



# COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan

## Education Sector



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Ministry of Primary and Mass Education  
Ministry of Education  
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## Abbreviation

a2i	Access to Information
DP	Development Partner
GEMR	Global Education Monitoring Report
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HSC	Higher Secondary School Certificate
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoICT	Ministry of Information Communication Technology
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
NCTB	National Curriculum and Text Book Board
NGOs	Non-Government Organization
OoSC	Out-of-School Children
SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
TMED	Technical and Madrasa Education Division
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	The World Bank
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization

# 1. Introduction

The Bangladesh COVID-19 Response Plan for Education Sector provides a framework of strategies and interventions for the school education system to cope with the adverse impacts of COVID-19. Given the COVID-19 emergency and the urgent need to develop a plan for a coordinated national approach, this plan has been developed through a rapid consultative process with the leadership of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and Ministry of Education (MOE) and the support of UNICEF (Coordinating Agency). The MOPME also consulted the Plan with government line agencies involved in education and the Local Education Group (LEG). The plan development also benefited from the desk review of a wide range of existing guidelines and global best practices. This plan focuses on the learning discontinuation and its associated challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic based on a rapid situation analysis.

COVID 19 made us compelled to think about alternative ways and means of living. It is not only limited to change from socialization to social distancing, from visiting doctors to online health care, from schooling to distance learning.

As the situation is still evolving with uncertainty, the future course of this pandemic cannot be predicted accurately. Accepting the fact that there are no alternatives of schooling and educational institutions, there should have readily available ways and means to handle the crisis situations which create uncertainties in relation to the continuation of learning and ensuring the health, safety and hygiene of pupils. The COVID-19 situation has unearthed the fact that the system is inadequately prepared to deal with a crisis such as this one. During the crisis period some ad hoc initiatives have been taken with limited success due to either the lead time required to implement the plans or due to limited access to resources, making it difficult to meet planned targets. COVID 19 reiterates the need for a comprehensive and robust plan to ensure the continuation of learning and the health, safety and hygiene of pupils.

Hence this Plan provides a set of options and strategies that can be operationalized and implemented by school education authorities and departments in collaboration with other stakeholders based on different short to medium- and longer-term interventions that will be context-based. This plan will be treated as a living document with subsequent elaborations capturing responses and best practices from within the country and outside as the implementation progresses. Existing national level response and coordination structures will be involved in revisions of the plan through a consultative and inclusive process involving other Ministries, line departments, development partners, academia and civil society. The unique nature of this challenge also calls for a more iterative planning and implementation approach with feedback loops to continuously adapt to changing circumstances expected over the next few months and possibly two to three years.

## 1.1 COVID 19 Situation analysis

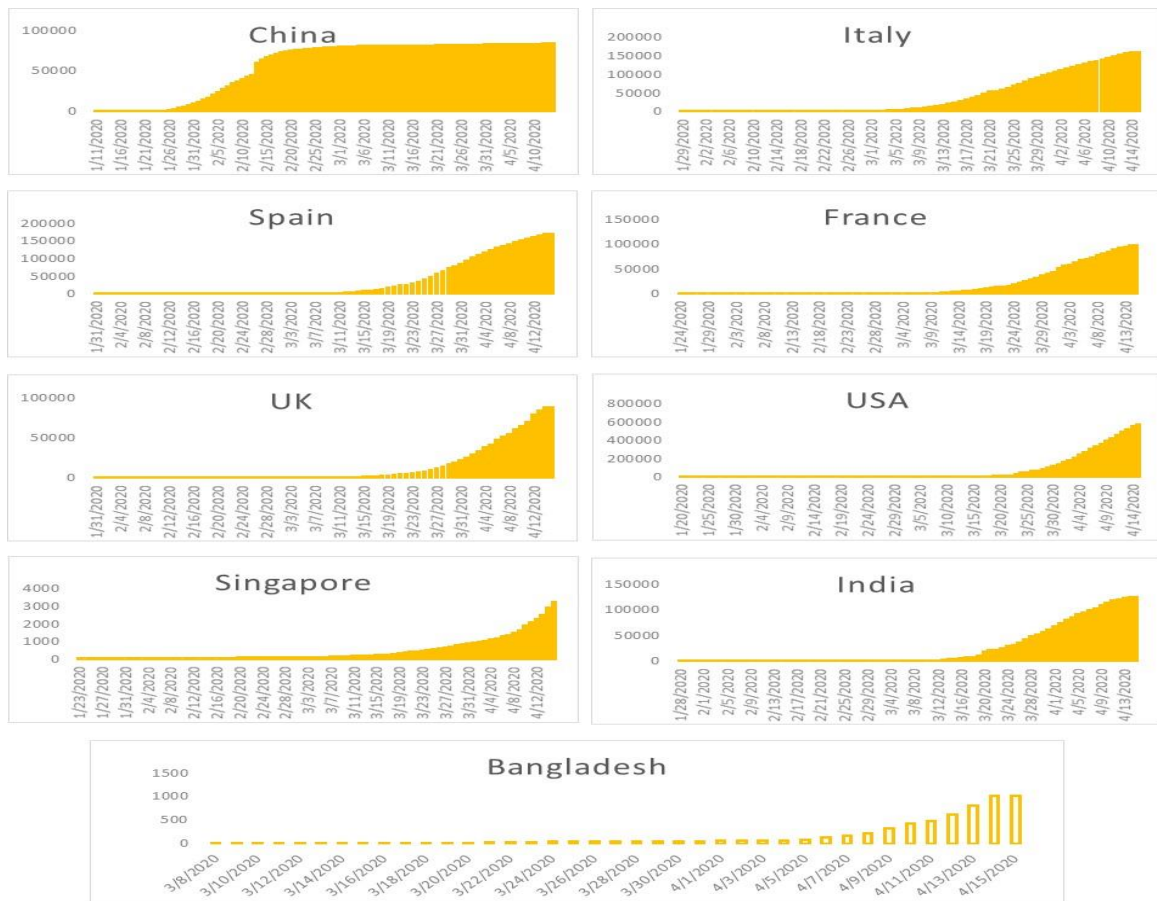
An outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) caused by the 2019 novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has been spreading rapidly across the world since December 2019, following diagnosis of the initial cases in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Since the beginning of March 2020, the number of cases outside China has increased exponentially spreading all over the world. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared this as a global pandemic. As of May 07,

2020, the outbreak has resulted in more than 3.8 million affected cases and 267,771 deaths in 210 countries and territories<sup>1</sup>.

