BEYOND COVID-19 –LESSONS FOR ADDRESSING EDUCATION INEQUALITIES IN THE LONG TERM

FEEDBACK FROM THE FIELD DURING THE 2020 PANDEMIC

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Foreword

Educate A Child (EAC) is a global program of the Education Above All Foundation (EAA) that aims to significantly reduce the number of children worldwide who are denied their right to education. EAA was founded in 2012 by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. Its aim is to contribute to human, social and economic development through the provision of quality education, with a particular focus on those affected by poverty, conflict and disaster.

As part of the EAA foundation, EAC has a commitment to young children who are out of school, to help provide them with opportunities to learn. When the pandemic started, EAA and EAC faced a challenge— how would they respond to the millions more children for whom closures made them out of school as well? We decided to retain our focus on the most disadvantaged—those who were out of school before the pandemic and those who could not return due to increasingly difficult circumstances.

The current COVID-19 pandemic forced a rethinking of how, when and where to conduct education activities, in the face of school closures and societal lockdowns. As a partial response to these new realities, EAC launched a new series of virtual discussions, or Webinars, to examine both the challenges and the solutions implemented in its own and selected other EAA partner projects around the world. The four webinars, conducted in the second half of 2020, focused on the theme *Keep Children Learning*, and explored the role of distance learning, the role of communities, the role of parents, and the role of teachers.

The purpose of this document is to capture the lessons learned from projects featured in these webinars, and more broadly, from responses in the field to providing education during a pandemic. One stark reality highlighted by the pandemic is the equity gap in services and accessibility for those already marginalized in society. Among the lessons learned from the webinars was that our continued focus on children who already had limited education access was a good priority choice for EAC. These children remain the central focus for how to ensure these inequities are addressed during and after COVID-19.

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Executive Summary

The global coronavirus pandemic thrust the world into a shared nightmare. And yet, this experience has also presented opportunities to reflect and rethink nearly everything previously perceived as normal. As the world began to shut down, new realities became prevalent. Loss is a predominant theme, loss of jobs, loss of loved ones, loss of traditional ceremonies and celebrations, loss of contact with friends and family, loss of activity, loss of food security, loss of homes, loss of hope. These significant changes in everyday life, extended for over a year and still continuing, brought an awareness and an appreciation for what is truly important to each of us. It also required new skills to apply to a changed context. Instead of leaving the house and interacting in various ways in society, people were at home, needing to learn how to stay active, how to help children learn, how to stay connected through technology and other means, how to change behaviour for the sake of safety, how to say good bye.

The pandemic also revealed in stark reality the inequities in all societies, in all countries. Those who were already marginalized and living a subsistence life became even more vulnerable. Means of modern connectivity through technology was not readily available to all learners. Access to adequate health support was jeopardized for many and health systems came to the brink of collapse. In the education sector, particularly for a global programme like Educate A Child (EAC) focusing on marginalized children, the consequences continue to be severe. With a focus on providing education for children already identified as out of school, closures of schools meant complete isolation from learning opportunities. As of mid-2020, there were 123 country-wide closures in addition to partial closures, resulting in 1,091,439,976 learners at all schooling levels being affected from COVID-19.[1]

And yet, another aspect the pandemic prompted was resilience and creativity in the face of enormous challenges. Featured here are some lessons learned from the ongoing COVID-19 experience, one year in, from experiences in the field with EAC partner projects in countries around the world. These lessons were examined in a series of four webinars around the theme, *Keep Children Learning*, broadcast in a discussion format, focusing primarily on EAC partners, during the second half of 2020. The four webinars focused on distance education, the role of communities, the role of parents, and the role of teachers. While these topics are distinct, it is also readily apparent that they are all related. Education does not happen in a vacuum, it is a holistic and systemic enterprise that requires the active engagement of all sectors, particularly for those who are marginalized. Some key takeaways revealed in the four webinars are enumerated below.

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[1] September 2020. Education and COVID-19. UNICEF Data: Monitoring the situation of children and women. https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/covid-19/

Keep Children Learning: Distance Education in No (Low) Digital Areas

1. Low technology applications served children with limited or no access to technology.
   - Radio education programmes accompanied by paper worksheets and workbooks provided a bridge to learning and helped to maintain student engagement. EDC in Mali, Alight in Pakistan, UWS in Nepal and UNICEF Nigeria provide examples of both individual and small group learning delivered with radio.
   - Mobile phones provided a vehicle to communicate education lessons with learners in Bangladesh with BRAC, where only 37.6% have access to internet but 95% of households have a low-cost feature phone.
2. It can't be assumed that students have adequate resources available in the home, such as needing to share one mobile phone for all the children's education programmes. Perceptions of where and how learning takes place needed to change, education doesn't just happen in school. Flexibility in what, where, when, and how children learn required new thinking on the part of teachers, parents and children.
3. Previous experience with the Ebola crisis, conflict, and natural disasters provided an experiential basis from which to build alternate learning approaches.
4. For the long term, flexibility with distance learning, small group learning, hybrid learning (combination of at home and in person), and access to technology needs to be addressed at the policy level.

imagine1day, Ethiopia

EDC, Mali

Keep Children Learning: The Role of Communities

1. Community support is essential to support alternative learning methodologies. Community leaders, school management committees, and volunteers provided necessary advocacy and support for children and families.
2. Open communication between communities and the education sector, with both sides listening and co-creating solutions, can result in enhanced educational opportunities. UNICEF Nigeria, for example, continues to work with communities, even though rural and remote, to sustain relationships and remain flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances.
3. Good relationships with communities led to mobilizing volunteers to distribute hygiene kits in India through Educate Girls, and making facemasks with buildOn support.
4. School construction continued with new safety protocols for buildOn community volunteers.

