OECS Education Sector Response and Recovery Strategy to COVID-19

Education Development Management Unit
OECS Commission

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OECS Education Sector Response and Recovery Strategy Coronavirus (COVID-19)

1.0 Background

Over the past months, various parts of the world have been gravely affected by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) with the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 12, 2020 declaring the outbreak of the virus a pandemic. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the virus strain 'severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus'[1]. The global threat of the COVID-19 has seen the closure of borders across the region, businesses and schools; directly affecting the education sector in the OECS region.

OECS Member States have been exploring various strategies to both mitigate the impact of this crisis and plot a way to return to normalcy (?). At present, all schools in the OECS are closed. States are in dialogue with their respective Cabinet of Ministers to review their response strategies which are hoped to be consistent across all states. It can not be stated strongly enough that the Coronavirus crisis in the OECS region will have a socioeconomic impact on students and will negatively affect instruction time, student assessment and students' psychosocial health.

Consequently, the Education Development Management Unit of the OECS Commission in collaboration with its Member States has developed this OECS Education Sector Response Strategy to COVID-19. This strategy, through partnership with civil society and the private and public sectors, will place emphasis on 1) harmonizing policy responses in Education Policy, 2) Transitioning to a Digital Education System, 3) Strengthening Safety Nets for students and 4) Promoting Engagement. The strategy is anchored firmly in the OECS Education Sector Strategy (OESS), which seeks to address disaster risk reduction as a cross cutting theme to reduce inequalities and build resilience to crises and shocks in its Member States.

This strategy is also aligned with the OECS Growth and Development Strategy, CARICOM Human Resource Development (HRD) Strategy 2030 and ultimately the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The strategy will assist the OECS Commission to respond to effectively to COVID-19 in achieving its mandate of improving socioeconomic status of citizens of the OECS as set out in the Revised Treaty of Basseterre. This strategy will assist in guiding the mobilization of technical and financial resources to support with the implementation of this response strategy.

An original needs assessment has been undertaken which has informed current interventions. However, a more detailed assessment of needs, both immediate and of a longer term nature, will be undertaken by July 2020 to inform the regional and national COVID-19 recovery programme. Therefore, the OECS Commission will continue to

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[1] Centre for Infectious Disease, Research and Policy. Modelling study suggests 18 months of COVI-18 social distancing, much disruption. March 18, 2020.

monitor and assess the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and will develop recovery measures in collaboration with OECS Member States.

2.0 Situational Analysis

At present, all schools in OECS participating Member States have been closed, with immediate implications for instruction that students were expected to receive. There are no dates set for the reopening of schools. This is understandable given that all MS are currently a fully or partial state of emergency in most of the MS.

Health advisories and protocols mean that traditional face to face classroom learning is no longer possible. Inevitably, productivity levels across education systems will be reduced due to the prevailing conditions in the context of a pandemic.

The EDMU of the OECS Commission hosted several planned stakeholder consultations to inform targeted responses at the Member State level and for OECS Coordination. The fora include engagement of Governance and Technical Groupings in Education. These stakeholders include:

- Ministers of Education
- Development Partners
- Permanent Secretaries
- Regional Advisory Groups
- Chief Education Officers and Planners
- Early Childhood Development, Curriculum Officers, Statisticians, Guidance Counsellors

The objectives of these meetings have been to assess the implications of the COVID 19 on Member States Education Systems and to identify strategies to ameliorate the situation in the short, medium and long term. The strategies can be split into two categories – those that can be considered to be responsive in nature and that will contribute toward recovery. The following challenges have been reported by OECS Member Countries *(See Annex 1 for Country Status Report as of March 17th, 2020):*

- Due to school closure, students are unable to access essential learning.
- Disadvantaged students have limited access to the nutritional support that they usually receive.,
- Disadvantaged students have less access to online learning opportunities
- Limited capacity to transition to online learning due to the absence of a harmonized solution.
- Administration of National and Regional Exams
- Unfavorable Parent-child interactions due to heightened stress
- Limited technical and financial resources across the region to support the response to COVID-19 crisis.

Moreover, instructional time has been seriously compromised because of the extensive impact of this pandemic. Whereas, the various Ministries of Education have control over

local examinations, for example, the Common Entrance and end of term exams, the regional examinations are controlled by the CXC. Fifth formers were scheduled to write CXC's, CPEA and Common Entrance examinations in May/June 2020 and there are concerns regarding adequately prepared students for those examinations.

In addition to the above-mentioned consultations with Member States, a rapid needs assessment was undertaken during the period March 17th – 25th, 2020. Member States identified their key priority areas as outlined in the table in Annex B. An analysis of this information was subsequently undertaken to develop the regional response strategy and as a result of these it was determined to focus attention on four key focus areas.

