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Listening to Covid-19's "Lost Generation": Insights From Our Global Youth Survey

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Covid-19 and the Opportunity to Rethink Education

When it comes to managing the socioeconomic impacts of the Covid-19 public-health crisis, the repercussions on young people's lives cannot be understated. Across the world, the pandemic has disrupted education systems, leading to widespread closures of schools, universities and colleges, and an increase in distance and online learning, affecting an estimated 60 per cent of the world's student population. The debate about when to reopen schools has been central to critiques of governments' management strategies, with mixed evidence about the extent to which children are less susceptible to catching or spreading the virus.

This debate has led to several bigger questions about whether the pandemic has created opportunities to establish a new normal when it comes to education provision – including radically overhauling education systems to be more flexible to uncertain times and embrace more blended learning outside traditional classroom settings. This is going to be absolutely essential to managing future outbreaks of Covid-19 (or other pandemics), especially in lower resource countries where the issues of school overcrowding, infrastructure constraints and teacher scarcity are further compounded by social distancing measures. Wide-reaching reform would also require addressing the significant digital divides that have been exposed during the crisis – inequalities in access to internet and devices needed for remote learning, in both high- and low-income contexts. Many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have become disengaged and less visible within the education system.

Discourse on education provision in the era of Covid-19 is taking place at the highest level – in parliaments, across broadcast media, on social media – but it is largely taking place between adults. The opinions of teachers, teachers' unions, academics and politicians are rightly prominent, but there has been less space for young people themselves to voice their perspectives on the longer-term impact of the pandemic on education and their lives.

To contribute to this understanding, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI) recently surveyed young people from seven countries about their experiences of Covid-19 and its impact on their lives, leveraging our network of young people engaged in our education work, principally our dialogue education programme, Generation Global. The aim is to give young people a platform to share their perspectives and amplify their voices so they can be heard, particularly in discussions where the outcomes will have a sizeable impact on their futures. [1]

Findings from our survey suggest that, on the whole, young people have a positive view of governments' efforts to respond to the pandemic but are less positive about long-term planning around recovery and future prevention. Young people are keen to return to "business as usual" – although they've enjoyed the break from normal routines – but they are wary of reopening happening too soon while the virus remains

a tangible threat and are sceptical about compliance with social distancing measures. Young people report that experiences of remote learning have differed greatly depending on access to technology at home, the quality of internet provision and the support provided by teachers and parents. Students and teachers have struggled to adapt due to access and motivation, with young people's ability to learn effectively decreasing as a result of lockdown and anxiety mounting about having to sit exams when schools reopen.

Approach

Our qualitative study used an open-ended questionnaire designed to better understand:

1. Perceived challenges faced by youth prior to the outbreak of Covid-19

2. The extent to which perceptions of these challenges have shifted since the outbreak

3. New challenges that have arisen as a result of the pandemic, and how these have impacted their daily lives

4. The extent to which young people feel perceived challenges are being or can be addressed by their governments

5. The main changes they feel society needs to make to create a new normal

The young people surveyed span four continents and eight countries including the United States of America (US), Ukraine, the United Kingdom (UK), Liberia, Rwanda, Jordan, Indonesia and India. The highest number of respondents are from Indonesia (29 per cent), closely followed by India (13.2 per cent). The sample was comprised of 51 (55 per cent) young women and 37 (39 per cent) young men, and an additional six young people whose gender was not disclosed. [2] Respondents ranged in age from 12 to 28 years old, with a median age of 16.

The study aimed for depth of responses rather than breadth. It is important to note that the perceptions shared by young people in this report do not necessarily represent those of their peers. However, they do highlight trends in the types of challenges that are being faced in a range of contexts. We received 94 responses to the online survey, which was designed and administered in accordance with TBI's safeguarding procedures and research ethics policy. Once the responses were gathered, we conducted a thematic analysis of the data to identify patterns in responses between young people in order to compare similarities and differences across geographies. This enabled us to examine the nuances of individual circumstances and explore these against the backdrop of the broader local context through analysis of secondary data at the macro level, i.e. national statistics on Covid-19 cases, indicators of economic decline and government-imposed restrictions.