Educate Girls, India

buildOn: Burkina Faso, Haiti, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Senegal

Keep Children Learning: The Role of Parents

1. Parents were called upon to manage learning for their children at home. Open communication, capacity building, and proper materials support, even if the parent is illiterate, enabled them to increase their confidence and skills and change their perspective on education. EK Tara India shows such examples of parents guiding education at home in the picture collage.
2. Child labour increased during COVID-19 as survival was at stake for some families. Cash transfer programmes, such as through UNICEF Nigeria, compensated parents for lack of expected child-generated income.
3. Redefining the role of parents as learning facilitators does not have to be a solitary experience. In Kenya, for example, Girl Child Network parents clustered with 20 children, using safety protocols, to learn together with radio programmes and phones.
4. Parental roles can continue to be integral in educating their children after schools reopen, as motivators and monitors of their child's learning, ensuring the school is a safe environment, and continuing to communicate with teachers.

EK Tara, India

Keep Children Learning: The Role of Teachers

1. Teachers are central to education, yet the pandemic changed the center of action, from school to home. Entirely new skills were required to manage this unfamiliar reality, how, when, where, and what to teach. New skills require new training, such as provided by UWS in Nepal. Teachers attended zoom meetings for training on script writing, social media, and mental health.

2. Learning from past experiences, such as Education in Emergencies (EiE), free distance learning programmes online, and workbook materials, helped to bridge the gap in developing new learning modalities. For example, UNWRA already had developed self-learning materials for use in conflict situations with Palestinians in Syria, and were able to adapt for broader use during COVID-19 school closures.

3. Teachers are part of a larger system and need effective interaction with other teachers, parents and communities, as well as children, as co-creators of learning experiences. Sonbola in Lebanon supports Transformative Pedagogy, recognizing the high complexities involved in teaching, including coaching, flexibility, digital literacy, blended learning, differentiation, management and peer support.

4. Enabling continued contact with all stakeholders in education, once schools reopen, is in everyone's interest. Adopting new safety protocols in schools; continuing hybrid learning (sometimes in person, sometimes at a distance); and understanding the changing needs of children, parents, communities and teachers; will help ensure quality education.

HPPI, India

UNWRA, Palestinian Refugees

Beyond COVID-19 –Lessons for addressing education inequalities in the long term

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to inequalities that previously existed but were brought to a heightened level of awareness world-wide. Those who are already marginalized are the hardest hit when another significant stressor is manifested. The Educate A Child (EAC) programme of the Education Above All Foundation, created by Sheikha Moza bint Nasser in 2012, sought to proactively and promptly activate its resources to minimize the impact on education brought about by the pandemic. As a partner with organizations working in the field in countries around the world, EAC jointly sought immediate responses to new realities being faced. Schools were closed, societies were locked down, new safety behaviours were mandated, and the "normal" conduct of daily activity was interrupted. Thus, business as usual was no longer possible. Every sector of society was affected and every sector of society needed to be engaged in creating innovative solutions to the challenges presented. This required a heightened level of engagement with teachers, parents, communities, and education administrations to co-create rapid and effective responses to the crisis.

From the beginning of the pandemic, EAC worked with partners to identify risks and solutions to the disruption of business as usual and sought to design rapid responses to the changes required. At the same time, there was high commitment to ensure marginalized children were not left behind in their educational opportunities. Creative and innovative interventions were designed and implemented to keep children learning, despite the enormous challenges the pandemic presented. Many of these short-term response actions have the potential to become long term adaptations to effectively reach children even after the pandemic subsides.

In the interest of exploring these responses, and analysing lessons learned, EAC launched a series of virtual discussions with selected partners in countries around the world. The series of four webinars were held during the second half of 2020 and focused on the theme, *Keep Children Learning*. Each webinar featured three or four project representatives explaining their organization's project and adjustments made resulting from the pandemic. While it was recognized that the many stakeholders in education are intricately related in a larger system, the seminars separately focused on distance education, the role of communities, the role of parents, and the role of teachers.

This document is organized in three sections:

- Section 1 explores the lessons learned from EAC projects,
- Section 2 summarizes the overall lessons drawn from all the projects,
- Section 3 presents the partner organization project overviews.

Section 1: Lessons Learned from EAC and EAA[2] Partners

While COVID-19 brings new challenges for education given the scale and breadth of the pandemic, many education providers for children already marginalized have been responding to numerous and ongoing crises for decades. To ensure true continuity of education provision, building on past experience allows projects to adapt and apply reinvented solutions in a rapid response to this prolonged crisis. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to latest data by UNESCO, more than 888 million children worldwide continue to face disruptions to their education due to full and partial school closures[3]. In March 2021, schools for more than 168 million children globally had been completely closed for almost an entire year due to COVID-19 lockdowns, according UNICEF data[4]. At least 1 in 3 schoolchildren have been unable to access remote learning while their schools were closed.[5]

How EAC partner projects responded to these new realities, addressed the challenges presented, made adjustments in education provision, and imagined adaptations for the long term, provided the focus for this series of Webinars. The four interactive virtual discussions were organized, moderated, and broadcast by EAC.

