

**DEEPENING INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION  
IN A  
POST-COVID-19 ERA  
FOR YOUTH AND EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARA AFRICA**

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## **Abstract**

In humanitarian emergencies, education is usually hard hit, with countries faced with the difficult decisions of how to respond and recover from such crisis, consideration for resources towards education might not always take priority; more vulnerable in such humanitarian emergencies are low-income African countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the education of the world's children and youths, from pre-primary to university. The disruption caused by this pandemic to communities and survivors alike is linked to both physical and emotional damage. Major concerns pertain to the inequity gap as it concerns families with low educational background and limited physical resources to support distance learning. Furthermore, the challenge and fear, is that youths could fall through the cracks and disappear from the schooling systems. Although restrictions are gradually being lifted in developed countries to allow for some form of normalcy, restrictions in schools are only rather slowly being lifted up. The pandemic continues to present challenges to even consider some form of restriction lifting in schools for most countries in Africa.

This paper explores the opportunity for developed countries to deepen collaboration with the African continent on youth and education in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. Despite frustrations faced in this unprecedented times, this paper recognises that there is the potential to turn challenges faced into opportunities for improving the education systems through calling on and enhancing international cooperation and solidarity. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 – ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ is a priority area for the members of the United Nations General Assembly. Likewise, ‘Investing in youth for accelerated inclusive growth and sustainable development’ was the driving theme of the African Union-EU Summit in 2017. The key objective was to invest in the continents’ young population and in future generations as a prerequisite for building a sustainable future for African countries. There is no time like now to deepen policy dialogue on efforts to reform higher education in Africa countries and to enhance collaboration to reaffirm the commitment of the European Union and the African Union.

## Introduction and Background of the issue

The unprecedented scale of the COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating effects on humanity. The crisis has put enormous pressure on countries around the world on how best to curtail the spread of the virus. Developed countries with advanced health systems and stronger economies in the past few months had struggled to curtail the spread of the virus and a few countries like Spain and Italy became overwhelmed by the scale of the crisis<sup>1</sup>. Worrisome was the impact on low income countries that met the crises from a weak position with limited resources to mitigate against the social and economic disruption caused by the crisis<sup>2</sup>.

When the virus first hit the African continent, it brought along a myriad of challenges and countries had to figure out how to resolve the resultant economic consequences<sup>3</sup>. Following standard epidemiological advice, various restrictive measures were introduced by some governments in the continent to curb the spread of the virus as with the rest of the world<sup>4</sup>. For instance, in Nigeria, there were swift actions taken to slow down the spread of coronavirus in Africa's most populous country. The country's government initiated the closure of its airspace and airports and also issued a lockdown order in three of its populous states, Lagos, Abuja and Ogun. It has been widely reported that the lockdown restrictions is hitting the most vulnerable in the Africa continent the hardest, indicating some negative impacts and highlighting a vast array of issues impacting on low income countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, about 23 million people are likely to go into extreme poverty due to the economic recession caused by the pandemic<sup>5</sup>. Generally, these African countries were already struggling with existing socio-economic vulnerabilities that included fragile health systems, huge infrastructure gaps, weak governance systems, poverty, increasing food insecurity and inequality challenges<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Belligoni, "5 reasons the coronavirus hit Italy so hard," *The Conversation*, March 26, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/5-reasons-the-coronavirus-hit-italy-so-hard-134636> (accessed 2 August 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Josephine Moulds, "How the threat of COVID-19 is affecting people across Africa." *World Economic Forum*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/africa-covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-food-water-perc> (accessed 20 July 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Niall McCarthy, "COVID-19's Staggering Impact on Global Education". *Statista* 2020, <https://www.statista.com/chart/21224/learners-impacted-by-national-school-closures/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Josephine Moulds, "How the threat of COVID-19 is affecting people across Africa." *World Economic Forum*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/africa-covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-food-water-perc> (accessed 20 July 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Gerszon Mahler, Christoph Lakner, R. Andres Castaneda Aguilar and Haoyu Wu, "The impact of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) on global poverty: Why Sub-Saharan Africa might be the region hardest hit". *World Bank Blogs*, April 20, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/impact-covid-19-coronavirus-global-poverty-why-sub-saharan-africa-might-be-region-hardest> (accessed 02 August 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Chukwuka Onyekwena, "The Impact of Covid-19 on Africa's Pre-Existing Vulnerabilities." *The Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa*, June 18, 2020, <http://cseaafrica.org/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-africas-pre-existing-vulnerabilities/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

