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Learning Renewed: ten lessons from the pandemic

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The urgent need to tackle the equity challenge

Technology alone is not the answer

School leadership matters

Teachers benefit from both support and challenge

We must harness the power of parents and community

The health emergency has stress-tested our education systems. What have we learned from the experience? And how can we apply these lessons as we seek to ensure that 'building back better' is an evidence-informed undertaking? We identify **ten lessons from the crisis of 2020-2021** that should be used to inform planning for the reconstruction of education in the long term. We arrived at these ten lessons through a thorough global review of a range of sources including policy documents and research findings and through a series of interviews with senior leaders in some of the organisations and programmes featured. Full references are on page 14.

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In the USA, the highly decentralised nature of the education system has led to great varieties of practice. Some school districts have been highly imaginative in the ways that they have managed school re-opening.

1. The crisis has reinforced the need for adaptive, agile policymaking

Policymakers have in many countries found decisions about school closure and re-opening highly problematic. Many jurisdictions have approached the issue in binary terms: provision has either been entirely remote or 100% face-to-face. Others have demonstrated greater agility, planning and developing hybrid or blended solutions or tailoring policy at regional or local level.

In many jurisdictions, early plans for reopening were often derailed by the evolution of the health emergency, which necessitated rapid changes to plans. The pandemic has thus highlighted the need for iterative planning that is responsive to real-world data.

There have been examples of planning that recognised that different solutions might be required in different contexts. In **Ecuador**, government plans provided a range of options for the management of blended learning on school reopening. While small village schools might potentially reopen full-time, the largest urban schools would need to limit in person attendance to one day a week:[1]

- **Option 1** (for schools with high-density populations): divide each class into five sub-groups, with each sub-group attending school one day per week and continuing with remote learning for the other four days.
- **Option 2** (not recommended for cities with high population density as this would increase mobility and transportation of students and teachers): divide the school day into four three-hour shifts and have each sub-group attending for one shift twice per week, while continuing with remote learning on the other days.
- **Option 3**: divide the students into two groups, with each group attending school two days per week, continuing with remote learning on the other days, and teachers providing remote tutorials on Fridays.
- **Option 4** (for schools with fewer than 35 students): greater flexibility, with all students potentially attending every day.

Sadly, schools in Ecuador have had to remain closed due to high rates of Covid-19 transmission and we are therefore unable to assess the success of this scenario planning.

[1] Ministerio de Educación (2020a); (2020b)

Schools in all nine educational zones are still required to remain in the *We learn together at home* phase of the Ministry of Education's Covid-19 plan.[2] In the second phase, called *Together we learn and take care of ourselves*, localised decision-making would be allowed, and the scenarios outlined here could come into effect.

In the **USA**, the highly decentralised nature of the education system has led to great varieties of practice. Some school districts have been highly imaginative in the ways that they have managed school re-opening. In the Northern Lehigh School District in Pennsylvania, for example, students and their parents were given a choice between a blended learning offer or continuing to work from home full-time.[3] Nearly 75% of students have chosen to follow the hybrid blended model based on two days at school and three days at home. During one of the days at home, students have a personal 'check-in' with a teacher.

In the **UAE,** the private sector regulatory bodies allowed schools to redesign delivery to suit their own context.[4] Schools had to follow health and safety protocols, but beyond that, were given leeway to deliver as they saw fit. In practice, there is a mix of models in operation: some schools offer 100% face-to-face provision, while others offer a model akin to Option 3 in Ecuador, with students attending school part-time with reduced class sizes. A key component of the model has been that parents are able to opt for their children to continue home learning if they wish, meaning that all teaching must be provided online as well as in person.

In the UAE's public school system, schools have been dividing students into groups and scheduling attendance across the week, blending home and in-school learning. The government has worked hard to strengthen the online aspect of delivery, and their success has afforded them the flexibility to move between face-to-face and remote education at will and with little notice.

