



Youth Statement on Investing in Education and Youth

Introduction

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, school closures in more than 180 countries affected 1.6 Billion children and learners. If quality inclusive education and learning is no longer a right but a tradeoff between the haves and have-nots, the connected and disconnected, **today's health crisis becomes tomorrow's social crisis**. We, the youth, call upon you, leaders of the global education community, to invest in young people and our future. **We ask for the opportunity to become the leaders of today and tomorrow.**

Education is a key topic affecting young peoples' lives. In particular, the skills and values we need for the future are very much at stake. As young people, we have first-hand experiences of the very education challenges and experiences that are being discussed at global meetings and we want a say in the decisions that shape our future. Moreover, we are also drivers of positive change and are working actively within our own communities and networks to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on education. We are greatly concerned by what we see as our future. However, we are also convinced of the power of our collective actions and we know that the only way we can fight this crisis is to do it together. We applaud the efforts of organizations to recognize the need to give space to youth voices to shape the decisions made about our education.

In this last decade for achieving the Global Goals and SDG 4, let us do it together!

Here are the two major challenges and two key opportunities we see coming out of this crisis where we would like to work together with you:

Exacerbation of Inequalities

The crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities around the world. The worst impacts of the crisis will be felt by the most vulnerable children who are out of school – most of whom live in lower-middle-income countries where there was already limited and inequitable access to quality inclusive education for all before the crisis. The pandemic increases risk factors for children and youth in vulnerable communities such as teenage pregnancies, school dropouts, and mass failure when school reopens etc. In particular, girls are at a disadvantage – according to UNESCO, over 111 million of girls who have been put out of school are living in the world's least developed countries where getting an education is already a struggle.

Most education systems in lower-middle income communities, particularly in Africa, were already underfunded before the pandemic. As countries rethink their approach to education, they are faced with the dilemma of putting structures in place to address new and emerging changes to education delivery. The Learning Generation report estimated that spending on education in low- and middle-income countries must more than double between 2015 and 2030, from approximately \$1.25 trillion per year to nearly \$3 trillion.

In a fast-paced world, millions of children and youth are at-risk of being left behind without access to modern technology. Though beneficial, it is evident that technology cannot replace the role of teachers

and the life experience they bring to the classroom. Technology can never replace the leadership, mentorship and psychosocial support a teacher provides to their students. Of the 68.8 million teachers needed to meet the education 2030 agenda, Africa makes up 70% of countries facing acute shortages of teachers rising to 90% at secondary level. The 2019 World's Teacher Day Report emphasized the value of attracting young teachers to the teaching profession. Amidst the economic crisis, some teachers may be forced to seek better paying opportunities outside of the teaching profession. Without concerted effort to strengthen the teaching force, learners may return to classrooms without teachers.

The COVID19 Socio-economic fallout

The virus itself does not kill many young people. However, young people and children will be victims of the looming economic and political crisis that will likely define the rest of our lifetime. An immediate challenge for youth is the uncertain job economy awaiting us. Students are already struggling with rising student debt, especially in countries with highly commercialized educational systems. This is bad for the economy as well. Quality education is a human right and must be the responsibility of the state. It should be public, free and accessible for all. We are starting out this decade with nearly half of the global workforce in immediate danger of losing their livelihoods according to ILO estimates. This precludes those of us with few or no working experience about to enter the workforce. Coupled with the fact that many young people are not being taught 21st century skills such as learning to learn, complex problem solving, emotional intelligence and creativity, all which are needed to succeed in the workplace, our prospects are rather bleak.

For young people, economic hardships caused by the crisis have negative spillover effects on physical and emotional wellbeing. Domestic violence has increased, fueled by the looming or actual stress of lockdown and unemployment, taking a heavy toll on mental and physical health. For many children and youth who face challenging family situations, schools are places that offer protection and a sense of security. For over 300 million children, the closure of schools also means being one-step away from food insecurity. The impossibility to access education due to the lack of connectivity and necessary hardware is a further factor of isolation for the most vulnerable learners.

