



Chronic Poverty Report 2023 Pandemic Poverty

Delivering pro-poor
education: lessons from
Covid-19

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Chronic Poverty Advisory Network

CPAN is a network of researchers, policy makers and practitioners across 15 developing countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Philippines, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe) focused on tackling chronic poverty and getting to zero extreme poverty and deprivation, and by sustaining escapes from poverty and preventing impoverishment. It is looking to expand this network to the 30 countries with the largest numbers of people in poverty. It has a 'hub', which is currently hosted by the Institute of Development Studies in the United Kingdom.

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Of course, responsibility for the contents of the report rests with the authors, and the report does not represent the views of IDS, the Covid Collective, or of FCDO.

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Key messages



The pandemic disrupted access to education globally, resulting in school closures, rising learning poverty, dropouts and various health consequences, all with intergenerational effects.



The future increase in poverty due to learning losses is likely to outweigh the current estimated increase in poverty due to loss of livelihoods, additional deaths and illness. There are also a host of intergenerational consequences, aggravated by large losses in early childhood care and education, and children falling 'off track' in their early development.



The length of school closures varied considerably across countries. While the logic of extended closures was to protect older family members, schools should be kept open or otherwise closed for shorter periods of time, with revised criteria for closures.



Delivering additional resources (e.g. financial, staff, learning materials, etc.) to enable uptake of learning modalities among vulnerable students, or developing a multimodal strategy to ensure pro-poor access, were both supply-side interventions to promote equitable learning. Given prolonged school closures, some governments made modifications to curriculums and implemented remedial education and re-enrolment campaigns. There were comparatively fewer examples of adaptations to teachers' professional development to support learning among marginalised children.



A range of conditions enabled pro-poor education during school closures, including access to electricity and connectivity, and coordination around information sharing to support marginalised children. Underpinning these interventions were efforts to improve data infrastructure to better capture dimensions of marginalisation.



Low- and no-tech means of promoting distance learning was observed to improve access to learning for marginalised children when combined with interventions that involved the support of families and communities in learning. Communities also played a remarkable role in financially supporting the education of marginalised children. These interventions were often more effective when coupled with measures to support caregivers.



Significant mental and physical health effects (e.g. absence of school meals, child abuse) combine to create intergenerational effects. School feeding is especially important for poor children's physical, cognitive and educational development, but seems to have been a casualty of school closures, and has been less prevalent in LICs. A big focus is needed on school feeding, especially in LICs, and working out the best ways of continuing to feed children if schools close. Support for socioemotional learning is also important to address intergenerational effects.

6.1 Overview

This chapter presents a brief overview of key challenges in education among marginalised children during the pandemic. It then considers how governments responded to enhance pro-poor education delivery, the enabling conditions for this, and their links with community and household support to deliver equitable access to education and learning.

6.2 Challenges in education among marginalised children

The pandemic disrupted access to education globally. At the **peak of the pandemic, 94 per cent of students were out of school** (World Bank 2020b). Between February 2020 and February 2022, schools were closed for 141 days on average. School closures were particularly high in South Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, where they lasted on average for 273 and 225 days, respectively, and were also high among LICs compared to other country income groups (UNESCO *et al.* 2021). At the same time, there were variations to this; among LICs and lower-MICs, for example, Nicaragua did not have any full school closures (but 15 weeks of partial closures),

while Tajikistan, Burundi and Belarus did not have any full or partial closures. There is a variety of related evidence on the effectiveness of school closures to control the spread of the virus (Walsh *et al.* 2021), which in turn further questions the need for the draconian school closures observed in many contexts. Several interviewees also questioned the need for school closures:

The closure of schools was not necessary because infection rates among pupils were very low. The government should have not closed all the schools, given that restaurants and pubs remained open, seeing that it is very difficult to contain such places (KII, Zambia).

The lack of decentralised decision-making was the reason [for long school closures]. For example, [they should have said] let the school community and their parents ...decide when this particular school should open, but we have no such mechanism for decision-making even at the block level (KII, India).

Although in some countries learning losses were low or unobserved at certain levels as a result of school closures (Box 6.A), more broadly, **70 per cent of 10 year olds in LICs and MICs are estimated to be unable to read or understand a simple text, a 17 percentage point increase from pre-pandemic levels** (Figure 6.2.1).

Box 6.A: Learning outcomes in Burkina Faso during the pandemic



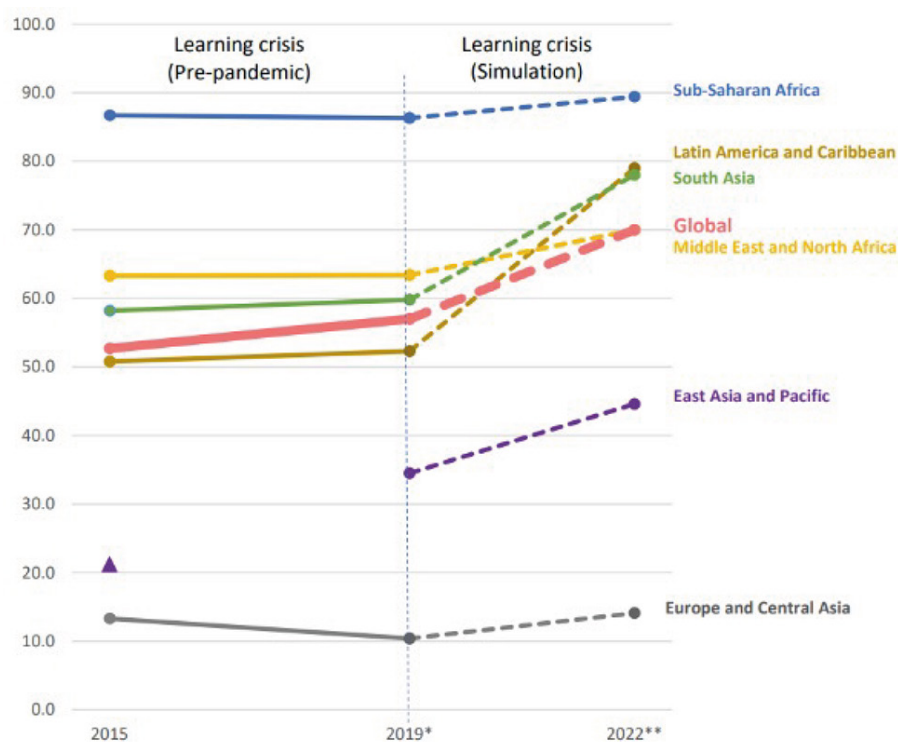
The Covid-19 Monitoring Impacts on Learning Outcomes (MILO) study in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Senegal and Zambia found no statistically significant difference between pre-pandemic and 2021 reading assessments. For mathematics, students in Kenya experienced learning loss, but Burkina Faso saw an increase in the share of students meeting the Minimum Proficiency Level test at the end of primary school. What might have contributed to improved learning in Burkina Faso?¹

