SIMULATING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS BY 2023

October 2020

GPE Transforming Education

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1. STRATEGIC PURPOSE

Based on analysis of actual and foreseen challenges, the purpose of this report is to: (i) synthesize the discussions and inputs from simulating the potential impact of COVID-19 on education systems by 2023, and (ii) share ideas from the simulation sessions on how the global community, and GPE in particular, could help mitigate disruption in service delivery and sustain learning outcomes.

2. BACKGROUND

To inform GPE strategic and operational development workstreams, the Secretariat organized three workshops with country partners on COVID-19 impact on education systems. Given the volatility and uncertainty of the current situation, country partners represented by Ministry of Education officials (DCP focal points), and accompanied by representatives from Coordinating Agencies in some cases, brainstormed two scenarios that simulate how education systems may react to different degrees of COVID-19 crisis severity (low or high) in the next 3 years (see Annex 2). Thirteen partner countries (see Annex 1), divided into three groups, participated in this simulation exercise.

As this exercise was purely consultative, participants were asked to draw on their own country situation and their respective advisory, technical or political capacities to anticipate how their education system would react to the scenarios presented.

This report is not intended to provide academic insights but to focus on practical guidance for policy and decision makers, as well as operational staff. It focuses on the needs identified consistently across the participating countries.

This report particularly highlights the type of support GPE was identified as being uniquely placed to provide to its partner countries to build resilience of their education systems in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, in order to maintain quality education services for all children.

3. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Participants were invited to think about how the COVID-19 crisis would exacerbate existing challenges faced by their education systems and focus on what new concerns this would create in the year 2023. The **first scenario** was based on a low severity crisis during which economic fallout and disease dynamics would be largely contained. To further identify challenges and needs and to anticipate appropriate responses, participants also discussed a **second-high severity scenario** in which developing countries would face an acute, persistent health crisis that drives long-running global economic recession (see Annex 2).

The table below summarizes key identified challenges and mitigation measures (actual or prospective

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Access and high drop-out rates: School environment is (or not perceived) as safe	
Challenges	**Mitigation measures taken or needed**
▪ Increased number of **out-of-school children (especially girls)** and **inequalities of access to school** (child labor, early pregnancy). ▪ Lack of **preventive measures** to reduce physical, mental, nutritional impact of the crisis ▪ **School infrastructure is limited**: schools are cramped and do not allow for physical distancing ▪ **PPE/sanitation equipment** is not available, and many schools have inadequate existing WASH facilities. ▪ **Teachers and parents' anxiety** about going back/sending children back to school whereas this is both a learning and economic imperative	▪ Organize **safe return to school** – critical importance of clear communication with communities - including "Back to school" campaign sensitization programs, health and hygiene campaign ▪ Develop **strategies to re-integrate** dropped out **children** ▪ Prioritize **gender-based violence prevention** Mobilize additional external resources to support the costs of **building new schools and classrooms** ▪ Redesign classrooms to enable appropriate social distancing ▪ Create **adaptable learning environments -** Rebalance school day between time at school/home and secure appropriate contact hours with teachers ▪ **Provide mental health support** (for teachers and parents) and psychosocial services for children in school ▪ Set up **health units** within/close to schools (with Ministry of Health)

Loss in learning outcomes: Distance learning is not adequately developed	
Challenges	**Mitigation measures taken or needed**
▪ **Connectivity** - Limited access to digital learning (e.g. remote areas) ▪ High **costs of technologies** - lack of equipment for students/teachers ▪ **Learning loss** - No control of **learning outcomes** (on lessons broadcasted via TV, radio); loss of contact hours ▪ Additional **pressure on teachers** without increased payment (obligation to teach twice with a shift system, adaptation to online learning) ▪ **Teacher qualification -** Inadequate **skills** to teach online	▪ Provide for **electricity** (rural areas), **connectivity** and **devices** ▪ Develop **teachers training** for blended and digital learning - strengthen e-learning channels and contents for teachers ▪ **Support caregivers** and empower them to support their children's distance learning ▪ Develop **digital libraries** and/or **distribute textbooks through apps** ▪ Conduct **learning assessments** periodically ▪ When schools reopen, develop **appropriate remedial measures** to get students back on track ▪ TV/radio programs - **quality control of lessons** before broadcasting ▪ Adapt and streamline **curricula** ▪ Involvement of **teacher unions** in redesigning teaching strategies

▪ **Lack of digital learning tools** ▪ **Specialists with expertise** in digital learning are in short supply and therefore expensive	▪ Develop **differentiated strategies** across the different levels of education – remote learning and catch-up modalities may look very different for children of different ages.

