

# STORIES OF RESILIENCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

How children continued learning  
with GPE support



# The COVID-19 pandemic swept through the world in early 2020, forcing the closure of schools for 1.6 billion children at its peak. Across GPE partner countries, decades of hard-earned gains in education were at risk.

A few weeks after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, GPE announced the earliest and largest sources of funding to education – over US\$500 million. This funding supported partner countries in their efforts to provide distance learning, reopen schools safely and build more resilient education systems.

While the pandemic triggered an unprecedented education crisis, it has also given governments a once-in-a-generation opportunity: to prioritize building equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems for the long term.

Thanks to GPE funding, partner countries have launched digital learning platforms, built new water and sanitation facilities, and provided school meals to support the wellbeing of children and encourage their return to school. These efforts had one goal in common: to ensure learning doesn't stop during emergencies.

GPE has also worked closely with key partners to support interventions aimed at ensuring the provision of new and existing learning continuity interventions at scale. With the allocation of a \$25 million grant to a consortium composed of UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, GPE has been able to leverage their expertise, help partner countries adopt evidence-based measures, and share experiences to respond to the pandemic.

This brochure highlights the power of partnership via eight stories that attest to partner countries' efforts to harness this moment by making their education systems resilient to any future crisis.

The following are stories of resilience, hope and inspiration; they are stories of how partner countries are transforming education for millions of children – especially the most vulnerable – as we deal with this extraordinary global crisis.

## RESPONSE TIMELINE

# 2020

MARCH 11

COVID-19 is declared a **pandemic**.

MARCH 25

GPE provided **\$8.8 million to UNICEF** to kickstart education systems' response in 87 countries, supporting planning and coordination.

APRIL 1

**GPE unlocked \$250 million** to help partner countries mitigate both the immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on education.

JUNE 1

After receiving more than 40 applications, GPE added **a further \$250 million to the COVID-19 window**, bringing the partnership's total response to \$509 million.

OCTOBER 30

GPE allocated **\$467 million in COVID-19 accelerated grants** to 66 countries and another \$25 million for a global grant to UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank.



Across all countries,

## 76% OF GPE GRANTS

supported equity and learning initiatives, while the other 24% supported reopening efforts and systems resilience.



## ALL GPE GRANTS

were required to identify gender-based interventions.



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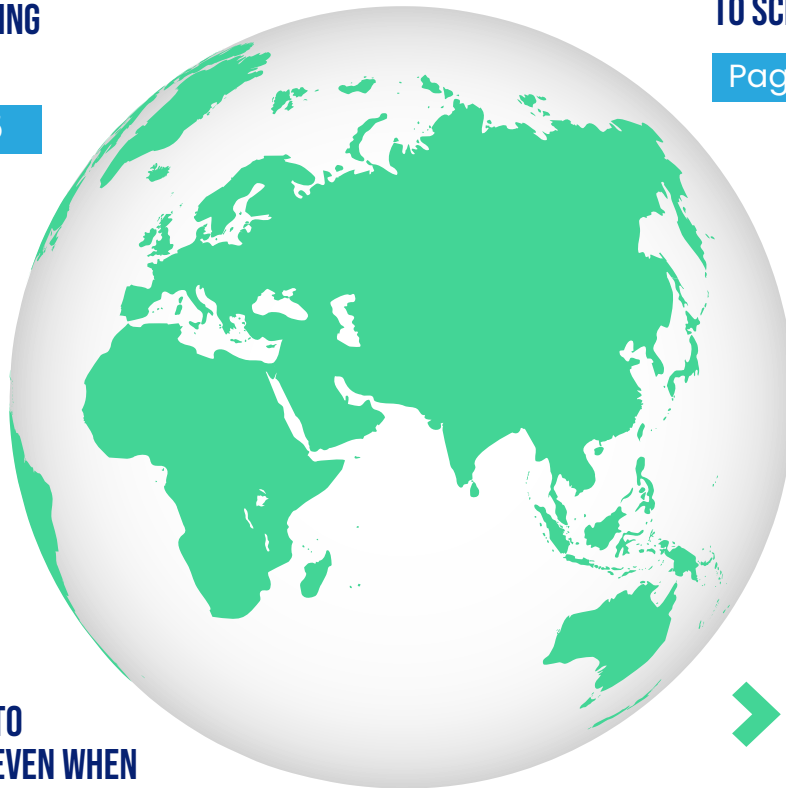
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# EASTERN CARIBBEAN: CREATING COMMUNITY-BASED JOBS DURING COVID-19 >>>