One of the immediate negative impacts has been food insecurity, civil unrest against shortages of food and basic necessities has occurred in South Africa, Malawi, and Nigeria<sup>7</sup>. Parents have faced prolonged challenges finding adequate food for their children, especially, in the absence of school meals due to the temporarily closure of educational institutions as part of restriction measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Schools serve as the largest national childcare scheme in countries around the world; more so, attendance at schools provides groups of children from low-income and food insecure families with the much needed social protection assistance and social stability. It goes without saying that school programs that provide food rations and other support incentives act as powerful vehicles for delivering social and economic protection to families with limited resources.

In April 2020, about 1.6 billion students globally, that is approximately 91.3% of the world's students in 194 countries were affected by school closures. Currently, countries like Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Norway and South Korea have reopened schools. There are still about 1.06 billion students, 60.5% of the world's students in 105 countries affected by school closures<sup>8</sup>. These figures refer to students enrolled at pre-primary, primary, lower and upper secondary schools and at tertiary levels of education. 63 million primary and secondary teachers have also been affected by school closures<sup>9</sup>.

This paper discusses and analyses the impact of the health crisis on children and youth and education in the sub-Saharan region of Africa. The paper comes from the perspective that there is an opportunity for developed countries; specifically, European countries to deepen collaboration with the African continent on youth and education in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. The paper refers to key goals and declarations stipulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals<sup>10</sup>; specifically SDG 4 – ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ and in the European Union and African Union (EU-AU) 2017 submit themed – ‘Investing in youth for accelerated inclusive growth and sustainable development’<sup>11</sup>. 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) were set in 2015 by members of the

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-Marc Bernard, Brahim Sangafowa Coulibaly, and Rebecca Winthrop, “Education is crucial to Africa’s COVID-19 response.” Global Partnership for Education, June 4, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/education-is-crucial-to-africas-covid-19-response/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO, “Covid-19 impact on education”. Global Education Coalition, August 4, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> (accessed 4 August 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Niall McCarthy, “COVID-19’s Staggering Impact on Global Education.” Statista 2020 <https://www.statista.com/chart/21224/learners-impacted-by-national-school-closures/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, Sustainable Development Goals, September 25, 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> (accessed 4 August 2020).

<sup>11</sup> African Union and European Union, “Investing in Youth for Accelerated Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development”, Submit Declaration, November 30, 2017, <https://au.int/en/documents/20171130/investing-youth-accelerated-inclusive-growth-and-sustainable-development> (accessed 11 July 2020).

United Nations General Assembly, these SDGs were designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all and it is the aim to achieve them by the year 2030. The EU-AU 2017 submit declarations had a recommitment to invest in youth as a prerequisite for building a sustainable future. Priority areas in the declaration are to provide the youth with the skills and opportunities that they need through the deployment of smart and targeted investments. The paper discusses some of the evolving challenges that necessitate the reinforcement of Africa's relationship with the European Union (EU) through deepened international collaboration and solidarity as part of the global United Nations efforts in education.

### **Challenging times for education in sub-Saharan Africa**

Africa is considered demographically as the world's youngest continent. In sub-Saharan Africa for instance, 43% of the population are reported to be younger than 15 years old and 3% are 65 years or older. In the European Union, 17% of the population are considered younger than 15 and 20% are 65 years or older<sup>12</sup>. 10 to 12 million youths enter into the workforce each year and it is predicted that by 2030, one-fifth of the global labour force which is approximately one-third of the global youth labour force will come from Africa<sup>13</sup>. Education is a central feature to childhood and an important driver in human capital investment. While school closures was a logical solution in enforcing social distancing rules within communities in sub-Sahara Africa, the impact of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has opened up some disparities in education in low-income countries<sup>14</sup>. The immediate response to education provision has been to deploy nationwide remote learning tools such as TV and the internet. In some communities however, there are fewer opportunities for learning at home and being out of school in some cases presents economic burdens for parents due to challenges posed in finding prolonged childcare<sup>15</sup>. It goes without saying that, certain groups of children and youths in sub-Sahara Africa countries are likely to suffer most from

