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Featured Panelist:

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## Effects of COVID-19 on Girls' Education in the Global South

The COVID-19 crisis is impacting education through a number of channels: school closures, reductions in household disposable incomes, and a reduction in school budgets due to lower tax revenues or development aid. Girls suffer disproportionately from these shocks and are at risk of falling further behind, relative to their male peers. Girls are more likely to bear the burden of care for younger siblings, they have less access to scarce intrahousehold resources (especially technology for accessing remote learning opportunities), they are more likely to drop out due to early marriage and childbearing, and they are more likely to suffer gender-based violence. We've seen these trends play out in the Ebola crisis, a disruption severe as it was yet pale in comparison to COVID-19 related disruptions. The long-term impacts to future earnings of reduced educational attainment are projected to be of significant proportions, influencing both individuals' standards of living as well as long term economic growth. We heard from four experts who have discussed the broad overview of what is at stake and the unprecedented scale of the shock to education, results from a survey of frontline organizations, a deep dive into the trends and likely reversal in decades of progress looking at India as a case study, and some of the practical issues faced by providers on the ground.

# Research Priorities

## Priority 1:

It will be important to understand the differential short-and long-term impacts of the crisis on educational attainment. Especially important will be the life-cycle effects, as young children may be more at risk of falling behind, relative to older children. While all children are likely to experience a negative shock, girls are expected to fare worse than their male peers.

## Priority 2:

The global shock has been experienced differently in different parts of the world as governments respond differently in terms of school closures and re-openings as well as in terms of the fiscal responses to protect vulnerable households. This provides interesting heterogeneity that can be exploited to better inform policy makers on what works and what doesn't. This effort should be accompanied by regular data collection to track the evolving nature of the crisis on education and the gender gap in education.

## Priority 3:

Among the long-term implications of education for women, one can study how education may impact women's access to the labour force and its contribution on earnings. Another interesting effect raised in the webinar is how education may affect women's position regarding marriage and child bearing. In India, for instance, the recent increase in women's education does not appear to have increased women's participation in the labour market nor increase the relative position of married women. It will be interesting to study to what extent the pandemic may affect this recent trend and also if the impact of the pandemic to these long-term trends is different in other cultural contexts.

# Policy Implications

## Implication 1:

Remote learning presents both challenges and opportunities for mitigating against the negative effects on schooling, especially for girls. Expanding access to internet can be a real game-changer, especially for remote or rural areas that are not currently reliably connected. However, this investment would need to be matched with securing girls' access to the hardware technology required to benefit from remote learning. In the meantime, TV and radio can be leveraged to fill the communication gap in the delivery of remote teaching.

## Implication 2:

The financial crisis associated with the pandemic has had a profoundly negative effect on educational budgets. This is in part due to the reduced government revenues, but also because funders have redirected funds to fight COVID. Protecting educational budgets to provide this essential service must be a policy priority.

## Implication 3:

Gender norms tend to imply that when intrahousehold resources are scarce, parental investment will favour boys' education over girls. Policy makers should explore possible tools to incentivize parents to invest in their daughters' education, especially once schools reopen (e.g. scholarships, uniforms, campaigns, etc)

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