Bangladesh Case Study
Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia
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UNESCO, as the United Nations’ specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

UNICEF

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Bangladesh Case Study

Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia

October 2021
Foreword

The pandemic caused a major children’s rights crisis: all service sectors being profoundly impacted, with the most disadvantaged being disproportionately affected.

COVID-19 – possibly the largest pandemic the world has ever seen - led to an economic crisis probably more radical and global than ever before; as well as disruption of learning on an unprecedented scale. The pandemic caused a major children's rights crisis: all service sectors being profoundly impacted, with the most disadvantaged being disproportionately affected.

In response, with support from the Global Partnership for Education, UNICEF and UNESCO joined forces with Mott MacDonald, Cambridge Education to carry out a situation analysis, primarily to generate analyses to inform strategic responses to the crisis going forward. While the extension and duration of the pandemic required to invest more time to produce the final analyses and reports, fortunately information had already been discussed through webinars and national conversations with Ministries of Education and other partners across large parts of the Asia Pacific region.

Furthermore, the reports continue to be of utmost relevance given subsequent waves of COVID-19 sweeping across the world in 2021 and very likely in 2022 as well. The task of learning from the crisis and how to mitigate its effects in education is on-going. More than one academic year has now been lost for many children. To ensure continuity of learning whilst schools are closed, the delivery of education is radically changing today through distance education: digital, blended or hybrid learning have become part of the new learning reality which all Governments, teachers and learners will have to adjust to.

While major efforts are needed to mitigate the learning loss of those children who return to school in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase, we must also remember that many children were not learning before the crisis and several million were not even in schools. The reports therefore also explore opportunities to build back better and to re-imagine education; to shift from fact-based didactic methodologies to competency-based approaches, which are more flexible, better respond to the holistic needs and aspirations of all children, and provide opportunities for life-long learning as per the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 agenda.

While the suite of reports provided within the Regional Situation Analysis are particularly relevant to the Asia Pacific region, contexts of course vary considerably across our huge region. At the same time, the reports may also provide insights that are relevant to other regions around the world. Hopefully the findings, including the country case studies, and regional budget needs analysis will help governments resume and accelerate progress towards SDG 4. The way education is conceptualized and delivered is changing fast, and the transformation journey will be steep and full of challenges. Governments, donors, all partners and the private sector will need to work together, not only to get the strategies and levels of investment right, but to build more resilient, effective and inclusive systems, able to deliver on the promise of education as a fundamental human right for all children, whether schools are open or closed.

Shigeru Aoyagi
Director
UNESCO Bangkok

Marcoluigi Corsi
Director a.i.
UNICEF East Asia and Pacific

George Laryea-Adjei
Regional Director
UNICEF South Asia
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**Md Zobayedur Rahman**
Director, Training Division
Directorate of Primary Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education

**MD. Mazharul Haque**
Assistant Specialist
National Academy for Primary Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education

**Md. Mostafa**
Senior Specialist
National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Ministry of Education

**Md. Afzal Hossain Sarwar**
Policy Specialist and Head-Future of Learning A2i, ICT Division, Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology

**Md. Nobej Uddin Sarker**
District Primary Education Officer (DPEO) District Primary Education Office – Nilphamari

**Md. Tajul Islam**
Assistant District Primary Education Officer (ADPEO) District Primary Education Office – Nilphamari

**Rizwanul Hoque**
Assistant District Primary Education Officer (ADPEO) District Primary Education Office- Nilphamari

**Swapan Kumar Das**
Upazila Education Officer (UEO) Upazila Primary Education Office- Dimla, Nilphamari

**Sharifa Akther**
Upazila Education Officer (UEO) Upazila Primary Education Office- Kishoreganj, Nilphamari

**Mohammad Sazzad Hossain**
District Primary Education Officer (DPEO) District Primary Education Office – Rangamati

**Nikhilesh Chakma**
Upazila Education Officer (UEO) Upazila Primary Education Office- Belaichari, Rangamati

**Jan E Alam**
Project Manager Sustainable Social Services in CHT (SSSCHT) Project, Rangamati Ministry of Chattogram Hill Tracts Affairs

**Narayan Kafle PhD**
Education Director
Save the Children-Bangladesh

**Safiqul Islam**
Director, BRAC Education Programme BRAC

**K M Enamul Hoque**
Deputy Director
Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)

**Md. Jahangir Alam**
Thematic Coordinator, Disabilityinclusive Development Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)

**Mong Thowai Ching**
Executive Director
Green Hill, Rangamati

**Lailunnahar**
District Coordinator,
Nilfamari BRAC, Nilfamari

**Md. Abdul Mannan**
Project Manager
ESDO, Jaldhaka, Nilphamari

**Tashmina Rahman**
Education Specialist
The World Bank

**Afroza Yasmin**
Education Officer UNICEF Chattogram Field Office

**Sifat-E-Islam**
Education Officer
UNICEF Rangpur Field Office

**Laila Farhana Apnan Banu**
Education Specialist
UNICEF Bangladesh

**Mahfuza Rahman**
Programme Officer
UNESCO Dhaka

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# List of acronyms

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADPEO</td>
<td>Assistant District Primary Education Officer</td>
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<td>AUEO</td>
<td>Assistant Upazila Education Officers</td>
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<td>BRAC</td>
<td>Building Resources Across Communities</td>
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<td>BIGD</td>
<td>BRAC Institute of Governance and Development</td>
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<td>CAMPE</td>
<td>Campaign for Popular Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBE</td>
<td>Community-based education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDC</td>
<td>Center for Disease Control and Prevention</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDD</td>
<td>Centre for Disability in Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHT</td>
<td>Chattogram Hill Tracts</td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>Coronavirus disease</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPEd</td>
<td>Diploma in Primary Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPEO</td>
<td>District Primary Education Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSHE</td>
<td>Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>EGE</td>
<td>Empowering Girls through Education</td>
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<td>ESDO</td>
<td>Eco-Social Development Organizations</td>
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<td>GoB</td>
<td>Government of Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>Higher Secondary School Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and communications technology</td>
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<td>LCG</td>
<td>Local Consultative Group</td>
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<td>MPL</td>
<td>Minimum Proficiency Levels</td>
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<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>MoHFW</td>
<td>Ministry of Health and Family Welfare</td>
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<td>MoPME</td>
<td>Ministry of Primary and Mass Education</td>
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<td>NAPE</td>
<td>National Academy for Primary Education</td>
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<td>NCTB</td>
<td>National Curriculum and Textbook Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>NSSS</td>
<td>National Social Security Strategy</td>
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<td>NSA</td>
<td>National Student Assessment</td>
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<td>PEDP</td>
<td>Primary Education Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPRC</td>
<td>Power and Participation Research Centre</td>
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<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parent Teacher Association</td>
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<td>PTI</td>
<td>Primary Teachers’ Training Institute</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEDP</td>
<td>Secondary Education Development Programme</td>
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<td>SLIP</td>
<td>School Level Improvement Plan</td>
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<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and vocational education and training</td>
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<td>UCEP</td>
<td>Underprivileged Children’s Educational Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UEO</td>
<td>Upazila Education Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UPEP</td>
<td>Upazila Primary Education Plan</td>
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<td>URC</td>
<td>Upazila Resource Centre</td>
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<td>WASH</td>
<td>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene</td>
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<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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UNICEF and UNESCO conducted a situational analysis of the effects of COVID-19 on education across the Asian continent and the responses of individual countries to this pandemic. Cambridge Education, part of Mott MacDonald, was commissioned by UNICEF and UNESCO to conduct this situational analysis. The objectives of the analysis are:

- To assess and estimate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector and its stakeholders (children, adolescents, teachers, parents, education officials, etc.) in Asia (East, Southeast and South Asia sub-regions);
- To examine the financial and policy implications of progress towards achieving SDG4-Education 2030;
- To identify examples of promising responses and strategies in education and associated social sectors, which can be shared with other countries.

This Situation Analysis has picked out examples of effective approaches in Bangladesh which could be replicated or adapted for use in other countries. The aim is to provide a deeper analysis of how Bangladesh has refocused its education system in a very short space of time and in very challenging circumstances to try to ensure children are safe and continue to engage with learning.

Background

When COVID-19 arrived, it quickly became obvious that this was an emergency unlike any that had gone before and would require a unique and tailored response. The Bangladesh Government is experienced in disaster management and is accustomed to working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at all levels of the system to provide a swift and comprehensive response. Their disaster management has been particularly effective in response to cyclones, which acted as an efficient early warning system; provision of shelter in cyclone-prone areas has led to minimal loss of life over the past few years, as compared to the 300,000 lives lost in the cyclone of 1970.1 As a result of experience and planning, there are thousands of trained people who can be quickly mobilized to respond to any sudden event.

All schools were closed at the start of the pandemic and, as yet, have not reopened. Over the past 25 years, Bangladesh has made great strides in increasing the enrolment of children in school at primary level. It has also achieved gender parity, and now has more girls enrolled in both primary and secondary schools than boys.2 In the past five years of the development process, Education Ministries have focused much more on improving quality, with major curriculum reforms currently taking place. However, learning achievement remains a major challenge. The Bangladesh Learning Poverty Brief in 2019, using data from the National Student Assessment (NSA) and Minimum Proficiency Levels (MPLs), stated that 57 per cent of children at late primary weren’t proficient in reading.3 The pre-existing learning situation in Bangladesh increases the challenge of meeting SDG 4 targets by 2030. The country will need to compensate for the learning lost during close to a year of school closures, and minimize dropout once they reopen.

One of the main challenges of both the pre-COVID-19 period and during the pandemic is how to reach and support the most marginalized and hard-to-reach children to participate in learning. Most children from marginalized communities who had enrolled in school in 20165 were in non-formal education and second-chance education, run by both the Government and the NGO sector. This highlights the importance of a joined-up coordinated and collaborative approach which enables the sharing of specific knowledge and the understanding of diverse barriers to learning, so that an appropriate response can be developed.

Effects of COVID-19

Remote learning cannot fully compensate for the lack of face-to-face education. For remote learning to be effective, there needs to be built-in support from a teacher, peers, parents, or community members so that learners can seek help when necessary. Without this interaction, learning can become passive, making it difficult for learners to stay motivated, particularly if they don’t understand a particular concept. In early years, face-to-face interaction is critical in the development of speaking and listening and social and fine motor skills, which are the foundations for the future. An Asian Development Bank (ADB) survey4 found that two-thirds of learners surveyed had no direct contact with teachers during lockdown, with teachers contacting girls slightly more often than boys, and the poorest quintile of children in rural contexts were contacted less frequently than other children.
Children who are already facing barriers to participation in learning were the most likely not to participate in any remote learning. Reasons included lack of technology and for ethnic minorities, and a lack of information due to the language barrier. The BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) survey of 5,000 students from urban slums and rural areas across Bangladesh in June 2020, found that during school closures the average number of hours that students in rural areas spent studying, including time at school, self-study and home tutoring, decreased from ten hours per day to two hours. Furthermore, the survey found that among its sample of students, those whose parents had the lowest education levels, were also studying the least. The Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC) Rapid Assessment study found that 14 per cent of students in their sample reported doing no study, while 56 per cent of students didn’t take part in online classes.

The above factors highlight the disparity in accessing learning for children from diverse backgrounds, with the most disadvantaged children least likely to have the parental support, the equipment, or the supportive environment to continue their studies away from school. As yet, there is no data on the learning loss suffered as a result of this reduced participation. It seems likely that, given the lack of face-to-face teaching, the reduction of teacher support, decreased motivation levels and learning hours, there will be significant learning loss for a generation of students. Once schools reopen, it will be essential to consider how they can assess the learning levels of returning students and find ways to support them to catch up. This would need a rethink of the curriculum at all ages to meet the actual learning needs of the students after such a significant absence.

There was an expectation that teachers would make the change from classroom teaching to supporting distance learning, for which most were not prepared. It was suggested during a stakeholder interview that for some teachers, this has brought benefits, as they have developed new skills in online teaching. Teachers have had the opportunity to access peer support and share learning with other teachers across the country and globally, from their home. Whilst this will have been true for many teachers, for others, the situation will have made them feel more isolated and anxious, struggling to do their job in a non-professional environment without social, emotional, or practical support. This also highlights the vastly different circumstances in which teachers are expected to continue working.
The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and Ministry of Education (MoE), manage the curriculum, administration, examinations, and day-to-day management of schools. During the pandemic, work had to be completed remotely, a challenge for a huge centralized system. At the local level, education officers, alongside their responsibility to support schools and teachers, were involved with COVID-19-related awareness-raising and distributed face masks among communities. All these changes will likely have caused disruptions to the everyday functioning, management, and development of the education sector.

At the end of May 2020, the World Vision report ‘Aftershocks’ reported on a national survey which showed that beatings by parents and guardians in Bangladesh had increased by 42 per cent and calls to helplines were up by 40 per cent. By the end of December 2020, children have still not returned to schools, so it is likely that this number will have risen by now.

Those households who are on the edge of poverty, and, therefore, vulnerable, are anticipated to see a drop in income of 42 per cent. At the same time as this decrease in income, there has been a price rise, particularly for potatoes and rice, leaving 91 per cent of the people surveyed in the Multi-Sector Anticipatory Impact and Needs Analysis without enough money to buy food. This drop in income may influence children’s ability to participate in learning in a variety of ways.