(1) **Harmonization of policy response amongst MS:** This will focus on streamlining education policy formulation and procedures across all MS. It will build upon the spirit of collegiality that has been achieved with both the development and implementation of OSSS. It will ensure legitimacy to any regional response to particular international situations (?) that may arise. This convergence in policy and practice is critical to the OECS pursuit of a harmonized education system across Member States.

(2) **Transition to a Digital Education System**: while there have been advances in increasing internet access to schools and children, some children and some communities, still have limited access to fast and reliable internet. This results in some children in each of the MS not having equal opportunity as their more-connected peers. Appropriate policies at the regional level are required so that programmes are implemented on a national basis to improve access to quality internet and thus bridge the digital divide and allow transition to a Digital Education System.

(3) **Strengthen Safety Nets for students / Ensuring the wellbeing of students both in and out of school:** Schools have always had a responsibility for the physical, psychological and socioeconomic needs of students and educators, in and out of school. This can be illustrated by the fact that Dominica has the expansion of the social safety net programs to schools as ine of their KRAs. The extent of the issues being faced have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hygiene and sanitation in schools remains of critical importance for the health and well being of whole school communities and attention should be taken of all WaSH and kitchen facilities. (Should we specify water supply?)

(4) **Promote Engagement**: To Facilitate the coordination of interventions to increase awareness and partnerships to mitigate the impact of the COVD-19 pandemic. Work under this component will be guided by the OECS COVID-19 Response Communications Strategy.

The response will be further be disaggregated between actions (?) to be undertaken in response to the COVID 19 and those to be undertaken as a part of the recovery from the pandemic.

3.0 Goal and Objectives

Goal: Improving resilience in the education sector in the OECS by strengthening Ministries of Education and schools ability to be prepared for, and respond to, disasters and emergences.

Objectives: For, the Education Development Management Unit (EDMU) of the OECS Commission to develop in collaboration with OECS Member States an Education Sector Response Strategy to COVID-19. This strategy seeks to:

- Improve response and recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector in the OECS
- Harmonize education policies and procedures for greater agility and responsiveness to the impact of COVID-19
- Develop a robust sustainability strategy for continuity within the education sector during emergences

4.0 Response Stage

The OECS Education Sector Response Strategy to COVID-19 considers immediate as well as recovery efforts to the impact of the pandemic. The response stage refers to the period immediately following instruction from the health authorities of the need for action. It includes the processes employed for the closing of schools, all aspects of the continuing education and welfare of children during the period of closure, and the planning for and preparatory actions taken to reopen of education institution.

Focus Area 1: Harmonization of policy response amongst MS

All schools in the region are currently closed following decisions made by Member States following advice from appropriate health professionals. There was some variation amongst MS as to exactly how this was done particularly with regard to teachers. There was a window made available in Grenada, for example, for teachers to remain to prepare work for their students. It is encouraging that the response has been relatively consistent across the region but there is capacity and **policy development work required for education policy makers** to ensure a well ordered measured response to disasters of whatever nature that may occur in future years.

It would have beneficial to the smooth response if reliable data that was accepted by all had been readily available for policy makers at all levels. An efficient response requires that the **development of the *OECS Data Governance and Management Framework*** is in place and in use by MS as soon as is practicable.

Focus Area 2: Transition to a Digital Education System

Instructional packages have been provided to students although both the nature and the delivery time of these have varied from state to state. As reported, in some MS, teachers remained at schools for a day or so following the closure of schools and parents were able to collect the packages. Ideally, MS would like to have used online platforms to allow their students to continue with their studies – all have indeed done so to differing degrees

using a wide variety of platforms. However, all states have experienced enormous problems with the availability of the devices required for both teachers and students to access the internet. St Kitts intend to loan devices to students and to provide internet connectivity in homes where it is absent during the period of school closure should it be protracted. This whole situation has highlighted the fact that some students and some communities are at an enormous disadvantage. There are instances in many MS of whole communities not having access to the internet.

WhatsApp groups have been formed and virtual platforms used, largely at the secondary level, where this has been possible.

It is clear that a lot could have been done better. The MS themselves need help in the transition to a digital education system and support could have been provided as an immediate response, and still could be, through the development of a **webinar series** to provide the technical support needed to support Member States with the transition to a digital education system

It is also true that many teachers are ill equipped to deliver the types of program that were required for all of their students, some of whom have internet and others have not. Teachers need to be provided with professional development opportunities to equip them with the skills to be able both continue with the provision of work during this period of schools closure and also to react more effectively in similar such occurrences in the future. However, traditional models for professional development will maybe not now be appropriate and **new models will be explored** that can be instituted, as a result of the closure of schools that can provide Professional development and training, coaching and mentoring whilst schools are closed. Content, both digital and otherwise, could be developed on a regional basis through a series of **technical working groups in subject areas**.

