Covid-19 continues to cause enormous disruption to education systems everywhere. As most of our partner systems have now settled into a period of relative stability, we wanted to take the opportunity to share the impact that this crisis has had on our work in recent months. We’ll also discuss the activities we’ve been working on to respond to the current situation, and some areas of innovation that give us excitement for future delivery.

**IMPACT AND INNOVATION**

With schools closed in all of our geographies, our teams have been working to understand what activities will still be possible alongside our partner governments. In India, we’ve been relatively lucky in that the outbreak hit towards the end of the school year, and most activities had been completed. It’s only in recent weeks that we are starting to miss out on planned face-to-face activities for the new school year.

This hasn’t been the case in Uganda. Schools were closed in the middle of a learning improvement cycle, and we had to cancel a number of district-level meetings as restrictions on travel started to be introduced. We’ve already missed nearly half of the academic year, and it now seems likely that schools may remain closed until January.

In both geographies, we’re concerned about the loss of momentum. Our approach is based on building strong relationships and effective role-modelling at all levels of government systems, which we expect to develop gradually over five years. This relies on teachers and officials promoting positive behaviours through their daily practice. But with all levels of the system away from their normal routines for such a long period, we have had to be creative with how we can enable this as much as possible through remote working. And we know that we’ll have to ensure an even stronger focus on these behaviours during the recovery phase.

There has also been an impact on our expansion to new geographies. We’re still launching our first project in Indonesia, with the first activities taking place this month. But we won’t be able to run a full learning improvement cycle to begin with due to restrictions on numbers for in-person gatherings, while we have postponed our second district until later this year. We’ve also delayed our scoping work in Ethiopia to later in the year, as government officials are fully occupied by their Covid response and unable to commit time to planning for our activities.

But it’s not all bad – the impact of Covid-19 has also given us some fantastic opportunities to innovate and try new approaches. Delivering content remotely makes it easier for us to scale to new districts within our existing geographies, as we do not need governments to commit to the significant costs of printing handbooks and holding network meetings. We’re delighted that the government in Tamil Nadu has encouraged us to expand to seven new districts, and we’re excited to be making progress towards the implementation of a central learning partnership. We’ve also made a similar proposal to the government in Karnataka and hope that this can be approved soon.

In all geographies, it’s been easier to engage with senior officials who are unable to commit to in-person activities in pre-Covid times, but have more flexibility to attend activities remotely. This is valuable learning for us to take into the recovery phase as these stakeholders will play a key role in the long-term sustainability of our work, and we’ll continue to experiment with virtual delivery of our other activities too.

We’ve also been more closely involved in wider system efforts, showing an increased level of integration into each government system. In Delhi, we’ve participated in planning exercises for school reopening, as well as gathering data from teachers at large scale on their contact with students. While in Uganda, we’ve provided training to teams at the National Curriculum Development Centre (a new department for us to engage with) on the principles of effective radio instruction, and we attend weekly meetings at the Ministry on overall progress.
OUR COVID RESPONSE

We recognise that we were initially slow to react to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Once we had ensured the safety and wellbeing of our team, our first instinct was to engage with our partner governments and identify areas where we could support with their wider response, while planning for the resumption of our programme. But as the scale of school closures has become clear, we’ve worked to find new ways to engage teachers and officials and add value to governments, and we’re excited about the potential of our activities to have a very positive impact.

CONTACT

From the very start of this crisis, we’ve been committed to maintaining regular contact with national, state and district officials. We think it’s critical that they know that we care, and that we’re doing what we can to support them.

In the beginning, it was important to complete an audit of the most effective ways to reach officials, since the availability of technology and connectivity varies significantly across our geographies. Over time, we’ve found that most officials have become easier to contact, and we’ve been able to conduct regular coaching calls. Officials have appreciated our ongoing engagement with them, and are increasingly engaging in our continuity activities below. They’ve also played a critical role in helping us to understand the needs of teachers at this time.

