IGDC
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Transforming Education Summit

Reflections from the Eastern Caribbean

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IGDC Working Paper No.5

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Antigua & Barbuda

Barbados

Commonwealth of Dominica

Grenada

St. Kitts & Nevis

Saint Lucia

St. Vincent & the Grenadines

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Foreword

This working paper summarises a more in-depth report submitted to UNICEF in September 2022 by Dr Gale T C Rigobert entitled 'Transforming Education Summit: Summary Report for the Eastern Caribbean' during Dr Rigobert's time with IGDC as a visiting fellow.

The report reflects the findings of consultation exercises carried out by participating countries: Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines. This working paper is a compilation of the main collective conclusions and proposed recommendations for transforming the education sector in the sub-region.

Title Rights

This working paper is published in accordance with the call for expression of interest for the overarching report, *"All materials created by the Contractor[1] which bears a direct relation to, or is made in order to perform this contract and any intellectual property rights thereof, including but not limited to patents, copyright and trademarks, shall be jointly owned by UNICEF and the Contractor. At the request of UNICEF, the Contractor shall assist in securing such property rights and transferring them to UNICEF in compliance with the requirements of the law governing such rights. Any third-party usage shall require written permission from both parties."*[2] This paper is duly published with the permission of the author, Dr Gale T C Rigobert and UNICEF.

Acknowledgments

The publication was made possible thanks to the multiple inputs of partners and stakeholders throughout the Eastern Caribbean and the United Nations regional personnel and representatives. A huge debt is owed to the public officers in the various Ministries of Education across the seven countries under consideration: Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines. In each of the aforementioned countries, Government Ministries and agencies, NGOs, CSOs, Youth organisations, private sector and representatives from regional and international organisations participated meaningfully, lending their voice to the topic of concern: transforming and reimagining education for the 21st century in a post COVID-19 environment.

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[1] Dr Gale T C Rigobert served as lead consultant/contractor overseeing the national conveners/consultants from the respective seven (7) countries: Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

[2] Transforming Education Summit | United Nations, Cited June 9th, 2022 @18:07pm https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit

The rich deliberations that ensued, benefitted from the collective experience and passion of all who participated. The outcomes of the various national consultations and the policy prescriptions for the way forward, are truly reflective of the depth of insight and commitment of stakeholders to the human resource development of their respective countries.

The level of interest that was evident at the highest political levels is laudable. At a time when there are so many competing priorities for Governments, it was very encouraging to note the keen attention of line Ministers and Heads of State as the Transforming Education Summit (TES) national consultations and related activities took place in the lead up to the September 2022 TES, alongside the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

The verve with which the youth embraced the opportunity to express their thoughts on the education system and in particular their vision for a reimagined education sector in the 21st century was particularly encouraging and is worthy of commendation. In many countries retired educators were keen to share their experiences and provided useful historical context to the discussions.

The technical support and guidance received from the United Nations family in the region, made it easy for interagency collaboration and cross fertilization of ideas and knowledge. The unrelenting dedication of the national TES conveners and consultants was evidenced by the effort that they put into driving the national consultation process and preparing the respective commitment statements and national consultation reports.

Particular thanks to Colleen Robinson-Hunte and Fiaz Shah, who provided leadership and guidance throughout the evolution of the project. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Prof. Henrice Altink and her team from the IGDC at York University, UK.

Executive Summary

There have been increasing concerns about the extent to which COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in the education system, thus deepening learning loss and the attendant global learning crisis, with the understanding that the most vulnerable groups experienced the most disproportionate disadvantage. While learning loss and yawning knowledge gaps pre-occupy many, there are other seemingly latent issues that have significant bearing on the learning experiences of students as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus the core strengths and resilience of the education sector, but also magnified the weaknesses, and may have exacerbated the existing shortcomings and unearthed new challenges. While many Governments sought desperately to stem the negative impact of COVID-19 on the school population and the education sector overall, the remarkable strain on those in the frontlines of education, and the lack of resources to respond to emerging issues in a timely fashion, meant that there were still very far-reaching and potentially detrimental consequences to generations of students.

