



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



MODERATORS

Kwame Akyeampong and Emiliana Vegas

November 2020

The 17 Rooms initiative is convened by the Brookings Institution and The Rockefeller Foundation to stimulate near-term cooperative actions to advance the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This document summarizes insights and actions that emerged from the working group discussions in Room 4 during the 17 Rooms 2020 flagship process. The text was independently prepared by the Room's Moderators and participants, in response to the common question asked of all Rooms in 2020: "In light of recent crises linked to COVID-19, systemic racism, and other urgent challenges, what are 1 to 3 actionable priorities over the coming 12-18 months that address near term needs while also making a decisive contribution to protecting or advancing your Goal's 2030 results? What actions can members of your Room take to advance these priorities?" Corresponding documents prepared by all the other Rooms are available [here](#), alongside a synthesis report prepared by the 17 Rooms secretariat.

Diagnosis

The last decade's progress in access to education and closing the learning gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students may be lost due to COVID-19. Education is emerging as a silent crisis because unlike health, where the deaths are obvious, the impact on life chances, wellbeing (socioemotional development of children and people), and economic productivity are not immediately visible, but still equally devastating. Unless this silent crisis in education is addressed, it could lead to an estimated [\\$10-15 trillion in lost global productivity](#) and a [7-25 percent loss in lifetime earnings](#) for today's cohorts of students. School closures have increased the risk of many more students dropping out of school, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. For young people not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET), COVID-19 has worsened their prospects. Girls are at a greater risk with [reported increases](#) in teenage pregnancy in some African countries.

Equally challenging is the pressure on education budgets during and after COVID-19. Before COVID-19, at least 35 countries spent less than 4 percent of GDP and less than 15 percent of their total government expenditure on [education](#). For most low-and middle-level income countries, rebuilding their education systems to provide equitable quality education and address learning loss will require increasing and smarter investment in education with benefits extending to other SDG goals. For example, increased access to quality [education increases economic growth](#), [delays marriage among the most vulnerable girls](#), [and improves access to decent work](#).

Unless education is prioritized, government recovery plans will be harder and take longer to achieve, and any future recovery will not benefit millions of disadvantaged and marginalized groups who have been most affected by COVID-19 school closures.

Response

COVID-19 has raised the urgency of scaling up investment in public education as the provider of last resort especially for the poor and marginalized students in society. However, given the constraints on national budgets, improving efficiency and equity of increased education financing must be a top priority. Globally, governments will have to focus on "catch-up" learning which means investing in teacher professional development to deliver effective remedial education has to be an important first step.

Potential next steps for 2021

Engage key stakeholders, policy makers and especially Ministers of Education and Finance in dialogue about restructuring education budgets and financing of 'catch-up' learning to reach children and young people in and out of school. This dialogue should include cost-effective approaches to rebuilding education systems to address learning loss and the role of technologies in improving access and quality learning for disadvantaged students. This can be achieved through regional, sub-regional, and national 'rebuilding education systems better and stronger' events. It will be important to produce evidence to guide governments especially in LIC/LMICs on how to invest more efficiently and equitably to accelerate learning for those furthest left behind. [#SaveOurFuture](#), a global campaign to raise awareness of the deep and silent crisis in education as a result of COVID-19 and the global consequences if this crisis is not given urgent attention, is underway. The proposed activities complement this effort by providing evidence-based, actionable guidance and tools for decision-makers to ensure that those most likely to be left behind may have quality educational opportunities during and after COVID-19.