Challenges

Providing a quick response that kept 36.5 million children learning throughout this crisis. As a centralized system, the Ministries had to lead a response that would meet the needs of a diverse range of learners throughout the country.

Minimizing secondary effects which could prevent children from learning. During school closures, children had other challenges to contend with beyond continuing learning, which the government response needed to consider and plan for.

Adequately preparing teachers to adapt to supporting distance learning. With the closure of schools and a changed approach to learning, over half a million teachers needed to be prepared to use technology and provide support to their students within a short timeframe.

Responses

The suddenness of the pandemic necessitated a swift and practical response by the two Education Ministries. They mobilized working groups, consisting of Government officers, UN agencies, development partners, academia and NGOs to design learning provision through four major delivery mechanisms.

The Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) survey commented that the intention of the emergency response plan was to reach the most marginalized communities, but they found that even though there were many initiatives by NGOs and the Government to continue learning, the marginalized groups remained hard to reach. This challenge was recognized by all the actors in the education system. The Secretary MoPME instructed his staff to look for solutions to reach these learners, and local and national NGOs considered it part of their role to target hard-to-reach and marginalized communities.

This inequity of provision potentially widens the learning gap for children who do not live in communities served by an innovative NGO or Government officer. At the field level, cluster mechanisms, which have the potential to reach every teacher, could have been utilized in every Upazila to give teachers orientation and training so they could find ways to reach out and support all students more effectively.

The Government worked to keep teacher training running. Diploma in Primary Education (DPEd), the Government’s initial teacher training programme, was delivered online by the Primary Teachers’ Training Institutes (PTIs), leaving trainees to access it from their home. Teachers learning from each other proved to be one of the most effective forms of professional development during school closures. Teachers were encouraged to record online lessons, and many can be found on Facebook, with evidence that they have learned from watching each other’s videos, as their teaching skills developed over time. This effort by teachers to provide online lessons is to be applauded, and by taking the initiative in this way, they are independently developing essential professional skills and knowledge which can be built on for the future. As well as building on skills, lessons can also be learned from a professional-development approach which was born out of need, individualized and self-initiated.

Despite these health messages reaching into communities, not everyone was able to follow the handwashing guidelines as they didn’t have adequate facilities. Many people work and socialize in overcrowded public spaces and live in communal multi-generational households and villages. This, combined with people not understanding terms such as ‘social distancing’ and being unwilling to wear masks, caused great difficulty in getting people to adhere to rules and change their behaviours.
A thread running through all the documents around effective COVID-19 response emphasizes the importance of involving communities in the planning and decision making. It is likely that the speed of response necessary and the centralized nature of the system made it difficult, particularly for the two Education Ministries to include any substantial community consultation when building their strategy. As would be expected, the main points of contact with communities were at the local level. In both Nilphamari and Rangamati, there were regular meetings between local government officers, school management committees, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and guardians to discuss continuity of learning and school reopening. Information and support for communities also came from local and national NGOs, who continued to work very closely with groups of parents and local leaders to give targeted support.

There were extra measures for families who were financially affected by the crisis. As part of its relief and support measures, the Government announced a plan to provide a monthly cash aid of Tk 2,000-3,000 to 3.4 million families. Cash was sent out starting from April 2020 for three months through mobile fund transfer. In July however, less than half the households had received the assistance. Economists argue that at least ten million families need this support to survive through the crisis. Many fear that hunger, not the coronavirus, will kill them. The Government increased the stipends for primary education students.

The National Response and Recovery Plan, developed by the Government, strongly supported by UNICEF, outlines in detail the areas that need addressing when schools reopen, with the aim of ensuring that all children, including the most marginalized, return to school as soon as possible. With schools not yet opened, both the MoE and MoPME have been working to develop school reopening guidelines. MoPME have published their guidelines, which are informed by the UNICEF/UNESCO/WFP/World Bank framework for reopening schools.

The Government is looking towards the future and has a series of ideas of how building back better will look. This is described in the National Response and Recovery Plan. Through discussions with stakeholders, some key areas where they could build back better and increase the resilience of the system were articulated. Initiatives have been built into the National Response and Recovery Plan which will eventually feed back into the fourth Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP4) and Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP). The document outlines the need to accelerate plans that were already in process, as well as use lessons learned during the pandemic response to influence future direction.

**Partnerships**

Given the size of the challenge and the coverage of schools, it was essential that the response was the result of joint planning among the different actors in the education sector, and that the vast range of expertise was mobilized to provide an effective response. Working collaboratively is a long-standing approach for Bangladesh. However effective inter-ministerial, interdepartmental, and national-subnational coordination/collaboration has always been a challenge for better educational management and governance.

The two Education Ministries, MoE and MoPME, lead the sector-wide programmes in primary and secondary education. In addition, there are well-established mechanisms at both central and field level for people from across both the formal and non-formal education sector to come together and share their expertise.

As you would expect in a centralized system, the MoE and MoPME provided large response programmes that had mass reach, supported by local education offices and NGO interventions, which were more targeted at reaching the most marginalized communities. There has been local-level sharing of learning, leading to pockets of good practice, but it is hard to gauge how far these programmes and initiatives are coordinated across the country so that provision is equitable.

There was a comment from one stakeholder that the partnership and collaborative approach to develop the plan for broadcast and online learning had been particularly effective. The task was completed very quickly, and some of the plans, such as the provision of support through mobile phones, was influenced by work that was being done at the field level.

At the field level, NGOs and Government have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the needs of the communities in which they work, meaning they were able to reach into different communities across the country and supplement the Central Government provision. Partnership was very much valued by both local Government officers and the NGOs, who felt that working together was beneficial for communities, as they had been able to pool their resources and reach as many people as possible.

It was also at this level where there was strong evidence of cross-sectoral working. Health messages have been communicated in many ways to communities. This is due to a concerted effort by Local Government offices and NGOs working together to get the messages across to as many different communities as possible, using a variety of local mechanisms. Teachers were at the forefront of
this community work, contacting families, not only to ascertain learning needs, but also to enquire about their financial, health or food situation. Where needs were identified, teachers tried to link households into NGO relief programmes. This is a good example of how different organizations have worked together, with a common goal to provide a coordinated service to local communities and is something that could be built upon in the future.

Undoubtedly it was beneficial for communities to have this sort of collaborative approach, and many children were reached because of the knowledge sharing, joint learning, and planning between the different actors in the education sector. Although there has been government/NGO collaboration in the past, stakeholders commented that the spirit felt very different this time and they were keen for this type of joint working to continue in the future. Although there were successes in terms of speed and broad coverage of the response, the evidence shows that learning hours were significantly reduced and there were low levels of access to the delivery mechanisms and content. Learners were not equitably reached, leaving behind the most disadvantaged.

Once schools reopen, it will be essential to consider how the partnership work can be further strengthened and utilized to support remedial programmes or catch up programmes to mitigate learning loss. As the education system grows and more emphasis is placed on ensuring participation of hard-to-reach groups, a redefined partnership between Government and NGO development partners and the private sector could help put the needs of marginalized children even more at the forefront of future planning and enable solutions to be found to challenges that are embedded within communities.

**Lessons learned**

One of the main lessons has been around the need to make the system more resilient to any future emergency situations. This highlights the importance of forward planning and preparation throughout the system, looking at issues such as continuity of learning, household support, preparation of teachers, schools and local education offices and roles and responsibilities throughout the education system.

This response has shown how working in partnership with organizations across the education sector and from outside can provide a swift and relatively comprehensive learning programme to reach a large number of children.
While technology can support learning, it is not the complete answer. Technology has its limitations and reliance on it can increase the learning divide which disproportionately affects hard-to-reach and marginalized communities. Future planning needs to put enabling engagement, participation and learning of the most marginalized at the forefront.

Teachers will self-develop professionally when they see a clear need and benefit of doing so. There needs to be improved infrastructure and support for teachers, so they have the physical space and equipment to participate in distance learning and support pupils. Well-targeted training and development opportunities based on a clear need and through a variety of mechanisms are essential.

Well-documented data and evidence informs strategy and decision making about how best to ensure participation and achievement of all children in education. Increasing involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in community monitoring of school performance can support this process.

Building assessment into distance learning would help generate a better understanding of what children have been learning and make it easier for teachers to know what to teach when back in school. It would also serve the purpose of finding out what type of activities and lessons are able to engage children and improve learning outcomes.

The health and well-being of pupils needs to be built into the curriculum in future, to support children. At the same time, there need to be stronger referral systems so that children can access the support they need. This is where partnership could be effectively leveraged, using the different expertise of NGOs and the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) in this area.

Localized initiatives enabled targeting of hard-to-reach communities. Using teachers as a contact point for families enabled them to reach all their pupils and give them learning support as well as understand household needs and tap into local/national support available to them. All children should be entitled to schooling which meets their needs, regardless of their situation.

**Recommendations**

There have been many successes in response to school closures during COVID-19, but there are still major challenges. The first action to be taken is to use the school opening guidelines to make sure that schools are reopened safely and face-to-face learning can resume.

At the heart of the challenge for the future is the question of how to compensate for the learning loss suffered during COVID-19 and at the same time improve the overall quality of learning so that the learners who were not achieving required levels of literacy and numeracy can be taught most effectively. This includes the need to address issues around access, quality and participation.

**Recommendation 1:**
**Regain learning losses**

Address children’s learning losses through remediation, focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy and teaching at the right level. Enable easier access to learning materials.

**Recommendation 2:**
**Distance learning**

Evaluate distance learning as an alternative tool for education provision in different circumstances and as a way for disadvantaged learners to access education: those unable to travel to a school setting every day because they are working, or those with mobility challenges, for example. Build on the successes, strengthen distance learning approaches to reach marginalized communities and provide alternatives for completion of higher secondary. Distance learning could also provide an alternative to children who are overage to study at their own pace.

**Recommendation 3:**
**Blended learning**

Introduce blended learning into schools to support the improvement of learning achievement.
Recommendation 4: Teacher training and parents’ engagement

Prepare teachers to deliver distance learning and use it as a platform for teachers to change the way they teach. Support parent-teacher collaboration so that parents and guardians know what their child should be able to do in each grade, and can encourage learning at home.

Recommendation 5: Local partnerships

Support and encourage education officers to work in partnership with local NGOs and CSOs to devise and implement local solutions. Working together would strengthen the knowledge and understanding of communities and the production of data/information about what works to enable all children to participate in learning and stay in school if possible.

Conclusion

With schools in Bangladesh closed for over a year, the decrease in learning time and inequitable access to alternative methods of education and support will lead to learning loss for most children, with the most disadvantaged left further behind. Alongside this learning loss, there have been other effects on children, which threaten growth and development and increase the risk of dropping out. Teachers have also faced changes in teaching methods for which they were unprepared, and many lack protected time and space to work. It will be the responsibility of the whole education sector to make sure that children are not disadvantaged by this gap in their schooling. This will mean effectively using assessment to drive learning according to need. There will need to be catch-up programmes and remedial measures implemented with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged children.

The Government and partners responded remarkably quickly to developing approaches for supporting continuity of learning while schools were closed. They mobilized national and local expertise from across the sector to create a response and recovery plan. At the same time, they set up four working groups to plan how different media, TV, radio, online platforms, and mobile phones could be used to support continuity of learning. These responses had broad coverage across the country but were not able to reach every community. Partnership at all levels and across sectors was essential to the sharing of learning and reaching remote communities with solutions that were flexible and adaptable. Although these localized solutions were not consistently applied across the country, this combination of a broad response being supported by local initiatives is model that can be learned from, both within Bangladesh and beyond.

The challenge now will be to use the learning from this experience to strengthen education in Bangladesh. Building on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that have developed and emerged throughout the sector could transform teaching, schools, and the way that they are managed. Mobilizing community members and parents to get more involved in learning would increase the value of those skills that are developed outside a formal setting and benefit many children’s future. With this type of rethink of education, Bangladesh could not only increase resilience for the future but also build a better system, which could improve learning outcomes.
Country fact sheet

The table below provides a snapshot of the pandemic, the response of the education sector and some background information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION</th>
<th>INDICATOR/QUESTION</th>
<th>INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epidemiology</strong></td>
<td>Date of first confirmed case</td>
<td>8 March 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date of first confirmed death</td>
<td>19 March 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COVID-19 cases and deaths over time</td>
<td>297,083 cases and 3,983 deaths [17]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School closure</strong></td>
<td>Were schools closed, partially or fully</td>
<td>Schools were fully closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date of school closures</td>
<td>18 March 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date of school reopening</td>
<td>As of 19 January 2021, schools remain closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have schools reopened fully or partially</td>
<td>Not yet reopened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What phase is the country currently?</td>
<td>Phase 1 - schools remain closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase 1, 2 or 3 and is this nationally or regionally?</td>
<td>Phase 1 - schools remain closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School population</td>
<td>36.5 million students [10]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• pre-primary – 8.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• primary – 14.8 million</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• secondary – 21.7 million</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• tertiary – 15.4 million</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Out of school – 6.7 million</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>170,600 education institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 million teachers deployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key marginalized and vulnerable groups</strong></td>
<td>Key marginalized and vulnerable groups affected by the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector</td>
<td>Children with disabilities, children living in remote areas in the Hill Tracts, Hoar, Char and tea garden areas, children from the poorest families, especially the urban poor, Rohingya refugees, children from fishing families, children of sex workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education system structure</strong></td>
<td>Brief description of the structure of the education system – federal or centralized</td>
<td>Centrally-run systems with administrative and school support offices at District and Upazila/Thana level. Large non-formal sector run by both Government and many non-governmental organizations supporting the Government’s formal education system. BRAC, the largest provider of non-formal education for children who have dropped out of or never attended formal schools. Faith-based schools (madrasas) A large network of low-cost private schools and higher-cost English medium and Bangla private schools provide an alternative education to government schools for those who can afford to send their children there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIMENSION</td>
<td>INDICATOR/QUESTION</td>
<td>INFORMATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-COVID-19 progress towards SDG4 indicators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Enrolment Ratio, primary school</td>
<td>120.75 %</td>
<td>112.36 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Enrolment Ratio, secondary school</td>
<td>78.28 %</td>
<td>67.09 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted Primary School Net Attendance Rate</td>
<td>89 %</td>
<td>83 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted Lower Secondary School Net Attendance Rate</td>
<td>65 %</td>
<td>51 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of children out of school (primary school age)</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of children out of school (lower secondary school)</td>
<td>8 %</td>
<td>18 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Parity Index, primary school</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Parity Index, lower secondary school</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction
Given the size of the challenge and the coverage of schools, it was essential that the response was the result of joint planning among the different actors in the education sector, and that the vast range of expertise was mobilized to provide an effective response.

