

An Education Workforce to Support the Learning of Girls and Students from Marginalised Communities: Evidence-based Action Areas



About this brief

This paper presents the crucial role of the education workforce in helping education systems to bounce back after COVID-19, with a special focus on the needs of girls and students from marginalized communities in continuing to access quality education. It is intended as a briefing for Ministers and education officials taking part in the high-level policy dialogue on 23 and 25 March 2021 entitled: *An Education Workforce to Support the Learning of Girls and Students from Marginalized Communities*. The event is being co-hosted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), and is convened by the Education Commission (EC) and the Teacher Professional Development at Scale Coalition (TPD@Scale).

Over the last year, the event hosts and conveners have been working on a range of evidence and guidance on how to deliver learning for the most marginalized – including girls. This paper brings this latest international evidence together, drawing on three recent flagship research papers:

- The [Save our Future White Paper](#), developed as a result a global campaign to protect education in the post-COVID-19 world, led by the Education Commission with partners including ADB, GPE, UNESCO, the World Bank and UNICEF.
- The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, co-hosted by FCDO and the World Bank, and its recent [Smart Buys report](#).
- TPD@Scale Coalition for the Global South's forthcoming White Paper *Designing Capacity Building at Scale Towards Education Equity*.

It sets out **six 'Evidence-informed Action Areas'** to help policymakers prioritize actions and potential initiatives to address the needs of marginalized girls as part of the COVID-19 recovery in their country.

The Challenge

COVID-19 is threatening to reverse many hard-earned gains in promoting gender equity in education.

Gender-related education inequities could be exacerbated by the pandemic. UNESCO has estimated that 11 million girls may not return to school this year due to the unprecedented disruptions from COVID-19¹. School closures are putting many adolescent girls at risk, making them vulnerable to early pregnancy, child marriage, violence, and trafficking². In East Asia and Pacific, about 1.2 million additional girls are at risk of drop out due to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. The most marginalised girls, especially those living in remote and rural areas, belonging to ethnic and language minority groups or who are living with disability, are at greatest risk. Concerted efforts by governments across the region had halved the overall number of girls out-of-school from 30 million to 15 million over the past two decades, however more than 15 million girls in the East Asia and Pacific region were not enrolled in education before COVID-19³.

It is critical to protect these hard-earned gains and maintain the momentum on promoting gender equity in education, with a focus on quality education and learning. As education systems seek to bounce back, the learning of girls, particularly from marginalised communities must be prioritised during COVID-19 recovery: it is now well established that educating girls delivers strong returns across a range of measures and can have a catalytic impact on both economic and health aspects of development. For example, each additional year of schooling for girls leads to an average increase of around 10 percent of earnings⁴.

The Opportunity

Teacher quality is the most important determinant of learning outcomes at the school level, but in many countries teachers are in short supply, isolated, poorly trained, and not supported to provide effective teaching and learning. To support the learning of girls and those from marginalised communities, **teachers are critical but they cannot work alone. Extensive evidence, including that drawn together by the Education Commission's Education Workforce Initiative in the Save Our Future White Paper, suggests that it takes a team to educate a child;** teachers need to harness the broader education workforce such as school leaders, education officials, learning assistants, librarians, school counsellors, office staff, and community education workers as well as parents. This combined workforce is one of the greatest levers for change in an education system⁵.

¹ UNESCO Global Education Coalition, 2020. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/girlseducation>

² UNESCO, 2020. Global Education Monitoring Report

³ UNICEF, 2020. Education COVID-19 Response Issue Brief: COVID-19 and Girls' Education in East Asia and Pacific October 2020. https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/7146/file/Issue_Brief%3A_Issue_Brief%3A_COVID-19_and_Girls%E2%80%99_Education_in_East_Asia_and_Pacific.pdf

⁴ Education Commission. (2016). The learning generation: investing in education for a changing world. https://report.educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Learning_Generation_Full_Report.pdf

⁵ The term education workforce describes teachers and all people who work directly to support the provision of education to students in education systems. This includes people working across all functions relevant for providing education: leadership and management, teaching and learning, student welfare, operations, and administration. The education workforce includes both compensated and volunteer roles and even communities and families when directly involved in formal education processes with schools. <https://educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Transforming-the-Education-Workforce-Full-Report.pdf>

Action Area 1: Reinforce professional development for teachers with a range of pedagogical support strategies, for engaging girls and students from marginalised communities.