Continued:

- **Multimodal strategies:** ‘Learning content, including for television, radio and online... were developed and made available to students in primary and secondary school.’
- **Priorities for exam years:** ‘Learners in examination classes, which included the target grade for MILO, were given priority access to learning materials.’
- **Translation of learning materials:** ‘Learning materials were translated into national languages to facilitate access by a range of students, including those in rural areas... Burkina Faso was the only country to provide support for students who speak minority languages.’
- **Multipronged mitigation measures:** across the six countries, Burkina Faso consistently had the highest rate of students attending schools where principals reported strategies to minimise the impact of Covid-19 on teaching and learning, especially through communication between staff and families (56% compared with 44% as the MILO median); providing additional staff professional development (54% compared with 41%); and offering digital resources to teachers and students (72% compared with 64%).
- **Shorter school closures:** after Burundi, Burkina Faso also reported lower numbers of Covid-19 cases and deaths, and had shorter school closures.
- **School feeding:** in addition, Burkina Faso also had the highest rate of school feeding during the pandemic among the six countries.

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2022), unless otherwise stated

Figure 6.2.1: Estimates of learning poverty during the pandemic



Source: World Bank *et al.*, and UNICEF, 2022.

Learning loss was also particularly pronounced among children in poor households (Table 6.2.1), aggravated by limited digital access and low digital literacy among children, parents and teachers (Nicolai *et al.* 2022). During school closures, digital and broadcast

remote learning programmes did not reach at least 463 million children around the world (31% of schoolchildren), three quarters of whom were in rural areas and/or from poor households, and more prevalent in LICs (UNICEF 2020).

Table 6.2.1: Learning loss among children in poor households during early months of the pandemic

Country	Quintile-disaggregated results
Ethiopia	<p>May/June 2020: ‘Over half of children from the poorest 40 percent of the population listen to educational radio programs compared to 26 percent of the richest 60 percent... whose children are more likely to complete assignments provided by the teacher, watch educational TV (probably because richer households are more likely to own a TV), and use mobile learning apps.’</p> <p>Figure 3: Student Educational Activities During School Closures, R2, by Bottom 40%, Percent, Percent</p> <p>Source: Monitoring COVID-19 Impacts on Households in Ethiopia. 2020. World Bank. Used with permission, CC-BY-NC.</p>
Indonesia	<p>May/June 2020: ‘Lack of a supporting device affects significantly more students in the bottom 40% and outside Java, preventing them from engaging in online learning.’ Even for those engaging in online learning, lack of supporting device was a more pronounced constraint among the bottom 40% (World Bank 2020c).</p>
Malawi	<p>May/June 2020: ‘Even in the wealthiest quintile only 25% of households are participating in any type of learning activity. The comparable estimate was 7% in households in the bottom 20 percent of the pre-Covid-19 wealth quintile.’ (World Bank 2020d).</p>
Philippines	<p>August 2020: Among the poorest quintile, only 11% of school aged children were engaged in learning activities during the pandemic, compared to 34% in the richest quintile (World Bank 2020e)</p>
Uganda	<p>June 2020: ‘After the closures, the share of households with any child attending any remote learning activity stands at 59% and is distributed very unequally. For example, it ranges from 44% among the poorest quintile to 74% among the richest quintile.’ (World Bank 2020f).</p>

Dropout rates also considerably increased as a result of school closures (Favara *et al.* 2021), though again with variation across LICs and MICs. Assuming just five months of school closures, simulations suggest that at least 24 million children around the world might never return to school (World Bank 2020). Of these, some estimates suggest that by the end of 2022 as many as 9 million additional children may have been pushed into child labour due to increased financial pressures (World Bank *et al.* 2021). Girls are especially at risk, vulnerable to violence, child marriage and adolescent pregnancy. The pandemic is estimated to have put an additional 10 million girls at risk of early marriage in the next ten years (*et al.*). Older children are also more likely to drop out. In rural Kenya, the risk of dropout increased threefold among secondary school-age girls compared to pre-pandemic levels (Zulaika *et al.* 2022). In the Philippines, by May 2022, 27–38% of households in the poorest quintile had children who had dropped out of school, compared with 11 per cent of households in the richest quintile (World Bank 2022c). Similar findings were observed in South Africa, with dropout rates especially high among the poorest households (Spaull *et al.* 2021), reflecting intersecting inequalities based on wealth, gender and age.

