor, and progress in most States is very slow. Some countries have made progress but in others, there are just pilot projects run by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Despite over 30 years of these small-scale projects, little movement to scale is seen. In this document, we examine the main ingredients of a successful inclusive education policy and illustrate with examples from Commonwealth countries. Some recent projects in the Commonwealth in Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania and Bangladesh are underway in the UK Government FCDO Disability Inclusive Development Project but, while making real change locally, there remain many issues to bring the good practice reported upon to scale.[7]

Barriers

The UN CRPD Committee identify barriers[8] that impede access to inclusive education for disabled people attributing them to multiple factors:

a. the failure to understand or implement the **human rights model of disability**, in which barriers within the community and society exclude, rather than personal impairments and functioning exclude **a medical model approach**;

"For disabled people of all ages, the main challenge remains to be able to attend and achieve at schools and educational institutions in the communities where they live and with their peers."



b. persistent discrimination against disabled people, compounded by the isolation of those still living in long-term residential institutions, and low expectations about those in mainstream settings, allowing prejudices and fear to escalate and remain unchallenged;
c. lack of knowledge about the nature and advantages of inclusive and quality education, diversity and its positive impact on the learning of all; lack of outreach to all parents; lack of appropriate responses to support requirements, leading to misplaced fears and stereotypes that inclusion will cause a deterioration in the quality of education, or otherwise impact negatively on others;
d. lack of disaggregated data and research necessary for accountability and programme development, impeding the development of effective policies and interventions to promote inclusive and quality education;
e. lack of political will, technical knowledge, and capacity in implementing the right to inclusive education, including insufficient education of all education staff;
f. inappropriate and inadequate funding mechanisms to provide incentives and reasonable accommodations for the inclusion of disabled students, inter-ministerial coordination, support and sustainability;
g. lack of legal remedies and mechanisms to claim redress for violations.

We have examples of making inclusive education work for disabled people with the full range of impairments in countries at every social and economic development across the Commonwealth.[9] What is stopping this from coming to scale is a lack of political will. The benefits of achieving this are high in terms of a sense of individual achievement, well-being in our communities and adding to the economic wealth and growth of all countries.■

1. Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum (CDPF) represents 94 DPOs/OPDs-Organisations run and controlled by disabled people with representation in 49 of 56 Commonwealth countries. More information can be found at www.commonwealthdpf.org.

2. Para 9 General Comment No 4 (2016). https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-4-article-24-right-inclusive

3. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html

4. UNCRPD Committee General Comment No 4 (2016). https://www.refworld.org/docid/57c977e34.html

5. UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework (1994). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427

6. Roger Slee (2018). Defining the scope of inclusive education: think piece prepared for the 2020 Global education monitoring report, Inclusion and education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265773

7. Disability Inclusive Development Inclusive Futures Education. https://inclusivefutures.org/inclusive-education/

8. Para 4 General Comment No 4 (2016)

9. R. Rieser (2012). A Commonwealth Guide to Implementing Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. http://worldofinclusion.com/v3/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Implementing-Inclusive-Education-promo-copy1.pdf

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SMU, through its staff and students, makes a significant contribution to the Hospitals and the community that it serves.

Additionally, as a uniquely African higher education institution, SMU claims its rightful position as a member of the international community of scholars and health practitioners. We embrace internationalisation as a state of mind that is borderless and extends to all academic, administrative, cultural, and social issues. Thus, SMU has committed to engendering an international dimension into the activities and functioning of the University to help build global citizens.

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Connecting with the Commonwealth: Education Cannot Wait Delivers with Humanitarian Speed and Development Depth

Yasmine Sherif,
Executive Director,
Education Cannot Wait

Nations across the Commonwealth are impacted by a number of ongoing conflicts, emergencies and protracted crises that are pushing children out of school, disrupting economies and derailing development gains.

The multiplying impacts of COVID-19, the climate crisis and massive displacement into Commonwealth countries, such as Bangladesh and Uganda, are further exacerbating the challenge. This puts girls and boys at grave risk of gender-based violence, early childhood marriage or recruitment into armed groups. It denies them their human rights and undermines the shared goals of the Commonwealth for "development, democracy and peace."

As the United Nations (UN) global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) works with strategic partners across the globe – and across the Commonwealth – to provide crisis-impacted children and adolescents with the safety, hope and opportunity that quality and holistic learning environments provide. Through these multilateral partnerships, we are delivering on our promise of Education for All (SDG4) as outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and paving the way for a more peaceful, more prosperous future.

Since ECW was founded in 2016, we have seen an unprecedented spike in the number of crisis-impacted girls and boys in need of educational support. Over a few short years, the number has nearly tripled, from estimates of around 75 million in 2016 to approximately 222 million today. Of these children,

"Through these multilateral partnerships, we are delivering on our promise of Education for All (SDG4) as outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and paving the way for a more peaceful, more prosperous future."

more than 72 million are out of school altogether according to new estimates.

With our donors and partners across the Commonwealth, we must come together to address these issues and realise the #222MillionDreams Campaign as we unite to mobilise $1.5 billion for ECW.

As outlined in our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan and our Case for Investment, these new resources will allow us to reach 20 million children and adolescents over the next few years. As we deliver with humanitarian speed and developmental depth, the funding also supports global efforts to end hunger and poverty, address the climate crisis and build back better from the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to disrupt education and economies worldwide.

Delivering across the Commonwealth

ECW has invested in a number of Commonwealth countries. Of the more than 40 countries that have benefitted from ECW funding to date, 11 are within the Commonwealth.

Through our investments, ECW has partnered with governments, donors, UN agencies, civil society partners, the private sector, and local and international non-profit organisations (NGOs) to provide holistic educational support. Commonwealth countries that have benefitted – or continue to benefit – from ECW's investments include Bangladesh, Cameroon, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

ECW's First Emergency Responses – designed to get a child back into

"With the war in Ukraine, floods in Pakistan, jumps in forced displacement across many Commonwealth countries, the specter of famine across many parts of Africa, and other protracted crises, education in emergencies funding appeals reached $2.9 billion in 2021, up from $1.4 billion the previous year."

education after an acute emergency – provide six to 12 months of continuous access to education, protection and psychosocial support, teacher support and safe learning environments. Our three-year holistic investments delivered through our signature Multi-Year Resilience Programmes provide a broader range of services – including continuous access to education, protection and psychosocial services, teacher training, school feeding, improved learning outcomes, gender equality, disaster risk management, school administrative support the inclusion of refugees in national education systems, resource mobilisation and systems strengthening.

Stories of hope and resilience arise from across the Commonwealth. After the massive floods in Pakistan, which impacted over 33 million people, ECW and our strategic partners launched a fast-acting 12-month First Emergency Response. Delivered in partnership with the Government of Pakistan by Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) and UNICEF, the investment will reach more than 80,000 girls and boys impacted by the floods, building on ECW's ongoing Multi-Year Resilience Programme in Pakistan – which focuses on providing equitable access to inclusive and quality learning environments, establishing temporary learning spaces, and providing children with the psychosocial supports they need to avoid dropping out of school permanently.

Uganda hosts 1.5 million refugees, the largest refugee population in Africa. With our donors, ECW has invested $80.8 million in funding to date. By crowding in resources and bringing partners together, ECW is ensuring localised aid has a real impact on the ground. To date, these investments have reached more than 187,000 children, including over 130,000 refugees. More than 160,000 children received training materials, 283 classrooms were built or rehabilitated, and over 1,700 teachers received financial support.

ECW takes a proactive stance toward gender responsiveness, targeting 60 per cent of girls through our multi-year programmes.

In human terms, this means that refugee girls like Janat Ara in

Bangladesh are able to attend school safely. It means building a connection between climate action and educational support in Mozambique. It means breaking down barriers to girls' education with targeted responses in Uganda and beyond.

Addressing the funding gap

With the wars in Ukraine and Sudan, floods in Pakistan, jumps in forced displacement across many Commonwealth countries, the spectre of famine across many parts of Africa, and other protracted crises, education in emergencies funding appeals reached $2.9 billion in 2021, up from $1.4 billion the previous year, according to analysis from ECW's Annual Results Report.

Currently, funding for education in emergencies only accounts for 2-4 per cent of global humanitarian funding. While 2021 saw a record-high $645 million in education appeal funding, the overall funding gap spiked by 17 per cent, from 60 per cent in 2020 to 77 per cent in 2021.

Leaders are stepping up – with many Commonwealth donor countries leading the way – but large gaps remain.

Since its inception, ECW and our strategic partners have mobilised more than $1.5 billion. Donations to ECW from Commonwealth donor countries total approximately $393 million to date – about 26 per cent – with contributions from the United Kingdom ($259 million), Canada ($127 million) and Australia ($7 million). Other developed Commonwealth countries and businesses headquartered in the Commonwealth are encouraged to step up to join ECW and our strategic partners in delivering on our promise of universal education and universal human rights.

The return on investment is truly remarkable. For every dollar invested in girls' education, we see $2.80 in return, and World Bank studies indicate that "making sure all girls are finishing secondary education by 2030 could boost the gross domestic product (GDP) of developing countries by 10 per cent on average over the next decade."

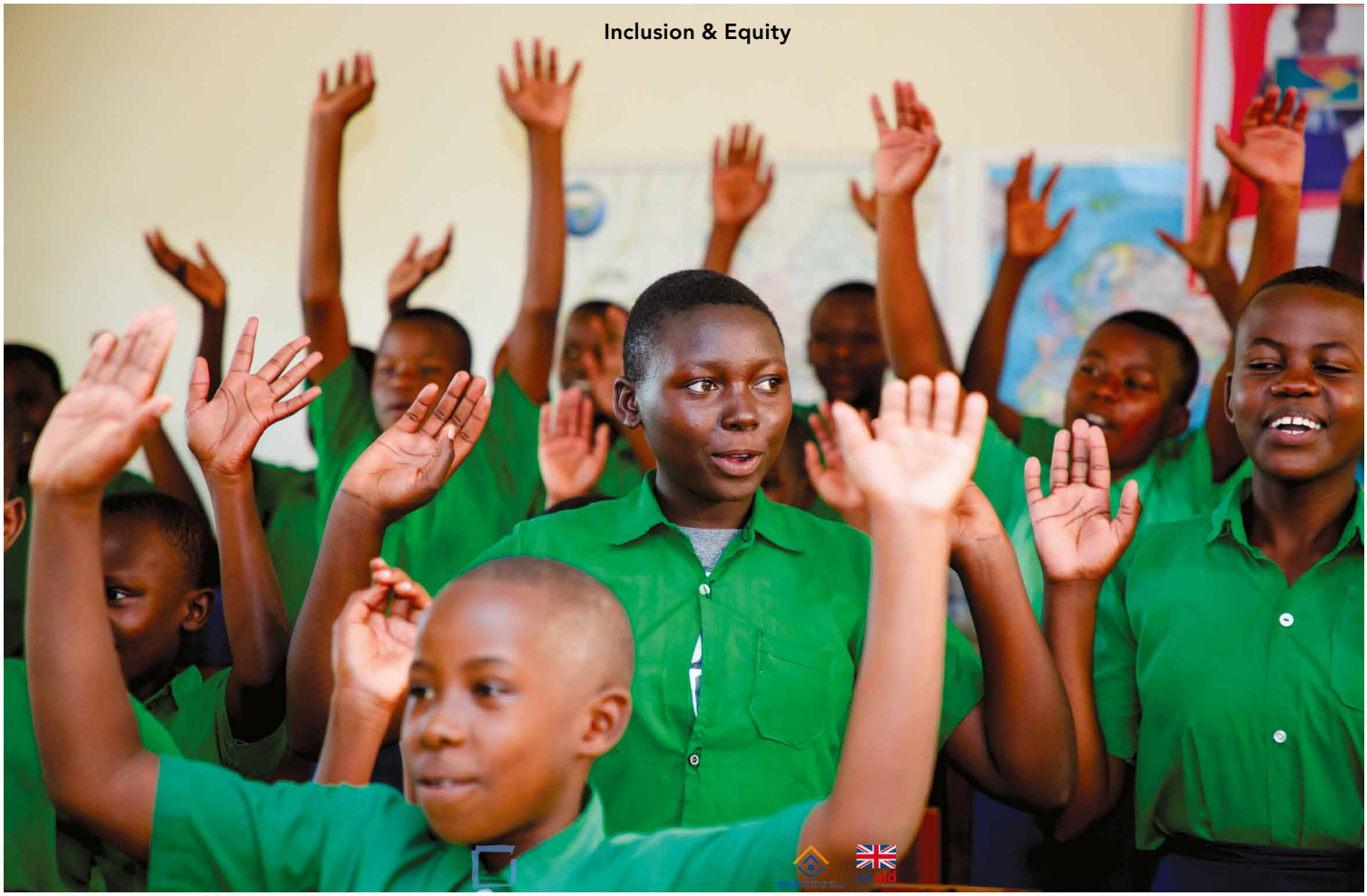
In the end, education is the best investment we can make in achieving not just our goals for 12 years of quality education for every girl and boy on the planet, but also our common goals for ending hunger and poverty, building gender equality, and making a more peaceful, more prosperous world for generations to come. ■

Life Skills Critical to Achieving Gender Equality in and through Education

Sarah Holst,
Lead Advisor on
Girls' Education and
Gender Equality,
Education Development Trust

Whilst most people recognise that enabling girls to access an education is not enough, it is becoming clearer that even attendance, as well as a quality classroom education, despite being a good start may not be enough to enable girls to progress through school and positively impact later-life outcomes.

A classroom education must be supported and enhanced by life skills, which are especially needed where gender equality in and through education has not been reached and where girls continue to face educational marginalisation within the home, school and community.
Every single girl, boy and non-binary young person has the right to education. It is a public good – yet



"Education is about ensuring girls have a quality learning experience, that they feel safe in schools, that they have the opportunity to complete all levels of education and are equipped to enter the labour market and navigate successfully through life."

in many parts of the world, it still favours boys. Whilst great progress has been made globally in achieving gender parity, and globally enrolment rates are getting closer for girls and boys, completion rates highlight that gaps remain and, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, these gaps increase as you transition from primary to lower and then upper secondary. UNESCO estimates suggest that only 63 per cent of female primary school students complete primary school, compared to 67 per cent of male primary school students. Secondary school completion rates also lag, with 36 per cent of girls completing lower secondary, compared to 44 per cent of boys. These gaps are even wider in countries affected by conflict and violence.

The global community recognises that there is more to be done, and with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) target deadline of 2030 approaching, new commitments to girls' education have been made. The G7 heads of state have endorsed the global objectives of 40 million more girls in school and 20 million more girls reading by age 10, recognising the systemic barriers that girls face and the targeted support that girls' education continues to need.

However, there needs to continue to be a global recognition that even when gender parity in education is achieved, girls are still disadvantaged in other areas of their lives, impacting those later-life outcomes. Unequal responsibilities for household chores remain, often bargaining power in financial decisions is not equal, access to formal paid work, assets and credit is lower, and the risk of gender-based violence continues in the school and community. Education has the power to address these barriers when we look beyond just getting girls into the classroom. Education is about ensuring girls have a quality learning experience, that they feel safe in schools, that they have the opportunity to complete all levels of education and are equipped to enter the labour market and navigate successfully through life. School is a place to equip young people with the socio-emotional and life skills necessary to make decisions about their own lives, challenge harmful gender norms, identify dreams and goals and map out the pathways to get there.

What we have learnt through our

direct delivery of education reform programmes for girls in Kenya and Rwanda is that in addition to a quality education, what many girls want and need is a safe place, someone to trust, someone to talk to, someone who believes in them and their abilities to succeed, someone to champion and guide them. The provision of these safe spaces for girls offers the opportunity to teach critical life skills whilst providing an environment to develop and maintain relationships, build confidence to allow both girls and boys to openly share challenges and concerns and be there to support one another. Education Development Trust (EDT) recognises the importance of the creation of these safe spaces. Across our programmes in Kenya and Rwanda, we have been establishing girls' clubs and designing life skills curricula in order to:

- Build girls' confidence and self-esteem;
- Challenge the harmful gender norms and stereotypes existing within the classroom, which lead girls to believe they can't succeed;
- Identify where gendered expectations are limiting girls' opportunities to engage in STEM subjects or those which have traditionally been identified as male;
- Identify unique skills and talents, which may not conform to society's expectations for different genders;
- Be equipped with the knowledge about their sexual and reproductive rights in order to make informed decisions about sex, as well as stand up against sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse.

While some aspects of life skills are best delivered through the national curriculum, such as Comprehensive Sexuality Education, many aspects are best unpicked and discussed within these safe spaces. Whilst our ongoing work around life skills and girls' clubs has demonstrated that there are some critical factors for success (the content, the facilitation, the attendance – size and inclusivity – as well as the commitment from school leadership), the flexibility around delivering life skills through this channel enables groups to identify what works best for them. Safe spaces can be within the school but can also be established within communities, which we started to see develop of their own accord during COVID-19 restrictions.

Through these life skills spaces, girls' educational aspirations are changing, their views of success are widening, and their understanding and knowledge about rights and consent are increasing. All of these are critical in order to equip and support this generation of young people to become gender equality activists and push for gender equality in the home, classroom, community and country. What starts as knowledge, skill and attitude building within a small safe space can eventually lead to:

- Equipping girls, through building confidence and self-esteem, to challenge teachers within the classroom who have gendered expectations and build a network of champions within the school who are all pushing for gender equality;

"Harmful gender norms and gender bias, portrayed in the classroom, are key barriers to achieving gender equality."

- Enabling girls to move into school leadership positions, such as class captains, school prefects or head girl. This both equips them for transition into further education or the workplace, as well as building valuable communication, negotiation and management skills;
- Creating the space to challenge gender bias which exists within the home and community and becoming advocates for themselves, their peers and their siblings to change attitudes around a girl's right to education and the future that she chooses;
- Highlighting and standing up against school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) within schools by acknowledging that the underlying intent of this violence is to reinforce gender roles and perpetuate gender inequalities. Changing attitudes and beliefs towards gender roles is the first step in working to prevent SRGBV.

It is important to recognise that whilst life skills are often delivered in girls' clubs, it is essential to engage both boys and girls in the conversations. Boys are also gender equality champions; they can help redefine gendered roles in the home and community, recognise, respond to and report violence against girls and be peer leaders to start to shift attitudes in the wider school and community. Life skills cannot be taught to girls in isolation, and those establishing and running girls' clubs where life skills are taught need to be equally mindful of the impact that gendered expectations also have on boys. Social expectations can lead to toxic masculinities, aggressive behaviour and ultimately violence – so these spaces create room to start to challenge this and break down the divide between how males and females are expected to behave and present themselves.

Harmful gender norms and gender bias, portrayed in the classroom, are key barriers to achieving gender equality. These harmful norms can affect girls' educational aspirations and ambitions. Limiting expectations around what girls can achieve affects confidence and self-esteem. The portrayal of girls and boys in gendered roles, which conform to social norms (often demonstrated by carers and leaders respectively), take away choices and dreams. Furthermore, a lack of support, guidance and belief in girls can contribute to their increasing rates of drop-out and repetition.

Working with teachers to tackle these harmful gender norms and to address stereotypes found within teaching and learning materials is one step, but equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to challenge these things and push for their rights is essential. Life skills are key to this. They start to address some of the barriers stopping girls from progressing through education and into a safe, secure future of their own choosing. ■

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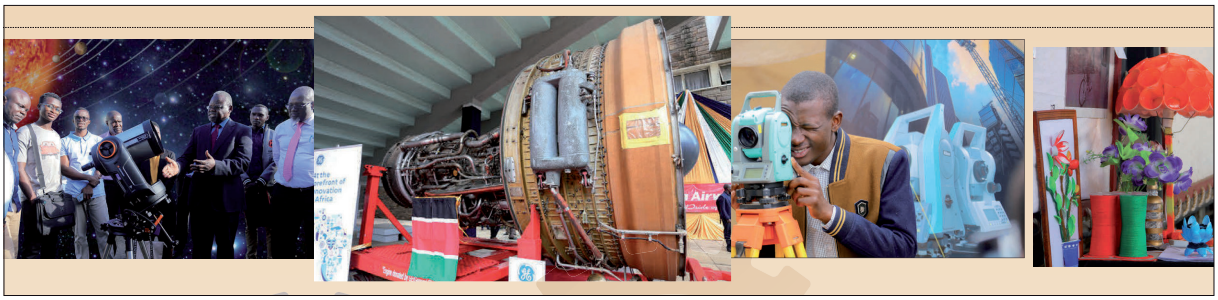

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Working with Communities: Learnings from Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Work

Manushi Yadav,
Head of Strategic Partnerships,
Pratham

For almost two years, the pandemic wrought havoc with lives and livelihoods around the world. Countries, communities, families and schools had to learn how to cope with the crisis at hand. Like with many other organisations, the pandemic has been a crucial turning point for Pratham. New challenges have emerged alongside chronic old problems.

