POLICY BRIEF

Youth and the Pandemic Conundrum - Lessons from Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda on Navigating COVID-19's Educational Impact

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About this policy brief

This policy brief represents the findings of a three-year research project, "COVID19 and the Youth Question in Africa," conducted across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. The project, funded by IDRC, aimed to bridge the divide between marginalized youth and their governments. By promoting transparency and accountability, it strived to improve governance mechanisms.

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Introduction

COVID-19 has severely disrupted the educational landscape in Africa. Drawing from our research project "COVID-19 and the Youth Question in Africa: Impact, Response and Protection Measures", this policy brief presents key findings from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda and offers targeted interventions to bolster educational resilience and digital inclusion.

A Landscape Altered: The Educational Impact of COVID-19

In Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, the COVID-19 pandemic has provoked significant educational turmoil, as observed among nearly 90 million students in these three countries. The school closures due to the pandemic have had a significant impact, leading to increased dropout rates, learning losses, and associated mental health challenges. The shift to remote learning was particularly challenging, exposing deep-rooted educational inequalities and digital divides.

A Disconnected Reality: The Digital Divide

The transition to remote learning accentuated the digital divide, leaving many students, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, at a significant disadvantage. Limited internet connectivity, lack of access to digital devices, and low digital literacy rates have hindered the effectiveness of remote learning and risked perpetuating educational disparities.

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A Path to Resilience: Lessons and Recommendations

Building Robust Educational Systems

Our findings underscore the importance of robust and flexible educational systems that can withstand future shocks. This involves enhancing teacher training for online instruction, devising catch-up programs for affected students, and incorporating mental health support to mitigate the psychological impacts of the pandemic.

Bridging the Digital Divide

Investments in digital infrastructure are crucial for democratizing access to education. This includes widening internet connectivity, reducing costs associated with digital access, and ensuring schools have the necessary technological tools to facilitate effective remote learning.

Ensuring Inclusive Remote Learning

Equitable remote learning initiatives are essential to ensure no student is left behind. Providing access to digital devices, creating offline learning materials for students without internet, and establishing community learning hubs are integral parts of an inclusive remote learning strategy.

Promoting Digital Literacy

Digital literacy has emerged as a key component in the shift to online education. It is critical to embed digital literacy in school curricula, thereby empowering students, teachers, and parents to utilize digital platforms effectively and safely.

Conclusion

Our research has revealed both the challenges and opportunities that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented for education in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. By fortifying our educational systems, addressing the digital divide, ensuring inclusive remote learning, and promoting digital literacy, we can turn this crisis into a transformative moment for African youth's education. The lessons drawn from this crisis can provide a roadmap for creating more resilient, inclusive, and effective educational systems in the post-pandemic era.

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