### 1.1. Background to the study

The global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic makes it unique in modern times, affecting the whole world with the twin shocks of a health emergency and an economic recession. This will lead to long-term costs on human capital accumulation, development prospects and welfare. The pandemic, though global, has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable and marginalized members of society.

Some of the most vulnerable children felt the impact of COVID-19-related restrictions from the moment nationwide lockdowns were put in place to control the spread of the disease. Markets, workshops, farms and factories closed, leaving children and families stranded. For many, the fear and uncertainty continue. Some minorities find themselves stigmatized and accused of causing or spreading the pandemic. Deep-rooted inequalities in societies are being exposed.

Asia, with its huge population and many overcrowded cities, is potentially very vulnerable to COVID-19 which spreads through close contact with infected people. The contexts within which the people of South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia, are coping with the virus are vastly different, with a disparity in living conditions and varying degrees of access to and quality of essential services such as health and education. Across the continent, there is vast inequality between the rich and poor and, therefore, different levels of resilience to the shocks that this disease has brought, putting the poor at long-term risk that reaches far beyond contracting the virus. This region regularly suffers from shocks which lead to localized learning interruptions. For example, during the pandemic, Bangladesh and India were in the path of a cyclone and recent floods across the continent which have threatened communities and resulted in a double shock.

This Situation Analysis has been undertaken as part of the broader analysis initiated by UNICEF and UNESCO to provide a snapshot of the response of the education sector to the effects of COVID-19 across Asia. It considers the direct effects of school closures and reopenings and identifies the initial impact that this may have had on learners, their families, and the overall education system. In so doing, it aims to develop insights based on the variety of responses to the pandemic with a view to assessing their efficacy in Asia.

It seeks an understanding of the contextual factors that may have supported or hindered learning, with particular attention on the most disadvantaged groups, who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. For this, the analysis has the following objectives:

- To assess and estimate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector and its stakeholders in Asia;
- To examine the financial and policy implications of progress towards achieving SDG4-Education 2030; and
- To identify examples of promising responses and strategies in education and associated social sectors, which can be shared with other countries.

This Situation Analysis identifies examples of effective country approaches which could be replicated or adapted for use in other countries. Following the development of the case studies (including this Bangladesh Situation Analysis), the overall study will include an overview of the situation in each of the three Asian sub-regions, as well as an overview of the region.
1.2. Methodology

This case study is part of a broader study into the impact of COVID-19 across Asia. The case studies have been supported by the UNICEF and UNESCO country offices which have provided relevant information and assisted the researchers in contacting relevant officials to collect country-specific documents, grey literature and data.

In addition to a literature review, each case study also involved interviews with key stakeholders (listed in Annex). This provided an opportunity to hear more about the challenges faced and the strategies developed by people at the frontline of the response, and provided a space for discussion and debate on lessons learned and what still needs to be done.

A cross-cutting focus on the most vulnerable members of society, particularly highlighting girls and learners with disabilities, has been used across the assessment. The aim of this is to identify interventions which have been able to successfully reach the most marginalized communities and how their different needs were addressed to increase accessibility and participation for all.

1.3. Structure of the case study

The case studies are divided up into four sections. After this introduction and a country fact sheet, Chapter 2 discusses the effects of COVID-19 on the education system against four dimensions (see Figure 2 below); challenges are identified and then the responses are set out against the three phases of school re-opening (see Figure 1 below) depending on the specific context of each case study country. Chapter 3 provides a deep dive into a particular theme, which was identified in each case study country by the UNICEF and UNESCO country teams and Chapter 4 provides an overview of the lessons learned, providing specific recommendations for Bangladesh, as well as for other countries on building back better and increasing the resilience of the education system to future shocks.

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**Figure 1 | Three Phases of School Reopening**

1. Prior to reopening
2. Reopening process
3. Schools reopened

**Figure 2 | Four Dimensions of Analysis of Effects**

- Access to and participation in learning
- Safe operations
- Health, well-being and protection
- Finances
02

Effects of and response to COVID-19 on the education sector in Bangladesh
2.1. Country background

Bangladesh has strong mechanisms in place to manage emergencies, vastly minimizing the effect of disasters which have impacted the country over the years. Response to emergencies is led by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) whose vision is not just about response but building the resilience of the population.

“Mission of MoDMR: To bring a paradigm shift in disaster management from conventional response and relief to a more comprehensive risk reduction culture and to promote food security as an important factor in ensuring the resilience of the community to hazards.”

When COVID-19 arrived, it quickly became obvious that this was an emergency unlike any that had gone before and would require a unique and tailored response, different from a sudden event. The Bangladesh Government is experienced in disaster management and accustomed to working with NGOs at all levels of the system to provide a swift and comprehensive response. Their disaster management has been particularly effective in response to cyclones, which acted as an efficient early warning system; provision of shelter in cyclone-prone areas has led to minimal loss of life over the past few years, as compared to 500,000 lives lost in the cyclone of 1970. As a result of experience and planning, there are thousands of trained people who can be quickly mobilized to respond to any sudden event.

Alongside the current pandemic, at the time of research, the Bangladesh Government was also working to minimize the damage caused by Cyclone Amphan in April 2020 and monsoon flooding in June 2020, which placed a strain on time and resources. More than 1.3 million children were affected by these floods, with an estimated half a million families losing their homes, further exacerbating the existing emergency situation.

All schools were closed at the start of the pandemic and, as yet, have not reopened. Over the past 25 years, Bangladesh has made great strides in increasing the enrolment of children in school at primary level. It has also achieved gender parity, and now has more girls enrolled in both primary and secondary schools than boys.

In the past five years of the development process, Education Ministries have focused much more on improving quality, with a major curriculum reform currently taking place. However, learning achievement remains a major challenge. The Bangladesh Learning Poverty Brief in 2019, using data from NSA and MPL stated that 57 per cent of children at late primary weren’t proficient in reading.

The pre-existing learning situation in Bangladesh increases the challenge of meeting SDG 4 targets by 2030. The country will need to compensate for the learning lost during close to a year of school closures, and minimize drop-out once they reopen.

The benefits of education on the lives of children and on their journey into adulthood is well documented. People who have an education are more likely to send their children to school, less likely to subject their daughters to...
early marriage and are in more of a position to help their children with schoolwork. They are likely to earn more, making them less vulnerable to sliding back into poverty when there is disruption to their lives. The closure of schools for such a long period of time was bound to have a significant impact on people’s lives.

Manusher Jonno Foundation, a non-profit organization working for the poor and the marginalized, estimated that there were about 30 million marginalized people in Bangladesh in 2016, all with a diverse range of needs. The organization carried out a survey in 2016 among a sample of marginalized communities in Bangladesh and found that they generally had very low levels of access to basic services, such as health, education and sanitation, all critical factors in being able to benefit from the pandemic responses and stay healthy. As would be expected from this, among the targeted, most marginalized communities in the survey, primary enrolment rate was 69.3 per cent, lower than the national rural rate of 78.48 per cent. At secondary level they found that the gap was even wider with a 58.27 per cent enrolment rate among the most marginalized communities compared to 72.28 per cent in rural communities.

“One of the main challenges of both the pre-COVID-19 period and during the pandemic is how to reach and support the most marginalized and hard-to-reach children to participate in learning. The majority of children from marginalized communities enrolled in school in 2016, were in non-formal education and second-chance education, run by both the government and the NGO sector. This highlights the importance of a joined-up coordinated and collaborative approach which enables the sharing of specific knowledge and the understanding of diverse barriers to learning, so that an appropriate response can be developed.

The pandemic is first and foremost seen as a health emergency, so education is not a universal priority. The Multi-Sectoral Anticipatory Impact and Needs Analysis exercise undertaken by the Needs Assessment Working group, surveyed communities in the most at-risk geographical areas across the country. They identified immediate and medium-term priorities for minimizing the impact of COVID-19. Community and key informants placed education as the least of their priorities for intervention, with food security and nutrition, hygiene, sanitation and dignity, income and employment, and health taking priority. For many people, in a time of crisis, education becomes a luxury rather than an essential need, increasing the risk of drop-out once schools are reopened. The purpose of this chapter is to show the effects that COVID-19 has had on learners who have been out of school due to the closures, and how the education system has responded to the challenge of ensuring continuity of learning. This study is mostly concerned with the response for children at formal schools, but as many children are educated at non-formal schools it also covers aspects of that response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION SYSTEM</th>
<th>ACHIEVEMENTS</th>
<th>RISKS DUE TO COVID-19</th>
<th>CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • 36.5 million learners  
• Formal schools  
• Non-formal centres  
• Second-chance education  
• Madrassa  
• Private schools (English and Bangla medium) | • Gross enrolment:  
  » Primary (2018)  
  » Females 120.75 per cent  
  » Males 112.36 per cent  
  » Secondary (2019)  
  » Females 78.28 per cent  
  » Males 67.09 per cent  
• Gender parity in primary 1.05  
• Gender parity in secondary 1.26 | • Increased dropout more likely for girls and children in poor and already marginalized families  
• Learning loss  
• 250,000 learners waiting for second chance education who may never return | • Density of population  
• Cyclone in April 2020  
• Floods in August/September 2020  
• Refugee crisis in Cox’s Bazar, also impacting the host community  
• Large numbers of the population reliant on day labouring  
• Remote border areas in Chittagong Hill Tracts |
2.2. Effects of COVID-19 against four dimensions

There were many surveys on the impact of COVID-19 and the subsequent responses by prominent international organizations. The following section integrates the information and data from some of those surveys to provide a picture of the different factors that affected children’s ability to continue learning during school closures.

Access to and participation in learning

Learners’ participation in learning during COVID-19

With schools closed for just under a year during the pandemic, all learners were deprived of face-to-face education. There is significant evidence from other crises around the world, which shows that being out of school for a short period of time has long-term effects on children’s learning. After missing school for three months due to an earthquake in Pakistan, children were found, four years later, to be 1.5 years behind in learning compared to their peers who did not live near the earthquake fault line. Experience from the Ebola crisis shows that significant time away from schooling will have an adverse effect on both enrolment and learning, particularly affecting those already vulnerable.

During school closures, the Ministry of Mass and Primary Education (MoPME) and the Ministry of Education (MoE), worked with stakeholders to provide a range of opportunities for continuity of learning, to reach as many learners as possible. However, remote learning cannot fully compensate for lack of face-to-face education. If remote learning is to be effective, there needs to be built-in support from teachers, peers, parents, or community members so that learners can seek help when necessary. Without this interaction, learning can become very passive, making it difficult for learners to stay motivated, particularly if they don’t understand a particular concept. In early years, face-to-face interaction is critical to developing speaking and listening, and social and fine motor skills, which are the foundations for the future.

An ADB survey found that two-thirds of learners surveyed had no direct contact with teachers during lockdown, with teachers contacting girls slightly more often than boys, and the poorest quintile of children in rural contexts were contacted less frequently than other children.

86 per cent of those surveyed had no support for learning other than the teacher. A Multi-Sector Anticipatory Impact and Needs Analysis Study looked at the support parents in the lowest income areas of the country had received to enable them to help their children. They found that there was little communication from schools or support for them to help children learn, making it difficult for many parents to support their child’s learning.

- 38 per cent of parents indicated no continuous educational support to children in lockdown.
- 60 per cent of parents indicated that there had been no regular communication from schools about learning continuity.
- 42 per cent had not heard of any remote-based education activities.

Two studies carried out by BRAC looked at the levels of participation in learning in different communities in the country during the pandemics and found that learning time decreased, and participation levels were low during school closures. Children who were already facing barriers to participation in learning were the most likely not to participate in any remote learning. Reasons included lack of technology and, for ethnic minorities, a lack of information due to language barriers.

Despite these studies being limited in the number of respondents, there were revealing findings about participation. The BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) survey of 5,000 students from urban slums and rural areas across Bangladesh in June 2020, found that during school closures the average number of hours that students in rural areas spent studying, including time at school, self-study and home tutoring, decreased from ten hours per day to two hours. Furthermore, the survey found that among its sample of students, those whose parents had the lowest education levels, were also studying the least. The BRAC Rapid Assessment study found that...
found that 14 per cent of students in their sample reported doing no study, while 56 per cent of students didn’t take part in online classes.