Effective agile policymaking requires evidence-based decisions, making research uptake a critical factor for future decision-making. While evidence from previous health crises was limited, there were some bright spots during the crisis. For example, the EdTech Hub, the UK Education Endowment Fund, and others mobilised pre-crisis evidence that was relevant to school staff as they undertook the management of the crisis.

75% of students in the Northern Lehigh School District chose to follow the hybrid blended learning model

Many policymakers were interested in robust evidence from the Ebola crisis when shaping policy. **Sierra Leone** is perhaps the standout example. Analysis of IIEP's UNESCO Planipolis documentation relating to Covid-19 crisis planning suggests that Sierra Leone's plans have been notably different from those of many other Sub-Saharan African countries. There is a keen sense that the government of Sierra Leone understood the impacts, the mitigating actions and the equity issues from the Ebola experience and brought this to bear in their Covid-19 response planning, which comes through strongly in its clear and well thought-out strategy. The same clarity, understanding, and focus are not always evident in the plans of other countries.[5] The Sierra Leone strategy also demonstrates clear ties with GPE investments and grants,[6] and as well as the capacity to use existing infrastructure (built post-Ebola). A good example is the GPE-funded Teacher Service Commission, set up after Ebola, which was used to mobilise remote education within one week of Covid-19-related school closures.[7]

2. Meeting the equity challenge depends on data, detail and deliberate action

There is almost universal agreement that the crisis has gravely exacerbated an already alarming equity gap between the learning opportunities we provide to students who are disadvantaged and their more privileged peers. While precise data relating to the extent of learning loss remains unclear, there is a global consensus that students belonging to marginalised groups have fared worse in both high- and low-income countries – and that these students are most at risk of dropping out of education entirely. Reporting from UNICEF country programmes in May-June 2020 showed that only 50 out of 134 reporting countries were thinking

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[2] Ibid. [3] Link (2020) [4] Informed by first-hand experience working in the region [5] Government of Sierra Leone (2020); IIEP-UNESCO (2021) [6] GPE (2020) [7] Ibid

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Learning opportunities between students who are disadvantaged and their more privileged peers has been gravely exacerbated by the pandemic

about reaching out to children who did not return to school upon reopening.[8] The Teacher Task Force (an international alliance of governments and intergovernmental bodies)[9] has urged countries 'to identify and support at-risk learners', especially as schools reopen, making sure that schools are made accessible for these children to ensure their return and minimise the risk of dropout.

While the pandemic has been an equity catastrophe, the crisis has stimulated some promising practice of such data-driven identification of and targeted action for vulnerable students. Without granular disaggregated data at student level, it is impossible to understand the scale of learning loss and disengagement for specific groups of students. Closing the equity gap depends, therefore, on attention to student tracking.

Rising Academy Network is a non-state school network serving over 50,000 students across more than 160 schools in **Ghana**, **Liberia** and **Sierra Leone**. The Network response to the period of school closure prioritised data collection and tracking the engagement levels of vulnerable students. Visibility, communication and connection with families of vulnerable children were explicitly identified as essential to minimising dropout and maximising equity. From the beginning of the period of school closure, teachers kept meticulous logs of household-level engagement with the

support programme for home learning, taking follow-up action when concerns were identified.

Similarly, in the **UK**, a multi-academy trust (a federation of government-funded schools) used Microsoft Teams as a means of facilitating a community of practice to develop a collaborative approach to remote learning for Year 10 and 12 students – with a particular focus on the learning of vulnerable groups. Staff gathered granular data on students' access to technology via a survey and follow-up phone calls and procured devices for students in need.

In addition, during the first wave of school closures in England, teachers in one secondary school identified vulnerable households and called each household between one and three times per day to check on students. Foreign language teachers provided additional support to students with English as an additional language (EAL).

3. The best external support for teachers comes from other teachers

Top-down training and guidance for teachers can be necessary in specific contexts, but even before the Covid-19 crisis, there was a growing consensus that 'grassroots' collaboration tends to be more powerful as an engine of positive change. The challenge is to provide an appropriate infrastructure to support collaboration and ensure quality, but we have witnessed examples of positive practice during the ongoing crisis.