Focus Area 3: Ensure the care of students both in and out of school

In terms of looking after the welfare of children as a result of schools closing, it is widely recognised that students have limited access to the nutritional support that they usually receive. This is of real concern for those children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. All MS have school meal programs at the primary level and some have extended this to other levels of schooling. The MS recognise the critical nature of these programs and made efforts to ensure that those students that are disadvantaged continue to be supported through a variety of modalities, usually the provision of hard rations that can be delivered. St Lucia have a list of vulnerable children available that allows them to target their support. Grenada and Anguilla both work with their Ministry of Social Development. St. Kitts, which operates their program from a central unit, has not been able to continue. It is expected that a national stimulus package would help to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on families.

It is clear that all MS are concerned about the students who come from families that experience fiancla difficulties and a number operate text book support programs. Grenada provide a book scheme for children who are identified by the schools as coming from

disadvantaged backgrounds. The parents have to show responsibility by signing an agreement to return the books at the end of the year.

Although the response does great credit to those who been involved a **food feeding model** needs to be developed that could be immediately be put into operation at times of crisis. This model would include both the meal content to be prepared and also detail regarding recipients. .St Vincent already do this with free school meals being provided to primary school children at an annual cost of ECD1.6m.

The emotional welfare of the children is of equal importance and teachers need to be able to be aware of possible impacts of COVID 19 and be able to provide **Psychosocial First Aid for students** in need. Such a first aid program would provide skills for teachers to reduce the initial distress caused by the COVID-19, or any other disaster, and to foster adaptation and coping mechanisms. This should be achieved through the development of an immediate **online course aimed at providing instructional support to teachers** in response to COVID-

As a first response a number of the MS have taken the initiative to procure further school cleaning materials and Dominica have provided additional training for school cleaners.

These regional exams have now been rescheduled and the format of some have been altered slightly in order that results can be determined in a timely fashion to allow for selection for tertiary education to take place.. It was hoped that the MS might take a joint approach but while there is some level of joint agreement the Ministers of Education, through their Cabinet of Government Ministers, the MS are exploring the best suited option for their respective MS. There is a major problems being faced by all of the MS regarding the availability of a suitable number of electronic devices to allow all of their students to be able to partake in the e testing proposal made by the CXC.

A number of national exams have already been cancelled, particularly at the 2nd and 4th Grade levels while the format at the 6th grade level have changed in some cases. Two of the MS use the CPEA for common entrance and they will face the same problems regarding availability of electronic devices. Ministries of Education will continue to explore alternative approaches to allow for student assessment to be conducted in a timely and safe format as COVID-19 continues to delay all national and regional matriculation examinations and threatens educational continuity for students.

Focus Area 4: Promote engagement

Parents are of immense importance in responding to the COVID-19 and helping their children. They have been involved in many MS in collecting instructional materials (School in a Bag as it is called in Antigua). An **online hub for parents** to allow them to access information should have been established to allow parents immediate updated information on all aspects of the pandemic as it relates to the education and well being of their children. Digicel have pledged US$70,400, resources that will be used specifically for implementing an Education Communications campaign using SMS and traditional media as well as Digital Media.

Students who are due to be sitting for Common Entrance and Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate examinations will be provided with **short subject matter videos** which will be distributed via both traditional and digital mediums.

The risk matrix for the Early Learners Programme (ELP) has been updated to respond to threats of the COVID-19 virus. Prior to the threat of this crisis, the emphasis for the ELP was on ensuring implementation of targeted activities that would directly impact the learners at the classroom level. Strategies to **address the effects on the ELP brought on by COVID-19** will ultimately necessitate minimizing human contact for the safety and well-being of all our stakeholders and will include promoting the use of virtual platforms for professional development and training and providing support to parents and families for engaging students at home with reading;

(1) Harmonization of policy response amongst MS:
   a. *Capacity Building for policy makers;*
   b. *Accelerate the development and adoption of the OECS Data Governance and Management Framework*

(2) Transition to a Digital Education System:
   a. *Develop and host a webinar series to support MS*
   b. *Explore Models for Professional development and training, coaching and mentoring*
   c. *Develop guidelines for the adoption of learning Management Systems*
   d. *Establish Technical Working Groups to develop content*
   e. *Develop Application for a regional response to access US4 million from the GPE*

(3) Ensure the care of students both in and out of school
   a. *Develop and implement a Food Feeding Model which can be instituted during this time.*
   b. *Explore virtual Psychosocial First Aid for students who are affected by the impact of COVID-19*
   c. *Develop a 2-5-hour online course aimed at providing instructional support to teachers in response to COVID-19*

(4) Promote Engagement:
   b. *Develop and launch an online hub for information dissemination on education sector response to COVID-19.*
   c. *Producing short subject matter videos*

5.0 Recovery Stage
An original needs assessment was undertaken which informed current interventions. However, a more detailed assessment of needs will be undertaken by July 2020 to further inform the regional and national COVID-19 recovery programme. This recovery stage will look at the reopening of the education systems in the MS and consider the ways in which

the COVID-19 will have impacted on those systems. The OECS Commission, through the EDMU, will continue to monitor and assess the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and include such findings in recovery measures in collaboration with OECS Member States.