School closures also have various health consequences. School closures have affected children’s mental health, contributing to depression and increased risk of abuse (World Bank 2020). In addition, ‘more than 370 million children globally missed out on school meals during school closures, losing what is for some children the only reliable source of food and daily nutrition’ (UNICEF 2022b). Some scenarios project that an additional 40 million children will suffer from wasting and an additional seven million children from stunting by 2030 due to inadequate nutrition (UNICEF *et al.* 2021). Health services were also disrupted

during lockdowns, due to declines in spending, service reductions and demand-side reductions in the number of people seeking healthcare (WHO 2022). These disruptions have contributed to a reduction in child vaccination and antenatal care, based on analysis in sub-Saharan Africa (Shapira *et al.* 2021). Partly a result, disruptions were estimated to have increased child and maternal mortality in 18 countries analysed (Ahmed *et al.* 2022).

As a result of the multiple pathways of impact on education, the intergenerational effects of the pandemic are alarming. With worsening learning poverty, and without remedial catch-up action to get children back in school and to pre pandemic levels, people are likely to be less educated, with reduced ability to use education as a key source of resilience in pathways out of poverty. Indeed, learning loss and increased dropouts historically have led to higher rates of poverty among adolescents and young people (Favara *et al.* 2021). To make matters worse, not only are LICs and MICs typically underinvesting in education (UNICEF 2022a), but two thirds of LICs and lower-MICs have cut their public education budgets since the start of the pandemic, compared to just one third of upper-MICs and HICs (Al-Samarrai *et al.* 2021).

Moreover, pointing to strong intergenerational dimensions to poverty, in most countries, ‘the simulated future poverty increase due to learning loss exceeds the measured short-run increase in poverty’ (World Bank 2022: 6). Simulations estimate, for example, that the pandemic resulted in ‘19.01 billion person-days of early childhood care and education (ECCE) instruction lost, [and] 10.75 million additional children falling “off track” in their early development’ (McCoy *et al.* 2021). This has implications for economic growth. Some estimates suggest that the

closure of pre-primary programmes in 140 countries during the pandemic has cost as much as 5.9 per cent of GDP in lower-MICs and 2.4 per cent of GDP in LICs, when considering future earnings foregone due to reduced pre-primary participation (López Bóo, Behrman and Vasquez 2020). When considering the current generation of students, this figure rises to 14 per cent of global GDP lost in lifetime earnings because of school closures (World Bank *et al.* 2021). Weak school-to-work transitions and poor access to remedial and non-formal education for those already in the labour market further amplify these losses:

It is challenging to ask people who are already in the labor market to learn. So, they implement [interventions] with the Ministry of Labour. This includes non-formal education – evening classes, etc., to compensate for education losses and flexible classes. However, this is not well implemented yet (KII, Cambodia).

6.3 Supply of equitable learning opportunities during Covid-19

Schools around the world shifted to remote education during prolonged school closures. **This contributed to a ‘remote learning paradox’, where globally ‘60 percent of national remote learning solutions rely exclusively on on-line platforms. Yet, almost 47 percent of school students do not have access to the internet at home’** (Aedo *et al.* 2020). This reflects limited policy preparedness on how to implement distance-learning strategies, as well as limited consideration of how these strategies might amplify pre-existing poverty and inequality (Jones *et al.* 2021).

At the same time, **pro-poor access to education was possible in some**

contexts. This was often the case where a multimodal strategy was present (Table 6.3.1), or where additional resources (e.g. financial, staff, learning materials) enabled uptake of learning among vulnerable students. The Cambodian government provided paper-based learning materials for vulnerable students alongside SMS (text) messages for follow-up interactions between teachers and students in a multimodal approach. This was done in recognition of high mobile penetration rates including in rural areas of the country (Muñoz-Najar *et al.* 2021). Zambia, building on a history of radio instruction, also steered towards mitigation strategies relatively quickly and in April 2020 began strengthening its radio learning programme, distributing solar radios and training teachers on distance learning (GPE 2020). In Brazil, a multimodal remote learning programme in São Paulo included horizontal information sharing (e.g. among teachers and families) on learning activities through social media, vertical information sharing (e.g. between the state education secretary and teachers in the state) and a task force to contact households with students who were out of reach (Barron Rodriguez *et al.* 2021).

Table 6.2.1: Learning loss among children in poor households during early months of the pandemic

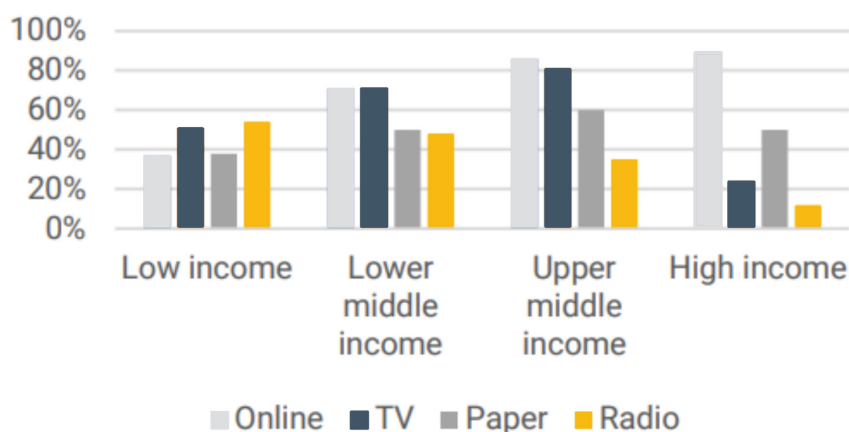
Connectivity level	Mitigation response
No access to device	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper-based packages for remote learning
No digital connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for access to technology (computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones), with access to offline content
Radio access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-recorded radio instruction
TV access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live or pre-recorded lessons • ‘Edutainment’ programmes
Telephone access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone-based parent-teacher-student links • Audio calls for tutoring, mentoring and teaching • Messaging apps for feedback • Hotlines with free numbers for technical assistance and socioemotional learning

Source: Summarised from Muñoz-Najar *et al.* (2021)

However, **multimodal approaches may be technically demanding where they require more resources and training to implement**, especially if capabilities to deliver remote learning (e.g. through staff or existing multimodal strategies) do not already exist (UNESCO 2020). For example, Figure 6.3.1 indicates that the

modality of remote learning changed considerably depending on country income level. In particular, LICs were often least able to rely on online means of remote learning, due in large part to limited enabling conditions for their uptake, as discussed in section 6.4.