One such example is the success of *Comunidad Atenea*, an internet-based support programme for teachers in **Latin America**, funded by the Varkey Foundation. During the period of school closures, thousands of teachers have been crowdsourcing good teaching ideas, including for

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[8] Nugroho et al. (2020) [9] UNESCO, International Task Force of Teachers for Education 2030 and ILO (2020:26)

https://comunidadatenea.org

Comunidad Atenea, an internet-based support programme for teachers in Latin America, has seen thousands of teachers crowdsourcing good teaching ideas.

remote learning.[10] In addition to teaching ideas, the site also offers materials, courses, and a virtual community for teachers. Although originally founded in 2017, it has come into its own during the pandemic: since school closures began, the site has registered many new teachers. Although designed for teachers in Latin America, the site and materials have been accessed by professionals in 92 countries and can be accessed on any connected device.[11] It uses widely known platforms such as YouTube and TikTok to encourage the creation and sharing of audio-visual content aimed at promoting and motivating learning and teacher development.[12] As a whole, *Comunidad Atenea* seeks to '[drive] innovation in pedagogical practices and educational spaces; the development of digital skills and skills for the 21st Century; and collaborative work of teachers across the region'.[13]

There have also been other imaginative examples of technology-enabled teacher support mechanisms. The **Indonesian** Ministry of Education launched the Guru Berbagi online platform and downloadable app for teachers to share methods and resources that they have used during the pandemic, either for online classes or for

blended learning. It also enabled teachers to collaborate through discussion and training activities.[14] Meanwhile, a teacher peer support network in **Uganda** has used WhatsApp to ensure effective communication and collaboration.

A secondary school in **England** that adopted an innovative '60/40' blended model reported that a major success factor was the way in which the leadership team managed and redeployed teaching staff, playing to individuals' strengths. For example, IT teachers had been using Google Classrooms for years prior to the pandemic. These teachers were tasked with training other teachers in the use of this application when the school switched to online learning, and provided teachers with ongoing support. In October 2020, all teachers were asked to record a lesson they had taught and to discuss elements that were or were not working in subject groups. The teachers were able to share effective practice and support each other in finding solutions.

4. School leadership matters

Understandably, the discourse relating to the crisis has highlighted the need to provide teachers with support, but it has also reminded us of the pivotal role of school leaders. To date, this has extended to supporting preparations for safe school reopening, supporting teacher wellbeing, and enabling teachers to effectively engage with ed-tech, assessment and remote or blended modalities of teaching and learning.

There have been some positive developments in recognising the importance of school leadership. The international Teacher Task Force and UNESCO published a comprehensive toolkit for school leaders based on the case studies and bright spots identified around the world, which includes guiding questions to help school leaders plan and examples and tips from countries, organisations and school groups.[15] Along with the ILO, they also published guidance for policymakers.[16] There have also been promising examples at country level. In **Benin**, school leaders set up pilot projects during the reopening of some classes to identify both