Dates have yet to be set for the formal reopening of schools for face to face instruction, although Anguilla at present intend to open in late July, but education authorities in all MS are in close consultation with their health authorities and national COVID19 response teams. None of the MS have yet to determine specific criteria that will allow schools to become operational again.

Ideally, all institutions would reopen at the same time but it is widely recognised that this will probably be a staggered process with, maybe, examination classes being started first. Some schools in the region are open, whilst respecting social distancing protocols, for the purpose of parents collecting assignments for their children and being able to speak with teachers. Professional development for teachers has also been going on in some schools.

Focus Area 1: Harmonization of policy response amongst MS

The education authorities in each MS are being guided by their respective health authorities, a set of standard guidelines/protocols for the reopening of schools are being developed by Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) for the region but **broad criteria, could be recommended by the EDMU** in consultation with MS. Issues related to social distancing are recognised but they are helped by the fact that class sizes are, for the most part, small across most of the region. There are, however, large classes in some of the urban areas that may have to be split and decisions still need to be made regarding shift teaching, children not attending school every day and the need for school hours to be staggered. All MS report that they are considering issues such as these. The criteria for the reopening of schools should include social distancing, the number of children in classes and hygiene issues. It is expected that any recommendations relating to the criteria for reopening schools would be entirely consistent with the UNICEF 'Framework for Reopening Schools'. This issues raised in this document framework are completely in harmony with discussions that have taken place between MS.

UNICEF has in recent years conducted **Education in Emergencies** programs in all MS. Understandably, this program and the development of the plans concentrated on the dangers posed by hurricanes especially in light of Irma and Maria that caused so much damage. These programs and plans will be adapted and plans updated to include a greater focus on the potential dangers of a pandemic of the type that is currently being experienced.

There should be a **program of further training workshops** for relevant staff in the MS aimed at providing guidance on how to prepare social protection programs to respond to disasters and climate change.

The Community Colleges are offering their courses remotely and meetings of the East Caribbean Joint Board of Teacher Education (is that right??) have been convened to discuss measures that need to be taken. The CC are well equipped to provide a remote service.

Focus Area 2: Transition to Distributed Learning

The onset of COVID-19 has pushed digital education as a major agenda item for policymakers in the region. This is evidenced by the fact that concerns were expressed from all MS regarding the availability of devices and the lack of connectivity in many communities. It has also been noted that even in areas where there is adequate connectivity many residents cannot afford broadband resulting in severe limitations in the accessing of resources to support distance learning. Never have telecommunication networks been so vital to our health and safety, and to keep our economy and society working, as they are at the moment.

It has also been noted earlier that there is a proliferation of Learning Management Systems, some with exorbitant price tags while some are new to MS. In an effort to better support MS it has been recommended that there be a pause on the roll-out of an LMS as whilst research is conducted on the options to be followed by the presentation of policy options for MS consideration. (It needs to be noted however that some MS have made mor progress than others in this regard and may not take kindly to this!)
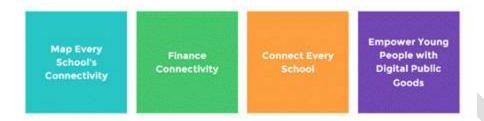
The requirements of children with special needs has been recognised around the region and all MS have made attempts to make arrangements for them. Anguilla have provided them with tablets for home use. Grenada have provided online tutorials which are beneficial to the students with visual or auditory impairments. (I think we need to develop an activity specifically related to children with special needs – St Lucia have suggested producing videos to explain the current situation. Could switch this to the response stage section?)

The support being given to schools to aid their transition to a Digital Education System will be accelerated. All critical operations will be mirrored in digital and virtual platforms. These operations will include, at national and regional levels:

- school operations and support services
- teaching and learning,
- knowledge management
- business operations.

To support with this intervention, the OECS Commission has accelerated the implementation of GIGA, an initiative to connect every school to the internet and every young person to information, opportunity and choice. GIGA will be implemented in collaboration with UNICEF, the International Telecommunications Union and other key development partners working in the OECS region. Furthermore, a consortium of partners across industry, investors, NGOs, IGOs, DFIs, and all other contributors will be established to drive investment and public-private partnerships models to increase affordable access to connectivity in the Eastern Caribbean —while creating a policy environment and regulatory landscape that favours this transition to a digital education system.