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<sup>12</sup> Josephine Moulds, "How the threat of COVID-19 is affecting people across Africa." World Economic Forum, May 6, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/africa-covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic-food-water-perc> (accessed 20 July 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Chido Munyati, "COVID-19 is likely to increase youth unemployment in Africa, this is how business can mitigate the damage". World Economic Forum, June 6, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/covid-19-is-likely-to-increase-youth-unemployment-in-africa-this-is-how-business-can-mitigate-the-damage> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Marc Bernard, Brahim Sangafowa Coulibaly, and Rebecca Winthrop, "Education is crucial to Africa's COVID-19 response." Global Partnership for Education, June 4, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/education-is-crucial-to-africas-covid-19-response/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Kaliopé Azzi-Huck and Tigran Shmis. "Managing the impact of COVID-19 on education systems around the world: How countries are preparing, coping, and planning for recovery". Education for Global Development, March 18, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/managing-impact-covid-19-education-systems-around-world-how-countries-are-preparing> (accessed 09 July 2020).

the economic impact of limited access to education and lost learning<sup>16</sup>. A report indicated that sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion with over one-fifth of children between the ages of about 6 and 11 out of school and one-third of the youth population between the ages of about 12 and 14 are out of school. It also indicated that nearly 60% of the youth population between the ages of about 15 and 17 are out of school<sup>17</sup>.

The long school closures present a worrying picture in terms of the negative impact on the learning of students, the extent remains difficult to say, but it is not without certain consequences for students. Such consequences can be attributed to loss of human capital from losing out on future opportunities and economic benefits that can be suffered by students who receive far less education, most especially students from the poorest and most vulnerable populations. Sub-Saharan Africa already significantly lags behind other continents in human capital development due to the negative impact of the shortfall in health and education. It has been suggested that the loss of learning during the World War II had negative impacts on the lives of students over 40 years later<sup>18</sup>. In essence, long-term disruption in education provision will harm sub-Saharan Africa's future productivity and economic competitiveness. Further decline in health and education would lead to widened productivity gaps between workers in Africa and in EU countries as well as having negative impact on Africa's long-term economic competitiveness. On the other hand, if the region achieves the highest health and education scores the GDP per worker will increase by 250%<sup>19</sup>.

Sub-sections 4.1 - 4.4 of the SDG 4 state the following; *4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes; 4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education; 4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university; 4.4 By 2030, substantially*

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<sup>16</sup> George Psacharopoulos, Harry Patrinos, Victoria Collis, and Emiliana Vegas, "The COVID-19 cost of school closures". Education Plus Development, April 29, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/04/29/the-covid-19-cost-of-school-closures/> (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Education in Africa." Education & Literacy, November, 2016, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/education-africa> (accessed 20 July 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Andrea Ichino and Rudolf Winter-Ebmer, "The Long-Run Educational Cost of World War II." Journal of Labour Economics, 22, no. 1 (January 2004), 57-87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/380403>.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Marc Bernard, Brahim Sangafowa Coulibaly, and Rebecca Winthrop, "Education is crucial to Africa's COVID-19 response." Global Partnership for Education, June 4, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/education-is-crucial-to-africas-covid-19-response/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

*increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship*<sup>20</sup>.

The finance of education depends majorly on parents in countries sub-Saharan Africa has compared to wealthier EU countries. Considering the on-going restrictive measures, not all parents would be able to send their children back to school because of the impact the pandemic has had on their livelihood. Increase in school drop-outs are more likely to happen as family finances dwindle leaving children at risks of child labour, family violence, trafficking, forced marriage and exploitation. The challenge faced in most countries sub-Saharan Africa is ensuring that more children do not fall between the cracks.

### **Crisis impact on vulnerable children and youths in sub-Saharan Africa**

Education was hit hard by the Ebola epidemic during the 2014-2016 outbreak in West Africa. This was a humanitarian emergency that affected primarily the West Africa countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Adults, children and youths were confined at home with social distancing rules and other required behavioural changes. Schools were closed for up to nine months leaving five million children out of schools<sup>21</sup>. These three worst hit countries already had large out-of-school populations with only about 61% of children in Guinea completing primary school, 72% in Sierra Leone and 65% in Liberia<sup>22</sup>. After the Ebola outbreaks a lot of students never went back to school.