It is this concern which, in part, motivated Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to convene a special summit in September 2022 dubbed – the Transforming Education Summit (TES) - in response to a global crisis in education. The spirit in which the TES was crafted is best expressed thus: "*The Summit provides a unique opportunity to elevate education to the top of the global political agenda and to mobilize action, ambition, solidarity and solutions to recover pandemic-related learning losses and sow the seeds to transform education in a rapidly changing world.*"[3]

Hence, in preparation for the TES, countries were encouraged to focus on at least one of five thematic tracks:
1. Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools;
2. Learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development;
3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession;
4. Digital learning and transformation and
5. Financing of Education.

Through a series of national consultations, countries engaged stakeholders to solicit their sentiments on the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector, but more broadly, and very importantly to reimagine what a transformed education sector in the 21st century should look like. National conveners/consultants championed and oversaw these consultations and related activities, and filed country reports, accordingly. Each country was also required to produce a two-page statement of commitment.

Further, the expectation was that the national engagements held preceding the TES would provide a better guide to Governments and provide very detailed prescriptions, not only to resolve the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system, and on the children in particular, but also to build resilience within the education sector, so that it is better insulated from future adverse shocks. It is for that reason in part, that some Governments were eager to institute "education continuity plans" (with some measured success), having experienced first-hand the ramifications of instruction time lost and the corresponding learning loss.

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[3] Transforming Education Summit | United Nations. Cited 18/09/2022 https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit.

Very importantly, the national consultations, well apart from assessing the impact of COVID-19 on the Education sector, also identified current challenges in the education system, some of which may very well have pre-dated COVID-19 and / or may have worsened because of COVID-19. Hence, recommendations on a way forward are innovative and have as their primary focus re-imagining education in the 21st century.

Recently there has been intense focus on reimagining education; how knowledge and learning can reshape the future of humanity and the planet, especially against the backdrop of increasing complexities and rapid innovations, with agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF leading the charge in some respects.[4] The creeping fears that SDG4, which pertains to education, may be under threat, and that the chances of meeting the ambitions enshrined in SDG4 appear to be eroding,[5] is yet another motivation for the ramped-up ambition that gave rise to the convening of the Transforming Education Summit (TES) of September 2022.

"Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education" published by UNESCO in 2021,[6] presented a jolting reality about the state of education globally. This initiative provided further impetus for the convening of the TES to allow countries to present their particular experiences in the sector and collectively to begin to craft a way forward.

In summary, therefore, participating countries undertook to:
1. Identify concrete recommendations to reverse or stem learning loss attributable to COVID-19;
2. Prescribe sustainable corrective measures to address learning loss, which pre-dated COVID-19;
3. Craft a roadmap to accelerate progress on SDG4;
4. Outline a new framework for engagement, to mobilize global political ambition and tangible commitment to action: in effect agreeing to a new social contract on education and eventually identifying the resources to realize/implement this and
5. Articulate what a reimagined education sector in the 21st century should look like.

The overarching concerns around the predetermined tracks indicated above sought to
1. Assess the impact of COVID-19;
2. Examine delivery, access, quality instruction and attainment;
3. Examine the reasons for inequity and inequality in the education sector (identify reasons for non-inclusion or exclusion) and
4. Assess the quality of delivery of educational services.

With respect to learning outcomes, the consultations touched on the following questions, among others:
1. Has the learning crisis deepened?
2. How did the performance of students in the following 18 months to 2 years compare with that of students in the pre-COVID-19 / pre-lock down periods?
3. To what extent were teachers able to ascertain whether distance, online or mixed modalities / blended learning resulted in worse / better educational outcomes?

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[4] UNESCO Futures of Education - A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT, Cited 20/09/2022, https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/.

[5] UNESCO Futures of Education - A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT Cited 20/09/2022 https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/

[6] Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education - UNESCO Digital Library, Cited 20/09/2022 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707

4. What were the vital lessons learned from that experience?
5. What sustainable measures can be instituted to better insulate the sector from external shocks, thereby building greater resilience in the sector?