Keep Children Learning, Distance Education in Low (No) Digital Areas

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequalities that already existed, including education. EAC works with partner projects around the world to address these inequalities exhibited in marginalized children who are not in primary school. One of the inequalities that became readily apparent with school closures, is the lack of access to digital platforms that support distance learning. Children at home with no internet, TV or even phones, led project leaders to create or adapt low technology solutions for reaching children with educational programmes. Three EAC partner organizations shared their strategies and ideas for reaching children in low or no digital access areas, American Refugee Council (known as Alight) in Pakistan, BRAC in Bangladesh, and the Education Development Center (EDC) operating in Mali.

For Alight in Pakistan, the Covid-19 outbreak was a major setback to the program, which was well on the way to achieve the EAC target of enrolling 1,000,000 out-of-school children (OOSC) in a three-year period. The major challenge emerged out of the pandemic was not only enrolling additional children but retaining those already enrolled. Alight, therefore, was compelled to do something immediately to ensure that children were not completely disconnected from learning.

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[2] Of the 13 partners that participated in the Webinars, 11 were EAC partners and one each came from other EAA programmes Innovation Development Directorate and Reach Out To Asia.

[3] UNESCO. Education: From disruption to recovery. https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse

[4] September 2020. Education and COVID-19. UNICEF Data: Monitoring the situation of children and women. https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/covid-19/

[5] August 2020. UNICEF Data: Monitoring the situation of children and women. COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures? A global analysis of the potential reach of remote learning policies. https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/

Alight initiated an internal exercise of risk assessment and after a long deliberation developed a mitigation strategy to minimize the pandemic impact on its program. Since internet connectivity is not readily available where marginalized children live, they realigned resources and partnership modalities, and with stakeholder consultations, and launched a self-learning-based radio programme for children in Grades 1-3 under the title "Muallim Radio". This back to the basics programme included 30 sessions for grades 1-3 delivered in six weeks, making it a low-cost, high impact intervention. People had their old radios fixed so they could participate. The program is being translated into regional languages for broadcast across the country.

In Bangladesh, the global pandemic forced a shutdown of all educational institutions. A pre-COVID-19 government estimate for primary dropout in Bangladesh stood at 18%. Post COVID-19 may see that number of dropouts rise with the advent of a national economic reshuffling. In response to the pandemic, the government took the initiative to reach students through a national television channel. However, it was realized that only 56% of households have access to television while just 37.6% of households have access to the internet. Therefore, the broadcast classes barely served marginalized communities, which included a majority of BRAC school children. BRAC decided on a low technology approach for home school through the use of feature phones, given that access to phones at the household level is 95%. BRAC Home School support now goes to 2,182 schools since April 2020. These virtual classes are conducted in groups of 3 children 1-2 times a week with each call lasting 15-20 minutes. Initially 3 key subjects are included in the curriculum: Bangla, English and Mathematics. Related health safety messages on personal hygiene and social distancing were added to the syllabus, and teachers provided psychosocial support to the students who were not used to being isolated at home. BRAC plans to scale up the Home School, eventually bringing every student in the BRAC school network under virtual learning across Bangladesh.
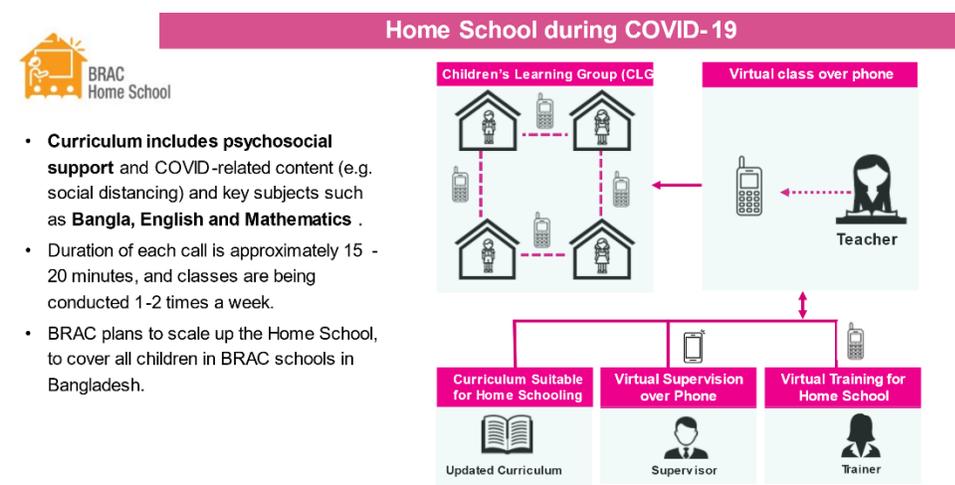
In Mali, the pandemic exposed inequalities, weaknesses of technology, a perception that learning only happens in school, low education of some parents, and new skills in virtual learning for teachers. EDC in Mali focused on repurposing Interactive Audio Instruction (IAI) using radio, stories, and games tied to academic outcomes. Previous EDC programs had used radio education for home use and also accessed other programs on the Global Digital Library. The IAI *Learning At Home in Times Of Crisis Using Radio Repurposing Toolkit* was a useful resource to apply during the pandemic in Mali. It is important to build on previous efforts to reach children through distance learning, which allows for a rapid response to an unexpected disruption. EDC also loaded programs onto a media tape device and distributed them to communities to ensure ongoing access. Content and methodology were imbedded in the radio programmes, along with worksheets, to assist with parents who were illiterate or spoke a different language.
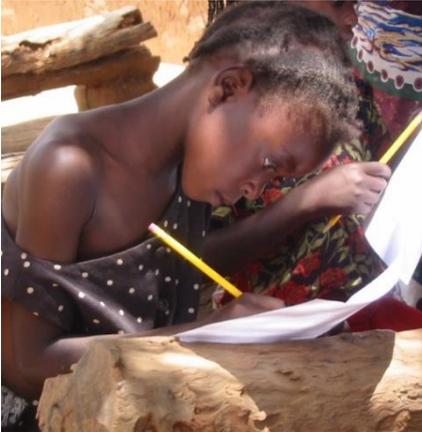
Keep Children Learning, the Role of Communities

