COVID-19 and Education

Support to governments and international development partners in low-and middle-income countries

The COVID-19 pandemic has launched the world into uncharted territory. Governments and development partners are grappling with a myriad of challenges. At the time of writing, education systems in nearly 180 countries remain completely shut down, affecting close to 1.3 billion learners worldwide (over 72% of the world's learner population).[1] Localised closures in several other countries are impacting millions of additional learners. This presents one of the most challenging moments in history for education ministries and their development partners.

How do we:

- **limit learning losses** and continue learning through distance methods and ed-tech

- ensure **equity and inclusion** for marginalised groups, such as children with disabilities and special needs, those from poorer backgrounds and those in remote locations

- **keep children safe** from abuse during school closures, especially girls and learners from vulnerable groups (including reproductive health, neglect and choice)

- **safeguard children's well-being**, nutrition and health through psychosocial and emotional support

- **protect and repurpose** current education sector plans and budgets

- ensure learners safely return to school, **addressing retention issues,** especially girls and those from the poorest families

- Catch-up strategies, **accelerated curricula post-crises,** examinations and track progression

- **future-proof education systems** through appropriate structures, providers and workforce to withstand shocks and build back better

- review and generate robust **evidence-bases** for learning solutions during crises

Experience from Ebola has shown that crises such as COVID-19 can have huge costs to children's schooling and lives. By the time schools reopened in 2015, learners in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia had lost up to nine months of education. The loss in learning was not the only factor. There were associated costs with many children being orphaned, a sharp rise in teenage pregnancies and abuse, children not returning to school, widening inequalities, malnutrition, trauma and vaccination delays.

The Ebola – and COVID-19 – experiences have shown that education systems and structures are hugely under-prepared for shocks. This means most governments and development partners are precariously balancing between taking quick-action learning-while-doing solutions, versus more evidence-based approaches that risk prolonging immediate learning gaps and issues.

While the present focus is primarily on the immediate Response phase, planning for Recovery and Reform phases of the COVID-19 pandemic needs to start shortly, if not simultaneously. This will

help ensure we are currently prioritising correctly and protect the education gains achieved over the last two decades under the Millennium Development Goals (MDG 2 universal primary education) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 Inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all). It will also preserve our promise and debt to the current generation of learners across the world.

OPM's education team have been thinking, reading and reflecting on how we can support national education systems pivot in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the widespread ban on travel, our global team, existing projects, networks of associates and experts, and OPM's international offices, put us in a strong position to offer both remote and on-the-ground support; simultaneously facilitating cross-country sharing, rigorous evidence generation and learning.

We summarise our expertise and experience below to start the conversation.

Our expertise and experience

Click on the project links in the text for more information

Distance education and e-learning

Learning continuity programmes through distance education and e-learning solutions; with prioritisation of content, developing and distributing audio-visual pedagogical and learning materials.

- **Support to Reaching All Children with Education – II** (*DFID – Lebanon - ongoing*) supporting the Government of Lebanon's National Education Response Plan, including training support to set-up 'virtual classrooms', developing content, an education e-portal and audio-visual material for TV broadcasts.

- **MUVA – Women's Economic Empowerment Programme** (*DFID – Mozambique - ongoing*) pivoting existing project networks to support continued learning for pupils via MUVA classroom assistants, linking schools and families, distributing materials and gender-based violence messaging.

Equity and inclusiveness

Ensuring learning approaches and response/remedial education strategies cater to all children (girls, children with disability, refugees, poor, marginalised)

- **Out-of-School Children Initiative in MENA** (*UNICEF - completed*) supported targeted strategies for improving access to education by developing a comprehensive evidence base and identifying bottlenecks for reform.

- **Sindh Education Non-state Actors Programme** (*DFID – Pakistan - ongoing*) monitoring, technical assistance support to NGO schools, providing primary education to most marginalised, poorest and disadvantaged children.

- **Girls Education Challenge** – multiple (*DFID - Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria - ongoing*) mixed-methods, gender- and disability-sensitive evaluations of education projects for marginalised girls.

Child safety

Keeping children safe during school closures, especially girls and children in vulnerable and conflict-affected contexts

- **Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme** (*DFID - Sierra Leone - ongoing*) annual assessment of school- and girls- safety issues in post-Ebola context as part of secondary grade assessment surveys and deep-dive studies.

