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Policy Brief

EDUCATION RECOVERY FOR STRONGER COLLECTIVE FUTURES

Task Force 5
Inequality, Human Capital and Well-being

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Abstract

Years of progress on United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 are under threat of reversal. Globally, we estimate an average total loss of 10.3 months due to school closures. The scale and scope of education disruption jeopardises our collective futures. Simultaneously, we are experiencing significant social, economic and political shifts. Group of 20 (G20) members are not immune. This brief presents five recommendations to G20 members and G20 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors from the perspective of education as a "common good", moving beyond the utilitarian functions of education. Recommendations are based on an equity-focused crisis-sensitive approach for inclusive and resilient education systems for recovery to build stronger collective futures.

Challenges

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are compromised (UNDP, 2020). Progress on SDG 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education, is under threat of reversal (UN, 2020). Amid the third academic year of acute education disruption, long-term school closures and existing systems-level challenges have had multiple inequitable effects on children, affecting a fifth of humanity (Box 1). Group of 20 (G20) members are not untouched. Termed a "generational catastrophe" (Guterres, 2020), the disruption jeopardises our collective futures.

We are simultaneously experiencing global social, economic and political shifts with complex implications on and across countries. They will also have substantial effects on the life opportunities of different individuals and groups. These include, among other factors: potential multilateral fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability and conflict, globalisation of climate policies, growth of the digital economy and renegotiating social contracts (UNICEF OGIP, 2022).

These global trends have implications for children and youth. An explicit renewal of the social contract for education oriented towards a more fulsome understanding of the purposes of education is urgently required. UNESCO (2021b) envisions reimagining education for the future, premised on two foundational principles: (1) the right to education and (2) a commitment to education as a societal endeavour and a common good.

Education for the common good moves beyond utilitarian functions, typically construed as education primarily for labour market integration or geared towards basic skills. While the latter functions are important, they are narrow and contested (Bonal, 2016; Locatelli, 2018; Marginson, 2019), as alone, they are insufficient to meet the growing challenges for societies. Education for the common good may be understood as connected to "the transformation of public institutions

through greater participation of citizens and communities in the introduction of viable policies and practices in order to overcome more utilitarian and individualistic approaches, and build more democratic education systems" (Locatelli, 2018, p. 11).

From a governance perspective, we highlight the responsibility of the state to guarantee education, its role in strengthening accountability mechanisms for all actors (state, non-state, and their networks), and promoting citizen engagement to enable inclusive and resilient education systems of good quality for all. From a philosophical perspective, it is based on a humanistic approach that views education, not merely as the sum of skills acquired, but as a broader societal endeavour towards human well-being that enables people to live meaningful and dignified lives (Srivastava, 2019).

These challenges are relevant to G20 members in view of their heterogeneous local circumstances, to G20 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors regarding their commitments to humanitarian and official development assistance (ODA), and to G20 members in their inter- and intra-regional cooperation and support. This policy brief synthesises and extends high-level recommendations for G20 members and G20 donors presented to the T20 for the 2020 and 2021 G20 Summit processes (Srivastava et al., 2020, 2021). We recommend an equity-focused crisis-sensitive approach to enable inclusive and resilient education systems to build stronger collective futures.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated barriers to education access and equity within and across countries, and across social groups. Children experienced significant challenges and losses in their lives.

Systems-level challenges and delayed policy responses hindered full and equitable education continuity. The intersection of new and existing inequities further jeopardises access to quality education. Education continuity measures were experienced differently across countries, and between urban and rural areas within countries (UNICEF, UNESCO, and World Bank, 2022).

An estimated 463 million children were not reached by remote learning during 2020 (World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF, 2021), the majority in low- and lower-middle-income countries. High-income countries also had inequitable access and negative achievement effects (Donnelly and Patrinos, 2021).

The effects of long-term school closures on learning and on different inter-sectional social groups are also inequitable, most harshly felt by girls and children living in poverty (Moscoviz and Evans, 2022; UNESCO, 2022). Interrupted access to mental health services for adolescents is a concern, aggravated by school closures that restricted timely detection of risks and symptoms (Castillo, 2021). Children also suffered stress, anxiety and depression more acutely, aggravated by the separation from and loss of primary or secondary caregivers (UNICEF, 2021a). A large cohort of children have become orphans or suffered family bereavement and experienced new other vulnerable circumstances. An estimated 5.2 million children worldwide lost a parent or caregiver between March 2020 and October 2021 (Unwin et al., 2022).