EAC partners typically engage communities to ensure OOSC are identified and supported in education programmes. During the COVID-19 school closures, it was critical to mobilise communities in support of the continuity of children's learning at home and as they returned to school. EAC partners buildOn Nepal, Educate Girls India, and UNICEF Nigeria articulated strategies employed to engage and mobilise communities to respond to the education imperative.

buildOn, operating in six countries (Burkina Fase, Haiti, Malawi, Mali, Nepal and Senegal), provided sensitization sessions with communities in rural areas concerning COVID-19 safety protocols. While practicing social distancing, handwashing, and wearing masks, community members continued to build the schools already underway. buildOn enters into a formal covenant with communities before construction begins, signed by all parents and community leaders. Since even more classrooms were needed to accommodate social distancing, communities were motivated, during COVID-19 shutdown, to continue working on their schools. There are handwashing stations on the construction sites and assurances community volunteers wear masks. As additional support, community members hand-made 40,000 masks for use by parents, students and teachers. Collaboration with communities requires listening and understanding issues and finding solutions together. Communities with stronger solidarity help to support education.

Educate Girls India embarked on a three-pronged strategy of relief, recovery and reimagining education. With 13,000 Team Balika community volunteers already part of the Educate Girls programme, they distributed hygiene kits across 1,517 villages. Team Balika volunteers are also trained in child protection methodologies and child rights, so they are already able to identify issues and provide psychosocial support. Using WhatsApp, SM, direct calling, and low-tech distribution of books for local learning clubs, volunteers focused on advocacy for girls' continuing education. For traditional rural patriarchal families, role models played a key role in changing perspectives on girls' education. In re-examining the quality of education through new lenses, community outreach was redesigned to include online and offline learning hubs at the village level.

UNICEF Nigeria focused on the role of community in ensuring the continuity of learning, approaches to home-based learning, and building on lessons from past experiences. Communities helped safeguard children from abuse, monitored learning in households, and promoted learning through radio and television. UNCEF worked with school-based management committees, mother's associations, and local

education authorities on how to identify abuse and engage child protection authorities with psychosocial support for children. Changes were made with the system of monitoring and measuring learning during the pandemic. Engagement strategies included town hall meetings with different community cluster groups; house to house visits and interactions with household heads on the importance of education for children; community radio programmes and edutainment through drama, with radio sets provided for 1,500 low-earning families;
strengthening capacity to support community level advocacy/ campaigns; and building capacity on parenting and household care for children.

Communities have a vested interest in education for their children, and can be mobilized to use, adapt, and create flexible approaches to education in a variety of circumstances.

Keep Children Learning, the Role of Parents

Parents are key participants in education, by ensuring their children attend school and supporting them at home. During the COVID-19 school closures, parents were on the front line and more was asked of parents than before, sometimes requiring a change in perspective about who teaches children, how children learn, and where learning takes place. EK Tara in India, Girl Child Network in Kenya, imagine1day in Ethiopia, and Sonbola in Lebanon are EAA projects engaged in the virtual discussion regarding the role of parents during the pandemic.[6]

EK Tara in India noted that girls are vulnerable to trafficking. Engaging parents is essential for continuation of learning for children. With the EK Tara programme, while none of the parents were educated, they took on this new role. Education materials were provided and continuous communications between teachers, students and parents were maintained daily. In some cases, daily visits to ensure children were participating were conducted. Learning games were interesting for parents, using recipes, plastics, and shapes seen in household items such as plates and glasses. In fact, COVID-19 home learning actually provided better connections with parents and showed how invaluable education is for their children. Continued communication between parents and teachers after returning to school is seen as essential.

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[6] EK Tara is supported by EAA's ROTA programme, and Sonbola is supported by EAA's Innovation Development Directorate.