Overview

The findings fall into three broad themes:

1. **A Global School Shutdown: The Move to Distance Learning**

This section explores how young people feel about different methods of distance learning and the challenges they have encountered in adapting to them. Findings suggest that the experience of distance learning differs greatly depending on access to technology at home, the quality of internet provision and the support provided by teachers and parents. On the whole however, surveyed students reported that their ability to learn effectively has decreased as a result of lockdown. Indeed, it was widely claimed that both students and their teachers have struggled to adapt to distance learning methods, both in terms of getting to grips with the practical technological challenges of online delivery, as well as maintaining motivation in the face of a perceived disconnect with their teacher and peers. On the back of these challenges, one of the primary concerns young people raised was that they would still be expected to sit exams upon their return to their classroom and they feared the disruption to their learning would be reflected poorly in their grades. However, despite these challenges, what also came across in some cases was a palpable sense of relief from taking a break from their standard routine, which suggests young people are under a lot of pressure in the normal system. Perhaps Covid-19 provides an opportunity for policymakers to reflect on what kind of learning and skills their education systems prioritise, and what it leaves out.

2. **Health Risks Persist as Society Reopens**

This section looks at how young people view the threat that the virus poses to their physical health, and how they are feeling about it as society begins to reopen. The young people we surveyed are eager to return to business as usual, but there is also a general wariness of this happening prematurely while the virus remains a tangible threat. Moreover, there was some scepticism across different country contexts about how well the social distancing measures would be respected by peers or enforced by school leadership.

3. **Taking Stock of Government Action (and Inaction)**

This section considers how young people perceive their government's efforts to address the challenges created by the pandemic, and what they are asking their leaders to prioritise and change as society starts to reopen. A number of the young people we surveyed positively acknowledged the efforts their governments have made across a range of sectors including the health response, support for the country's economy, and adapting the education system to reduce the scale of lost learning as a result of school closures. However, they also recognise and call for their leaders to be present to the ongoing challenges that their countries face. Responses to our survey suggest young people lack trust in their

government's ability to plan for crises; they want focused effort and resources to ensure policies and procedures are in place that will prevent a future pandemic and limit the negative consequences of any future outbreaks.

A Global School Shutdown: The Move to Distance Learning

As the world locked down in response to Covid-19 in February and March 2020, approximately 1.5 billion pupils were forced to move from in-person to distance learning. This resulted in governments attempting to encourage remote learning through different means, including online resources and content broadcast on TV and radio. In some low-resource contexts, physical educational packs were also sent by post or hand-delivered to students at home.

Among the young people responding to our survey, there were mixed feelings towards these distance learning measures and being away from school, with some students feeling that, pre-pandemic, school was a source of stress. One 15-year-old male from Indonesia said: "Even though I have the fear and anxiety, my mind actually feels lighter than before. No stress about exams and other school related stuffs." Of the Indian respondents, 73 per cent claimed that the intensity of education, exam pressure and the subsequent lack of leisure time were some of the biggest challenges they faced before the pandemic. Many young people reported that the pandemic had, at least, meant they had more time to complete their schoolwork. However, without the routine that school provides, young people also spoke about having greater difficulty concentrating and motivating themselves to engage with their work. As one 15-year-old female student from Ukraine, said: "Staying focused, organised and productive was tough."

In the UK, students spoke about the impact of Covid-19 on their exams and assessments. One university student, aged 22, explained that due to the use of distance learning they had lost access to materials and had to significantly alter their research project. An A-level student, aged 17, explained that they felt the exam results received this year would not be a fair reflection on students' ability, saying: "They are likely to not reflect the student in a lot of cases. Schoolwork doesn't give an accurate representation of how someone performs in an exam". This comment was prescient: Four weeks after conducting our survey, a controversial algorithm used to generate grades resulted in roughly 40 per cent of students being downgraded from teachers' predictions – responding to the public outrage that followed, A-level results in England were later overturned. [3] This is directly opposed to the "safety nets" implemented by many UK universities, designed to protect grades against the impact of Covid-19.

Looking closer at distance learning, a few common themes emerged from the data. Though governments have generally been good at providing alternative resources, many students have struggled to access them, either because they didn't have the required devices, or because they didn't have access to a quality internet connection. Unsurprisingly, because access to technology is typically tied to socioeconomic status, the switch to online learning will disproportionately affect already disadvantaged young people. This is noted in a reflection from a 17-year-old male student in Indonesia: "I noticed our

country has very huge and very diverse differences such as geographical condition, the capacity of technology, the ability of human resources, and other cases. Using online teaching will make this problem worse than before. Due to the fact that our learning program [has been] hampered [by Covid-19], our education will be harder to be developed. That gives a very big problem for our country in the future, especially in facing Industrial Revolution 4.0."

Case Studies on Distance Learning: India, Jordan and Indonesia

Education ministries around the world needed to adapt approaches to teaching so that young people could continue learning at home. Most governments, even in lower income countries, quickly turned to high-tech solutions including online learning platforms and virtual classrooms, often with support from tech companies that could provide data add-ons and free access to their platforms to help overcome accessibility problems. To unpack in greater detail how different lower-income countries experienced remote learning, this section analyses responses from Jordan, India and Indonesia to explore how these young people feel about the high-tech options available in their countries.

