Teacher Task Force

Regional Virtual Meeting for Asia-Pacific Region

COVID-19 education crisis - Supporting teachers in distance learning and on school reopening

26 May 2020, 15:00 (Bangkok time/GMT+7 hrs.)

Final Report

Under the auspices of the Teacher Task Force (TTF), a regional meeting for members from Asia-Pacific was held to discuss countries' challenges and national responses in relation to teachers in the use of distance education and for the return to school (Annex 1). The meeting brought together a combination of country level perspectives and those from international organizations operating in the region. The speakers represented TTF members from Cambodia, China, India and Maldives. Additionally, the World Bank's strategy for COVID-19, with a focus on teacher effectiveness, was presented (Annex 2).

Across the presentations and during the question and answer period, the following emerged as important considerations for COVID-19 related education responses specific to supporting teachers and teaching.

Challenges raised by COVID-19 school closures

1. Existing educational inequalities and inequities limiting inclusivity in education;
2. Inadequate infrastructure and the digital divide which hinders full utilization of technology-based education solutions; and
3. Preparation and training of teachers to use and manage different distance learning strategies and ensure student learning assessment in preparation for school reopening.

COVID-19 responses developed by countries and organisations

1. **Technology solutions to address inequalities and inequity:**
   All countries discussed efforts to develop multiple response strategies combining digital solutions with broadcast media including TV and radio, and where needed print materials to ensure continuity of learning. Teachers remain central to countries' strategies to ensure equity in learning. Teachers' role to maintain communication with parents and facilitate students' access to technology-based distance learning materials is crucial. Across countries, where possible, governments are leading responses in partnership with private sector (i.e. broadband service providers, private sector providers in digital learning) and development partners. Some of the country specific strategies to address inequity are the following:

   a. **Cambodia**: Teachers were regarded as the main solution regarding concerns of equity and inclusion of marginalized learners. Supported by the Ministry, teachers provide guidance to students in remote areas in the use of the various options like television, radio to continue learning. In some cases where access to any sort of device is difficult, teachers invite parents to collect learning materials from schools to take home to support learners. Additionally, schools remained partially open to enable visits to use devices.

   b. **China:** Ensuring the right of education for all students has been one of the Ministry's key measures. China's experiences in technology development in education served as an important foundation for developing its response. The Ministry of education also collaborated with other relevant ministries and departments to ensure the best use of the national platform to ensure

the learning needs of students in rural areas are met. Furthermore, local governments enacted measures to adapt to the needs of diverse local conditions. Efforts also focused on developing stronger partnerships with broadband service provider(s) to ensure connectivity in rural areas.

    c. **India**: Strategies included reliance on government educational platforms for open educational resources (OERs) to share content amongst teachers and students. This is in addition to other forms of technology; for example the 'Swayam Prabha' television broadcast and DIKSHA digital platform of the National Council of Educational Research and Training.

    d. **Maldives**: Efforts have been undertaken with the help of parents and general community to address the learning needs of students with special needs and those whose access to infrastructure remains limited. A survey was conducted to identify the greatest needs amongst households without Internet. Based on survey data, Internet providers therefore provided 5 GB of free data to students in households with no access, whereas teachers were given 10 GB. Televised classes for pre-primary to grade 12 students and online classes using Google classroom are also being conducted.

2. **Training for teachers to support continuation of learning:** Across countries there has been a focus on building capacity of teachers to ensure continued learning through the wide array of distance education measures adopted, especially different media and online methodologies.

    a. **Cambodia**: Teachers are supported by central and provincial governments, by leveraging the potential of decentralised structures like school management commitees (SMCs) to organize peer enabling interactions between teachers and for them to receive professional and personal guidance through social messaging appliations like Whatsapp and Telegram.

    b. **China**: Based on China's five-phase approach to the COVID-19 pandemic (Phase 1: preparation; Phase 2: online learning; Phase 3: normalization of online learning ensuring 'no one is left behind'; Phase 4: core grades return to school; and Phase 5: full return), teacher preparation has focused on training for online learning including selection, development and use of learning resources and identifying and addressing students' learning gaps once schools reopen. Additionally, there are efforts to ensure teachers have instructions for home-school cooperation, psychological support, and organizing online symposia of experts. China has also engaged with experts to study teachers' current online teaching to inform future direction.

    c. **India**: In India, the government built on initiatives of technology-based solutions through its ICT@School programme including efforts to develop digital platforms to strengthen digital and online learning that involve teachers to use technology as a 'constructive tool' at theirs and learners' disposal. Supported by the Centre for Education Innovation and Action Research, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), COVID-19 responses will be built on research to shed light on teaching preparedness and equity concerns.

    d. **Maldives**: There is a three-phase strategy to train and certify 7000 teachers on 'Google Education', which was previously used to broaden and strengthen distance education. The country also needs to focus on pedagogical development of teachers, for which Maldives expressed it was seeking support from development partners.

3. **Various school reopening measures:** Strategies being considered included decentralising decision-making to ensure adequate infrastructure for the safe return to school, including sufficient WASH

facilities in schools, and others such as double-shifts and changes in timetables to ensure physical distancing.

4. **World Bank principles to support an education response strategy:** The World Bank (WB) shared three principles that provide a framework to support teacher effectiveness in different phases of the response to the pandemic including resilience, instruction and technology. More specifically, the WB stressed **resilience** by safeguarding teacher salaries and ensuring there are mechanisms to address stressful situations that teachers face such as communities of practice, etc. It also stressed **instructional** support to teachers for instance preparing them to address learning shortfalls effectively, assessing student learning, and using this opportunity to expedite other changes to teacher training. For **technology**, the WB focuses on providing teachers with access to technology such as in Kyrgyzstan where teachers received sim cards to ensure provide access to data as well as skills to use the technology effectively.