It is important to remember that even before the pandemic, school enrollment levels were very high in India, but learning levels were very unsatisfactory and persistently low. For example, available estimates from 2018 indicate that less than 30 per cent of children in rural India were at grade level in Grade 3 based on data from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018. Even after five years in school, nearly half of all children had yet to acquire the ability to read simple text fluently or do basic subtraction problems. Although the average number of years of completed schooling has been rising over time, even after eight years of compulsory schooling, a significant proportion of young people were not adequately equipped for further learning in school or for life. Two years of school closures have made many of these problems worse.

For Pratham, our response to the crisis has evolved over the last 24 months; the initial period of complete lockdown, subsequent waves of the pandemic, including the brutal second wave, uncertainty over schools re-opening and fears about continued economic disruption – each of these phases have taught us many lessons. We have learned to reach children and communities in different ways and to engage students and young people with new methods.

At a time like this, it is even more crucial to look for community-owned, local solutions, delivered at a fraction of the costs of wholly externalised interventions. By engaging a variety of actors, sufficiently empowering them through simple and low-cost solutions, and incentivising participation

through access to relevant learning and growth opportunities, it is possible to leverage communities for impactful interventions delivered at scale as we look to build back better than before.

Here are some lessons from Pratham's work with communities over the years, especially since the pandemic.

What helped mobilise volunteers at scale remotely?

Pratham has been implementing community-focused programmes since 1995. Enabling young parents to help their children, mobilising youth volunteers to champion initiatives, and engaging village leaders in community interventions lie at the core of Pratham's programming. Over the years, teams have experimented and developed ways of encouraging community participation, mobilising unpaid community volunteers and sustaining this involvement over time.

One of the biggest lessons from the pandemic has been the realisation of how much others can and want to do to help children learn, grow, and thrive - especially community members like youth, and family members like parents and siblings. Over time, Pratham has worked closely to engage and inform local communities and schools about challenges and solutions, particularly those that pertain to education and learning. Despite difficulties and constraints, a big leap occurred during the pandemic whereby mothers and youth came forward to actively work with children to engage, motivate, and support their learning.

What can be achieved through volunteer engagement?

Reliance on a community often raises questions about the quality and sustainability of interventions and their impact. It is imperative to do quick reviews to ensure you are targeting the actors most motivated and willing to contribute and develop specific strategies to sustain their engagement.

In February 2021, Pratham teams conducted what was called the "Reach and Learning Exercise". At the time, the incidence of COVID-19 seemed to be abating, and it was important to carry out structured visits to a sample of Pratham communities to understand how children had fared in the past year regarding their schooling status and learning levels. A sample

"One of the biggest lessons from the pandemic has been the experience of how much others can do and want to do to help children learn, grow, and thrive."

"School children will continue to need substantial support for returning to school and rebuilding learning, making the role of these youth volunteers critical."

of 270 villages and communities were visited across the country. These were locations where Pratham had already been running programmes pre-Covid. Data was gathered from approximately 20,000 children on whether they had received any inputs from Pratham since lockdown began in March 2020. Inputs included phone messages and participation in any Pratham-facilitated children's group activities, including classes. For younger children, it included involvement of their parents in mothers' group activities. Data suggests that children who received more inputs (messages, neighbourhood activities) gained slightly more in terms of basic learning than those who received fewer inputs. Also, children who were part of Pratham's volunteer classes in the community had overall better learning levels than children who did not participate.

In 2022, Pratham used the summer period (May-June) as a good opportunity to help primary school age children "catch up" on reading and basic math (especially children who were in year IV-VI). The focus was on catchment areas where Pratham teams had a presence. Across 19 states, almost 60,000 volunteers conducted learning camps in approximately 30,000 communities. Over half a million children were reached during this six-week campaign. A lean measurement framework was introduced to ensure simple but reliable tracking of the impact of this work. After the campaign, the proportion of children who could read at least a paragraph increased by 38 percentage points, showcasing a significant improvement during the 24-30 days of camps run by volunteers.

How can this work be sustained over time?

School children will continue to need substantial support with returning to school and rebuilding learning, making the role of these youth volunteers critical. These volunteers belong to the same socio-economic background as the children, and after a year and a half of lockdowns and limited mobility, are looking for opportunities that can help with their own growth and development. It is possible to offer Education for Education (EfE) programmes that provide remote education and basic skill development courses to volunteers in exchange for helping younger children with education in their neighbourhood.

As part of Pratham's EfE programme, volunteers who give time to educating children in their community are offered a very basic course in digital literacy and readiness. The course is available to volunteers and parents who are interested. After registering on Pratham Digital's YouthNet portal, a participant completes the course via online content and assignments. The course covers basic digital skills and knowledge like internet behaviour, WhatsApp, email, Zoom and how to access portals and upload data. This is the first step towards introducing more such courses to the youth in the communities. During the aforementioned Summer Campaign, interested volunteers were given a practical Digital Readiness Course in return under the concept of EfE.

Initial feedback has been promising for the various pilot programmes of the contextualised courses and support systems already underway nationwide.

What does the future look like?

Pratham works on scale and constantly thinks about maximising reach and impact with minimum cost. This philosophy and operating style are based on the belief that we have solutions that can address some of the major problems in foundational literacy and numeracy gaps in India today. Hence it is critical to constantly work on mechanisms and pathways that can help to rapidly spread the know-how that we are developing. Since 2022, Pratham's core strategy with communities involves outreach and instructional work carried out by trained local volunteers who go beyond Pratham's core area of intervention to help reach additional communities in the catchment area using Pratham's teaching and learning practices – allowing the spread of Pratham's solution beyond our current geographical scope at very little additional cost. The fact that it is driven through community partnerships also builds durability and sustainability by creating a social structure that can remain without external inputs.

Building on our deep roots and growing networks in communities, and leveraging technology for continuous communication and sharing of content, Pratham intends to significantly explore and expand the geographical reach of our work through community connections. ■

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY (EDTECH)

Technology-Enhanced Learning: a Solution or a New Wicked Problem?

Maddalaine Ansell,
Director Education,
British Council

When the COVID-19 pandemic closed campuses around the world, universities had to rapidly move their teaching online. Some, such as the UK's Open University, the University of the South Pacific and the University of the West Indies, who were used to delivering for remote populations, had considerable expertise to use and share. For others, the learning curve was steep. Now that many of us are nearly out the other side, what have we learned?

The first lesson is that technology-enhanced learning is here to stay. In a world where more and more students fit their education around work and caring responsibilities, it enables universities to offer students a more personalised higher education experience where they can study in their own time, at their own pace and without needing to commute. This is often supported by course materials being placed in a virtual learning environment (VLE) which students can access easily at any time – removing frustrations about finding out what resources are available and locating them. Many students also find that regular quizzes help them understand their progress, and real-time feedback keeps them motivated.

For some students, particularly those studying in a second language or from cultures where speaking up is not encouraged, asynchronous provision can give them time to think through and check their contributions. It also removes the need to participate as quickly as students who are more comfortable speaking up. Hearing from everybody makes the discussions richer.

It also improves access as students based in remote locations can participate. This is increasingly true even of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics courses, as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies enable students to participate in virtual experiments even if they are not close to a laboratory. AR and VR can, of course, also offer enriching, immersive learning experiences to students studying the Arts and Humanities and have been doing so for some time.

Remote delivery can also support the sharing of resources in areas where there is a shortage of teachers and

facilities. A relatively small number of highly qualified teachers can develop and produce high-quality modules that can be used online by many universities. Similarly, a small number of universities can be funded to build capacity in technology-enhanced learning with the expectation that they will share this knowledge more widely within the sector. This was trialled through the Partnership of Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL) initiative in East Africa, with the knowledge built up by the participating universities proving extremely useful during the pandemic.

Finally, university leaders recognise that the outside world is increasingly technology-enabled and that they would be failing in their duty if they did not help the students to engage effectively – and critically – with tools that will

"technology-enhanced learning is here to stay. In a world where more and more students are fitting their education around work and caring responsibilities, it enables universities to offer students a more personalised higher education experience where they can study in their own time, at their own pace and without needing to commute."

become essential for them to succeed as members of society both within and outside of their professional lives.

Although the case, including the equity case, for technology-enhanced learning is strong, there are still huge challenges. The digital divide is real. Many potential students live in areas with poor connectivity and do not have access to sophisticated devices or quiet places to study. Not all students are "digital natives". Many do not have the skills to get the most out of a digitally-delivered education. Equally, some teachers are not skilled in designing and developing digital courses and fall back on filming their lectures and putting them online.

While universities cannot solve connectivity problems alone, they can think about how to design courses that will still work where it is poor. For example, if the internet is patchy, courses can use audio files which are smaller than video files and easier to stream. It may also help if learners can download material at the beginning of a session so interruptions like power cuts will not feel so disruptive. Discussions can be set up to work effectively asynchronously so that students can contribute whenever they can get connected.

Where students are unlikely to have access to sophisticated laptops and tablets, universities can design courses that will work on a basic smartphone. Equally, if students are unlikely to be able to study at home, universities can establish remote hubs which, while not providing everything a full campus might, can at least provide physical spaces within which to learn, and informal spaces to congregate and connect with peers. These approaches were tried with some success during the Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access (PADILEIA) project working with Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.

We also need to recognise that digital inequality intersects with other inequalities such as race, poverty, gender and [dis]ability, and that individual learning preferences and different personality types also need to be taken into account.

University leaders will also need to think about how to support their staff to develop their digital skills at every stage of their careers. This includes thinking through incentives that reward improvement in this area and a culture that allows them to experiment, make mistakes, and adapt.

None of this is cheap. For digitally delivered courses to be recognised as being as effective as face-to-face, their quality must be assured. Developing high-quality e-learning modules is expensive and takes time. Adding to this challenge is the fact that many students still want the benefits of a campus environment, including the opportunity to learn with and from others, socialise, and access facilities that they do not have at home. This means that most people see a hybrid rather than a fully online model developing over the short to medium term. In the longer term, campus costs may be reduced while ways to deliver these benefits online are developed, but in the short-term, university leaders may have to manage the cost of both face-to-face and digital delivery. This comes on top of the perennial issue of how to maintain quality when seeking to educate more students while keeping the amount spent on higher education affordable within government budgets.

The challenge of digital delivery sits alongside, and interacts with, the other wicked problems with which university leaders must grapple. How to manage scarce resources? How to ensure higher education drives towards a fairer and more inclusive society? How to meet the needs of both a changing and unpredictable labour market and evolving student expectations? These are not easy problems and underline the need for the many brilliant university leaders from across the Commonwealth to share knowledge and expertise to tackle them together. ■

"We also need to recognise that digital inequality intersects with other inequalities such as race, poverty, gender and [dis]ability, and that individual learning preferences and different personality types also need to be taken into account."

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Dr Rose Anne Cuschieri
CEO, MFHEA

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Ensuring Accessible and Inclusive Education for All

Hon. Dr. Clifton Grima,
Minister for Education, Sports, Youth, Research, and Innovation, Government of Malta

I welcome the occasion to look back at the unprecedented challenges brought about by the two-year COVID-19 pandemic, but also delve into lessons learnt and the way forward. I emphasise 'lessons learnt', as I firmly believe that the challenges we faced led us to adapt and turn those challenges into opportunities.

Malta observes that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected and put unprecedented pressure on education and training systems worldwide. Education is fundamental to well-being and is a foundation of collective resilience. The need to rethink and reimagine its role was already acute before the pandemic, in light of technological changes and the need to reskill for the transition to a more sustainable economy.

We believe that although the switch to digital teaching and learning played a major role in enabling the continuation of the learning process during the pandemic, digital education cannot fully substitute quality face-to-face teaching and learning.

In view of the significant disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Malta developed a number of measures aimed at supporting all students and mitigate the impact of these disruptions. These permanent measures have enhanced the educational journey for all students and allowed for the development of best practices, which will also be retained post-Covid. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to strengthen Malta's digital preparedness and digital tools to improve the quality and inclusiveness of education systems.

We believe that digital education and training also needs to prioritise the needs and circumstances of vulnerable learners. Malta is ensuring that free internet access and electronic devices: laptops and tablets are provided. This became ever more important following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach has recently been extended to encourage post-secondary education, where eligible students will benefit from free internet for one year if opting to immediately continue their studies after finishing secondary education. The 2022-23 Scholastic Year will also see the distribution of free laptops to all Year 7 Students.

Malta continued to operate virtual primary, middle and secondary schools for medically vulnerable students, as well as providing 12,643 free online recorded lessons through Teleskola that are accessible on-demand.

This measure was supported by an educational Catch-Up programme organised over summer 2021, targeting medically vulnerable students who missed out on lessons. This continued

in Scholastic Year 2021/2022. Such measures serve as a good exploratory platform to tap into the possibilities of exploring mixed online and offline blended learning methods.

Post-compulsory and tertiary institutions also re-opened their doors through the adoption of multiple approaches to lecture delivery, in-person, online and hybrid options.

Malta's supportive measures brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic are being monitored and evaluated within the observation of the government's programme.

Challenges have been significant, and they have also brought to the fore the need to continue to modernise education systems and build sustainable strategies for inclusive and open-ended pathways which cater for all abilities and thus tap into the potential of all students.

Malta's education system has undergone a series of adaptations in the wake of the pandemic in a bid to maintain access to quality and equitable education. In this regard, adaptation measures have devoted particular attention to maximising the use of innovative teaching and learning, including more emphasis on the use of digital tools.

Throughout the pandemic, we maximised the available virtual resources whilst continuing to provide access to high-quality education, a top priority. I consider that resetting education and training for the digital age is key for maintaining the high standards of life and economic growth.

The digital transition is creating promising opportunities whilst bringing forward newly implied challenges. In this regard, we consider that further discussions and assessments are needed to properly assess the impact whilst preparing a cohesive mitigation plan so that no one is left behind, which also ensures a smooth transition towards digitalisation.

It is imperative for educational institutions, including Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions and universities, to focus further on putting digital and innovation skills at the core of learning experiences. This can be achieved by seeking ways in which such experiences are incorporated into the theoretical and practical components of curricula. Malta has targeted the enhancement of digital literacy amongst young learners through the One Tablet Per Child initiative.

Thus, we are supporting social inclusion, particularly in relation to access to digital platforms and tools, such as through this One Tablet Per Child scheme, established to ensure that all children are given a fair and equal

"Challenges we faced, led us to adapt, and turn challenges into opportunities."

"It is important to ensure that we move away from a 'one size fits all' system to more inclusive and equal programmes which maximise the abilities and skills of each individual."

opportunity to be closer to technology.

Education and training play a key role in fostering a skilled and knowledgeable society which is able to address challenges faced and identify opportunities.

It is essential that we rethink how education and training can enhance equal access, create opportunities for all and guarantee better social well-being. In doing so, it is important to ensure that we move away from a 'one size fits all' system to more inclusive and equal programmes which maximise the abilities and skills of each individual.

I believe that in reviewing education priorities, the Commonwealth needs to renew its approach to bringing education closer to industry needs and ensure that our learning systems are able to cater for any forthcoming changes.

Rethinking our education priorities involves placing a renewed focus on achieving high-quality education for all, through inclusion and diversity too. This involves placing particular emphasis on ensuring access to continued education for disadvantaged students to guarantee education systems that work for all.

Furthermore, adaptations need to focus on blending formal, informal, and non-formal education in order to ensure the acquisition of relevant skills, aptitudes and lifelong values required for active and responsible citizenry.

As all Commonwealth nations are recovering from the pandemic, it is opportune enough to think about how through our shared principles, we can rethink our outlook towards inclusive and accessible education mechanisms which can prepare learners for upcoming challenges and transitions.

Skills mismatches remain a challenging reality across the global economy, which has increased with the onset of both digital and green transitions.

In this regard, Malta supports continued investments in digital infrastructure, as well as learning opportunities through the development of policies geared towards supporting skills development within and beyond compulsory school age.

Within compulsory education settings, personalisation and mobilisation of learning are key in order to keep up with the modern advances of today's society.

I believe in the collective need for the Commonwealth to ensure investment in the creation of adaptable, accessible, and high-quality education opportunities. This will serve to enable an actively engaged society that leaves nobody behind.

Lessons learnt will be our strength to shape a better future through collective effort and collaboration. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that we can no longer operate in a vacuum, and cooperative initiatives are not only beneficial but necessary to ensure open channels of communication among us. ■

AFRICA SPECIAL FOCUS

Looking Past Recovery to Transformation: Building Resilient, Adaptive Education Systems in the Wake of COVID-19

Rachel Christina Ph.D,
Director of International
Basic Education,
Education Development Center

As the everyday threat of COVID-19 waned, 2022 was heralded as a year of education system recovery from drastic declines in enrolment and learning outcomes over the prior two years. Progress has been slow, however, and even among the best-resourced systems, the effects of school closures, learning disruption, and the psychosocial toll of the pandemic will linger for years. For education systems already challenged by constraints of poverty, violence, and other crises, the burden of recovery is even heavier.

Indeed, recovery, if defined as the restoration of the status quo, is an unachievable and less than satisfactory goal, as many systems, ante COVID-19, were simply not meeting the needs of learners and their communities or broader national and global development goals. What is needed, post-pandemic, is a rethinking of the aims of education at all levels, and a recalibration of content and delivery that promotes resilience, adaptation, and opportunity. COVID-19 is only one of many threats to the continuity of education; systems must be able to address continued health risks, climate change, forced displacement and migration, and altered patterns of conflict and violence within and across states. Education systems must become more flexible and responsive as they rebuild after the pandemic and consider the costs of learning posed by these other threats.

The cost to learners and families, if change is not made, will simply be too great. Simulations from 2022 indicate that rates of learning poverty (the proportion of children who cannot read a simple text with comprehension by age 10) have surged by more than 15 points since 2019 to an estimated 70 per cent in low- and middle-income countries.[1] As a result, the gains made since 2015 have effectively been lost. Traditionally marginalised and excluded populations, which had less access to the supplementary technology and learning spaces with which governments experimented during the pandemic, have fallen further behind.

COVID-19's impact on education is seen in sharp relief in Commonwealth countries like Uganda and Zambia. In those contexts, progress in reducing learning poverty through significant investment in foundational literacy over the past 15 years was reversed, and in some cases erased, by the pandemic. In Uganda, 2022 reading scores plummeted to a low not seen since 2016. In some languages, declines in the percentage of learners meeting national benchmarks were greater than 40 per cent from their 2018 high.[2] In Zambia, where performance improvements in literacy across the seven national languages were uneven but persistent over the last decade, the percentage of Grade 2 students reading at minimum proficiency in 2021 was half that of 2018, and no students met the national benchmarks for reading fluency.[3] Performance gaps in 2021 between the roughly two-thirds of primary learners in government schools and the one-third in community schools were stark, with community school learners performing even more poorly than their public school peers.

Learning loss undermines children's opportunities to succeed in higher levels of education, access the foundational skills necessary for employment, and ultimately contribute meaningfully to their communities as responsible and productive citizens. Fundamentally, children have been deprived of their right to learn and of the opportunities that flow therefrom.

Restoration of the right to learn for the millions of children who have lost schooling during the pandemic and the protection of that right for those who come after them must be prioritised as part of recovery. The RAPID framework put forward by the multi-actor group behind The

"What is needed, post-pandemic, is a rethinking of the aims of education at all levels, and a recalibration of content and delivery that promotes resilience, adaptation, and opportunity."

State of Global Learning Poverty, of which the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is a member, promotes access and inclusion as essential. Support for more adaptive and resilient education systems is also crucial and should be prioritised. Uganda's learners returned to school after one of the longest and most stringent Covid closures in the world, only to face another shutdown to control an Ebola outbreak. In other contexts, post-pandemic teacher strikes interrupted instruction and unbalanced the school year. Conflict continues to close schools and fracture communities worldwide. The global COVID-19 pandemic was unique in scale but not in localised impact, and education systems need to focus on adaptation[4] of delivery strategies and learning tools to better manage future shocks.