**The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission, with support from GPE, developed and implemented a regional plan to address the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure a more coordinated and effective response in OECS Member States, including GPE partner countries: Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.**

While schools transitioned to distance and blended learning, local economies experienced severe contractions, and vulnerable families in particular needed support. Providing safety nets, such as income-generating activities, was crucial to recovery efforts.

In St. Lucia, for example, the Ministry of Education, with GPE's support, employed seamstresses from the community to manufacture masks to be included in hygiene kits for primary school students ahead of schools reopening.

“ The ministry is pleased to be partnering with the OECS Commission and GPE. [This partnership] goes beyond providing direct funding in response to the pandemic-related challenges within the education sector: it also offers indirect support to the local economy through the creation of jobs at the community level to vulnerable families, one household at a time.”

**Michelle Charles,**  
Permanent Secretary,  
Ministry of Education,  
St. Lucia

“ With COVID-19, business was slow and the future seemed very uncertain. I have a child who has an intellectual disability and the pressure to provide for his basic needs was great. I was grateful for the opportunity this [sewing project] provided, helping me to care for my family in these challenging times.”

**Cindy Jno-Baptist,**  
seamstress and parent,  
St. Lucia

Additionally, for the safe return to schools and to maintain the required social distance, it was important to make sure students had single desks and chairs. This offered another opportunity to provide income-generating activities at the community level. Through the GPE program, the Ministry of Education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, for example, engaged local joiners to manufacture the required furniture. Through interventions like this, over 2,500 pieces of furniture were distributed to St. Lucia, Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.



Students in St. Vincent and the Grenadines using furniture manufactured by local joiners. Credit: Ministry of Education, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

# LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC: LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM >>>

When COVID-19 hit, the government of Lao PDR developed an innovative approach to ensure students could continue learning despite school closures. With support from GPE, UNICEF and the European Union, the Ministry of Education and Sports launched **Khang Panya Lao (Wisdom Warehouse)**, the country's first national digital teaching and learning platform.

Khang Panya Lao – based on UNICEF'S Learning Passport initiative – makes curriculum textbooks and supporting resources, including interactive games and quizzes, videos and storybooks, as well as resources on COVID-19 and safety practices, available for pre-primary and grades 1–12. Teaching materials and professional development courses, including on digital literacy, are available for teachers through the platform as well.

The platform aims to facilitate distance learning while mitigating any learning loss due to the pandemic. It supports online learning for children who can't physically go to school, due to disability or location, helping to reach more of the most vulnerable populations.

Khang Panya Lao records all the lessons taken by students, and will in time allow teachers and parents to monitor students' progress and support their learning. The platform is accessed via the web and/or an app and offers offline options to enable those without internet connection to access the digital content.



Children across Lao PDR are benefiting from quality digital learning thanks to Khang Panya Lao, the country's first national digital teaching and learning platform. Credit: UNICEF Lao PDR/K. Saypaseuth.

As of May 2022, more than 85,400 students have registered on Khang Panya Lao – and the numbers are expected to keep growing. The potential for Khang Panya Lao goes beyond helping children continue their education during COVID-19: it can be used to ensure uninterrupted learning no matter the emergency, making the education system more resilient.

# PAKISTAN: GETTING CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL >>>

“

We were very scared because of the coronavirus spread when schools reopened but then I saw social media posts from the Ministry of Federal Education on Facebook. These interesting posts really helped me learn how to stay safe at school.”

**Maryam Bibi, grade 6 student**

Pakistan’s Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, with support from GPE and the World Bank, has been generating grassroots-level awareness to make schools as safe as possible on their reopening.

Through an active communications campaign, students, teachers and parents – especially those living in the most remote areas – have developed a better understanding of how to maintain healthy hygiene during COVID-19. The first phase of the campaign emphasized the importance of using COVID-related sanitizing and hygiene kits, which were distributed to students and teachers to ensure the safe reopening of schools.