GIGA is made of 4 pillars: 1) map every school's connectivity, 2) finance connectivity, 3) connect every school, 4) empower young people with Digital Public Goods. Under pillar 4 of this initiative, empower young people with Digital Public Goods, A program will be developed and implemented to facilitate the identification, testing and scaling of **digital public goods in education**. This will be conducted at the regional level with active participation from all MS. The outcome from this activity will be a suite of public goods recommended for use in schools in the region. A start to this has already been made in a number of states. St Lucia, for example, have allocated ECD2.4 million on e books and licences as part of a pilot that covered 13 secondary schools.

GIGA will be implemented across the region and for there to be successful outcomes there first needs to be Information and Communications Technology in Education Policy Framework which will govern this transition to a digital education system and importantly **promote digital equity across OECS MS**. The development of this policy framework will be fast tracked due to the increasing importance being accorder to digital education as a result of the COVID-19. One component of the strategy will be to determine recommended minimum specifications for devices to be used in schools around the region. Some states, including St Kitts and Anguilla already have minimum specifications which means that EDMU will have to be a little wary.. Who will drive this? EDMU? Steering Committee? Technical

The completion of an approved strategy will then allow the GIGA Team to work with the OECS and MS to create a **consortium of partners across industry, investors, NGOs, IGOs, DFIs, and all other contributor**s. This will drive investment and public-private partnerships models to increase affordable access to connectivity in the Eastern Caribbean—while creating a policy environment and regulatory landscape that favours massive participation.

The two greatest obstacles to the transition to a digital education system are first, that, not all communities have access to an affordable internet service and, second, that not all students have access to suitable devices in order to access the internet. The first of these will be addressed through partnership with a consortium of partners noted earlier. The second of the obstacles is not likely to get any better in future years as the shock of COVID-19 starts to impact on the MS economies and parents will less likely to be able to afford to purchase such devices for their children.

The MS have determined that the only way in which to alleviate this problem, and to close the digital divide, is for the MS to take the initiative and **procure devices for students.**

Some, such as St. Vincent, who have allocated ECD4m, and St. Kitts have already started the process and Grenada have reallocated some funds from the GEEP to purchase devices for students. The latter is as a result of Government priorities relating to e learning and being done in consultation with the Caribbean Development Bank.There are a variety of ways in which this program can be implemented – providing for only the disadvantaged, providing them to schools rather than individual students, providing them to just secondary students in the first instance, or implementing a loan program. The EDMU is entirely supportive of MS using the strategy that is best suited to their particular situation. As noted earlier, the EDMU will work with MS to determine a set of minimum specifications for devices to be used in schools. As with the implementation of the program, it is recognised that some MS have their own specifications that have been determined, often in consultation with their own IT authorities. This is again acceptable to the EDMU provided that they satisfy both the agreed minimum specification and those recommended by the CXC. It is intended that all procurement will utillise an approach similar to that of the PPS in order to make the most of going to scale. It is, however, recognised that some states may wish to tender themselves in order to provide business for the private sector in their home economies (is this right? Is this even allowe?)

The procurement of devices for students will have to be preceded by the preparation of the teachers. Professional development for teachers will increasingly be conducted virtually and the OECS will **procure the equipment necessary** and allocate to the schools in order to implement relevant capacity building. This equipment will then allow teachers to continue with the **training required for the transition to digital education**. It is intended that a research program be undertaken and a report furnished by June, 2020. This report would present insights on the online learning strategies currently being implemented by MS, children's access to online solutions, and their access to devices (the digital divide). The hope is this research will inform policy moving forward and will build upon the training that MS are currently providing for their teachers. The training program for the teachers will focus on pedagogy to achieve a higher quality of teaching both online and at home. It is expected that this program will lend resilience to the system to deal with the effects of COVID-19 and any other situations that may affect schools in future years.

Focus Area 3: Ensure the care of students both in and out of school

The care for students both in and out of school has always been of the greatest concern and much was done in the immediate response to COIVID-19. The unknown nature of the COVID-19 virus dictate that these efforts must be redoubled to ensure that everyone is safe. Water supply is of great importance and progress made with the WaSH program (has there been any progress with WaSH?) will be built upon. Full recovery will involve i**mproving schools' water supplies** and this can be undertaken in a number of ways: through school based rain water harvesting, installation of additional or new water tanks and pumps. A study will need to be conducted to determine exactly what each school needs. There may need to be widespread retrofitting of school bathrooms whilst taking measures to improve the water supply, Many schools also have kitchen facilities that may also need a similar retro fitting program during the recovery stage.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the plight of many who are disadvantaged over and above the digital divide. St Vincent allocate ECD1m annually for a book loan scheme for secondary students who are unable to afford to buy them

Even if widespread renovation is not required to ensure full recovery then the **deep cleaning of existing bathroom facilities** for students and staff may be following inspection.