In most geographies, we’ve had a special focus on district officials – ‘Education Leader Managers’ in our language. This is because this tier has a deep understanding of the communities in which they operate, giving them invaluable insights on how best to engage children and teachers both in our own activities, and those led by governments or other partners. Their ties to their communities put them in a position to provide us with important anecdotal evidence on engagement with these activities, helping us to ensure that they are having the desired impact.

CONTINUITY

Once contact had been established, we focused on how we can best support government efforts to ensure continuity. We believe it is crucial that we don’t lose sight on our longer-term goals on system strengthening at this time – if we do not fully engage all system stakeholders in efforts to ensure continuity of learning, we risk undermining our work to date. We’ve been really pleased that each of our governments has shared these concerns, and asked us to continue to focus on supporting teachers and officials during this period.

We’ve designed a curriculum which is explicitly designed to meet the needs of teachers during this pandemic. The topics have been selected to ensure that teachers are prepared to meet the needs of learners returning after a prolonged period outside of school. We understand the most important things here to be:

- The promotion of safety (both from Covid-19, and being emotionally ready to return to learning);
- Effective checking for understanding (to understand any learning gaps that may have developed);
- Breaking down learning (to support teachers to address these gaps through their instruction);
- Building teacher belief in their ability to create change at this time (starting with Growth Mindset).

Our delivery mechanism varies significantly by geography. In Delhi, this looks closest to our traditional programme – all of our regular activities (including network meetings, coaching meetings and district alignment meetings) will continue to take place remotely, with the exception of classroom observations. It’s been great to see the willingness of all system stakeholders to experiment with this new method of delivery, and feedback from teachers suggests that in many cases, this is offering them more flexibility to complete activities at a time that suits them.
In Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, we’re using **new online learning platforms** to virtually engage teachers and officials to maintain learning. We will be combining videos and reading, quizzes, field tasks, online discussion forums and group reflection meetings to continue to develop the professional capacity of all stakeholders.

In Uganda, online engagement is not an option for most teachers and officials. So we’ve designed a programme of **bi-weekly radio CPD** for teachers, supported by regular coaching calls for headteachers and district officials, to support with preparations for a return to school. We’re also supporting efforts to improve the quality of radio lessons for children by quality assuring scripts drafted by the National Curriculum Development Centre.

Finally, in all of our geographies, we’ve been supporting in efforts to build the capacity of teachers and officials in the **usage of technology**. We have led sessions on effective virtual facilitation, and provided training on the use of Zoom to support stakeholders to conduct more effective meetings online. This is a very important step as many stakeholders have very limited prior experience of using online platforms, and the impact of these activities will hopefully be seen across all of their work.

**COVID RECOVERY**

As well as supporting our government partners during the ‘response’ phase, we’re also planning ahead for helping them to recover once schools are able to re-open. We’re clear that while Covid-19 presents the most significant challenge to global education in a generation, this is part of a broader trend towards an increasingly uncertain future, including the climate crisis, increased inequality and rapid technological changes. We believe it’s more important than ever to build the foundations of lifelong learning in children, to equip them to manage life in this world of ‘unknown unknowns’.

We recognise that it’s crucial to reflect **now** on the world that will emerge post Covid-19, and on the critical role of lifelong learning in supporting and shaping a sustainable future for our children and young adults. So at a global level, we have embarked on a strategy consultation process to understand where our approach sits relative to the current needs of education systems. We’re exploring our positioning within the areas of education, employability and skills, governance and technology, and look forward to sharing initial outputs from this process in October.

Within our geographies, we’re also continuing to focus on the long-term sustainability of our work. As mentioned above, the current crisis is deepening our engagement with a wider range of government stakeholders, and we’re hopeful that the support we are providing at this time is putting us in a strong position to discuss a greater investment from governments into our approach in the recovery phase. We’ve already had detailed discussions with governments in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu about our central learning partnership proposals (more detail [here](#)), and we’re also managing to continue some sustainability discussions with the government in Uganda.