There are fears that during this COVID-19 pandemic many more children and youths will fall through the cracks, drop out of the school systems completely and are at a higher risk of becoming victims of the crisis. This is more worrying for female children who are further exposed to psychosocial and physical risks and are in time of crisis twice likely to drop out of school. Exclusion rate at primary school age for girls is 23% compared to 19% for boys and at secondary school age 36% compared to 32% for boys. More generally, across sub-Saharan 9 million girls between the ages of about 6 and 11 will never go to school, compared to 6 million boys<sup>23</sup>. In Sierra Leone, during the Ebola epidemic, school closure led to an increase in sexual assaults and teenage

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<sup>20</sup> United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, Sustainable Development Goals, September 25, 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> (accessed 4 August 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Winthrop, “COVID-19 and school closures: What can countries learn from past emergencies?” Center for Universal Education, March 31, 2020 <https://www.brookings.edu/research/covid-19-and-school-closures-what-can-countries-learn-from-past-emergencies/> (accessed 20 July 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Ewan Watt, “From Ebola to coronavirus: education must not be forgotten in a health crisis” Theirworld, April 2, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ebola-coronavirus-education-must-not-be-forgotten-health-crisis> (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Silvia Montoya, “Missing From School: The Education Challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa”. UIS Blog, July 20, 2016, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/blog/missing-school-education-challenge-sub-saharan-africa> (accessed 02 August 2020).

pregnancies, unfortunately when schools reopened pregnant girls were not let back to their studies<sup>24</sup>. The country's government signalled that allowing pregnant girls continue their studies was bad for their health and that it would encourage teenage pregnancy. It has taken about five years of campaigning by education and human rights activists for the government to overturn the ban<sup>25</sup>. In recent times, girls' education in Africa has become a major priority, due to the great barriers to education and other gender-based vulnerabilities they face. The EU-AU 2017 submit acknowledges the importance of youth, especially girls and young women, and those living in fragile environments, to have access to the knowledge and skills that are necessary to enable them to be active citizens in their countries. So also a recommitment to increase efforts in both urban and rural areas to ensure universal, inclusive, and equitable access to quality education at all levels, from pre-school to higher education, for all children and youth, especially girls<sup>26</sup>. This is coming on the back of the implementation of the AU roadmap on harnessing the demographic dividend through investment in youth.

Vulnerable, other marginalised children and youth groups that are often forgotten and most at risk during this crisis period are displaced and migrant children. It is very easy for this vulnerable group to fall through the crack because national policies may not always include this group in their national responses to crisis. Children and youth with disabilities and those affected by trauma or mental health issues are other groups of vulnerable young people. For these two groups, schools and learning centres are places in communities that act as support systems for their wellbeing and development. When considering SDG 4, sub-section 4.5. *By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations*<sup>27</sup>. The extent of government's continuous support of educational activities during the pandemic has a direct implication for the extent of learning loss for students. It should be noted that there is the risk of regression for children classified as the most vulnerable who do not have access

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<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International, "Sierra Leone: Continued pregnancy ban in schools and failure to protect rights is threatening teenage girls' futures" Sierra Leone: Right To Education, November 8, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/sierra-leone-continued-pregnancy-ban-in-schools-and-failure-to-protect-rights-is-threatening-teenage-girls-futures/> (accessed 2 August 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Ewan Watt, "From Ebola to coronavirus: education must not be forgotten in a health crisis" Theirworld, April 2, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ebola-coronavirus-education-must-not-be-forgotten-health-crisis> (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>26</sup> African Union and European Union, "Investing in Youth for Accelerated Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development", Submit Declaration, November 30, 2017, <https://au.int/en/documents/20171130/investing-youth-accelerated-inclusive-growth-and-sustainable-development> (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 26.



to digital schools and virtual platforms where students can interact with their teachers<sup>28</sup>. Widely accessible mediums like radio and television centred on mass education will be difficult to target children that are not learning under normal school settings<sup>29</sup>.

