

ECOSOC Partnership Forum

Summary of Spotlight Session:
EDUCATION FOR ALL AS A KEY STEP OF THE RECOVERY
2 February 2022, 1500-1550 EST

Organizers: NGO Major Group, African Regional Mechanism for Major Groups & other Stakeholders, Indigenous Peoples Major Group, Education & Academia Stakeholder Group, Together 2030 and the National Planning Development Commission of Ghana.

Background on the event

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the most severe disruption to global education in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle income countries. At the same time, education has moved into the “virtual world”, using digital and ICT tools to bridge the gaps in learning. But the prolonged pandemic has raised further and more serious issues, such as the ‘digital divide’, disruption of the provision of essential services to children and communities, reduction in access to nutritious food, challenges for many parents to work, and an increase in the risk of violence against women and girls.

The session provided diverse perspectives on the current challenges facing the education system in light of the COVID-19 pandemic; as well as good practices on the engagement of stakeholders and resilient models for providing quality free education for all to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Key Issues discussed

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education infrastructure and the major challenges faced across the globe to provide free quality education for all

The specific case study of Ghana was shared and the steps that have been taken by the Government of Ghana to provide targeted support to ensure that education continues to be accessible for all, including support for online learning and also a package of economic support to families facing a loss of earning to ensure continued education.

- The particular challenges for access to education faced by marginalised communities were highlighted

A number of challenges in terms of access to education were considered including the perspective of young indigenous people in Central America and those in refugee situations in and around Syria.

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In the case of indigenous communities, a clear emphasis was placed on the importance of valuing traditional knowledge and ensuring learning that builds on ancestral teachings, that respects biodiversity and the living environment.

In the case of those in refugee situations, the intervention highlighted the need for the integration of Education together with Emergency and Child protection to ensure holistic support for children, contributing to children's needs to survive, develop and thrive, especially in situations of humanitarian emergencies

- Limitations of online learning

Online learning and virtual platforms have helped us to bridge the gaps in education and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they will play an important role in the future as well. But concerns were raised on the push to move most education, especially lifelong learning onto the online spaces and virtual world.

It is offered as a ready-made solution for future education. However, there are a number of challenges:

- Half of the world is still not online! We will not be able in one or two years of recovery to equip everyone with relevant digital skills;
- There are areas of learning and education that cannot be fully covered through online formats, for example: education for empowerment, education for peace and tolerance; critical thinking, open-mindedness, creativity; increasing motivation for lifelong learning; social-emotional learning; education for health, sport and recreation; developing skills (especially in vocational training) that require practicing and exercising;
- It is not a suitable method of learning for some learners' groups and some contexts;
- It is still more important 'what' (goal, content) we learn than 'how' – it is a question of values and ethics. Online learning is an instrument, a powerful means but not the goal. Currently the often quoted "right to connectivity" must not replace the "right to education".

Key recommendations for action

- **The importance of a human rights-based approach to education, that recognizes the right to education as a fundamental right.**
- **The need for sustained long-term support for education as a key steppingstone to ensure we 'leave no one behind'.**
- **Specific support and tailored packages should be provided to those who face marginalisation, including a holistic approach to connect child protection and education.**
- **Respect for diversity and a recognition of traditional knowledge to be incorporated into education curriculums.**
- **Lifelong learning to be prioritised as a key step for many to re-engage as part of the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.**
- **Donor community and development partners should provide increased and more targeted support for free education available to all.**