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[10] See https://comunidadatenea.org/ [11] Varkey Foundation (2020a) [12] Varkey Foundation (2020b) [13] NuBE Docente (2020) [14] Cahya (2020); Teacher Task Force (2020a) [15] Teacher Task Force (2020b) [16] UNESCO, International Task Force of Teachers for Education 2030 and ILO (2020)
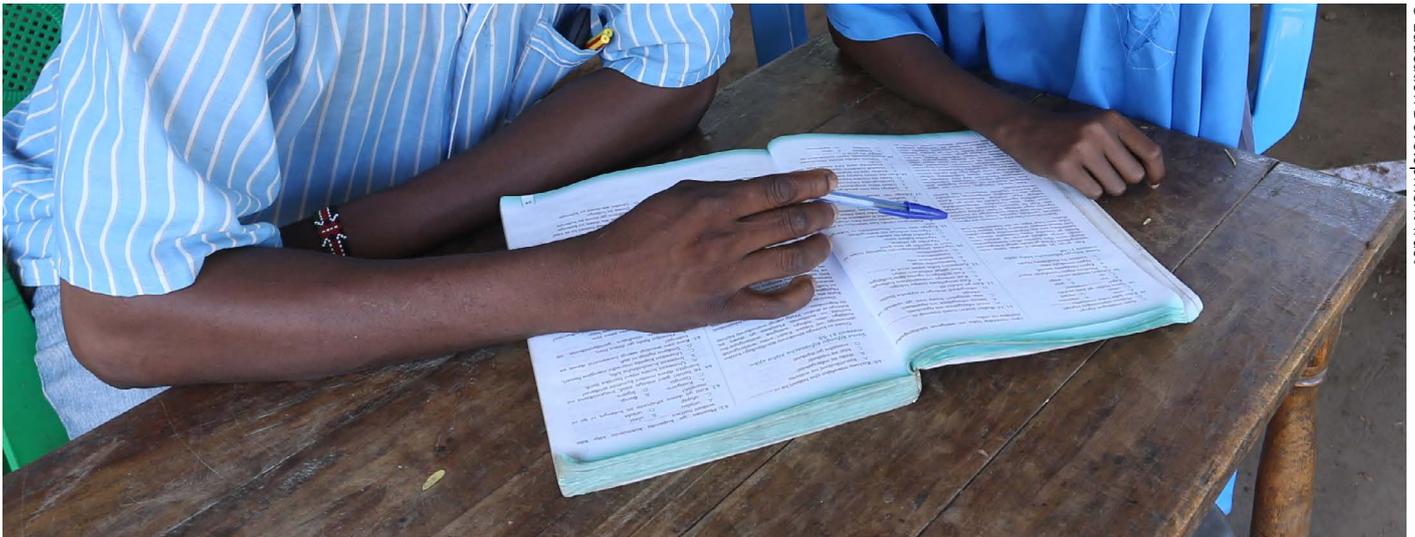
Learning recovery will be most effectively supported if teachers have information about the levels that learners are operating at and are able to monitor their progress over time and put additional support in place as needed.

difficulties that prevented teachers from working effectively and examples of promising practice.[17]

In **Rwanda**,[18] in preparation for school reopening (originally due to take place in September 2020, but delayed to October 2020), VVOB developed a toolkit for school leaders, in partnership with the University of Rwanda and the Rwanda Education Board. This included a checklist of issues to discuss at the monthly school leaders professional learning communities (PLCs) sessions in July and August. The first session covered teaching and learning, as well as safety and healthy environments, while the second focused on dealing with psychological and socio-emotional wellbeing challenges, alongside social dialogue and communication for school re-opening. Both sessions included discussion of cross-cutting dimensions, such as:

- equity-related challenges on accessibility and use of ICT devices;
- gender-related issues, including gender-based violence, adolescent pregnancies, and dropout;
- monitoring and evaluation.

These examples are promising, but there is a need for further discussion regarding the role of school leaders in supporting the development of solutions to long-term problems and challenges. Such challenges include issues of equity and inclusion, maximising the promise of community and family involvement, and cross-sectoral partnerships to support schools, teachers and learners.

5. Without effective assessment for learning, it is impossible to meet the needs of individual students

When planning for school reopening started in earnest, many commentators rightly identified the importance of understanding where children are in their learning as a precondition for catch-up. Learning recovery will be most effectively supported if: (i) teachers have information about the levels that learners are operating at; and (ii) they are able to monitor their progress over time and put additional support in place as needed.