While there were broad similarities across the various territories, some individual accounts stood out, warranting further enquiry and most certainly would require massive injections of resources to resolve.

Introduction

The onset of COVID-19, which was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in March 2020, has brought with it unimaginable changes and unforeseen disruptions that the world was woefully ill prepared for. As the international community grappled with this new health pandemic, the impact on every sector was disastrous, leaving Governments scrambling for answers with no playbook or blueprint to follow. It meant that it was largely trial and error, which worked relatively well in some jurisdictions, but proved particularly challenging in most. If ever there was any scepticism about the world being a global village and that globalization had come to near full maturity, COVID-19 proved how porous our borders are and how susceptible we are, even when there is a presumption of insularity.

While there is no denying that every sector was adversely impacted by COVID-19, perhaps the sector that proved most volatile with wide ranging implications (now and possibly in the future), was the education sector. Well beyond what the naked eye could see, the unintended consequences of lockdowns and the temporary halt to face-to-face instruction unearthed the weaknesses of the education system; the opportunity cost of remaining stuck in old pedagogic modalities of teaching; the cost of techno-phobia in education, especially among educators; and the dire implications of years of underfunding of the education sector all further exacerbating existing learning loss globally.

For those who appreciate the holistic character of education service delivery, COVID-19 also brought to the fore what many had long argued or suspected: school for many students is the safest place and the place where many are guaranteed at least one nutritious meal per day and provided with love and comfort that some are denied in their homes. Therefore, the psycho-social impact of COVID-19 must form part of any holistic analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on students.

Scope

This report reflects the outcome of national engagements in the seven participating countries of the Eastern Caribbean.[7] While one can expect there to be many similarities, issues such as resources, teaching capacity, the extent to which ICTs had already formed part of the backbone of the service offering in education, size of the school population, the character and extent of a national digital divide and resource mobilisation capacity, all informed the findings and will inevitably determine the way forward in the respective countries.

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[7] The research focuses on seven (7) Caribbean states – Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts & Nevis and St. Vincent & the Grenadines.

Notwithstanding, this initial enquiry is critical to shaping future interventions, as it is now widely understood that COVID-19 is going nowhere, at least not for now. In fact, we must now accept that we must co-exist with COVID-19. While this current undertaking is more focused on taking a snapshot of where we are today, based on the experience of the last two or three years, it would be worthwhile to consider a more longitudinal study to trace the academic development of students subjected to the effects of COVID-19 and how they fare over time.

The age group under consideration here ranges from kindergarten students (age five) to secondary-school students pursuing CSEC in form five and students pursuing tertiary level programmes. The report also reflects how well students fared during what can be considered the peak periods of COVID-19 and the immediate months that followed.

While the national consultations were a critical prerequisite for meaningful participation in the TES, the exercises leading up to the event need not be seen as an end in and of themselves, but rather as an important component of anticipated programmes of interventions by the UN and its affiliates to address the global crisis in education.

Some countries had already started their own internal assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on their education sector, in some cases with technical and financial assistance from regional or international organisations.

Methodology

For any comprehensive understanding of the issues outlined around the various tracks on which the TES hinges, ideally both quantitative and qualitative approaches should have been employed. Regrettably, the resources and timeframe within which the national consultations were held did not allow for a rigorous quantitative enquiry. Therefore, much of the information gathered stemmed from focus group-type engagements, largely   qualitative in nature. It is strongly recommended that a follow-up study be undertaken to generate some quantitative data to corroborate much of what was reported anecdotally.

The consultations involved a wide cross-section of public and private sector entities and sought very deliberately to engage the youth.

Objectives and Outcomes of the National Consultations

The main objective of the national consultations was to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector during the period March 2020 to September 2022 and to articulate what a reimagined education sector should look like.