Bangladesh detected its first COVID-19 case on March 08, 2020. The outbreak started spreading rapidly on the first week of April 2020. As of May 07, 2020, Bangladesh has detected 12,425 confirmed cases and 199 deaths<sup>2</sup>. Government has taken several measures to limit the transmission. The country is undergoing a nationwide shutdown (with exception of emergency services) and public transport restrictions since March 26, 2020 which has been extended till May 15, 2020.

## 1.2 COVID 19 Trajectory: Confirmed cases by dates of Few Countries

From graphs related to the trajectory of coronavirus infections, for several countries, the trend has been for cases to increase for at least 60 days under lock-down situations. Based on this analysis and the trend of increasing cases in Bangladesh, it is anticipated that the number of cases in Bangladesh will peak within the next few weeks.



(Source: WHO, updated 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020, 1:00PM)

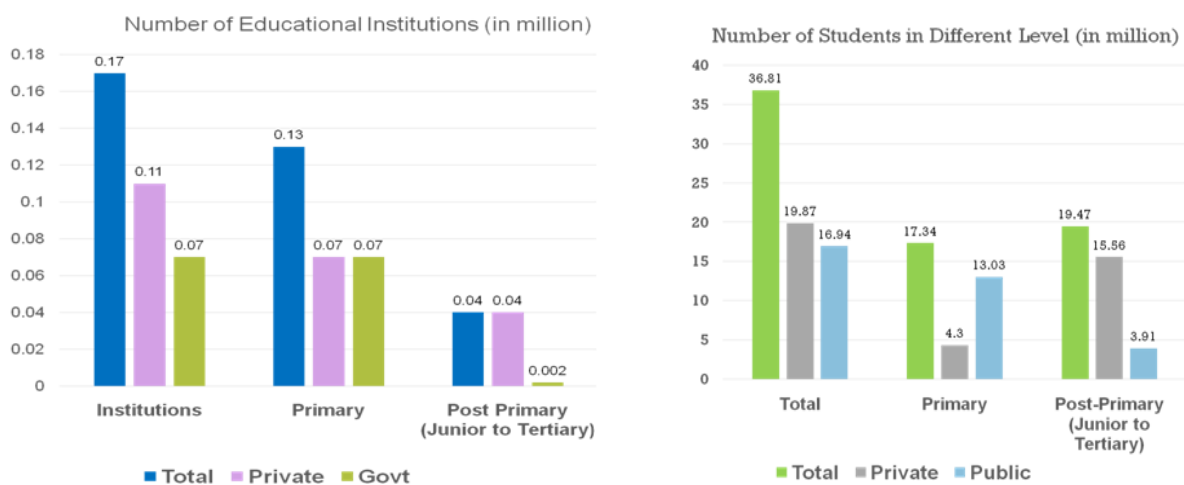
<sup>1</sup> Johns Hopkins University and WHO

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR)

## 2. Analysis of Education System

Bangladesh has a large education system with 38.6 million students: 3.6 million in pre-primary; 18 million in primary; 13 million in secondary and 4 million in tertiary education<sup>3</sup>. According to Bangladesh Education Statistics, 2018<sup>4</sup>, there are 0.17 million educational institutions from primary to tertiary level including 0.13 million primary level educational institutions. Among primary level students, around 75.2% are enrolled in government primary schools and only 48.9% of primary schools are government schools. The country's economic development is closely linked with ensuring strong education attainment, learning outcomes, and skills development.

The following graphs illustrate detailed statistics on education institutions and students<sup>5</sup>:



Globally, at the peak of school closures, the COVID-19 pandemic led to around 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 193 countries, representing over 90% of the total enrolled learners.<sup>6</sup> Education of around 38.6 million students of Bangladesh has also come to a halt with the on-set of the COVID-19 pandemic, when nation-wide school closures were declared on March 17, 2020; this is expected to continue in alignment with the national lockdown<sup>7</sup>. It also led to the suspension of the first term examination of all primary schools in the country, while the Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) Examination (Grade 12/equivalent terminal exam) has been postponed for the academic year. The authorities are considering expanding the closure of education institutions until September 2020. The continuation of school closure and disruption of learning is expected to have short, medium and long-term impact on learning and human capital development in the country. Hence, the Government of Bangladesh realizes the importance to plan and address the COVID-19 pandemic in education for Bangladesh.

<sup>3</sup> Annual Primary School Census 2018; BANBEIS, 2018

<sup>4</sup> Bangladesh Education Statistics 2018, BENBIES, Ministry of Education

<sup>5</sup> Bangladesh Education Statistics 2018, BENBIES, Ministry of Education

<sup>6</sup> Enrolled at pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary levels of education, as well as at tertiary education levels.

Source: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

<sup>7</sup> All education institutions, including public and private education institutions (schools, colleges, universities etc.) in Bangladesh

### 3. Impact of COVID-19 in the Bangladesh Education System

Bangladesh has made impressive gains in ensuring equitable access to basic education and gender parity under the leadership of MoPME and MoE. Currently, two government programs - Fourth Primary Education Development Program (PEDP4) and Secondary Education Development Program (SEDP) - are supporting the whole school education system under these two ministries. However, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh was grappling with issues of out-of-school children and low and unequal learning outcomes. There are also large differences among sub-populations: student from well-off and urban areas do better than those from poorer families and rural areas.