Figure 6.3.1: Share of countries responding to school closures with different forms of remote learning, by income group



Source: The World Bank’s Education Response To COVID-19. World Bank. Used with permission, [CC-BY-NC](#).

Given prolonged school closures, some governments also made modifications to their curriculums, and implemented remedial education and re-enrolment campaigns to make up for lost learning. Some measures targeted vulnerable children who may have dropped out or performed poorly on exams (Box 6.B). In pre-pandemic periods, such cases tend to be particularly prevalent among children in low-income households. In Mozambique, the government expanded its ‘catch-up’ programme in the summer of 2020 to

enable students to reintegrate into school after dropping out (Barron Rodriguez *et al.* 2021). In Rwanda, a diagnostic assessment was rolled out for primary and lower-secondary schools; subsequently, students with low scores, with a poor rate of academic progress and those at risk of repetition or dropout were targeted for a remedial learning programme (*et al.*). Finally, the World Bank has also financed re-enrolment campaigns focused on girls and students from marginalised communities in Madagascar, Ethiopia and Pakistan (World Bank 2020).

Box 6.B: Preventing school dropout and learning loss in India



Dropout: the Ministry of Education in July 2020 issued guidelines for identification, a smooth admission process and continued education of migrant children, requesting states to identify and enrol all such children without any procedural formalities. Identification of out-of-school children was supported by conducting door-to-door, and helpdesk- and app-based surveys, and creating nodal groups at village/town level to implement Covid-19 action plans. In addition, scholarships were offered to better-performing students from marginalised groups through the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Scheme to help prevent dropout in the transition to secondary levels.

Private-public school transitions: through the Samagra Shiksha scheme for states and union territories, new schools at primary and lower-secondary levels were developed, while free uniforms and textbooks, transport allowances and other features were offered to government schools. These provisions as a pull factor, alongside depressed household incomes as a push factor, drove many households to switch from private to public schools.

Private tuition and learning loss: although there has been a fall in learning levels in India since the pandemic, this has varied greatly across states, partly linked to the penetration of private schools vs private tuition across the country: ‘Education has been severely impacted due to this pandemic. Since he has been concerned about his children’s education, he put his children for private tuition as an alternative’ (PMI interviewee).

Northwestern states (e.g. Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand) have many private schools and low rates of private tuition, compared with eastern states, which have low rates of attendance in private schools but high rates of private tuition. The drop in learning levels in eastern states has been smaller, which is attributed to the more local and flexible tuition sector, which allowed parents to negotiate with tuition providers during school closures. At the same time, poorer households may not have been able to afford tutors.

Source: KIIs, India

There were comparatively few examples of continuing professional development of teachers to support the education of marginalised children.

In Rwanda, new measures ensured that teachers allocated three hours a week to continuing professional development (UNESCO *et al.* 2021). Smartphones and digital cards pre-loaded with videos of teaching practices were also rolled out in Kenya and Rwanda to support teacher training in low-income contexts (Save the Children 2021). In India, the Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing platform for school education was primarily used by teachers to increase their digital literacy and training during the pandemic (KII). More broadly, however, there was a relative dearth of professional development support for teachers working in LICs or with marginalised children. There were also regional variations, where fewer than three in ten countries in sub-Saharan Africa provided additional support to teachers, compared to nine in ten countries in East and Southeast Asia (UNESCO *et al.* 2021).

6.4 Enabling conditions for education amid school closures

There are various enabling conditions at the macro level that can help mitigate education disruptions among children in poor and vulnerable households.

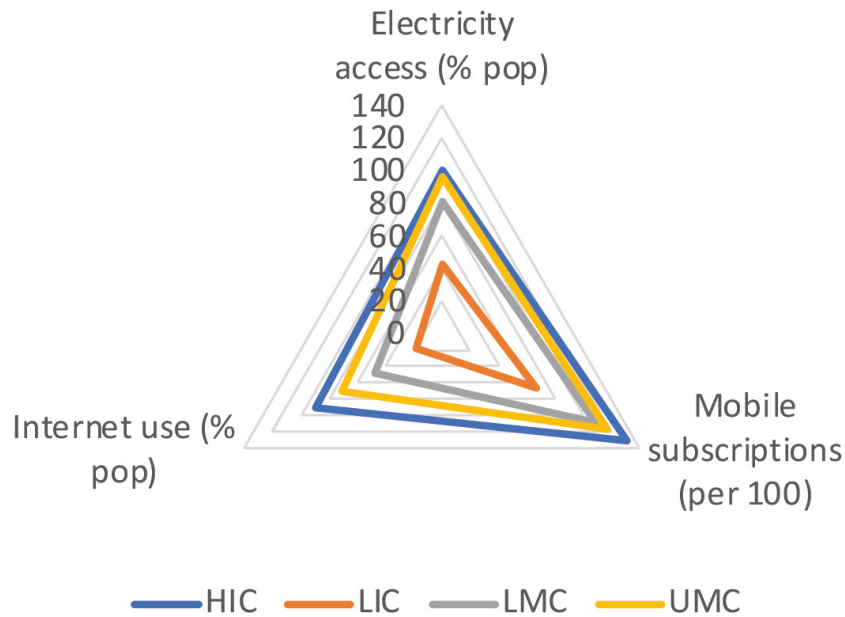
Electricity and connectivity are often important enabling infrastructure that countries were able to leverage in the Covid-19 response, which was typically less prevalent among LICs (Figure 6.4.1). However, there was wide variation within country income groups, as well. For example, Malawi adapted an existing interactive radio instruction programme

during the pandemic (Gondwe 2020). To enable uptake among children in areas with limited access to electricity, the government also disbursed solar-powered radios to vulnerable households (Global Partnership for Education 2020). Similarly, the Rwanda Education Board, in collaboration with Save the Children Rwanda, provided 950 solar-powered radios to disadvantaged families to help children access remote learning through the radio. It also constructed 22,505 additional classrooms and 31,932 toilets in less than three months to comply with social distancing in classes and prevent the spread of Covid 19 (MINEDUC 2020).