Girl Child Network (GCN) in Kenya helped parents redefine their role as learning facilitators, ensuring capacity and confidence to monitor and motivate learning at home. In some cases, parents could not understand how they could be teachers, so GCN clustered students together with one radio or mobile phone and parents who shared resources. These clusters of households were provided guides for the learning process, and parents became aware that learning can take place outside of school. Parents were clustered with 20 children using the NyumbaKumi [7]structures, and sensitized on how to support the learning process using radio and phone learning programmes. Parents began giving their children assignments and monitoring their progress. Through "Family Matters" programs, parents are supporting household conflicts that might have a direct bearing on the learning outcomes of their children. And through Village Tracking Committees, parents are involved in identifying and profiling out of school children ready for enrolment once the schools reopen.

imagine1day in Ethiopia realized only 28% of households have radio-TV and the literacy level of parents is low for 40% of people living in rural areas. imagine1day drew on experiences with the Ebola crisis and adapted distance learning modalities mostly through radio. They supported the Oromia and Tigray Regions to create comprehensive and interactive radio lesson for primary grades, provided solar operated radio devices for students and teachers/facilitators, and loaded radio lessons on USB sticks to be used where there is no radio satellite. Imagine1day had to convince uneducated parents that they can be teachers, worked through radio programs together to understand the lessons, and in turn helped the children. Parents were also encouraged to motivate their children to use the radio, helped to monitor their learning, and subsequently prepared their children to go back to school. In addition to learning materials, health safety kits were provided, including soap, masks, and sanitizers. Looking to the future, efforts were underway to construct more school health infrastructure including water, latrine, and hand wash facilities, for a safe learning environment for when the schools reopen.

In Lebanon, Sonbola trained teachers to better interact with parents to engage and empower them. Working together, they tackled digital literacy and blended learning with peer support. A learning by doing model was used to adjust to the COVID-19 crisis, where refugee communities were most affected and least supported. Sonbola considered parents as partners and employed basics of security, stability and wellbeing before adding academics. They established a strong preventive system for better preparedness to times of uncertainties, and equitable access to connectivity and tech-based solutions and devices for all children.

Parents were asked to be active partners in their child's education, thus requiring new skills, new relationships with teachers, and new perspectives on their role in their child's future. Building on the new skills and relationships established during the pandemic can enrich education going forward once the

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[7] "Nyumba Kumi" is a Swahili phrase meaning ten households, though not literally. ... The concept is aimed at bringing Kenyans together in clusters defined by physical locations, felt needs and the pursuit of a common ideal of a safe, sustainable and prosperous neighbourhood.

children return to school. New attitudes of both teachers and parents on the value they each contribute to the education process and the learning outcomes of children can facilitate a higher quality education.

Keep Children Learning: The Role of Teachers

Teachers are the centre stone of education. Without them, an education system does not exist. That does not mean, however, that teachers are alone in an educational endeavour. Learners, parents, communities, and administrators are all part of the same system. How each part interacts and carries out its role is integral to the effective functioning of the system and the positive outcome of educating children in society. Sonbola in Lebanon argues that teaching itself is a complex skill, and with an overlay of a pandemic causing interruptions in the regular routine of doing business, the complexity increases. It can't be assumed that an automatic shift will occur for teachers in how, when and where education takes place. Particular attention needs to be paid to the needs of teachers, the adjustments in the teaching process, and the resources and support needed for increasing capacity to operate successfully in radically different circumstances. Some of these new requirements enumerated by Sonbola include training and empowering teachers on high-complexity skills with special focus on:

- Wellbeing and coaching for new safety protocols
- Flexibility/adaptation with instructional delivery methodologies
- Best practices for distance and blended learning
- Parent interactions
- Differentiation for both teachers and learners
- Management and peer support in new ways to monitor and assess student outcomes

For this focus on the role of teachers, Humana People to People India (HPPI), United World Schools (UWS) Nepal, and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) for Palestinian Refugees offered insights from their field perspectives.

HPPI organizes small groups of primary school children from resource-poor homes, where technology is not feasible, with direct teacher interaction. Engaging teachers and students as co-creators of learning allows for individualized approaches to learn at one's own level and pace. This approach involves assessment of where students are and where they need to be, and then building appropriate learning lessons. HPPI reached teachers with weekly full-day capacity building sessions using online training during the pandemic lock-down. Students were then organized in smaller groups for peer learning with direct teacher interaction. For home follow-up, offline learning with workbooks was facilitated by parents and volunteers. Existing free software provided the basis for reaching students through WhatsApp, phones and Google Classroom.

UWS Nepal conducted household mapping, noting only 12% of students they reach have TV while 98% have radio. So UWS utilized radio for self-learning education programmes at home. In preparation for this new normal, teachers attended zoom meetings with training on script writing, social and behaviour change, psycho-social support, and social media as a vehicle for teaching and learning. Major interventions included the radio programme, health safety awareness campaign, new WASH facilities, and "Take Away" education for use at home.

UNWRA realized a need to monitor and evaluate in different ways, including direct phone calls from teachers with parents and students. Taking a system approach, they adapted existing self-learning modules and borrowed from Education in Emergencies (EiE) past experiences with rapid response and communicating health and safety measures. Faced with new challenges, teachers needed clarity on what was expected of them and the resources and connectivity available. Sometimes they only had one-hour mobile phone connection per child, and thus learned to conduct remote or hybrid learning models. These approaches necessitated employing varying methods for monitoring and evaluating learning, and communicating with other teachers on adapted strategies. Through peer coaching, creating communities of practice, and co-facilitation, teachers helped children to become autonomous learners when the only option was to study at home.

The pandemic highlighted equity issues such as socioeconomic gaps, high and low educated families, digital accessibility, and learning loss without direct interactions in school. Adjusting to these realities required creative adaptation by teachers, and increased support for teacher capacity building and resources.