Box1. Pandemic effects on the education and lives of children

Proposals for G20

Envision education as a societal endeavour for recovery – key considerations for an equity-focused approach

The pandemic has brought into focus the inextricable role of education in the development and advancement of individuals and societies. Education must be conceived as an overarching societal endeavour towards knowledge, well-being and social justice that enables people to live meaningful and dignified lives to fulfil the promise of stronger collective futures. In governance, we must envision education as a key pillar for resilience and preparedness to face humankind's pressing challenges.

We stress the urgency of equity-focused education continuity and recovery. Education disruption has institutional- and individual-level effects. Institutional-level inequities will affect education systems governance. Individually, inequities will compound on those in existing vulnerable circumstances, emergency and conflict contexts, and facing "hard core" exclusion (Kabeer, 2000) due to intersecting characteristics (e.g., relative poverty, gender, race, language, disability, etc.), and those experiencing new pandemic-related vulnerabilities and exclusions. On a practical level, the approach requires instituting pro-equity

measures and policies in education financing, provision and regulation (Box 2).

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Education recovery to unlock human potential is contingent on countries and donors instituting pro-equity measures as a matter of urgency.

G20 countries and donors must institute and support mechanisms and policies in education financing, provision, and regulation that proactively boost education resources overall, and target supplementary resources to the most disadvantaged at all levels, i.e., countries, sub-nationally, local communities, schools, and individual groups. Pro-equity measures should build on an integrated crisis-sensitive inclusive approach to educational policy and planning for response, recovery, and future prevention, ensuring the needs of all learners and prioritizing vulnerable groups.

At the systems-level, issues of governance should be addressed: (i) by extending system capacities and by focusing on equity concerns; (ii) being attuned to bidirectional and multi-dimensional relationships of education with other outcomes; and (iii) through cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder, and multilateral coordination and collaboration.

At the individual level, governments and donors should support those experiencing new exclusions and vulnerabilities, existing vulnerabilities and compound crises, and with intersecting social inequities by redressing individual experiences of disruption for marginalized groups. These should be supported by incorporating data strategies that focus on and involve vulnerable groups and by extending avenues for broad-based citizen engagement.

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Box 2 Pro-equity measures for education recovery

While future-oriented, we warn against accepting the discourse of a "post-pandemic" education context. School closures continue in some countries. Schools were fully closed in four countries and partially closed in 19 at the end of March 2022 (Box 3). Globally, we estimate an average total of 10.3 months have been lost to full and partial school closures from February 2020 to March 2022, with large inter- and intra-regional variations (Box 3). The variable length of closures across regions, countries and within countries, and the disproportionate effects of closures on certain populations necessitate a long-term approach to recovery and rebuilding, even in countries where schools have reopened (Figures 1 and 2).

Finally, we warn against treating pandemic education recovery and the impact on children as a "second-order issue" (UNICEF OGIP, 2022). The

severe effects of protracted education disruption are both immediate and cumulative, with individual and long-term societal effects.[1] There will likely be longer-term cumulative and potential inter-generational effects (Box 4). Precarity is heightened in crisis-affected contexts that bore a disproportionate burden entering the pandemic (Box 4).

Globally, a total average of 10.3 months was lost to full and partial school closures since February 2020. There are large variations across and within regions. The extent of partial closures also shows that there are large variations within countries. This will have further unequal effects on the extent of education access of children in different jurisdictions within a country.

Global estimate and inter-regional variation
We estimate that between February 2020 and March 2022, schools were closed globally for an average of 41 weeks (10.3 months), due to full (20 weeks/5 months) and partial (21 weeks/5.3 months) pandemic-related closures (Figure 1). However, there was considerable inter-regional variation. Latin America and the Caribbean sustained the longest average closures (62 weeks/ 15.5 months), including the longest full closures (30 weeks/ 7.5 months) and partial closures (31 weeks/7.8 months), while Oceania had the least average disruption with an average total of 13 weeks (3.3 months) over this period.

