

# New research reveals best investments to tackle learning crisis in vulnerable countries

- The UK, the World Bank and partners launch a new report authored by leading global education experts that identifies cost-effective ways to improve global learning.
- Nine out of ten children in low income countries cannot read a story by age 10 and the coronavirus pandemic has compounded this global learning crisis as schools have been forced to close.
- The report follows the World Bank-IMF Annual Meetings that warned of the huge setbacks that COVID-19 will have on education progress without concerted, sustained action, and comes ahead of a major global education summit – co-hosted by the UK next year – that will raise funds to get children into school.

The UK government, the World Bank, and Building Evidence in Education Global Group have brought together the world's leading education experts to identify cost-effective ideas to transform learning for millions of children. A virtual event today (Wednesday 28 October) marks the launch of the first report of the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, which includes 12 leading education experts from around the world and is co-chaired by Abhijit Banerjee, Nobel prize-winning economist and MIT Professor, and Sylvia Shmelkes, Provost of the Universidad Iberoamericana of Mexico.

Both of them will appear at the report launch, along with Ministers from around the world, including Baroness Liz Sugg, the UK's Special Envoy for Girls' Education and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Minister; Maria Antonieta Alva, Minister of Finance, Peru; and David Senghe, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education & Chief Innovation Officer, Sierra Leone; and Valentine Uwamariya, Minister of Education, Republic of Rwanda. They will also be joined by other members of the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel.

The report sets out the best investments to improve the quality and take-up of education in developing countries, and those which do not necessarily represent good value for money. It comes as the world faces a learning crisis, with the coronavirus pandemic forcing more than 1.6 billion children out of their classrooms at the peak of school closures.

Speaking ahead of the virtual launch, the UK's Special Envoy for Girls' Education, Baroness Sugg said

Coronavirus is not only the biggest global health and economic threat we've faced in a lifetime – it is also an unprecedented education crisis.

Even before the pandemic struck, nine out of 10 children in low income countries were unable to read a story by age 10. Without action, this will get worse.

That is why it is more important than ever that we invest wisely to get children learning again. The UK and the World Bank have brought together world-leading expertise to highlight the best ways to educate children today, so we can transform the world of tomorrow.

Hosting today's event, Mari Pangestu, World Bank Managing Director of Development Policy and Partnerships, said in advance of the launch

The COVID-19 crisis is exacerbating what was already a global learning crisis. Our research shows that learning poverty could increase sharply, with losses especially large among the most disadvantaged students.

Now, more than ever, it will be critical to bridge research and policy, theory and implementation in our collective work, in order to turn development knowledge into development outcomes and particularly to support those hit hardest by this unprecedented crisis. The education field was lacking this bridge between academia and policymaking. This initiative tries to fill this gap.

To improve learning, build back better from coronavirus and deliver value for money, the report identifies "best buys" including:

- tailoring teaching based on ability and learning level, rather than age or grade, and providing extra catch-up support to help children falling behind;
- increasing investments in pre-primary education, to halt the learning disparity seen by age 5 between low and higher-income households;
- developing structured lesson plans with teacher mentoring and training
- providing merit-based scholarships to disadvantaged children to help them stay in school;
- informing parents about the benefits of sending their children to school and the choices available to them; and
- working to reduce travel times to schools.

This report follows a Ministerial meeting at the World Bank-IMF Annual Meetings, where experts warned of the huge setback that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on education progress without concerted, sustained action.

These recommendations build on the UK's leading role in championing every girls' right to 12 years of quality education. Next year, the UK will co-host a Global Partnership for Education replenishment summit to urge world leaders to invest in getting children into school and girls' education will be a central theme of the UK's upcoming Presidency of the G7.

The UK and World Bank are already working with partner governments across the

world to deliver successful, value-for-money programmes in line with the report's findings, showing how these recommendations can help to make smart, cost-effective investment choices in education.

