

Transforming Education Summit 2022: Eswatini National Commitment Statement

Background

The Kingdom of Eswatini, like many countries in the world, was negatively affected by the advent of COVID-19, forcing schools and tertiary institutions to suspend operations for a period of 18 months, leading to the reversal of education gains made over the past years. Our education system incurred losses that may take a long time to recover.

Being out of school for an extended period of time, learners were disoriented, lost hope and the value for education, with others being unable to return to school due to various reasons, including early unintended pregnancy in the case of girls. The mental health of both learners and educators got severely affected due to loss of teachers and parents' lives and livelihoods due to business closures.

The pandemic exposed limitations in the resilience of our education system, compounding the challenges that existed before COVID-19, which included low levels of inclusivity and equity, restricted access to secondary and tertiary education and the mismatch between skills produced by the education system and those required by industry and life in general.

We, as a country, realize the need to take bold steps to recover the education losses experienced, while transforming our education system towards producing skills that meet our current and future socio-economic development needs, as well as attain the Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets by 2030.

Through a participative process we identified four priorities and, as a country, we are committed to implementing these priorities to reach our goals for education in Eswatini.

Priority 1: Recovering education losses due to COVID-19

Our first action will be an assessment of the extent of the losses to quantify the number of drop outs, and to evaluate the losses in learnings. Thereafter, a campaign to bring every learner back to class will soon be launched, encouraging every learner including those with disability and girls who dropped out of school due to pregnancy and other reasons to continue with learning to ensure that no one is left behind.

In addition, a catch-up programme for remedial classes facilitated by volunteer teachers from within the communities will be implemented in all the 59 Tinkhundla community learning centers during school breaks and weekends for learners to attend and catch up with their learning. This programme will not only help learners catch up on learning losses and coverage of the compressed curriculum but also promote community involvement in the education of their children. We will also expand rollout of the Learning Passport, an Online Learning Platform which has started at secondary level to cover the primary school curriculum. The MoET is also piloting digitalized learning materials at primary through an alternative learning management system.

Our target is to fully achieve recovery of education losses by 2024 whereby the country will be back on track towards the achievement of the SDG4 by 2030.

Priority 2: Transforming approaches to teaching and learning

Teaching and learning needs to be supported by digitalizing the curriculum so that learners can study from various platforms to strengthen learning outcomes and deliver education in accordance to the SDG 4 targets as well as making the education system more resilient.

We commit to create capacity for digital learning through investing in infrastructure improvements, developing radio and television channels for educational purposes and internet made accessible in all schools and tertiary institutions in the country for educational purposes to facilitate blended learning and innovation. Coupled with digital innovations for teaching and learning will be the development of the necessary learning programmes and support material to cater for all types of learners, including vulnerable learners, and learners with disability.

Priority 3: Improving the quality of education

The country has recently reformed its curriculum to a Competency-Based curriculum in primary schools. The implementation of Competency Based Education (CBE) aims to develop skills required for life and work in order to achieve sustainable development as well as meeting the country's current and future socioeconomic developmental needs.

As a country, we commit to up-scale the implementation of this curriculum to secondary level. This would ensure that skills development is research-based, addressing the current and future needs of the country through the involvement of industry in prioritizing required skills.

Exchange training programmes with industry will be put in place to expose Educators to industry practice so that their approach to teaching is enhanced for relevance and quality training. Further, the country will prioritize entrepreneurship, technical and vocational skills in order to improve on training for employability, and gainful self-employment.

We also realize the need to bring our educators to speed pertaining the teaching of the compressed curriculum, online teaching and CBE curriculum. Capacity building will be provided to upgrade educators on online teaching and teaching the CBE curriculum. To this end, we will intentionally strengthen and capacitate the in-service training of teachers to provide quality training for teachers, leading to Continuous Professional Development.

To further improve education quality, the country will strengthen social protection systems to improve household resilience to shocks and commitment to their children's education, in the long term.

Priority 4: transforming Financing of Education

Having successfully introduced free primary education in 2010, which significantly improved enrolment in primary education, the country sees an opportunity to increase its mileage by extending free primary education to free basic education and to Grade zero in order to increase chances for all learners to complete basic education and ultimately access tertiary education.

We shall also transform our scholarship mechanisms through establishing an autonomous National Education Revolving Fund which will provide loans to all tertiary students. This will significantly improve access to tertiary education while ensuring sustainability of resources for tertiary education.

In conclusion, transforming our education system will not be achieved by the government working in isolation, but through the concerted efforts of all stakeholders in education playing their respective role, which include the private sector, civil society, international partners, communities, parents and learners working in partnership for a common purpose.