Transforming Education Summit convened by the United Nations Secretary-General

Briefing Note

Analysis of National Statements of Commitment

08 September 2022

Common Agenda

Purpose: This analysis identifies patterns in commitments and actions to transform education as articulated in 80 out of a total of 105 TES National Statements of Commitment submitted as at 08 September 2022.

Nature of the Statements of Commitment: The nature of Statements varies widely in the level of precision of commitments and actions articulated. While some include declarations of commitment to principles and outline strategic policy priorities, others also articulate goals, targets, strategies and measures to reach them.

Articulation with National Consultations: As per guidance provided, National Statements of Commitment were to be informed by National Consultations organized as part of the TES process. 76 of the 105 countries that submitted Statements of Commitment also submitted National Consultation reports. A quarter of Statements of Commitment analyzed here reference TES National and/or Youth Consultations. In many other cases, Statements referenced consultations associated with education policy reform processes initiated prior to TES.

Covid-19 educational recovery

Almost all National Statements expressed renewed commitment to mitigate the impacts of the Covid-19 educational disruption.

Addressing learning loss: 40% of countries prioritized measures to address learning loss through accelerated or catch-up programs designed on the basis of diagnostic assessments of foundational literacy and numeracy skill levels.

Ensuring re-enrollment and mitigating drop-out: Some 40% of Statements indicated that students in rural or remote locations were more likely to have been left behind. Yet, efforts to mitigate drop-out and ensure re-enrollment were less prevalent. Two countries mentioned measures to incentivize return to school through community-based communication campaigns or extended nutrition programmes geared towards disadvantaged learners.

Supporting mental well-being: Over a third of countries prioritized the need to support the psycho-social well-being of both students and teachers. It is to be noted, however, that very few articulated concrete measures to do so.

Resilience to future shocks

Many countries underlined the need to strengthen diverse aspects of education system resilience to withstand future crises and shocks, including:

- Many countries indicated aspirations or plans to **strengthen digital learning solutions** to prepare for future crises.
- Commitments to strengthen **capacity-building in disaster-risk reduction and climate-change adaptation** within the education sector.
- A number of statements outlined the need for greater **budget elasticity**. Readiness to leverage emergency funds and crisis-responsive institutional capacity varied widely and were commensurate with countries' economic health.

Addressing educational exclusions

Most countries expressed commitments to ensuring free access to quality education as a **public good,** sometimes explicitly articulating the need to protect the non-profit nature of education.

Economically vulnerable communities: 75% of countries referenced measures to offset the direct and indirect costs of education for economically vulnerable communities. Nearly a third of countries committed to expanding school-feeding/nutrition programs. Other measures included cash incentives for poor families, free school transportation, as well as scholarships and tuition exemptions for higher education.

Learners with disabilities: 60% of Statements acknowledged gaps in access, specialized teachers, and adaptive programmes and materials for students with disabilities. These were expressed most consistently in LMICs and conflict-affected countries.

Gender equality: 75% of countries underlined the importance of gender-specific or gender-sensitive education policy, programs, and/or approaches, but few articulated specific or innovative measures.

Cultural and linguistic minorities: Only two country statements addressed the exclusion of linguistic minorities relative to the dominance of national or former colonial languages of instruction.

Legal and migratory status: While the countries analyzed here collectively host an estimated 56mi refugees, IDPs, asylum seekers, migrants or stateless persons, fewer than 40% acknowledged these marginalized populations or their specific needs in their commitments.

Transforming the teaching profession

Teacher shortages: Measures to address teacher shortages were almost entirely absent from Statements of Commitment, even in countries where there is increasing pressure on demand for teachers due to high population growth. Four countries highlighted the need to incentivize more equitable distribution of teachers in regions where learners were in greatest need. Only one country forecasted the number of recruitments needed to respond to the shortage of teachers.

Working conditions and social status: Improving the working conditions and social status of teachers were generally acknowledged as strategic priorities to attract qualified candidates and strengthen the quality of the teacher workforce. Yet only two countries offered significant examples of salary increases.

Supporting pre- and in-service training and professional development: Some 80% of countries acknowledged in-service training and professional development as a key determinant of teacher motivation/retention and this was prioritized over salary increases. Learning opportunities that support teaching as a collaborative profession through exchange programs, communities of practice, and peer mentoring were highlighted, as was continuous professional development. Many countries highlighted the need to increase qualification requirements for teachers to university level in order to elevate both teacher capacity and professional standing.

Contract teachers: The issue of contract teachers and the professional needs of the significant and invisible unappointed teacher workforce that frequently serves the poorest or most marginalized learners in LMIC communities is entirely absent.

Curricula renewal

Rethinking curricula content and methods was at the heart of more than 80% of Statements of Commitment.

Prioritizing foundational skills: More than a third of countries committed to redoubling efforts to address inadequate levels of basic literacy and numeracy skills, with focused attention on disadvantaged learners. Half of these commitments identified free, universal early-childhood education as the key to narrowing literacy achievement gaps in primary grades.