But campaign messages now go beyond health and safety measures: they include promoting distance learning content, the importance of learning continuity and reenrollment, and the value of girls’ education. Mental health is also addressed by sharing information about how to cope with stress related to the pandemic.



Health and hygiene protocols being followed in the classroom of a girls’ school. Credit: Pakistan’s Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training.

Using multiple platforms of communication, including national and regional language newspapers, social media and SMS, awareness has been generated to more than 21 million people across the country. Messaging is also being shared through a large-scale TV and radio campaign.

The campaign is breaking geographical and social barriers by creating avenues to reach out-of-school children, especially girls, while playing a role in empowering communities to address the challenges of the pandemic as safely as possible – and ensure their children continue to learn.



# SENEGAL: SCHOOL MEALS BOOST LEARNING IN TIMES OF CRISIS >>>

School feeding programs can play a crucial role in student wellbeing and provide big incentives for the most vulnerable children to attend school. As part of its COVID-19 pandemic response plan, Senegal's Ministry of National Education launched a school feeding program with the support of GPE, the Agence française de développement and the World Food Programme.

The school feeding program aimed to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on student education, ensure the continuity of education services and encourage vulnerable students to return to schools when they reopened.

The program provided public schools with meal services in the most disadvantaged rural and peri-urban areas that were also hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. Close to 107,000 students in 637 primary schools benefited from daily meals at school for six months.

The provision of school meals was supplemented by initiatives to support local-level partners to improve management skills and encourage greater ownership of the program. For example, school management committee members, school cooks, and merchants who supplied food to schools benefited from sessions covering hygiene, nutrition, food storage and the supervision of school feeding activities.

Thanks to this partnership, more students in Senegal received nutritious meals during the COVID-19 crisis and were able to continue learning in school.



Students eating at Nguekhokh school canteen in Senegal.  
Credit: World Food Programme.

# SOMALIA: SUPPORTING THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN TO CONTINUE LEARNING >>>

Somalia's Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, with the support of GPE and Save the Children, has been able to promote learning continuity during COVID-19 school closures. An online platform (both website and app) was launched, which hosts video and audio educational content. To date, 200 schools have been registered and over 17,800 students are accessing the platform daily. To ensure wider coverage, the video and audio lessons were also broadcast in 2020 through national TV and radio channels.

“ During the pandemic, we weren't able to interact with our teachers in class. But I'm happy that I'm still able to learn through this mobile app. I enjoy the video formats because I can see what's being explained. The app is very useful, and I can access it while I'm at home.”

**Suhayba\*, grade 8 student**



Suhayba\*, 14, benefited from the online learning platform developed with GPE support to help children access learning during the COVID-19 crisis. Credit: Save the Children and GPE.

\* Name has been changed



In the beginning, we were worried about our students, but with this online and offline learning system, many children continued to learn while at home. With the support of parents and teachers, I believe this system of learning will help children continue their classes during school closures.”

**Najma Ali\***, teacher

Vulnerable students received radios with memory cards and USB flash drives, which carry all lessons for grades 1 to 8. In total, more than 17,300 radios were distributed. To compensate for limited access to electricity, solar panels were supplied to help students charge and use the radios for their lessons. The audio lessons serve students in hard-to-reach areas, along with marginalized and internally displaced children.

Supporting children with disabilities was also a key focus: GPE supported the production and distribution of over 8,600 copies of braille textbooks, benefiting more than 650 visually impaired students. In addition, 199 students benefited from 387 assistive devices including walking canes, talking calculators, eyeglasses and crutches.

The GPE program helped ensure the most vulnerable children had opportunities to continue learning during school closures and supported urgent needs that were unlikely to be covered by other donors in the short term.

\* Name has been changed

# TANZANIA: SAFE SCHOOLS FOR SAFE LEARNING

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, health and hygiene practices have taken on new importance throughout schools in Tanzania. Historically, hygiene-related diseases have been linked to student absenteeism. The increased focus on hygiene practices is helping keep students in school.**



Students wash their hands at Diamond Primary School.  
Credit: Embassy of Sweden/Enock Temba.