Following a nationwide school closure on the 25 March, some of India's private schools initiated distance learning, in contrast to public schools that were completely disconnected from their students. The Indian Ministry of Human Resource Development worked to make several different educational e-platforms free to access, covering different subjects in several languages. [4] Despite these attempts to increase provision of distance learning resources, several of the young people surveyed in India felt their education had been impacted as a result of the forced move to e-platforms. A male student from India explained that due to weak internet they were struggling to engage with online classes: "Some online classes are being conducted, but due to 2G net we face problems ... I [have] lost interest now because online classes are often disconnected." This issue was reinforced by a female student who observed: "If the Wi-Fi is even a little weak, the video pauses and half the explanation is missed."

In Jordan, the government worked with private organisations to deliver an online learning platform, Darsak, in its public schools within just one week of the lockdown. A female student from Jordan reflected on the experience: "My education after quarantine and [Covid-19] became electronic. It was a difficult experience at first, but I got used to it after more than a month had passed." However, despite the Jordanian government's ambition and speed with the creation of the online platform, equitable internet access remains a barrier for many young people in Jordan. Research shows that 16 per cent of students in Jordan do not have access to the internet and almost a third have no access to a computer they can use for schoolwork. [5] Although none of the young people surveyed were unable to access online content, the problem of bad internet connection meant the quality of engagement with the platform varied enormously. Some young people were unable to access the online resources due to poor quality

internet, but they will not be counted statistically in the group of students understood to have no internet access at all, creating a hidden group unable to access the online resources that are not captured in official statistics.

Challenges in accessing online education were also prevalent in the young people surveyed from Indonesia. The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) collaborated with private sector organisations to provide free access to their online learning platforms, [6] but with only 56 per cent of the country's population having access to the internet, many would have been unable to take advantage of these offers. "A lot of young students are struggling with online school. A lot of us young Indonesians don't have the money for the gadgets or the internet connection," reflected one student from Indonesia.

The experience of distance learning for young people therefore differs greatly depending on access to technology at home and the quality of internet provision, especially with multiple users online at the same time. This was summarised by a female student from India, who said: "Everyone is not rich enough to afford the online schooling because not everyone has smartphones and internet connection, and even if their parents have they also need to work from home!" We should expect to see this variance reflected in outcomes for different demographics in years to come, with the more financially disadvantaged bearing the brunt of the consequences.

Learning at home is very ineffective. The students are only told to do copying out and given a lot of work. We aren't actually learning, but we are doing work.

a student, aged 15, from Indonesia

The emphasis of our public-school system shifted from explaining parts of the syllabus, to completing the syllabus. The teachers have begun to run through the books and their content rather than explaining the chapters and terms.

a student, aged 17, from India

The survey responses showed that some students felt their education was being adversely affected by a lack of face-to-face learning. Some students insinuated a strong preference for in-person activities, with one student from India commenting: "The connection between teacher and student is completely lost, the aura of a classroom does not exist, the quality of education has decreased." Meanwhile, another from

Jordan observed: "When I was studying in school, I understood teachers and followed lessons easily, but after the appearance of [Covid-19], schools were closed and distance learning appeared, and I think that the majority of students did not get the appropriate amount of understanding." A student in Indonesia also reflected on how remote teaching has affected her ability to understand the content of her lessons: "Rather than actual directly taught lessons, we tend to get assignments instead. Meaning that we have to understand and study the topic on our own. I have always preferred being taught directly by a teacher since it is much much easier to fully understand."

Some of the young people surveyed were critical of their teachers' approach to facilitating lessons following the move to distance learning, as one student, aged 15 from Ukraine observed: "It was hard to get used to studying online at first. A lot of teachers had problems explaining the subject due to bad internet connection or some other factors. Overall, it was harder to get the knowledge I need but as time passed I got used to that." One UK student aged 17 felt there was increased pressure on them to do well in exams despite the lower quality of teaching they were receiving: "We had to do lessons online which means we didn't get as good teaching." They felt that the failure of teachers to adapt to online contexts has limited their ability to learn during lockdown, contributing to the estimated $10 trillion that this generation will lose in earnings over their lifetime as a result of lost learning. [7]

Safety, Security and Well-being

On the whole, surveyed students suggested that their mental health and well-being had decreased during the lockdown, citing a lack of ability to socialise with friends and family, particularly at the beginning of the lockdown, and for special events. For example, one student from Jordan reflected that: "A new challenge young people face is that we cannot gather with a complete family on the day of Eid because of the lockdown applied by the government. This has never happened before." A 17-year-old student from Indonesia said that although socialising with friends and loved ones could continue over social media, "the joy of meeting them in person is missing. This impacts me the most because I love to meet friends when I have time, whether they come to my house or the opposite."