Education Sector Plan Strategies are not achievable	
Challenges	**Mitigation measures taken or needed**
▪ Some ESP strategies and activities are no longer realistic; i.e. responsive to the new context ▪ **Reforms are deferred** (e.g. free schooling, focus on special needs students) ▪ **Data are not available** to adapt policies/ quickly react. ▪ Concern about shifting focus away from learning and back towards **basic access issues**	▪ **Adapt** Education Sector Plans et **redefine new set of priorities** ▪ **Undertake education sector diagnoses** during and beyond COVID-19 in order to identify specific issues and priorities for planning development ▪ Develop **crisis action plan/risk management policy** – at national and local level strengthen capacity to develop a plan and **increase system resilience** ▪ Undertake **resource reallocation exercises** to address regional inequalities ▪ Strengthen **data collection/EMIS** (on enrolment, learning, teachers) and integrate COVID-19 related factors to enable targeted actions. ▪ **Support the development of multisectoral strategies** at both national/regional level (based on lessons learned from Ebola crisis). ▪ Strengthen **coordination of education sector and sector dialogue across all education stakeholders.**

Lack of funds constraints Ministry of Education activities	
Challenges	**Mitigation measures taken or needed**
▪ **Budget redistribution**: priority given to the health sector ▪ Need to consider **sustainability** from the outset – will COVID related activities be able to continue past the short-term? ▪ **Teachers' salaries and recruitment** - salary cut, feeling to not be treated equally to others public servant, no health insurance. ▪ **Private school closure** (additional pressure on public schools)	▪ With limited financing, **better coordinate** to reduce duplication of aid. ▪ **National and global advocacy** in favor of maintaining education budgets and **increasing tax-based resources** (e.g. on consumer products). ▪ Manage human and financial resources more effectively ▪ **Teacher salaries** - Ensure good employment conditions to attract/ maintain qualified teachers ▪ Ensure enough support **(financial incentives)** for disadvantaged schools/families

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR GPE SUPPORT

This section specifically identifies the type of unique support GPE is best placed to provide to its partner countries in order to:

- build resilience of education systems in the context of the COVID-19 crisis;
- maintain quality education services for all children.

Participants recommended the following regarding GPE support:

A. Sharing of good practices / Peer learning

- Country partners unanimously stressed the need to more frequently share experiences, good practices, and knowledge between countries. GPE could play a key role in (i) setting up **a database of experiences** on managing the effects of the pandemic on education systems, with the prospect of sharing good practices to strengthen resilience and (ii) **organizing real-time exchanges**, such as workshops or other meetings when partners can be brought together to share and learn from each other.

B. Upstream support

- **Data:** Some countries specifically stressed the need for (i) more and better data (e.g. on access, student learning); (ii) training for planning/statistics departments; and (iii) technical support in strengthening EMIS and adapt it to crisis context.

- **Planning:** Support country partners to (i) **adapt current education sector plans** in light of COVID-19; and (ii) strengthen their **emergency systems** including through health crisis prevention (identify other emergencies that could affect the sector beyond COVID-19 and build resilience into plans). GPE could contribute to **building capacities** for policy makers (managers and planners) to specifically (i) develop response plans at the national and sub-national levels and integrate them into Education Sector Plans; (ii) manage crisis; and (iii) make informed decisions.

- **Advocacy:** More "aggressive" advocacy for education as a right at global and country level to tackle gender equality issues and to ensure education is provided to all children even in a form of hybrid/blended modalities, including children with special needs. The importance of sustained financing for the sector was also stressed.