### **The case for deepened international collaboration in sub-Saharan Africa education**

Due to the extent of economic contraction caused by the unprecedented crisis, many governments in the region are in a difficult position on how to expend their resources to ensure education is not left out of the on-going response and recovery strategies. Revenues are dwindling and education budgets are being cut in order to put public health, social protection and economic stimulus ahead in response to the pandemic. During the 2008 financial crisis, governments were able to maintain education budgets by issuing debt, however, sub-Saharan's current public-debt burdens are already huge, and borrowing conditions are not quite favourable<sup>30</sup>. As governments plan their next policy move, it is pertinent to recognise that education is a paramount tool in securing future opportunities and in enhancing economic recovery initiatives<sup>31</sup>. The sacrifice being made by students as a result of learning loss should be taken into great consideration because ignoring continuity in education provision would have future consequential impacts on the region's productivity and competitiveness.

The move of school systems from traditional approach to learning, to remote technology based learning is perceived as a welcome development. In fact, about 25% of countries in Africa are providing online and broadcast learning opportunities<sup>32</sup>. The approach supports students learning, allowing them to develop new skills and computer literacy. On the other hand, such move to remote learning has excluded the less-privileged learners from accessing online resources because not many schools have in place contingency plans to deal with the large scale crisis that has led to many months of school closures. In addition, not many families can afford the internet charges or cost of

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<sup>28</sup> Jean-Marc Bernard, Brahim Sangafowa Coulibaly, and Rebecca Winthrop, "Education is crucial to Africa's COVID-19 response." Global Partnership for Education, June 4, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/education-is-crucial-to-africas-covid-19-response/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Adedeji Adeniran, "Ensuring learning continuity for every African child in the time of COVID-19." Education Plus Development, June 4, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/06/04/ensuring-learning-continuity-for-every-african-child-in-the-time-of-covid-19/> (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Jean-Marc Bernard, Brahim Sangafowa Coulibaly, and Rebecca Winthrop, "Education is crucial to Africa's COVID-19 response." Global Partnership for Education, June 4, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/education-is-crucial-to-africas-covid-19-response/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Edwin Ikhuoria, "South Africa: Higher Education Budgets Key to Securing Africa's Future after COVID-19." AllAfrica, June 1, 2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202006010459.html> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Marc Bernard, Brahim Sangafowa Coulibaly, and Rebecca Winthrop, "Education is crucial to Africa's COVID-19 response." Global Partnership for Education, June 4, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/education-is-crucial-to-africas-covid-19-response/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

equipment that are needed for remote learning<sup>33</sup>. According to figures released from UNESCO, about 89% of students in sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to home computers and 82% have limited access to the internet<sup>34</sup>. In other words, online classes serve only a limited number of the student population. Inadequate investment in the provision of education widens the inequality gap. The inequality issue that stems from this situation is that a learning gap is created for students who cannot access digital tools and these students will for long after the pandemic is over struggle to catch up with their peers<sup>35</sup>. 87% of children in sub-Saharan Africa already have limited skills to function in a dynamic labour market<sup>36</sup>.

The many challenges faced by the education sector as a result of poor governance across the continent left most schools underprepared to survive migrating to remote learning<sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup>. Worsening this problem is the limited technological infrastructure, erratic electricity supply and access to qualified teachers who can offer online learning<sup>39</sup>. It is evident that there is a critical gap in providing continuous quality education remotely in Africa's education sector that would support not only learning, but help maintain some normalcy during the crisis for the psychosocial well-being of both students and teachers<sup>40</sup>. A multi-stakeholder support is necessary to mobilise resources and to finance the education gap<sup>41</sup>. As part of the EU-AU 2017 summit declaration, a pledge was made to deepen collaboration and exchange in education, technology development, knowledge, skills, research and in development to respond effectively to the specific needs of the EU and AU economies and to launch innovative actions in the fields of Scientific, Technical and Vocational

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<sup>33</sup> Wycliffe Osabwa, "How students in Africa are handling the coronavirus outbreak." *Times Higher Education*, April 16, 2020 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/blogs/how-students-africa-are-handling-coronavirus-outbreak>. (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>34</sup> UNESCO, "Startling digital divides in distance learning emerge". Global Education Coalition, April 21, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/startling-digital-divides-distance-learning-emerge> (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>35</sup> Amorighoye, Toritseju, "COVID-19 has exposed the education divide in Nigeria. This is how we can close it." *The World Economic Forum COVID Action Platform*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/education-nigeria-covid19-digital-divide/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Oley Dibba-Wadda, ADEA and Stefano De Cupis, "After COVID-19, education in Africa will not be the same." *Global Partnership for Education*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/after-covid-19-education-africa-will-not-be-same> (accessed 4 August 2020).