We’re excited about the increased use of technology in most of our geographies. So we’re delighted to announce that the Peery Foundation has provided additional funding to support the development of our custom app, which we hope to launch before the end of the year. We hope that we can use this to build on our learning by collecting data directly from teachers and officials, which will help to future-proof us from similar challenges and able us to better monitor our progress remotely. We’re currently working to ensure that the app includes features that will support remote engagement based on our learning in recent months. Once active, it should give us the opportunity to experiment with parts of our approach that could possibly go fully virtual even beyond this crisis.

Back in March, we could never have predicted the scale of the disruption to our work. But we’re so proud of our teams for the way in which they have thrown themselves whole-heartedly into the response, despite many challenges in working remotely themselves. We’re confident that these efforts are making a difference to each system – and we hope that the impact will be seen through deeper engagement whenever we enter the recovery phase.
STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

We’ve received so many positive messages about our Covid response that we wanted to share some of these here.

“The TDC co-learning session [an institute for school leaders] was conducted on Zoom with 1,024 TDCs from the nine districts in Delhi. It was heartening to see the intrinsic motivation shown by the district officials and TDCs during the sessions. Since this was delivered online, everyone had their concerns regarding its quality. However, the mastery shown by officials in adapting to new technological tools and precision session planning made the ‘impossible’ possible. The participation level and sharing of practical experiences by all stakeholders, regardless of their Covid-19 situation, was inspirational. The ownership showcased by every stakeholder has been instrumental in the success of these sessions.”

Mr B. P. Pandey, Officer on Special Duty, Directorate of Education, Delhi

“I found the Zoom training held by the Ministry of Education and Sports in conjunction with STiR a very clearly productive meeting. We were able to connect wherever we are in a new way during the Covid-19 situation. In the meeting, we were able to share in smaller groups about our reflections on growth mindset and what we will do to support our district officials. We were also able to share reflections in the larger group. This training created hope. We went back to share the learnings in our colleges. Even if things are bad, we believe they will get better. After the meeting, we encouraged every official to set up a WhatsApp group for their headteachers. We have even implemented this in a district which is not part of the STiR programme, and with headteachers from private schools in our districts. This is because growth mindset is open to all teachers and districts in creating hope and a positive change in attitude. The radio programmes for teachers are gaining momentum and we look forward to the next session.”

Mr. Oketta George, Deputy Principal Outreach, Nakaseke Core Primary Teachers’ College, Uganda

“I have been attending virtual meetings on Zoom, organised by STiR Education. At the first meeting, a few questions were asked for us to think about before the start of the meeting. This helped us to understand the skills that everyone needs to improve, and to share our needs for online engagement. At the second meeting, we shared our experiences of the lockdown forced by Covid-19. It was a great opportunity to connect with all of our colleagues across the district. Personally, I learned about the various way to meet our teachers and help them to cater to the learning needs of children during this pandemic, especially the extensive use of different technologies. Overall, the sessions were productive in experiencing the joy of having all of us together on a single platform.”

Mr. A G Gnanesha, Cluster Resource Person, Mysuru district, Karnataka

“I am one of the presenters of the professional development programme. I find the programme very helpful to teachers in Jinja and the surrounding districts. When the first CPD was broadcast, I immediately received phone calls from several teachers, including some from distant districts. They said: ‘You have really explained the concept of growth mindset very well and I am willing to change the way I perceive my learners. I now understand it better and I will try it out in my classroom.’ When the teachers listen to the programme, they become excited and feel hopeful about the return to school. We are reminded of our role to continue supporting learners during this pandemic.”

Ms. Juliet Mwogeza, School Education Leader, Jinja district, Uganda

“I would like to thank the STiR team for conducting a virtual session, which is the first we have ever attended. During this pandemic, we have been worried and concerned. The sessions on Covid-19 and other motivating stories helped us to think strongly and act accordingly. I really like the way that your team ensured that although we may be physically quarantined, learning is not quarantined. Thanks for introducing virtual tools and please continue the great work!”

Mr. Betarayappa, Cluster Resource Person, Kolar district, Karnataka