The World Bank has argued for using learning assessment in the process of school reopening in a way that will build long-term capacity in this important area of practice.[19] Historically, schools in many countries have been

[17] Teacher Task Force (2020b) [18] VVOB, Rwanda Education Board and University of Rwanda (2020) [19] Bazaldua, Levin and Liberman (2020)

preoccupied with 'summative assessment' at the end of a block of learning to measure whether students have achieved the learning goals set out in the curriculum. School reopening provides an opportunity to go beyond this, increasing focus on diagnostic and formative assessment. The World Bank Group guidance note on using learning assessment outlines four scenarios, based on the financial resources available, and provides practical step-by-step guidance on how to plan and administer the following types of assessments in schools:

- **Diagnostic assessment** (as schools reopen), which helps teachers to ascertain the extent to which students' knowledge and skills are at the level expected by the curriculum;
- **Formative assessment** (throughout the school year), which helps check students' understanding through classroom activities, quizzes, tests and homework.

Promising and imaginative assessment practice is emerging at country level. In **Chile**, the Education Quality Agency (*Agencia de Calidad en Educación*) has developed an integrated diagnostic tool to measure socio-emotional and academic learning needs in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. (Please see section 6 for more on socio-emotional needs.) This tool seeks to support schools in assessing learning in literacy and mathematics, enabling teachers to use the evidence it generates to design appropriate pedagogical support for their students over the remainder of the school year. Participation in the assessment is voluntary and results are only to be used internally by schools.[20]

In **Liberia**, Rising Academies print assessments on paper, send them to schools for teachers to use, and log the results. School performance managers input the data into a data collection tool which gives visibility to the central office of what is going on in schools. In November, they conducted learning assessments for 2,413 students and found that reading and numeracy levels had improved through Covid-19 as a result of the *Rising on Air* broadcast programme the organisation had released. (It was not possible to attribute improvements to a specific aspect of the programme.) Over the past year, the Rising Academy Network has developed a simple assessment tool, based on the Australian Council for Educational Research tools and inspired by the TARL movement. It includes two simple literacy and numeracy assessments which are foundational to the accelerated learning programme (whereby students

are grouped into ability levels). The tool, which was due to be rolled out this academic year but was delayed, will also be used by school performance managers with samples of students at key points during the year.

Kenya has partially reopened schools and as part of this process, the National Examinations Council planned large-scale classroom assessments. These assessments, covering the main subjects in the curriculum, have been administered by teachers in order to monitor student learning. The assessment has national coverage and results will help inform policymakers about learning losses so that they can implement appropriate system-level interventions. Schools are responsible for printing and administering the assessments whilst teachers are responsible for scoring assessments and inputting results into the assessment portal. A team of subject specialists, researchers and data analysts will then verify and analyse this data using it to produce a national report on learning. Schools will be able to see school-level reports online and the national report will be shared at national fora.

6. Great teaching and learning are not enough: schools need to address the wellbeing of students and teachers

The crisis has highlighted a pre-existing challenge: how to ensure that students are not only developing cognitively but are also happy and resilient. The need to focus on wellbeing and mental health has always been important – the fact the crisis has forced these issues into the spotlight is a good thing. Tackling this issue will be challenging for many education systems and schools to accommodate, but useful examples are emerging.

[20] Agencia de Calidad de la Educación (2020)

Many schools in the **UK** have adopted the idea of a special 'recovery curriculum' that addresses the mental health crisis engendered by the period of school closure. This draws on the work of Barry Carpenter, the UK's first Professor of Mental Health in Education. He identifies five losses that children will have experienced as a result of school closure – routine, structure, friendship, opportunity and freedom – and has called for policymakers, teachers and leaders not to underestimate the overall impact this will have on children's wellbeing and preparedness for learning.[21]

There have been some interesting examples emerging about how to assess student mental health. The Education Quality Agency (*Agencia de Calidad en Educación*) in **Chile** (mentioned in section 5) has developed an integrated diagnostic tool to measure socio-emotional and academic learning needs in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.[22] The tool seeks initially to support schools in assessing the socio-emotional state of their students so that teachers can use this evidence to design appropriate pedagogical support for their students during the remainder of the school year.