Asking young people to think back to the time before Covid-19, they reflected on the challenges they and their friends were most affected by, with intensity of education and pressure to succeed being the most common. The young people also reported feeling burdened by a lack of leisure time, pressure to have clear goals for their future and worries about the environment (such as traffic, pollution and climate change). Following the outbreak, however, 44 per cent felt that the challenges they face have got worse, while 32 per cent claimed their problems remained the same. Moreover, prior to Covid-19, 80 per cent of young people claimed they either often or always felt happy, 71 per cent hopeful and 66 per cent excited. Following the outbreak of the pandemic, the number of young people often or always feeling scared had increased by 35 per cent, sadness by 19 per cent and anger by 23 per cent.
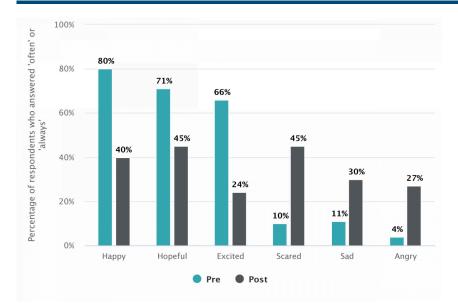
Figure 1 – How frequently respondents felt certain emotions before and after the spread of Covid-19

In Rwanda, the anxiety expressed by some students related principally to economic challenges, referencing lack of food and income where previously they were supported by in-school initiatives. For example, one student commented: "I was studying, getting [a] bursary, now I am alone without [the] bursary – no food, no parents, no transportation and [no] money." Other fellow students from Rwanda said the challenges they now faced as a result of Covid-19 were unemployment and poverty. One student said the lockdown and the fact that people could no longer go to work meant that people "do not have enough money to buy all the basic needs they need like shelter, clothes, food, etc. Hence, it caused poverty." Indeed, the UN, among others, has highlighted malnutrition resulting from school closures for 368.5 million children across 143 countries who normally rely on school meals as a reliable source of daily nutrition. [8] Anxieties about family income, a lack of job security and long-term economic damage were also reported by young people in the other countries we surveyed.

The impact is the economy has dropped dramatically and workers are laid off. My family usually trades before there is a Covid virus. Mother's merchandise often sells out, but when the Covid virus arrives, my mother's merchandise decreases, often empty of customers.

female student, aged 16, from Indonesia

I am worried... it will affect very badly the global economy.

female student, aged 15, from Ukraine

Students responding to our survey also mentioned changes to their relationships with their families during the lockdown. For some, spending more time with relatives they live with was a welcome opportunity. For others, mental well-being was somewhat dependent on how well their family got on. As one female student, aged 14, from Jordan said: "Some of them don't have good relations with their family so they spent all the time arguing with their families." Another student in Rwanda spoke about how some young people have witnessed incidents of domestic violence in the family, for example "fighting and quarrelling between their parents". This reflects a disconcerting global increase in domestic violence, with the UN labelling the 20 per cent increase in incidents during lockdown a "shadow pandemic" alongside Covid-19. [9] Therefore, the mental health and well-being of young people during the lockdown in many cases may have been impacted by violence and tension experienced in the home.

Students Explore New Pursuits

While our survey has highlighted some concerns about young people's mental well-being, some young people we surveyed offered positive reflections regarding the impact of the lockdown. Some students felt that the change to distance learning has enabled some teachers to be more attentive to the individual needs of students. One student from India reflected that, "my teachers are giving individual attention to each one of us. No one is a backbencher today."

Furthermore, when the initial shock of the lockdown had eased, young people across different country contexts reported that they were able to use newly freed-up time to explore their own interests, chiming in with reports across global media that the lockdown and abandonment of usual schedules has in fact provided some relief. [10] As one student from Jordan reported: "I got more time at home so I got closer to my family and I learned many things such as: playing piano, photoshop, improved my skills at making logos, improved my English and now I'm getting ready to announce my own business that I was working on during the lockdown." One female student from Indonesia said: "It made me more productive at home and made me discover new hobbies and [ways] of thinking." What was striking is that young people from all different contexts reported using their free time to pursue creative and innovative ideas which, ironically, they did not have time to do alongside their normal education in school.

