

LETTER TO G20, IMF, WORLD BANK, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT BANKS and NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

We write to call for urgent action to address the global education emergency triggered by COVID-19. With over 1 billion children still out of school because of the lockdown, there is now a real and present danger that the public health crisis will create a COVID generation who lose out on schooling and whose opportunities are permanently damaged. While the more fortunate have had access to alternatives, the world's poorest children have been locked out of learning, denied internet access, and with the loss of free school meals - once a lifeline for 300 million boys and girls - hunger has grown.

An immediate concern, as we bring the lockdown to an end, is the fate of an estimated 30 million children who according to UNESCO may never return to school. For these, the world's least advantaged children, education is often the only escape from poverty - a route that is in danger of closing. Many of these children are adolescent girls for whom being in school is the best defence against forced marriage and the best hope for a life of expanded opportunity.

Many more are young children who risk being forced into exploitative and dangerous labour. And because education is linked to progress in virtually every area of human development - from child survival to maternal health, gender equality, job creation and inclusive economic growth - the education emergency will undermine the prospects for achieving all our 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and potentially set back progress on gender equity by years. According to the World Bank the long-term economic cost of lost schooling could be as much as \$10 trillion in lost productive output.

We cannot stand by and allow these young people to be robbed of their education and a fair chance in life. Instead we should be redoubling our efforts to get all children into school - including the 260 million already out of school and the 75 million children affected by protracted conflicts and forced displacement, including 35 million children living as refugees or internally displaced - with the comprehensive help they need - and to make it possible for young people to start or resume their studies in school further and higher education.

There is a longer-term challenge we must also meet. Even before COVID-19, the world faced a learning crisis. Over half of the children in developing countries suffering 'learning poverty' and even at age 11 had little or no basic literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, 800 million of today's young people leave education with no qualifications whatsoever. If we are to avoid this, millions of children who are now preparing to return to school, who have lost over half a year of education, need their governments to invest in catch-up programmes and proper learning assessment. When schools reopened after Pakistan's 2005 earthquake attendance recovered, but four years later children had lost the equivalent of 1.5 years of schooling.

Resources are now urgently needed to get young people back into education and enable them to catch-up. What is more, we should rebuild better: more

support for online learning, personalised learning, teacher training, conditional cash transfers for poor families and safer schools that meet 'distancing' rules, building on the enormous community effort that has been displayed during the pandemic. And to spur global momentum in support of progress in education, a coalition of global organisations has now joined forces in the 'Save our Future' initiative launched on August 4.

Yet at the very time we need extra resources, education funding is in danger on three fronts:

1. As slower or negative growth undermines tax revenues, less money may be available in almost every country for public services, including education.
2. When allocating limited funds, some governments may leave education crowded out and underfunded as they prioritise expenditure on health and economic recovery.
3. Intensifying fiscal pressure in developed countries will result in reductions in international development aid, including aid for education, which has already been losing out to other priorities in the allocation of bilateral and multilateral aid. There is also a danger that multilateral donors, who already under-invest in education, will reallocate funds.

The World Bank now estimates that, over the next year, overall education spending in low and middle-income countries could be \$100-150 billion lower than previously planned.

This funding crisis will not resolve itself.

We call on the G20, the IMF, World Bank and regional development banks and all countries to recognise the scale of the crisis and support three initiatives to enable catch-up to happen, and progress towards SDG4 to be resumed:

- First, every country should pledge to protect front line education spending, prioritising the needs of the most disadvantaged children through where possible, conditional and unconditional cash transfers to promote school participation.
- Second, the international community must increase aid for education, focusing on the most vulnerable, including the poor, girls, children in conflict situations and the disabled. The quickest way to free up resources for education is through debt relief. The 76 poorest countries have to pay \$86 billion in debt-service costs over the next two years. We call for debt suspension with a requirement that the money for debt servicing be reallocated to education and other priority investments for children.
- Third, the IMF should issue \$1.2 trillion in Special Drawing Rights (its global reserve asset) and its membership should agree to channel these resources toward the countries that need them most, creating a platform for recovery.

And the World Bank should unlock more support for low income countries through a supplementary International Development Association budget, and, following the lead of the UK and Netherlands which have now pledged \$650 million to the new International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd) to help unlock billions in extra finance for education in lower middle income countries, invite guarantees and grants from donors. This is in addition to - and compliments - over the next 2 years the replenishment of GPE (Global Partnership for Education) and scaled up investment in ECW (Education Cannot Wait) and continued support for the UN agencies focused on education and children led by UNESCO and UNICEF. We call on private sector corporations and foundations to make support for global education a greater priority.

Sustainable human development can only be built upon a foundation of quality education. While the challenges are momentous, the impact of the crisis on children has made us even more determined to realise our ambition contained in Sustainable Development Goal 4, that ours can be the first generation in history in which every child is at school and has the chance to develop their potential to the full. Now is the time for national governments and the international community to come together to give children and young people the opportunities they deserve and to which they are entitled.

Signed,

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Member, Ogun State House of Assembly of the Republic of Ghana

Hassan Omar Mohamed

Member of Parliament, National Assembly of the Republic of Djibouti; President of the Parliamentary Group of Population and Development

Margaret Mary Quirk MLA

Member of the Parliament of Western Australia

Niki Rattle

Speaker of Parliament of the Cook Islands

Mohamed-Iqbal Ravalia

Senator, Senate of Canada

Dharma Raj Regmi

Parliamentarian, Federal Parliament of Nepal

Dr Azmi Shuaibi

Anti-Corruption Advisor, TI Palestine, Transparency International

Amanda Simard MPP

Member of the Provincial Parliament, Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Andres Sutt

Member of Parliament of Estonia; Deputy Governor and Member of the Executive Board, Bank of Estonia (2001-2009)

Catherine Zainab Tarawally

Member of Parliament, Parliament of Sierra Leone; Deputy Whip, All People's Congress Party

Dr Olanrewaju Adeyemi Tejuoso

Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2015-2019)

Umayya Toukan

Senator, Parliament of Jordan

Nguyen Tuong Van

Secretary General of the ASEAN Inter-
Parliamentary Assembly