Protecting the mental health of teachers in this new world and ensuring that new forms of education provision do not place unhelpful strain on the workforce remain important. With remote learning during the period of school closure and mixed modalities of learning and teaching as schools reopen, teachers are feeling the pressure. Ed-tech has in part exacerbated the issue for teachers – not only requiring them to learn new skills and develop their practice in new ways, but also adding to their workload by increasing communication with families. This has especially been the case in contexts where parents and students contact teachers directly and frequently, including through virtual groups and chat functions.[23]

The crisis has also generated considerable discussion of how best to support the mental health and wellbeing of teachers. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies has developed guidance on psychosocial support that includes teachers and other education personnel as one of its five domains and emphasises the need for effective support and supervision for teachers, including through peer-to-peer networks.[24]

Routine, structure, friendship, opportunity and freedom – five losses that children will have experienced as a result of school closures

Save the Children has also developed guidance on teacher wellbeing as part of their Safe Schools teacher professional development manual. The module looks at identifying and managing stress and how this influences teacher and student wellbeing. It aims to help teachers to develop personal strategies and draw on the support of others to combat stress.[25]

Practical tools and advice for school leaders on how to support teachers (and themselves) with their psychosocial and emotional wellbeing can also be found in the Teacher Taskforce toolkit. Guiding questions help school leaders consider what they can do to support staff and prepare them to provide psychosocial support to learners. Peer support for leaders, teachers and pupils is key, alongside counselling services where required.[26]

7. Access to technology is necessary but not sufficient: many teachers urgently need training in digital pedagogy

The pandemic has starkly demonstrated the scale of the digital divide. In some countries, there has also been a recognition of the fact that many teachers lack the skills needed for online teaching and other forms of technologically enabled pedagogy. In **Uganda**, the National Teachers' Colleges (NTC) has been working to increase the digital competence of teachers, with the support of the Belgian Development Agency, Enabel, and its Digitalization for Development programme.[27]

[21] Carpenter & Carpenter (2020) [22] Agencia de Calidad de la Educación (2020) [23] Teacher Task Force (2020) [24] INEE (2018) [25] Save the Children (2020) [26] UNESCO, International Task Force of Teachers for Education 2030 and ILO (2020) [27] Enabel and Ministry of Education and Sports (2020)

Many teachers lack the skills needed for online teaching and other forms of technologically enabled pedagogy.

8. Technology solutions must be accessible – and include a no-tech safety net

During the health emergency, many policymakers have perceived 'high-tech' online teaching as the key to learning continuity and effective academic work at home. Others approached the question differently and used a mix of different forms of technology. Given the scale of the 'digital divide', the use of 'low-tech' and 'no-tech' resources during the crisis have been more than justified. In many low-income countries, the 'low-tech' media of TV and radio have played a significant and effective part in ensuring some level of educational engagement during school closures.

In the **UK**, on behalf of the IBM Trust, the London Connected Learning Centre (CLC) is engaged in a teacher professional development programme that is explicitly intended to address some of the weaknesses in pedagogical competence that were highlighted during the period of school closure, specifically:

- The pedagogy of blended learning
- How to adapt content and delivery for distance learning using digital tools
- How to make distance learning engaging
- How to support families with little or no access to devices
- The value of and differences between synchronous and asynchronous teaching.

The IBM/CLC team have analysed teachers' own professional development priorities and identified that teachers want advice and guidance in their native languages, on supporting parents in the roles they may be required to undertake, on supporting students' mental health and wellbeing, and on developing basic digital competencies. They also found that educators want more advice on pedagogy and less on tools, and that they want a platform that is easy to navigate and not overwhelming.

In situations where there is close to comprehensive internet access, the use of online communication can be transformative. This has been demonstrated by Peepul, a not-for-profit organisation in **India** that focuses on creating student-teacher interactions that enhance student engagement and maximise learning. Peepul's approach centres on building an ecosystem of support around teachers through training, visual exemplars, mentoring and monitoring. Peepul runs a programme of support for teachers in the state of Madhya Pradesh that has been used by over 300,000 teachers (of 9.5 million students) in their professional development. The teachers accessed training via smartphones. Peepul knew from previous experience that training modules delivered in this way needed to be short, bite-sized and easily consumable. They needed to be accessible for teachers with limited mobile phone data, and for those with limited or no prior experience in undertaking online professional development training.