Adaptation for resilience can occur across the socio-ecological system within which learning is embedded. Classroom instruction for individual learners must be made more responsive to learner needs, based on more formative assessment. Communities must be able to respond to stresses with more flexible alternatives to traditional schooling, as in the example of community-led COVID-19 learning groups in Uganda, which drew on idled capacity within communities to keep learners engaged with literacy instruction. Low-cost, robust use of technology can support the extension of learning during schooling interruptions, as seen in the example of interactive audio instruction and remote teacher training in Zambia. These same adaptive strategies can be institutionalised at the system level, with attention to lessons learned from COVID-19 in terms of cost, quality, and equity of implementation.

Improved delivery of education must be paired with attention to its content and purpose. Expanding the understanding of foundational skills to address broader habits of mind that promote critical thinking, collaboration, complex problem-solving, judgement, effective expression, and cognitive flexibility is also essential to individual and societal adaptation and resilience. Mechanics of literacy and numeracy must be balanced with the flexible application (including through early and active exposure to science teaching and learning) of those foundational competencies that support and reinforce social-emotional learning and empower learners to make meaning of and contribute effectively to the world around them.

Finally, pandemic recovery provides a touch point for education system transformation. Better investment in and more effective coordination of education resources is critical to ensure that all children experience a continuum of schooling that leads to opportunities for work in changing economies vulnerable to a variety of shocks or stressors. Indeed, shifts towards knowledge and service economies can be positively influenced by schooling that supports environmental conservation, attention to biodiversity, and climate-responsive growth. Building resilient, adaptive education systems that can leverage the lessons of the pandemic and reorient in their wake is in the interest of all. ■

"Restoration of the right to learn for the millions of children who have lost schooling during the pandemic and the protection of that right for those who come after them must be prioritised as part of recovery."

1. World Bank, UNICEF, UK FCDO, USAID, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and UNESCO (2022). The State of Global Learning Poverty, 2022 Update.

2. USAID Uganda Integrated Child and Youth Development Activity (2022). Cohort 2 Early Grade Reading Assessment.

3. USAID Education Data Activity (April 2022). Zambia Early Grade Reading Assessment 2021 Midline Report.

4. A framework for education adaptation focused particularly on the most vulnerable in Africa is found in the Global Center for Adaptation's State and Trends in Adaptation Report 2022.

School Meals: a Win-Win Solution to Address Intersecting Hunger, Health, Learning and Climate Crises

Liesbet Steer,
President and CEO,
Education Development Center

Investing in school meals is a win-win solution and a no-brainer for governments seeking to build their nations' future. There is overwhelming evidence that well-designed and effectively delivered school meals programmes – especially when implemented with complementary health programmes to maximise impact – can build a nation's human capital through increased years of schooling, better learning, and improved health and nutrition.[1] Despite setbacks during the pandemic, school meals programmes are one of the largest social safety nets in the world. School meal provision also has important economic benefits. They have generated about 4 million jobs in 85 countries, often benefitting local companies in food preparation led by women.

In addition, school feeding programmes can be an effective strategy to make progress on climate goals by promoting climate-smart solutions and creating a platform for increasing awareness around sustainability. They can help create sustainable and climate-friendly agricultural practices, predictable markets for local farmers and food preparers, and climate-friendly preparation and distribution practices that will combine to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, lift communities economically and provide sustainable and healthy meals to young learners. They can address the global and national equity concerns at the heart of climate justice while supporting the reform of food systems, especially at a local level.[2] As Dr. Rachel Christina writes in her article; Looking Past Recovery to Transformation: Building Resilient, Adaptive Education Systems in the Wake of COVID-19 (page 70 in this volume): 'the pandemic recovery provides a touch point for education system transformation...[including] schooling that supports environmental conservation, attention to biodiversity,

and climate-responsive growth.' This greater climate awareness could be built around school meals programmes.

The State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022 report paints a hopeful picture for the expansion of school meals programmes in the post-pandemic landscape. The number of children benefiting from such programmes is now 418 million, which is an increase of 30 million over the level prior to the pandemic in early 2020.[3] This significant gain in the number of children receiving school meals has, in part, been the result of the political commitment of the 78 countries and 86 partners in the School Meals Coalition, a group dedicated to improving the quality of school meals and strengthening school meal systems globally. More than 40 per cent of all primary school children globally now have access to a free or subsidised daily school meal. But coverage varies by income level. While programmes have been restored and expanded relatively quickly in middle- and high-income countries, and coverage stands at 39 and 48 per cent respectively, progress in low-income countries has been much slower despite significant domestic investments. Just 18 per cent of school children in low-income countries receive free or subsidised meals today. The international community must continue to prioritise support to these countries to help them achieve their targets.

Continued support for the expansion of school meals programmes is critical, especially in the current environment of global food insecurity. New data suggest 153 million school-age children have been impacted by the rising food and hunger crisis, and another 23 million children have been pushed into acute food insecurity.[4] Climate change will likely aggravate children's food insecurity in the coming years.

Addressing these challenges will require a fundamentally new way of working across sectors and stakeholders. For far too long, the challenges posed by the failure of food systems – hunger, obesity, unsustainable agriculture, precarious rural livelihoods – have been treated by policy-makers and non-government organisations as separate issues, leading to fragmented responses. School meals programmes have the potential to cut across polarised political divides.

Making progress will also require additional investment. Many countries have made great strides on this front. Over the past 20 years, 44 countries have moved from reliance on external funding towards financing school meals programmes from their own resources, and others are well on their way. However, despite this progress, 60 per cent of low-income countries are currently unable to finance school meals programmes from their domestic revenues.

A recent school meals financing landscape analysis highlights the need for a new approach to mobilise additional investments.[5]

First, national strategies need to be supported by feasible financing plans. Most countries have adopted school feeding strategies, often delivered by an array of central and local government agencies, but strategies are often not

supported by comprehensive costing estimates or financing strategies. In some cases, especially in resource-scarce environments, this will require setting strategies for targeting. Some countries have opted for targeting based on income (e.g. Bangladesh), while others target by geography (e.g. Ghana).

Second, countries that are not in a position to fund their school meals today could devise a path to self-reliance over time and explore innovative funding strategies to help bridge the gap. A number of strategies have shown the way forward in terms of options to strengthen and scale financing. These include using natural resource revenues and public bads taxation, SDG bonds, debt swaps and earmarked taxes.

Finally, there is a need for a shift in approach from donors and the international development community. Based on reported data, overall aid to school feeding from 2018 to 2020 ranged from $132 million to $297 million per year, or just 1.5 per cent of aid to education (which itself fell by $359 million). Efforts to mobilise additional financing will need to go beyond the siloed organisation of international financing institutions and innovate to facilitate multi-sectoral financing, prioritising school feeding in the concessional financing of multilateral development banks and in funding from leading bilateral donors and philanthropy, and leveraging scarce donor resources by supporting innovative mechanisms such as the International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd).

Many Commonwealth countries are already making great strides, both in expanding and implementing school meals programmes and displaying their multi-sectoral benefits. In Rwanda, President Paul Kagame's administration has already met the commitment announced in 2021 of universal school feeding. The country has moved from supporting 660,000 children in 2020 to 3.8 million in 2022. In Sierra Leone, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education David Sengeh endorsed the new School Feeding Policy in May 2021, developed to reflect the government's increased focus on food security, nutrition, and National Home Grown School Feeding Programmes. Finally, last year, the government of Sri Lanka – facing a budget crisis and inflation - utilised a new menu-planning tool to increase dietary diversity and include local ingredients, keeping costs down without interrupting delivery.[6] The Sustainable Financing Initiative (SFI) for school health and nutrition, an initiative of the School Meals Coalition, will begin discussions with several Commonwealth countries in 2023 to determine how national school meals programmes could be used for these multi-sectoral benefits.

It is time to leverage our best and biggest social safety net. School meals programmes could – and should - be part of building adaptable and resilient food, education, and climate systems for future generations. ■

1. Dubai Cares & The Education Commission (2022). Rewiring Education for People and Planet.

2. Watkins, K. (2022). "School Meals Programmes and the Education Crisis: A Financial Landscape Analysis", Sustainable Financing Initiative, The Education Commission.

3. WFP (2022). State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022. Rome, World Food Programme.

4. WFP (2022). "A generation at risk: nearly half of global food crisis hungry are children"

5. Watkins, K. (2022). "School Meals Programmes and the Education Crisis: A Financial Landscape Analysis", Sustainable Financing Initiative, The Education Commission.

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Covenant University

Raising a New Generation of Leaders

www.covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Founded in 2002, Covenant University is a vision-driven world-class university in Ota, Nigeria. The university's campus is uniquely located in Canaan Land, the home of the 50,000-seat capacity sanctuary, the Faith Tabernacle, which was listed in the 2008 edition of the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest Church auditorium in the world with overflow facilities for 250,000 worshippers. The University campus, known as Hebron- the birthplace of Kings and Queens, is an ultra-modern, serene and secured, with beautiful gardens and an array of iconic facilities for teaching, research, sports, and residential purposes.

Covenant University is driven by a compelling vision of raising a new generation of leaders in all fields of human endeavours. The university's departure philosophy and pillars are deeply rooted in Biblical principles and are directed towards effecting change in the recovery process of Nigeria's education sectors and the restoration of the dignity of the Blackman. We are blessed with a transformational leader and Chancellor, Dr. David O. Oyedepo. Covenant equipped students with practical and life-applicable skills via its custom-built programmes as well as internships and mentorship by experienced professors, scholars, and industry technocrats. Also, our robust campus and off-campus activities, groups, and chaplaincy distinctively bring out the gifting of students, turning them into rare gems. Consequently, Covenant students are uniquely packaged as change agents ready to impact the world and change the unpleasant narratives of Africa.

Covenant University is a multicultural community with more than 8,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students representing over 13 nations. The university also has an alumni network of more than 20,000 members across over 50 countries. In Covenant, students pursue 34 programmes of study leading to the award of bachelor, master, and Ph.D degrees in the university's four colleges, namely: Engineering; Management and Social Sciences; Leadership and Development Studies; and Science and Technology.

Our unparalleled quality assurance mechanism has earned the University accreditation status for all programmes with the National Universities Commission, the apex regulatory body for university education in Nigeria, and all relevant professional bodies in Nigeria. Also, one of the university programmes has an international accreditation status, and more are expected in the nearest future.

In just 20 years of its existence, Covenant has become a leading world-class university and the best higher education destination in Africa. Also, within the Nigerian Higher educational system, Covenant is a reference point for its unique pedagogy, innovative curriculum, cutting-edge research engagements, community service emphasis, and administrative excellence. These institutional best practices have earned the University accolades and recognition from government and professional regulatory bodies, the industry, and rating agencies. For instance, the National Universities Commission has consistently named Covenant the best private university in Nigeria and the Number 2 ranked university overall. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board also, in the 2022 policy meeting, named Covenant, "The Most Compliant Institution in Keeping to the Guidelines in 2020 Admission."

OUR AWARDS

- Top 800 in Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings in 2023.
- The only Private university among all the Nigerian Universities in the 2023 THE World University Rankings, making it the best private University in Nigeria and Africa.
- Led all Nigerian Universities in 5 Subject Rankings in the 2023 THE World University Rankings, and these disciplines are: Social Sciences (Top 300) and Business and Economics, Computer Science, Engineering, and Physical Sciences (Top 500).
- Nigeria's Leading Research University in the 2023 THE World University Rankings and ranked 562 globally.
- Ranked Top 400 globally in 2022 THE SDGs Impact Rankings.
- Ranked Top 200 globally in Emerging Economies Rankings in 2022 by THE.
- Won Triple Awards at Nigeria Technology Awards.
- Best Private University Award at the Prestige Nigeria Education Awards 2022.
- IAESTE Long Standing Support award.
- Covenant Enactus' Pet City Project Won IFTDO Global Award 2022 in the Innovation in Practice Category.
- Best Tertiary Institution Website/Portal at the 5th Nigerian Internet Registration Association.ng Awards in 2022.
- Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Abiodun H. Adebayo, was elected as a member of the Council and Trustee of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU).
- Africa's Best World Class Private Varsity of the Decade in Quality Education Award.
- First African University to Win the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN) Award in nine years under the Whole Systems Approach with its PET City Bricks Submission.
- Ranked 2nd Best in 2022 Webometrics Rankings among Nigerian Universities.
- The United Nation's Award as Climate Champion.

RESEARCH

Research has been central to the twin missions of Covenant University by offering solutions to critical societal problems and being a leading global educational institution. These ambitions are intimately linked, and their innovations have benefitted the country's health, economy, and political processes and made Covenant increasingly prominent. Also, the university is currently one of Africa's leading research universities. The feat is made possible by our world-class faculty, staff, and postgraduate students who are immersed in innovative and cutting-edge research, including studies in bioinformatics, human genome research, cancer research, renewable energy, IOT-enabled smart & connected communities, biotechnology, as well as leadership, arts, humanities, social sciences, among others. These research activities are coordinated under research clusters and centres of excellence superintended by the University's Centre for Research, Innovation, and Discovery (CUCRID). The unique funding arrangements of the institution ensure its long-term commitment to the welfare of society. The following are some recent grants the university and its faculty/research groups won to execute different research projects from local and international organisations:

- The World Bank Grant for Research on Applied Informatics and Communications.
- African Translational Cancer Genomics Training Grant from CRDF Global.
- COVID-19 Research Grant Award from Nigeria COVID-19 Research Coalition.
- Optimisation of Off-Grid Energy Supply Systems in Nigeria research grant from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.
- Grant for the Development of a Secure Federated Genomics Cloud Architecture Towards Precision Medicine in Africa (SEC-FEDGEN) - Research Project from Agence Francaise de Development (AFD) ACE Partners.
- West African Sustainable Leadership and Innovation Training in Bioinformatics Research (WASLITBRe) Grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Health, Fogarty International Center.
- West African Virus Epidemiology (WAVE) research project grant from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- "Early Life Aflatoxin B1 Exposure and Epigenetic Programming in Nigerian New Borns" grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services.

The university's projects are chiefly targeted toward solving health challenges, global food security problems, climate change, waste management, electronic governance, business, and poverty eradication. Although these are the "big picture" challenges, each issue has a local aspect, which provides relevance and impetus.

COVENANT UNIVERSITY'S ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Covenant University continues to enjoy and benefit from collaborations and active partnerships with many highly reputable organisations and higher education institutions across the globe, including:

- United Nation
- UNESCO
- African Development Bank Group
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA
- Nottingham Trent University, UK
- University of Missouri-Kansas City, USA
- Royal Holloway University of London, UK
- Witten/Herdecke University, Germany
- University of California Davis Campus, USA
- University of Johannesburg, South Africa
- Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa
- The Africa-America Institute, USA
- Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada
- Science Po, France
- École pour l'informatique et les techniques avancées (EPITA), France
- Morgan State University, USA
- Ecole Cenrale De Nantes, France
- Landmark University
- OLLMOO Limited, UK
- OBTranslate, Germany
- Riga Technical University, Latvia (Erasmus+)
- University of London, UK
- Skyline University, Kano
- ABM University College, Botswana

Teachers at the Heart of Education Transformation

Carlos Vargas,
Head of the Secretariat of the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 and Section for Teacher Development, UNESCO

The COVID-19 pandemic showed us that we can only overcome great challenges if we work together as a global community. And we know that more challenges are ahead: climate change, rapid technological development, mounting inequality, armed conflict, and the rollback of democracy demand an unprecedented response from all of us. Education is key to providing people with the tools they need to address these challenges and build just and sustainable futures, but to fulfil this transformational role, education itself must be transformed. As the pandemic demonstrated, teachers are the front-line actors in innovating and implementing education system changes, and to succeed in their essential role, they need to be supported.

More and better-qualified teachers are needed

At the Transforming Education Summit (TES), convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in September 2022, teachers, teaching and the teaching profession were recognised as fundamental in getting the world back on track towards meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), particularly after the disruptions caused by school closures and the shift to remote education during the pandemic. The Summit also confirmed that the single most important thing we can do to ensure quality education and the well-being of students and communities is to put more qualified and motivated teachers into classrooms. But in too many places, especially in remote and disadvantaged areas, classrooms are overcrowded, and teachers are too few. When teachers are overworked, demotivated and unsupported, they cannot contribute to improving learning and transforming education for the future.

Globally, we need millions more teachers: in sub-Saharan Africa alone, 16.5 million extra teachers are needed. But the profession is facing enormous difficulties in attracting and retaining the best candidates. Poor working conditions, low professional status and meagre salaries discourage talented young people from joining the profession and force many of the best teachers to change careers. In too many countries, teachers are paid less than comparably qualified people in other career paths, and in crisis-affected areas, they are often paid late or not at all. The gender imbalance persists, with women over-represented in the profession as a whole and

under-represented in leadership roles. Meanwhile, the increased use of contract teachers across many regions and countries means that too many teachers have inadequate job security and do not receive the same benefits as their public sector counterparts. In order to attract more and better teachers, all teachers need to be respected and properly resourced.

The teacher gap is not just quantitative; not enough teachers have the minimum required qualifications and training to perform their important role, and this has heavy implications on the quality of education. All teachers need to be provided with quality initial education and continuous professional development throughout their careers, but this is not happening everywhere: even before the pandemic, one in three teachers in sub-Saharan Africa and one in four teachers in Southern Asia lacked the minimum required qualifications and training. In-service training is crucial to help teachers deal with crises and changing education environments. It can also help prevent stress and burnout and instil a sense of belonging to a professional community. However, teachers do not always have access to the continuing professional development that they need; in 2019 in Pakistan, for example, only 62 per cent of primary school teachers had received in-service training in the previous year. UNESCO and the TTF's Global Report on Teachers will aim to capture the complexity of teacher shortages in its first edition, planned for the end of 2023.

Teachers need recognition and support to innovate

Emerging demands have made the need for teachers to develop new skills even more stark. During the pandemic, teachers had to find new ways of working in extremely difficult conditions, transforming learning content and methodologies and contributing to supporting the

"Education is key to providing people with the tools they need to address these challenges and build just and sustainable futures, but to fulfil this transformational role, education itself must be transformed."

well-being of students and parents, while frequently receiving little socio-emotional support themselves. A joint UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and OECD survey showed that only a little more than half of countries provided the psychosocial support needed to promote teacher well-being. Teachers achieved great things in difficult times. In Uganda, for example, teachers from one school broadcasted lessons on local television, in an initiative that became so successful that it has now spread to 45 channels across Africa. This kind of innovation needs to be supported, and teachers need to be given the autonomy and flexibility to put their ideas into practice in the classroom. Teachers are best placed to identify and address the needs of learners and communities, and this is part and parcel of their everyday work; this should be recognised. With the proper training and support, they can exercise their pedagogical judgement to determine how to help their students achieve their full potential. Empowering teachers and preparing school leaders to support them can help to achieve bottom-up as well as system-wide transformation.

The pandemic showed that digital technology holds great promise for opening up learning to more children and young people, with many schools in different education systems working to facilitate continued student learning through Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-enabled distance education. But access to technology is uneven, both for teachers and for learners. In sub-Saharan Africa and low-income countries, on average, fewer than one in three schools have computers that students can use for learning, and fewer than one in five have internet. Teachers need not only access to devices and infrastructure, but also training on how to use ICTs as a means to an end, rather than as an end in themselves. The trend towards digitalisation will continue when the COVID-19 threat recedes, and to fully participate in the 21st century, both teachers and students need training in digital literacy and advanced digital skills. Peer-to-peer collaboration, can be a powerful tool in helping teachers share best practices on digital technology in teaching methods. Facilitating teacher collaboration and experimentation through communities of practice can help teachers to take full advantage of existing research and drive innovation.

Transforming education means investing in teachers

If the effort to transform education is to succeed, teachers need to be respected and properly supported. Consultations held as part of the TES have signposted three ways to do this. First, teachers' status and working conditions must be improved, and teachers' voices must be heard. Teachers are central to the transformation of education, and as the interface between learners and education systems, their perspectives must be central to policy debates and systemic changes. To facilitate this, robust social dialogue should be fostered, and teachers should be empowered to participate in every stage of education decision-making, from the classroom to the policy level.