“Field data suggests that 56 per cent of students are not taking part in online lessons or Sangsad TV. This non-participation is more evident among the students of ethnic minorities (75 per cent), madrassa students (68 per cent), students with disabilities (61 per cent) and those living in rural areas (60 per cent).”

The ADB survey looked at motivation levels for studying before and after school closures and found that more than half of learners were less motivated than when they had attended school.

The BRAC Rapid Assessment study revealed differences in reasons for not studying between rural and urban students. ‘Lack of direction from school’ was the most popular reason for rural children not studying, followed by ‘food insecurity’ and ‘mental health issues, including depression, isolation and anxiety’ among urban students.

It is also likely that many students may lack a quiet space at home for their studies. These findings highlight the wide effect that COVID-19 has had on learners far beyond being unable to go to school, emphasising that support for learners needs to extend beyond the provision of lessons. The above factors highlight the disparity in accessing learning for children from diverse backgrounds, with the most disadvantaged children the least likely to have parental support, the equipment needed, or a supportive environment to continue their studies away from school.

As yet there is no data on the learning loss suffered because of this reduced participation. It seems likely that, given the lack of face-to-face teaching, the reduction of teacher support, decreased motivation levels and learning hours, there will be significant learning loss for a generation of students. Once schools reopen it will be essential to consider how they can assess the learning levels of returning students and find ways to support them to catch up. This would need a rethink of the curriculum at all ages to meet the actual learning needs of students after such a significant absence.

**Teachers**

As mentioned above, not all teachers were in contact with their students during school closures. Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) found that one of the difficulties for them was a lack of directives around what they should do, which led to many teachers being under-used. Support from education officers will have been likely reduced during lockdown, which left most teachers trying to manage new delivery processes with little support.

With 62 per cent of primary school teachers being female, there will likely have been many family and household demands on them. Finding protected time to support students from home or take part in training would have been a significant challenge for many female teachers. Government teachers continued to receive pay and had job security. By contrast, NGO and private school teachers were worried about being unpaid or underpaid. NGO teachers received between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of their salary, but teachers in low-cost private schools suffered most because their schools were generating very little income and were unable to pay wages.

According to an ADB survey, 68.7 per cent of households were significantly affected by a decrease in income, averaging a 21 per cent drop. Many teachers will have been among that number.
At the same time, there was an expectation for teachers to make the change from classroom teaching to supporting distance learning, for which most were not prepared. It was suggested during a stakeholder interview that, for some teachers, this has brought about benefits, as they have developed new skills in online teaching. Teachers have had the opportunity to access peer support and share learning with other teachers across the country and globally, from their home. While this will have been true for many teachers, for others, the situation will have made them feel more isolated and anxious, struggling to do their job in a non-professional environment without social, emotional, or practical support. This also highlights the vastly different circumstances in which teachers are expected to continue working.

All these factors are likely to have adversely affected the ability of teachers in all types of schools to support students to continue learning throughout the school closures.

**Education systems**

The education sector had to respond quickly to this unusual situation, and it will have affected the functioning of the Ministries at a critical time. There is little information about the impact on the education system, but at a time when officials at all levels had to make quick decisions about education, they were facing a national lockdown, having to change their methods of communication with each other and schools. They also faced uncertainty about the length of time they had to plan for. As well as plan for the immediate educational response to the situation, look for new ways of working and keep all areas of the system running, they also had to look toward the future and think about how to get children back into schools.

MoPMe and MoE manage the curriculum, administration, examinations, and day-to-day management of schools. During the pandemic, work had to be completed remotely, a challenge for a huge centralized system. At the local level, education officers, alongside their responsibility to support schools and teachers, were involved with COVID-19-related awareness-raising and the distribution of face masks among communities. All these changes are likely to have caused disruptions to the everyday functioning, management and development of the education sector.

**Safe operations**

A small-scale Save the Children perceptions survey of 121 children found that 98 per cent of them knew about COVID-19 and how to keep themselves safe.\(^{58}\) The BRAC Rapid Assessment survey\(^{59}\) backed this up with findings that all but four of the 1,938 student respondents were well informed about the virus and got their information from three main sources: the media, teachers and parents. However, according to UNICEF/WHO data,\(^{60}\) approximately 107 million people in Bangladesh do not have adequate handwashing facilities at home, which affects their ability to apply their knowledge of safe practices. The Multi-Sector Anticipatory Impact and Needs Analysis Study\(^{61}\) found that about 15 per cent of people in remote and marginalized communities don’t have safe sanitation, and about 50 per cent of people don’t follow proper handwashing-related hygiene,\(^{62}\) putting them more at risk of catching the virus.
With the halting of the school feeding programme, 2.9 million children have missed out on at least one nutritious meal per day. Bangladesh has made great strides in improving nutrition levels, particularly among those under five years of age, even though they are still above the global average for malnourishment at that age.

As part of the sector-wide programmes, MoPME and MoE have been slowly improving latrine and handwashing facilities in schools. Over 80 per cent of schools at primary level and 93 per cent at secondary have limited or basic water services but only slightly more than 50 per cent of all schools have adequate handwashing facilities. This will present a challenge for safe hygiene and sanitation practices when children eventually return to school.

Health, well-being, and protection

The financial shocks that have been brought about due to the emergence of COVID-19 have had an impact on the physical and mental health of households.

With the halting of the school feeding programme, 2.9 million children have missed out on at least one nutritious meal per day. Bangladesh has made great strides in improving nutrition levels, particularly among those under five years of age, even though they are still above the global average for malnourishment at that age.

One stakeholder during interviews highlighted the issue of decreasing security for girls and women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. He commented that this had led to higher incidences of rape and murder.

Underprivileged Children’s Educational Programme (UCEP) Bangladesh, a non-profit organization that provides quality second-chance education to underprivileged children and youth and decent employment through technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and skill development, conducted a 2020 survey to estimate the impact of COVID-19 on the workplace. Study findings show that 30 per cent of children will not return to school from child labour due to the pandemic. Additionally, the assessment of child marriage among students of UCEP general schools revealed that 53 per cent of the girls were married by their 18th birthday during July and August in 2020, and about 50 per cent of child marriage was a direct result of financial and social insecurity. These girls will not come back to school from their in-law’s house.

All these factors will have a long-term impact on families, which will affect children’s ability to participate in education.

Finance

Demand for ready-made garments reduced during the fourth quarter of the financial year, service industries were disrupted, and there were losses in the agricultural sector, all impacting both the economy and employment levels. Economic growth dropped to two per cent in 2020 and the outlook for 2021 projects a further deceleration to 1.6 per cent. However, growth is expected to recover in the medium term.
Youth unemployment levels were projected to increase from 11.9 per cent in 2019 to 24.8 per cent in 2020 after six months of containment, with over 1,500 full-time jobs estimated to be lost. Most of these job losses were expected to be from agriculture, retail, construction, and textiles, which both employ a lot of people and have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Those who rely on daily labour will also have been particularly affected due to drastic slowdowns in, and disappearance of, day work as the country shut down.

“Poverty is expected to increase substantially in the short term, with the highest impact on daily and self-employed workers in the non-agricultural sector and salaried workers in the manufacturing sector. Urban areas will continue to be disproportionately affected, with an estimated 68 per cent of directly-affected workers located in Dhaka and Chittagong.”

Those households on the edge of poverty and, therefore, vulnerable, are anticipated to see a drop in income of 42 per cent. At the same time as this decrease in income, there has been a price rise, particularly for potatoes and rice, leaving 91 per cent of people surveyed in the Multi-Sector Anticipatory Impact and Needs Analysis without enough money to buy food.

This drop in income may influence children’s ability to participate in learning in a variety of ways:

- Decreased household income will increase the likelihood of children being required to work rather than study. The BIGD survey found that the percentage of children, working for more than two hours per day to support the family’s income, rather than participating in learning, had risen from four per cent to 16 per cent. This was not disaggregated by sex, so it’s not possible to tell if girls or boys were more adversely affected. However societal norms among low-income families would suggest that girls are more likely to be involved in household chores while boys are more likely to be involved in work outside the home.

- Family anxiety and stress levels have increased with food security being a major cause. Families are likely to have to use different means to find money, including using the safety net of precious assets such as jewellery or household furniture to raise cash. This level of anxiety in households will also affect children’s well-being, making studying challenging.

- People have prioritized survival, so there has been an estimated 46,000 phones disconnected during the pandemic as household incomes decreased, potentially having an impact on children’s education as lessons and support through mobile phones was one of the responses to support continuity of learning.

### 2.3. Main challenges faced by the education sector that influenced their response

All the above effects will have profound consequences for children’s learning and provided a range of challenges for the Ministries charged with leading on education to address. These challenges included:

**Challenge 1**

*Providing a quick response that kept 36.5 million children learning throughout this crisis.* With schools closing on 18 March 2020, the MoE and MoPME faced the challenge of ensuring that learning continued, so that learners didn’t fall further behind. As a centralized system, the Ministries had to lead a response that would meet the needs of a diverse range of learners throughout the country. This included children of different abilities, some of whom needed significant support, children at pre-primary who needed to develop critical foundation skills and early language, children who speak languages other than Bangla, and children with disabilities who need adapted materials. The response had to consider different levels of infrastructure, resources, and support.

**Challenge 2**

*Minimizing secondary effects which could prevent children from learning.* During school closures, children had other challenges to contend with beyond continuing learning. As shown above, decreasing finances and increased anxiety in households, coupled with families being together in a small space for longer periods of time, has led to an increase in child marriage, abuse and child labour. Some children will suffer more greatly from anxiety, or suffer the trauma of loss of a close relative due to the pandemic. The Government response needed to take these factors into account and plan for them.
Challenge 3
Adequately preparing teachers to adapt to supporting distance learning. With the closure of schools and a changed approach to learning, over half a million teachers needed to be prepared to use technology and provide support to their students within a short timeframe. The diverse range of learners made the provision of a quality intervention critical. This called for teachers to make pedagogical changes and deliver lessons through a completely different medium at a time when many of them were anxious and had conflicting household commitments.

2.4. Education sector response to COVID-19 and supported continuity of learning

Phase 1: Prior to reopening

Access to and participation in learning

The Bangladesh Government recognized the need for learning to continue while schools were closed. With a large school population, the response needed to be able to do the following:

1. Reach beyond the main population into the more remote and marginalized communities, including learners with disabilities, and young children.
2. Ensure learners engagement and participation in lessons.
3. Develop a quality intervention for teaching and learning to continue uninterrupted.

The suddenness of the pandemic necessitated a swift and practical response by the two Ministries charged with leading on education. They mobilized working groups, consisting of Government officers, UN agencies, development partners, academia and NGOs to design learning provision through four major delivery mechanisms:

1. TV broadcast to reach the first wave of students with access to TV;
2. Production of a series of radio programmes;
3. Online lessons;
4. Provision of support through mobile phones was, at the time of writing, in the pipeline.

1. TV broadcast

Within three weeks of school closures, lessons for secondary students were being broadcast on national television, using the Parliament channel which was free and available to the 51 per cent of the population with a television. Teachers were identified to support the TV broadcast development and delivery, and advanced teachers were contacted to be used as resources.

Access to television is uneven across the country, with only 4.8 per cent of households in the lowest wealth quintile owning a television, as compared to 90 per cent in the highest wealth quintile. There are also disparities in ownership between rural (43.9 per cent ownership) and urban (74.2 per cent ownership) areas, which means that many learners were not able to watch the broadcast lessons. A further illustration of this disparity comes from a small-scale survey carried out by the Empowering Girls through Education project (EGE) of 2,127 households in two hard-to-reach areas – Rajarhat Upazila in the North of Bangladesh, and Madarganj Upazila on the banks of the Bahmaputra River. This survey found that 38 per cent of the families surveyed did not own a television and 70 per cent of the girls surveyed had no access to lessons broadcast on the television.

Some provision was also made for pre-primary children. Sangsad TV had lessons on pre-primary. BRAC did a significant amount of work targeting pre-primary children, including improvements in delivery and curriculum, and lessons delivered through community radios in 14 districts.

While this immediate response did not address all the challenges mentioned above, it responded to the urgency and was regarded as a work-in-progress that would evolve over time and in addition to other interventions.

2. Radio programmes

More than 200 radio classes in maths, Bangla, English, and social science were broadcast for primary educational levels. These lessons, in line with the National Curriculum, were developed with UNESCO. They started broadcasting in August 2020 through the state-run Bangladesh Betar and 16 community radio stations.

Although household ownership of radio is low, less than one per cent throughout the country, over 90 per cent of households have access to mobile phones which can broadcast radio programmes. This does not guarantee, however, that households used their mobiles for this purpose.
3. Online lessons

Lessons were uploaded onto various online platforms, such as YouTube, Google Classroom and Zoom, so that students were able to watch them in their own time and more than once. More than 75,000 online classes were delivered using social media and education portals. Many teachers, with the support of A2i, took the initiative to record lessons themselves and post them on social media platforms, setting up Facebook pages for these lessons at division, district, and sub-district level. Edu Hub was set up which gathered 25,000 pieces of content from all over Bangladesh, which was made accessible to teachers and students with the appropriate devices and facilities.