Intra-regional variation
Average regional figures can be further understood by examining variations across countries within regions. Figure 2 shows the spread of total average closures (full and partial) within each region. It reveals high variation in all regions. Sub-Saharan Africa (maximum: 89 weeks Uganda; minimum: 0 weeks Burundi) and Central and Southern Asia (maximum: 93 weeks India; minimum: 4 weeks Turkmenistan) both had the greatest intra-regional spread. Oceania, which had the smallest average spread across regions, also had large variation within its region (maximum 48 weeks Fiji; minimum 0 weeks Nauru). Further country-level analysis is required to fully assess. It is clear, however, that the variable length of closures within and across domestic contexts is an important factor to consider when instituting appropriate systems-level and targeted measures.

Continued pandemic-related school closures
According to the UNESCO global dataset on school closures, as of the end of March 2022, schools were fully closed in four countries (Honduras, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu), and partially closed in 19 countries (Afghanistan, Belize, Bolivia, Cambodia, China, Dominica, El Salvador, Guyana, Indonesia, Iraq, Laos, Maldives, Malaysia, Panama, Russia, Thailand, Tonga, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Viet Nam).

Box 3. Global estimate on average school closures and regional variations

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[1] For example, although estimations do not consider the wealth distribution across different groups, projections based on the first phase of school closures lasting an initial quarter of an academic year, estimate income losses of $US 17 trillion for this cohort, and loss of 18 percent of GDP globally (Psacharopoulos et al., 2021). As our estimates show, the average global and regional length of school closures are substantially higher.
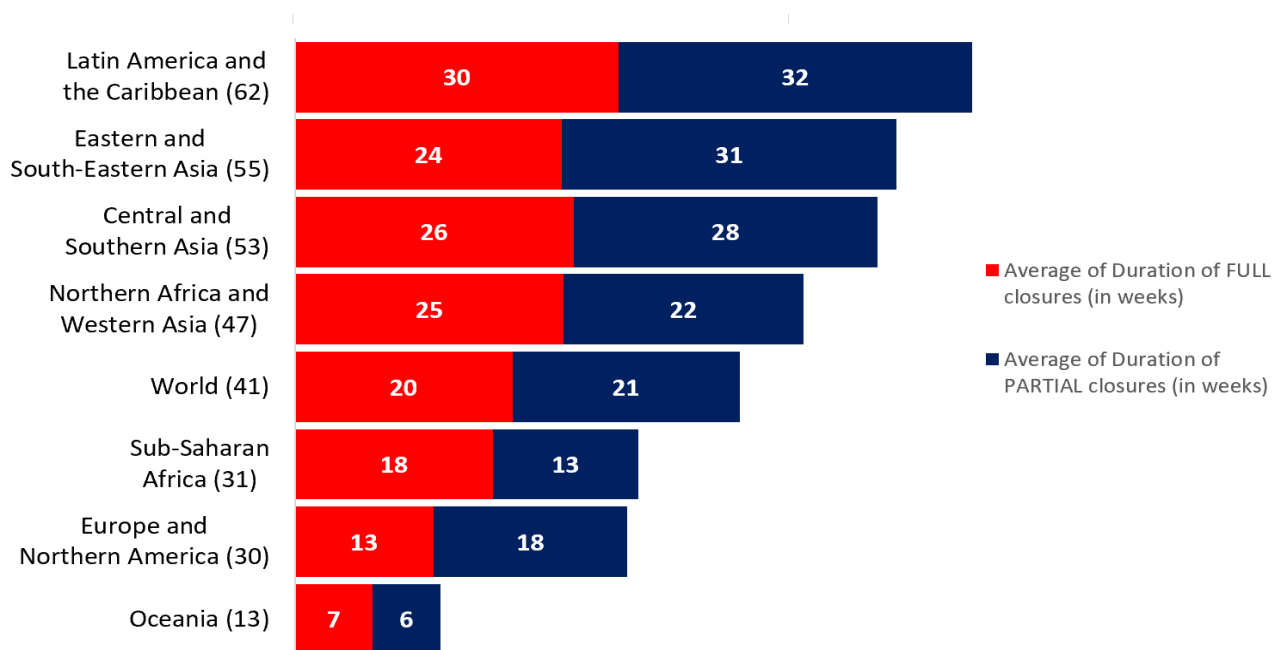
Figure 1. Average duration of full and partial school closures due to COVID-19, February 2020 to March 2022

Note: Full closures refer to instances where all schools were closed nationally due to COVID-19. Partial closures refer to school closures in some regions, or for some grades, or with reduced in-person instruction. Numbers in brackets are the total average duration of school closure per region in weeks. Totals may not add up because of rounding.