Some MS have already acted with extra cleaning materials being provided but further to this the availability of classroom sets of hygiene products and apparatus such as hand sanitizers and face masks will be required. There is a case for the OECS undertaking a **joint procurement of masks, hand sanitizers and other appropriate cleaning equipment for schools**. This could be achieved using the OECS Pharmaceutical Procurement Services (PPS) model as a part of the recovery process.

Hygiene has always been taught in schools **to promote good practice will be continued.** In light of the COVID-19 additional materials to promote proper hygiene practices will be developed that will include short radio and television programmes for students with key preventative practices messages and activities

Teachers will need to be explore ways in which the system can **respond to the psychological and socioeconomic needs of students and educators** who may be affected by this pandemic. Much will depend upon what transpires with respect to the response to COVID-19 and just how schools are reopened but it could be that some groups of children will have to remain at home for much longer periods than desirable (reword). Programs will be developed online to prepare teachers to help the children adapt to new circumstances. The MS will be helped in this regard by support from the Pacific American Health Organisation (PAHO) and UNICEF through their inter agency program, 'Shoring up Mental and Psychosocial Support to Affected Populations During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Barbados and the East Caribbean Countries'. They make the following points on the effect of the pandemic:

The limited literature on the impact of recommended public health measures, such as physical distancing, hand hygiene and environmental cleaning, notes the following effects, inter alia, on mental and physical health over a period of time:

i.   *That social isolation can increase the risk of a variety of health problems and drive some people into negative habits of connecting less*
ii.   *That children not in school can become more exposed to all forms of abuse;*
iii.   *That people of all ages are susceptible to the ill effects of social isolation and loneliness;*
iv.   *That there is increased strain on single headed households in balancing work demands and children's continued learning and safe care arrangements*
v.   *That persons already having problems with social anxiety, depression, loneliness, substance abuse, or other health problems become particularly vulnerable;*

There can also be a loss of "collective effervescence" which describes the shared emotional excitement people experience during group events such as as religious ceremonies and sporting events that has the potential to reduce social cohesion.

PAHO and UNICEF ECA will collaborate to immediately augment national efforts and systems to:-

    a. provide options of mental psychosocial support to enable targeted populations to better cope with the negative effects of the necessary physical distancing and other measures; and to

    b. deliver these options in primarily virtual, innovative and participatory ways that respect the principle of social distancing and maintain the privacy and dignity of women and men, girls and boys.

A number of types of pyscho social services will be provided: individual and group based education and counselling, some general advice and support on parenting and an engagement with children and adolescents to ensure that their feelings and concerns have a chance to be expressed and taken account of. Activities will include:

Add list

Focus Area 4: Promote engagement

The UNICEF **'Return to Happiness'** initiative offering psychosocial support to children across the East Caribbean whose lives were disrupted when Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria caused enormous damage and trauma in 2017 (?). As a part of this program children participate in various activities to help in their emotional recovery from their trauma. This successful program will be adapted and updated for use where appropriate to help children suffering from COVID-19 by including a module on responding to disease outbreaks and will be included as a part of the joint PAHO / UNICEF program.

To Facilitate the coordination of interventions to increase awareness and partnerships to mitigate the impact of the COVD-19 pandemic. Work under this component will be guided by the OECS COVID-19 Response Communications Strategy.

The engagement of the community as a whole and parents in particular will be enhanced by the delivery of an **aggressive campaign targeted at parents** highlighting the many ways to support the learning process at home. This campaign will be supported by the Branding and Marking Expert from the project while the OECS will seek support from the private sector to provide air time for the ELP Public Service Announcements (PSAs). A Communication Plan has also been developed.

Recovery will focus on the following Focus Aeas:

    (1) Harmonization of policy response across amongst MS:
        a. Determine common guidelines for the opening of schools
        b. To adapt EiE programs to include the danger of pandemics
    (2) Transition to a Digital Education.

a. *Development and implementation of a programme to facilitate the identification, testing and scaling of digital public goods in education*
b. *Development and implementation of a strategy to promote digital equity across OECS Member States*
c. *Develop guidelines for the adoption of Learning Management Systems*
d. *Forge partnerships with international, regional and national telecommunications regulators and providers to provide access to quality internet vulnerable students*
e. *Procurement of equipment and implement relevant capacity building initiatives to facilitate virtual professional development under the ELP*
f. *Develop Application for a regional response to access US4 million from the GPE*
g. *Continuation of Capacity Building, Education, Training and Sensitisation*

(3) Strengthen the care of students both in and out of school
a. Improving schools' water supplies
b. Availability of hygiene products and apparatus
c. Renovation and or deep cleaning of education institutions
d. Continuation of programme to promote good hygiene practices
e. To develop suitable response to the psychological and socioeconomic needs of students and educators.