The deliberations pivoted around the five thematic tracks and the following key areas of concern:

Thematic Action Track 1: Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools

In deconstructing what is entailed in this thematic track, one could not help but observe how broad it is, and the extent to which the issues under consideration assumed a new resonance in a COVID-19 context. It revolved around national responses but also assessed the efficacy of the global response to the challenges caused by COVID-19 in the education sector. The main discussions were around:

1. Ascertaining how many countries/jurisdictions had a national framework for responding to the COVID-19 crisis;
2. Assessing the level of collaboration between and among agencies to help stem the impact of COVID-19 on the student population in particular;
3. Assessing the extent to which inclusivity forms part of the service offering in education (especially as it pertains to migrants, ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities/or differently abled and students with special needs);
4. Assessing the extent to which countries were able to cater for students, who come from indigent families (be it through the school feeding programme or school bursary or book support program);
5. Determining how many countries were able to draft and implement education continuity plans and measure the effectiveness of those and
6. Assessing the capacity of countries to mobilize technical and financial resources to deal with the COVID-19 crisis in education and the effective utilisation of these resources.

Here too, there was much dialogue on the psycho-social impact of COVID-19 and how countries could improve on their service delivery in that respect.

1. Assessing the psycho-social impact of COVID-19 on students, teachers and parents alike;
2. Determining whether there was any psycho-social support given to students, parents and educators and evaluating the effectiveness of this intervention and
3. Determining the effectiveness of public health education as it pertained to COVID-19 in particular.

Thematic Action Track 2: Learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development

Regrettably the various consultations revealed that "sustainable development" as a core theme did not feature in the delivery of the school curricular. In that regard, there was an unmistakable plea to do more to integrate sustainable development into the school curricular.

In a similar vein the conversations about "learning and skills for life" reflected a new appreciation for technical and vocational education and training (TVET), not solely as a pursuit in and of itself, but more broadly speaking as a life skill. It was argued that exposure to one or more TVET subjects would overcome the stigma attached to TVET, equip students with some "survival skills" and enhance their employability. Hence, TVET should underpin the educational experience of students throughout their academic career.

Thematic Action Track 3: Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

All the consultations highlighted the level of preparedness of the teachers to leverage existing learning technologies as a key area of concern and sought to address the techno-deficit in teacher training and to remedy the situation by providing opportunities for digital retooling and upskilling. Ongoing professional development was deemed critical to ensuring that today's teachers are adequately equipped to deliver learning outcomes in the 21st century.

Thematic Action Track 4: Digital learning and transformation

Much of the discussion revolved around the level of preparedness of the sector to leverage educational technologies. Moreover, having experienced first-hand how hybrid learning can be implemented and, in particular, the benefits and shortcomings of online teaching/learning, stakeholders were in a much better position to ascertain where the resource gaps lie and how these define or worsen the digital divide in education and the associated implications for learning.

All the participating countries were keen to delve into the issue and the main questions raised included to what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated or highlighted the nature and magnitude of the digital divide? That investigation involved:
1. Assessing the impact of lack of devices, and non-connectivity on students' ability to continue to follow their curricular;
2. Assessing the impact of the distribution of devices;
3. Measuring the number of educators, who availed themselves of learning opportunities, with respect to enhancing their digital competency and comfort level with teaching/ learning technologies;
4. Determining the impact of upskilling and retooling of educators with respect to teaching and learning technologies;
5. Assessing the effectiveness of the various practices employed to help the most vulnerable (especially students with physical and/or learning disabilities);
6. Ascertaining how many children were "left behind" because of the digital divide;
7. Determining the barriers to access and how detrimental these were to students' ability to learn;
8. Determining how many students had absolutely no interaction with their teachers during lock down periods or suspension of (face-to-face) school;
9. Determining how many students with learning or physical disabilities were left behind;
10. Determining what percentage of parents/guardians had the capacity to assist students at home and
11. Determining what percentage of parents/guardians were able to assist students with learning disabilities.