While many teachers embraced the idea of recording online lessons (described in more detail below), and 9 million students benefitted, there are many barriers to the majority of students accessing online platforms. Computer ownership is low, with a national average of below 40 per cent, and internet access, particularly among the lowest wealth quintile (which is predominantly rural) is only 9 per cent. Digital literacy, particularly among females, is very poor, with only 1.4 per cent of females able to perform at least one of 9 specific information and communications technology (ICT) skills. Electricity supplies are uneven across the country, which prevents the use of many devices and makes charging phones very difficult.

4. Mobile phones

The Government has plans to develop a national mobile education platform through IVR (Interactive Voice Response) with toll-free calls. The process is underway to make it live for students. This technology can be used by button phones, which means that it could potentially reach 95 per cent of households with a device, including the 14 million children who receive stipend payments through their mobiles. While there is high ownership of mobile phones in both rural and urban areas, they are not all smartphones. The EGE survey, mentioned above, found that while 97 per cent of those surveyed had a mobile phone, only 23 per cent of households had a smartphone.

Other initiatives from both government and non-governmental organizations took advantage of the high mobile phone coverage and didn’t rely on access to a smartphone. These included:

- Teachers making phone calls to give instructions, and distributing SD cards so that learners could watch video classes offline.
- BRAC worked with the Government to reach learners through low-tech, low-cost mobile phone lessons. This included small group calls for children and their parents, twice a week, which reached 83,000 students. Extra calls for students with disabilities, weaker students and those who’d missed classes took place after every 6th class.
- Khulna teachers were asked to call five students per day to see if they were participating and if they had any problems.
- Teachers in Nilphamari were requested to contact five students per day to follow up on learning, particularly those in the hard to reach Chor areas of the District.

These initiatives potentially opened up opportunities for increased numbers of learners, although in households where there is only one mobile phone, access for students is likely to be limited.

While the Ministries produced a comprehensive response to keep learning going, it was still not enough to penetrate the many households where there is low or no access to technology. There also appears to be very little adaptation of inputs for children with disabilities, suggesting that their needs have not been met. The CAMPE survey commented that the intention of the emergency response plan was to reach the most marginalized communities, they found that even though there were many initiatives by NGOs and the Government to continue learning, the marginalized groups remained hard to reach. The Director of Teach for Bangladesh made a similar observation:
“While trying to reach our students in the most marginalized communities amidst the school shutdowns due to the global pandemic, our biggest challenge has been connecting with students with low or no access to technology. We’ve had successes by using technology as a collaborative tool for learning, which was facilitated by our fellows and parents at home. And we know that we need to do more to bridge the digital divide that currently exists in our country. We need joint efforts to create more access to technology, especially in under-served communities, because it is our collective responsibility to ensure that no child is left behind in this education crisis.” - Maliha Fawzia, Teach for Bangladesh Alumna, and Director of Programmes and Alumni Impact 

It is clear from discussions with stakeholders and study of the education sector plan that this challenge is recognized by all the actors in the education system. The Secretary of MoPME instructed his staff to look for solutions to reach these learners, and local and National NGOs consider it as part of their role to target hard-to-reach and marginalized communities.

It is recognized that the pandemic has had negative consequences in terms of learning outcomes, and that it has disproportionately affected children from the poorest households.

But being able to reach learners does not guarantee their ability to participate in learning. While lack of access to technology, disproportionately affecting learners from disadvantaged and rural communities, was one reason for learners not watching broadcasts or participating in online lessons, it was not the only cause of low or zero levels of participation. Other reasons included no protected time for children to study, household distractions, and family noise all affecting their ability to concentrate.

As well as the inequality of access to distance learning that relied on technology, there was also a disparity in the level of support students received at home, which also impacted whether they were enabled to participate in learning. Although the literacy rate in Bangladesh has been increasing, 25 per cent of adults are classed as illiterate - unable to read and write simple sentences. A recent World Bank (WB) study found that learners who received support from family members were more likely be in the top wealth quartile (62 per cent) as compared to those in the bottom wealth quartile (39 per cent).

Many local initiatives ensured that children had regular contact with their teachers either by phone or during individual visits. However, as they were generally part of a targeted programme, and there is no information as to size and scale of these initiatives across the country, it is difficult to tell how far they enabled all children to participate in learning. Keeping in contact by phone was not an expectation of every school and teacher, and this led to a lack of evenness in coverage. This inequity of provision potentially widens the learning gap for the children who do not live in communities served by an innovative NGO or Government officer. At the field level, cluster mechanisms, which have the potential to reach every teacher, could have been utilized in every Upazila to give teachers orientation and training so they could find ways to reach out and support all students more effectively.

Teachers

The Government worked to keep teacher training running. DPEd, the Government’s initial teacher training programme, was delivered online by the PTIs, enabling or allowing trainees to access it from their home. However, this was not able to start until 1 July 2020, which meant that time was lost for teachers and the full curriculum would not be covered. Usually the DPEd programme integrates schools-based practice, giving trainee teachers the opportunity to practice their skills in schools. This didn’t happen in 2020 because of school closures. This could lead to learning loss for these trainees, ultimately impacting the quality of education in the future.

It will be essential to have catch-up programmes once schools reopen, so trainees have time to develop vital knowledge and skills.

During August 2020, subject-based training, the main government face-to-face in-service training programme, was rolled out online for four Upazilas. Training manuals were revised and converted to online training. For many female teachers taking part during school closures, however, it was likely difficult for them to access the training successfully. As described above, competing demands on their time would impact concentration levels, given the many distractions of the home. One stakeholder commented that moving subject-based training online was very successful as they could reach more teachers and felt that this approach could point the way for future trainings. While this learning method clearly has advantages, it also needs to be viewed with some caution, and to be carefully planned. The materials and approaches would need significant adaptation to take advantage of the different media platforms and teachers would need protected time and space to enable them to take part.
Teachers learning from each other proved to be one of the most effective forms of professional development during school closures. Focus group discussions revealed that teachers were uploading guidance for other teachers on how to conduct online classes through social media platforms. Other teachers were encouraged to record online lessons, and many can be found on Facebook. There is evidence that teachers have watched and learned from each other’s videos, as their teaching skills were demonstrably developed over time. Teachers were not specifically prepared for online teaching, so many did not have the necessary digital skills. This was understandable, as the response needed to be activated rapidly, but there is evidence that they have been able to support each other to learn. Those teachers who received some form of ICT training in the past were more likely to take part in recording online lessons for different platforms, even though the training was not focused on the provision of remote learning.99

Recording online lessons presented considerable difficulty for some teachers in areas where there is regular load shedding and intermittent electricity. For recording, some teachers had to move to a different place, outside their home, to find a regular electricity supply. There also would have been difficulties around access to devices, particularly in households where there is only one phone and, for some teachers, gender-influenced household dynamics would mean that they can’t get access to a phone or other means of technology.

This effort by teachers to provide online lessons is to be applauded; by taking the initiative in this way they are independently developing essential professional skills and knowledge which can be built on for the future. Watching the lessons online, a clear progression can be seen from the start of the pandemic as teachers have learned these new skills- not only how to record lessons but also to make them attractive and enjoyable. As well as building on the skills, lessons can also be learned from a professional-development approach which is born out of need, and is individualized and self-initiated.

Online teaching

A quick look at Facebook reveals several online lesson groups which have been self-initiated by local education officers and teachers. Teachers’ Dream Education Online, a Facebook group created in July 2020, and now with almost 5,000 followers, is one of the many places where teachers post their online and live lessons. The page has a timetable of live lessons and people can receive notifications when one is about to take place. The lessons are mainly focused on English, Bangla, science and maths. The videos have between 100 and 19,000 views, although there is no way of knowing how many of the views were by students, and if they watched the whole lesson. The comments boxes were used for viewers to leave their thoughts on the lesson and answer questions that were asked during the video. At a quick glance, most of the comments were from fellow teachers rather than students and many of them were from the same person multiple times, but they were all positive and encouraging.

The video lessons were of varying quality, but all teachers had tried to make their environment look attractive and the lessons were clearly well planned and structured. Many teachers used visual aids of different types. One teacher started with a small role play which was very attention-grabbing. Another used puppets. Other teachers used a television in the background to illustrate a point, e.g., in this lesson on festivals.

Many lessons can be learned from this approach, which can be used to strengthen teaching and learning in the future. For example:

» Teachers watching and copying ideas they have seen online, according to their need and interest
» Use of carefully-made visual aids
» Instant feedback and encouragement for lessons
» Planning
» All learners having the opportunity to record their answers
Safe operations

Surveys showed\textsuperscript{[100]} there is a strong awareness of the need for health and hygiene among children and their families, helping them to stay safe while at home. Local networks were used to get messages to the community. For example,

- Community health workers spreading messages in communities;
- Using opportunities where people gather, e.g., the market during Eid, to talk to people about health and hygiene;
- BRAC have used teachers to communicate health messages to students during their phone lessons.

UCEP Bangladesh organized an orientation on safety and protective measures for COVID-19 through an awareness-raising campaign, with posters, leaflets and courtyard meetings before the lockdown. Online training and the activation of volunteer teams (child and youth councils) in the school catchment areas played a significant role in this regard. Despite these health messages, not everyone was able to follow the handwashing guidelines as they don’t have adequate facilities. Many people work and socialize in overcrowded public spaces and live in communal multi-generational households and villages. This, combined with people not understanding terms such as ‘social distancing’ and being unwilling to wear masks, has caused great difficulty in people adhering to rules and changing their behaviour.\textsuperscript{[101]}

Community participation

A thread running through all the documents around effective response emphasizes the importance of involving communities in the planning and decision making. It is likely that the speed of response required and the centralized nature of the system made it difficult, particularly for the two education Ministries to include any substantial community consultation when building their strategy.

However, as would be expected, the main points of contact with communities have been at the local level. In both Nilphamari and Rangamati there have been regular meetings between local Government officers, school management committees, PTAs and guardians to discuss continuity of learning and school reopening. Information and support for communities has also come from local and national NGOs, who continue to work very closely with groups of parents and local leaders to give targeted support.

One example of an intervention where an NGO worked with communities to understand their needs and response, was Lalmonirhat, in the very north of the country, on the Indian border. Targeting 740 low-income families, where students were at particular risk of dropping out, Eco-Social Development Organization (ESDO) carried out a survey to understand the sort of challenges students were facing. They discovered that children were finding it difficult to continue English, maths, and science without any education. ESDO then created a teacher’s pool where teachers called students and supported them with lessons they were struggling with. These calls targeted slow learners. However, they still couldn’t reach the 10 per cent of families who had non-functional mobile phones.

Health and well-being

In recognition that many children will be missing out on the school feeding programme, various interventions, led by the Government, have been taken to compensate for this. The Government and WFP have taken rations of food, non-food items, and leaflets to children’s homes.\textsuperscript{[102]} High-energy take-home biscuits have been distributed to nearly three million schoolchildren throughout Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{[103]} This programme is spread across 15,200 primary schools across 104 Upazilas.

BRAC used their phone lessons to raise awareness of health and well-being. All phone lessons initially focused on health and well-being, and subsequent lessons started with psychological counselling and a discussion.

Some small-scale programmes were already in existence in the system pre-COVID-19 and were able to continue, such as the Sesame Workshop programmes around health and well-being and health habits for children, aimed at pre-primary to eight-year-old children.

Finances

Having adopted the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) in 2015, Bangladesh is currently implementing various programmatic and institutional reforms to transition from an ad hoc and fragmented system of safety nets to a more structured and streamlined approach to help communities address their lifecycle risks and mitigating covariate and idiosyncratic shocks.\textsuperscript{[104]}
This is a long-term process and, despite progress, the social protection system is still not adequate for the speed at which the economy is transforming. The COVID-19 crisis came at a time of transition for the system. The Government responded quickly, allocated one-off payments for five million families in need, and increased some social security programmes to reach more people.\textsuperscript{105} There were extra measures for families who were financially affected by the crisis. As part of its relief and support measures, the Government announced a plan to provide a monthly cash aid of Tk 2,000-3,000 to 3.4 million families. Cash was sent out starting from April 2020 for three months through mobile fund transfers. In July, however, less than half the households had received the assistance.\textsuperscript{106} Economists argue that at least ten million families need this support to survive through the crisis. Many fear that hunger, not COVID-19, will kill them. The Government increased the stipends for primary education students.\textsuperscript{107}

The Second Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC)-BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) survey,\textsuperscript{108} supported by World Food Programme, of 7,658 households was carried out in June-July 2020. The survey found that households used various coping mechanisms to mitigate the financial pressure, of which government help was but a small proportion. Fewer rural households (21.86 per cent) received support from the Government, community or NGOs than urban households (60.85 per cent). The highest number of households receiving support was from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (69.88 per cent). The support given included money, rice, and multiple food packages.

The reopening of schools does not necessarily mean that the financial crisis will go away, and will likely lead to more children dropping out, as families re-prioritize both their time and their spending needs.

Education system

The MoPME and the MoE had to make a series of quick decisions about how to respond to the pandemic due to the suddenness of its arrival. They had previously developed an Education in Emergencies framework to plan for disaster response. Although this wasn’t a sudden disaster, unlike a flood or earthquake, which affected schools infrastructure, and for which the plan was mainly devised, much of this plan could still be applied, particularly in terms of the processes to respond, e.g., ownership of the school and consultation with stakeholders at every level.