Source: Authors' calculations based on the UNESCO global dataset on duration of school closures, prepared by the Future of Learning and Innovation Team, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris. Data cover the period, 16 February 2022 to 31 March 2022. Last date accessed, 22 April 2022.
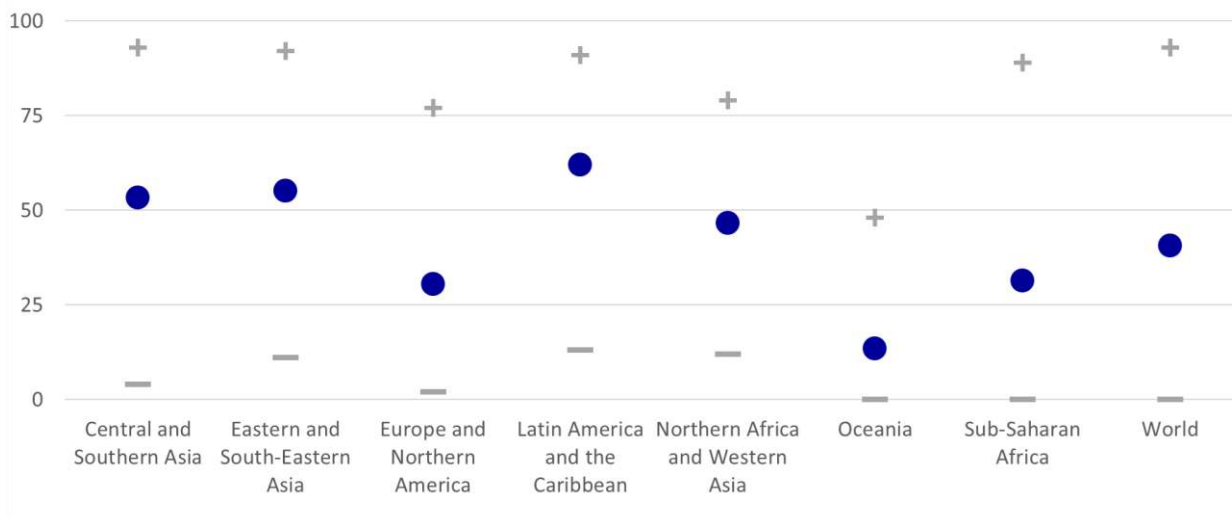
Figure 2. Regional average duration in weeks of all types of school closures, with maximum (+) and minimum (-) durations in the region
Source: Authors' calculations based on the UNESCO global dataset on duration of school closures, prepared by the Future of Learning and Innovation Team, UNESCO Headquarters, Paris. Data cover the period, 16 February 2022 to 31 March 2022. Last date accessed, 22 April 2022.

Inter-generational economic impact in Latin America and the Caribbean
Regionally, Latin America and the Caribbean sustained the longest school closures, where 30% of the total population is below the age of 18. A young population presents generational opportunity for societies to thrive. However, a quarter of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in the region are not engaged in education, employment, or training This proportion increases to a third in the 18–24 age group, with young women and those from vulnerable and marginalized communities, the most affected (UNICEF, 2021a).

Disproportionate burden on existing and new emergency and conflict-affected contexts
Globally, approximately half of all out-of-school primary and secondary-aged children live in crisis-affected countries, yet they have 29% of the total school-age population. Furthermore, while girls living in conflict contexts represent just 14% of the world's primary and secondary school-aged population, they make up more than 25% of out-of-school children and youth (INEE, 2020).