Second, national policies for the teaching profession need to be formulated and implemented. These policies should cover ways to improve the recruitment and deployment of teachers, as well as their continuous professional development, linking teaching standards and quality frameworks to curricula and accreditation processes and teachers' careers. They should also lay out ways to promote innovation and enable teacher leadership.

Finally, countries need to invest more in improving teacher wages, professional development and working conditions. Governments have committed to spending 20 per cent of annual public expenditure on education, and they must honour this commitment. Annual donor budgets, too, need to increase to meet international aid benchmarks. The world needs more and better-qualified teachers who are capable of carrying out their essential role in forming global citizens prepared to change the planet – so the world must be prepared to pay for them.

As posited in UNESCO's recent publication on Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education, education goes beyond the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. To achieve the futures we want, education must inculcate the values and norms and shape the attitudes needed to arrive at more peaceful, just and sustainable societies. Teachers are the defining force that can bring about this transformation. So, as a matter of priority, we need to ensure that all teachers have the support, respect and resources they need to contribute to the future of education, and of the world. ■

"The pandemic showed that digital technology holds great promise for opening up learning to more children and young people."

Busitema University, a Centre of Excellence in Training, Research and Innovation In Uganda

Busitema University
Pursuing excellence

Established in 2007 in the rural communities of Eastern Uganda, Busitema University is a multi campus science and technology University with six faculties of Engineering, Science and Education, Agriculture and Animal Sciences, Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, Health Sciences and Management Sciences. The University also runs a Maritime Institute and a Clinical Research Institute. To accelerate its contribution to the socioeconomic transformation of the rural society, the University has established centres of excellence in Space Science, Soil Science, Materials and Energy Engineering, Maternal and Child Health, Natural Products Research and Innovation and Artificial Intelligence.

Vision: "A Centre of academic and professional excellence in science, technology and innovations."
Mission: "To provide high standard training, engage in quality research and outreach to support industrialisation and sustainable development."

Busitema University Main Library, Centre of Information Science and Digitalisation.

Prof. Paul Waako, The Vice Chancellor of Busitema University steering the University towards Research, Innovation and Product development.

The Rt. Hon. Robinah Nabbanja, The Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda inspecting TAZCOV stall, a new medicine developed by Busitema University for management of COVID-19 during the National Science Week 2022 at Kololo.

Busitema University Embraces Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) Strategy.

Busitema University (BU) has since 2019 run distance learning programmes, but adoption of e-learning was slow. However, in an effort to live up to the expectations of BU strategic plan (2020/2030), the University adopted blended learning with the Busitema University Online Learning Environment (BUOLE) – which is a Moodle-based Learning Management System (LMS) as integral to this approach. The need to fully adopt BUOLE was heightened by 'social distancing' and prohibition of social gathering that the country adopted for the control of the COVID 19 pandemic to continue the teaching and learning process even during the lockdowns. Unprepared for this highly demanding approach regarding digital tools and human capacity, Busitema University empowered its ODeL Unit to foster the online implementation of all its academic programmes. The number of courses hosted on the University LMS (BUOLE) has since increased from less than 100 at the beginning of 2020 to 1,446 courses as of 23rd March, 2023. At determined intervals, students are periodically allowed to develop hands-on skills during face-to-face sessions with their facilitators.

Members of Busitema University management receiving a CISCO switch from the Research Education Network Uganda (RENU), an internet service provider whose internet is zero-rated for access by students via their mobile devices. This enhanced the attendance of both synchronous and asynchronous online sessions by students.

The Government of Uganda is emphasizing the development of Science, Technology and Innovation as the main driver to its middle income state aspirations with Universities and other tertiary institutions as its changing agents.

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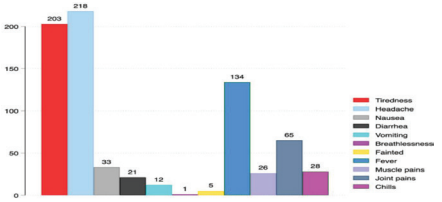
Hon. Dr. Monica Musenero Masanza, The Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation inspecting the TAZCOV Facility. She is spearheading the government agenda of having 'a science-led economy' through accelerating the development of Science, Technology and Innovation.

Busitema University's Contribution To Knowledge, Solutions and Evaluation of Public Health Interventions and Pandemics.

Through its Community and Public Health Department, established in 2015, the researchers designed, implemented and evaluated interventions used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccine hesitancy was a key challenge to COVID-19 vaccinations, which have proven to be the most effective strategy against the pandemic. We explored the levels and drivers of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, and one of the key themes was fear of side effects. We followed up with 2,204 participants to ascertain the nature of side effects experienced by recipients to distinguish facts from myths. Below are the side effect profiles that our participants experienced.



Local Side effects following Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 Vaccine in Tororo District

The researchers also explored treatment outcomes, and experiences of participants treated under the home-based care interventions rolled out hurriedly during the pandemic. We found that COVID-19 home-based care was associated with fear, anxiety, loneliness, depression, economic loss and stigma. We recommended that policy makers consider various home-based follow-up strategies and strengthen counselling of COVID-19 patients at all stages of care.

Busitema University Developed a Medicine for COVID-19 and other Acute Respiratory Illnesses.

Busitema University Natural Products Research and Innovation Centre (BUNaPRiC) was started in 2020 by Dr. Samuel Baker Obakiro (PhD) with support from the Presidential Scientific Initiative on Epidemics (PRESIDE) at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic when there was a desperate need for therapeutics to manage COVID -19 patients. Our Scientists, inspired by their previous research works as well as the traditional medicine practices, developed a unique natural therapeutic (TAZCOV) for symptomatic management of acute respiratory infections (ARIs) like COVID-19, common cold, influenza (flu), sore throat, parainfluenza, respiratory syncytial virus infection, rhinitis, pharyngitis, bronchitis, pneumonia and bronchiolitis.

TAZCOV underwent a rigorous scientific process of preclinical evaluation and was notified by the National Drug Authority (THA1087). It is currently undergoing an independent clinical trial at Makerere Lung Institute under the Clinical Trial on Natural Therapeutics (CONAT) programme supported by the Government of Uganda through the Secretariat of Science, Technology and Innovation. Besides TAZCOV, our scientists have developed several other promising medicines from our rich biodiversity for malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, diabetis mellitus and are at different stages of product development.

One of the ways we give back to the community is by improving the quality of medicines prepared by traditional healers to meet acceptable standards. The Centre is also building sustainable relationships with traditional medicine practitioners to ensure proper documentation and preservation of indigenous knowledge and practices. The Centre welcomes partners and donors who share our vision of building a one-stop centre for training, research, community outreach, innovation and technology development in natural products, promoting local manufacturing, import substitution, and poverty alleviation.

The minds behind TAZCOV; Dr. Andima Moses , Dr. Gavamukulya Yahaya, Dr. Obakiro Samuel Baker, Dr. Oriko Richard Owor, Dr. Kiondo Peter.

Investments Needed to Transform Education in Africa

Dr. Vongai Nyahunzvi,
Chief Network Officer and
Head of Africa Region,
Teach For All

We have long failed to make adequate investments in education across Africa. In 2020, the African Development Bank (AFDB) noted in the African Economic Outlook that African governments spend about 5 per cent of GDP on education. While in line with the recommendations of the 2015 Incheon Declaration, this is clearly insufficient considering the scale of the challenge facing Africa's education systems and growing populations. When we envision improving education, we often debate how to improve funding, government policy, teacher training, technology, or curricula. Whilst these conversations put forward a relevant and important perspective, debates around financial investments have rarely taken into consideration all the other key building blocks that will lay the ground to enable us to realise the full benefits of these financial investments.

Of course, there is no silver bullet solution – many different pieces of the puzzle need to come together if we are to achieve the education we need in Africa. However, focusing on the following five big areas is central to making progress.

"debates around financial investments have rarely taken into consideration all the other key building blocks that will lay the ground to enable us to realise the full benefits of these financial investments."

"To reinvent and strengthen our education system, we need to train teachers as innovative leaders, who will find creative ways to maintain student engagement and enable learning even in the most complex circumstances."

1. **Push for locally-led education solutions**. Presently, an ever-growing force of locally-led initiatives is paving the way to enable all children and young people to thrive by supporting the development of promising African leaders at all levels, driving educational innovations, and inventing new development approaches. What these initiatives have in common is that they prioritise and believe that, for our education to truly transform, we need to support and work with local actors and change agents as they craft their own solutions to tackle some of the most pressing educational challenges in their contexts.

2. **Transform how we recruit and train teachers**. In most places across Africa, how teachers are trained has not changed for generations. We are using the same strategies in our teacher training academies and institutions as we did five decades ago. We could invest in education however we like, but unless we change this, we will not realise the progress we need. We must reimagine education so that it builds leaders of the future. How are we training and supporting teachers to lead the next generation? Taking a look at the curriculum of a number of teacher training institutions across the continent, the majority do not train teachers to address crucial issues around girls' education or climate change – let alone about how to foster leadership. Educators need the knowledge, skills, and competencies to teach towards new outcomes. Both experienced and novice teachers need to receive training around new teaching methods and their own leadership development, including support for their emotional well-being. To reinvent and strengthen our education system, we need to train teachers as innovative leaders who will find creative ways to maintain student engagement and enable learning even in the most complex circumstances. We need to integrate leadership development into our

schools and teacher development programmes, along with enabling local leaders to learn from each other across borders, to expose them to what is possible and what is working in other places.

Evidence from the work of Teach For All's network partners across the African continent and beyond has shown that when teachers are given access to continuous professional development combined with professional coaching and support, they are more effective in their work.

3. **Ensure that educational reforms are linked to policy changes**. Across the continent, we continuously see scenarios where the education policies do not support the present and future needs of the populace, particularly young people. There has been a continuous mismatch between areas of need and policy changes by governments. To reverse this phenomenon, there needs to be a redesign of the policy processes and focus. The case of Rwanda gives credence to this. Over the last couple of decades, Rwanda has made great strides in the performance of its education system. To improve education quality and outcomes, changes in areas such as teacher management and an improved education strategic plan have been implemented. The Rwandan government has ensured that investment is made in areas where there is a high need and deployed the right experts to lead the process. Rwanda shows that we cannot separate a strong political will demonstrated through government policy from sustainable and inclusive gains in education.

4. **Rethink the purpose of education.** A number of education systems in Africa are still deeply entrenched in curricula that were defined during colonial periods. They were designed to create workers who would fully comply with their colonial masters, and not those with the critical thinking skills and awareness that could lead them to challenge their status quo. Very few countries have taken the time to redefine the purpose of education in their contexts. When one looks at how students are trained, they are taught how to cram content for exams rather than learning for understanding. Some of these curricula have no real-life applications to students and their future paths. Rethinking and gaining clarity on the purpose of education is a prerequisite to a true transformation of education across the continent.

5. **View students as leaders who can shape a better future for themselves**. In most classrooms across the continent, we see a similar trend where students are considered as unable to make decisions for themselves. But increasing evidence from institutions such as the African Leadership Academy shows that students have inherent leadership that should be harnessed. We need to rethink how we involve students in the learning process and look for new and creative ways to unleash and harness their leadership potential.

If we get these five things right, we can greatly accelerate the progress of education systems across the African continent. The good news is that there are emerging examples of these changes throughout Africa. It is time that we amplify our efforts to bring these approaches to all corners of the continent. ■

"Students have inherent leadership that should be harnessed. We need to rethink how we involve students in the learning process and look for new and creative ways to unleash and harness their leadership potential."

HIGHER EDUCATION & TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET)

Constant and Committed Leadership: Caribbean HEIs' Response to COVID-19

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Executive Assistant to
the Vice-Chancellor,
The University of the West Indies
Dr. Helen Williams-Cumberbatch,
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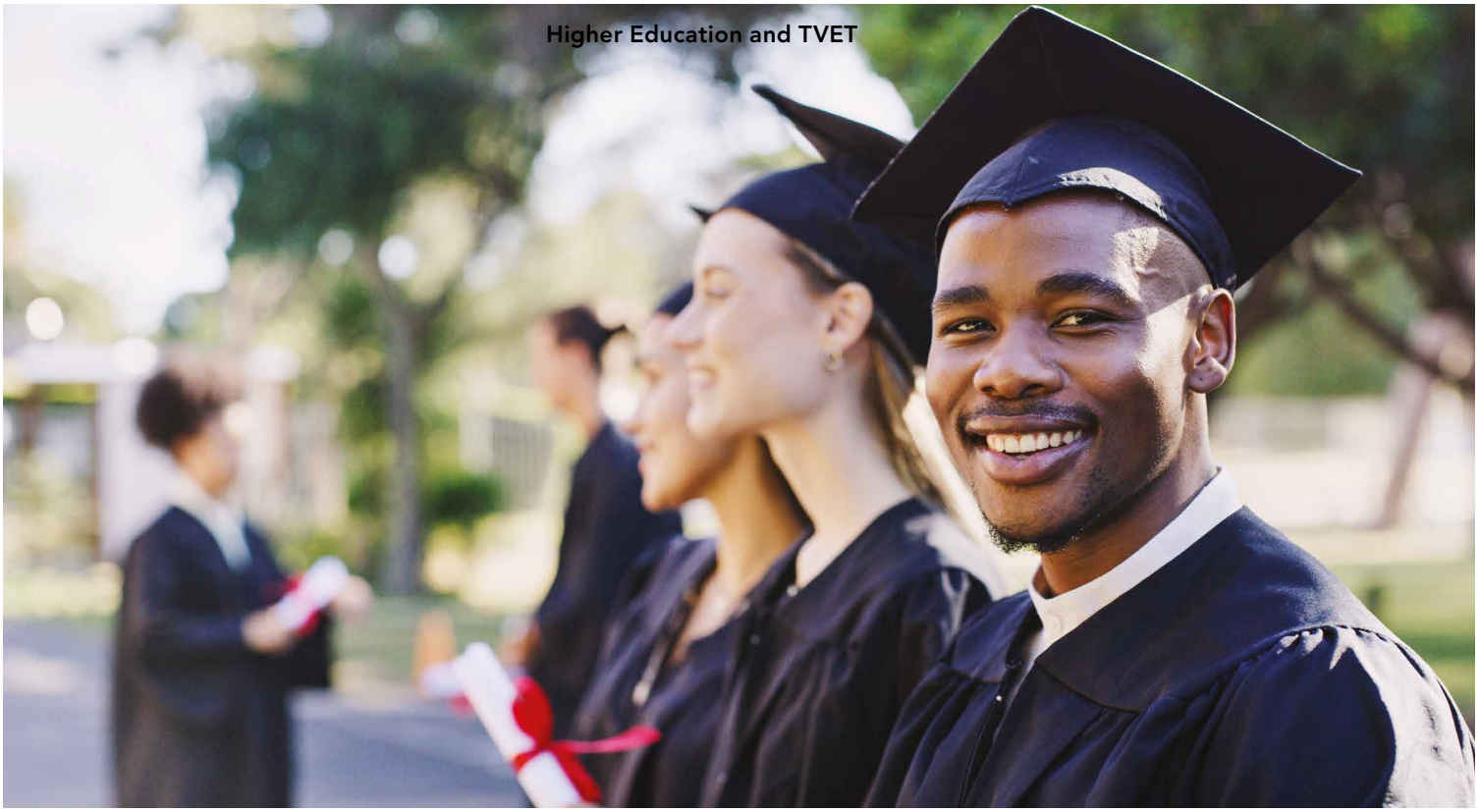
Coordinator,
UWI Open Campus

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many higher education institutions (HEIs) in the English-speaking Caribbean were already facing funding challenges, in particular those that depend wholly or in part on governments, directly or indirectly. Directly infers that payments are made to the institutions through government subventions, while indirectly reflects payments made through student loan facilities such as the Student Loan Bureau in Jamaica or the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) programme in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to funding challenges, indigenous Caribbean HEIs have been grappling with the internationalisation of higher education and the concomitant competition from offshore entities, as well as the increasing availability of online programmes made possible by the significant advances in information technologies. Issues such as attracting high-quality academic staff and ensuring ongoing relevance and quality of programmes and courses in a highly globalised operating environment remain a constant consideration of the leadership of all HEIs.

On 11 March 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic, the HEIs globally joined other organisations in pivoting to online work. Emergency remote teaching (ERT) was used to describe the mode of instruction delivery utilised, to distinguish it from the regular high-quality online education.

What was the impact?

The impact of the pandemic on Caribbean HEIs was, we believe, both positive and negative. The negatives were primarily financial – stemming from decreased enrolment due to job loss and inability to pay tuition, with students opting to pursue pathways alternative to face-to-face education. In the case of publicly funded institutions, there was uncertainty regarding government subventions, as scarce national financial resources were redirected to respond to the



"Reduced income made it impossible to maintain or upgrade infrastructure, including technology infrastructure critical for the delivery of instruction in ERT mode or for transitioning to full online delivery."

immediate public health issues. Reduced income made it impossible to maintain or upgrade infrastructure, including technology infrastructure critical for the delivery of instruction in ERT mode or for transitioning to full online delivery.

The psychological impact of the pandemic on students and staff has not been fully assessed. Students reported a loss of camaraderie associated with not being able to connect with fellow students and faculty in spaces that are conducive to learning. Academic and administrative staff reported challenges with work-life balance. This was a global phenomenon, with many academics and administrators taking the brunt of managing both work and home – including managing their children's online learning – simultaneously.

Financial difficulties which resulted from the pandemic, and in turn threatened the financial sustainability of HEIs, included a decline in tuition income, the introduction of unplanned capital expenditure and new types of operational costs, increased sanitation costs, suspension of entrepreneurial activities, surrender of part or the whole of the institution's investment portfolio, and reduction of productivity. The University of Technology in Jamaica, for instance, was reported to have been forced to liquidate its investment portfolio to cope with the financial difficulties which resulted.

How did institutions respond?

The response by Caribbean HEIs was mixed. Some institutions were able to transition to remote online teaching more effectively than others. Immediately following the declaration of work-from-home mandated by governments, The University of the West Indies (UWI) allowed resident students to return to their homes, where possible. Administrative staff pivoted to online work and, where necessary, essential staff continued to report to work with all COVID-19 protocols in place. In the meantime, the expertise in online delivery within the Open Campus was deployed to train academics at the other four campuses in the use of online teaching tools. After two weeks, all UWI campuses were able to resume classes in hybrid mode – a combination of emergency remote teaching and face-to-face in the case of clinical training and laboratories – and continued to do so until the start of the academic year in August 2022. Courses that required a practical module were deferred to later semesters and resumed when restrictions were lifted, with protocols in place for the management of laboratories and clinical training. Counselling services for staff and students were provided by the human

"This was a global phenomenon, with many academics and administrators taking the brunt of managing both work and home – including managing their children's online learning – simultaneously."

resources departments, in collaboration with on-campus health centres and student departments.

Already attempting to bridge the gap between online delivery and face-to-face instruction, the University of Guyana responded with alacrity to the potential learning loss that naturally accompanied the global shutdown of all institutions. Given the absence of face-to-face meetings, the assessment strategy was revised to include a series of practical and valid means of assigning continuous assessments to students. Another mitigating factor was the relaxing of regulations for the payment of fees. Students were not penalised if they were unable to complete the payment of fees because of the disruption to their earning capacity. The University also invested in upgraded Zoom access and Moodle platforms to facilitate the delivery of classes for students. Faculty and students were exposed to training programmes to upgrade their skills in the use of eLearning technology. Further, systems were established to ensure that students and faculty had access to free counselling services that were required based on the traumatising effects of COVID-19.

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, the College of Science, Technology, and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) had deliberately adopted a phased approach to transitioning courses and programmes to the online learning environment. By March 2020, therefore, 35 per cent of courses were already available via the College's Moodle platform, making the transition to the online environment more manageable. Using the Train the Trainer model, the College's technology working group collaborated with suitably-trained faculty to convert courses and equip faculty with alternative strategies for the online delivery of instructions. Students also benefitted from training programmes and tutorials to help them navigate the online teaching and learning environment. While the training provided relief for some students, many remained concerned about their ability to access reliable internet connection, navigate the virtual classroom, connect with faculty, and complete assessments successfully. Further, the economic challenges brought on by the pandemic hindered many from meeting their financial obligations to the College, and some withdrew from their courses. In response, COSTAATT introduced a number of relief measures, including the removal of penalties and holds for course withdrawals and delayed payment, waiver of late fees, automatic extensions of library loans, introduction of fully online counselling support services, and extended deadlines for submission of assignments. Further, the College introduced a computer loan programme, through which computers, donated by a corporate partner, were loaned to students for an academic year.

