

# BUILDING BACK BETTER FOR ALL

## **WEBINAR:** Technology-enabled inclusive education: Emerging practices from COVID-19 for learners with disabilities

15 June 2021 (11am-12:30pm GMT+2, Paris time)



Photo credit: YPSA

**Date:** Tuesday, 15 June 2021    **Time:** 11am GMT+2 (Paris time)    **Duration:** 90 minutes

**Title:** Technology-enabled inclusive education: Emerging practices from COVID-19 for learners with disabilities

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## INTRODUCTION



The COVID-19 pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting persons with disabilities (UN, 2020). Even prior to widespread school closures, one billion persons with disabilities worldwide were less likely to access quality education, healthcare, or livelihoods, and were less likely to be included within a community. The pandemic has intensified these inequalities: persons with disabilities are at a greater risk of marginalization and are more likely to experience the related socio-economic or health impacts<sup>1</sup>. Any response to this crisis must, therefore, consider the pre-existing marginalization, discrimination, exclusion, and inequalities of persons with disabilities to ensure that they are not even further left behind.

<sup>1</sup> As outlined in the UN policy brief [A Disability Inclusive Response to COVID-19](#).



As restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 led to school closures in 191 countries, 85 percent of the world's learners were forced out of school<sup>2</sup> (UNESCO, 2020). Teaching moved either online or was broadcast through televisions or radio programmes: this 'open and distance learning'<sup>3</sup> (ODL) enabled education to continue for millions of students.

Access to ODL, however, is not universal. The pandemic has exposed significant levels of exclusion and inequality in this area, particularly for populations at risk (ITU, 2020). Almost one third of schoolchildren worldwide (463 million) cannot be reached by internet- or broadcast-based learning initiatives due to a lack of connectivity or access to technology (UNICEF, 2020a), with three quarters of these students living in the poorest households or in rural areas (UNICEF, 2020b). Learners with disabilities - 80 percent of whom live in developing countries and are more likely to live below the poverty line in all countries (UN, 2018) - are particularly at risk; those at the intersection of disability, poverty, and remoteness are even more so (Dube, 2020). In short, learners with disabilities, particularly those in poor and/or remote areas, are being left behind; stranded on the wrong side of the digital divide.

- **Existing inequalities in education have been intensified by the pandemic**
- **Learners with disabilities are less likely to be able to access ODL**
- **These students are being left behind: more must be done to ensure that ODL is inclusive and accessible for all**
- **Technology is key for ensuring continued education during school closures (and beyond), but it must be designed and delivered so as to include all learners**

## EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



During school closures, technology was positioned by governments around the world as the primary – and, in some cases, only - way to deliver ODL and to ensure the continuation of learning (Tawil, 2020). This technology has taken many forms, from 'low-tech' initiatives such as radio-based or feature phone (non-smartphone) learning, to 'high-tech' examples that have included live lessons on Zoom or work on smartphone applications. In many cases, however, learners have been unable to access technology-enabled ODL; two key inhibiting factors are a lack of connectivity or access to devices - half of the world's population still does not have access to the internet (UNESCO, 2020) - and limited accessibility features for learners with disabilities. The case studies presented in this webinar focus on some examples of technologies employed to facilitate ODL during the pandemic, and, specifically, how these technologies have been created to be accessible to learners with disabilities and how they are being used.

Technologies created to facilitate ODL have the potential to dramatically improve education for all. Steps must be taken, however, to ensure that future technologies are designed and implemented to be inclusive of the most marginalized learners. If market forces alone are allowed to drive their

<sup>2</sup> See <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> for more information and data on school closures.