- **No Generation Lost Initiative** (*DFID - Lebanon, Jordan - completed*) needs analysis to support DFID's regional programming interventions for children after Syria crises via HEART framework.

- **OPM Safeguarding Policy & Frameworks** (*corporate strategy*) context-specific safeguarding frameworks, field protocols, incident reporting and response routes developed for relevant projects.

Cross-sectoral expertise (cash transfers, WASH, nutrition)

Keeping children safe during school closures, especially girls and children in vulnerable and conflict-affected contexts

- **Benazir Income Support Programme** – Education CCT (*DFID – Pakistan - ongoing*) evaluation, monitoring and research, including in aftermath of crises (floods)

- **Child Development Grant Programme** (*DFID – Nigeria - completed*) evaluated cash transfer pilot on cause of inadequate diet intake, counselling/behaviour change campaign

- **Impacts of School WASH Improvements** (*UNICEF – Uganda - ongoing*) RCT study of WASH services on learners' attendance

- **Bihar Child Support Programme** (*DFID & CIFF – India - completed*) supported State Department to introduce and evaluate programme for improved child nutrition outcomes

Teacher training and workforce management

Ensuring teachers and education frontline workers are protected, have appropriate resources and skills for distance education, and response and recovery phases

- **Teaching in Distress** (*DFID – Nigeria - completed*) assessment of the impact of protracted violence due to insurgence on primary school teaching workforce in Borno State

- **Teacher Demand and Supply Studies** (*DFID – Nigeria - completed*) supported state governments to ensure adequate numbers of appropriately trained teachers in their basic education systems

- **Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria** (*DFID – Nigeria - completed*) school level capacity assessment via multi-year composite surveys

Sector finance and system resilience

Securing and pivoting sector budgets, plans at national and sub-national levels to address new demands, including direct technical assistance

- **Uganda Education Response Plan for Refugees:** (*DFID – ongoing*) developing options for pooled funding mechanisms and tool to track financing

- **Public finance for children** (*UNICEF MENA region – ongoing*) knowledge products on impact pathways, financing/ service delivery challenges and expert-online support post Covid-19

- **Research on Improving Systems Education – RISE** (*DFID – Ethiopia, Nigeria, Indonesia, Pakistan, Tanzania, Vietnam, India – ongoing*) evidence & uptake of systems research for improved learning outcome; create communities of practice

Out-of-School children and back- to-school campaigns

Relevant policies and strategies are in place to bring children back to school, especially the most at-risk/vulnerable groups

- **Out-of-School Children studies - multiple** (*UNICEF - East Asia, MENA, South Asia, Zanzibar - complete*d) documentation and analysis of profiles, pull-push factors, barrier analysis and policy advice focusing on vulnerable and at-risk groups

- **Education Data, Research and Evaluation in Nigeria – EDOREN** (*DFID – Nigeria - completed*) back-to-school community study on primary school attendance (especially girls) in wake of armed conflict in Borno district

Catch-up strategies, accelerated learning and tracking performance

Strategies for curriculum recovery, managing transitions to post-crises phase, blended learning approaches, assessment plans and learner progression

- **Assessment and Education Reform Support Programme** (*DFID – Myanmar - ongoing*) pivoting to support Ministry of Education in accessing emergency funding, planning for high-stakes exams, assessments in school closures and readiness upon opening

- **Education Quality Improvement Programme** (*DFID – Tanzania - completed*) assessment of six-year primary education improvement programme

- **Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme** (*DFID, Sierra Leone – ongoing*) annual assessment of learning performance and teaching base on accelerated curriculum

Rapid evaluations, evidence, learning and data reviews

Assessing international evidence, programme evaluations, formative studies with rapid policy advice and learning focus

- **Maintaining Essential Services after Natural Disasters – Maintains** (*DFID - Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, Uganda - ongoing*) using a systems lens to conduct sector reviews, rapid research on preparedness and response, Covid-19 case studies and technical assistance

- **Teacher Development Programme** (*DFID -Nigeria -completed*) mixed-methods evaluation of mobile/tablet based ed-tech solutions to in-service teacher training

- **Early Learning Partnership** (*World Bank – Liberia - ongoing*) pivoting project to evaluate government's new model of delivering Early Childhood Education classes via radio/homework assignments

For details on the above, or other projects, please contact Sourovi De (Education Portfolio Lead) at sourovi.de@opml.co.uk