<sup>37</sup> Sampson Kofi Adotey, "What will higher education in Africa look like after COVID-19?" *World Economic Forum*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/higher-education-africa-covid19-coronavirus-digital-online/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>38</sup> Wycliffe Osabwa, "How students in Africa are handling the coronavirus outbreak." *Times Higher Education*, April 16, 2020 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/blogs/how-students-africa-are-handling-coronavirus-outbreak> (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>39</sup> Dube Bekithemba, "Rural Online Learning in the Context of COVID-19 in South Africa: Evoking an Inclusive Education Approach. Multidisciplinary." *Journal of Educational Research*, 10, no. 2 (May 2020): 135-157, doi: 10.4471/remie.2020.5607 (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>40</sup> Allison Anderson, "COVID-19 outbreak highlights critical gaps in school emergency preparedness." *Education Plus Development*, March 11, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/03/11/covid-19-outbreak-highlights-critical-gaps-in-school-emergency-preparedness/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>41</sup> Adedeji Adeniran, "Ensuring learning continuity for every African child in the time of COVID-19." *Education Plus Development*, June 4, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/06/04/ensuring-learning-continuity-for-every-african-child-in-the-time-of-covid-19/> (accessed 11 July 2020).

Education and Training and, youth employment and entrepreneurship, aimed at increasing the employability of young people<sup>42</sup>. This pledge was made with the recognition that the fourth industrial revolution and its consequences impacts on economies, including unlocking the potential of the digital economy for Africa and Europe in the creation of jobs, skills and economic development for the youth.

A central principle in post Covid-19 crisis recovery is to take advantage of the current situation to rebuild better and encourage children to go back to school<sup>43</sup>. Education systems in sub-Saharan Africa can use this crisis as an opportunity to rethink some of their practices and to create innovative solutions for the transformation of their educational system. There is no better time than now to follow through on the pledge to mobilise financial and technical resources to support the joint priority projects; specifically, Joint Strategic Priority Area One by using appropriately integrated instruments and mechanisms to invest in people through education, science, and technology and skills development. There are an increasing number of global partnerships that have been formed to provide guidance and support as countries move towards some form of remote learning<sup>44</sup>. Strategy tools that enable schools develop effective responses at the onset of a crisis are heavily influenced by the level of preparedness and contingency planning<sup>45</sup>. For instance, Malawi's education ministry long before the pandemic has been working with civil-society organisations to successfully use solar-powered offline tablets to deliver effective literacy and numeracy instruction<sup>46</sup>. Strategies and frameworks advocating this approach has been published by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), World Bank and Department for International Development (DFID)<sup>47</sup>. These strategies encourage an inclusive learning approach during emergency education. More so, collaborative responses that utilise locally available infrastructure and services should also be encouraged.

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<sup>42</sup> United Nations, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", Sustainable Development Goals, September 25, 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> (accessed 4 August 2020).

<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Winthrop, "COVID-19 and school closures: What can countries learn from past emergencies?" Center for Universal Education, March 31, 2020 <https://www.brookings.edu/research/covid-19-and-school-closures-what-can-countries-learn-from-past-emergencies/> (accessed 20 July 2020).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Allison Anderson, "COVID-19 outbreak highlights critical gaps in school emergency preparedness." Education Plus Development, March 11, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/03/11/covid-19-outbreak-highlights-critical-gaps-in-school-emergency-preparedness/> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>46</sup> Paula J. Hubber, Laura A. Outhwaite, Antonie Chigeda, Simon McGrath, Jeremy Hodgen and Nicola J. Pitchford, "Should Touch Screen Tablets Be Used to Improve Educational Outcomes in Primary School Children in Developing Countries?" *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, no. 839 (June 2016):1-4, <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00839>.

<sup>47</sup> Adesuwa Ifedi, "These Nigerian schools are teaching more in a term than they used to in a year. Here's how." World Economic Forum, June 24, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/nigeria-edo-school-education-reform> (accessed 09 July 2020).