Despite the existence of this framework, however, the National Response and Recovery document, subsequently developed, commented that the system was not prepared for such a crisis as COVID-19. They recognized the need for a nationwide coordinated approach rather than a series of ad hoc initiatives as there had been at the start of the response.

Another decision that had to be made quickly, was what to do about the Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) exams which were due to be taken two weeks after school closures. The HSC was postponed indefinitely and then finally cancelled in October 2020 and it was agreed that the results of earlier national exams would be used to give students grades. Students who had been working hard for their final school exam and were a week or two away from taking it, had to wait 7 months for this news. The uncertainty about when to hold the exams and how much material to cover must have had a profound effect on the well-being of some students as results are critical to their future. These are the main exams for entrance into Tertiary Education, and therefore are very high stakes for the students.

O and A level exams, international exams, run by the British Council and sat by students of English medium private schools have now been given permission by the Government to go ahead in October and November 2020 under strict conditions.\textsuperscript{109} There are a much smaller number of students who participate in these exams, and so there is clearly recognition from the Government that they are essential for students and they have managed to get them moving again.
Phase 2: Part of the reopening process

The National Response and Recovery Plan, developed by the Government and strongly supported by UNICEF, outlines in detail the areas that need addressing when schools reopen, with the aim of ensuring that all children, including the most marginalized, return to school as soon as possible.

These measures include:

- A suggestion for phased reopening, considering issues such as staggered opening, school premises preparation, readiness of teachers, etc.
- Strengthening monitoring and tracking at school and sub-nationally and to minimize absenteeism and dropout rates.
- Assessing student learning and their mental health.
- Preparing teachers for managing learning on return; supporting them to engage with alternative methods of community-based education, including peer support groups, providing support for children who have fallen further behind in literacy and numeracy, and receiving guidance and training to understand behaviour change, along with referral pathways for psychosocial support for children.
- Deploying financial and non-financial incentives for families in low-income and disadvantaged households to mitigate against early marriage and child labour and encourage students to return to school.
- Revamping the school feeding programme.
- Reviewing exam syllabus and high-stakes exams.

With schools yet to open, both the MoE and MoPME have been working to develop school reopening guidelines. MoPME have published their guidelines, which are informed by the UNICEF/UNESCO/WFP/World Bank framework for reopening schools.

The school reopening guidelines have been issued centrally and will be localized by each school according to need. School Head Teachers and education officials have been involved in regular meetings to prepare and submit plans for school reopenings and communities have also been part of the discussions.

The main emphasis is on safe operations and the document lays out standard measures, adopted all over the world, such as all children to wear masks, only two children on the bench at a time, encouragement of more online classes, and schools to have handwashing arrangements. It allows schools to be flexible in scheduling arrangements so that they can encourage safe practices.

While these are the approaches to take to minimize infection, the reality is likely to be very different as there are many schools in Bangladesh which currently have inadequate WASH facilities and overcrowded classrooms. There are plans in the Bangladesh Education Sector Plan 2020 to ensure that all schools have adequate WASH facilities by 2023. In the short and medium term, many schools will need to be innovative and inventive to overcome these challenges. To do this they have been permitted to use school-level funding (SLIP) and Upazila- (UPEP) level funding which can be repurposed to support cleaning and sanitizing once schools have reopened. Messages about safe practices in schools will be spread through posters, leaflets, and campaigns through the media.

Children’s health and well-being are to be a priority once schools reopen and the guidelines recommend that there is more emphasis on enjoyable teaching learning activities. However, there is no emphasis in the document in terms of curriculum adjustment and assessment, although there are instructions for schools on how to ensure learning from home if children need to stay away from school for a period of time. This might also be a reflection of the fact that the curriculum is currently undergoing a major revision, which includes plans for formative assessment, but in the short term, teachers will need to know what children can do so that they can compensate for any learning loss.

Teachers continue to receive subject-based training online for English and Bengali from 22 August 2020 for 75 Upazilas. The manuals for this training have been adapted from the regular subject-based training programme, and a review and improvement is in progress. There is a plan to eventually make the training a combination of online and face-to-face which will mean that more teachers can take part.
Phase 3: With schools reopened

“Although COVID-19 is not a good situation, another door is open for us, especially for a country like Bangladesh.” – Stakeholder interviewee.

The Government is looking towards the future and has a series of ideas of how building back better will look. This is described in the National Response and Recovery Plan. Through discussions with stakeholders, some key areas where they could build back better and increase resilience of the system were articulated. Initiatives have been built into the National Response and Recovery Plan, which will eventually feed back into the PEDP4 and secondary sector-wide programme (SEDP). The document outlines the need to accelerate plans that were already in process, as well as use lessons learned during the pandemic response to influence future direction. Some of their suggestions included:

- Understanding more about hard-to-reach children and what it takes to help them participate.
- During the pandemic some teachers were able to access global online professional development opportunities in their home. They could also use technology and blended learning for their professional development. This would probably be unrealistic for most teachers and would involve them taking their own initiative to access these opportunities. However, utilizing international platforms could be a way of encouraging professional growth and introducing new ideas into the education system from classroom level.
- The Government is actively thinking about how to increase coverage, through using the Bangabandhu Satellite communication company. This would make it easier to reach hard-to-reach areas with TV and radio.
- Education financing is heavily centralized in Bangladesh. Even division and district line offices cannot receive direct funding. All funds are managed by Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) and disbursed to local offices and schools. One stakeholder commented that the Government is considering making schools cost centres. The exact meaning of this was not explained, but if implemented could lead to schools having more autonomy and flexibility to find innovative solutions to some of challenges around access and participation for all.
- One stakeholder remarked that while the online training needed improvement, it had been successful in reaching many teachers. This would potentially decrease the cost of the current system of face-to-face training and was something that could be applied in the future.
- There are plans to develop online versions of textbooks for use at any time by students. These would be accompanied by standard notes for teachers.
- The Education Sector Plan in September 2020 lays emphasis on ensuring all schools have WASH facilities by 2023 and that schools are better prepared for education in emergencies, including increased internet connections and digitization.
- The Government is planning to use mobile phones more effectively for learning, as 97 per cent of households have at least a button-based phone. They are also in talks with network providers about how to facilitate mobile communication for teachers and students.
03

Thematic deep dive: Partnership
The focus of this section of the Situation Analysis is to consider how the different actors in the sector worked in partnership to provide a systematic, equitable and quality response to COVID-19 to minimize loss of learning.

Bangladesh has two Ministries responsible for education: MoPME and MoE. Due to the time limitations of this situational analysis, the focus of this section is on primary education at national and grassroots level, with some discussion of the secondary response.

There are many different types of schooling and schools in Bangladesh, serving 36.5 million learners, run and managed by a range of institutions and organizations, including Government, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

The focus of this section of the Situation Analysis is to consider how the different actors in the sector worked in partnership to provide a systematic, equitable and quality response to COVID-19 to minimize loss of learning. This was chosen because of the many different actors in the education sector who have all contributed to education for many years. These actors have a range of strengths and networks which could be utilized to provide a comprehensive response to assist in delivery, reach the most marginalized and meet the needs of children in different communities.

3.1. The response

Partnership at the national level

“The fight against COVID-19 cannot be carried out by the government alone. It will require an unprecedented level of coordination between the public and private at the local and international level.”

Given the size of the challenge and the coverage of schools it was essential that the response was the result of joint planning among the different actors in the education sector, and that the vast range of expertise was mobilized to provide an effective response. Working collaboratively is a long-standing approach for Bangladesh. However, effective inter-ministerial, interdepartmental, and national-subnational coordination/collaboration has always been a challenge for better educational management and governance.

Given the two education Ministries, MoE and MoPME, lead the sector-wide programmes in primary and secondary, there are well-established mechanisms at both central and field level for people from across both the formal and non-formal education sector to come together and share their expertise. For example:

- There is Government cross-sectoral work at the macro level, as the different Ministries meet once a week.
- The Local Consultancy Group (LCG) was sent up as a mechanism for the Government and development partners such as UN, ADB, WB and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to discuss a National Strategy for poverty reduction and other sectoral matters. Arising from this are the sectoral working groups. The LCG working group for Education have been meeting at least quarterly since 2013 to exchange information, collaborate and coordinate. Often there are ad hoc interim meetings when the situation necessitates. The members of this group includes representatives from Government, UN agencies, development partners and civil society. The Government of Bangladesh and development partners are co-chairs of the group. The development partner chair rotates every two years, with the current incumbent being UNICEF. This working group was at the forefront of leading the response to COVID-19.
- There are monthly meetings between the different levels of management in the DPE (Table 1). These meetings have a very crowded set agenda, which is mainly administrative, although there is sometimes some room for additional items to be added.
- According to one stakeholder there are also regular meetings between Upazila Education Officers and NGO representatives, so they remain informed about the work in their Upazila.
The COVID-19 response was able to use those mechanisms to mobilize expertise and resources.

Chapter 2 has already described the different initiatives that were carried out in response to the emergency. This chapter will look in more detail at the organizations involved in the response, the nature of their involvement and the benefits that this collaboration has brought to the response at the national and district/Upazila level. The next section looks at some of the factors inherent in successful partnership and describes how they play out in the different partnerships at the national level.

### Common purpose

At the national level, the overall leads for the response were MoPME and MoE, which used existing relationships with development partners and the NGO sector to set up an emergency response group, produced two key deliverables with a clear purpose of supporting continuity of learning. These plans also enabled them to identify and secure any extra funding and were:

- A National Response and Recovery Plan.
- Plans for learning continuity through different forms of technology.

Table 2 looks at some of the different types of partnerships involved in the COVID-19 response and identifies the purpose and characteristics of the relationship.

### Table 1 | MONTHLY DPE MEETINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>DPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Divisional Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>District Primary Education Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Upazila Primary Education Officers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Table 2 | Purpose and Characteristics of Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>Purpose of Relationship</th>
<th>Characteristic of the Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF, UNESCO, MoPME, a2i, MoE, National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), and NGO working groups</td>
<td>To produce plans for the continuation of lessons through TV broadcasts, radio, online and mobile.</td>
<td>Working groups brought together for the short term but members of the working groups have long-standing working relationships. Common purpose. Working towards a tight deadline. Primary and Secondary working together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs and government organizations at the local level to target specific communities</td>
<td>Learning from each other and sharing experience. Reaching as many of the population as possible. Finding solutions to challenges.</td>
<td>Long-standing relationships. Sharing expertise and knowledge. Joint service delivery.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Long-standing relationships

As is shown in Table 3, many of the partnerships that were formed in the COVID-19 response were the result of long-standing relationships. Four sector-wide programmes, spanning over twenty years, have built these relationships between the different organizations in the education sector, all working towards the same purpose of improving education opportunities and learning. While these relationships have not always been smooth, the strength of them was a critical factor in the speed of the response at the national level.

### Joint service delivery

As you would expect in a centralized system, the MoE and MoPME provided large response programmes that had mass reach, supported by local education offices and NGO interventions, and which were more targeted at reaching the most marginalized communities. There has been local-level sharing of learning and working together, leading to pockets of good practice but it is hard to gauge how far these programmes and initiatives are coordinated across the country so that provision is equitable. Evidence suggests that there remain many children who are not accessing any learning opportunities, and that reach and support to participate might depend on having an active education officer, NGO, or targeted project in the place where they live.

### Efficiency

The overall strategy development was clearly led by the Government, with others invited to be part of the debate and discussion. Table 3 shows some of the roles that the different actors in the Bangladesh education sector have had to play in the national response to the pandemic. These are not fixed or exclusive and some organizations played multiple roles. A2i had a pivotal role to play in the coordination of the response, having the knowledge and skills to coordinate a response that relied on different forms of technology.

The fact that these were long-standing relationships also led to efficiency. As well as individuals knowing each other, they had also worked together to plan the sector-wide programmes and work on education, so are extremely knowledgeable about the education system, the different projects and programmes around the country and the enrolment and achievement data.

One area where there could have been more efficiency was the development of the school reopening guidelines. The primary and secondary sector worked separately to produce guidelines for school reopening. There also been concerns that the guidelines should not only be for government-operated schools, but need to be planned for all types of schools run by different providers. Working together would ensure consistent messaging and a joined-up approach at all levels and across different providers, making it easier to support schools and communities to reopen safely.
The extent to which there was specific collaboration across Ministries, for the development of the MoPME school reopening guidelines is unclear. However, the draft English translation of the documents state that they followed the Directives provided by the Prime Minister’s Office, Cabinet Division, Ministry of Public Administration and Health Services Division, and the guidelines shared by WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (USA).

**Momentum**

There was a comment from one stakeholder that the partnership and collaborative approach to developing the plan for broadcast and online learning had been particularly effective. The task was completed very quickly, and it can be seen how some of the plans, such as the provision of support through mobile phones, had been influenced by work that was being done at the field level.