Perhaps of the five tracks, "Financing of education" was subjected to the highest level of scrutiny and consensus among participating stakeholders. Many participants stressed that education is woefully underfunded. In all of the countries, education accounted for a significant slice of the national budget but much of that budget (in some cases as much as 80%) went to salaries and emoluments, given that the sector is a large employer. Many lamented that when one disaggregates the spending on education, it is astounding to note that there is little left over for development programming or for undertaking the necessary policy interventions. Hence, there were clarion calls for increase in finance for the sector and very importantly more sustainable financing for education.

Delimitations

One of the unforeseen impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was the exacerbated condition of women and children living in unsafe homes with abusive partners or parents. That concern reverberated across the international community, earning the dubious title of "the shadow pandemic".[8] While there was much dialogue on this new scourge stemming from the compulsory lock downs instituted by many countries, the lack of data meant that advocates and policymakers were reliant on anecdotal accounts with very little data to support claims of an emerging "shadow pandemic".

If we are to continue to advocate for and introduce or enhance policies for the safety of women and their families, we cannot continue to rely on passionate accounts of traumatic experiences, without undertaking the relevant research. Any response by local Governments, CSOs or International Organisations must be inspired by data.[9] Therefore, a subsequent study must assess the impact of COVID-19 on women and children in already vulnerable situations.[10] While much of the exchanges on the provision of psycho-social support referenced the "shadow pandemic", in the absence of scientific data there is still no way of adequately measuring the delivery gap in this area. Notwithstanding, the participating territories all recognized the need to broaden services in that regard: calling for more school counsellors and social workers, for example.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of schools and lockdowns. This has inadvertently forced the international community to wake up and pay closer attention to the education sector. The perennial issues of inequity and inequality in education, learning loss, knowledge gaps and the attendant social and economic

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[8] Unintended Consequences of Lock downs: COVID-19 and the Shadow Pandemic by Saravana Ravindran and Manisha Shah. Cited 30th December 2021 https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w27562/w27562.pdf

[9] While understandably this concern merits its own independent research, there is no denying that this issue warrants some investigation albeit a preliminary enquiry, given the harrowing reports (largely unofficial) from women and girls in particular.

[10] While this is a critical and often neglected area of research, the current undertaking will not address this issue in the depth required. However, subsequent, and more in-depth research will inevitably have to treat with this issue as it has direct bearing on what obtains in the classroom, the learning experience of children and how their capacity to retain and performance in exams are impacted.

problems have been exacerbated, presumably for generations to come, and have finally caught the attention of most (and not just an interested few!). The TES championed by the UN Secretary-General in September 2022, may signal a paradigmatic shift in the way education is perceived globally (and especially in the Eastern Caribbean).

The TES had among its major objectives to:
1. Mobilise greater political ambition;
2. Reimagine education and
3. Accelerate progress on education and the 2030 agenda.

Initially, many countries voiced some scepticism about the TES national consultations, worried that these too would become another talk shop. UN personnel gave stakeholders the reassurance that "the TES is not a talk shop", and that the conversations are critical to designing programs to delve deeper into the issues (in education) and put the countries on a progressive path to achieving the SDGs.[11] Further, it is the collective responsibility of all stakeholders to drive concrete commitment and action to address the global learning crisis. The goal is to ensure that the countries benefit from the critical policy interventions and that development agencies, lending institutions, Governments and policymakers are better informed regarding the specific needs of each jurisdiction. In effect the ambition is to maximize the return on every dollar invested in the sector, and to realize these gains in the quickest possible time.

The national consultations convened preceding the TES sought to:
1. Assess the impact of COVID-19;
2. Identify concrete recommendations going forward;
3. Promote a reimagining of education (find innovative solutions) and
4. Encourage countries to make a bold commitment to education (expressed in a two-page statement of commitment).

Having held such comprehensive deliberations involving a wide range of stakeholders and meaningful engagement, it is expected that the recommendations proffered will prove useful to the countries under study. For these prescriptions to have the desired beneficial effect, they must be crafted with the particular socio-political context and specificity of each jurisdiction in mind. Evidently some of the prescriptions will have broad applicability, but it is expected that some countries would need very particular interventions given their own peculiar circumstances.