## **Towards building resilient sub-Saharan African education systems**

In education emergency responses, collaboration is paramount towards joint work in support of governments. A diverse set of actors that have built experience from previous outbreaks and understands the options available is required to proffer innovative education solutions in crisis situations<sup>48</sup>. Two main drivers of such collaboration are the budgetary challenges that necessitate the mobilisation of funding from international collaboration and the transfer of efficiencies from such international collaboration<sup>49</sup>. This is achieved by gaining access to their specialised capabilities and innovative approaches. These diverse actors usually operate through international collaboration; they work keenly with national governments and the private sector in areas of education and information communication technology (ICT) to develop and finance various innovative solutions for the continuity of education and to build capacity to respond to any future crises. The Education Commission's learning generation report estimated that spending on education would rise steadily in low and middle income countries from \$1.25 trillion per year to nearly \$3 trillion between 2015 and 2030<sup>50</sup>. International collaboration helps to close the funding gap and scale up targeted efforts. Such education finance is raised through a number of collaborative means that include funds from indigenous government's domestic resources, foreign aid and private and philanthropic aid. Generally, governments in low income countries spend less than \$200 on education per school-age child; this is compared to wealthier countries that spend over \$12,000 on education per school-age child<sup>51</sup> <sup>52</sup>. As international agencies deploy their in-built agility and emergency response design to assist local bodies, their efforts should support innovative and cost-effective approaches.

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<sup>48</sup> Kaliopé Azzi-Huck and Tigran Shmis. "Managing the impact of COVID-19 on education systems around the world: How countries are preparing, coping, and planning for recovery". Education for Global Development, March 18, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/managing-impact-covid-19-education-systems-around-world-how-countries-are-preparing> (accessed 09 July 2020).

<sup>49</sup> Osikhuemhe Okwilagwe, "Towards Rethinking Public Private Partnership Implementation: Insights from the Nigerian Context". In: The Emerald Handbook of Public-Private Partnerships in Developing and Emerging Economies: Perspectives on Public Policy, Entrepreneurship and Poverty, edited by Leitão, J., Sarmiento, S.M. and Aleluia, J., 465-487. Emerald Publishing Limited.

<sup>50</sup> Education Commission. Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation. 1-170, 2019, New York: Education Commission., <https://educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Transforming-the-Education-Workforce-Executive-Summary.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Christopher J. Thomas, "The case for more international cooperation in education". Education Plus Development, June 2, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/06/02/the-case-for-more-international-cooperation-in-education/> (accessed 4 August 2020).

<sup>52</sup> World Bank, "Government expenditure on education, total (% of government expenditure) - Low income, High income, Lower middle income, Upper middle income." UNESCO Institute for Statistics, August 4 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GB.ZS?locations=XM-XD-XN-XT> (accessed 4 August 2020).

In consideration of SDG 4 sub-sections 4.6 – 4.7<sup>53</sup>: 4.6; *By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy*; 4.7: *By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development*; 4.a *Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all*; 4.b *By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries*; 4.c *By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States*.

In line with the SDG 4<sup>54</sup>, sub-section 4.1: *By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes*, extensive consultations during this crisis, with national governments, local actors and international response teams are paramount to assess and determine the entire educational needs of children and youth. International collaboration assisted many countries to achieve basic education in the 1990s and 2000s<sup>55</sup>. Much more of such collaboration is needed in sub-Saharan Africa countries to enhance their secondary and higher education. It should be noted that countries that moved up the World Bank’s income group classification in the last 30 years educated their population at secondary and at higher levels<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, Sustainable Development Goals, September 25, 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> (accessed 4 August 2020).

<sup>54</sup> United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, Sustainable Development Goals, September 25, 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> (accessed 4 August 2020).

<sup>55</sup> Christopher J. Thomas, “The case for more international cooperation in education”. Education Plus Development, June 2, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/06/02/the-case-for-more-international-cooperation-in-education/> (accessed 4 August 2020).

<sup>56</sup> The World, Bank, “World Bank Country and Lending Groups”. Country Classification, August 4 2020, <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups> (accessed 4 August 2020).