Section 2: Summary Lessons Learned

Drawing from the lessons learned and practices put in place during the pandemic by EAC projects in countries around the world, the following summary lessons are derived.

Rapid Response

It is always advisable to prepare as best as possible for the unexpected. However, when a once in a hundred years global crisis hits, everyone is caught off guard. Yet, more than ever, a quick response to the crisis is required. With the COVID-19 pandemic, every country in the world was affected in varying degrees over time, and the education sector was hit hard as nationwide school closures became a reality. One significant factor in the ability to respond quickly is the hard work of EAC projects that previously invested in building relationships among the entire education sector, including communities, parents, teachers, administrators, and students. Because working and personal relationships were already built, a foundation for taking quick action was in place. The unexpected and widespread nature of the pandemic created a need to think and act quickly with input from all involved. The first step was to assess what already existed and what was needed. Having a project in place with staff to conduct such an assessment was key to the response strategy. Gross inequities were prevalent among the populations of students served by the EAC projects, given the primary purpose of finding and educating marginalized children who were already out of school. The fastest and most effective ways to reach students remotely was not digital technology, as most of their constituent households had little or no connection or hardware to support these methodologies. Low technology education inputs, including radio and phones, can reach the most disadvantaged and those in remote areas. Once a vehicle was identified, the process of creating educational materials to be delivered was needed, including programmes to be broadcast and worksheets to be distributed. In addition, hygiene protocols brought on by the pandemic needed to be communicated and practiced in the education sector along with all other sectors. Communities were mobilized to distribute hygiene kits to rural areas, parents were coached on how to facilitate and monitor learning, teachers were trained on how to deliver and monitor distance learning, and administrators developed expanded health and safety measures for facilities. With the foundations built among staff, parents, communities, teachers and administrators, EAC projects were in a position to respond rapidly to the crisis and manage to combat the learning loss of children separated from their teachers and friends.

Capacity

Assuming people will automatically have the capacity to make significant and rapid changes to the way they normally do things is short-sighted. While teachers know how to conduct classroom learning, they don't necessarily know how to write scripts for radio broadcast education programs, or how to communicate with parents on facilitating learning, or how to monitor students' learning from a distance, or how to manage their own psycho-social needs in a life-threatening pandemic. As well, parents don't necessarily see themselves as educators, or have the education and language skills to guide their children's learning, or the confidence to monitor progress, or even the time and resources to engage with their children who were now at home all the time. Communities are not necessarily organized to reach out to remote areas and provide food and health safety support, nor are they set up with proper safety protocols to host planning meetings or spaces for small groups of students and parents to share education resources. Administrators do not necessarily have the additional resources needed to properly equip their schools, or train their teachers, or provide appropriate educational materials for distance learning

distribution. All this is to say that building capacity within each of these groups requires thought and planning and execution before responses to the crisis can be mobilized. In the case of EAC projects, capacity building is typically part of the portfolio. When faced with new challenges and requirements, attention must be paid to addressing the needs and developing the new skills necessary to compensate for the changed environment.

Co-creation

Co-creation is built on an underlying principle that everyone has something to contribute, whether it be expertise or perspective or background information. When thrown into a shared crisis, it became an imperative to learn together and create together some possible solutions to immediate needs, and change along the way if new circumstances arose. Newfound respect for each other was an outcome that can serve well in the future as things begin to return to what used to be considered normal. Parents and teachers learned how to listen and learn from each other, communities worked together with education administrators and parents, students bonded with their teachers in new ways and provided useful feedback on interventions that worked and some that didn't. Teachers found new resources available from past experiences in countries around the world for educating in the midst of a crisis, and learned new skills in education provision. While physically isolated, a shared responsibility and joint problem-solving brought a sense of togetherness to the entire system that will hopefully not be lost.

Flexibility

Once the regular routine is disrupted, and business as usual can no longer be conducted, it becomes necessary to think differently about how to accomplish intended outcomes. For education, this means being flexible in how and where education is conducted and who is involved in the day-to-day process. Large bureaucratic systems are difficult to impact with anything that is different, so flexibility is not an easy road to follow. However, the sharp interruption in providing education that was prompted by the pandemic, required maximum flexibility in thinking and behaviour related to how the system functions. Communication, trust, capacity building, learning support, and safety protocols all needed to be revisited and provided in new ways. Were it not for the pandemic, it is unlikely this flexibility in reaching particularly underserved populations, and in acknowledging the disparities among different students, would have materialised. This speaks to the need to consider policy change that allows flexibility in how, when and where education takes place, and new protocols for assessing student progress.

Inequality

Huge disparities in socioeconomic advantages, technology support, and access to education were highlighted by the pandemic. While EAC projects were already focused on addressing the inequalities exhibited by marginalized children, the education system as a whole was faced with these stark realities. Bridging the gap and providing quality education for children on the edge was a priority for EAC projects. But for the longer term, it provided an opportunity to highlight these disparities and engage in policy dialogue to address them in the long term. Some of the strategies used by EAC projects to reach marginalized children were employed to engage larger segments of the student population who were suddenly isolated as well. Some ministries have already committed to continuing some of these programmes, such as radio supported learning and flexibility in options for education delivery. Yet, gross inequality is multifaceted and seemingly intractable. Continued deliberation on how to move forward in the education sector to ensure better access and quality in service delivery is warranted.