Immediate direct impact of the COVID 19 is the discontinuation from learning of around 36.8 million students. On top of that, under the pilot phase of the second chance education scheme, the drive to reach 1 million out of school children has been disrupted due to the closure of learning centers. Youth and adult literacy programs of the Government and NGOs have also been suspended. It is likely that this will impact literacy rates, which had seen improvements prior to COVID-19. Due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, major impacts on education in Bangladesh are as follows:

- **Learning loss due to discontinuation:** Long period of disengagement from school and learning activities would disrupt children's learning gains. The current situation is disrupting the planned activities of the school year and may result in a complete gap of one year in the worst-case scenario. Keeping children motivated with learning and maintaining engagement with lessons, especially among families with less educated parents and from poverty-prone areas, is also a challenge to ensure learning continues during this crisis.
- **Increasing risk to learning outcomes and assessment:** National Student Assessments show that among Grade 3 students, 62 percent do not achieve grade-relevant competencies in Mathematics. Among grade 5 students, grade-relevant competencies were achieved by only 36 percent of students in Bangla and only 24 percent of students in Mathematics<sup>8</sup>. At the Grade 8 level, only 44 percent and 35 percent of students achieved grade-relevant competencies in English and Mathematics, respectively. The temporary suspension of classroom learning activities and scheduled assessments due to the pandemic will make it more difficult to improve learning outcomes, or even maintain the percentage of students achieving grade-level competencies. At the same time, the authorities and teachers will face difficulties finding a suitable solution for national assessments, considering the loss of learning due to school closures and other associated factors.
- **Inequality in learning:** The most educated and wealthiest families are expected to better sustain their children's learning at home during school closures. They are more likely to have computer equipment and Internet connectivity; space to study; books and other learning materials. They are also better equipped to help their children study, which includes having the digital literacy skills to support their children with technology-based learning modalities. This means that when schooling restarts, children from hard to reach areas and disadvantaged children - including those from households which cannot afford such modern and costly facilities - will find themselves even further behind their peers. This may also become a big problem for teachers when schools re-open, as they will have to deal with

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<sup>8</sup> National Student Assessment 2017, DPE, MoPME

greater student heterogeneity within their classrooms due to the expected widening of learning gaps.

- **Increase in dropout rate resulting in more out-of-school children (OOSC):** In Bangladesh, around seven million children and adolescents (80 percent in rural areas) aged between 6-16 years old were out-of-school in 2016. Females are at a huge disadvantage representing 87 percent of this population<sup>9</sup>. During the current shutdown of schools, the drop-out rate at primary and secondary levels is likely to increase, especially among girls and children from socio-economically disadvantaged families. Although decreasing in recent years, Bangladesh still experiences a considerable incidence of dropout at both primary (around 18%) and secondary (around 35%) levels. The disruption of the second chance education pilot to get back 1 million out of school children into learning centers<sup>10</sup> will further worsen the dropout situation. The estimated global economic crisis due to the pandemic and its severe impact on household income will also increase the drop-out rate, especially for girls and for poor/disadvantaged households. The increase in school drop-out will most likely also lead to an increased adolescent fertility rate and higher incidence of early marriage and child labor.
- **Teacher engagement and development:** The lives of teachers are also disrupted due to the pandemic and school closures. Prolonged absence and disengagement from teaching and on-going professional training will affect the quality of teaching and motivation. Coping with the changing nature of remote learning activities and lack of professional development opportunities for school teachers in using the online teaching-learning platform is an added challenge, both during and after the shutdown period. The nature of assessments will also be changed, requiring innovative solutions to adapt to the current situation and address the anticipated increase in learning gaps between students. Sensitization and training on this will also be required for school teachers to make this response plan effective.
- **Health and nutrition of school children:** Globally around 364 million school children are now missing out on school feeding or meals<sup>11</sup>. In Bangladesh, the government-led School Feeding Program in Poverty Prone Areas reaches over 2.7 million children each year<sup>12</sup>. MoPME has been providing 75gm fortified biscuits 5 days a week to every child of 104 poverty-prone Upzilas since 2010. Due to schools closures, all children who rely on school feeding programs missed out on these important nutrition intakes, increasing the chance of malnutrition for children in areas where the School Feeding Program operates. Moreover, there is no system of regular basic health checkups to ensure the detection of malnutrition, short sightedness and problems in hearing.
- **Increased risk of hygiene issues:** The cleanliness and level of hygiene of the school environment would be an area of concern once schools resume. Worldwide around 53 percent of schools have basic hygiene services (defined as having a hand washing facility with water and soap available). Nearly 900 million children lack basic hygiene services at their school<sup>13</sup>. In government primary schools of Bangladesh around 71% schools have wash blocks<sup>14</sup>. However, wash blocks mainly consist of toilet facilities. The availability of hand washing facilities with running water and soap as a means for disinfection is currently very

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<sup>9</sup>Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), 2016, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS)

<sup>10</sup>Fourth Primary Education Program (PEDP4), Bureau of Non-Formal Education, MoPME

<sup>11</sup>Impact of COVID19 on school meal by WFP, 27 March 2020

<sup>12</sup><https://www.wfp.org/news/government-bangladesh-expands-school-meals-programme>

<sup>13</sup>Novel Coronavirus (COVID 19) Global Response by UNICEF, last updated 8 April, 2020

<sup>14</sup>APSC, 2018, Directorate of Primary Education, MoPME



limited. This will likely increase the risk of exposure to diseases such as COVID-19 when schools resume.

