

Education for the most marginalised in a post-Covid-19 era: guidance for governments

Aim

This four-month initiative will develop guidance for governments that have limited resources but wish to use digital technologies systemically and holistically to reboot their public education systems in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, paying particularly attention to the provision of public education systems and learning opportunities for the most marginalised.

Context

Covid-19 has already had a significant impact on people's lives and learning globally, regionally and nationally. Two observations, though, are universal:

- The role and use of digital technologies for all kinds of economic, social, political and cultural activities has rapidly increased to a very large, and unanticipated, extent; and
- The level of uncertainty for governments, individuals and wider economic activity has also increased dramatically.

Taken together these mean that the poorest and most marginalised are being increasingly adversely affected by Covid-19 – regardless of whether they have become infected by the coronavirus or not.

Many digital initiatives have already been launched in response to this pandemic, reflecting both the actions of those with good intent and also those who are seeking mainly to maximise their profits and individual gain from the crisis. Companies, civil society organisations and donors of all sorts are eager to be seen to be doing something positive, and are funding numerous initiatives. Unsurprisingly, the digital technology community has been at the forefront of efforts to design new technological solutions to these challenges. This has, though, often resulted in confusion, duplication and wasted effort and money, thereby significantly increasing the uncertainty for governments trying to grapple with the pandemic while maintaining basic services for their citizens.

Sadly, and particularly given the very rapid spread of Covid-19 across the world, the reality is that most of these initiatives will be too little and too late. If basic electricity and digital connectivity are not in place now, for example, it will be exceedingly difficult to deliver services, such as education, over the Internet to people in their homes. There is therefore an important need for governments to have holistic and wise advice to support them in protecting and strengthening public education systems in the future.

It is particularly important to think strategically and systematically now about how countries can use digital technologies most effectively from mid-2021 onwards, once the immediate impacts of Covid-19 are over and vaccines or alternative treatments for this coronavirus may become available.

Guidance to governments

It is therefore imperative that governments (politicians and civil servants) that may still not have extensive experience at delivering effective and relevant education systems through the use of digital technologies can have ready access to sound advice as they seek to respond to the pandemic and build education systems that are fit for purpose in the future. This crisis provides a positive opportunity for many governments to reconsider their entire educational provision in an integrated, systemic and holistic manner, that would make it more resistant to future systemic shocks. This initiative is therefore intended to provide a basic framework of advice relating to information and processes that governments can use in shaping and delivering such policies from August 2021 onwards.

Rather than seeing Covid-19 exclusively as a threat to be overcome, this initiative sees it as an opportunity to reboot education systems so that some of the poorest and most marginalised can indeed benefit from the potential of digital technologies.

Process

The development of this report will draw on the expertise and experience of a core team of c.5-6 people (with c.5-10 advisors), who will consult widely with relevant stakeholders across the world. It will undertake research, consult stakeholders, and produce its report within a four-month period.

Two main forms of consultation are envisaged:

- A series of online discussions with leading authorities, drawn from governments, the private sector, civil society and academics, in different time-zones, designed to explore the key issues that the report should address, and recommend topics for guidance notes. Each of these will generate a mind-map of ideas to be incorporated within the report.¹
- Specific interviews with a selection of other individuals through which more detailed comments and evidence will be elicited.

The main report will include three parts:

- I. Overview and context (c. 4000 words)
- II. Core themes (c.5-6 in number, c. 5000 words)
- III. Conclusions and next steps (c. 1000 words)

It will also include c. 15-20 specific guidance notes, each of c.1000 words, that will address key topics that governments should address, and will be of the following format:

- Context
- Guidance (c. 5-10 core ideas)
- Notes
- Examples
- Suggested reading

Examples of infographics and slide-decks that could be developed further will be attached to some of the guidance notes.

¹ This will build on the process adopted in the crafting of the recent UN CEB HLCP paper on the future of learning and education.

Sharing and implementation

Too many reports funded by donors are left to rot in digital depositories or on ageing bookshelves. Disseminating the report and ensuring that it is used will therefore be of critical importance. This will be achieved through:

- Working together and sharing outputs with key international agencies such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO and the ITU
- Working through the global platform of the DFID/World Bank EdTech Hub to share findings
- Ensuring collaboration with substantial global initiatives such as GIGA
- Involving national governments in the design of the outputs through membership of the team, involvement in workshops and interviews
- Working and sharing output with bilateral donors that have extensive networks in the economically poorest and most fragile countries. Guidance could provide a key element in advice and funding given by donor governments in the post-Covid-19 reconstruction support
- Disseminating a soft-copy “solution” with live links on the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D site <https://ict4d.org.uk> (the draft will also be shared globally in this way so as to elicit feedback that will improve it before the final version is released)
- We will also explore possibilities of engaging with governments on the ground to implement the report’s recommendations.

In the longer term, a high-quality learning resource could be developed to enable government users to access relevant advice and examples of good practice through an online toolkit.

Funding

Production of the main Report is being funded by DFID and the World Bank through the EdTech Hub. The Report will be translated into French, and we are exploring additional funding for translation into other UN languages. Further funding to develop additional infographics and slide-decks, as well as a longer term flexible digital toolkit is also invited.

Conclusion

A short and practical Report will be produced that outlines ways through which governments can protect and support public education systems through appropriate and wise use of digital technologies once solutions to the Covid-19 coronavirus have been identified and implemented.

The output will be a guidance document for governments containing advice and recommendations around key aspects of educational change, including 25 pages of core text, with c. 15 short guidance notes on critical things that must be got right. These will also have links to examples of good practice infographics and slide-decks that might be adapted to specific national or local contexts.