How did institutions address the challenge of assessment?

During the pandemic, assessments were a major challenge for all institutions. Where possible, assessments were summative and 100 per cent coursework. COSTAATT developed alternative assessments for courses that required field research and engagement with the public. However, courses requiring in-person lab sessions, clinical training, or face-to-face final examinations were deferred until the lifting of the pandemic restrictions. To support students who experienced connectivity or technology issues during exams, a final exam backup session was introduced. Similarly, at The UWI, where possible, assessments pivoted to 100 per cent coursework and, in some instances, proctoring software was utilised. However, as soon as it was possible, face-to-face examinations resumed. Despite these challenges, as an indicator of success, students pursuing programmes at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic were largely able to complete their programmes of study, as evidenced by graduation ceremonies held virtually and in hybrid mode in 2021, at both institutions.

What are the recommendations for handling future crises?

In reflecting on the Caribbean experience, it is determined that there were similarities with the global experience. We, therefore, recommended the following for handling future crises in higher education administration:

- Application of scenario planning to steer HEIs through crises.
- Development, by governments, of specific national policies to aid Caribbean HEIs to deal with the challenges.
- The support of vulnerable students, which was the knee-jerk reaction to the pandemic, should be assessed and codified where deemed appropriate.

The COVID-19 pandemic tested Caribbean HEIs but we believe these institutions have emerged not unscathed, but with newfound knowledge of what they can do, cannot do, and what can be improved. It is important that HEIs continue to nurture resilience at the institutional and constituent levels, in order to thrive. ■

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

to restore the dignity of man

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka is a Federal University located in Enugu State. It was founded in 1955 and formally opened on 7 October 1960. The University operates on three campuses namely Nsukka, Enugu and Ituku Ozalla. The Institution prides itself as the first land-grant university in Nigerian and the entire African Continent. It continues to rank among the first five elite universities in Nigeria. Classes began at the Nsukka campus on 17 October 1960, with an enrolment of 220 students and 13 academic staff. Currently, the University has over 50, 000 students.

With its motto 'To Restore the Dignity of Man', the University today has grown to 19 faculties and over 100 departments. The main campus of the university is located on nearly 900 hectares of hilly savannah in Nsukka, some 80km north of Enugu, the state capital. The Nsukka campus enjoys a pleasant and healthy climate. An additional 200 hectares of arable land there are available for agriculture, while another 200 hectares is set aside for staff accommodation.

The University of Nigeria is renowned for having produced first-class academics and administrators. Notable amongst them are the author Chinua Achebe, who held a research and teaching appointment at the University in the early 1970s and the astrophysicist Sam Okoye, who founded the Space Research Centre in 1972. The centre remains one of the few institutions in Africa that researches and offers courses in astronomy, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The medical school performs most of its activities in the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH), where doctors and other health workers are trained to exceptionally high standards and have proven over the years that they can effect a significant positive change in Africa, and for the entire healthcare system globally. Doctors and nurses trained in the institution have also contributed significantly to the advancement of medicine. The first open-heart surgery in Sub-Saharan Africa was performed at the UNTH in 1974. The team of surgeons were led by the visiting Professor Yacoub from the United Kingdom, assisted by the Nigerian Professors Adikwu and Anyanwu. And with the siting of the Nigerian National Cardiothoracic Centre at UNTH Enugu, the College of Medicine has since developed into the centre of excellence for cardiothoracic surgery and tropical cardiology for the entire West African region.

Today the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, has a particular focus on science and innovation. Through its iconic and visionary Vice-Chancellor, Professor Charles Arizechukwu Igwe FAS, the University is driving innovations in Nigeria through impact-based research and innovative technologies. The University of Nigeria hosts many centres of excellence, Including the UNESCO Biotechnology Centre, the Resource and Environmental Policy Research Centre, Environment for Development (REPRC-EfD) Nigeria, and the African Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Power and Energy Development (ACE-SPED).

The University of Nigeria is committed to providing evidence-based advice to policymakers to help solve the myriads of problems confronting Nigeria and the entire African continent.

MISSION
To place the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the forefront of research and the development innovation, knowledge transfer and human resources development in the global academic terrain, while promoting the core values which will ensure the

VISION
To create a functional, globally competitive and research focused university which is not just an Ivory Tower but responsive to the needs of the society while delivering world class education and knowledge.

PROF. CHARLES A. IGWE FAS
Vice Chancellor
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

www.unn.edu.ng

A Fairer Future for Higher Education

Dr. Joanna Newman,
CEO and Secretary General,
Association of Commonwealth Universities

The Commonwealth is home to one in three of the world's youth. This young population has extraordinary potential to build a fairer, greener, and more prosperous future for all if empowered with the knowledge and skills they need to do so. Higher education is the key to unlocking this potential. Yet governments worldwide often focus on basic education reform, leaving higher education struggling to compete for funding and recognition.

At the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), we believe that this "either/or" dynamic overlooks the bigger picture, in which universities are a cornerstone of international development and the education ecosystem as a whole. As the only organisation to represent higher education in the Commonwealth, and through forums such as the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, we make the case that investment in higher education is a vital investment in the development of every society and nation – and one no government cannot afford to ignore.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were the first such global goals to include tertiary education. Their forerunners, the Millennium Development Goals, made no mention of higher education, either as a development target itself or as a driver for international development more broadly. Its explicit inclusion among the targets for SDG 4 arguably signalled the start of a long-overdue shift: from viewing higher education as something primarily benefitting the individual towards its rightful role as a public good.

But there is still some distance to go in achieving the recognition that universities need and deserve. Higher education is a cornerstone of the education ecosystem – training teachers, creating educational content for schools, and supporting lifelong learning – and is essential to realising the targets set out under SDG 4. But its contribution goes far beyond that. University research produces the knowledge and innovation needed to tackle global challenges, from the development of drought-tolerant crops to life-changing vaccines. Through teaching and learning, they shape generations of skilled, employable graduates whose knowledge and training will move the world forward and bring social and economic developments to their societies. Through community engagement, universities combine academic knowledge with the experience and

expertise of their communities to address social disadvantage and local challenges. And in a polarised world, universities offer a space for critical thinking and the open exchange of ideas that can broaden minds and transcend borders. In short, the SDGs can only be achieved with higher education.

Of course, the SDGs are not just interlinked but indivisible. A lack of progress on one hinders progress on others. This means that for higher education to fulfil its potential as an engine of social and economic development, opportunities to access it must be made available to all those who would benefit. But access remains one of our gravest challenges. Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, has a population of over a billion, 70 per cent of whom are under the age of 30. This young population have immense potential to shape their nations and build a fairer, more prosperous future. And yet the gross tertiary enrolment ratio in the region is just 9.4 per cent, significantly below the global average of 38 per cent. Such figures are a stark reminder that access to higher education is still too often dictated by geography, wealth, and circumstance.

So, what can be done to close the gap? Commonwealth collaboration is the bedrock of the ACU's work and elevates everything that is vital and valuable about higher education – from research partnerships to the student experience. Our 500 member institutions across 50 countries represent the breadth and diversity of universities worldwide and the wealth of expertise that exists within them. We know that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to improving access, but international collaboration offers some important ways forward.

One of these is international mobility – the opportunity to study or undertake research in another country – as referenced under target 4b ('to substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries… for enrolment in higher education). The ACU has a proud history of promoting opportunities for international mobility, including the management of major international scholarship schemes. These include the UK Commonwealth Scholarships, which are led by international development objectives, and the Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarships, which offer opportunities for students from all parts of the Commonwealth to study at a university in a developing country.

"Higher education is a powerful force for realising global sustainable development, if accompanied by a radical transformation in access and inclusion."

Our decades of experience in this area have shown us that scholarships have an impact far beyond the individual. Thinking of SDG 4, for example, the evaluation of the Commonwealth Scholarships shows that its alumni are helping to fortify education systems across the world, increasing the supply of qualified academic staff, strengthening doctoral capacity, and enhancing the provision of university teaching and supervision for new generations of students.

While scholarships are inevitably limited in number, there are still ways to expand the opportunities they provide. The Commonwealth Split-site Scholarships, for example, enable PhD candidates in low- and middle-income countries to spend 12 months at a university in the UK, accessing equipment and research resources that might not otherwise be available to them. Meanwhile, virtual mobility opportunities, such as the ACU's Commonwealth Virtual Exchange programme, create opportunities for intercultural and knowledge exchange without the need for international travel.

Another area with huge potential to widen access is blended learning. This hybrid approach combines online and face-to-face learning in an integrated and complementary way, aided by purpose-built learning technologies. It is particularly useful in regions where demand for higher education outstrips supply, with the potential to reach far more students than traditional campus-based study – including those in remote or rural areas. However, its design and delivery can present challenges, particularly where resources are stretched, or investment in online learning has been constrained.

The ACU-led Partnership for Enhanced and Blended Learning (PEBL) aims to address this challenge. This innovative collaboration brings universities together – including those with particular experience in online learning – to share teaching resources and expertise. By working together in this way, they are able to develop, share, and deliver quality-assured, credit-bearing degree courses on a far greater scale than would have been possible by going it alone. At the same time, the partnership trains academic staff to design and deliver blended learning, meaning the project will continue to yield benefits in the years to come.

PEBL launched its West Africa project in 2022, building on the success of PEBL East Africa, which has unlocked learning opportunities for over 40,000 students to date and trained more than 3,400 academics in the design and delivery of blended learning. Participating universities reported that being part of the programme also offered a considerable advantage when the COVID-19 pandemic forced universities to make a rapid pivot online.

Yet this also highlights the double bind of online learning's potential. While online teaching and learning can enable many more people to surmount the traditional barriers to higher education, it relies on internet access, to which precisely the same barriers exist.

The pandemic laid bare this gaping digital divide, not only between high- and low-income countries, but within countries and institutions themselves. For many students, access to learning became rapidly reliant on their capacity to access the internet – not just a fast, stable connection, but also the devices, data costs, and infrastructure that enable online learning to happen. It became clear that if we are to prevent unequal access to the internet from further entrenching existing inequalities in education, digital equity must become a priority for both the sector and society.

This mix of challenge and opportunity is what defines Commonwealth higher education now and in the years ahead: higher education is a powerful force for realising global sustainable development, if accompanied by a radical transformation in access and inclusion. Finding solutions, and realising its potential, calls for universities and countries to work together, and the Commonwealth provides a powerful and relevant framework for exactly that. ■

"Its [higher education] explicit inclusion among the targets for SDG 4 arguably signalled the start of a long-overdue shift: from viewing higher education as something primarily benefitting the individual towards its rightful role as a public good."

It is so Important to Keep Investing in Skills as Purse Strings Tighten

Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith,
Chair of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, Member of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom

The British economy is, like the rest of the world, facing stark economic challenges driven by the surge in inflation and energy costs.

This massive headache for businesses has come just as they were adjusting to Brexit and the fallout from COVID-19.

I am all too aware of the harsh impacts of this perfect storm through serving as President of the British Chambers of Commerce until autumn 2022.

What I want to focus on with this article, in my capacity as Chair of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), is how we are keeping businesses engaged with skills training through these cash-strapped times.

We have managed to do this so far in England – the other devolved nations have their own skills systems – by making the system ever more employer-focused. By that, I mean apprenticeships and the new wave of skills programmes, T Levels, and Higher Technical Qualifications are all now designed and approved by groups of employers from across the private and public sectors.

We have taken this approach because we need them to have full confidence that the training is worth using to upskill their workforce. They should also look to whether newcomers have passed these courses as a reliable indicator of the quality of applicants when recruiting.

That had not been the case in England for many years before. Dating back to the Wolf Report 2011, successive reviews noted that too many qualifications being offered to students did not satisfy the needs of employers. The influential Richard Review of Apprenticeships published a year later, and the 2016 Sainsbury Review of Technical Education reached similar conclusions.

The problem had been that they were designed by awarding organisations, further education providers, and government officials – with businesses rarely getting a look in.

This resulted in too many students being trained for low-skilled occupations, with limited opportunities to progress to higher levels and gain promotion. Employers did not rate the training and mainly looked to academic A Levels and degrees as an indicator of talent and ignored technical education.

The employer-led reform programme, introduced over the past decade, has changed things for the better.

It has, for example, led to the introduction of prestigious degree-level apprenticeships that provide a more aspirational target for trainees and ensure businesses' higher-level skills needs are met as well as their entry-level ones.

Another major quality improvement was the introduction of end-point assessment at the end of apprenticeships, which apprentices have to pass to give employers the confidence that they really know their stuff.

The launch in 2017 of the apprenticeship levy, which rightly obliges large employers to pay into the system, has also more than doubled the funding available for the programmes.

"Keeping things employer-focused also allows us to be vigilant to changing skills needs and react fast."

"A massive priority for IfATE will now be encouraging many more businesses to reap the long-term rewards of investing in skills training, rather than cutting back as purse strings tighten."

Looking beyond apprenticeships, a further important innovation has been the rollout of T Levels since 2020 for 16- to 19-year-olds. These are more rigorous than other equivalent classroom-based technical qualifications and stand out because every student has to complete a substantial work placement, typically lasting around 45 days.

Offering T Level work placements is proving to be a really good way of opening out new talent pipelines into businesses. We are hearing of lots of cases where T Level students have been offered jobs straight from placements. Many others have gone on to university or higher-level apprenticeships.

These reforms are all helping to improve the quality and perceptions of skills training. Demand from school leavers for some apprenticeships even outstrips that for places at Oxbridge universities.

Keeping things employer-focused also allows us to be vigilant to changing skills needs and react fast. The best example of this was during the COVID-19 pandemic and successive lockdowns, when we were able to quickly introduce hundreds of flexibilities that allowed for more remote learning and assessment. This helped keep apprenticeships going and apprentices to complete their courses and move on with their careers.

The results of all this have been encouraging. Apprenticeship starts for the whole of last academic year grew by around 8 per cent, and around 700,000 people are currently training through apprenticeships.

There are now far more apprenticeships to choose from, covering a massive variety of jobs up to degree level. As well as all the traditional trades, they now train economists, nurses, aerospace engineers, countryside rangers, brewers, laboratory scientists, graphic designers and even archaeologists.

Apprenticeships have high satisfaction rates with employers (typically over 80 per cent), and they generate a lot of loyalty among the trainees. Additionally, 92 per cent of apprentices surveyed this year by IfATE felt confident that the skills they were being taught would equip them to succeed in the future.

There are more than 650 different employer-designed apprenticeships in total – a higher number than in many of our European neighbours – because they have filled the many skills gaps specifically identified by our employer panels. If we break down that overall number, just over half are at entry levels 2 and 3 (equivalent to GCSEs and A Levels), with around 150 at levels 4 and 5 (foundation degree equivalent), and 150 at levels 6 and 7 (degree level).

That is a much better reflection of the economy's true skills needs than we have seen before, and the broader spread of levels of training provides more opportunities to clamber up the careers ladder.

So, things have improved a lot, but there is a long way to go. Businesses' ability to ride out the financial storm is still being undermined by labour shortages which undermine their productivity.

Workers need meaningful skills to fill those skills gaps from the moment they leave school and better help with finding those training opportunities. The good news is that schools are now being forced by more rigorous government legislation to provide careers advice on technical as well as academic education opportunities.

I know from running a FTSE 250 firm how important it is to invest in brilliant people. A massive priority for IfATE will now be encouraging many more businesses to reap the long-term rewards of investing in skills training, rather than cutting back as purse strings tighten. That will be the best way to steer through challenging times and get back onto a growth footing. ■

Higher Education in the Commonwealth: Nurturing Soft Power, Workforce Readiness, and Global Challenges

Dr. Balasubramanyam Chandramohan,
Senior Research Fellow,
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Should countries focus on Higher Education or School Education? This has long been debated in several countries in the Commonwealth and beyond. In the past debates on development, Higher Education, or the Tertiary sector, was seen as a costly indulgence compared to investment in primary and secondary sectors. The rationale behind this perspective was that investing in early education would provide greater returns on investment in terms of social progress, as well as spin-off effects of having a bigger share of population equipped with essential literacy and numeracy skills. However, the role of Higher Education in achieving economic and social progress has been receiving increasing recognition as countries look to contributing to supply chains in a more integrated and mobile world. Also, notions of lifelong education have gained fresh recognition and prominence, not least in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), instructional tools, and flexible credentialisation of learning.

"The youngest children and more marginalised learners, including children with disabilities and those living in remote and rural areas, have been hit the hardest by the pandemic."

Thus, Higher Education is seen as an engine of growth and prestige, and several attempts across countries in the Commonwealth have been directed at leveraging the vertical integration of education with economically demonstrable value-added supply chains and communities of practice, and with enhanced horizontal outreach with local and global communities. The debate now is whether the role of Higher Education should be one which helps to develop individuals and communities through nurturing qualities of free expression and individual responsibility, consequently enhancing the 'soft power' or alternatively to prepare a 'work-ready' population that can find jobs and contribute to the community and country through more visible 'hard power'. Strategic orientation in policy and practice in education and training shifted in several countries which led to prioritising courses in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects over courses in subjects perceived as less 'useful' or of 'low value'. Such shifts, more broadly, raise questions on how to find a balance between the apparent choice between academic and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) strands of education. In some countries, in the UK, for example, equivalence in academic and vocational qualifications in admission to Higher Educations courses brings both streams together, in the process, countering some societal attitudes that privilege academic over technical/ vocational education.

However, the binary between subject groupings is giving way to 'hybridity'. This shift is manifested through the restructuring of knowledge taxonomies and organisational configurations within Higher Education, such as new Units/ Departments/ Centres/ Faculties/ Universities. Consequently, this reconfiguration influences the multi and interdisciplinary organisation of formulation, delivery, and quality assurance mechanisms of teaching and learning as well as research. The trend is to move away from canons of subject orthodoxy to curricula that help with foregrounding 'problem-solving' aptitudes and skills that link Higher Education more effectively to the local, regional, and pan-Commonwealth job mobility, especially as some countries adopt a points-based approach to visas and immigration.

Current developments

Current developments can be mapped along a life-cycle model of student mobility, admission, delivery of courses, assessment, credentialisation, alumni activities and new recruitment of students.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused major problems in student mobility both within countries and across the Commonwealth, as colleges and universities were closed in order to maintain public health. However, as the pandemic eased, with greater availability of vaccines and the reduction in the severity of the pandemic, recruitment has gradually picked up. Additionally, COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption

"TVET is critical for promoting a path to recovery and resilience building in the post COVID-19 pandemic era, and for accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goals."

of new technologies in the field of online education, particularly in terms of course delivery and staff-student interactions. These developments have been uneven depending on the access that colleges and universities managed to develop and, crucially, the extent and quality of digital resources and IT infrastructure that students had. TVET was seriously affected, especially as it relies heavily on face-to-face contracts and hands-on learning and teaching. Nevertheless, the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) tools has opened not only new opportunities that bypass the limitations, but also new ways of training.

"TVET is critical for promoting a path to recovery and resilience building in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, and for accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development Goals."[1]

Post-Covid student mobility has seen a significant upsurge in the number of applicants planning to study in traditional destination countries such as the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. This trend has also coincided with policy changes to make the residence more attractive in the intense competition for international students, who contribute to the intangible soft power of the individual institutions and nations, and tangible benefits of income flows to the institutions and local, regional, and national economies. Additionally, the number of international students is a key metric in some international rankings of universities.

Some policy changes in progress in India are likely to impact on student mobility in the Commonwealth. These include the decision to allow the Indian Institute of Technologies (IITs) to offer courses overseas establishment of campuses by foreign universities, and mutual recognition of academic qualifications with some exclusions, between India and the UK as part of the UK-India Trade negotiations.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of digital resources and technology, foregrounded pedagogies requiring the acquisition of skills at a rapid pace by students and staff, and encouraged the implementation of innovative or alternative methods of assessment. In the context of public investment not keeping up with the demand for Higher Education, costs become a priority, as the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) points out: "Open universities, online and blended approaches are viable options for increasing access and equity, improving quality, and cutting the costs of education."