- **Gendered impact of school closures:** Girls are more likely to have fallen behind in their schooling than boys, especially in disadvantaged families, for various reasons. They are more likely than boys to be involved in household activities including taking care of siblings and sick relatives, and they are much less likely to have access to technology such as mobile phones. In addition, during school closures, girls are more vulnerable and may be at increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV) including sexual exploitation and abuse violence, as well as child marriage. For boys, those in poor families are more likely to be under pressure to support their families' livelihoods and may discontinue school by taking up daily labor.
- **Impact on children in rural areas and from the poorest households:** Children in rural areas and from the poorest households are much less likely to have access to television, Internet or computers.<sup>15</sup> Only 44% of 5-11 year old children in rural areas and 6% of children belonging to the poorest wealth quintile have a television at home. This compares to 75% of urban 5-11 year old children, and 90% for the richest wealth quintile. Similarly, only 3% of rural 5-11 year old children have a computer at home and close to 0% for the poorest wealth quintile. Regarding Internet, only 30% of 5-11 year olds in rural areas have Internet access and just 7% in the poorest wealth quintile – generally, through mobile phones. 92% of 5-11 year old children in the poorest quintile do have a mobile phone in the home, though these will generally be low-cost feature phones, which may be able to connect to Internet but will have limited capabilities. Reaching children in rural areas and especially the poorest households in both rural and urban areas therefore requires special consideration and alternative delivery mechanisms.
- **Impact on children with disabilities:** For children with disabilities, who are disproportionately represented among those living in poverty, the pandemic and resulting school closures are particularly likely to have had a negative impact. They are more likely to have underlying health conditions which put them at increased risk of serious complications from COVID-19. They are also likely to be excluded from distance learning programmes, for example, due to lack of assistive devices, greater difficulties in using technology, and learning modalities which are not accessible for those with vision or hearing impairments.
- **Safety and psychosocial issues:** For many students, especially those living in fragile contexts, schools can provide a safe haven from violence and other external threats, as well as access to services such as psychosocial support. With the closure of schools, children may be more exposed to gender-based and other types of violence, including in the home. Stress and trauma caused by unprecedented uncertainty due to the pandemic are likely to affect the mental health of students, parents and teachers and may cause psychosocial issues during and post pandemic. The lack of a system of basic health checkups and for maintaining health information of school children also increases risk in the post pandemic period.
- **Disruption and uncertainty around non-formal education:** Due to the pandemic the non-formal learning centers; prevocational, vocational and technical training centers and other non-formal mode of education and skills training have been shut down. The loss or disruption will affect learners, especially disadvantaged youth from poor socio-economic households, due to the increased opportunity cost of education and loss of skills attainment.

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<sup>15</sup> Bangladesh MICS6, 2019.

The effect of COVID-19 on the already resource constrained non-formal education sector with comparatively weaker institutional capacity, already disadvantaged target population and limited scope of distant learning facilities will likely have a negative impact on the desired outcomes of the demographic dividend.

- **Increase in youth unemployment:** The economic impacts are likely to worsen the country's youth unemployment. Especially among postsecondary students, economic impacts are foreseen to lead to an increase in drop-out, as well as increase in youth unemployment, in the absence of education and skills training to support access to the formal job market. The loss or disruption of the academic year will especially affect disadvantaged youth from poor socio-economic households due to the increase in opportunity cost of education. This may lead to increased anti-social activities and social unrest among youth. This is a particular risk in Bangladesh because of its youth bulge and increasing prevalence of social media.

#### 4. Government of Bangladesh's Response to COVID-19 for Education Sector

To engage school level students through distant learning mechanisms, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has taken some quick initiatives. Four working groups have been established to develop remote learning content and roll out lessons through four platforms: Electronic Media Platform, Mobile Platform, Radio Platform and Internet Platform. Government, Development Partners, and NGO entities are working together in each working group to produce and facilitate remote learning contents to reach a maximum number of students.

Currently the Electronic Media Platform is operational through Television broadcasting of pre-recorded lessons for preprimary to primary grades. The state-run '*Shangshad Bangladesh Television*' has started broadcasting this content from 29 March for secondary and from April 7, 2020 for primary. During the program '*Ghore Bose Shikhi*' (Learning from Home), lessons are being delivered on every subject for 20 minutes from 2pm to 4pm every day. At the secondary level, 10 classes per day are televised on secondary general education, allocating 20 minutes for each class. Classes have also started on technical and Madrasha based education.

Assessment is a critical issue for both students and teachers. Well thought out planning is required to identify appropriate ways and means for assessments, so that teachers can effectively identify student learning levels especially those who are furthest behind, provide appropriate support, and are aware of learning gaps between students.

Consultations have been ongoing on whether the students of grades III to V are expected to do a set of homework after taking the classes through a remote platform, particularly TV, and submitting it to their teachers once schools reopen. The scores obtained on the homework assignments will be considered a part of their continuous assessment. However, there are limitations due to TV programming not reaching a large proportion of children who do not have access to TV.

Considering the issue of inclusiveness (reaching all children), other platforms for remote learning, such as radio (national, FM and community) and mobile phone (both feature and smart phones) are being explored. Currently the MoPME and MoE with technical support of "Access to Information" (a2i) of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, and

development partners are developing radio and mobile based distance learning programs considering that 95% of the population in Bangladesh has mobile phones and radio programs can be accessed through a large percentage of mobile phones. Simultaneously, the introduction of an Internet platform is underway. The development and operationalization of content under the other three platforms is in progress.

In addition, some of the previously created supplementary content, which are not regular lessons, are available through online portals for students and teachers to explore. Several radio stations are broadcasting awareness raising programs on hygiene and safety issues regarding the pandemic since March 2020, targeting people of all groups and ages.