For example, the UK is working with the Ethiopian Government to reduce learning inequality by supporting its investment in pre-primary education; supporting Ghana to provide quality education for children where the curriculum is tailored to their learning level and helping Rwanda to develop and deliver well-structured lesson plans through teacher coaching and mentoring.

Through dedicated initiatives like the World Bank's Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund, the Bank has been investing in building evidence on effectiveness and costs, as well as helping governments around the world translate findings into policy action.

## Further information

- Launched in July 2020, the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel is an independent, cross-disciplinary body composed of leading education experts, including:
  - Professor Abhijit Banerjee – Co-Chair of the Evidence Panel, Nobel Laureate and Professor of Economics, MIT
  - Sylvia Schmelkes – Co-Chair of the Evidence Panel, Provost of Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City
  - Professor Kwame Akyeampong – Professor of International Education and Development, The Open University
  - Professor Tahir Andrabi – Dean, LUMS School of Education, and Professor of Economics, Pomona College
  - Dr Rukmini Banerji – CEO, Pratham Education Foundation
  - Professor Susan Dynarski – Professor of Public Policy, Education and Economics, University of Michigan (Joining Harvard in 2021)
  - Rachel Glennerster – Chief Economist, Foreign, Commonwealth, & Development Office (FCDO)
  - Emeritus Professor Sally Grantham-McGregor OBE – Emeritus Professor of Child Health and Nutrition, UCL GOS Institute of Global Health
  - Professor Karthik Muralidharan – Professor of Economics, University of California San Diego
  - Dr. Ben Piper – Senior Director, Africa Education, RTI International
  - Jaime Saavedra – Global Director, Education, The World Bank
  - Professor Hirokazu Yoshikawa – Professor of Globalization and Education, NYU Steinhardt
- The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel has a mandate to provide succinct, useable and policy-focused recommendations to support policymakers' decision-making on education investments. It is convened jointly by the UK's FCDO and the World Bank and is hosted by Building Evidence in Education Global Group (BE2).
- Today's report is titled 'Smart Buys: Cost-effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning' and can be [found here](#)
- Today's event is titled 'Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel's 'Smart Buys' to Improve Global Learning' and can be [attended here](#)

- The UK is investing in generating research into the areas which are identified as potential smart buys which have lower levels of evidence, such as around involving community leaders in the management of schools.
- Since 2015, the UK has supported 15.6 million children, including over 8 million girls, to gain a decent education.
- The UK is already providing support in line with the report's recommendations. For example, the UK-funded Girls' Education Challenge programme is enabling Camfed International to help over 260,000 vulnerable girls in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania to progress and succeed in secondary school, through combining quality education based on tailored learning, mentoring and skills training, with extra financial help for those in desperate need so they can buy uniforms, textbooks and stationery to make sure they can stay in school.
- The World Bank is working with countries as diverse as Vietnam, Senegal, Jordan, Cameroon, and Bangladesh on expanding cost-effective access to quality early childhood education. In Bangladesh, based on the evidence generated by a World Bank assessment, the government will be expanding pre-primary education from a one- to a two-year programme and introducing an advanced certification for pre-primary teachers. In the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Guyana, the Bank is supporting computer-assisted learning technology to help teachers to tailor instruction to students' learning needs. In Turkey, technology is being used to enable teachers to deliver individualized instruction and to deliver practical blended training of teachers at scale.
- On the sidelines of its Annual Meetings, the World Bank launched its 'Accelerator Countries' program for global education. The Accelerator Countries program recognizes and supports countries that are politically and financially committed to accelerating progress in foundational learning, a key element of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 focused on education.
- The World Bank Group is the largest financier of education in the developing world. In fiscal year 2020, The World Bank provided about \$5.2 billion for education programs, technical assistance, and other projects designed to improve learning and provide everyone with the opportunity to get the education they need to succeed. The World Bank's current portfolio of education projects totals \$20.6 billion, including 92 COVID-19-related projects in 62 countries that amount to US\$2.4 billion, highlighting the importance of education for the achievement of its twin goals, ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. The World Bank works on education programs in more than 80 countries and are committed to helping countries reach Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 by 2030.