<sup>3</sup> ODL is a broad term that embraces online learning, e-learning, distance education, correspondence education, external studies, flexible learning, and the massive open online courses (MOOCs) movement. As defined by UNESCO (who draw from Spector, 2009), ODL is learning that incorporates: teacher-learner separation by space and time (or both); two-way communication and group communication (network); the use of media and technology; more personalised educational experience.



development, technologies will likely be created primarily for learners in high-income areas and without specific learning needs (i.e., those that do not have additional learning needs or disabilities that would benefit from specific technological adaptations). Important lessons can be learnt from how technology has been designed and used during the pandemic: these lessons can help to prepare education systems for future shocks and can be drawn from to ensure that *all* learners have access to quality education. Ministries of Education, Ministries of ICT, NGOs, development partners, disabled people's organisations (DPOs), and UN country teams must draw from the lessons learnt during the pandemic and work in partnership with technology developers to ensure that quality and inclusive education remains available to all learners.

Technology alone cannot provide quality inclusive education; indeed, it is only a tool that must be effectively used by educators and stakeholders. UNESCO's Strategy on Technological Innovation in Education (2021 – 2025) supports "human-centered innovation in the use of technologies for education to achieve equitable and inclusive quality lifelong learning for all."



## THE UNPRPD GLOBAL JOINT PROGRAMME

This research presented during this webinar was produced by IIEP and IITE in the context of the global programme supporting disability-inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery at national level supported by the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) multi-partner trust fund.

The UNPRPD global joint programme leverages the experience of 9 UN agencies, organizations of persons with disabilities and broader civil society to support countries and other global initiatives to incorporate a strong disability inclusive perspective to COVID-19 response and recovery.



## THE WEBINAR

The webinar will be live at 11 GMT+2 (Paris time) on 15 June and will last for 90 minutes. Organized by IIEP-UNESCO and IITE-UNESCO, the webinar will present technology-enabled ODL case studies and technology assessments from Bangladesh (case study), Rwanda (assessment), and Mauritius (case study and assessment).

The main focus for the webinar is technology and access to learning opportunities for learners with disabilities during COVID-19 and beyond. The primary objectives are to present key findings and recommendations related to the implementation of technology-enabled ODL initiatives and to have an open discussion about lessons learned in order to explore ways to enhance future initiatives.



## Audience and technical specifications

Ministry of Education staff; Ministry of ICT staff; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); Disability People's organizations (DPOs); development partners; and UN country teams will benefit from attending this webinar.

The webinar will use Zoom as a technical platform and will be held 'live'.

**Weblink:** <https://zoom.us/j/91643579334?pwd=NEJmSTFyVmdiaVlxMkcwK1lLcHNydz09>

**Webinar ID:** 916 4357 9334      **Passcode:** 754445

## Agenda

Time (GMT+2 – Paris time)	Item
11:05 – 11:20	<b>Ken Chua</b> , Director, <a href="#">(these)abilities</a>
11:20 – 11:30	<b>Sergey Pankin</b> , Adviser to the Director-General, International Research Institute for Advanced Systems, Russian Federation
11:35 – 11:45	<b>Anuradha Gungadeen</b> , Senior Lecturer in Open and Distance Learning, Mauritius Institute of Education
11:50 – 12:00	<b>Vashkar Bhattacharjee</b> , National Consultant for Accessibility in the Aspire to Innovate (a2i) Programme, Government of Bangladesh
12:05 – 12:20	<b>Discussants</b>
12:20 – 12:30	<b>Closing remarks</b>



## RELATED CONTENT AND FURTHER INFORMATION

### UNESCO documents funded by UNPRPD

#### [COVID 19, technology-based education and disability: The case of Bangladesh](#)

*Emerging practices in inclusive digital learning for students with disabilities, UNESCO-IIEP and UNESCO-IITE.*

#### [COVID 19, technology-based education and disability: The case of Mauritius](#)

*Emerging practices in inclusive digital learning for students with disabilities, UNESCO-IIEP and UNESCO-IITE.*

#### [COVID 19, technology-based education and disability: The case of Colombia](#)

*Emerging practices in inclusive digital learning for students with disabilities, UNESCO-IIEP and UNESCO-IITE.*

#### [Inclusive open and distance learning solutions for students with disabilities in Rwanda and Mauritius: a rapid assessment, UNESCO-IIEP and UNESCO-IITE.](#)

#### [Learning for All: Guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning, UNESCO \(updated link to follow\).](#)

Policy brief: Technology and education during COVID 19, UNESCO.