## 5. Challenges with ad-hoc initiatives

The government has taken quick and appropriate measures. However, some critical challenges remain especially in terms of coverage. The major challenges include:

- **Reaching the whole student population:** Reaching all school-going children from all socio-economic backgrounds is a key challenge. Currently, around 56 percent households of the country have access to television while in the case of radio it is a staggering 0.6 percent - though many may have access through their mobile phones, and this requires awareness-raising around the possibility of using mobile phones to access radio programmes. Only 5.6 percent households of the country have access to a computer and 37.6 percent households have access to Internet. Moreover, most access Internet through mobile phones - often basic phones which will not necessarily run many of the learning platforms and apps. Access to mobile phones at household level is at a promising 95 percent.<sup>16</sup> However, they may have to be shared with the entire household, so between parents and potentially multiple siblings, which also needs to be taken into account in the design of distance learning programmes. In this scenario, even after rolling out all four platforms of distant learning mechanisms, a significant segment of the student population will be out of reach and disengaged with learning activities.
- **Reaching younger children:** In the case of younger children, especially at pre-primary level, remote learning opportunities are generally less appropriate and may be much less effective than for older children. This is because younger children need a lot more guidance and assistance from parents/caregivers, as they are less able – or unable – to learn independently. Parents/caregivers of younger children may therefore face particular difficulties during school closures, especially in disadvantaged households, and where they need to support learning for multiple children.
- **Low tech environment in the primary education sector:** In Bangladesh, the secondary and tertiary education sectors are familiar with some form of digital activities. However, primary schools in Bangladesh function in a low-tech environment where teachers and students are not accustomed to using digital platforms for learning. Producing digital content and accessing it will be more difficult and challenging for primary level teachers and students.

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<sup>16</sup> Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), BBS 2019

Moreover, young children require assistance and motivation to be engaged in distant learning activities which is an added challenge for households with less educated parents.

- **Resource constraints:** Currently, Bangladesh does not have the necessary digital infrastructure and digital literacy for system resilience building at the primary education sector to cover the whole student and teacher population through effective remote learning approach for a long period of time.
- **Monitoring and assessment of remote learning initiatives:** It is a major challenge to monitor access to engagement with different remote learning modalities, disaggregated by learner groups, as well as assessing their quality and effectiveness. Moreover, teachers and education authorities have not had any past orientation or experience in monitoring remote learning.

## 6. Three Phase Response Plan to Recover and Transform Education Sector to be a Responsive and Resilient System

The strategies and interventions proposed below outline how the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) will continue education during the crisis while supporting the system to be ready to recover and improve after the emergency. The overall aim is to minimize learning loss and ensure boys and girls, including the most vulnerable groups such as adolescent girls and boys, refugee learners, and children with disabilities, are protected during the emergency response and the system is strengthened as a result of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 response.

A three-phased plan to address the challenges has been conceptualized. Through preparing for a timely response, it is intended to limit the huge crisis in the education sector which may be encountered post-pandemic. The approach is built around three broad expected results, organized for the short-, medium- and long-term, and focused on the following:

- a) Children's safety and learning continuity;
- b) Readiness and support for recovery and re-opening in the post-emergency period; and,
- c) Building system resilience through learning from the COVID-19 response and sustaining good practices.

For an effective coordinated response, different levels of government need to move in a synchronized and complementary way. The district and upazila levels will be crucial in implementation and scaling up the strategies that work; hence they should be the focus of planning and implementation. It is essential that those involved in local service delivery (district and upazila officials, head teachers, teachers, parents and students) are able to provide feedback on what works and where there are obstacles to the continuation of education. The geography-based and population group vulnerabilities also are a strong argument for decentralized planning, management and response mechanisms for education programs within an overall policy and strategy framework.

This plan will complement the existing GoB programs in school education (PEDP4 and SEDP) while development partners are expected to contribute through technical assistance. All three phases will start simultaneously and based on impact continue from starting to 24<sup>th</sup> month. Also, many of the ideas used for the pandemic response would also be extremely helpful for improving school education quality post-pandemic.

Many of the initiatives implemented for the pandemic response will also be highly relevant for improving education quality and reach post-pandemic (including for out-of-school children), and thus, special efforts will be made to design interventions with a view to ensuring long-term sustainability.

**Short Term (Immediate to 6 months)**

**Output 1: Children remain safe and continue to learn and the education system is ready to support the safe re-opening of schools.**

A critical component of the emergency response will be to ensure children remain engaged in learning activities and, as much as is feasible, the education system continues to function. If children are able to continue to learn during an emergency, it not only serves as a protective measure for them and their families, but also reduces learning loss and ensures learners are ready to learn when schools and learning centres re-open. In the Bangladesh context, significant focus will be placed on needs and interests of the most marginalized especially girls, out-of-school children, and children with disabilities. Interventions will also be implemented in ways that help improve the system and ensures that the COVID-19 crisis does not exacerbate the pre-existing learning crisis.

This first immediate phase will focus on the shutdown period to minimize learning loss as far as possible and promoting awareness for students' safety through::

- **Maximizing content availability and reach through four platforms:** By creating *interactive* and *easily accessible* content that are adapted to different platforms and disseminated widely. Preparation of contents and making all four platforms fully functional quickly should be a priority by using TV, radio, mobile and online modalities to disseminate learning content. Alignment with the national curriculum will be prioritized to ensure meeting of learning objectives of different grades and appropriate ages, while developing content in the shortest possible time to be rolled out amidst the shutdown. The current capacity and resources of the system will also be evaluated to ensure that the solutions can be scaled up in a timely manner and eventually integrated into the national school education system. Equity considerations will be central to the dissemination design, so that students with poor access are not neglected. Simultaneously, alternate and effective modalities to reach and engage non-formal education students needs to be developed and deployed, which may be different from formal school remote learning modalities. In addition, large-scale awareness raising activities on the benefits and use of various learning modalities will be conducted to ensure better engagement and reach. The private sector, in particular private ICT sectors/mobile network operators (MNOs) will be encouraged to participate in the process, with the aim of reduced rate internet/mobile charges for educational purposes, and/or free access to specific platforms/websites for learning. Printed learning content may need to be developed for reaching the most marginalized learners who have no access to any of the four remote learning platforms, as well as exploring adaptations to Internet-based platforms so they can run effectively on low-cost feature phones.
- **Proactive messaging to parents and students to minimize potential drop-out:** This may also include tracking at-risk students – in particular adolescent girls and children with disabilities - and providing them with targeted financial / counseling support. These messages could also

include guidance/support for at-home schooling. Existing communication platforms including social media will be utilized to minimize potential drop-outs, early marriage, gender-based violence and maintain engagement with learning through various media. Community awareness building plans will be rolled out to ensure the inclusive re-enrollment of the maximum possible number of students at reopening. Good practices from other countries/education systems will be used as a reference.