Renewing pedagogical approaches: Many countries placed strong emphasis on competency-based approaches, as well as on interdisciplinary approaches that are seen as developing capacities for systems thinking. Statements further underlined the value of project-based learning, collaborative methods, problem solving, and research on contemporary issues. Eight countries committed to the renewal of evaluation methods that assess critical, independent thinking.

Greening education: A third of countries committed to integrating climate-change education into curricula and to efforts to ensure school infrastructure exemplify carbon-neutrality.

Health education and citizenship: Socio-emotional learning, citizenship, intercultural, and sexual-reproductive health education were also frequently referenced.

Higher education, research and innovation

Some 20% of countries referenced the important role of higher education institutions as spaces of ideation, innovation, and experimentation that serve both the entire education system, as well as wider sustainable development goals.

- Close to half of these commitments referenced university research and teaching personnel as best situated to drive technological innovation generally, including through applied research directed at improving access and learning outcomes in basic education, technical education, and STEM research and application.
- LMICs frequently committed to developing post-secondary technical and vocational programs and a skilled higher education teacher workforce both to strengthen education systems and to support national economic development plans.
- Recognizing the growing transnational nature of education in today's world, Statements referencing higher education frequently pointed to the need for strengthened knowledge and intercultural exchange and cooperation.

Digital learning and transformation

80% of countries highlighted one or more aspects of digital learning. LMICs were most likely to suggest that digital solutions would help solve endemic learning deficits for out-of-school, rural, or crisis-affected populations. This was true even in the many countries that reported severe limitations in access to public digital learning, and who recognized that deployment of digital learning during the pandemic exacerbated educational inequities.

Universal connectivity:

- Two thirds of countries made commitments to universalize broadband internet connectivity and to expand access to devices and connectivity among more disadvantaged learners and schools.

- Countries in which overcoming connectivity gaps represent significant financial challenges also committed to establishing or strengthening public-private partnerships with technology providers.

Learning content:

- Building on post-pandemic initiatives, a third of all countries endeavored to create and further extend open, free, and curriculum-aligned digital resources and platforms.

- LMICs were frequently focused on offline resources that do not rely on connectivity, including traditional broadcast technologies such as radio and TV.

Digital skills and competencies:

- Commitments to strengthen digital skills among learners and teachers are less prevalent across National Statements than are those relative to connectivity and digital educational resources.

- Two countries committed to strengthening the capacity of teachers to create digital content and to ensure that they are able to leverage digital tools for pedagogical innovation and not simply for knowledge dissemination and consumption.

- Beyond technical skills, three countries also emphasized the need to strengthen the capacity of learners and teachers to understand technology in reflexive and critical ways. Training programs that address the issues of safety, privacy, online bullying, and misinformation were considered key to developing a common sense of digital citizenship.

e-Governance: Four countries committed to reinforcing e-governance in education through the progressive digitization of management processes.

Financing education

Renewed commitment to the international benchmarks for domestic financing of education: Over one third of countries set time-bounded targets to maintain or increase the share of domestic public education spending in line with international benchmarks of 4-6% of GDP and 15-20% share of public expenditure. One country noted that its debt burden restricted possibilities to increase domestic financing of education.

Innovative and/or complementary financing of education: Proposals to strengthen public financing of education included redirecting part of the revenues from extractive industries into social sectors, inheritance taxation, or value-added taxation on luxury and/or climate-intensive consumption goods. Innovative sources of financing such as special saving products in the banking system were also suggested. Cash transfers from diaspora communities, proposed by a number of LMICs, acknowledged that all or part of the financial burden for the direct and indirect costs of education falls on households.

Equity in the allocation of public funds was a concern expressed by several countries, proposing measures to alleviate the cost of education for the most vulnerable populations through tuition fee exemptions, scholarships, or conditional cash transfers.

More efficient use of education budgets was indicated as a priority by many countries, and 20% indicated that efficiency gains could result from decentralization reforms. Where there is sufficient institutional capacity, local administrations and financially autonomous schools were entrusted to allocate resources adjusted to local needs. Five countries also indicated that well-trained civil servants skilled in program-based budgeting and results-based management would be key to monitoring and accounting for efficiency. Two countries indicated that large numbers of retired or absent teachers remained on payroll.

International aid and cooperation: While least-developed countries called for sustained technical and financial assistance, only two donor countries expressed commitments to increasing aid flows to support education in emergencies and girls' education. A number of countries suggested a shift in discourse from donorship to partnership to co-construct the digital commons.

Governing education as a common good

Whole-of-society: More than half of all countries recognized that the transformation of education systems requires constant, horizontal collaboration and social dialogue across a broad range of actors, with one country specifically calling for a new social contract for education. Having said this, only four countries committed to including teachers and educators, and youth and students in decision-making and legislative processes. To ensure that "education agenda[s] be crafted for the people by the people," two countries envisaged offering communities and families the possibility of recourse to legal measures in order to hold public authorities accountable.

Whole-of-government: While frequently referenced in National Consultation reports, whole-of-government approaches were almost entirely absent in National Statements of Commitment. Two countries identified inter-ministerial dialogue as a strategic lever for increased public funding of education.