“Her children did not have access to smartphones since she and her husband had ordinary cell phones. So her children not only missed school when even they were sent home ‘to collect the fees’, and also on days they had to do casual work, and then also missed out on the ‘online’ lessons sent out on the smart cell phones teachers assumed they had access to whenever schools were forcefully closed in response to the Covid pandemic.”

(LHI, Zimbabwe, 2022)

Figure 6.4.1: Access to electricity, mobiles and internet connectivity



Source: Authors' own analysis based on WDI (2023).

In this process, **coordination around information sharing helped support marginalised children.** This included vertical coordination – for example, at different levels of governance – to strengthen information sharing. Low pupil re-enrolment rates in Kenya prompted the creation of a government inter-ministerial task force that resulted in community-based mobilisation of households, prompting re-enrolment (UNESCO *et al.* 2021). A study of Nairobi, Kisumu, Kilifi and Wajir counties in Kenya suggests that 87–94% of adolescent boys, and 81–94% of adolescent girls re-enrolled in 2021 (Population Council 2021). Horizontal coordination through partnerships between the public and private sectors also enabled effective responses in Nigeria. In particular, the Edo-BEST@Home programme, implemented by the government and private sector, delivered a mobile phone-based learning programme at no cost to students or teachers (Box 6.C). Such examples of financing, whether

through the programme examples above or more targeted scholarships, could thus help disadvantaged groups continue to access education in times of distress.

Underpinning these interventions were efforts to improve data infrastructure to better capture dimensions of marginalisation. Indeed, it is important to understand who marginal groups are and where they are located, the prevalence of enabling infrastructure such as electricity, and availability of financing. All of this can be used to design and deliver a pro-poor response. An example is the Giga initiative, a public-private partnership launched in 2019, which supported the response to Covid-19 by strengthening connectivity in schools. The initiative ‘maps connectivity in schools around the world, works with governments to find financing and delivery models and partners with industry to advise on technical solutions to help connect all schools’ (UNESCO *et al.* 2021).

Access to devices and connectivity needed for remote learning varies across Edo state; 46 percent of households possess a radio, 69 percent have a television, and 91 percent have a mobile phone (NPC/Nigeria and ICF 2019). The Edo BEST@Home program took these constraints into consideration by focusing on delivering content and learning activities through mobile phones (De Simone *et al* 2020). By mid-July 2020, Edo's remote learning program reached 930 out of 1,000 primary schools in the state and over 7,000 virtual classrooms were created to deliver remote education. However, only 29 percent of Edo's primary school population had accessed the program's interactive mobile-based platform. According to government officials, the main reason for the low take-up was that working parents have to use their mobile phones for their jobs and, if they have more than one child, it can be unfeasible to share one device among many children (Muñoz-Najar and Oviawe 2020).⁷ This suggests considerable scope for testing out and refining programme design expectations to improve take-up.

Source: Muñoz-Najar *et al.* (2021)

6.5 Community and household support for learning

In the absence of stronger government support to educate marginalised children, especially during school closures, many communities and households increased their level of support for learning. This was also an important strategy, more broadly, to strengthen outcomes of distance learning among children facing socioeconomic barriers. The discussion here is not one about cost-effectiveness, on which limited studies exist (Nicolai *et al.* 2023), but rather about the ability to reach marginalised children. In this regard, some research suggests that low- and no-tech means of promoting distance learning is observed to support learning among marginalised children when combined with interventions that involve engaging families and communities in learning (UNICEF 2020). For example, community support was especially important in enabling young children and children whose parents had limited

literacy and numeracy to progress with their learning. In Cambodia (Box 6.D), small local-level study groups were formed to deliver learning. This enabled students at similar levels to share technology. In some countries, existing infrastructure such as through NGOs BRAC in Bangladesh and Pratham in India offered volunteer-delivered, in-person tutoring before the pandemic that continued during Covid-19 (Hassan *et al.* 2022). In parts of Africa, the African Union is working with traditional and religious leaders to create platforms to share best practices to promote girls' and women's education on the continent (Ravat 2021).

Box 6.D: Clustered learning in rural Cambodia



Education was delivered flexibly during the pandemic through digital and clustered learning. Clustered learning typically involved several components as outlined below. Alongside this, to encourage children to stay in school, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport also focused on providing school meals for children in rural-poor schools, and a ‘one village, one school’ initiative that sought to build more schools to reduce the distance pupils/learners had to travel.

Cascading teacher training

The ministry identified national master trainers for selected schools (e.g. generation and networks schools) and local trainers to deliver ‘blended learning’. This resulted in more than 1,000 teachers and principals being trained with digital tools.

Group formation

The ministry encouraged teachers to choose around ten students, organising them into small groups to provide them with education. The teachers travelled by motorbike to where the students were, improving access for children in poor households.

Decentralised approach

The teacher would assign students to groups, deciding how often and what content to teach them. Teachers provide homework and need strong participation and support from the community and parents to provide education to children.

Blended learning

Teachers adapted technology by assigning a leader in each group with access to technology to send homework through smartphones to disseminate to the rest of the group. The teachers would then collect and grade homework.

Note: Blended learning combines face-to-face teaching with digital tools. It is different from multimodal learning, which instead more broadly employs more than one mode of teaching.

Source: Authors’ own based on analysis of CPAN key informant interviews in Cambodia.