In the EU-AU 2017 submit, a declaration was also made to commit to stronger mutual engagement and to a more coordinated approach to ensure effective multilateralism, including through stronger AU-EU collaboration at the UN and other international institutions and to also commit to strengthen AU-EU-UN trilateral cooperation. This requires in-depth consideration so as to ensure holistic approaches that cover child protection, quality of learning, gender equality, hygiene education and training of teachers<sup>57</sup>. The various international agencies that coordinate with bodies like the UN to support responses at country levels comply with the UN's guidance to crisis response by determining critical areas for risk-assessments, priorities and directives. International collaborative responses that encourage increase access to learning and opportunities for girls as well as the prevention of barriers like the marginalisation in the home and inequitable distribution of learning resources should be prioritised, so also responses that provides structure and support for mental health issues. To provide quality education to children and youth beyond the pandemic, proposed interventions by the global education community need to take into consideration that the circumstances of each country are different and one policy measure imposed by donor and aid agencies would not work in every context. Imperatively, acknowledgment of local actors such as international bodies, educational administrators and policy makers in each context would support inclusiveness, build trust and confidence. Localised information, support and response are paramount to achieving any form of successful outcomes. The current situation is by all means challenging, but lessons must be learnt from countries that showed great resilience in past crises, building on the experience of this will generate quick response (Ebola, SARS)<sup>58</sup>. This potentially provides the opportunity to improve education systems.

Teachers are at the centre of the learning process; a modern and effective education workforce can keep pace and respond to the shift in world's demographic and evolving curricula. Teacher quality is a very important determinant of learning outcomes at any school level. They should be recognised as a workforce of change makers. The transitioning period to the reopening of schools provides the opportunity to build a motivated and qualified teaching force during and after the pandemic. To meet SDG 4, an estimated 69 million teachers must be recruited globally by 2030,

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<sup>57</sup> African Union and European Union, "Investing in Youth for Accelerated Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development", Submit Declaration, November 30, 2017, <https://au.int/en/documents/20171130/investing-youth-accelerated-inclusive-growth-and-sustainable-development> (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>58</sup> Kaliopé Azzi-Huck and Tigran Shmis. "Managing the impact of COVID-19 on education systems around the world: How countries are preparing, coping, and planning for recovery". Education for Global Development, March 18, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/managing-impact-covid-19-education-systems-around-world-how-countries-are-preparing> (accessed 09 July 2020).

with over 76% of these in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia<sup>59</sup>. In some of the poorest countries, the required increase in teachers is equal to at least half of the projected number of tertiary education graduates, given low secondary completion rates (less than 25% in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>60</sup>. Continuity of salary in terms of the welfare of teachers and job security is paramount. Collaborative responses and decision-making processes to achieve should not lead to lengthy bureaucratic processes in obtaining approvals for the deployment of much needed fund<sup>61</sup>.

In conclusion, collaborative responses should channel creative thinking on how to deliver education differently; especially in terms of time intensiveness, amount of input and accessibility. If well implemented, it supports the mental health of children and youths, giving them a sense of stability and supporting them as they develop strategies for coping in the new normal amid rapid changes. While sub-Saharan African countries have started to gradually lift lockdown restrictions, life as we know it would not be as normal as it was before the pandemic. In the current, recovery mode, governments' approaches to implementing educational policies must be forward thinking in regaining lost time. The continuity of appropriate educational activities in addition to the public health safety messages is one of the broadest reaching activities pertinent in supporting children and youth through the process of adjusting to their changing external environment. Education has always played an important role in past public-health campaigns and in recent times, in reiterating life-saving COVID-19 health messages, such as keeping social distance, temperature checks, wearing facemasks, hand-washing and sanitising and sanitation practices. Schools can therefore, serve as important front-line sites for public health interventions and could empower children with much needed knowledge that would translate into changing the behaviours of their families. Furthermore, these public health measures would serve to allay the fears of parents for when decisions are made for safe reopening of schools.

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<sup>59</sup> Education Commission. Transforming the Education Workforce: Learning Teams for a Learning Generation. 1-170, 2019, New York: Education Commission., <https://educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Transforming-the-Education-Workforce-Executive-Summary.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid 59.

<sup>61</sup> Osikhuemhe Okwilagwe, "Towards Rethinking Public Private Partnership Implementation: Insights from the Nigerian Context". In: The Emerald Handbook of Public-Private Partnerships in Developing and Emerging Economies: Perspectives on Public Policy, Entrepreneurship and Poverty, edited by Leitão, J., Sarmento, S.M. and Aleluia, J., 465 - 487. Emerald Publishing Limited.

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