SDG-Education 2030 Webinar Series for Latin America and the Caribbean: Leaving no one behind in times of the COVID-19 pandemic

Tuesday 2 June 2020
11:00 (-4 UCT)

Background
The global pandemic of COVID-19 has brought about an unprecedented crisis on all fronts. In the area of education, this resulted in massive closures of educational institutions in more than 190 countries around the world in order to prevent the spread of virus and mitigate its impact. According to UNESCO1, as of late May 2020, 1,198,530,172 learners are affected worldwide by COVID-19 related school closure. Of these, more than 166,552,325 were students from Latin America and the Caribbean2.

This situation has provoked an acute emergency for national education systems. The governments of the region, led by the Ministries of Education, have rapidly implemented distance learning modalities, supporting educational staff and mobilizing parents, caregivers and communities, with a view to ensuring the continuity of learning as an immediate response.

At the regional level, multiple instances of technical and political dialogue have been convened, which clearly demonstrated strong commitment and corresponding action by Governments with the support of international, regional and national organizations. The various dialogues held during the first month of pandemic then highlighted three common central themes that require immediate and longer-term political and programmatic support:

(1) Important advances and innovation in the area of distance education have been made through the use of technologies in recent weeks more than at any other time. However, there are still important challenges to guarantee equity and inclusion, considering the most vulnerable and marginalized population groups;

(2) There is need to move towards flexible educational systems, with a focus on preparedness; and

(3) A new mentality and paradigm shift towards interdisciplinarity and intersectoriality is required beyond education sector-focused planning and implementation. Cooperation and collaboration across different sectors and actors is paramount.

In other words, this crisis presents itself an unprecedented opportunity to transform national education systems into one of resilience, making the SDG-Education 2030 Agenda more relevant and necessary than ever.

Regional Webinar Series
It is against this background that in collaboration with the Regional Education Group for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO launched on 17 April, a biweekly series of knowledge and information exchange, and of policy dialogue, in order to respond to the pandemic, focusing on the four pillars of SDG-Education 2030: equity, inclusion, quality and lifelong learning.

1 https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures
2 https://es.unesco.org/fieldoffice/santiago/covid-19-education-aic
The objective of this initiative is to support the Ministries of Education and the different educational actors for the development, management and dissemination of relevant evidence and to inform the immediate response as well as the medium and long-term actions towards the 2030 goal. In addition, considering the need for interdisciplinary response, the dimension of culture, health and other areas will also be touched upon during the series.

Considering the specific contexts of each sub-region, Latin America and the Caribbean, two parallel schedules will be implemented.

Each webinar will be recorded and made available with presentations and reference materials on UNESCO’s portal dedicated to COVID-19 (https://es.unesco.org/fieldoffice/santiago/covid-19-education-alc). At the same time, for each webinar, in-depth country experiences will be further explored and documented both in Spanish and English with a view to promoting sustainable knowledge exchange and policy dialogue with regional public goods across the region and to contributing to the same at the global level.

The Caribbean webinar series will be organized in partnership with CARICOM Secretariat and the Regional Education Group Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Webinar Series n° 3. Impact of COVID-19 on Gender and Education

Evidence show that public health crisis has distinct gendered impacts, and the COVID-19 pandemic is not an exception. The pandemic has resulted in massive school closures, with more than one billion learners worldwide affected. This phenomenal crisis has the potential to exacerbate existing gender inequalities in education and create new challenges.

Among the possible negative consequences of school closure are: exposure to child labor; need to assume caregiving roles within homes; increased health risks and gender-based violence, including sex exploitation; increased risks of being victims of violence in digital spaces; child marriage, early pregnancy and difficulties in accessing sexual and reproductive health benefits.

In the Caribbean region, it is estimated that 876,849 girls and 864,722 boys have been affected by COVID-19 related school closure. While girls are heavily impacted on the education front, boys’ disengagement from education due to poverty is also an imperative to look at. Gender-responsive distance learning approaches must consider boys’ participation, motivation and learning, while school return plans address the factors which may further steer boys away from fair and equal opportunities in education.

The COVID-19 crisis has shed light on particular and existing challenges still faced by girls and boys. It is therefore essential for educational planners and practitioners to examine the existing and emerging challenges as a result of COVID-19 on children from a gender dimension, as well as to prepare national education systems and the wider society to address them.

While swift measures are needed, the crisis can also provide a window of opportunity to more precisely target actions needed along the path to achieve the Education 2030 Agenda, advancing the SDG 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” and SDG 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, and essentially on our overall goal to leave no one behind.

The third episode of the Caribbean webinar series thus offers a space for knowledge exchange and

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4 https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse
5 UNESCO: Education Issue Note: Addressing the gender dimensions of school closures
discussion on how countries can ensure gender-responsive, evidence-based actions during and after this unprecedented educational disruption.

The following questions will be addressed:

- What is the impact of COVID-19 on gender and its implications on education?
- What efforts are Caribbean countries making to respond to the challenges?
- What actions (immediate, medium and long term) are needed to ensure Caribbean countries make progress towards gender equity and equality in times of crisis?

Objectives:

- To discuss the main impacts and challenges associated with gender during the COVID-19 education disruption in the Caribbean region.
- To share experiences on how to address the negative gender consequences for boys and girls in the Caribbean region, as well as strategies to support the education sector during the pandemic.

Agenda:

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<th>Time</th>
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| 11:00 – 11:05 | Welcome and introduction:  
  - Dr Laurette Bristol, Programme Manager, Human Resource Department, CARICOM Secretariat |
| 11:05 – 11:15 | Overview:  
  - Gender Equality during COVID-19, Ms. Mary Alison McLean, Caribbean Representative, UN Woman Multi-Country Office |
| 11:15 – 11:55 | Presentations (8 minutes each)  
  - Ms. Ann-Marie Williams, Deputy Programme Manager, Gender and Development, CARICOM Secretariat  
  - Ms. Shelly N. Abdool-Zerezeghi, Regional Gender Advisor, UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office  
  - National Experts on COVID-19 Impact on Gender in the Caribbean:  
    - Belize  
      - Ms. Cynthia Williams, Executive Director, National Women’s Commission  
      - Ms. Shawna-Kae Burns, Youth Representative, MPhil/PhD candidate at the Institute of Gender and Development Studies, The University of the West Indies  
    - Dominica  
      - Ms. Melissa Morgan, Director, Bureau of Gender Affairs, Dominica |
| 11:55 – 12:25 | Q&A and discussion |
| 12:25 – 12:40 | Summary, key messages and closing  
  - Dr Laurette Bristol, CARICOM Secretariat |