The Health Risks That Remain

It is clear that while young people are eager to return to business as usual, there is also a general wariness of this happening prematurely while the virus remains a tangible threat. Responding to a question on whether she feels ready to return to school, one student from Indonesia said: "I'm worried because I don't think that my country is already in a New Normal stage yet, with the number of cases still increasing." Similarly, another student in India commented that, "the reported confirmed cases are only seeing the trend of rising at an alarming rate. I don't want to put my family or myself in danger of getting infected."

In managing the crisis, all governments have faced the dilemma of balancing the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. The severest restrictions observed in most cases, including lockdowns, curfews and the closure of non-essential businesses and public services, generally indicates a prioritisation of public health. However, following some months of economic hardship and, in some instances, promising declines in the rates of infection, governments are now eager to move the needle back to the economy and are starting to gradually reopen society, easing restrictive measures. In many countries, education is being prioritised, so this means a return to school, an opportunity to be reunited with friends and a break from the online learning experiment. Generally, young people surveyed feel optimistic about returning, with an air of excitement surrounding the prospect of being reunited with friends and traditional classroom learning.

Simultaneously, however, there is also an understanding that while going back to school would be a positive return to the familiar, in the majority of cases it will mean having to abide by social distancing measures, wearing face masks as a mandatory staple to the school uniform, regular use of sanitiser and becoming acquainted with adapted timetables and lessons plans to accommodate smaller classes. Therefore, a return to school will not represent a reunion with the old normal. Young people in our survey voiced a nervousness about returning with such measures in place as it serves as a stark reminder of the health risk still posed. Moreover, there was some scepticism across different country contexts about how well these measures would be respected by peers or enforced by school leadership. These mixed emotions are reflected in the following comments from a range of countries:

I will be able to meet my friends which is what I am the most excited about. But I am also worried about how I am going to be safe from this virus amidst a place where children don't know the meaning of social distancing. When school ends, there is a huge crowd in the corridor pushing and falling over one another in order to get out. I am worried how we are going to protect ourselves from being in

female student, aged 16, from India

I am excited to go back because I am not a big fan of distance learning and I miss the activities I used to do there, but I am worried about the students who don't care about other's safety and they might infect others if they are infected because of their recklessness.

male student, aged 15, from Jordan

I am excited to be able to see my friends and teachers again, but I am also nervous to see what changes have to be made in light of ensuring the safety of the students.

female student, aged 16, from the US

I am excited to see my friends and get back to a little bit of normality. I am worried about the virus spreading more but also worried about how our lessons will be changed and whether my education as a whole will be worsened.

male student, aged 17, from the UK

This apprehension about returning to school goes against the prevalent narrative in the media that young people are more risk tolerant and take fewer precautions when it comes to stopping the spread of the virus. This is demonstrated, for example, by coverage of students in America who made headlines when they flouted guidance by enjoying their spring breaks in crowds, [11] and the WHO's suggestion that

young people may be responsible for the recent spikes in the virus across Europe. [12] In contrast, our survey findings suggested that young people have mixed emotions with regards to returning to school, with 60 per cent of surveyed young people reporting feeling both excitement and worry, and a further 12 per cent feeling just worried about the prospect of resuming school life. This burden on mental health must be considered as students return to school with governments and schools doing all they can to support students' sense of agency to be safe while still receiving education.

I have been trying to make myself healthier for the sake of my family and myself. I have been pushing myself to exercise more which is something I didn't do on a daily basis before Covid, eating healthier, and also learning how to be productive at home. Such as cleaning, crafting, writing, reading, etc.

a student from Indonesia

I still feel afraid for my family that the virus can infect, especially my grandparents and my young brothers because immunity at [these] ages is weak.

a student, aged 15, from Jordan

Spotlight on Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa has had to contend with more than its fair share of health crises in recent history, from Ebola and HIV to cholera, yellow fever and locust plagues. Even prior to the arrival of Covid-19, alongside poverty, epidemic diseases like malaria and AIDS were frequently cited by respondents in the region as one of the biggest challenges facing young people. When the WHO declared Covid-19 a global pandemic, it was always feared that it would be the least developed countries that would be hit the hardest. While countries in sub-Saharan Africa like Liberia and Rwanda are ranking more favourably in terms of the number of confirmed cases and fatalities than some other parts of the world, it is clear from our survey responses that this has not translated into complacency amongst its youth. As one young man from Rwanda said, "It's exciting to return to school, [but I] worry about returning due to the doubts that by the time to return Covid-19 won't have been defeated."