Research shows that professional development is most effective when it is school-based, focused on a specific subject or pedagogical approach, tailored to topics relevant to the local context, and supported through the provision of materials, follow-up visits by mentors, and peer collaboration opportunities (such as professional learning communities) that complement training⁶. Two examples of effective approaches to support teachers who may lack the core competencies of effective teachers are: (i) a structured pedagogy framework⁷ that combines teacher professional development, teaching and learning materials, formative assessment, caregiver engagement delivered through an effective management and accountability system; and (ii) Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) by the NGO Pratham⁸ which enables children to acquire foundational skills, like reading and arithmetic quickly by ensuring that, regardless of age or grade, teaching starts at the level of the child. Wider priorities for teacher capacity building may include a focus on inclusion, especially for mitigating dropouts during school reopening; communication and collaboration with parents and communities; and teaching foundational knowledge and skills. Training on interactive pedagogy and formative and ongoing assessment in support of differentiated teaching could also be impactful.

There is anecdotal evidence that girls may have been at a disadvantage with regard to accessing online learning during the pandemic. Gender considerations need to be included in the design and delivery of teacher training in using technology. Strategies likely to be effective at increasing learning for girls include ensuring a good representation of females among key education workforce (e.g. teachers and counsellors) and producers of content (e.g. curriculum and textbook authors)⁹. Women role-models and mentors can greatly influence the retention of female students in adopting non-traditional methods, including online learning. As girls and students from marginalised communities are less likely to have access to the internet or digital devices, teachers need to be supported to integrate low-tech solutions (such as, education resources on radio and television) to support the learning of these students, while also advocating for equal access to digital resources by girls.

Action Area 2: Design professional development of the education workforce for scale, for greater impact on quality of learning, while localising it for inclusion.

In view of the large-scale shift to online learning and its expected continuation to some degree even after the re-opening of schools, there is an urgent need to consider large-scale support to teachers to keep up with emerging needs and address learning gaps of students who did not benefit from online learning when schools were closed. To deliver professional development to teachers at scale a combination of online and

⁶ Save Our Future Campaign (2020). Save Our Future: Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children. A White Paper in response to COVID-19 issued by Asian Development Bank, Association for the Development of Education in Africa, BRAC, Education Above All, Education Cannot Wait, the Education Commission, Education Outcomes Fund, Global Partnership for Education, Save the Children, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Bank, World Food Program. Washington DC.

⁷ UNICEF, 2020. Working Paper - Structured Pedagogy: For Real-Time Equitable Improvements in Learning Outcomes

⁸ <https://www.pratham.org/about/teaching-at-the-right-level/>

⁹ Naylor, R. and Gorgen, K. with Ed Gaible and Jamie Proctor (2019) Overview of emerging country-level response to providing educational continuity under COVID-19 What are the lessons learned from supporting education for marginalised girls that could be relevant for EdTech responses to COVID-19 in lower- and middle-income countries? EdTech Hub.

offline methods with flexible localized approaches need to be developed to suit diverse and under-resourced contexts.

To improve inclusivity at scale, professional development programs need to adapt digital technologies to the context. For example, teachers could be working on offline professional development courseware, and benefit from face-to-face discussions facilitated by a mentor, senior teacher or district education officer. Alternatively, education personnel from remote and rural areas could be accessing professional development via radio and/or television, and engage in discussions within their professional learning communities through Whatsapp, Telegram or other social media applications.