- **Raising awareness on health and safety issues:** All students, parents and teachers should be targeted through mass awareness campaigns to promote hygiene and COVID-19 safety practices and social distancing. Existing animations/simulations appropriate for children/young children can be utilized with accessible and easy to interpret information related to COVID-19. These can be broadcasted separately or incorporated in daily lessons. The programming will include psycho-social support and various cultural activities/games through TV, radio, and mobile phones as part of the learning programmes, as well as for socio-emotional support. Developing a simple guideline on hygiene measures, hand washing, cleaning procedures and safe food preparation with contextualization according to the local culture will be helpful for schools for better management of learners' health and wellbeing.
- **Capacity building of teachers and education officials' through remote learning:** Prepare online training for teachers on pedagogy, content knowledge and supporting remote learning of students while schools are closed. This may also include online platforms for teacher peer groups, upazila-level teacher support pools, or small groups of teachers.
- **Using remote services for coordination:** For monitoring the reach and effectiveness of distant learning activities and to ensure that learning continues, through usage of mobile, radio and Internet services, a coordination mechanism can be established within clusters through engaging teachers, head teachers and education officers. A feedback mechanism needs to be developed for parents, students, teachers and head teachers to provide input on what works and obstacles to continued learning. This coordination mechanism will articulate and delineate different roles and responsibilities and establish standard operating procedures for reaching learners, while also supporting teachers.

### **Medium Term (Immediate – 12 months)**

#### **Output 2: All girls and boys, especially the most marginalized, return to institution-based learning as soon as possible, once schools re-open**

The return to institutional learning will reflect the core principles set out in the joint global framework by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and WFP, for re-opening schools. The framework proposes key dimensions to assess the states of readiness and inform planning: policy, financing, safe operations, learning, reaching the most marginalized and wellbeing/protection. These will be integrated into planning as well as guide the programme.

One of the grave risks posed by the suspension of classes due to emergencies is that children never return to school and, for those who return, the system is not ready to support their learning. In addition to ensuring children continue to learn amidst school closures, it is essential that the process of re-commencing schools is carefully planned in line with guidance provided by Health authorities, the period of closures is kept to a minimum, and robust supports are available

to ensure children, especially the most disadvantaged, are ready to return. This can be achieved by preparing the system, schools, teachers, parents and children for returning to, and remaining in, learning facilities.

This phase will focus on the immediate post-pandemic recovery to ensure swift transition to regular school routine through:

- **Assessing the readiness:** Assessment of preparedness of local education officers and school management is required to develop guiding principles to ensure preparedness of all stakeholders prior to school reopening. Assessing the readiness for school re-opening will be guided by the Framework for Reopening Schools (jointly developed by UNESCO, UNICEF, WB and WFP), to ensure government protocols are followed with guidelines from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- **Developing and implementing a phase wise school re-opening plan:** Based on global examples, MoPME and MOE will develop a safe school re-opening plan detailing the criteria and steps for school re-opening post shutdown period. The Plan will ensure that health protocols are followed, and school premises and classrooms are properly disinfected. The role of schools, teachers, head teachers and local administration will be crucial and will become more important to reach the maximum number of students and will require increased efforts for continuity of learning using different modalities during school closures, after reopening of schools and post COVID-19 to mitigate the effects during different phases. Teachers, head teachers and education officials will need to be trained in the ways and methods of the new “blended learning” approach (combining face-to-face with technology based learning modalities) with different outreach modalities with continuous monitoring and mentoring. More of the teaching workforce will need to be engaged if the reopening of schools and conduct of examinations occur through a staggered process, for certain grades and priority segments of learners. To prepare for this, the district and upazila education offices will need to explore and strengthen partnerships between schools and communities and other stakeholders.
- **Ensuring health, safety, hygiene and school cleanliness:** The COVID-19 pandemic poses serious considerations for the health and safety of all learners and education staff. The education system can play a role in providing health, hygiene and psychosocial support messages to families during the lockdown period. Critically, clear health, hygiene, cleanliness and safety procedures need to be established, with measures put in place before schools reopen. This is to minimize the risk of infection of children and staff while at school and also as a means of preventing dropout and increasing retention of all students. It will be ensured that hand washing and disinfectants facilities will be provided to all schools and field offices to maintain health, safety, hygiene, and cleanliness, as well as continuing these measures to ensure health and safety in the post-coronavirus period. Special orientations for teachers and staff need to be arranged on social distancing and maintaining cleanliness and hygiene at schools on a regular basis. Guidance around monitoring staff and student health and wellbeing will also be widely disseminated.
- **Strengthening monitoring systems and tracking and bringing children back to school to prevent dropout:** Ensuring the maximum share of school-age children are back to school

after the shutdown is of utmost importance. One component of this will be motivating families to send their children back to school. Re-enrollment campaigns will be conducted which should include participatory community action and awareness-raising campaigns. This will be complemented by efforts to strengthen school and sub-national systems to better monitor and track absenteeism and students at risk of dropping out once schools re-open. This could be linked to the provision of targeted financial / counseling support and referral systems, tracking mechanisms, along with strengthened administrative data processing. A comprehensive situation analysis will also be conducted by schools to identify children who dropped out or are at risk of dropping out. Special measures need to be taken for adolescent girls and children with disabilities who are at higher risk of dropout, as well as the poorest families, for whom cash transfer facilities will be considered. School admission policies and requirements will also be reconsidered with the view to eliminate barriers to entry.