---

**TABLE 3 | ORGANIZATIONS AND ROLES IN THE RESPONSE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>NATURE OF ROLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Organizations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoE &amp; MoPME</td>
<td>• Strategic leadership</td>
<td>• Leadership and decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPE Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE)</td>
<td>• Leading and coordinating planning and implementation of education response.</td>
<td>• Leadership and decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCTB</td>
<td>• Oversaw technical and pedagogical content for TV broadcasts and gave final approval before it was aired.</td>
<td>• Membership of working groups, specific tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE)</td>
<td>• Supporting PTIs to continue training online for initial teacher training.</td>
<td>• Membership of working groups, specific tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2i</td>
<td>• Technical support and part of planning for broadcast/TV and online response. • Supporting the design of online training. • Supporting the design of online subject-based training. • Coordinating people to upload materials and resources on the EduHub – 25-30 organizations. • Working with NCTB online assessment design.</td>
<td>• Technical leadership and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>• Co-chair of the Local Education Group (LEG) and at the forefront of the development of the response.</td>
<td>• Leadership and advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Partners</td>
<td>• Funding, participating in working groups, advice, and support, global learning, and international frameworks for response.</td>
<td>• Strategic planning • Providing the global perspective • Providing technical and financial support • Evidence generation through studies and surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>• Advocacy, surveys, reaching the most marginalized communities, concept notes for ‘building back’ better. • Shared the lessons that they had developed. • Working with out-of-school children (OOSC) as part of PEDP 4.</td>
<td>• Involvement, influencing and innovation, membership of working groups • Formal partnership for OOSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector organizations</td>
<td>• Part of negotiations for network data packages for teachers and students.</td>
<td>• Support at the request of the Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>• Surveys, research, and policy recommendations.</td>
<td>• Influencing • Provision of evidence to influence policy and practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Partnership at the local level

At the local level, NGOs and Government have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the needs of the communities in which they work, meaning they were able to reach into different communities across the country and supplement the central Government provision. Partnership was very much valued by both local Government officers and the NGOs, who felt that working together was beneficial for the communities, as they had been able to pool their resources and reach as many people as possible.

It was also at this level where there was strong evidence of cross-sectoral working. Health messages have been communicated in many ways to communities. This is due to a concerted effort by local Government offices and NGOs working together to get the messages across to as many different communities as possible, using a variety of local mechanisms. Teachers were at the forefront of this community work, contacting families, not only to ascertain learning needs, but also to enquire about their financial, health or food situation. Where needs were identified, teachers tried to link households to the NGO relief programmes. This is a good example of how different organizations have worked together with a common goal to provide a coordinated service to local communities and is something that could be built upon in the future.

Regular coordination meetings between NGOs and local Government are held at Upazila level. However, with so many people working at the local level, there was a duplication of efforts in some areas, while some families were not receiving support. During stakeholder interviews, coordination was an area identified as needing improvement at the local level.

3.2. Analyzing the response

Benefits of the partnership

**National-level partnerships**

In terms of output, the partnerships were successful at the national level. However they are still working on ways to increase the reach of the materials. As yet it is difficult to know what the impact of these initiatives are on learning, although the planned Education Watch research should give some indication of the level of success and make recommendations for the future. Successes include:

- Creating a response and recovery plan which covered a range of issues and was influenced by a clear understanding of global frameworks.
- Accessing 90 million dollars of GPE funding to support its implementation.
- Developing guidelines for school reopening
- Ensuring that children who benefited from the school feeding programme continued to receive food during school closures.
- Responding swiftly to the situation which enabled many children to access lessons online, through broadcast TV and social media. Lessons for TV, radio and online broadcast aligned with the curriculum and were quality assured. Comprehensive plans were developed to use mobile phones, a widely available technology, to support learning, along with mechanisms to make data learning cheaply.

**Partnerships, which were able to pivot existing provision to adapt to the COVID-19 situation, had some unexpected benefits.**

UNICEF and the Chittagong Development Board had worked in partnership on a pre-primary programme prior to the pandemic. Once COVID-19 hit, they formed a technical group and developed a two-month programme, focusing on basic learning activities including health and hygiene and protection, supported by basic learning materials for any parent to use at home. They built the capacity of workers who then held orientations with parents.

Pre-COVID-19 they had found it difficult to engage parents with the programme, but during the crisis parents became much more involved in their children’s learning.

Nilphamari District wanted to make sure that as many people as possible could have access to TV broadcast lessons. They created a partnership with local cable network providers who broadcast to villages. Every village has a TV cable connection and most households have a TV, except in the most remote Chor areas. This type of partnership, with 80 participants, extended the reach of the broadcast service.

Regular coordination meetings between NGOs and local Government are held at Upazila level. However, with so many people working at the local level, there was a duplication of efforts in some areas, while some families were not receiving support. During stakeholder interviews, coordination was an area identified as needing improvement at the local level.
Planning for and carrying out teacher training online, adapting subject-based training manuals for remote use. Designing an online course for the DPEd programme which was delivered by the PTIs.

**Local-level partnerships**

Where there were partnerships at the local level, they appear to be effective in terms of reach. What is not clear is whether every district and Upazila had the same level of partnership operating.

- An increase Government and NGO coordination at the local level. Normally they meet for celebrations or events, but during the COVID-19 response they were all working together to minimize the effects of the pandemic and meet some significant challenges, such as access to learning opportunities, particularly for marginalized children, and quality of learning outcomes, which brought them much closer.
- Generation of data from teachers and cross-sectoral surveys such as the Multi-Anticipatory Impact and Needs Analysis, which identified need and gave a picture of the effects of COVID-19 on households and learners.
- Mobilization of teachers and community workers through local partnerships, who have a significant understanding of different needs of communities and the mechanisms to meet as many people as possible and support their needs.
- Contact with many hard-to-reach children and families to provide them with support, although, as mentioned above, this was still not able to reach every household.

Three major factors contributed to the success of these partnerships:

1. Bringing together expertise from different organizations involved in education, at both the local and national level created a strong group, with all stakeholders actively planning and developing solutions together from the very start of the crisis.
2. Working together on specific time-bound tasks with specific deliverables gave a focused approach and developed a good working spirit among the members of the working groups.
3. Where an intervention had been successful at the local level during COVID-19, there had been cross-sectoral working among organizations based on their joint knowledge of communities. For example, the reach into communities to spread health messages relied on local-level organizations working together and using their knowledge of the communities they work in to disseminate messages through local platforms.

Small-scale interventions have the potential to be resilient to shocks, as they can be more flexible and adaptable in responding to a changing environment. For example, pre-COVID-19, ESDD, in partnership with Plan International, had a support programme for parents of secondary school girls. Once COVID-19 restrictions were in place, the partnership continued, but the way in which the programme delivered changed. It was relatively straightforward for ESDD to make small parental groups and support them through mobile phone contact. Because of local knowledge, they knew their stakeholders well and were able to understand the best way to reach them.

There was a comprehensive approach, with the Government harnessing expertise across the country to provide a response at the strategic level, which swiftly responded to the challenges of providing alternative delivery mechanisms, and which at the level of implementation was flexible and adaptable. Undoubtedly, it was beneficial for communities to have this sort of collaborative approach, and many children were reached because of the knowledge sharing, joint learning and planning between the different actors in the education sector. Although there has been Government and NGO collaboration in the past, stakeholders commented that the spirit felt very different this time, and they were keen for this type of joint working to continue in the future.

Despite these strong relationships, cooperation and use of expertise at all levels, this was not sufficient to provide an equitable response across the country. Although there were successes in terms of speed and broad coverage of the response, the evidence presented in Chapter 2 shows that learning hours were significantly reduced, and there were low levels of access to the delivery mechanisms and content. Learners were not equitably reached, leaving behind the most disadvantaged. This suggests that while organizations came together to respond to the crisis, there needed to be a stronger systematic approach to planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation which maximized the knowledge and expertise of all relevant organizations and sectors across the country. A more interconnected response could have strengthened implementation and feedback so that plans were adapted and changed according to identified need. It will be instructive to see whether the large-scale NGO alternative and non-formal education programmes of, for instance, BRAC and Save the Children, managed to mitigate the
worst impacts of the pandemic for out-of-school children and if the reduced contact hours constraining learning outcomes.

Once schools reopen, it will be essential to consider how the partnership work can be further strengthened and utilized to support remedial programmes or catch-up programmes to mitigate learning loss. As the education system grows and more emphasis is placed on ensuring participation of hard-to-reach groups, a redefined partnership between Government and NGO development partners and the private sector could help put the needs of marginalized children even more at the forefront of future planning and enable solutions to be found to challenges that are embedded within communities. In the recommendation sections below there are some suggestions of areas where this cooperation could be particularly effective.
04

Lessons learned
4.1. Lessons learned

From both the desk review and discussions with representatives from the national and local Government, NGOs, and development partners, the following lessons learned emerged for future consideration. These lessons will feed into the recommendations in the next sector-wide programme:

One of the main lessons has been around the need to make the system more resilient to any future emergency situations. This highlights the importance of forward planning and preparation throughout the system, looking at issues such as continuity of learning, household support, preparation of teachers, schools and local education offices and roles and responsibilities throughout the education system. This type of planning will also support budgeting for emergencies as mechanisms will already be in place and money allocated to respond.

This response has shown how working in partnership with organizations across the education sector and those from outside of it can provide swift and relatively comprehensive learning programmes to reach many children. Continuing to involve all types of organization and other Ministries working with children in strategy discussions and implementation would facilitate a stronger education system, providing challenge, enabling innovation, and increasing access and participation for all, especially those children with significant barriers to education.

The Government is looking at how technology use can be strengthened in the future to provide further learning opportunities for both students and teachers through a form of blended learning, which can reach more teachers. They recognize the need to improve infrastructure, particularly in schools, so that every school has access to the internet. Using technology can open access to national and global training from home or workplaces if the infrastructure is in place. To ensure comprehensive access, it is essential to use technology that is already available to most people, e.g., many teachers used their mobile phones for learning.

While technology can support learning, it is not the complete answer. Technology has its limitations, and reliance on it can increase the learning divide which disproportionately affects hard-to-reach and marginalized communities. Future planning needs to put enabling engagement, participation and learning of the most marginalized at the forefront. Provision of alternative methods through a range of online, offline and printed packages along with targeted follow-up support will increase the reach and participation for children of different ages and with a variety of learning needs. Follow-up support is critical so that children can interact with the lessons/materials and get individualized help where necessary. This follow-up support can be carried out effectively by teachers with small groups of children, or communities and parents who are eager to help with learning where they see a need and have the support and the time for preparation to do so.

Teachers will self-develop professionally when they see a clear need and benefit of doing so. Most teachers are motivated mostly by children learning better and faster: so, when shown innovations which can lead to better learning outcomes, teachers will make personal efforts to adapt and provide a better, more efficient service. This was illustrated by the Bangladesh teacher’s response to online learning: the way in which many teachers who took part developed their professional skills and knowledge. There needs to be improved infrastructure and support for teachers, so they have the physical space and equipment to participate in distance learning and support pupils. Well-targeted training and development opportunities based on a clear need and through a variety of mechanisms are essential.
LESSONS LEARNED

Well-documented data and evidence informs strategy and decision making about how best to ensure participation and achievement of all children in education. Increasing involvement of CSOs in community monitoring of school performance can support this process.

Building assessment into distance learning would help understand what children have been learning and make it smoother for teachers to know what to teach when back in school. It would also serve the purpose of finding out what type of activities and lessons are able to engage children and improve learning outcomes. Assessment is essential for any future blended learning so that there is a smooth integration between home learning and school, as well as designing and adjusting future programmes to ensure that they are relevant and effective.

The health and well-being of pupils needs to be built into the curriculum in future, to support children. At the same time there needs to be stronger referral systems so that children can access the support they need. This is where partnerships could be effectively leveraged, using the different expertise of NGOs and GoB in this area. The NGO networks across Bangladesh can serve as detectors of child protection issues that are not always picked up in schools: with good coordination between schools and NGO-CSOs involved in the same communities, more information can be obtained on children who are in need of more support. Some NGOs might also be able to provide better knowledge and know-how: teachers are the first responders in schools for all kinds of issues, but do not have the training in health, child protection, or even knowledge of the legal system. They cannot be expected to detect all issues and find solutions to all problems. This is where coordination between education and health authorities is important at the grass-roots level. CSO-NGO networks in Bangladesh can help in facilitating this collaboration by providing links, evidence, information, and additional expertise.

Localized initiatives enabled targeting of hard-to-reach communities. Using teachers as a contact point for families enabled them to reach their pupils and give them learning support as well as understand household needs and tap into local/national support available for them. All children should be entitled to schooling which meets their needs, regardless of their situation.

4.2. Recommendations for building back better and increasing resilience to future shocks

There have been many successes in the response to school closures during COVID-19, but there are still major challenges. The first action to be taken is to use the school opening guidelines to make sure that school reopen safely and face-to-face learning can resume.

At the heart of the challenge for the future is the question of how to compensate for the learning loss suffered during COVID-19 and at the same time improve the overall quality of learning so that the learners who were not achieving required levels of literacy and numeracy can be taught most effectively. This includes the need to address issues around access, quality, and participation.

The Government’s agenda to build back better and work towards achieving improved education for all children and the SDG 4 targets, are integrated into this aim. In the National Response and Recovery document the Government outlines some main priorities for building resilience into the system which can be integrated into the two sector-wide programmes at primary and secondary levels. These include an emphasis on strengthening digital provision:

1. Integrating remote learning into schools through a blended learning approach.
2. Developing low-cost learning packages for distance learning for both formal and non-formal schools.
3. Developing an online assessment system.