Box 4. Examples of compounded effects on children and youth

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Institute a long-term crisis-sensitive approach with collaborative cross-sectoral participation and citizen engagement

A crisis-sensitive approach for pandemic educational policy planning and recovery involves four key considerations: (i) managing a crisis and instituting first responses; (ii) planning for (interrupted) reopening with appropriate measures; (iii) sustained crisis-sensitive planning with considerations of assessing risks for the most vulnerable; (iv) adjusting existing policies and strengthening policy dialogue (Srivastava et al., 2020). Collective planning exercises with cross-sectoral collaboration and community engagement from marginalised groups should be a sustained part of planning exercises (IIEP-UNESCO, 2018).

An enhanced educational planning cycle is recommended wherein formal cross-sectoral and citizen consultations are integrated throughout the process, whether for global or local policy setting or implementation. Key components of the planning cycle include education sector and context analysis; formulating policy priorities and strategies; programme design; costing and financing; implementing decisions and an action plan informed by data; and designing monitoring and evaluation frameworks (Figure 3, planning cycle; Box 5, data considerations).

Instituting participatory planning processes with adaptive feedback loops with consultation and citizen engagement enable setting macro-level goals while allowing for local strategy identification and implementation (e.g., national goals, sub-national differentiation, local adaptation). Implementing integrated micro-planning processes to ensure clear accountability lines throughout the processes, including data reporting and use and for community engagement, is also essential.

Box 5. Equity considerations for data
Source: Srivastava et al., 2020
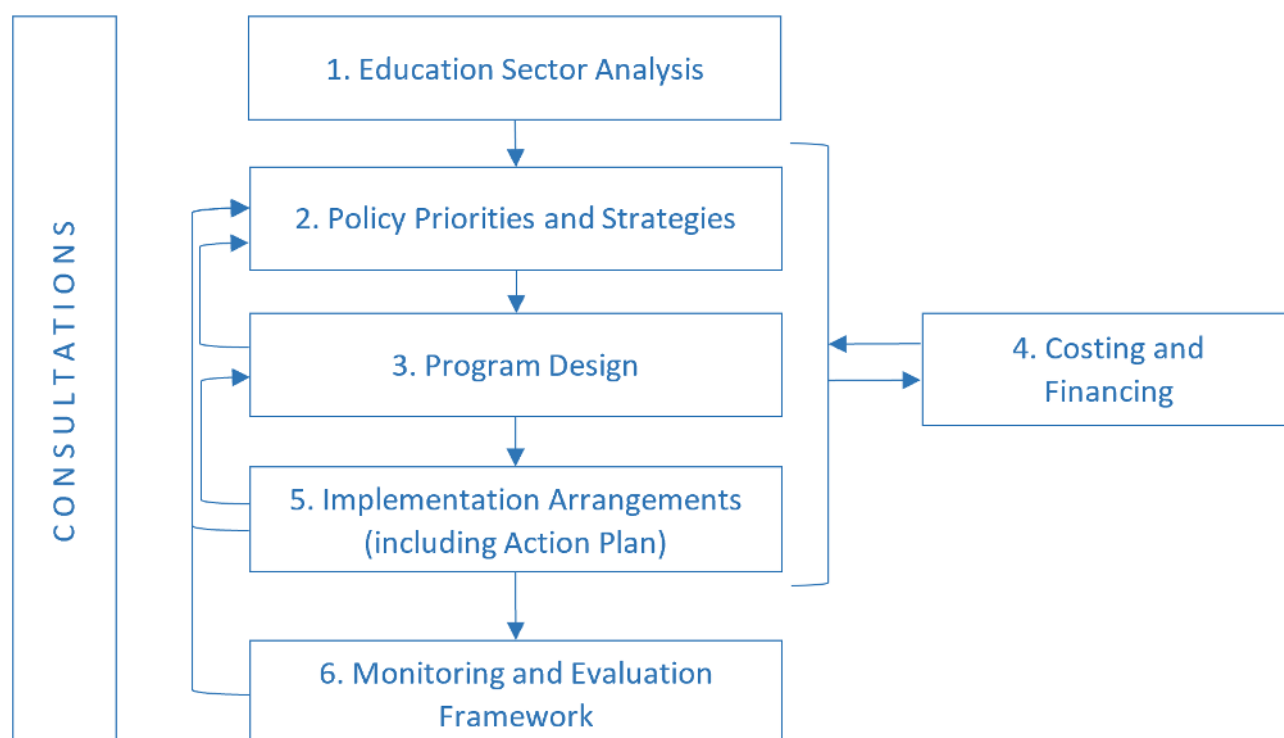