Though the threat of serious disease is sadly part of life in sub-Saharan Africa, Covid-19 has been different. Rarely have governments in the region responded to epidemics with measures as strict

as the lockdowns and curfews imposed in the past few months. Neither Liberia nor Rwanda have the health infrastructure or economic strength to withstand a serious hit. For the young people we surveyed, in a context where device ownership and opportunities for internet connectivity are often too limited for online learning and tech-based job opportunities to be viable substitutes, the past few months have been a particular challenge. Despite these challenges, and although young people are eager to return to normal, it was also clear that they understood and respected the threat the virus poses. As one 13-year-old student from Liberia said: "I feel excited to return to school because I would finally be out of the house and socialising with people, but I am also worried because I don't know what to expect and I also don't want to catch the virus." Restrictions are in the process of being lifted in Liberia and Rwanda but, while welcomed, there remains a palpable sense of anxiety that the risk to public health has not gone away.

Taking Stock of Government Action (and Inaction)

Young people around the world are calling for governments to look ahead, focusing efforts and resources on ensuring that effective policies and procedures are in put in place to both prevent a future pandemic and its impacts, and limit the negative consequences of this pandemic. One student from Liberia captured this sentiment as: "I feel like society needs to be prepared for something like this to happen again in the future. Even after Covid-19 I don't think we should expect anything to be 'Normal' again."

Some of the young people surveyed had positive reflections on the efforts their respective governments have made to address challenges faced by young people following the spread of Covid-19. A significant number acknowledged the efforts their governments have made across a range of sectors including the health response to the virus, support for the country's economy, and adapting the education system to reduce the lost learning as a result of school closures. Young people from the US, for example, reflected on the positive actions taken by the New York state government, recognising their endeavours to keep people safe while also reopening society so the economy can recover. "The federal government and state governments [need] to have plans on the event of a pandemic. Medical professionals need to come together and address what went wrong and how it should be fixed for the future," a 17-year-old female student from the US observed.

However, speaking about government plans for students to return to schools in the UK, one 17-year-old student commented: "They are trying to get us back into schools but I don't think they have a clear or viable plan as to how to do this safely and effectively". A recent university graduate from the UK also expressed concerns about their career prospects and apparent lack of government help: "The problem of recent graduates finding secure employment and financial sustainability has probably not become acute yet but [it] will do after the summer. I'm not sure what the government has done to help this."

Young people surveyed in Rwanda highlighted economic opportunities for youth that have been initiated by the government in a direct response to the pandemic, such as internships with established organisations and incentivising young people to set-up their own small businesses: "The government is providing the opportunity to young people to create the jobs for themselves! And even providing different formation and training to youths to be able to find themselves at job market. There are different boards like RDB (Rwanda Development Board) which is providing professional internship to fresh graduates that will ease them to find job," a male student from Rwanda said. To support the government to provide vocational training, the president of Rwanda recently renewed a financing partnership with France, which aims to increase the employability of its youth by strengthening their technical and linguistic skills through reinforcing the teaching of French. It therefore responds to Rwanda's strategy to make the country a hub for regional growth and languages. Extra financial

investment will be provided by AFD to French operator Expertise France, to provide technical assistance to Rwanda Polytechnic.1

A number of surveyed young people referred to their government's efforts to address remote learning when schools were forced to close. Young people referenced a broad range of learning formats, including online platforms and resources and online teacher support. Recognition for governments providing more access to data and cancelling examinations during lockdown were mentioned by young people particularly in Indonesia, India and Ukraine:

They give us a cellular data so that we can meet with the teacher by some media who support the situation such as Zoom, Webex.

a student, aged 16, from Indonesia

A few months ago the government cancelled final examinations (compulsory exams that everybody must take to finish elementary and middle school) for fourth and ninth grades. And I completely support this decision due to the fact that studying online was new to everyone.

a female student, aged 15, from Ukraine

However, there was no mention of governments providing remote learning support from the young people completing the survey in Liberia and Rwanda, which is likely reflective of the challenges that many lower-income countries face when trying to teach students during school closures including:

- **A lack of equitable access to tech in the home**. According to The World Bank, only 25 per cent of people living in sub-Saharan Africa access the internet. [13]

- **A lack of teacher support**. Across sub-Saharan Africa, just 64 per cent of primary and 50 per cent of secondary teachers have received minimum training, and this frequently does not include ICT skills that would inevitably support them when the move to remote learning struck. [14] This is not unique to low-income contexts, however, as evidenced in the OECD and Harvard University's latest report on the impact of Covid-19 on education outcomes. [15]

- **Socio-economic inequality.** This exacerbates inequities for children from low income households living in conditions that make home schooling difficult such as low parental language and literacy rates.