- **Assessing student learning status and their mental health:** Special recovery classes and adjusting lesson plans and assessments to prevent loss of academic year depending on the length of the shutdown are needed to be developed. Cluster-wise learning lag assessment and special lesson plans will be developed and delivered. Local education officers and head teachers will be deployed to facilitate. In addition, there may be a need to establish remedial and accelerated education programs to help students make up for any learning losses, contingent on the duration of school closures. This also needs to be aligned with assessment practices and specific guidance needs to be developed/provided to teachers to help them identify student learning levels and those in need of remedial education.
- **Ensuring smooth transition support for teachers:** Efficient engagement of teachers is required in resuming schools successfully. Teachers would need to be prepared for the shutdown period remote learning and assessment mechanisms as well as the post-COVID-19 classroom environment through professional development and guidance in several areas, including assessing learning lags, identifying and supporting at-risk students, syllabus prioritization and digital skills. This will include providing school teachers and head teachers with the necessary guidance and tools for community outreach (through safe methods) and follow ups including dissemination of learning content and engagement with learners in the community through different methods; this will include peer support groups and/or free call-in numbers (or mobile phone credit) for guidance. It is anticipated that teachers may be required to provide additional support especially on literacy and numeracy to some learners who have fallen behind, including children with disabilities. Guidance and training for teachers may include identifying age and developmentally appropriate behavior changes in their learners, communication of referral pathways for psychosocial support, and sensitivity to stigmatization and discrimination.
- **Deploying financial and non-financial incentives** to bring back students from affected disadvantaged and low-income households and prevent early marriage and/or child labor. This will help ease stress on families which will allow vulnerable learners to continue remote learning and will also mitigate the risk of dropout once schools reopen.



- **Revamping the school feeding program** which can have positive impacts on school re-enrolment and attendance<sup>17</sup>, while at the same time helping mitigate the nutritional shortfalls some students may have experienced during school closures, especially for adolescent girls.
- **Reviewing and updating of the Syllabus and high-stakes examinations / procedures** to adjust for the COVID-19 impacts on student learning and preparedness for testing in consultation with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). Procedures need to be developed for conducting this year's high stakes examinations. Examination centers/spaces need to be selected and designed with adequate social distancing measures in place. This may require more space or that students conduct the examinations in a phased manner, which may require extra security precautions for examination questions or the preparation of multiple examinations. Multiple options for dates of examinations depending on the rates of infection in different parts of the country needs to be considered. There should be a contingency plan considering worst case scenario if examinations cannot take place due to a continued COVID-19 outbreak.

#### **Long Term (Immediate-24 months)**

#### **Output 3: Education system develops sustainable systems for risk informed planning and supporting learning**

This phase will focus on building system resilience and readiness for future recurrence of the outbreak of similar situations and natural calamities, as well as building on technology supported learning modalities put in place, through:

- **Developing a Crisis Response and Recovery Plan with Standard Operating Procedures** as part of the regular education planning. In this case the Emergency in Education and Disaster Risk Recovery Framework approved by MoPME in 2015 needs to be further reviewed and updated to incorporate pandemic issues. It could be a plan for whole school education. While the Covid-19 pandemic poses unprecedented challenges, it also provides opportunities to strengthen the education system, including through preparedness for additional outbreaks related to Covid-19 and for further strengthening DRR and crisis-sensitive planning for schools. In addition, this is an opportunity to identify and build on lessons learned from the Covid-19 response to be better prepared to respond to other emergencies.
- **Integrating Remote Learning into regular school education through a blended learning approach** (e.g. e-tutorial lessons, e-lectures to substitute for coaching) to familiarize students, teachers and parents and ensuring swift transition to distant learning when required with minimum learning loss and maximum coverage. MoPME will also consider the needs of non-formal learners within the mainstream framework, as well as explore how out-of-school children and youth may also be reached through remote learning modalities. Low-tech modalities such as interactive radio, SMS, interactive voice response, offline apps which run on simple phones, as well as adaptive technologies will also be explored to reach disadvantaged populations including children with disabilities. Research and reviews will be

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<sup>17</sup> Jomaa, L. H., McDonnell, E., & Probart, C. (2011). *School feeding programs in developing countries: impacts on children's health and educational outcomes. Nutrition reviews*, 69(2), 83-98.

informed by ground level realities, as well as the experiences of other countries and the relevant literature/guidance/research.

- **Developing a sustainability mechanism for Remote Learning Platform** by developing the ecosystem to support it, including digital content developers; ICT training for teachers; strengthening of the ICT system in the primary education sector and enhancing children's basic skills and use of remote learning materials.
- **Developing low cost Learning Packages** for school education and non-formal education to ensure accessibility and to minimum learning loss in the case of future shut down situations, including the above-named low tech modalities, with a particular focus on those from the poorest households, those with limited or no access to technology, considerations for girls/adolescent girls, and considerations/adaptations for children with disabilities.
- **Developing a sustainability mechanism for remote teacher professional development** by developing a digital platform aligning on-going initiatives under Professional Development Plans.
- **Developing an online learning assessment system** by introducing an "online learning assessment" tool, including the provision of research/assessing the efficacy of remote learning mechanisms in consultations with the local community, civil society, NGOs and Development Partners.
- **Developing a Health tracking System:** In collaboration with the Community Health Clinic, a basic health screening system will be developed, and the health profile of students will be an integral part of the central MIS system.