Communities also played a role in financially supporting the education of marginalised children. In Ethiopia, communities provided targeted support to pay poor students’ school fees (Box 6.E). In Liberia, a women’s rights organisation (WRO) implemented a programme that supported cost free digital learning to

enable continuity of learning during school closures. Moreover, when the Ministry of Education in Liberia launched its ‘Teach by Radio’ programme for learning, many WROs raised funds to purchase mobile phones with radio access for girls in low-income communities (Feminist Humanitarian Network & Partners 2021).

Some of these efforts were also reflected in the policy sphere; Rwanda, Malawi and Ghana, for example, had measures in their national education plans to reduce

gender-related barriers to studying during school closures, or to re-integrate adolescents who were pregnant or mothers into education systems (UNESCO et al. 2021).



Box 6.E: Community mobilisation to promote education of marginalised students in Ethiopia

There were considerable community interventions to support the education of poor and marginalised students in Ethiopia before the pandemic. Prior to the war in Tigray, which began in November 2020, there was a village network system in place, influenced by the government, which during the Covid-19 lockdown was mandated to provide group support. Community mobilisation resulting from this network included:

- **Building 16 classrooms in one community in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' region, ordered by the regional education bureau:**
We used the additional classrooms and made the school half-shifts (1–4 in one shift; 5–8 in the other shift), changing every week. There is no water in the school. We had brought water from the nearby area to maintain the hygiene of the students.
- **School feeding:**
We organised a resource mobilisation to support the poor students. The programme is called “one kilogram”. One student was asked to bring 1kg of grain; it could be teff, maize, sorghum or wheat. Then we sold the grain for 11,756 birr. Then we used the money to buy a uniform, pen, pencil and exercise books for 64 students from poorest families. With the remaining money and some contributions from teachers, we bought two chickens for each one of the 38 poorest students in the school, whose family cannot afford schooling costs of their children. The objective was to take them home and to breed them at home to cover their future schooling costs.

Even with these efforts, many students ended up dropping out: ‘*There was a lot of pressure on the children to do family agricultural activities. Some of them did not come again. We had 1,329 students in pre-Covid-19. During the reopening, only 1,297 returned*’. For those who did re-enter schooling, quality of education was compromised as students were promoted regardless of skill level. A reduction in class size to maintain Covid-19 precautions meant that multiple shifts were required, which also posed additional stress on resource needs; for example, for chalk and other teaching material. The shift programme also changed weekly, which made it difficult for children in poor households to combine income-earning activities with schooling, and so attendance also dropped.

Source: summarised from KII with school principal, Ethiopia (2022)

Interventions were often particularly effective in reaching marginalised children when coupled with measures to support caregivers. In India, Pratham formed mothers' groups during the pandemic to support learning

in several parts of the country. The Maharashtra state government then adopted the strategy across the state, so that all primary schools would have this complementary resource as part of the government's Foundational

Literacy and Numeracy strategy – a key focus of the New Education Policy released in 2020 (KII).

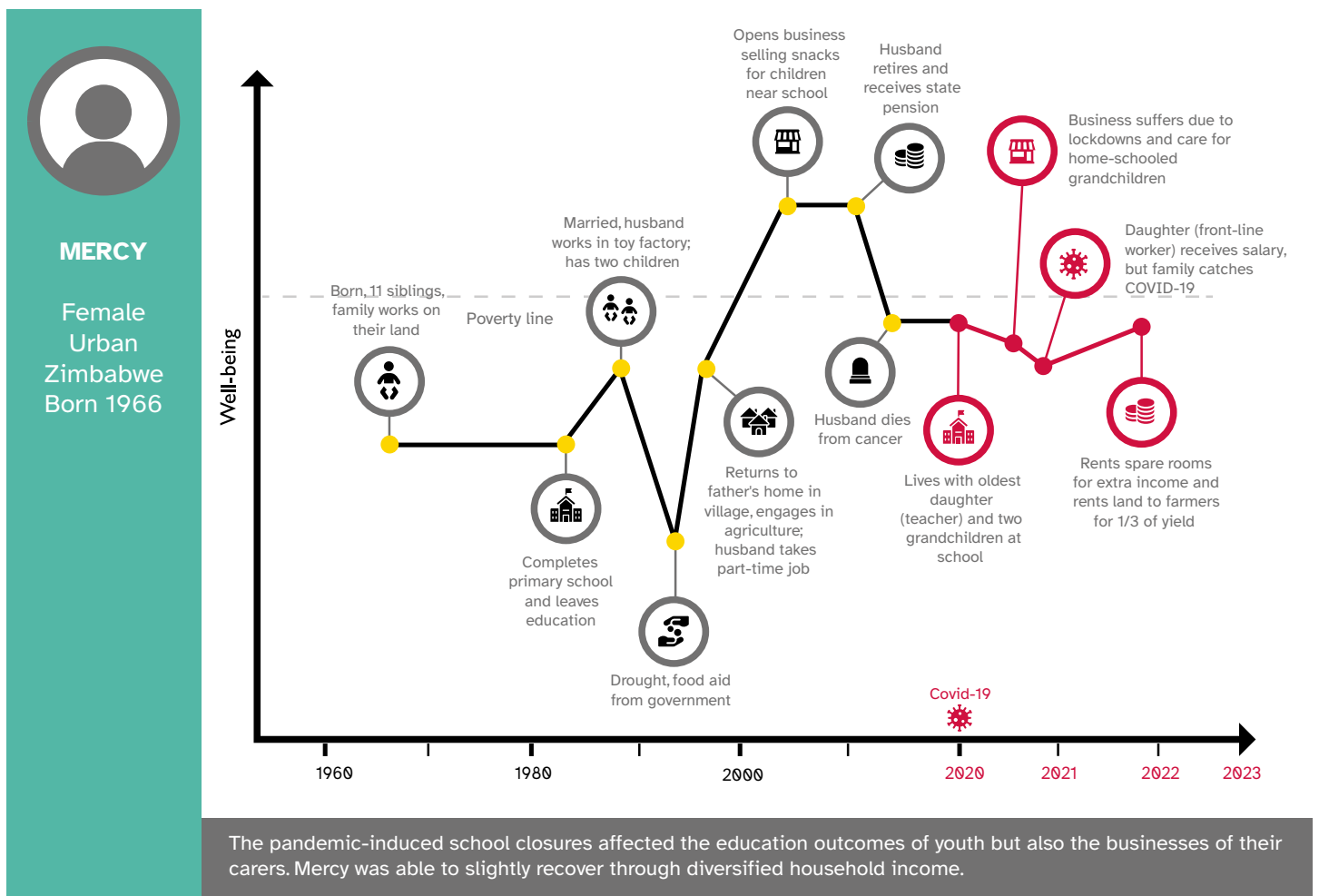
families with illiterate caregivers’ (UNESCO *et al.* 2021).