In other situations, 'low-tech' approaches have proven to be more effective. The Rising Academy Network, responded to the crisis with a 'low-tech', low-cost remote solution for students and teachers, which they called *Rising on Air*. This comprised a programme of free distance learning using high-quality, structured curriculum content, redesigned

In many low-income countries, TV and radio have played a significant part in ensuring some level of educational engagement during school closures.

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for low-tech delivery via radio and SMS text messaging. They had learnt, through the Ebola crisis, the importance of engaging children quickly, and the **Sierra Leone**'s prior experience of delivering remote learning meant that they were able to mobilise resources for radio instruction almost immediately. They developed a programme of free distance learning using high-quality, structured curriculum content, redesigned for low-tech delivery via radio and SMS text messaging.

In **Jordan**, UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education to develop and deliver a remote learning programme called Learning Bridges,[28] which has reached over one million students in grades 4-9. Whilst the intention is for the programme to be delivered through a blend of face-to-face and remote modalities, at the time of writing, it is being delivered exclusively remotely due to ongoing school closures. Learning Bridges uses high-tech delivery methods (online learning using 'Padlet' notice-board software), but there is also a 'low-tech safety net' in the form of hard-copy versions of the learning materials for students lacking internet access. TV is also being used to introduce course content.

9. Parental and community resources must be harnessed to support learning

The role of parents, family members and communities has always been important for children to learn and flourish, but this role can be quite different where they are supporting remote elements of blended (or mixed face-to-face and remote) delivery models.[29]

Across the world, teachers and school leaders have built on existing relationships with local communities and parents to redefine the role of these actors in supporting students'

[28] UNICEF (2020) [29] McAleavy (2020)

CHVs, coaches and teachers in Kenya have been briefed by Education Development Trust programme teams on how to support girls' learning during school closures.

learning. This has included sensitising them on hygiene, psychosocial support, child protection (human trafficking, violence and sexual abuse) and home-based learning to help learning to continue and to ensure a safe to return to school.

In a joint UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank survey on countries' education responses to Covid-19, respondents from 50 countries reported that parents and caregivers had received regular telephone follow-up from schools either by teachers or principals.[30] This included four low-income countries:

- **the Democratic People's Republic of Korea**;
- **Nepal**;
- **Somalia** and
- **Togo**.

During the period of school closure in **Mali**, schools organised regular chat sessions between students, teachers, parents and community leaders, whilst in the **Gambia**, community members received training to help them work alongside teachers and students to help encourage children to safely return to school.[31]

In **Kenya**, the FCDO-funded Girls Education Challenge programme has offered guidance to parents on how to support their children's learning – through posters, audio messages on social media, WhatsApp, briefings from Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) and local radio slots. CHVs, coaches and teachers have been rapidly briefed by Education Development Trust programme teams on how to support girls learning in the community during school closures. Spot checks are being run through household visits and/or SMS messages to parents to verify if students are completing the assigned work.

The secondary school in **England** which implemented the 60/40 model (discussed in section 4), reported engagement with students, parents and the local community as a major success factor. The headteacher streamed live on Instagram and Facebook explaining the plans, allowing parents to ask questions and receive immediate responses in a public forum.

Rising Academies is considering the use of non-trained, more passive facilitators, drawn from the community, to enable learning within the community as part of a future accelerated learning/blended delivery model. They see this as one way to enhance reach but recognise the potential negative impact it may have on quality. The Rising Academy Network will test both approaches in 2021 to determine the model they adopt.

Given the importance of and promise associated with harnessing the potential of parental and community support for long-term education recovery and improvement, further attention should be paid to investigating how to undertake this effectively.