## 7. Indicative Budget for FY21-FY22

Area	Indicative Cost in USD
<b>1. Content Development</b>	
TV, Radio, Mobile and Online content development	15,000,000
Developing low cost Learning Packages and Distribution	12,000,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>27,000,000</b>
<b>2. Communication</b>	
TV, radio, and online communications to reduce drop-out and sensitize on health practices	5,000,000
Development of pamphlets, printing, and distribution	500,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>5,500,000</b>
<b>3. Technological Solution</b>	
Using remote services for coordination	100,000
Integrating Remote Learning into regular education	500,000
Upgrading and optimizing Remote Learning Platform	1,000,000
Developing Remote professional development platform for teachers	2,000,000
Developing online learning assessment system	500,000
Set-up of toll-free hotline for student and teacher support	500,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>4,600,000</b>
<b>4. Policy and Advisory</b>	
Developing and implementing a phase wise school re-opening plan	300,000
Reviewing and updating Syllabus and high-stake examinations	500,000
Developing a Crises Response and Recovery Plan with Standard Operating Procedure	500,000
Strengthening of school and sub-national monitoring systems to identify dropouts and children at risk	500,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>1,800,000</b>
<b>5. Health, Safety and Prevention Practices</b>	
Sanitization of schools following health protocols for re-opening	8,000,000
Raising awareness on health and safety issues	800,000
Maintenance of Health Safety, hygiene, and cleanliness School	8,000,000
Developing a Health tracking System	15,500,000
Mental health support for students and teachers	300,000
Developing plan and project for school feeding all over the country and piloting	4,000,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>36,600,000</b>
<b>6. Ensuring Learning Equity</b>	
Student assessment on school return	500,000
Teachers training (ICT, Assessment, etc.)	10,000,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>10,500,000</b>
<b>7. Ensuring Access for the most disadvantaged</b>	
Supplementary Learning Materials	3,000,000
Community based targeting activities	1,000,000
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>4,000,000</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>90,000,000</b>

## **8. Implementation of the COVID-19 Response Plan for School Education**

The implementation mechanism of this three phase COVID-19 response plan would be a fast track one. In case of financing, the Plan would be supported initially through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Accelerator Funding for COVID-19 to initiate the implementation of the plan. Additional financing from other DPs would also support implementation of the Plan.

Implementation of this plan will be the responsibility of the respective ministries and directorates in collaboration with upazila and district level administration and key development partners. To the extent possible, regular monitoring will continue through existing structure of PEDP4 and SEDP. It is expected, however, that there will also be a need to adapt and test out different methods for monitoring, especially as lockdowns continue. Education offices will need to adapt their processes for officials to be able to work remotely and for keeping in contact with school officials. There will also be a need for increased monitoring during the acute phases of the pandemic so that evidence-based decisions can be made based on available data at all levels of the system. This will also allow for course correction and changing/adapting strategies as needed.

Considering the evolving and unprecedented effect of COVID-19 across the education streams and levels, policy level coordination and guidance would be imperative to maximize impact and smoothening the transition by taking informed decisions. A High-Level Advisory body will be formed comprising of members of MoE and MoPME to take policy decisions and immediate actions for the implementation of the National Plan.

A Common National Framework for schools reopening will also be developed to guide educational institutions to reopen in the post COVID period. In addition, an Emergency Response Working Group will be formed comprising members from the government, private sector, NGOs, development partners and other stakeholders to tackle any emergencies that can occur in the education sector in the future.

Appropriate Monitoring and Evaluation approach will be taken considering the implementation plan of the specific programmes and projects.

## 9. Result Framework Matrix of the Program

EXPECTED RESULTS	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	END TARGET (2022)
<b>Impact</b> <i>(based on sector plan, PEDP4)</i>	% of grade 5 students achieving band 5 competencies in Math	25	40
	Net enrolment rate (by level and gender)	Primary: 97.85 Secondary: 58	Primary: 98.4 Secondary: 60
	Percentage of out-of-school children (by age and gender)	Primary: 6 Secondary: 13	Primary: 6 Secondary: 13
<b>Outcome:</b> <i>Girls and boys, especially the most vulnerable, are protected and continue to learn during and after COVID-19 emergency.</i>	Percentage of boys and girls who know how to protect themselves from COVID-19 (disaggregated by gender)	NA	80%
	Percentage of children re-enrolled after the emergency phase (disaggregated by gender and disability)	NA	90
<b>Output 1:</b> Children remain safe and continue to learn during the emergency phase of COVID-19 pandemic.	Percentage of girls and boys supported with distance learning initiatives during the COVID emergency (disaggregated by gender and disability)	0	60
	Number of girls and boys reached with information on COVID-19 prevention	0	21,000,000
	Number of children provided with learning materials/packages	0	4,000,000
Output 2: All girls and boys, especially the most marginalized and refugees, return to institution-based learning as soon as possible.	Percentage of schools meeting safe school guidelines at reopening	NA	75
	Percentage of primary level girls and boys accessing stipends (disaggregated by type of service and gender) <sup>18</sup>	90	95
	Percentage of re-enrolled girls and boys completing a learning assessment when they restart school	NA	75
	Percentage of children benefiting from the School Feeding		25 <sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Government under a separate project provides stipend to all students of the primary level. It is ongoing.

	Program <sup>19</sup> in Primary Education Sector post-COVID-19 emergency		
<b>Output 3:</b> Education system develops and integrate education technologies into the teaching and learning process	Integrated platforms for distance learning (students and teachers) and data management (including health) are functional	No	Yes
	Number of subjects per level with complete digital contents for the whole academic school year (linked to the curriculum)	TBC	50
	Percentage of teachers accessing some of their professional development online	NA	50

<sup>20</sup> A national school feeding programme is expected to be approved soon. Targets may change to reflect targets of that programme.

<sup>19</sup> The GoB will continue supporting primary school students under their school feeding program during and post COVID-19 situation.

## 10. Conclusion

The Government of Bangladesh is aware of the grave risks to education gains posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The risks especially to girls, children with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups, is even more concerning. It is with this in mind that the government has mandated the responsible ministries and agencies to take the necessary steps to minimize learning and ensure the education system recovers as soon as possible. This recovery plan sets out the main strategies of this ambitious agenda which will supplement and eventually be integrated with education sector strategies set out in the Fourth Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP4) and the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP). While there is clarity that the ultimate aims of the government is recovery and strengthen of some aspects of the education system in the period after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also clear that the strategies and activities cannot be cast in stone at this stage. This plan will be reviewed periodically with partners, including schools and the local education group, to ensure the interventions are meeting the needs of children and the system at large. This flexibility is not only necessary for the context but will be a critical part of the strategy to strengthen ownership while contributing to strengthening the system, including addressing future emergency responses.