In Bangladesh, an over-the-phone learning support intervention to mothers and children included student volunteers from local public universities, who acted as mentors, setting weekly timetables for home schooling, collectively solving problems and advising mothers on how to help with homework. The intervention in turn resulted in improvements in parenting ability among poorer households and mothers who had attained low levels of education (Hassan *et al.* 2022).

Yet despite these examples, 39 per cent of LICs did not introduce measures to support parents and caregivers in learning at home during school closures (UNESCO *et al.* 2021). This might relate to resource prioritisation among governments and education ministries in LICs, and inevitably prompted impoverishment amongst many households (see Life-History Figure 5 below). Moreover, there is limited evidence more broadly on high-quality cost data and how it relates to the effectiveness of interventions on education (Gustafsson-Wright and Lee 2021). Perhaps as a result of these constraints, **many programmes worked exclusively with schools rather than the learning environment as a whole; for example, including interactions with and within families and communities** (KII).

In rural Kenya, an intervention that ‘provided low-literacy households with culturally and linguistically appropriate books and dialogic reading training for caregivers increased reading frequency and the quality of caregiver-child interactions for pre-school-aged children, including for

Life-History Figure 5: Impoverishment amongst households common amidst multiple crises



Source: Authors' own.

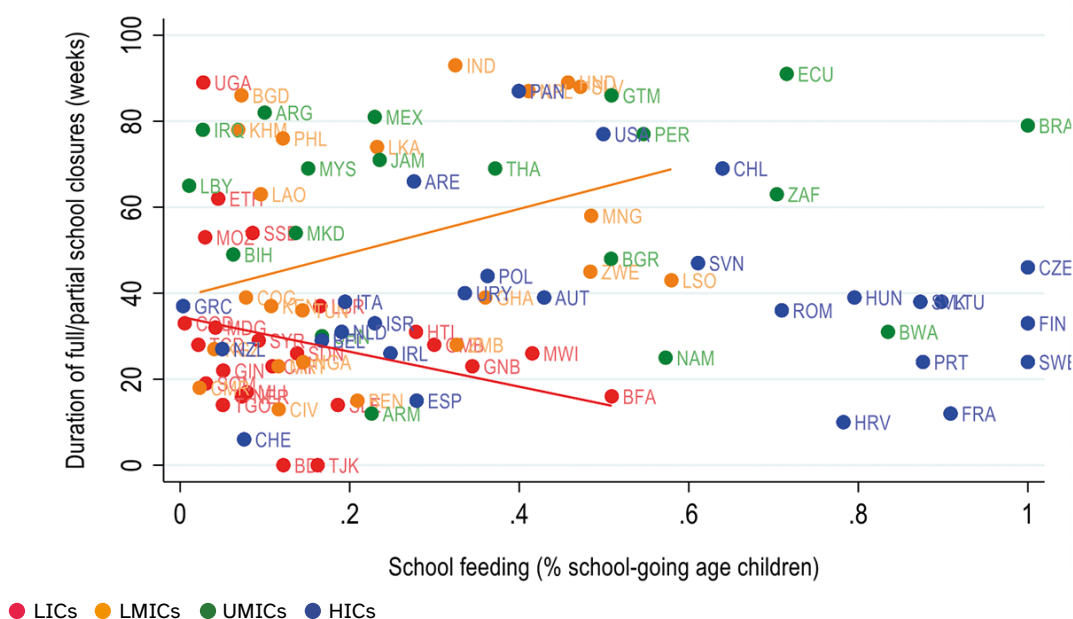
6.6 Multidimensional support for marginalised learners

Certain interventions also provided multidimensional support to learners directly. For example, school feeding programmes often aimed to improve enrolment, attendance and learning, rather than focusing on nutrition exclusively. These programmes saw considerable expansion during the pandemic, with an estimated 330.3 million children receiving food through school feeding programmes in the school year beginning in 2020 (GCNF 2022). Some school meal programmes were universal, typically among HICs and upper-MICs. Among targeted programmes, many focused on areas with high levels of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, while others targeted students based on household income or membership of a marginalised group (*ibid.*).

Yet the majority of school feeding

programmes were concentrated outside of LICs. **Just 10 per cent of primary- and secondary-school age children in LICs received school meals, compared with 27 per cent in lower-MICs, 30 per cent in upper-MICs and 47 per cent in HICs** (*ibid.*). Moreover, as Figure 6.6.1 indicates, LICs with longer school closures – such as Uganda, Ethiopia and Mozambique – sometimes had lower rates of school feeding; school closures lasted over 50 weeks, yet school feeding programmes reached less than 10 per cent of school-age children. However, Burkina Faso and Malawi are examples of LICs with higher rates of school feeding, supported primarily through the government and the World Food Programme (WFP) with wider coverage even prior to the pandemic, and comparatively lower duration of school closures (see Box 6.2.1 on Burkina Faso). Regionally, just 16 per cent of children in sub-Saharan Africa received school meals, compared to 55 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean (*et al.*). Finally, most programmes targeted primary school-age children, leaving pre-primary and older students without support (*ibid.*).