Arguably, some of the prescriptions would require a longer gestation period to bring about the desired outcome. The goal is to ensure that the intended beneficiaries do not get trapped in a downward spiral of learning loss and widening knowledge gaps, but that in the least, the negative and undesirable outcomes and downward learning trends caused or exacerbated by COVID-19 can be halted or stemmed.

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[11] Marlon Marie, UN Country Coordinator in Dominica. It was also evident from other conversations with UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP, that partner agencies stand ready to work with the education sector to address the concerns or challenges that beset the sector.

The inspirational tone that pervaded the many presentations by UN leaders and heads of state suggest that there is much consensus on the urgency of addressing the educational crisis and in meeting the above stipulated objectives. In the months and years ahead, it will be left to be seen whether the ramped up political ambition is matched with the commensurate financial resources to help fulfil the many prescriptions that countries have tabled for consideration. Further, the quality of the corrective interventions (programs) will be judged not only by the dollar value of the projects undertaken, but more importantly, the extent to which these programs can be sustained and can stem or reverse learning loss, afford marginalized populations equal opportunities for access to learning, and better equip and position Caribbean nationals to participate more meaningfully in the global political economy (one that is largely digital in nature and has to treat with the greatest existential threat to humankind, that is, climate change)!

The Way Forward

The roadmap for the way forward emerging from the consultations included the following critical actions and priorities:

1. Prioritise foundational learning: Early childhood education is fundamental to all learning. Hence, more should be done to achieve universal early childhood education, especially given that still too many families are priced out of the market and simply cannot afford to pay.
    a. Integrate the early childhood education sector into mainstream schools, so that parents do not have to bear the burden of the cost (especially that of private Early Childhood Education centres).

2. Train teachers to deliver educational outcomes reflective of trends and labour needs of the 21st century national and global market.

3. Review qualifying entry requirements (including psychometric testing[12]) for the teaching profession. Endeavour to attract the brightest and the best. However, this also means that remuneration packages will have to be reviewed so that they are competitive, and teaching can be perceived as a lucrative career option.
    a. Revisit scale of pay for teachers in the early childhood education sector in particular.

4. Review the teaching profession and the standards that inform what obtains in the sector. This endeavour can benefit from policy prescriptions emanating from CARICOM[13] and the OECS (to ensure some degree of harmonization and alignment of standards throughout the region). There are guidelines in place that are still to be embraced by all CARICOM member states. Some, countries have already started the process. There is full appreciation for the sentiment that teachers need to be on the same level, to be able to deliver "excellence".

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[12] These discussions revolved around attracting the "right" personality type for teaching.

[13] Such as the CARICOM Standards for the Teaching Profession: Teachers, Educational Leaders and Teacher Educators. Cited 30/09/2022 https://caricom.org/wp-content/uploads/CARICOM-Standards-for-the-Teaching-Profession-21.08.2020-.pdf

5. Provide more scholarships and learning opportunities for professional advancement of teachers, especially in specialised areas of training. Continuous professional development of teachers and institutional leaders will ensure that they remain relevant and au courant with developments in the sector (and overall, to the extent that the education sector can be impacted). Further pleas were made for more attention to be given to mentoring and succession planning in the sector.

6. Introduce digital competency courses[14] at every level in the education system to benefit teachers and students alike. These should become part of the core subject offering, given that we live in a digital world and greater efforts are being made to integrate ICTs in education.

7. Embrace gaming[15] for educational purposes (leveraging the use of more interactive learning technologies, such as educational apps).

8. Integrate digital learning technologies into the education system. The lingering fear is that hybrid learning, and the introduction of online instruction become an emergency response and are not fully infused into the educational staple in the region.

9. Establish sustainable mechanisms for financing education (reducing reliance on national budgets).

10. Enhance multi-stakeholder engagements. Engage educators and other stakeholders (multiple constituencies and interest groups) when contemplating key policy decisions.