Figure 3. Main components of educational planning — a framework
Note: Adapted from UNESCO-IIEP and Global Partnership for Education
Source: Reproduced from Srivastava et al., 2020

Ensuring effective coordination among stakeholders nationally, including from all key sectors that are implicated (e.g., education, health, child protection, labour, etc.), and multi-stakeholder

coordination between governments, donors and international agencies can create a foundation that is more likely to be sustainable. It may also help in supplementing or pooling education financing resources. Such planning and coordination can take place through formal existing bodies or ad-hoc mechanisms and can help facilitate decision-making (Box 6, example).

Cross-sectoral educational planning for pandemic response, example from Burkina Faso

The Ministry of Education worked cross-sectorally, including with ministries responsible for health and social cohesion, to coordinate school reopening in Burkina Faso. It also engaged local-level actors in planning for reopening and identifying appropriate measures as part of the country's broader COVID-19 response through the development of local-level coordination committees, which monitored and coordinated back-to-school activities and included a range of regional, provincial, and school-level actors (Ndabananiye et al., 2022).

Box 6. Example of cross-sectoral educational planning for pandemic response

Recommendation 2: Prepare resilient systems for the future by reinforcing risk-informed educational planning and integrating equity-oriented analysis

The pandemic exposed the unpreparedness of education systems during crises. Resilient education systems must enable education continuity for all, with special measures instituted to protect vulnerable groups. Equity-oriented and risk-informed educational planning can help to secure education systems for the future in the event of challenges, such as natural hazards and emergencies, climate change, new pandemic waves, and conflict.

Risk-informed educational planning involves identifying and assessing risks with a special focus on examining potential effects on access, equity and quality considerations for vulnerable groups, and developing disaster-prevention and financial plans for emergencies (IIEP-UNESCO et al., 2021). Implementing crisis-sensitive educational planning can help to institute measures addressing disparities, especially considering localised risks and hazards in conjunction with assessing educational

infrastructure and the composition of local school-age populations (Gagnon & Vargas Mesa, 2022; Vargas Mesa et al., forthcoming).

Integrating risk reduction and risk management strategies within the curriculum (UNISDR and GADRRRES, 2017) by ensuring that information and materials are inclusive and accessible (GFDRR, 2017), and gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive planning are vital (INEE and UNGEI, 2019). These are significant as countries move forward since pandemic effects of long-term school closures are more severe on vulnerable groups, particularly on girls and women and those living in poverty (UNESCO, 2022).

Recommendation 3: Actively implement targeted open and public initiatives for citizen engagement

A multi-faceted approach to accountability, in which citizen engagement is one key aspect, can foster shared responsibility (UNESCO, 2017). Citizen engagement should be institutionalised in formal decision-making and educational planning processes and include a regulatory or legal framework for citizen participation including regulations for public consultations, petitions and grievances.

Extending open government initiatives, along its three principles — transparency, accountability and citizen engagement (Huss and Keudel, 2021) — can bolster education service delivery commitments for recovery (Huss and Keudel, 2020). Citizen engagement can spur government accountability regarding education commitments on the one hand, and provide critical information on gaps to administrators and policymakers, on the other. Community participation is a foundation standard for education (INEE, 2010).

As marginalised groups may be excluded from general calls, targeted initiatives to ensure their engagement must be institutionalised. A "social" or "citizen audit" can be a key mechanism. This is a form of direct audit by which citizens can check the authenticity and veracity

of programmes meant for them through modalities to collect and share information and spur platforms for citizen voice. Social audits involve examining information that conventional audit mechanisms and agencies may not assess, such as government-held information accessed by citizens and brought into the public domain, or new information collected from citizens for public scrutiny (Bhatty, 2021). Platforms of state-citizen interaction to facilitate government responses in addressing grievances are crucial.