The recommendations consider ways to build on the successes, plans and lessons learned from the COVID-19 experience and are aligned with the National Response and Recovery Plan and the Education Sector Plan, developed in September 2020.
Recommendation 1

Address children’s learning losses through remediation, focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy and teaching at the right level. Enable easier access to learning materials.

1. Carry out a review of literacy and numeracy provision for all age groups, considering how the curriculum needs can be prioritized and delivered in a different way to raise learning achievements. Learn from the work of Room to Read and NAPE who are planning how to address early literacy needs through curriculum adaptation and identification of support materials from all sources.116

2. Support teachers to use formative assessment to understand levels of student learning on return to school to:
   » Use the assessment findings to consider where in the curriculum they need to start teaching so that learners can catch up.
   » Be driven by the needs of the learners to teach at the right level and pace rather focus on covering the whole curriculum.

3. This approach will need a consideration of how the curriculum is delivered and implementation is supported. Education officers, teachers and school leaders would all need to have the same understanding that learning levels should be the driver of planning rather than the curriculum schedule, and know how to support that.

4. Continue to review and refine approaches to formative assessment, which is at the heart of all learning. Develop the skills of teachers to carry out formative assessments and understand how to plan for learning so that they can adapt their teaching to a range of needs.

5. Build 21st century skills into the curriculum and delivery of the curriculum so that learners are equipped for learning through a range of media. Digital skills should be integrated into the curriculum from early years so that children are accustomed to using various devices and can practice interacting with devices for discovery and learning. Integration of these skills will make learners more flexible and better prepared for different learning circumstances and the changing work environment in the future, ultimately making the Bangladesh workforce more competitive in a global market. These skills could include self-study and independent learning skills, teamwork and leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving and decision making, citizenship, etc.

Recommendation 2

Evaluate distance learning as an alternative tool for education provision in different circumstances and as a way for disadvantaged learners to access education: those unable to travel to a school setting every day because they are working, or those with mobility challenges, for example. Build on the successes, strengthen distance learning approaches to reach marginalized communities and provide alternatives for completion of higher secondary. Distance learning could also provide an alternative to children who are overage to study at their own pace.

1. Evaluate the distance learning approaches introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, considering which elements were most successful in encouraging students to participate and learn and which elements were least successful and why. Use the results to influence planning for alternative approaches to education in the future.

2. Carry out Upazila-level mapping of the different approaches, resources and materials that have been used for distance learning, to find out which approaches really work and use data to develop priorities for funding which feed into the programme planning for the two sector-wide programmes.
   » Consistency of provision across the Upazila/District/region/country.
   » Gaps in provision and reasons for those gaps.
   » Types of approaches used to reach different communities.
   » Interventions that have been successful in reaching marginalized groups and reasons why they have been successful.
   » Interventions that have been successful for children’s participation and why.

3. Build on those partnership operating during the COVID-19 response and use joint knowledge to map the barriers to participation in distance education for disadvantaged groups of learners at the district and Upazila level. Support this with mapping connectivity gaps for the future roll-out of major infrastructure development projects, like Giga Connect and others, depending on the choices Bangladesh makes. Collect information about internet access limitations (which school and communities are not reached, which schools and communities have connectivity but no access to adequate devices, or adequate data packages, etc.) then review education policies and strategies to ensure that they include evidence-based plans to address these barriers to distance education for the minority and marginalized groups of children.
4. Develop support for learning mechanisms at local levels. Schools and teachers, with the support of Assistant Upazila Education Officers (AUEOs), Upazila Education Offices (UEO) and Upazila Resource Centre (URC) staff to develop localized plans for supporting the children in their school to interact with the learning packages, including increased teacher outreach through individual visits or mobile calls, identifying people in communities who could support small-group home learning. These might include older students, peers, siblings, parents, volunteers, etc.

5. Develop a range of packages for learners which encompass different ability levels and learning situations. Specifically, consider how children under five can be supported and what adaptations need to be made for children with disabilities.

6. Equip and support community volunteers, parents and teachers with the skills, knowledge and understanding of how to support distance learning. Young learners will still depend on a responsible adult to supervise and direct their learning, so will need the support of parents to learn through different media. Many parents are not equipped to do this and will need support and training. Partnerships with NGOs could identify the most appropriate solutions for working with appropriate adults at the community level, so would be critical partners to roll out parent and community training packages.

**Recommendation 3**

**Introduce blended learning into schools to support the improvement of learning achievement.**

- Work with NCTB and NAPE to explore how the curriculum could be enhanced using technology.
- Revise the DPED curriculum to include an understanding of blended learning approaches for new teachers, including supporting them to source and leverage additional resources for a variety of digital platforms, e.g., using TV and radio lessons or materials shared by WhatsApp or SMS to reinforce learning, multiply children’s engagement with learning materials, and turn many more moments in the day as learning opportunities for children, even when they are not in class or even in school.
- Review the education management induction and training to enable them to use technology systems effectively for the smooth running of the school, e.g., using mobile phones for attendance monitoring.
- Building on the way in which parents were involved in the children’s education during the COVID-19 pandemic, and develop a better awareness of the expected level of learning outcomes, and encourage parents to stay involved in their children’s education by supporting them with alternative delivery mechanisms. Strengthening communication mechanisms between home and schools to encourage parents to support their children with remote learning. Support parents to recognize the importance of informal learning opportunities during everyday activities as well as help them to see how to encourage children’s learning.

**Recommendation 4**

**Teacher training:** Prepare teachers to deliver distance learning and use it as a platform for teachers to change the way they teach.

Distance learning mechanisms are a future priority for the Government. Support for distance and blended learning takes in a range of considerations to enable teachers to deliver blended-learning programmes. Adequate preparation and the development of both teachers and school leaders are essential for teachers, along with the development of supportive conditions will enable the system to build a level of resilience.

1. Place more emphasis on school-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD). This pandemic showed how teachers have become engaged and improved their skills to deliver online lessons because they were responding to a real need to learn and improve. School-based CPD will encourage teachers to work together to find solutions for their school and
students based on an understanding of local context. Support school-based CPD with easily accessible online resources that can be used by individual teachers or in discussion with peers. Use learning from successful examples such as English In Action. 117

2. Build training to manage social and emotional learning into PTI trainings and integrate it into the teacher competencies.

3. Give school leaders and teachers the support to develop skills and knowledge in different aspects of distance learning so that they can develop materials and support their students effectively. This would include topics such as developing print materials, coaching students by phone, peer-to-peer learning, etc., so that a greater number of students could be reached through different media. This would strengthen a teacher’s ability to manage continuity of learning when there are school closures for reasons such as flooding, cyclones, etc., thus decreasing the loss of learning hours for students. Developing these skills would also have the potential to permanently change the way that teachers interact with their students, giving them the time to get to know them in smaller groups and understand their learning strengths and difficulties and provide support which really meets the students’ needs. This effect can be amplified with an additional focus on teacher-parent interactions, especially regarding learning outcomes: parents need to understand what their child is supposed to know how to do in each grade, especially early grades, so they can monitor and encourage their child’s home learning, writing practice, reading practice, etc.

4. Consider what support mechanisms could be introduced to support teachers to manage family and household commitments in times of emergency and still be part of distance learning.

Recommendation 5

Support and encourage education officers to work in partnership with local NGOs and CSOs to devise and implement local solutions. Working together would strengthen the knowledge and understanding of communities and the production of data/information about what works to enable all children to participate in learning and stay in school as long as possible.

1. Encourage stronger teamwork between primary and secondary local education officers and NGOs so that they can share learning and develop a greater understanding of the needs of the communities, leading to greater efficiency and a smoother transition between primary and lower secondary.

2. Encourage Upazila teams to identify those responses within the district/Upazila which have been effective in reaching marginalized groups, build on them and consider how they could be adapted to reach different communities. Develop targeted plans to reach the most marginalized children who are in schools and out of school to support their participation.

3. Enable local education officers and schools to be flexible in finding the different approaches to improving access, participation and learning, e.g., through mechanisms like flexible opening times.

4. Education officers, working in collaboration with relevant CSO-NGO where relevant, at local level, could also more efficiently combat early marriage and child labour among marginalized groups.
4.3. Conclusion

This report has shown that the effects of the pandemic on children encompass different aspects of their growth and development. With schools closed for almost a year, the decrease in learning time and inequitable access to alternative methods of education and support will lead to learning loss for most children, with the most disadvantaged left further behind. Alongside this learning loss, there have been other effects on children, such as a decrease in access to food and rise in abuse, which threaten growth and development and increase the risk of dropping out. Teachers have faced changes in teaching methods for which they were unprepared, and many lack protected time and space to work. Families have had added pressures as unemployment has risen, incomes dropped, and food prices increased leading to high levels of anxiety. All this points to a worrying impact on the long-term future of learners, and when schools reopen there will need to be a rethink of the curriculum to meet their needs.

The Government and partners responded remarkably quickly to developing approaches for supporting continuity of learning while schools were closed. They mobilized national and local expertise from across the sector to create a response and recovery plan. At the same time, they set up four working groups to plan how different media, TV, radio, online platforms, and mobile phones could be used to support learning to continue. The first of these plans was rolled out within three weeks of schools closing, and the rest soon thereafter. Thousands of lessons were recorded, shown on TV, and posted on social media platforms. Recognizing that there were still many children who did not have access to those platforms, radio lessons were broadcast through community radio and mobile phone support was planned. These two initiatives extended the reach but there remained children without access to these devices who were left behind.

These responses had broad coverage across the country but were not able to reach every community. Localized approaches from Government officers and NGOs have supported the broad coverage. Because of the knowledge and skills of the education officers and NGO workers, they were able to reach further into communities with solutions that were more flexible and adaptable. Although these localized solutions were not consistently applied across the country, this combination of a broad response being supported by local initiatives is a model that can be learned from, both within Bangladesh and beyond.

Another area which emerged as a strength, and something which could be capitalized on in future is the way in which teachers were able to develop skills according to need and interest. Teachers were enthusiastic about recording video lessons and, despite various obstacles, they used phones and other devices to video lessons in their houses, then posted them on social media. The change in the quality and the spread of ideas throughout the months showed that they were learning from each other and improving their practice.

The size of the education system and the number of learners meant that the Government could not work alone in its response. Partnership at all levels and across sectors, which utilized strength and networks, were essential to the sharing learning and reach as far as possible into remote communities. Some of this was successful, such as the use of teachers to highlight and refer any health and well-being concerns, spread health messages and support learning. There needed to be more interconnected communication, monitoring and feedback mechanisms so that this reach and support extended throughout the country. Children have now been out of school for almost a year. It will be the responsibility of the whole education sector to make sure that children are not disadvantaged by this gap in their schooling. This will mean using assessment effectively to drive learning according to need, rather than teachers being overly concerned with curriculum coverage. There will need to be catch-up programmes and remedial measures implemented with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged children.

The challenge now will be to use the learning from this experience to strengthen education in Bangladesh. Building on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that have developed and emerged throughout the sector could transform teaching, schools, and the way that they are managed so there is more flexibility. Mobilizing community members and parents to get more involved in learning would increase the value of those skills that are developed outside a formal setting and benefit the future of many children. With this type of rethinking around education, Bangladesh could not only increase resilience for the future but also build a better system, which could improve learning outcomes.
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<tr>
<th>CONSULTATION</th>
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<th>DESIGNATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development partners at the national level</td>
<td>Tashmina Rahman</td>
<td>Education Specialist</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nor Shirin MD Mokhtar</td>
<td>Chief of Education</td>
<td>UNICEF Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahfuza Rahman</td>
<td>Programme Officer</td>
<td>UNESCO Dhaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government partners at the national level</td>
<td>Md Zobayedur Rahman</td>
<td>Director, Training Division</td>
<td>Directorate of Primary Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MD. Mazharul Haque</td>
<td>Assistant Specialist</td>
<td>National Academy for Primary Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Md. Mostafa</td>
<td>Senior Specialist</td>
<td>National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Md. Afzal Hossain Sarwar</td>
<td>Policy Specialist and Head- Future of Learning</td>
<td>A2i, ICT Division, Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government partners at the sub-national level</td>
<td>Md. Nobej Uddin Sarker</td>
<td>District Primary Education Officer (DPED)</td>
<td>District Primary Education Office- Nilphamari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Md. Tajul Islam</td>
<td>Assistant District Primary Education Officer (ADPEO)</td>
<td>District Primary Education Office- Nilphamari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rizwanul Hoque</td>
<td>Assistant District Primary Education Officer (ADPEO)</td>
<td>District Primary Education Office- Nilphamari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Swapan Kumar Das</td>
<td>Upazila Education Officer (UEO)</td>
<td>Upazila Primary Education Office- Dimla, Nilphamari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharifa Akther</td>
<td>Upazila Education Officer (UEO)</td>
<td>Upazila Primary Education Office- Kishoreganj, Nilphamari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mohammad Sazzad Hossain</td>
<td>District Primary Education Officer (DPED)</td>
<td>District Primary Education Office- Rangamati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nikhilesh Chakma</td>
<td>Upazila Education Officer (UEO)</td>
<td>Upazila Primary Education Office- Belaichari, Rangamati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jan E Alam</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Sustainable Social Services in CHT (ISSSCHT) Project, Rangamati, Ministry of Chattogram Hill Tracts Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Afroza Yasmin</td>
<td>Education Officer</td>
<td>UNICEF Chattogram Field Office</td>
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