Post-Covid, Sustainability and Climate Change are emerging as new multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary academic fields. Several universities in the Commonwealth have responded to the challenges by pooling their research expertise to address urgent global issues brought on by climate change. Additionally, in response to students' increasing demand for the "relevance" of their academic learning, courses are being (re)designed to incorporate UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the curriculum, even as campus buildings undergo sustainability audits. There are external pressures too, such as getting a good rank in the Impact rankings of the *Times Higher*, whose metrics are based on the SDGs.

While some universities have chosen to have dedicated organisational structures, others have created ad hoc communities of learning. The concern with the social role of the universities is reflected in the interface between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and University Social Responsibility (USR) in emerging consortia that sometimes receive external encouragement, such as the support of the UK-India Business Council to the USR Consortium which includes universities in the UK, India, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere. The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) has also given a prominent place to sustainability issues in its work through the Higher Education and the SDGs Network and the Commonwealth Climate Resilience Network. Other Higher Education-sector-organisations, such as Universities UK, recognise the importance of Climate Change and Sustainability.

The University of Plymouth had a stand at the Annual United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP), CoP27, in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in November 2022, which foregrounded their work on sustainability and climate change.

Higher Education in the Commonwealth responds to global challenges and promotes knowledge generation by leveraging its ability to solve problems (such as contributing to the Oxford Astra Zeneca COVID-19 vaccine) and by reconfiguring its knowledge taxonomies to develop multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary solutions to problems of sustainability and climate change. ■

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FUTURE OF EDUCATION

Buried Treasure? Educational Co-operation in the Commonwealth

"Education is a top priority in virtually every member state whatever its level of income. Education also represents the greatest binding force in the Commonwealth."

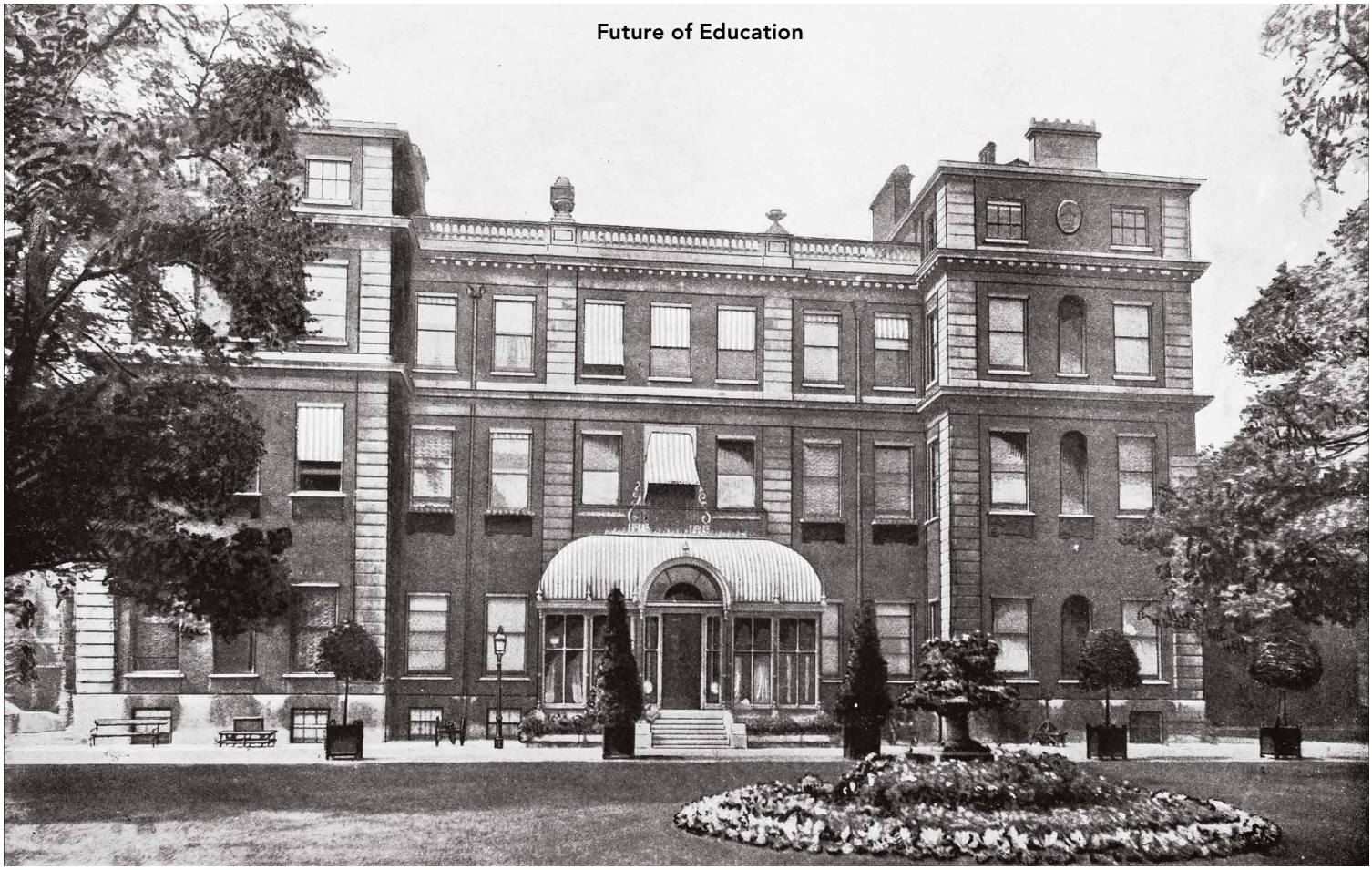
Peter R. C. Williams OBE, President of the Commonwealth Consortium for Education; former Director of Education Commonwealth Secretariat

This year the crown to be used in King Charles' coronation ceremony was first checked over and adjusted to fit its new wearer. Sir Shridath Ramphal, writing 14 years ago to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first Commonwealth Education Conference in Oxford in 1959, described Commonwealth educational co-operation as 'the Jewel in the Commonwealth Crown'. Many in the Commonwealth community now ask whether the Commonwealth crown also requires fresh scrutiny and refurbishment. Are the precious stones of Commonwealth principles and programmes intact? Have some been dislodged or mysteriously disappeared? Does the educational 'jewel' to which Sir Shridath referred retain its lustre and prominent position, or has it become no more than a memory, a buried treasure?

Education is a top priority in virtually every member state, whatever its level of income. Education also represents the greatest binding force in the Commonwealth through student and teacher mobility; through the understanding of our shared heritage and appreciation of each other's cultures in all their distinctiveness, through the promotion of shared values and ideals; through the pursuit of knowledge and the search for practical responses to common challenges, and through its role in fostering competence in the English language as a means of communication across boundaries. It has a key role to play in realising the ideals of the Commonwealth Charter and in the successful pursuit of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This clear importance has been reflected in the development of the Commonwealth's infrastructure for co-operative activity in education, which is broader and deeper than in any other sector. At the apex have stood the triennial Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEMs) - traditionally hailed as the largest inter-governmental gathering in the Commonwealth calendar, second only to the biennial Meetings of Heads of Government (CHOGMs) – and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Beyond them, the co-operative framework in education comprises inter alia a full-fledged inter-governmental organisation, the Commonwealth of Learning; the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, which, has supported over 35,000 bright young Commonwealth citizens to study in another country; the Association of Commonwealth Universities with its 500-plus institutional members; and a host of Commonwealth accredited voluntary organisations.

For a variety of reasons, however, yesterday's promise has not become today's reality. The much-diminished status of the Ministerial Conferences, bearing prime responsibility for promoting Commonwealth educational co-operation, illustrates this. Earlier CCEMs attracted a 'full house' of ministers, generated passionate debates on issues of contemporary interest, and habitually



spawned new joint initiatives for collaboration and exchange.Today's gatherings are generally not so representative, are less dynamic and engaging, and are more prone to substitute fine words for practical proposals.

The danger that Ministers will stay away from Commonwealth Conferences is evident. Perversely it has been exacerbated by the global community's growing mastery of new technologies enabling stay-at-home participation in international dialogue from one's own office desk via Zoom and similar platforms. The experiment of holding a 'hybrid' 21st CCEM in Nairobi in April 2022 was hardly encouraging: only nine of the 54 countries sent delegations to Nairobi, while another 24 participated remotely. It was not obvious that all those registered as attending remotely were, in fact, fully and continuously engaged with proceedings. No firm conclusions for the future can be drawn from this innovation, forced on the 21 CCEM organisers by an uncertain timetable of emergence from the COVID-19 pandemic and by the exigencies of the national election timetable in the host country, Kenya. There was insufficient time for thorough preparation of the Conference and many frustrating technical hitches in delivery were experienced. My own conclusion is that while online conferencing promises huge benefits in connecting Commonwealth communities and in enabling engagement in productive collaboration and consultation, the CCEMs should involve the personal presence and interaction of Ministers themselves.

Restoration of the drawing power of the CCEMs represents a formidable challenge. Education ministers have packed schedules, and the CCEMs of today have to compete with a plethora of other attractive and well-financed educational gatherings convened by international bodies – the World Bank, Global Partnership for Education, UNICEF, UNESCO etc. – disposing of multi-billion budgets from which conference participants may hope to benefit. Regional organisations with an interest in education have also grown in importance.

Even in the face of such competition, a well-organised Commonwealth gathering with a reputation for opening up new perspectives, challenging orthodox opinion and generating new ideas should attract good attendance.

"At an operational level, the huge potential of Commonwealth co-operation in education lives on, spearheaded by co-operative organisations and programmes."

"Access to the best study programmes on offer is now technically feasible for students in every part of the Commonwealth."

Differences of opinion on the role of the private sector, religious schools, language policy in education, streaming pupils by ability and conditions imposed by education-aid donors can generate passionate debates. Among resource-poor Commonwealth countries, extortionate textbook and journal prices, restricting access to knowledge, may be as controversial as high producer prices for vaccines.

In addition, there are manifold issues where Commonwealth countries with similar education structures and traditions may find exchange of experience fascinating and instructive. What are the advantages of having a single ministry responsible for all education and training versus separate ministries for tertiary education and technical training? Should teachers be allowed to offer private tuition after hours? Should schooling be compulsory for certain age groups, and can it be enforced? How can one stop schools from inflating their examination pass rates by expelling weak pupils or failing to enter them for exams? How are member countries dealing with a new brand of entrepreneur selling model essays/ dissertations and addressing plagiarism by students skilled at navigating the internet?

Rather than embrace controversy, the Commonwealth has chosen to play safe in choice of the Conference theme by concentrating almost exclusively on mobilisation, for achievement of education for all, in the form first of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and now SDG4. For the past eight or nine ministerial conferences, Conference agendas have focussed on aspects of universalisation of education: access, equity, inclusion and quality. In the absence of any substantial resource to launch programmes and projects that would make any real difference, the outcomes of the conferences have inevitably tended to be bland statements of pious resolve to pursue somewhat nebulous objectives, with no clear accountability for delivery.

At an operational level, the huge potential of Commonwealth co-operation in education lives on, spearheaded by co-operative organisations and programmes referred to above. The full realisation of this potential does depend in large measure on the various players having access to governments through a supportive Commonwealth Secretariat and on the Secretariat's resumption of its leadership and co-ordination role. This, in turn, requires member countries to restore the Secretariat budget at least to its level 10 years ago and within an enlarged resource to re-set Commonwealth priorities in co-operation, in so doing reaffirming the central role of education both for promoting socio-economic development and the welfare of Commonwealth peoples and for strengthening the Commonwealth association itself. Allocation of resources for Secretariat work in education needs to be sharply increased, especially if a mooted Commonwealth Education Forum is to be held in the wings of the next Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa in 2024 and in advance of 22 CCEM. The scale of the gap between present provision and need may be gauged from the fact that the professional education team at the Secretariat, at one time headed by an Assistant Secretary-General for Education, and as recently as 2010 having a professional complement of six full-time staff, had at its disposal just half of one full-time, middle-level, professional post at the start of 2023.

Notwithstanding this author's reservations about allowing remote attendance at Ministerial Conferences, the internet has opened up hitherto undreamed-of possibilities for educational collaboration and interchange across national boundaries. Access to the best study programmes on offer is now technically feasible for students in every part of the Commonwealth, and the scope for participation in consultations, partnerships and project development in education has become greatly enlarged. This is an area where the Commonwealth has done pioneering work and where its open-learning institutions possess vast expertise. If the Commonwealth can use the occasion of a 2024 Education Forum, and of a reinvigorated 22 CCEM soon afterwards, to grasp this potential, a bright future surely beckons – so let's not leave our 'treasure' even half buried.■

How to Recover Learning Losses from COVID-19 School Closures in the Pacific

Leah C. Gutierrez,
Director General,
Pacific Department,
Asian Development Bank

A generation of students faces the risk of lower future incomes and fewer opportunities due to education interruptions caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This generation of students is at risk of having lower productivity for the rest of their lives because of missed schooling. Globally, it is estimated that over 2 trillion hours of face-to-face learning have been lost.

While the Pacific region had the least number of in-person school days closed due to COVID-19, each of the 14 Pacific small island developing states that are members of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has had a unique experience since the pandemic began.[1] The length of school closures differed, and so did the ability to use distance learning effectively to stem losses.

These differences affected education systems that already varied widely in their learning effectiveness before schools were closed for extended periods.

The youngest children and more marginalised learners, including children with disabilities and those living in remote and rural areas, have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. Students from the poorest families have not had access to effective remote learning due to limited connectivity, insufficient hardware and software, as well as capacity constraints among school leaders and teachers. Even today, two in five learners continue to experience significant disruptions to their education due to the lingering effects of the pandemic. Efforts to strengthen early childhood and primary education are, therefore, more important than ever.

Two examples of ADB's work addressing these challenges include

"The youngest children and more marginalised learners, including children with disabilities and those living in remote and rural areas, have been hit the hardest by the pandemic."

ADB Pacific developing member countries school closures
(16 January 2020 - 30 March 2022, 117 weeks)

Country	Weeks partially open	Weeks fully closed	Distance learning modalities
the Cook Islands	0	4	None
Fiji	10	38	Online + Radio
Kiribati	0	3	Online
the Marshall Islands	1	1	None
Micronesia (the Federated States of)	13	11	None
Nauru	0	0	None
Niue	0	1	None
Palau	0	12	None
Papua New Guinea	0	6	None
Samoa	0	4	TV + Online + Radio
Solomon Islands	3	13	Online + Radio
Tonga	2	8	None
Tuvalu	7	5	None
Vanuatu	1	7	Online + Radio

Source: UNESCO map on school closures (https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse) and UIS, March 2022 (http://data.uis.unesco.org)

"As COVID-19 becomes part of everyday life, we must make sure children return to school."

improving the quality of basic education in the North Pacific through a regional project and strengthening early childhood development, student learning outcomes, and well-being under the Pacific Regional Education Framework through regional technical assistance.[2]

A recent ADB brief provided recommendations on how to recover learning losses from COVID-19 school closures.[3]

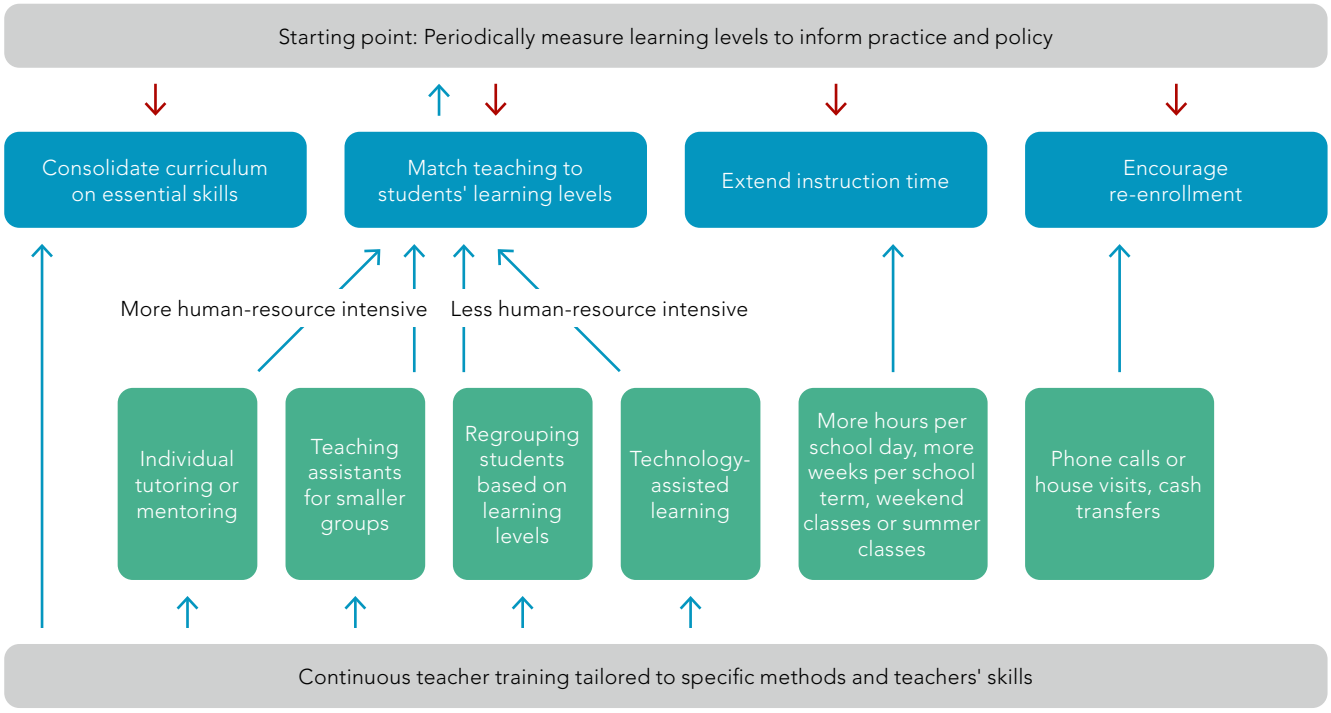
First, with schools reopened, it is critical to get children learning in person again. The longer the students remain out of school, the harder it will be to get them back. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were already over 100 million out-of-school youth in Asia and the Pacific; now, the numbers are even higher.

As COVID-19 becomes part of everyday life, we must make sure children return to school. There should be public back-to-school campaigns and systemic monitoring of attendance, especially with children having lower COVID-19 risks compared to adults.

Second, it is important to measure the extent of learning losses as soon as students return to classrooms. Nationally representative surveys and tests can help to inform policymakers about the learning levels across the country, regions, and localities, and across groups defined by socioeconomic status and gender. The Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment is one good example of regional collaboration to measure learning outcomes and improve learning. The results of surveys and tests will help countries allocate better resources for education and training.

In addition, teachers should conduct regular learning check-ups or formative assessments. These classroom assessments enable teachers to track students' progress,

How to Recover Learning Losses



Source: ADB. 2022. How to Recover Learning Losses from COVID-19 School Closures in Asia and the Pacific. Manila.

make adjustments to ensure they are teaching appropriate material, support lagging students, and evaluate the effectiveness of different catch-up strategies.

Third, teaching must be tailored to the learning levels of students. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified disparities in learning levels among students. Tailoring instruction to each student's level can help lift the performance of students at all learning levels.

The specific approach to teaching at the right level depends on the local context. One method is to divide the classroom into groups based on students' level of knowledge and provide customised lessons to each group with the support of teaching assistants or other teachers. If it is not feasible to hire more teaching personnel, students can be regrouped according to learning levels, and existing teachers can be reassigned to these groups.

Another method is to use education technology (EdTech) programmes with embedded feedback loops that assess a student's individual learning level and provide lessons appropriate for that level. ADB's work with the Government of Fiji for improved Open Distance Flexible Learning is putting these opportunities in place.

Finally, tutoring (or mentoring) provides individualised attention and customises lessons based on the student's rate of progress.

Fourth, the curriculum should focus on the critical foundational skills and give teachers the flexibility to adjust in response to student needs. This involves setting priorities and making decisions on which lessons are most essential for each class. Teachers should be provided with the autonomy to make further adjustments for the benefit of their students. To enable this change, school priorities must shift away from administration and towards empowering teachers to apply flexibility in adjusting instruction based on the student's progress.

Fifth, learning hours can be extended and academic breaks reduced to increase learning time. Additional classroom time can give students the opportunity to cover material missed during school closures. This can take the form of hours added to the school day (where feasible), weekend classes, and reducing the breaks between academic years and terms.