Recommendation 4: Reassess partnerships between state and non-state actors to ensure they meet collective goals

The 2021/22 Global Education Monitoring Report estimates 350 million children are educated by non-state actors (UNESCO, 2021a). While the state is the ultimate duty-bearer for the right to education, there is increased non-state engagement in education globally. Non-state engagement by actors which may operate simultaneously across different levels of governance, from the global to micro-school environments in local communities, is underpinned by a complexity of arrangements (contracting, partnerships, networks), activities in different domains of operation (provision, financing, regulation, management), mix of actors with commercial and non-commercial motives, and limited and contested data on their effectiveness in some areas (Srivastava, 2020) (Figure 4). This engagement is contested due to equity considerations. The implications are more severe on compulsory education levels, given the right to education, and regarding commercial actors.

The pandemic has accentuated these tensions. Evidence is emerging on the economic shock on private providers to sustain operations and on teacher employment, which increases risks to continuous access for learners (Alam and Tiwari, 2021). Furthermore, the economic effects of the pandemic, particularly on disadvantaged households, are likely to aggravate their ability to access education in the absence of good quality public systems (UNESCO, 2021a). More generally, there are aggravated risk burdens on the state in partnership arrangements with

non-state actors (van Marrewijk et al., 2008), and in education bureaucracies that have limited capacity to monitor and regulate arrangements (Aslam et al., 2017). Equity and inclusion criteria and common monitoring processes must be integrated into such arrangements (Patana, 2020; World Bank et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2021a).

Reconsidering a new social contract for education necessitates an assessment of the appropriateness of state and non-state partnerships to ensure that resources and capacities supplement and strengthen inclusive public systems of good quality, meet equity-oriented goals, and are not funnelled away from, establish parallel structures to, or undermine public systems (UNESCO, 2021a). The Abidjan Principles on the human rights obligations of states to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education are a reference point to assess respective roles and duties of state and non-state actors in education with relevant interpretations from international human rights law (Aubry et al., 2021).[2]

[2] The Abidjan Principles compile and unpack existing legal obligations that states have regarding the delivery of education, and the role and limits of non-state actors in education. They detail the implications of international human rights law and existing interpretations on the roles and responsibilities of the state and non-state actor involvement. Drafted by an expert committee and signed by specialists on international law, human rights, and education, the final document outlines 97 guiding principles organised in 10 overarching guidelines.
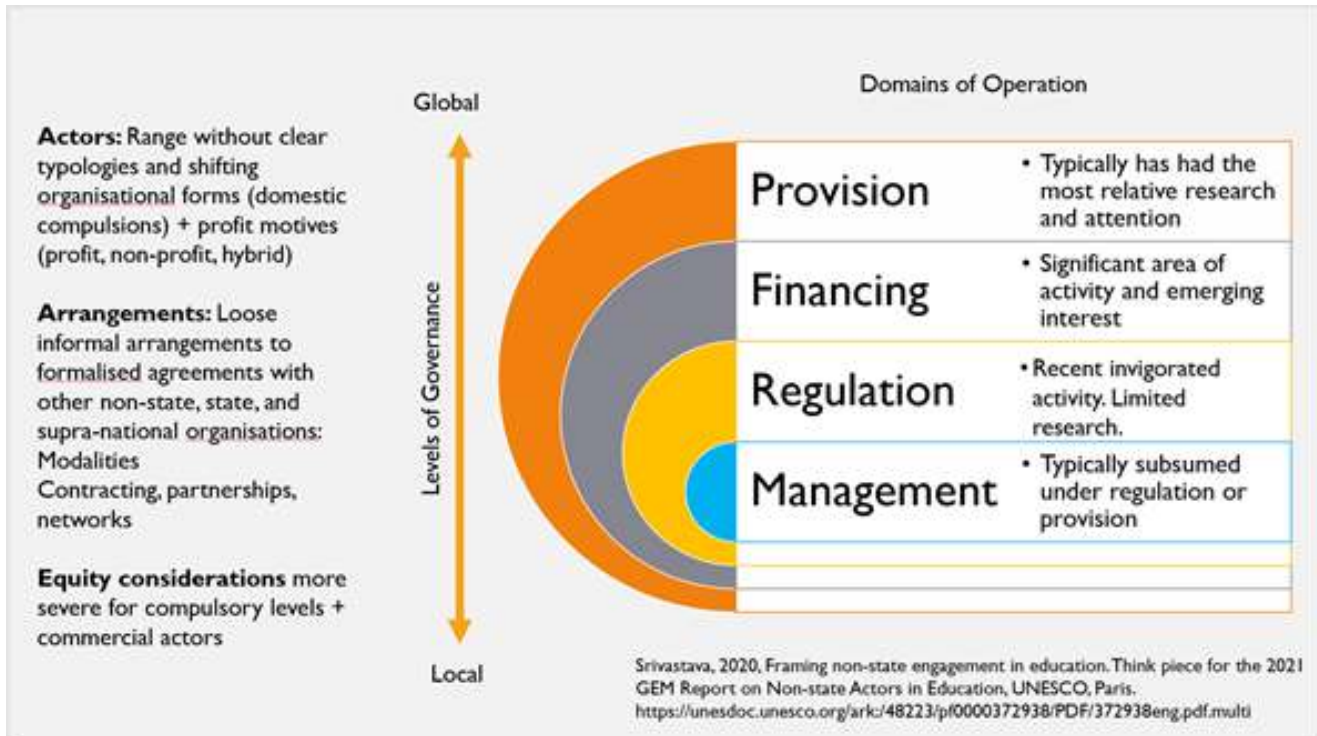
Actors: Range without clear typologies and shifting organisational forms (domestic compulsions) + profit motives (profit, non-profit, hybrid)