C. Delivery support

- **Distance learning:** Establish strategic partnerships with United Nations agencies, international organizations, foundations and the private sector to help partner countries to **set up and/or consolidate distance learning systems to improve the quality of learning outcomes**, in particular through:
    i.   promotion of digital curricula;
    ii. **both pre-service and in-service teacher training** to master distance education practices (including lesson planning, content development);
    iii. **pedagogical supervisor/inspector training** on supervision of distance education;

iv.   support to **production of digital teaching materials** and **open educational resources**;

v.   training in **distance learning assessment;**

vi.   guidance on how to support digital education centers.

D. Financial support

▪ **Grants:** There is a need for continuous financial support to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Partners expressed appreciation of GPE's prompt response to COVID-19 which supported sectoral coordination within countries as well as contributed to an efficient prioritization of needs. However, recipient countries stressed that GPE should offer more flexibility in the grant process and in the selection of activities that could be financed (e.g. teachers' salaries, infrastructure). Some countries mentioned that because of time constraints and complexity of grant requirements they missed the opportunity to submit a proposal on time.

▪ **Resource mobilization:** A priority should be to (i) advocate at country level to secure Ministry of Education budgets; (ii) strengthen the case for investment in education and be more "aggressive" in order to engage further with governments and new partners including on innovative financing; and (iii) support country partners engaging with the private sector/civil society to support education.

5. CONCLUSION

▪ All participants agreed that building resilience in education systems should look beyond the COVID-19 emergency and take into consideration the sustainability of any new activities, especially for distance learning/online teaching. A major risk is losing gains made over the years if teachers do not receive appropriate support thereby moving back to a focus on access rather than learning given high dropout rates. Consequently, a decrease in learning will have long term impact on productivity and economic growth.

▪ Some partners indicated that the experiences shared by their counterparts during these workshops will help inform additional mitigation measures within their own strategic plans at country level. Sharing more such good practices through blogs on GPE's website would be useful. Such lessons and experiences would also help countries be better prepared in contexts of continuous or acute crisis situations in the future.

ANNEX 1: PARTICIPANTS (October 7th, 8th and 9th 2020)

	Name	Title	Country
October 7	Priso Patience	Economist-Advisor	Cameroun
	Crépin Aristide Foukpio Voukoulet	DG Statistics and Planning	Central African Republic
	Gilberte Amari	Education Specialist, UNICEF	Central African Republic
	Marcel Richard N'Doute	Education Officer, UNICEF	Central African Republic
	Francis Jonh Biney	Technical Advisor	Cote d'Ivoire
	Valère Molomb'Ebebe Munsya	General Secretary on Education Sector Coordination, Secrétariat Permanent d'Appui et de Coordination du Secteur de l'Education (SPACE).	Democratic Republic of Congo
	Issa Mboup	Education Officer, UNICEF	Democratic Republic of Congo
	Alima Boukary Marcos	Chef Education, UNICEF	Democratic Republic of Congo
	Juvence Kasang Nduku	Expert at the Secrétariat Permanent d'Appui et de Coordination du Secteur de l'Education (SPACE).	Democratic Republic of Congo
	Amissou Oumarou	Expert at the Secrétariat Permanent d'Appui et de Coordination du Secteur de l'Education (SPACE).	Democratic Republic of Congo
	Hamintsoa Prisca Randrianarison nee Razafindralambo	GPE Focal Point, MoE	Madagascar
	Adama Jimba Jobe	Deputy Permanent Secretary	The Gambia

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October 8	Carl Quist	Development Partners' Coordination Unit	Ghana
	Aishath Neena	Statistical Officer, MoE	Maldives
	Alfredo Araujo	DCP Focal Point	Timor Leste
October 9	Sivutha Onn	Director of Planning Department, MoEYS	Cambodia
	Nicola Johnson	Acting Chief Planning Officer, MoE	Guyana
	Martha Ekirapa	National Project Coordinator/Deputy Director of Education	Kenya
	Tumisang Thabela	Permanent Secretary, MoE	Zimbabwe

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ANNEX 2: SCENARIOS SLIDES

Session	Presentation Link
COVID-19 Scenarios Simulation*: Group 1 - October 7, 2020*	Group 1 - Oct 7
COVID-19 Scenarios Simulation*: Group 2 - October 8, 2020*	Group 2 - Oct 8
COVID-19 Scenarios Simulation*: Group 3 - October 9, 2020*	Group 3 - Oct 9