Additional support may be needed for children from lower-income households. Given the macroeconomic and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, a larger percentage of children returning to school will likely be coming from such households and be vulnerable to other challenges, such as food insecurity. Children from these households can be supported with, for example, free lunches, which will help augment food and nutrition security, as well as provide further incentives to attend school.[4]

Sixth, teacher competencies need to be improved so that they will be able to introduce teaching methods suitable to the student's level, conduct formative assessments, and adjust teaching content appropriately. Empowerment of teachers is critical to support learning recovery by students. It also includes following up with teachers to ensure that new skills are employed. These actions will require additional financial resources for improved continuous professional development of teachers and pre-service training, as well as investments in better learning environments and pedagogical tools.

School reopening is an opportunity for taking stock and ensuring that education systems are reformed to address both learning losses that occurred when schools were closed and the causes of learning crises that predated the pandemic. The key challenges for governments include finding effective ways to organise, coordinate, and scale up these strategies while securing the necessary funding. ■

1. ADB's Pacific developing member countries are the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

2. ADB. Regional: Improving the Quality of Basic Education in the North Pacific; and ADB. Regional: Strengthening Education in the Pacific Region. The technical assistance support implementation of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (https://pacref.org).

3. ADB. 2022. How to Recover Learning Losses from COVID-19 School Closures in Asia and the Pacific. Manila.

4. N. Gounder and J. Narayan. 2021. Strategies for education recovery in Fiji. Canberra.

"Given the macroeconomic and socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19, a larger percentage of children returning to school will likely be coming from such households and be vulnerable to other challenges, such as food insecurity."

UNIVERSITY JOSÉ EDUARDO DOS SANTOS

Education, Research and Extension

GOVERNING BODY (2022-2025)

Rector (middle), Prof. Dr. Virgínia Quartin, Academic Vice-Rector (right), Prof. Dr. João Cardoso and Scientific Vice-Rector (left), Prof. Dr. Ataúlfo Pereira

VISION

The UJES intends, in the next 5 (five) years, to focus its actions on quality management, aimed at the implementation, consolidation and expansion of a contemporary Higher Education Institution, based on principles of sustainability. It is articulated in four fundamental axes, namely: Teaching, Research, Innovation and Postgraduation; University Extension and Administrative Management. Thus, establishing itself (and have a place if merit) in the regional (SADC) and international context as an innovative university.

MISSION

The mission of the UJES is to develop high-level academic and professional training, scientific research and university extension activities in all areas of knowledge.

VALUES

i) Commitment to the mission of the UJES;
ii) Integrity, cooperation and solidarity;
iii) Tolerance and respect;
iv) Scientificity;
v) Creativity and honesty.

SCIENTIFIC, ACADEMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

- Technological incorporation in scientific actions and encouragement to the handling of scientific research equipment and software.
- Modernisation and confirmation of the academic-pedagogical instruments.
- To improve and to make the University appear in the national, regional and international university rankings.
- To expand and improve its training offer through the creation of new postgraduate courses (specialisation and masters) and the re-edition of existing courses.
- To receive students from the Southern African region through the delivery of a master's course in GIS and Earth Observation. Working language: bilingual (English and Portuguese).
- Improve scientific publishing services through the dynamisation of the multidisciplinary scientific journal and university repository.
- Reform the Libraries, introduce innovation, both in bibliography and in user use, and train librarians with specific software.
- To encourage exchange with other Scientific Research Units, Libraries and Journals on a local, national, and international level.
- To organise training courses aimed at the different professionals of the sectors linked to the University's areas of knowledge.
- To value and support artistic and cultural production, increasing its visibility.
- Flexibility of curricula and study plans in the face of new social, professional and technological challenges.
- To conform to the Credit System.

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Universidade José Eduardo dos Santos

2009
START OF ACTIVITIES

07
ORGANIC UNITS
(6 Faculties and 1

Faculties & Courses 2022/2023

Faculty of Agricultural Sciences

BA DEGREE
- Agricultural Management Teaching
- Agro-livestock Production Teaching

Teaching Food Technologies

DEGREE COURSE
- Agronomic Engineering
- Forest Engineering

MASTER'S DEGREE
- Agronomy and Natural Resources
- Food Production and Technology
- Forest and Environmental Sciences (newly created course)

DOCTORAL PROGRAMME
- Agro-food Technology (newly created course)

Faculty of Law

DEGREE COURSE
- Law

MASTER'S DEGREE
- Law

Faculty of Economics

DEGREE COURSE
- Economics

MASTER'S DEGREE
- Business Sciences
- Accounting, Taxes and Corporate Finance

Faculty of Medicine

DEGREE COURSE
- Medicine

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine

DEGREE COURSE
- Aquaculture
- Veterinary Medicine

SPECIALISATION
- Production and Nutrition of Small Ruminants (newly created course)

MASTER'S DEGREE
- Veterinary Medicine - Animal Production and Health

Polytechnic Institute

DEGREE COURSE
- Architecture
- Electromedicine
- Nursing

Electronic Engineering and Telecommunications
- Construction Engineering
- Hydraulic Engineering
- Informatics Engineering
- Mechanical Engineering
- Clinical Laboratory

SPECIALIZATION
- New Technologies Applied to Health (newly created course)

MASTER'S DEGREE
- Obstetrics and Neonatal Nursing Science (newly created course)

UJES in Numbers

343
TEACHERS 2023

172 PERMANENT STAFF
(34 Graduates, 100 Masters & 38 Doctors)

90 CONTRACT STAFF
(69 Graduates, 18 Masters & 3 Doctors)

81 EXPATRIATE
(17 Graduates, 44 Masters & 20 Doctors)

257
ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF
211 PERMANENT STAFF
46 HIRED PERSONS

29
COURSES

3
BACHELOR COURSES

16
UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

2
SPECIALIZATION

8
MASTER'S DEGREE COURSES

1
DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

7.964
ENROLLED 2022/2023
(2.650 Female and 5.314 Male)

61
BACHAREL
(12 Female and 49 Male)

7.708
GRADUATE (2.589 Female & 5.119 Male)

195
MASTERS (49 Female & 146 Male)

9.902
STUDENTS GRADUATING BY 2022

9.746
DEGREE

156
MASTER'S
(34 Female and 116 Male)

Don't Look Up; Look Forward: How are Global Trends Shaping Education?

Andreas Schleicher,
Director for Education and Skills and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

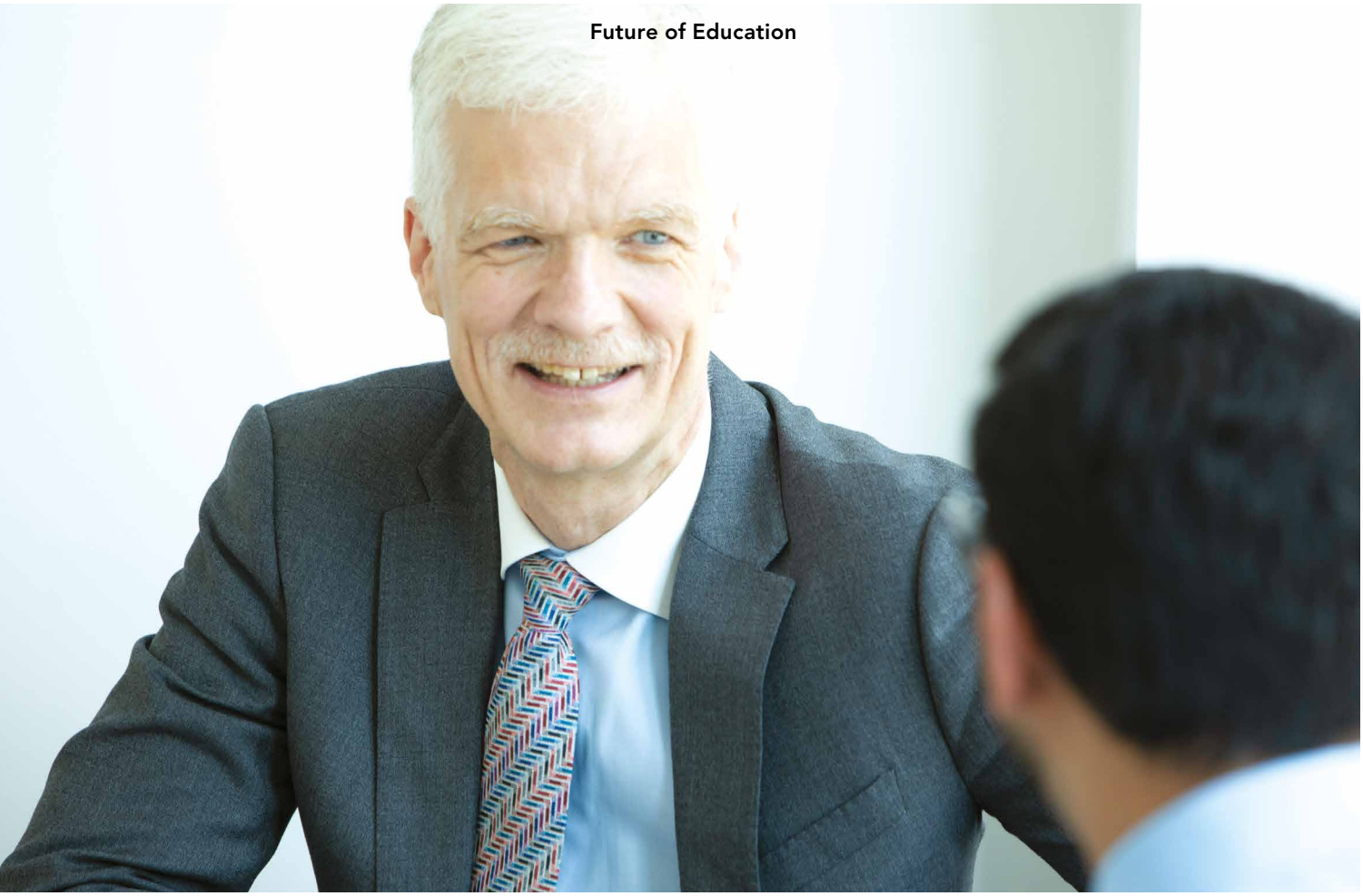
If you are a film buff or have opened your social media accounts lately, in fact, even if you have been living under a rock, you will have probably heard of the film Don't Look Up. Equally acclaimed and obliterated by the audience and critics, this film tells the story of two scientists who discover a super-sized comet on a direct collision course with Earth, and face great difficulties in making themselves heard by politicians and the media.

Future-proofing education by looking forward

Globalisation and digitalisation have connected people, cities, countries and continents in ways that vastly increase our individual and collective potential. But the same forces have also made the world more volatile, more complex, more uncertain and more ambiguous. The world has seen a growing disconnect between the infinite growth imperative and the finite resources of our planet; between the financial economy and the real economy; between the wealthy and the poor; between the concept of our gross domestic product and the well-being of people; between technology and social needs; and between governance and the perceived voicelessness of people.

No one should hold education responsible for all of this, but neither should anyone underestimate the role that people's knowledge, skills, attitudes and values play in social and economic development and in shaping our cultural context. But while digital technologies and globalisation have disruptive implications for our economic and social structure, those implications are not predetermined. It is the nature of our collective responses to these disruptions that determines their outcomes – the continuous interplay between the technological frontier and the cultural, social, institutional and economic agents that we mobilise in response.

The OECD has long advocated future-thinking policymaking to prepare for shocks and surprises – be it climate change, digitalisation or pandemics. This is important because the future will always surprise us. For a start, intangibles are the driver of today's economy, and that makes education so central. An example



of their power is the growth of tech companies compared to the declining revenue of the traditional companies that dominated the Fortune 500 decades ago. The great thing is that, unlike tangible assets, knowledge can be used repeatedly and in multiple places simultaneously, which explains the rapid growth of big tech companies in just a few years. In education, we should ask ourselves more about what competences are needed to participate in an increasingly intangible economy. What knowledge, skills, attitudes and values do we need to generate new ideas and products? Or for organising and governing new ways of working and producing? And what is the role of new technologies in facilitating learning?

And big tech firms are becoming important players in education, especially through the provision of digital education platforms and services. What are the implications for education governance? What kinds of (public-private) co-operation and leadership are needed to deliver public value?

Over time, we have also seen a shift in the way we use our time towards leisure, family and political life; we work less, even if it sometimes doesn't quite look so. Can education help individuals, young and old, to develop the competences needed to engage meaningfully across all aspects of life?

In 2020, temporary employment accounted for 24 per cent of dependent employment for youths, compared to 11 per cent for the general population. This corresponds to a seven per cent increase compared to 1980. Part-time contracts have also been rising over the last two decades, particularly among young workers. What are the consequences for on-the-job learning and training if increasing numbers of workers have no permanent employer to sponsor such education? What does this shift mean for education systems, formal or non-formal, and for education professionals?

What is the potential of new training opportunities emerging from the gig economy, such as peer networks and crowd-curated resources, to fill this gap?

Knowledge also means power. Whereas only an elite few produced traditional encyclopaedias or the mass

"It is the nature of our collective responses to these disruptions that determines their outcomes – the continuous interplay between the technological frontier and the cultural, social, institutional and economic agents that we mobilise in response."

"Training systems must support people to continuously learn, unlearn and relearn as we transit towards "greener" economies and societies."

media of the 20th century, today's social media and internet sites like Wikipedia are fed by the masses who generate the content. The number of pages in all wikis grew from about 10,000 to over 250 million in just 20 years. But are people ready for this? The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that Korea, Singapore and parts of China are the only jurisdictions where more than half of the 15-year-olds are fit for the digital world – like figuring out fake news. In most countries with comparable data, the majority of students still have limited digital navigation skills or not even the basics. So how can we better support all individuals to access and use knowledge effectively? What types of education are needed to enable students, teachers and education leaders to do that effectively? And what (digital) skills and attitudes are needed to effectively evaluate the quality and trustworthiness of information? How can we support teachers to validate the knowledge they use in their practice? Our social circles also influence our access to knowledge. Should educational institutions work more actively to strengthen (digital) social ties? If so, how?

Education must prepare for environmental shocks

The data also highlight that meeting the global goal of net zero emissions by 2050 will require bold action. For example, in the field of energy, as demand for renewables has risen and their technology has improved, the costs of renewables have fallen. However, while the availability and affordability of renewables have increased, we continue to burn fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas at an unsustainable rate, and our carbon footprint keeps growing.

More remains to be done in our fight against climate change, and education has a pivotal role to play. Education is key to providing all citizens not only with an understanding of the science behind the climate crisis but also its socio-demographic, political and moral implications. Moreover, education can make a fundamental contribution by offering learners the space to take direct action in their communities while fostering pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours.

Training systems must support people to continuously learn, unlearn and relearn as we transit towards "greener" economies and societies. In parallel, our research systems must depend on appropriate policies and resources to engage in the kind of long-term, risk-taking research that we need to innovate our way out of our current unsustainable growth model while still ensuring shared prosperity.

Furthermore, as large employers and consumers, education systems must "green up" their infrastructure and operations, enhancing their environmental performance while preparing for the challenges already underway, such as the increased likelihood and severity of extreme events like floods and droughts. These are not issues from a distant future; they are happening now.

We shouldn't ignore the trends shaping education

Whether you're a fan or not, Don't Look Up raises an important message, reminding us that, in our global and interconnected world, incremental threats like climate change as well as abrupt systemic disruptions like COVID-19, will continue to challenge our ways of living, working and learning. Most importantly, the film tells us that we cannot and should not look away from these trends. ■

The Future of Education Depends on 'Operationalising' Dignified Learning

Dr. Geetha Murali,
Room to Read,
CEO

Well into 2023, the state of basic education remains complex. World leaders, policy-makers, educators, parents, and learners all feel the strain put on children's education. Before the pandemic, we already had high learning poverty (i.e., children unable to read a simple text by age ten) with 57 per cent in low- and middle-income countries. Now, some estimate an additional 72 million primary-school aged children have fallen into learning poverty, increasing the rate to 70 per cent!

As school systems and communities around the world grapple with remediation and the future of education, one universal truth remains and must guide our decision-making; quality. Education is a fundamental right for every child. That inherent right transcends economics, race, gender, language, conflict and crisis.

To realise a future where all children exercise this right, we must create localised learning systems that are scalable across contexts. Effective materials development and supply chains, teacher support and coaching, lesson plans and assessments, and meeting

basic needs like nutrition and safety are essential. Just as important as this is human connection – which is critical for young learners to appreciate their self-worth and the increased opportunities education provides. Sustainable, dignified learning systems are the only way to solve the ever-widening learning gap and is the best way in which young learners can recognise their rights and abilities to maximise the power of learning.

What do we mean by dignified learning?

Systems affording children dignity by acknowledging their diversity, their need for social and emotional support to lessen the effects of chronic or toxic stress, and their learning outside of school are more likely to sustain positive learning outcomes at scale. The combination of ensuring barriers between home language and language of instruction are overcome through well-designed curricula, accessible hardware (e.g., hard copy materials, radios, televisions or mobile phones), and a motivated educator who is also present (e.g. a trained teacher, community advocate or family member) and prepares a child not only with the skills they need, but also with the treatment they deserve.

"Quality education, of course, supports strong learning outcomes. Quality learning must also foster children's recognition that they deserve those outcomes and are equipped to forge their own futures."

Educational spaces, schools and other non-formal settings are places of academic learning where children recognise their self-worth and the value they can bring to themselves, their families and society. Learning systems also need to sustain excellence in the quality of curricula, materials and skill training alongside activities that reinforce the ongoing human connection.

How do we "operationalise" dignified learning?

The United Nations (UN)'s 1989 ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child set standards to recognise a child's right to an education. However, learning systems have not evolved in order to scale quality learning for all children. Quality education, of course, supports strong learning outcomes. Quality learning must also foster children's recognition that they deserve those outcomes and are equipped to forge their own futures.

Room to Read (www.roomtoread.org) focuses on creating a world free from illiteracy and gender inequality through education. Our programmes have operated across 21 countries in the past two decades and benefitted more than 32 million children. We scale learning sustainably by designing, implementing and institutionalising effective models for literacy and gender equality. We support governments as they integrate our models into their own.

Humans, especially the youngest, learn best face-to-face with trusted mentors, advocates, role models and peers. Research shows that we cannot underestimate the importance of learning through social transmission. Education systems have the infrastructure to harness this human connection between teacher and students and

"When young students with access to locally relevant, high-quality learning materials, are encouraged and treated as diverse thinkers, they exercise their right to education and experience dignified learning."

among peer groups. Room to Read supports teachers in engaging with learners in literacy and life skills activities, and designs and scales quality mentoring for adolescent girls. We create high-quality, proven teacher guides and student books that are organised, scoped and sequenced, allowing teachers to lighten their load, thus increasing time to focus on connecting with students.

Strong teachers and mentors need time to build trust with students. They have knowledge and expertise learners can recognise. They allow learners to ask questions and try new things. They give respectful feedback and encourage their students to experiment and improve their skills. They guide with patience, helping develop grit and perseverance. They create opportunities to laugh and rejoice in learning. They celebrate "aha" moments and affirm their students' self-worth. They ensure dignified learning.

We know there needs to be more qualified teachers with enough time to address the learning needs of every student. Some students find themselves in classrooms with more than 100 children per teacher. Other children are left out of classrooms completely. If we have any hope of ensuring quality education for all, solutions for dignified learning in informal educational settings are critical. We need to broaden our definition of educators, and encourage those with skills to impart, support to give and who respect every child's dignity.

Responding to disruptions in learning

The pandemic disrupted our understanding of effective learning systems and Room to Read's implementation model was tested as we could not depend on face-to-face learning in school. Previously celebrated solutions of replacing teachers with technology clearly reduced student enrichment, limiting access to the human connectivity needed for self-development.

We focused on benefitting children wherever they were, so we partnered with local radio and TV stations to broadcast literacy and life skills lessons, and supported parents in engaing their children as they observed those lessons. We delivered hard-copy books and self-guided learning materials to students at home via post offices, cars, camels, and boats. We reinforced human connectivity by building the efficacy of teachers' and mentors' work with their students and provided peer support networks in all our programming.

The result? In the first two years of the COVID-19 crisis, when many of the world's schools closed, Room to Read conducted more than 550,000 individual remote mentoring sessions with girls. Numerous young women reflected that they would have dropped out of school if not for these sessions and their connections with their peers. 95 per cent of the girls on our programme returned to school as schools reopened – even though 50 per cent were at risk of dropout!