[30] UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank (2020) [31] UNESCO, International Task Force of Teachers for Education 2030 and ILO (2020)

10. Effective support for girls must be prioritised in plans for reopening and learning recovery

Evidence from the Ebola crisis demonstrated beyond doubt that girls suffered particularly badly during the period of school closure. The recent period of school closures is expected to disproportionately affect girls. There is widespread concern about the limited amount of learning many girls have been able to achieve during school closures, as well as about their access to ed-tech (where this is required or available in the household), their safety and wellbeing, and their ability to return to school once it is safe to do so. There is therefore an urgent need for policymakers to emphasise the needs of girls in plans for reopening and learning recovery.

However, there is insufficient evidence about how to effectively get girls back to school after educational disruption, about mental health, about girls with disabilities, pregnant girls and young mothers, and about system-level reform that can support girls in education post-crisis. Further evidence and knowledge of these matters is needed.

Some priorities emerge from previous experience. There is a reasonable amount of evidence about the effectiveness of material support for girls to aid re-enrolment in school. Such support may include cash transfers, merit-based scholarship and school feeding programmes.[32] But few countries appear to be including such strategies as part of their return to school plans.[33] Cash transfers and other forms of material support, in many contexts, have little impact on the learning of those already in school[34] but are effective at enabling those previously out of school to enrol and attend. There is good evidence to support the community-based schooling to reach the most marginalised and support learning.[35]

Despite the somewhat patchy evidence, promising examples are emerging. Teach for Pakistan, for example, ensured teacher support for girls was targeted to address learning loss. Outreach work mobilised soon after schools closed in March 2020 helped to identify wellbeing, health and financial issues and gave a rapid insight into access to technology (or lack thereof) that could be used for remote learning. The global organisation, Teach for All, supports Teach for Pakistan and used this data and leveraged relationships within the community to design and deliver distance learning strategies that were responsive to students' – and particularly girls' – needs. These strategies responded to the additional challenge girls faced to increase the likelihood they would fully engage with distance learning (for example, accommodating time spent on household chores). The approach used by Teach for Pakistan/Teach for All also purposefully addressed school reopening and sought to engage girls and their families and communities in preparing for reopening and returning to the classroom. When schools partially reopened in October and November 2020, Teach for All data indicated that 93% of girls returned.

90% of CEG girls in Kenya's the arid and semi-arid lands were engaged in learning for at least two hours a day

Girls (and boys) benefit from good cross-sectoral working with education and health collaborating effectively together at school and community level. In **Kenya,** a Girls Education Challenge (GEC)project that supports the learning of highly marginalised girls has brought together education staff and Community Health Volunteers (CHVs). During the period of school closure, the CHVs were able to maintain contact and encourage learning engagement at household and community level. A household survey of parents and caregivers indicated that 90% of CEG girls in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands were engaged in learning for at least two hours a day although the schools were closed.[36]

Examples like this show the importance of maintaining contact with girls and their families during school closure, as well as the need to proactively support preparations for the return of girls to school.

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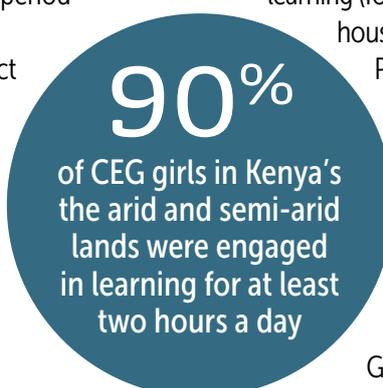
[32] Carvahlo et al (2020); Unterhalter et al (2014); Sperling and Winthrop (2016) [33]A review of National response plans from 31 lower- and middle-income countries, including FCDO priority countries, found that only four included material support as part of their return plans. In all cases these were supported through Global Partnership for Education Funding [34] Sniltsvielt et al 2015, World Bank FCDO, BE2 (2020) [35] World Bank, FCDO, BE2 (2020); Evans (2019) [36] Amenya et al (2020)

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