11. Incentivize the private sector, the diaspora and alumni associations to invest in education.

12. Improve monitoring and evaluation modalities.

13. Incorporate all-inclusive education into the educational framework. This means that countries are better able to cater to the multiple intelligences of students; deliver to students with learning and physical challenges/special needs; ethnic minorities and students whose first language is different from the official language.

14. Establish institutions that offer specialised training. For example, centre of excellence for sports.

15. Promote skills training. Prioritise the teaching of TVET. Promote / facilitate opportunities for formal and informal learning in TVET.

16. Promote the value of NVQs, CVQs and embrace the CARICOM qualification framework (CQF).

17. Review the curricular throughout the education system to ensure alignment[16] with UN standards and to ensure that the offerings are in keeping with the demands of the global political economy.

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[14] The suite of courses should also include modules on cyber security, online safety for students. Many insisted that IT should be compulsory at all levels.

[15] Game-based learning can prove particularly beneficial in the teaching of science and Mathematics, for example.

[16] Concerns were also raised about curricular harmonisation within countries across grades and forms. This was echoed vociferously in Dominica, for example.

18. Encourage greater youth[17] involvement in decision making in education. Many young people do not see the tangible outcomes of their learning experiences. Hence the "student voice" should be critical to future decisions and initiatives in the sector[18].

19. Engineer sustainable, resilient education continuity plans that are readily available for implementation in emergency situations.[19] This is particularly poignant given the region's susceptibility to adverse weather events that usually cause disruptions to instructions.

20. Rethink the design of schools to incorporate the needs of differently abled students; integrate climate smart / green technology and make provision for the full integration of educational technologies. Teachers, youth and other stakeholders should be intimately involved in discussions on the design of schools.

21. Strengthen and expand the telecommunications framework to allow for easy and affordable access to internet services.

22. Invest in technological hardware to retrofit schools with smart classrooms.

23. Establish learning / ICT centres in communities to help address the urban-rural digital divide.

24. Equip students with the requisite technological hardware (tablets, e-books etc so that they are well poised to maximize the benefits to be had from e-learning.

25. Improve psychosocial support services to teachers and students. Every participating country highlighted this need, with many asking very specifically for social workers and counsellors (appreciating their distinct skillsets and clinical roles).

26. Expand the social welfare provision to indigent families (For example, the school feeding program and school bursary program).

27. Address the persistent non/poor-performance of boys at every level in the education system.

28. Move away from the continuing use of corporal punishment in schools. Adopt a framework that promotes rewarding positive behaviour versus the punitive posture still being adhered to in many jurisdictions.

29. Institute remedial programmes to address the learning loss that occurred during COVID-19 in particular.

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[17] The unmistakable plea by students to make school a "safe" and "fun" place resonated with educators and policy makers.

[18] Incidentally on the same day that national consultations were being held in St. Vincent & the Grenadines a youth parliamentary debate was convened to address concerns in the education sector. That seemed rather fortuitous but proved particularly useful. The youth were very vocal about their own vision for the educations sector in their country.

[19] In countries such as Dominica, given their recent experience of hurricane Maria in 2017, "resilience" assumed a very comprehensive connotation – climate, financial, physical and educational resilience, for example.

31. Make deliberate and calculated effort to integrate education for sustainable development into school curricular.[20]

32. Accelerate progress towards SDG4. This understandably requires massive investments in education at all levels. The calls for sufficient, equitable and effective financing it is hoped will not fall on deaf ears.

A new and reimagined education system should also be hinged on resilience in education. Education goals and ambitions need to be redefined, depicting a new vision for the global citizenry.

Thankfully, many of the interventions recommended can be championed at a regional level to better leverage the synergistic gains and maximize returns on every dollar invested in education. Indeed, a new social contract on education is what the world needs now. But for any real gains to be made, the requisite political will and financial backing are critical for the reimagined educational framework to deliver on the collective promise "no child left behind"!

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[20] ESD is a critical component of global citizenship education, but is relatively absent from the curricular.

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