Thanks to GPE funding, as well as support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Tanzanian Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has been able to provide clean water, sanitation, and health facilities in primary schools to help avoid the spread of contagious diseases, including COVID-19.

The program enabled the construction of over 13,000 latrines along with rainwater storage tanks in 1,100 primary and secondary schools that did not have a reliable water source. Students and teachers are now able to easily adhere to hygiene practices like handwashing before class and while at school.

Through the program's provision of water, sanitation and health facilities, children are safer at school and are establishing a strong foundation of healthy habits, benefiting them as well as their families and communities.

# TONGA: READY TO LEARN EVEN WHEN DISASTERS STRIKE >>>

**Tonga is highly susceptible to natural disasters, including cyclones and tsunamis, as well as the effects of climate change, all of which threaten education continuity. The country's Ministry of Education and Training, with support from GPE and Save the Children, has taken steps to ensure the education system is better prepared to address emergencies of any kind, including the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The GPE-funded Tonga Accelerated Resilience Program (TARP) was implemented in 2021 and has already mitigated learning loss and disruption for thousands of Tongan students. When Tonga went into its first protracted COVID-19 lockdown in early 2022, while still reeling from a devastating tsunami, the country's education system was better positioned to support students to learn from home.

The TARP developed "learn from home" packages, including print, TV, radio and online lessons for students, as well as guidance for teachers and parents to support students to learn remotely. Since the protracted lockdown began, thousands of children have logged in to the Hama e-Learning Platform to access interactive lessons from home.

Lessons have also been broadcast over radio and TV by the Ministry. These lessons and their distribution have been responsive to the changing lockdown situation and have emphasized inclusion and child safeguarding.

Teachers have received training from the program, enabling them to use technology to support students to learn remotely during this difficult time. Parents have been given guidance on how to best support their children to cope with lockdowns and continue learning from home.



12-year-old Mosa was thankful to learn from home and used the Hama e-Learning platform to study for his upcoming exams. Credit: Patimiosi Ngungutau.

Local telecommunications companies Digicel and Tonga Communications Corporation have partnered with the Ministry to facilitate access to the online platform during the lockdown. The companies allow students and parents to log in to the platform free of charge, without consuming data while they access lessons, and to watch educational content at home.

“

I feel happy that I can study at home for my final exams tomorrow.”

**Mosa, 12-year-old student**

The Ministry of Education and Training will continue supporting students to learn remotely until children can be vaccinated for a safe return to school. The Ministry is also planning to complement this return to in-person learning by uploading homework and textbooks for students to the platform, as well as guidance on child safeguarding and disaster readiness for teachers.

Thanks to the support of TARP, more than 20,000 students and their caregivers have access to remote learning resources during lockdown and 362 teachers have the skills to support them. While Tonga can't stop disasters, it can be better prepared for them by building a more resilient education system.

# ZAMBIA: MENSTRUATION DOESN'T STOP DURING COVID-19 >>>

While waves of COVID-19 have led to multiple school closures across Zambia and disrupted learning, for girls the pandemic has also disrupted their access to menstrual hygiene management products. This has led to many girls missing out on school or simply dropping out, which puts them at higher risk of teenage pregnancy, child marriage and limited future opportunities.

“ I would miss school for a week whenever I had my period because of fear of embarrassment. The cloth pads [I was using] were not adequate. The absenteeism resulted in me falling behind in my schoolwork.”

**Victoria, 13-year-old student**

With the joint efforts of GPE, Zambia's Ministry of General Education and UNICEF, over 54,560 reusable sanitary pads have been distributed to girls as part of a comprehensive school support effort. This support also includes 251,920 school kits and school bags, 13,500 new classroom desks and 75 new or rehabilitated boreholes.

The GPE-supported program is not only helping Zambia's education system recover from the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also ensuring menstruation doesn't prevent girls from attending school.



Joyce and Patience attend Nakonde Primary School and have benefited from reusable sanitary pads. Credit: Vasiti Lungu

“ The pads fit well and they are very comfortable. They also prevent leakages. They have given me confidence to stay in school even when I have my period.”

**Joyce, 14-year-old student**

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