Without inclusive social policies, there is a high risk of the socio-economic fallout that provides fertile breeding ground for crime and/or violent extremism. Human Rights, freedom of speech and democracy are also at risk. The casualties of the pandemic will undoubtedly extend towards citizens who live in societies where governments are taking advantage of the pandemic and using the state of emergency to centralize power, censure and arrest journalists, political opponents and student and youth activists.

Redefining the relevance of education

We also believe that the crisis brings about opportunities to reset for a better future. Education is a key tool to allow young people to fulfil their potential. Here, we are given the opportunity for learning to happen anywhere and anytime bypassing the physical infrastructure of schools. We must not waste this opportunity.

So far, we see that distance learning has to large extent brought back the model of rote learning and instruction, leaving little space for experiential learning, which is key to fostering 21st century skills. This is especially true with radio and tv mediums of instruction, which are not built for two-way interactive learning. In its absence, communities such as the family, neighbors and even villages have stepped in to impart important experiential learning. This shows that quality education is inextricably linked with

lifelong learning. There is a huge potential for non-formal pedagogical models and TVET that go beyond the traditional teacher-student relations with experiential service, learner-centered and collaborative learning being the center of it.

There are also key qualities of the new education model that are emerging. COVID-19 has only shown us how interconnected we are and we need global citizenship competences in order to reduce hate speech, discrimination and education for sustainable development so that we can contribute towards building a better world that does not threaten our existence. Critical thinking skills are necessary if youth are to combat the fake news war. We recognize the importance of SDG 4.7 as fundamental for all young people. Above all, we need greater emotional intelligence to build a world of human cooperation and peace. This is our answer to tackling the current pandemic and those that are to come.

Investment in and prioritization of youth

There is no better time than now to invest in a better future, a future for youth to thrive. It has been estimated that more than half of the world's population is younger than 30. However, young people under 30 make up just over 2% of the world's Members of Parliament. Even less are young women. For too long, we have been talking about youth engagement, but young people are still poorly represented in decision-making processes. 2019 has been referred to as the year of youth uprisings calling for structural change, social and economic equality and more just societies. In these uncertain times, it is now more important than ever to ensure that these voices are not silenced but listened to and most importantly, acted on.

Education systems should support young people to participate in discussions at all levels, especially in their own communities. Young people should be brought into the decision-making processes that are shaping the world. Students should be partners in shaping all educational policies. After all, this is the world that we are to live in for many years to come after the crisis. As much as we stand to lose a crucial decade for education leaving behind a lost generation, we also have the opportunity to recognize a full generation of ideas and actions, a generation of youth.

Leaving no one behind has never been as important as now. If the next generation is not at the forefront in rebuilding the world post-covid-19 and of championing the SDGs, we would already have lost the most important fight for a better future.

As such, we call upon governments, donors and decision-makers to:

- 1. Leave no one behind.** Those most vulnerable before COVID-19 are more affected now than ever.
- 2. Guarantee** adequate financing for education systems, including investment to achieve connectivity for all, and continuous teacher development.
- 3. Ensure** that every teacher is adequately valued and trained to deliver quality distance learning and to be proficient in interactive teaching as well as 21st century skills
- 4. Reset** current education systems and make them fit for purpose with a focus on disseminating 21st century skills and competences
- 5. Promote** free and public education of high quality that is accessible at all levels and end student debt. Education is a fundamental human right, not a commodity.
- 6. Narrow** the education divide within and between countries and regions through distributive policies and increasing the weight of education in foreign aid schemes

7. **Invest in and prioritize** youth and students through representation
 - a. This means bringing young people and students into decision-making processes and to co-create solutions together for a better future
8. **Invest in and prioritize** youth through funding and support
 - a. We recommend that no less than 50% of all the funding to education should be co-decided with young people and students. We further recommend that young people working on the ground to achieve quality inclusive education should be prioritized with at least 25% of the total funding accorded
9. **Aim** for a #BetterNormal instead of “back to normal” with sustainability being the leading principle.

This Statement has been presented to the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee on 4 June 2020.