Evidence shows that peer collaborative learning can drive the improvement of teaching quality at scale, helping to embed and sustain new practice¹⁰. Coaching and mentoring in professional learning communities can support teachers to take up new pedagogical practices, reflect on the effectiveness of their practice, develop strategies for improvement, and review progress. This approach fosters a culture where members of the education workforce work together through planning, discussion and feedback with the aim of responding to and being inclusive of students and their communities. For example, in the Philippines, through the practice of 'learning action cells' (LACs), groups of teachers engage in collaborative learning sessions to share knowledge from trainings, peer mentors, share challenges and come up with solutions together. This has proven to be an effective way of stimulating teamwork to support the professional development of teachers.

Action Area 3: Create student-centred learning teams, leveraging parental and community support to ensure inclusion of girls and marginalized students and to accelerate their learning.

The pandemic has shown that we can no longer expect teachers to work alone. Teachers have been collaborating more closely than ever with parents, members of the community and school principals to reach the most marginalized students, including girls, and to maintain continuity of learning and support their wellbeing. Emerging evidence suggests that supporting teachers and learners with a multidisciplinary team-based approach can be an effective way to reduce barriers to learning, including for girls and other marginalized students. By adopting a learning team approach, it would be faster and more effective to maximize the collective capacity of professionals available in the system.

For example, community-based learning can play an important role in easing the gender divide in access to technology. Raising parents' awareness of the out-of-school education resources available via radio, mobile phones and TV and of the benefits accrued to their daughters through improved access to education-related technology can be critical to ensuring girls' have access to technology¹¹, and demonstrates that teachers need support in facilitating girls' learning, particularly in non-traditional learning spaces. Community learning assistants can play an important role in schools too in supporting marginalized students in areas such as foundational literacy, catch up classes and mother tongue instruction.

¹⁰ Education Commission. (2019). Transforming the education workforce: Learning teams for a learning generation. <https://education-commission.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Transforming-the-Education-Workforce-Full-Report.pdf>

¹¹ Allier-Gagneur, Z. & Coflan, C.M. (2020). Your Questions Answered: Using Technology to Support Gender Equity, Social Inclusion and Out-Of-School Learning. (EdTech Hub Helpdesk Response No. 14). DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3874247.

In Lao PDR, Pupil Parent Associations in schools in ethnic group areas have played a crucial role in identifying and ensuring remedial support for students and advising schools on the design of dormitories and other school facilities to be more appropriate in their cultural contexts, which has created a more inclusive learning environment. In Kenya, Education Development Trust worked with Community Health Workers to liaise with parents during lockdown, and facilitate distance learning using paper-based, radio and TV resources, resulting in 90% of marginalized girls achieving two hours' study per day during lockdown¹². Now is the time to harness these collaborations and embed them into education systems for greater resilience, inclusion and improved education outcomes for all.

Action Area 4: Use data-driven approaches to improve the number of female leaders and encourage the leadership of girls especially in STEM

The presence of female teachers in schools has been linked to higher enrolment, retention and learning of girls¹³. Even where women make up a larger proportion of teachers, women's participation in education leadership typically decreases in higher level positions¹⁴ including school principals, school management committees and government officials. There is a need to give special consideration to increasing women's participation in key education sector decision-making roles by creating clear meritocratic career pathways for female leadership across the education workforce.

In countries like Indonesia, Viet Nam and the Philippines, education systems are encouraging the recruitment of women into non-traditional career pathways typically dominated by men, e.g. Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. This means that there need to be sufficient female teachers in these STEM subjects to act as role models. Data-driven approaches can be used to undertake a gender and social inclusion analysis to distribute and allocate specialist and shortage resources for example female science teachers to the highest need areas. There are also examples where technology has helped share the expertise of specialist teachers in specific subject areas across schools and within school districts so that all schools have access to the skills they need.