(4) Promote Engagement:
a. *Further develop the Return To Happiness program*
b. *Develop and implement an aggressive campaign targeted at parents highlighting the many ways to support the learning process at home. Branding and Marking Expert ELP*
c.

6.0 Beneficiaries

It is envisaged that the strategy will be implemented at the regional and national levels depending on the project interventions as articulated above. Participating Member States include Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, St. Christopher (St. Kitts) and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Montserrat, British Virgin Islands, and Anguilla. It is expected that 139, 294 students and 14, 592 teachers and principals in government and government-assisted primary and secondary schools benefit from this intervention. Schools, teachers and students who have been determined to be especially at risk of low levels of achievement will be specifically targeted.

7.0 Duration
The strategy is planned to be implemented over a period of 18-month period.

8.0 Sustainability

This strategy will consider a multidimensional approach to sustaining the components of this intervention. These include:

- The establishment of an official of the Ministry of Education as focal point and effective, national manager to work closely with the Education Development Management Unit of the OECS Commission to manage the activities at the country level.
- In order to further secure beneficiary ownership and commitment, the programme will be built into the annual work plans of the respective beneficiary countries through an established annual OESS implementation planning and review process. The process allows for Member States, through the involvement of Education Planners and Directors of Education (Chief Education Officers), to include in their annual work plans elements of the regional response and recovery strategy.
- Facilitate sharing and replicating of successful practices among Member States. There are many benefits to be gained by strengthening the culture of sharing local experiences and solutions to common challenges faced. One important benefit is the building of local capacity within countries and in the wider region.

9.0 Risks
Several potential risks are likely to affect implementation and achievement of the response goals. Some examples and proposed mitigation measures are:

- **Limited availability of officials to participate in the process** due to natural and health-related occurrences. Virtual meetings are an alternative to face-to-face. The consultations will also form smaller sessions across the country rather than large groups. Electronic data collection will also be used to maximum effect.
- **Insufficient funding on an annual basis due to the impact of COVID-19 on Government revenues.** This will affect the ability of MS to sustain the program.
- **The diverse priorities of participating Member States.** Some participating states are at different levels of preparedness ad response. Much effort therefore will be given to achieving consensus through consultation with member countries.
- **Limited access to and availability of data.** As a first step a rapid needs assessment has been undertaken, areas have been identified. Further engagement with member states will be critical to outline specific areas of needs, gaps and priority.

11.0 Log Frame

EDMU COVID 19 Response Log Frame	
Goal:	**Improving resilience in the education sector in the OECS by strengthening Ministries of Education and Schools response to disasters and emergences.**
Objectives	• Improve response and recovery to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector in the OECS • Harmonize education policies and procedures for greater agility and responsiveness to the impact of COVID-19 • Develop a robust sustainability strategy for continuity within the education sector during emergences
Key Performance Indicator	**Activity**

EDMU 1.1 An endorsed education Sector Response Strategy to COVID 19
 	
EDMU 1.2 An application for mobilization of resources under the GPE COVID 19 Accelerated Fund
 	
EDMU 1.3 Level of resources mobilized to support COVID 19 response in education
	1.1.1 Coordinate efforts to ensure harmonized approach in policy and practice among MS
	• Engage Governance and Technical Groupings
	   • Ministers of Education (1)
	   • Development Partners (1)
	   • Permanent Secretaries (3)
	   • Regional Advisory Group (1)
	   • Chief Education Officers and Planners (3)
	   • Early Childhood Development, Curriculum Officers, Guidance Counsellors, Statisticians
	• Harmonize response to regional and national assessments
	• Explore Models which can be instituted as a result of the closure of schools; Professional development and training, coaching and mentoring
	• Accelerate the development and implementation of the OECS Data Governance and Management Framework

EDMU 2.1 A regional data governance and administration framework developed and adopted by at least 6/9 MS EDMU 2.2 Guidelines for the selection of LMS developed and adopted by at least 6/9 MS EDMU 2.4 Number of persons participating in Webinars to facilitate the transitioning to online learning EDMU 2.5 Number of learning devices procured to support transitioning to online learning EDMU 2.6 Number of vulnerable students with access to internet connectivity EDMU 2.7 Number of newly developed resources in an online repository to support learning at home EDMU 3.1 An endorsed online course for teachers to provide psychosocial support for teachers EDMU 3.2 Number of teachers participating in online PD activities EDMU 3.3 Number of students reached through virtual Psychosocial First Aid	2.1.1 Support Countries in Transitioning to a Digital Education System • Develop and implement an ICT and Data Governance Framework to support with the transition to a Digital Education System • Develop and implement a programme to facilitate the identification, testing and scaling of digital public goods in education • Develop and implement a strategy to promote digital equity across OECS Member States • Develop and host a webinar series to provide technical support to Member States with the transition to a digital education system • Develop guidelines for the adoption of learning Management Systems • Forge partnerships with international, regional and national telecommunications regulators and providers to provide access to quality internet vulnerable students • Procurement of equipment and implement relevant capacity building initiatives to facilitate virtual professional development under the ELP • Establish Technical Working Groups to develop content • Develop Application for a regional response to access 4 million from the GPE **3.1.1** Strengthen Safety Net for Student**s** • Develop and implement a Psychosocial Advice Members on Food Feeding Model which can be instituted during this time. • Update the UNICEF Return to Happiness Programme to include a module on responding to disease outbreaks • Explore virtual Psychosocial First Aid for students who are affected by the impact of COVID-19 • Develop a 2-5 hour online course aimed at providing instructional support to teachers in response to COVID-19
	4.1.1 Promote Engagement