Arrangements: Loose informal arrangements to formalised agreements with other non-state, state, and supra-national organisations: Modalities Contracting, partnerships, networks

Equity considerations more severe for compulsory levels + commercial actors

Domains of Operation

Provision • Typically has had the most relative research and attention

Financing • Significant area of activity and emerging interest

Regulation • Recent invigorated activity. Limited research.

Management • Typically subsumed under regulation or provision

Srivastava, 2020, Framing non-state engagement in education. Think piece for the 2021 GEM Report on Non-state Actors in Education, UNESCO, Paris. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372938/PDF/372938eng.pdf.multi

Figure 4. A framework for non-state private engagement in education
Source: Based on Srivastava, 2020

Recommendation 5: Institute collective action across the humanitarian-development spectrum and enrich international cooperation beyond North-South engagement

G20 members and donors must lead a new shared vision of education by enabling collective action and increased multilateral cooperation beyond Northern-led engagement with the South. Furthermore, coordination and joint action between development and humanitarian communities and structures are required to meet new challenges for recovery and rebuilding (INEE, 2021). The development, support and use of common frameworks for education recovery aimed at guaranteeing the right to education, with a particular focus on the needs and experiences of vulnerable groups must be a shared endeavour (Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, 2022; INEE, 2021).

Guiding principles for ethical collective action and partnerships to address education in emergencies should be further developed (Global

Hub for Education in Emergencies, 2022; Menashy and Zakharia, 2022). This can be used to bridge development and humanitarian aspects of global education action. From a governance perspective, humanitarian and development partners and governments increasingly recognise the importance of aligning shorter-term emergency responses with longer-term education sector plans and policies. Coordinated action to address national priorities and extend education systems capacity, especially led by countries with experiences of emergencies, are integral to enriching international cooperation. One example is the Global Compact on Refugees, which was affirmed by the UN General Assembly in 2019, and introduced comprehensive refugee response model that includes a commitment to address education for refugee children and youth (INEE, 2021).

An obvious area of support is for G20 donors to match the EU commitment to allocate 10 percent of total humanitarian aid to education. The share of education from total humanitarian aid was 3 percent in 2019 (US$705 million) (UNESCO, 2020). The European Commission substantially increased its investment to humanitarian aid for education in emergencies, from 1 percent in 2015 to 10 percent in 2019 (ECHO, 2020). G20 donors must sustain this commitment and consider harmonised funding. Domestically, G20 countries must protect and boost education resources. The increased needs require sustained multi-year support (Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, 2022) for humanitarian and development education assistance and domestic education financing.

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