Action Area 5: Support school and district leaders to provide instructional leadership, enhance teacher capacities for a post-COVID environment including for meeting the learning needs of girls and the most marginalized

While safety and logistical issues are a critical first step to ensure learning continues, school leaders' 'instructional leadership' is more important than ever. School leaders need to ensure that teachers are present and utilizing effective and appropriate teaching practices to help girls and marginalized students

¹² Donvan Amenity, Rachael Fitzpatrick, Ella Page, Ruth Naylor, Charlotte Jones, Tony McAleavy (2021) Maintaining learning continuity during school closure: Community Health Volunteer support for marginalised girls in Kenya. Education Development Trust. <https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/our-research-and-insights/research/maintaining-learning-continuity-during-school-closure>

¹³ Lloyd, C.B., and Young, J. (2009). New Lessons: The Power of Educating Adolescent Girls—A Girls Count Report on Adolescent Girls. New York: Population Council.

¹⁴ European Commission (2013). Women and men in leadership positions in the European Union, 2013. Disponible online en: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm. (Fecha del último acceso: Septiembre, 2016).

catch up on lost learning. International evidence shows that this kind of instructional leadership happens most powerfully when school leaders support teacher learning and motivation¹⁵ by creating a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility¹⁶.

Mobile technologies can support school leaders to facilitate school-based teacher collaboration. In Zambia, the Roger Federer Foundation developed the iAct Android application to offer support to school-based communities of practice (Roger Federer Foundation, 2016). The application provides scaffolding for teacher-facilitators to organize and administer workshops on learner-centered teaching and videos of interactive teaching to watch and discuss. Teachers can also record and share videos of each other's lessons to identify meaningful steps to improve their practice¹⁷.

Teachers are likely to need support in integrating the use of digital tools in their teaching and learning practices through medium- to long-term professional development. Teacher training models have largely relied on a cascade approach, which often dilutes the quality of training but evidence suggests that the most effective professional development is school-based. School leaders can harness digital tools to support school-based professional development, for example, in Indonesia, fully online approaches to teacher professional development (TPD) have been compared with models that used online learning to supplement school-based coaching. While less than a third of participants completed the online course, no teachers dropped out of the hybrid school-based programs¹⁸. The delivery of teacher training and its monitoring at the classroom level allows for continuous improvement to classroom practices by teachers and student participation in learning.

Evidence suggests that, to meet the needs of the most marginalized students during the recovery, school leaders will need support with accessing learning resources (financial, human and teaching materials), an evidence-base for decision-making, and clear and timely guidance to successfully navigate crisis responses. They will also need professional development that enables safe school reopening, helps them to undertake learner assessments, remote and blended learning, and to facilitate collaborative professional development¹⁹.

Action Area 6: Enhance the long-term sustainability of the education workforce with cross-sector partnerships that will serve learning of girls and the most marginalized students.

Within the education system, cross-sub-sector partnerships should be built and sustained, this is enabled where members of the education workforce share an overarching vision and a set of goals for supporting the learning of girls and students from marginalised communities. Further, complementary partnerships should be nurtured beyond the education system with the caregivers and families of the students, health and social protection agencies and CSOs. For example, teachers, especially now during COVID school lockdowns need

¹⁵ Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 28(1), 27-42. <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6967/1/download%3Fid=17387&filename=seven-claims-about-successful-school-leadership.pdf>

¹⁶ Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2008). Linking leadership to student learning: The contributions of leader efficacy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(4), 496-528. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X08321501>

¹⁷ Save Our Future Campaign (2020). *Save Our Future: Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children*. A White Paper in response to COVID-19 issued by Asian Development Bank, Association for the Development of Education in Africa, BRAC, Education Above All, Education Cannot Wait, the Education Commission, Education Outcomes Fund, Global Partnership for Education, Save the Children, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Bank, World Food Program. Washington DC.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

support from local facilitators, community workers, health workers, social workers, caregivers and parents to ensure that girls are provided the time and support for their learning at home, and that their physical and mental well-being are taken care of, regardless of their learning environment (e.g. schools must have safe and reliable sanitation while homes must have access to safe and reliable electricity).

International guidance suggests that co-ordination with health and social services is a strategy which could identify and mitigate risks for reopening, including reducing the vulnerabilities of women and girls. This could include the sharing of data and evidence across the education, health and social services sectors, to support the needs of girls and marginalized students in overcoming any barriers to participation in formal learning environments.