Concluding Remarks

The need for taking a cautionary approach to distance education and leveraging technology-based solutions was raised during the meeting. The use of technology should not result that countries regress to traditional, rote-learning models of education; nor should it exacerbate tendencies to use data-driven models to centralize decision-making at the cost of developing and building trust in the professional autonomy of teachers. In addition to protecting jobs and salaries, there is a need to guide efforts towards building on the professional identities of teachers and the need to avoid measures which move towards casualisation of the profession.

The presentations discussed a number of distance and online technological solutions implemented at country-level. However, details are limited on the scope and depth of teacher training, preparation and support. As mentioned in the seven dimensions discussed in the TTF guidance note on reopening schools, teachers will require significant assistance in the transition to online learning and using other distance educaton methodologies. Responses that reflect the TTF guidance note on returning to schools and the WB principles for effective response strategies will be instrumental to ensure teachers have the tools, knowledge and support to ensure the continuation of learning and deliver quality teaching.

The meeting also discussed aspects of the return to school including safety and health of teachers, psychological support and working conditions and rights as professionals. It also covered the issue of teachers' centrality in equity-backed strategies as underlined in the Teacher Task Force Call for Action on teachers. Countries can consider the TTF Guidance Note on the Return to School as well as the TTF Toolkit for School Leaders on the Reopening of Schools for guidance, tips and resources.

In order to move ahead, countries might also focus on highlighting (in detail) the financial implications of different strategies based on current weaknesses, and as relates to national priorities aligned to the TTF's seven dimensions for reopening schools. Moreover, the new TTF Knowledge Hub provides Country members and the wider education community with a central repository of quality resources on teachers and teaching for policy-makers, decisions-makers and teacher educators to remain knowledgeable of better practices and evidence-based research around teachers and teaching.

Annex 1: Concept note

Background and Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted education in an unprecedented way with, at its height, some 194 countries closing their schools affecting 1.58 billion learners from all levels and over 63 million primary and secondary teachers. Governments have had to act rapidly to continue providing quality education in a new environment, where face-to-face pedagogy is no longer possible and where many teachers lack skills related to ICT, distance education and education in emergencies.

Throughout school closures, governments have adopted various measures to ensure learning continuity. In some cases, this has meant working with infrastructure constraints, such as a lack of connectivity or devices. As countries plan to reopen schools, teachers' role will shift significantly for a second time. Teachers' knowledge of learners' needs and their pedagogical expertise will be critical to develop school reopening plans and responses. Teachers themselves have also been impacted by the crisis professionally and personally. Therefore, the voices of teachers, teacher educators and their representatives need to be included when designing context-sensitive resilience strategies.

Acknowledging these challenges, the Teacher Task Force (TTF) launched a Call to Action on Teachers that emphasises the following six key messages for governments and education stakeholders:

- preserve employment and wages;
- prioritise teachers' and learners' health, safety and well-being;
- include teachers in developing COVID-19 education responses;
- provide adequate professional support and training;
- put equity at the heart of education responses; and
- include teachers in aid responses.

Objectives of the regional meeting

The Asia-Pacific region includes countries which represent a wide range of socio-economic realities including countries leading in the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning, while others have significant infrastructural challenges. Additionally, some countries in the region struggle with inequalities regarding access to online and other forms of education. Notwithstanding these variations between and within countries, the virtual meeting seeks to provide a platform to engage in dialogue on the main challenges and potential and planned interventions related to teachers and teaching, including the reopening of schools.

The Regional Virtual meeting for the Asia-Pacific region was organised by the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 with the support of the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education (Bangkok) and the UNESCO New Delhi Office on 26 May 2020. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Understand the challenges faced by countries in addressing issues related to teachers and teaching while designing education responses to COVID-19;
- Share promising practices to support teachers, including training, psychosocial support, and others; and
- Highlight challenges and opportunities in the reopening of schools.

Some of the main questions to be covered included:
- How are governments ensuring adequate training and support for in-service teachers to deliver effective distance/online instruction? How prepared are education systems in deploying online platforms and supporting teachers in using digital technology?
- How are governments supporting teachers working in areas with poor or no internet connectivity?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for the reopening of schools and how to best include teachers in responses? How should governments support teachers to meet their professional and personal needs?
- What measures are in place or planned that consider vulnerable populations (e.g. girls, disabled learners, cultural and linguistic minorities, displaced persons) to ensure equity in teaching and learning and mitigate dropout?

Annex 2: Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting of Teacher Task Force Webinar Agenda and list of presenters

ITEM	TIME
Welcome and Introduction	5 mins • Chair: Mr Libing Wang, PhD, Chief, Section for Educational Innovation and Skills Development (EISD), UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education
Presentation of the TTF work	10 mins • Mr. Borhene Chakroun, Head a.i., Teacher Task ForceSecretariat, Director, Division for Policies and Lifelong LearningSystems, UNESCO
Countries perspective -4 country experiences	20 mins (5 mins each) • Cambodia: Dr.Samsideth Dy, Cambodia's Representative to the ITTF and Deputy Director-General for Education, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport • China: Mr Ren Yougun, D.G. for Teachers, Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China • India: Prof. Padma Sarangapani, Chairperson, Centre for Education, Innovation and Action Research, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. • Maldives: Dr Abdulla Rasheed, Minister of State for Education and Head of National Institute of Education
NGO/IGO intervention	5 mins • Dr Tara Béteille, Senior Economist, Head, Teacher Thematic Group, World Bank
Q&A and discussion	45 mins
Closing remarks	5 mins • Dr Ethel Agnes P Valenzuela, Director, SEAMEO Secretariat