The politicisation of the pandemic was noted by young people in India and the US, chiming with the concerns raised by a number of international agencies including the WHO, whose director-general recently said: "We cannot defeat this pandemic with a divided world. The politicisation of the pandemic has exacerbated it. None of us is safe until all of us are safe". A student in India spoke about her government's choice to "use the pandemic to gain support for elections". Similarly, a student in the US expressed that "the pandemic was never something that should be made into politics, but it ended up being based around that". The concerns of the young people surveyed reflect the current discourse about upcoming elections in America, with speculation about how coronavirus will affect Biden and Trump's political fortunes. The most prominent virus-related dispute is over how easy it should be to vote, with Republicans claiming an epidemic of voter fraud will be exacerbated by social distancing measures that call for postal and digital voting, while Democrats claim this is an opportunity to increase turnout. This live debate is just one example of how the pandemic is being used by political leaders to bolster existing tensions.

What Do Young People Want From Their Leaders and Governments?

Some of the young people who responded felt their governments were not prepared enough for the pandemic, resulting in a strain on health systems and less-than-adequate educational support to learn from home. Young people in Ukraine reported being concerned by their government's response to the disease ("right now, I don't really see anything specific from the government") with particular concern over medical supplies and individuals not adhering to the lockdown procedure ("our level of medicine is low, and people do not really want to comply with quarantine"). These concerns were mirrored by young people in India, with a 13-year-old student saying the government is doing "Frankly, nothing!" while another in Liberia said: "I don't feel like the government is taking any action to address this matter."

When asked to consider what more governments should be doing to respond to the pandemic, most young people seemed to sway towards preventative measures to stem the spread of this virus and prevent another pandemic outbreak in the future, rather than an investment in securing a vaccine. While we cannot speculate as to why the young people we surveyed refer more to behaviour changes and hygiene practices than an investment in vaccines, it does suggest that young people are conscientious and have a desire for their governments to continue to provide clear health guidance.

Young people in every country surveyed called for their governments to maintain health and sanitation measures for the foreseeable future, because they see this as crucial to preventing a spike in infection rates: "I think that society should factor in more disease control mechanisms in order to prevent the spread of another virus or a repeat of the Covid outbreak," a 16-year-old female student from the US said. Young people in Indonesia, Rwanda and the UK also referred to specific hygiene measures that should continue to exist when countries ease lock down. A student in Rwanda said: "I think the

government of Rwanda needs to maintain preventive measures among people like frequent hand-washing, social distancing and wearing facial masks."

Young people in India came up with creative ideas, such as installing vending machines for face masks in public places and hand sanitiser being included in cars and places of worship. One young person in Jordan came up with the idea of changing the cultural norm of shaking hands when meeting someone new, instead replacing this with a formal introduction that allows for social distancing measures between individuals to remain. Only one student, from Ukraine, referred to vaccines when asked to share their views on what is needed in the future, stating: "And everything will be fine as soon as we have a vaccinated society!"

Regarding reforms to education following the outbreak of Covid-19, our surveyed young people had varied responses. Some believe education systems should continue to offer remote learning even once lockdown is over, with a 13-year-old male student from Jordan saying: "We should get used to online schooling and practice it as much as possible." But some young people also highlighted the basics that need to be addressed first, such as households having access to the internet and technology devices in the home.

Young people in India seemed particularly concerned about the reforms needed to education in their country, advocating for their government to address inequality in access to the internet and improve tech literacy so more people will have the basic skillsets to learn from home. A 14-year-old student from India suggested: "Provide access to internet connection to all, either free or at subsidised rates and free workshops for all to learn basic technology and internet skills." While the Indian government compiled a list of free online resources at the beginning of lockdown and created its own national library, these were only accessible to those who could afford internet. In fact, only 8 per cent of all Indian households with members aged between 5 and 24 have both a computer and an internet connection.[2]

Furthermore, there were suggestions made for reforms to teacher training that would enable educators to feel confident online and be competent when supporting students via online platforms. One young person in India said: "Training to the teachers to upgrade their skills and gain confidence in using online platforms to deliver lessons both academic and non-academic such as dance, music, physical education, art and culture classes."