4.1.1 Number of PSA developed and released 4.1.2 Number of students reached with messages around literacy enhancement 4.1.3 Number of parents/caregivers reached with key messages related to parent-child interaction	• Develop and launch an online hub for information dissemination on education sector response to COVID-19. • Develop and implement an aggressive campaign targeted at parents highlighting the many ways to support the learning process at home. Branding and Marking Expert ELP • Producing short subject matter videos which will be distributed via both traditional and digital mediums targeted at students preparing for Common Entrance and Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate examinations

Annex 1

Country Status Report As of March 17th, 2020 *(to be updated as per meeting April 2)*

Member States	Mitigation Strategy and Challenges
Antigua and Barbuda	1. All schools are closed 2. There are existing online learning platforms at some schools. The ministry will explore other platforms for use such as Notesmaster 3. *"Education in a Bag":* These are Teacher-made packages for students which includes learning exercises and activities for students to be engaged while at home. 4. School feeding programme will continue on a daily basis for less fortunate students
Anguilla	1. Schools are closed from 16th- 20th March, 2020 2. Exploring potential platforms for online learning. Notesmaster has been identified as a potential platform, however, there has been challenges identifying a suitable platform for the primary grades 3. Daily Meetings with teachers are being held.
British Virgin Islands	1. Meeting with the Cabinet of Ministers to discuss the possibility of closing schools for 14 days in the first instance. 2. Limited mass gathering, social distancing encouraged. 3. Meeting will be held with policy officers to discuss mitigation strategies. 4. Exploring Notesmaster, online access platforms for CSEC Exams. FLOW to provide support. 5. Donations have been received from Google Foundations. Currently seeking to mobilize additional support from other stakeholders to donate laptops for teachers 6. Proper hygiene practices and information circulated to schools 7. Cabinet meeting scheduled for March 17th, 2020 to discuss response plan

British Virgin Islands	1. To date, schools remain open 2. A meeting of Principals has been scheduled for March 18th, 2020 3. Proper hygiene practices and information circulated to schools 4. Increased provision of cleaning supplies to schools 5. Exploring alternatives for an online platform for e-learning 6. Limited internet coverage at homes will pose a challenge 7. Training teachers in the use of Google Platforms 8. Cabinet to meet with a view to update COVID-19 Protocols
Grenada	1. Schools are closed for two (2) weeks commencing March 16th, 2020 in the first instance. 2. Online learning platforms are being explored (ENMOODLE and MSTAR platforms are explored) 3. Additional supplies provided to schools for cleaning.
Montserrat	1. Schools are closed until end of the second term 2. Developing mitigation strategies with both the private and public sector players
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1. Schools remained open. 2. All public events have been postponed
Saint Lucia	1. Schools are closed for the period March 16th- April 13th, 2020 2. In discussion with Digicel for the donation of portal internet devices for students with no internet access at home. 3. Exploring various online platforms for e-learning 4. In discussion with Teachers' Union to discuss response plan
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	1. Schools will be closed commencing March 20, 2020. 2. Supplies sent to schools for sanitizing and assigned more staff for school cleaning, 3. Insufficient water supply at some schools in particular the Grenadines islands. 4. All mass activities have been cancelled. 5. The circulation of fake news has posed challenges in the public domain 6. Issue of Price gouging has been flagged

Annex B

Country	Priority Needs COVID 19 Response
Dominica	• Support and guidance for our support team of Guidance Counsellors • Monitoring and evaluation of approaches • Provision of Meals for less fortunate students • Ensuring digital equity
Grenada	• Devices and any additional Training Support being offered.
St Lucia	• Provision of Electronic Devices for Teachers and Students • Psychosocial Support • Provision of Meals for less fortunate students • Activities to deal with Psycho Social Needs of Teachers • Development of videos for Special Needs Students to Explain the current situation. • Bridging the digital divide
St Vincent and the Grenadines	7. Supplies sent to schools for sanitizing and assigned more staff for school cleaning, 8. Insufficient water supply at some schools in particular the Grenadines islands. 9. Provision of Meals for less fortunate students 10. Bridging the digital divide