Adaptation

Everything does not need to be created from scratch. One advantage technology affords the education sector is shared resources developed for use in crisis or emergency situations. Natural disasters and conflict cause disruption in education and adjustments need to be put in place to continue education provision. While the pandemic created a widespread crisis, previous experience with education in emergencies proved helpful in adapting learning materials and delivery mechanisms and educational support for children learning from a distance. Adaptation was also required for everyone concerning their own health safety behaviours, their roles as parents or teachers or community members, their perspectives on how/when/where education occurs, and their survival in terms of both livelihood and health. Changing so many things at once takes a toll on mental health and support for psychosocial needs is an important dimension to consider for all participants in the education process.

Implications for Partnerships

The pandemic illustrates in no uncertain terms the importance of partnership. Because of longstanding strong partnerships that had been developed and maintained over time, EAC and other EAA programmes were about to engage actors on the ground to share and reflect on their COVID-19 actions, even If they were no longer receiving funding from us. At the same time, EAC, as the largest programme in EAA, developed guidance for the funders it was supporting at the start of the pandemic, recognizing the need to remain a strong partner during troubled times. For example, funding flows continued, particularly for staff and educational and related activities that could be sustained in the midst of COVID-19, and significant efforts were made to accommodate reprogramming that was responsive to the emergencies caused by the pandemic.

Section 3: EAC/EAA partner organizations

Innovation is a hallmark of EAC/EAA partnerships, since the focus is already on marginalized children for whom the regular education system is challenged to serve. When unexpected circumstances, including natural disasters, economic collapse, conflict, and the current pandemic occur, partner organizations are called upon to reflect, rethink, and respond so that they can accomplish the core goal of providing primary educational opportunities to the children they serve. What was demonstrated in the webinar discussions concerning responses to the pandemic crisis, was the creativity, flexibility and adaptation each organization developed to meet the needs of their constituents in their particular country contexts. Each of the EAC/EAA partner organizations participating in the four-part series on Keep Children Learning who managed this creative process are described in this section.

Alight

(formerly American Refugee Committee-ARC), a global humanitarian organization, has been working in Pakistan since 2002 and has served over 5 million people through its health, nutrition, protection, livelihood and education programs. Alight is currently implementing Pakistan's largest ever OOSC programme and has a goal to retain 1,000,000 children in education programmes. So far, 816,000 OOSC have been engaged in both formal and non-formal primary education. One of the most encouraging aspects of this program is that 46% of all children enrolled are girls.

BRAC

BRAC Education Programme (BEP) plays an important role to supplement Government efforts in Bangladesh to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and SDG goals in education. BRAC now operates 24,636 schools of various categories covering different age/social groups in all 64 districts of Bangladesh. So far, 13 million children (more than 55% females) have graduated from the BRAC school system. Half of the 13 million children are from Non-formal primary schools and the rest are from Pre-primary schools. Major innovations in primary education in BRAC, supported by EAC, include Non-formal Primary Schools, Boat Schools, and Bridge Schools. Providing early learning and basic education to the Rohingya children in Cox's Bazaar is currently being implemented in collaboration with EAC.

buildOn

For the past three decades buildOn students and community members have been breaking the cycle of poverty, illiteracy, and low expectations through service and education. In developing countries, buildOn uses a participatory approach which allows rural community members the opportunity to build schools to increase access and elevate the quality of education, to participate in literacy programs, engage in income generating projects, and take the lead in bringing OOSC back to the classroom. Community members have contributed over 3 million volunteer work days to build 1,720 schools in Burkina Faso, Guatemala, Haiti, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Nicaragua and Senegal. They have also removed the major barriers to education enabling 55,000 children to return to school.

Educate Girls India

Educate Girls is a non-profit established in 2007. The program model supports India's 'Right to Education Act" passed in 2009. Over the last 12 years, Educate Girls has enrolled over 750,000+ out of school girls, ensured 94% girls' retention, and improved learning outcomes for over 1.3m children. The programme has supported 26,000 schools across 18,000 villages, engaging over 1,700 staff and 13,000 volunteers. It was determined that an effective mechanism for increasing girls' participation in school, in areas of high incidence of early marriage, was to meet individually and directly with families in communities. The process of identifying, training, and mobilizing over 13,000 Team Balika volunteers led to the success of this approach. After conducting door-to-door surveys to identify every girl not in school, home visits resulted in school enrolments. Having Team Balika already established as community volunteers, enabled an early response to the school closures resulting from the pandemic crisis.

Education Development Center

The Education Development Center (EDC) has provided development services since the organization's formation in 1958. EDC works in both the American domestic sector and the international development community with a focus on education, youth and health services. EDC's international work has long been characterized by the innovative use of technology to support development goals. The development of Interactive Audio Instruction (IAI) has led to a learning series using IAI in almost 30 countries. EDC works with EAC in Mali with the PACETEM consortium project to provide quality basic education, especially for the most vulnerable out-of-school learners who have limited access to regular learning programs.