Hope for a Better Future

The pandemic has catalysed a turbulent process of change for young people, flipping the world as they have known it upside down and forcing them to adapt to a different way of life. As has been illustrated, adjusting has not been easy, and the new environment forged by restrictions is uncharted territory, making for a harsh test of resilience at a young age. Through all the uncertainty that has ensued, however, it is clear from the responses to our survey that young people have not lost sight of the

fact that the collective global chaos is a product of an unprecedented public-health crisis. To many, this global pause on business as usual has provided the world with time to reflect. Governments and individuals alike have reflected the desire to see Covid-19 as a rare moment in which leaders can ensure that building back economies and nations is done in a way that serves people's needs and meets the challenges the world is facing. We heard that young people are also using this time to reflect, as demonstrated by two students from Ukraine:

The one positive thing about the lockdown – I had time to actually slow down and think. Yes, sometimes it was making me anxious and cry, but at the end of the day, I managed to set priorities for myself, focus on really important things and understand the value of my life and my surrounding.

a student from Ukraine

But I'm glad even a little of this pandemic, because we began to appreciate moments of life, community, communication, and this is not unimportant.

a student from Ukraine

Similarly, young people in the US reflected on the global issues that Covid-19 has inadvertently shone a light on such as climate change, inequality and racial injustice. One student captured this sentiment perfectly when she said: "I really want for us to go to more peaceful times, but I seriously think that our 'normal' was only normal because we were blind to the many issues that have been surfaced as a result of the pandemic. I want to see people energised to take on these issues once we are fully back to a functioning society." This was similar to a response from the UK, where a respondent called for society to rethink working values and further the attempts currently being made to slow climate change: "Need to rethink the world of work for the 'fourth industrial revolution'. These changes must be made in parallel to our transition to a carbon-neutral economy. Additionally, the hyper-inequality of recent decades must change."

Another 17-year-old in the US said: "The recent political uprisings have fuelled many of us and we are dissatisfied with the status quo. If anything, we're really disappointed and broken. However, I'm very proud that my generation is picking up and addressing these issues that have come to the surface."

Although it is fantastic that young people are engaged in thinking about the future they want to see, we cannot underestimate the mental health impacts on this generation for carrying this responsibility for change. Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on young people's mental health and well-being cannot be understood without taking into account their political frustrations as well as their commitment and desire for change.

Final Reflections: What Is Education For?

The findings from the survey convey the wide-ranging challenges that have affected young people in specific and distinctive ways compared to older generations. Young people have experienced an extraordinary loss of learning, a lack of social interaction with their teachers and peers, bereavements, increased risk of long-term socio-economic fragility that will affect their life prospects, and exposure to violence in their homes. It is no wonder that respondents to our survey reported increased feelings of anxiety and sadness. Nonetheless, they also exhibited hope for the future captured in an image of a new normal that involves our society collectively placing more value on time, being grateful for good health and family, and prevention measures to stop future repeats of the crisis.

The respondents to our survey highlighted a mixture of emotions they are feeling about returning to school. They cited relief and excitement about being back in the classroom with their peers and teachers, providing much-needed social interaction, face-to-face teaching support and consistent routines. However, they have also expressed some fear about the potential health risks from infection of Covid-19 for them and their families. Governments and education systems around the world will be required to continue monitoring the infection rates as schools restart, balancing this alongside the need to enable young people to learn in ways that best supports their academic attainment. Perhaps Covid-19 offers an opportunity for leaders to think about what education provides young people; what is its purpose, what is it *for*? Is it just to build the knowledge base of young people so they can access jobs, or should education also cultivate broader life skills such well-being, creativity, resilience and critical thinking skills?

It is clear that Covid-19 will shape the legacies of governments and leaders for the next generation of young people who are watching the efforts of those in power during this unparalleled global event. It may alter how elections are fought, what citizens demand and what political parties will need to deliver in order to build popular support and trust in their ability to govern. More than that, it will reinforce the primacy of the government in everyday lives.

Footnotes

1. ^ This report is one way in which TBI is supporting the Save our Future campaign which aims to leverage the voice of global youth to influence education reform for a post-Covid-19 world: https://saveourfuture.world/

2. ^ Inference methods were used to calculate gender breakdown, and therefore these statistics may contain a small margin of error.

3. ^ https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/aug/17/a-levels-gcse-results-england-based-teacher-assessments-government-u-turn

4. ^ https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech/brief/how-countries-are-using-edtech-to-support-remote-learning-during-the-Covid-19-pandemic

5. ^ https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/Covid-19-and-digital-learning-preparedness-jordan

6. ^ https://www.kompas.com/edu/read/2020/03/15/182027571/8-link-pembelajaran-online-gratis-untuk-isi-kegiatan-belajar-di-rumah?page=all

7. ^ https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/06/15/how-much-learning-may-be-lost-in-the-long-run-from-Covid-19-and-how-can-mitigation-strategies-help/

8. ^ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_Covid-19_impact_on_children_16_april_2020.pdf

9. ^ https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic

10. ^ https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/Covid-19-apac-hobbies/

11. ^ https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-us-canada-51955362/us-students-party-on-spring-break-despite-coronavirus

12. ^ https://www.newscientist.com/article/2237475-Covid-19-news-young-people-may-be-driving-spikes-in-cases-says-who/

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