Figure 6.6.1: School closures (2020–22) and school feeding (2021) across LICs and MICs



Source: Authors' analysis based on public datasets UNESCO (2022), GCNF (2021).

There was some, albeit limited, support for social and emotional learning (SEL) during the pandemic; for example, by strengthening students' social skills, emotional regulation and self-efficacy, and mental health and wellbeing, more broadly (Yorke *et al.* 2021). They are, thus, multidimensional, improving mental health and learning simultaneously. One study suggests that female teachers were more likely to foster SEL among grade 6 students in Ethiopia, which could help mitigate the poorer mental health and wellbeing observed during the pandemic amid social distancing, school closures, household economic instability and health-related trauma (Favara *et al.* 2021). In Kenya, the GPE Covid-19 Learning Continuity in Basic Education Project supported reopening schools for vulnerable students through the National School Meals programme, monitoring student attendance and providing online or in-person psychosocial support services (World Bank 2020). An interviewee from Cambodia emphasised the benefit of this approach to SEL and linked mental health support more broadly:

In school, we only think about physical needs but not mental health. For children living in poverty or family violence, there should be a service for those children. Children might learn [more] slowly than their peers because of their personal problems, so there should be a programme based on that, which could be in school or out of school, to target all children. I think it is the government's [responsibility] to improve education in their public service that covers all angles for all students (KII, Cambodia).

6.7 Recommendations

Lessons learned from the pandemic response that are generally helpful to improve access to education, learning and prevent dropouts among children in poor households are presented in

Table 6.7.1, disaggregated by whether the areas of intervention relate to the macro-level enabling context, community and household factors, or schools and teaching. The intervention areas are further categorised into measures to strengthen absorptive resilience capacities, adaptive capacities and transformative capacities. A key takeaway from this framing is around the benefits that derive from strengthening resilience across levels, not necessarily in ways that are specific to a pandemic crisis, but which strengthen pro-poor education more broadly.

An important learning from the Covid-19 responses is the need to keep schools open, or otherwise close them for shorter periods of time, while revising the criteria for school closures. More broadly, the recommendations in Table 6.7.1 are expansive, but overall point to the need for complex programmes of support to schools, teachers and students based on a holistic commitment to transform education and learning for the most marginalised children (Unwin *et al.* 2020), in line with the resilience focus noted above.

Beyond this, a life-cycle approach is needed, focused on interventions in early childhood development, for school-age children, young people and wider human development systems to sustainably counter the erosion of human capital that has occurred during Covid-19 (Schady *et al.* 2023). There are constraints to all of this, not least because measures need to be taken during a pandemic in the contexts of scarce resources and quickly shifting understandings of the virus. However, the cost of inaction is likely to be monumental, especially when considering the lifetime and intergenerational effects that may otherwise persist.

Table 6.7.1: Lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic to strengthen access to education and learning of children in poor households

Level	Absorptive	Adaptive	Transformative
Macro context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public financing for disadvantaged groups (e.g. bursaries/ scholarships for rural girls, poor households, in remote and hard-to-reach areas) • Disaggregated data (e.g. by gender, socioeconomic status, disability, ethnicity, geography, etc.) and monitoring to identify gaps and at-risk students • Strengthened, integrated data infrastructure across levels of education governance • Contingency planning to manage education response to local outbreaks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to electronic devices (and multiple devices in households with more children) • Electricity and network connectivity • Horizontal cooperation (e.g. between central government, and ministries of education and health, to target funding and support socioemotional learning among marginalised children) • Vertical information sharing (governments, districts, community leaders, school administration and teachers, etc.), with decision-making strengthened at local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender equality and social inclusion policies • Education sector plans targeting marginalised groups • Inclusion of interventions focused on the poorest, most marginalised groups • Inclusion of interventions focused on the poorest, most marginalised groups • School to work transitions strengthened through labour market reforms • Debt relief to free up resources for social services including education
Communities and households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local stakeholder engagement in design of strategies, including religious/traditional leaders to work with families to encourage girls' learning • Village savings and loan associations to improve household liquidity and savings • Efforts to support social networks, including through remittances, which are often used to support education needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open learning spaces and community study circles • Donation of electronic devices and other learning tools • Low-cost digital tools (e.g. interactive handbooks) • Support (e.g. through information campaigns, equipment, etc.) and guidance for parents and caregivers, to engage them in the learning process and support SEL • Volunteer networks to engage in mentoring, tutoring and content delivery support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted support to girls' education and empowerment • Gender norms challenged, including around who holds technology, and also care and domestic responsibilities • Consideration of holistic needs (physical, socioemotional, mental health)

Level	Absorptive	Adaptive	Transformative
School environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk-informed school policies and infrastructure (e.g. water, sanitation and hygiene facilities) • School feeding, with easy-to-access distribution sites during school closures • (Un)conditional cash transfers targeting children at risk of school dropout, girls at risk of gender-based violence, boys at risk of forced labour and children in the poorest households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep schools open, or close them for shorter periods of time, revising criteria for closures • Multimodal learning options that are fit for purpose, using different types of contextually relevant technology (and offline options) among teachers and students • Use of mobile phones (where appropriate) for two-way communication between students, teachers and parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of pre-primary education programmes for marginalised groups • Approaches to mainstream socioemotional learning at all levels of education • Development of digital and pedagogical tools for blended learning • ‘Teach at the right level’ learning programmes to help students of different abilities to catch up

Source: Authors’ analysis, summarising this chapter

Endnotes

Chapter 6

¹ Although the student response rate for participating in MILO was lower in Burkina Faso (84%, compared with 93–98% in other countries), the increase in achievement in the country was not accounted for by changing wealth between 2019 and 2021 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2022).



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