EK Tara

EK Tara is a registered Trust, which started its operations in Kolkata, India in 2011. Its mission is to transform marginalized communities through quality education of girls. EK Tara operates primary and middle schools, provides extra-curricular activities, and engages communities in skill building and information sharing. This includes tackling deep-rooted patriarchal mind sets to elevate the position of girls and allow them educational opportunities. Parents are part of the process of change and EK Tara promotes proactive teacher-parent dialogues. During the pandemic, EK Tara provided food and daily essentials to continue to live with dignity, provided mental health support, and engaged children academically.

Girl Child Network,

Girl Child Network, in partnership with EAC, is implementing 'Our Right To Learn – Reaching The Unreached' project aimed at increasing access to quality basic primary education for hard-to-reach and vulnerable OOSC from resource-poor households. The project is implemented in public primary schools and respective school communities to unlock barriers that perpetuate exclusion of boys and girls in education. To empower girls and make their voices heard in and out of school, the project uses proven models and child led structures within the school and in the community. Through "Family Matters" programs, Community Facilitators (CFs) and Village Tracking Committees (VTCs) support in resolving household conflicts that might have a direct bearing on enrolment of out of school children. The project also works with media houses and the Hotel Industry players to curb child sex tourism and promote child protection by strengthening institutional systems and policies, including supporting them to institutionalize the Code of Conduct. Since 2012, the project has reached 78,865 children, 55% of whom are girls from 240 primary schools. Over 25,000 community members have been reached through Community Conversations (CCs) leading to increased support of education for their children

Humana People to People India

Humana People to People India (HPPI) works in 99 Districts across 14 States of India in the areas of Education, Health, Livelihoods and Environment, with empowerment of girls and women as a focused, cross-cutting intervention. EAC has supported the scale-up of the Kadam Step Up Programme has enabled HPPI take the programme to 6 States and reach 130,000 children. HPPI education initiatives envision the teacher and the student as co-creators of knowledge and skills. This "People to People Pedagogy" has the objective to empower learners with knowledge, skills and the capacity to engage in a world of life-long learning.

imagine1day is a Canadian registered charity that has exclusively operated in Ethiopia since 2007. Working under Ethiopia's public education system and in partnership with the country's federal, regional and district government education offices, imagine1day has implemented education activities that have significantly improved enrolment, retention, and succession rates in primary education. Imagine1day has been in partnership with EAC since October 2013, creating access to quality education for over 93,488 (38% girls) primary-age out-of-school children in Ethiopia. The organization's holistic program activities include school construction, in-depth teacher training, and capacity building with its direct partners in the rural communities in Ethiopia. As of June 2020, Imagine1day has trained over 15,000 people; constructed, and furnished 63 primary schools, 47 libraries, 53 water schemes, and 74 gender segregated latrine blocks.

Sonbola group for Education and Development (ROTA partner) in Lebanon was founded in 2014 to address the Syrian education crisis both at scale and quality levels. Two key gaps were addressed, quality-based and innovative educational programs; and high-level training and empowerment for teachers in context of conflict and crisis. Sonbola has three streams of education support:
- TAMKEEN, the Non-Formal Education Program that provides holistic, differentiated and innovative learning activities, that addresses children's wellbeing, personal skills and learning.
- TALEEM, Formal Education Support focused on the complementarity between formal and non-formal education through Back To School campaigns, coordination and referrals to public schools, homework support, and basic literacy & numeracy.
- TADREEB, provides capacity-building opportunities for Syrian refugee teachers and teachers working with refugees to enable them improve their own professional skills and knowledge in the areas of effective teaching, inquiry/student-based learning, and tech-based learning.

UNICEF Nigeria The partnership with EAC is enabling UNICEF to expand education interventions, targeting the enrolment and retention of over 500,000 out-of-school children (OOSC) in four states in northern Nigeria. Interventions aim to increase enrolment and retention of OOSC. Cash transfers, teacher training and support to school/centre-based management committees in primary and integrated Qur'anic schools provide a holistic approach addressing supply and demand barriers to children's enrolment. The quality of teaching and the learning environment are also addressed through teacher training and facility upgrades.

UNRWA The United Nations Refugees and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by the General Assembly in 1949 to provide assistance and protection to, what is today, some 5.4 million Palestine refugees, registered with UNRWA across Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Across the Fields of operation, approximately 540,000

Palestine refugee children are being educated in 709 schools. In the last decade, the Education reform and the UNRWA Education in Emergencies (EiE) programme - the latter supported by EAC - have further helped UNRWA students to continue to access high quality education, alongside psychosocial support and with an emphasis always on safety.

United World Schools (UWS Nepal) is a UK based charity program dedicated to improving educational opportunities for the poor and marginalized children in three countries, Cambodia, Myanmar and Nepal. The major objective of UWS Nepal is to construct and manage state-of-the-art facilities in rural areas so that children feel safe and encouraged to study. Since buildings alone can't ensure learning, UWS also provides classroom resources, basic education resources to the children, fulfils teacher requirements where needed. In addition, UWS sends well-trained teaching fellows to teach in its schools under its program - the UWS Nepal Teaching Fellowship. Since its inception, the organization has successfully constructed 35 schools in Sankhuwasabha and Gulmi district, thus enrolling and ensuring quality education for around 5000 children. In UWS Nepal Schools, the quality of education is maintained by formulating a needs-based curriculum and introducing educational methodologies that allow for greater innovation in the classroom. UWS Nepal proactively invests in quality education for girls in marginalized communities to empower young women to create better prospects for their families and their futures.