Through our literacy work, we benefitted more than 10.5 million children and witnessed children creating libraries in their homes and introducing their parents to the habit of reading. We witnessed dignified and individualised learning continue outside of classrooms. The successful partnerships with governments that ensured the power of learning continued with all the education resources they had available (e.g., national broadcast stations, government digital portals, community outreach networks) and led to exponential growth. These experiences gave us new insights on pathways to scaling dignified learning. Human connectivity made all the difference.

The future of education

When young students with access to locally relevant, high-quality learning materials are encouraged and treated as diverse thinkers, they exercise their right to education and experience dignified learning, placing them on track for improved educational and life outcomes.

I invite education leaders everywhere to make this vision possible by examining their operational models and recognising the value of traditional educational components alongside those that foster learners' sense of self-worth. Nelson Mandela noted: "The true character of society is revealed in how it treats its children". Let's make sure our children are treated with dignity. ■

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

Service and Excellence

The **University of Zambia (UNZA)** is the nation's leading Higher Education Institution ranked 6th in Africa by the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings as of 2022. UNZA boasts of over 22,000 students in thirteen Schools, three Institutes with over 300 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. UNZA graduates, on average, 4,500 students per year and has over 60,000 alumni who are helping to create sustainable success in both the profit and non-profit sectors.

Mission

To provide quality and relevant higher education, research and innovation that shape the future of society.

Vision

A renowned University with a global appeal that is driven by the pursuit of knowledge, research, innovation and responsiveness to societal needs.

Core Values

Excellence | Innovativeness | Integrity | Academic Freedom | Equity | Green-environment | Customer-centric

Schools

The University of Zambia has thirteen schools namely; School of Agricultural Sciences | School of Education | School of Engineering | Graduate School of Business | School of Health Sciences | School of Humanities & Social Sciences | School of Law | School of Medicine | School of Mines | School of Natural Sciences | School of Nursing Sciences | School of Public Health | School Veterinary Medicine

Programmes

The University offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes spread across thirteen schools and two institutes. Training is offered on full-time, part-time, distance learning and 100 per cent online (e-campus).

Library Services

The University Library provides a wide range of physical and electronic resources to support the learning, teaching, and research activities. The Library system consists of seven libraries, the Main Library at the Great East Road Campus, the Veterinary Library, the Medical Library at Ridgeway Campus, the Graduate School of Business Library, Livingstone Library, and the Kitwe Library. The Main Library is designated as a National Reference Library and is open to the general public.

(i) Institute of Economic and Social Research

The Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR) at the University has continued to distinguish itself as a centre of research and knowledge generation in the country and beyond. INESOR, through its community of scholars and researchers, conducts research on key policy-relevant thematic areas guided by six interdisciplinary research programmes, which include the following; health promotion, economics and business, urban development, agriculture and rural development, socio-cultural and governance.

(ii) Research and Graduate Studies

The Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies, established in 1994, has a mandate to coordinate research and postgraduate activities of the University. The Directorate has two departments, namely Research Department and Graduate Studies Department. The Research Department is responsible for administration of research activities of the University. The Graduate Studies/Postgraduate Department coordinates applications, admissions, registration, examinations, graduations and other postgraduate activities of the University of Zambia. The Department manages a combined 195 Masters programmes with options for Doctorate degrees as well as Postgraduate Diploma programmes.

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The Trajectory of our Education Systems is the Trajectory of our Future. We Must Start Treating it as Such.

Robert Jenkins,
Director,
Education and Adolescent Development,
Programme Group,
UNICEF

The acceptance that the majority of children, especially those from the most marginalised communities and countries, are failing to grasp basic literacy and numeracy skills – the foundation on which all learning is built – is the tragic reality of schooling globally.

Under-resourced schools, underpaid and underqualified teachers, over-crowded classrooms and archaic curricula have been undermining children's ability to reach their full potential for decades. COVID-19 has simply exposed and exacerbated the failure of education systems worldwide.

"One of the most critical interventions to address low levels of learning is teaching the foundational skills upon which all future learning depend – literacy and numeracy skills. We have to go back to basics to ensure children have a strong foundation for learning."

25 years. That is how long it would take for just 70 per cent of primary school children in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo to learn basic reading skills. These are skills that should be acquired in just two years. While these two countries are extreme examples, the rate of learning in other countries is nowhere near what it should be. Data from 32 countries show that it would take an average of seven years for schoolchildren to learn to read at the level expected of a child in second grade. When looking at numeracy skills, the situation is far worse, with an average 11 years required for just 70 per cent of schoolchildren to grasp what they should in two years of primary education.

Another analysis of data from 34 low- and middle-income countries found that three-quarters of schoolchildren in grade 4 are not obtaining foundational numeracy skills. Data from 79 middle- and high-income countries show more than a third of 15-year-old schoolchildren have yet to achieve minimum proficiency in mathematics.

The data point to a dire pre-existing learning crisis. With up to two years of disruption to schooling for millions of schoolchildren worldwide, the latest estimates show the situation today is likely far worse. It is estimated that only a third of 10-year-olds globally can read and understand a simple written story – the minimum marker for reading proficiency, down from half pre-pandemic.

So why has education failed children across the world on such a large scale? Arguably, there is an acceptance that children from certain communities and countries will never learn how to read, write, or do basic math, despite spending years in school. There is an uncomfortable assumption that schoolchildren from the poorest communities, schoolchildren from

rural communities and schoolchildren from marginalised groups have never learnt these skills, and therefore they should not be expected to. Children who cannot read, cannot learn effectively. It is as simple as that.

The world, and the skills needed to thrive in it today, requires more from this generation of children than ever before. Yet, with the acceptance of low levels of learning, governments have created a perfect storm for unproductivity, at the detriment of their children and at the detriment of their societies and economies. On the flip side, advances in technology and advanced levels of learning in a handful of places comparatively have pushed some children's abilities to the highest level, further deepening inequality. As a result, rather than the greatest equaliser, education in its current form is becoming the greatest divider.

We need a complete transformation of education systems. There are quick, cost-effective ways to reform education entirely and get children on track. We must start with the foundations. Focusing on foundational remediation initiatives at scale will help us get there. Part of this includes the frequent assessment of every child's learning, which will enable qualified teachers to differentiate their needs, while helping track progression. We know that changing the curricula slightly to allocate just two hours a day to literacy and numeracy is hugely beneficial, easily implemented, and cost-effective.

UNICEF is working with governments and partners on five key interventions to address the learning crisis. The first and foremost is to reach every child and retain them in school. Rising poverty, insecurity and conflict, and the impact of the climate crisis, coupled with the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic closures have made this even more complex. UNICEF is on the ground providing cash transfers, setting up temporary schools, advocating for safe schools, providing school supplies, and supporting back-to-school campaigns to try and address the barriers that keep children out of the classroom.

We are also working with education ministers to ensure that children in school are regularly assessed on where their learning levels are at. This involves training teachers to execute these assessments and building the infrastructure to ensure the results are documented and monitored.

One of the most critical interventions to address low levels of learning is teaching the foundational skills upon which all future learning depend – literacy and numeracy skills. We have to go back to basics to ensure children have a strong foundation for learning.

UNICEF is working on increasing catch-up learning to progress beyond what was lost during the pandemic. We have seen children return to the classroom unable to recognise letters and numbers. Accelerated, intensive catch-up classes are the best way to get children where they need to be in their learning.

And finally, we are developing psychosocial health and well-being in schools so that they create a safe and supportive environment conducive to learning. This includes providing mental health support to students, healthcare including immunisation, and school meals for the most vulnerable children.

When children are given the tools to learn, they thrive. Their confidence builds, and along with it, so does their ability to learn. It also supports their mental well-being. But during the early decades of life, children's confidence can be fragile, especially in school, and when they feel like they are falling behind, it leads to a domino effect that is much harder to overcome. ■

"When children are given the tools to learn, they thrive. Their confidence builds and along with it so does their ability to learn."

Renewing Education to Transform the Future

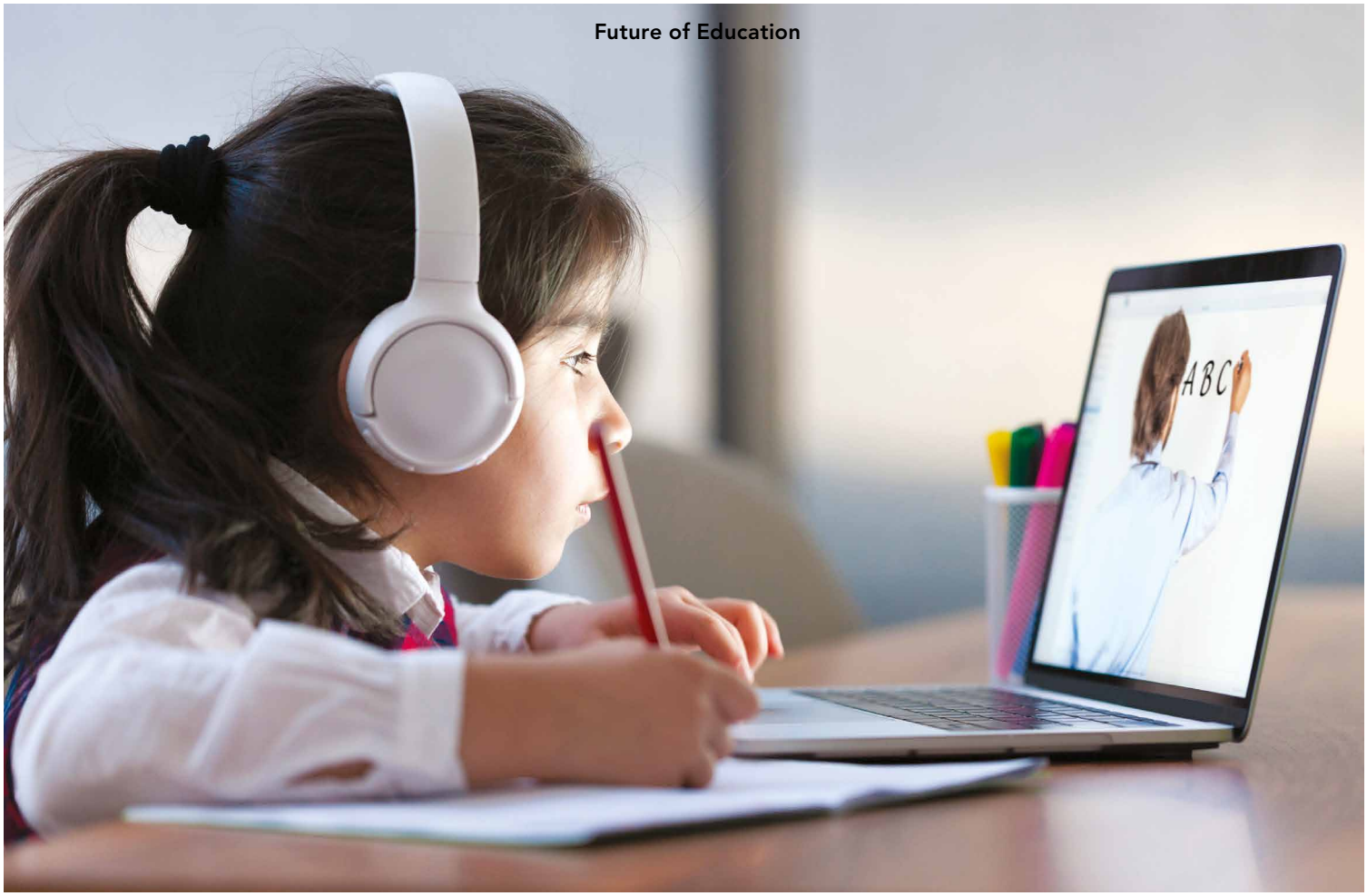
Sobhi Tawil,
Director, Future of Learning and Innovation,
UNESCO

There has recently been much reference to the transformation of education in global development discourse. This is undoubtedly related to the Transforming Education Summit (TES) convened by the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General in New York in September 2022. The process around the Summit arguably represents one of the most significant mobilisations of the international education community in recent years. Bringing together heads of state and government in New York, the Summit was preceded by a pre-Summit at UNESCO in Paris attended by over 150 Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Education. The process also included the mobilisation of international expertise around five thematic tracks, the organisation of national consultations with over 130 countries submitting national statements of commitment to transform education, and the release of a vision statement by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Despite this international mobilisation, however, there has been little clarity on why we need to transform education, confounding the short-term need to address the impact of the COVID-19 educational disruption with ambitions to strengthen commitment to the globally agreed education goals and to unlock the transformational potential of teaching and learning for longer-term change.

There has also been very little discussion on what "transformation in education" actually means and how it may differ from reform. In order to provide more clarity, it is useful to go back to the UN Secretary-General's 2021 report — Our Common Agenda — which first announced the Summit on Transforming Education, referencing the report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education as a key framing document for the process.[1]

The 2021 report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, Reimagining Our Futures Together: A new social contract for education, proposes a vision for the renewal of education. It begins by looking at the present with a long view towards 2050. Any effort to reform,



"How can current models of education possibly transform the future when over 770 million youth and adults around the world are non-literate?"

renew, or transform education must begin with a critical re-examination of our present realities, shaped as they are, both by past trends, as well as our visions of probable and possible futures.

Examination of projections based on current development trends makes it abundantly clear that probable futures are bleak and even dystopic. Indeed, environmental destruction continues unabated with an acceleration of climate change and biodiversity loss that threatens the future of life on Earth. Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, exacerbated by demographic pressures, continue to exceed the capacity for replenishment of the natural world. Greater concentration of wealth across the world fuels growing inequalities. Regression of democratic space is undermining hard-won gains in human rights. And while the digital transformation of our societies offers new possibilities for human development, it not only ushers in uncertainties about the future of work but also contributes to greater surveillance and the polarisation of societies. The new multipolar world continues to be a stage for violent conflict, the destruction and disruption of lives, and the displacement of millions.

We are at a critical historical juncture in global development with threatening prospects of probable futures. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that the UN Secretary-General, in his 2021 Our Common Agenda report, affirmed that: "Humanity faces a stark and urgent choice: a breakdown or a breakthrough." This framing is echoed in the Futures of Education report, which states that "the future of humanity and the planet is at risk" and that "we are faced with an existential choice: continue on an unsustainable path or radically change course."[2]

But in highlighting that "no trend is destiny", Reimagining Our Futures Together insists, not only on the possibility of shaping alternative futures, but also on the urgent necessity of doing so. It reaffirms that education is key to changing course. As the foundation for human development, knowledge and education are also the basis to transform and shape alternative possible futures. Indeed, education has great potential to help shape more just, inclusive, and sustainable futures by rebalancing our relationships with each other, with the living planet, and with technology. Despite this potential, however, the

"To shape more just and sustainable futures, education itself must be transformed. We need to rethink our models, our approaches, our practices."

report argues that current educational models, approaches, and practices will not help us change course and transform the future.

The first rationale for the renewal of education is the persistence of widespread exclusion from educational opportunity despite progress made in expanding access worldwide over the past several decades. How can current education possibly transform the future when over 770 million youth and adults around the world are non-literate?[3] When an estimated one in four youth are excluded from education, employment or training?[4] How can our models of education transform the future when close to 60 per cent of youth around the world do not possess minimal proficiency levels in reading and mathematics?[5] We cannot hope to transform the future without addressing these knowledge divides and educational exclusions. Doing so requires addressing the root causes of social exclusion. As argued in the report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, today's gaps in access, participation, and outcomes are based on yesterday's exclusions and oppressions.[6] Past injustices need to be addressed and corrected. This is the necessary condition for the renewal of educational models and approaches that can hope to shape more just and inclusive futures.

But we also know that some of our educational approaches, models, and practices also contribute to the socially, economically, and environmentally unsustainable development trends we are witnessing today. The second rationale for renewing education is based on the recognition that education has been part of the problem; sustaining models based on human exceptionalism, individual accomplishment, selection, competition, and exclusion. Our educational models continue to be informed by a utilitarian approach with its imperative on economic growth that all too often overrides the role education can play in promoting social or environmental justice. Indeed, as has been noted, "[t]he world's most educated countries and people are the ones most accelerating climate change", and that if "being educated means living unsustainably, we need to recalibrate our notions of what education should do and what it means to be educated."[7] The same can be argued about the role that many education systems play in perpetuating bias, discrimination, and division and in undermining social cohesion. More of the same will not do. Maintaining or strengthening political commitment to, and financing of, current education systems as a foundation for national development policies cannot take us towards breakthrough. We need a different education. In order to shape more just and sustainable futures, education itself must be transformed. We need to rethink our models, our approaches, and our practices.

What, then, does transforming education actually mean? The more than 130 national statements of commitment to transform education submitted as part of the 2022 Transforming Education Summit process represent a useful starting point. Unsurprisingly, the analysis of these statements indicates that the vast majority of countries highlight the need to renew how and what we teach and learn. Almost 95 per cent of countries have highlighted teacher training and professional development, while almost 70 per cent cite curriculum reform and the renewal of content and methods as key levers to improve the quality of teaching and learning and transform education.[8] Paradoxically, however, only a third of countries acknowledge the need to improve the working conditions and social status of teachers, only a quarter address the fundamental issue of teacher shortage, and only a handful reference the question of contract teachers. To what extent can we hope to transform teaching and learning practice without addressing the fundamental social, economic, and political issues that define the teaching profession?

Renewal of education must mean going beyond reform. Rather than better versions of existing systems, renewal implies education systems that are different from today.[9] It implies fundamental changes to educational processes and opportunities. And while we know that teachers remain the most significant factor in educational quality, we also know that their role must change. There can be no renewal of education without the transformation of the teaching profession. The voice of teachers is key in shaping the future of the profession and of education. The profession must be both revalued and reimagined as a collaborative endeavour that builds new knowledge and capacity to bring about possible alternative futures. ■

1. United Nations (2021). Our Common Agenda. Report of the Secretary-General (p.40).

2. UNESCO (2021). Reimagining Our Futures Together: A new social contract for education. Report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education (p.7).

3. UNESCO Institute of Statistics data.

4. International Labor Organization data.

5. UIS (2017). Fact Sheet No 46.

6. UNESCO (2021: 20).

7. UNESCO (2021: 33).

8. UNESCO (2022). Analysis of National Statements of Commitment on Transforming Education.

9. International Commission on the Futures of Education (2022). Transforming education together for just and sustainable futures. Statement from the International Commission on the Futures of Education. June.

THE UNIVERSITY of SIERRA LEONE

THE UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA LEONE

Higher education in Sierra Leone was restructured by the Universities Act of 2005, which provided for the establishment of private universities. Under this Act, the University of Sierra Leone was reconfigured to incorporate the historic Fourah Bay College, the Institute of Public Administration and Management and the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences. Since 2005, administration of the University of Sierra Leone has been overseen by a Vice-Chancellor and Principal, who are the chief academic and administrative heads of the University respectively, and a Registrar.

Fourah Bay College

The oldest college of the university was established as far back as February 1827 and is administrated by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor and a Deputy Registrar. It comprises four faculties: Arts, Engineering and Architecture, Pure and Applied Sciences and Social Sciences and Law. In 2000, the College replaced the trimester with the semester system. The rearrangment of the academic year from three to two sessions also gave birth to the modular system of student assessment.

The College is located on Mount Aureol, with a picturesque view overlooking Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. Its beautiful landscape and serene learning environment are etched into the beautiful green scenery and provide a panorama over much of the capital city. At a 300m elevation above sea level, and with a low carbon foot-print, the location is ideal for both learning and ecotourism.

The Institute of Public Administration and Management

Established on 5th November 1980, it has two faculties. The Faculty of Management Sciences comprises four departments – Accountancy and Finance, Business Administration, Banking and Finance and Public Administration – and the Faculty of Information Systems & Technology, which is composed of the Department of Information Systems and the Department of Technology.

The College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences

The first medical school in Sierra Leone was founded on 12th April 1988 by the Government of Sierra Leone, in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigerian and the World Health Organization. The College is tasked with the training of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, biomedical scientists and laboratory technicians, with a view to improving the healthcare delivery system across Sierra Leone through its four faculties of Basic Medical Sciences, Clinical Sciences, Nursing and Pharmaceutical Sciences.

Image by mi168 - Freetown from Fourah Bay College

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