

Knowledge hub

Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

A systems approach to transform national education and accelerate access to digital learning

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Republic of Tajikistan

3. Please select the most relevant Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools

Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development

Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession

Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation

Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

UNICEF in partnership with the European Union

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

How to sustain digital transformation of education systems; National Roadmap on digital reform; addressing teachers and parents' perception about technology; reducing digital divide in education

6. What makes it a best practice? *

Rather than adopting an ad-hoc approach to education technology, the Republic of Tajikistan has embarked in a major national reform supported by evidence generation and development of strategic partnerships. • A National Digital Road Map has been developed in 2021 in close partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science, including a detailed action plan and financing for digital transformation. Its implementation is underway ensuring all components of digital learning are addressed (i.e. digital content; devices and connectivity; teachers' capacity; and national awareness).

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

i) Which population was affected?

- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

The COVID-19 pandemic marked the start of a concerted effort to develop digital learning solutions and an adequate enabling environment for quality learning in the Republic of Tajikistan. The outbreak of the pandemic provided a great impetus for accelerating access to digital learning and address the digital divide in education.

Promoting quality education represents a key challenge in a country, where over 40% of the population are children. Poor learning outcomes and lack of relevant skills development opportunities further lead to unemployment; 50% of graduates cannot find jobs and are forced into low skilled jobs and to migration.

The Government is already investing over 5% of its GDP in education, the highest investment across Central Asia, but additional resources are needed to meet the funding gap due to expected population increase. Currently specific groups are still left behind and do not benefit from a full cycle of education. Particularly girls are twice as likely to not complete secondary education as boys. The lack of participation in education along with limited skills acquisition limit children's futures by denying them opportunities to reach their full potential. Children with disabilities are also among the most excluded as 60% of them do not have access to education.

Within this backdrop, in April 2020, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) launched the National Education Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19 with key intervention areas at system, school, and household levels to ensure child safety and continuity of learning in case of school closures. While focusing on contingency and adaptation measures in case of school closures, the Education Preparedness and Response Plan was also used to initiate a broader agenda for expanding digital learning.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

i) What are the main activities carried out?

ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?

iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?

iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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As part of the immediate response, digital video lessons were developed for teachers and students in preparation for school closures. In parallel, realizing the potential of technology to improve learning outcomes beyond emergencies, a comprehensive national strategy for digital learning was developed, building on a country-wide assessment of connectivity, ICT equipment, and institutional capacity.

Implementation of the national Roadmap for Digital Learning is underway with key areas related to the harmonization of the regulatory and policy framework regarding education, ICT, and data privacy and security. Alongside this, locally appropriate, quality digital learning platforms have been developed based on the Learning Passport for early childhood education, the Maktab Mobile platform for primary and secondary education learners, and Omuzgur (teacher in Tajik language) Mobile platform for teacher professional development. These platforms provide offline solutions enabling users with low internet bandwidth to access e-learning courses, video-based lessons, and other content and features such as built-in learning assessments and automatic progress tracking.

Understanding the importance of investing in teachers' capacity to promote innovation and digital skills, innovative teachers learning innovation centers – first in the country – have been established to enable teachers to produce education digital and video lessons and to support MoES in the promotion of blended learning content as part of long-term teacher professional development. The vision is to leverage technology to modernize the current teacher professional development pathways and to prepare teachers on how to use technologies for learning in schools.

To enable the full use of platforms and digital learning content in schools, UNICEF has been supporting the government in laying the groundwork for improved connectivity and access to devices. Servers and supporting infrastructure were also procured to set up a centralized base for the hosting and management of e-learning solutions. At the same time, an investment case is being developed with mobile network operators to provide zero-rated access to content hosted by MoES.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below: i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies,

impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);

ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?

iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

Quality Digital Resources developed

• Digital standards on common functionalities adopted by MoES.

• Three different platforms have been developed to meet national requirements: Learning Passport for ECE, and two localized platforms (Maktab Mobile) – one for basic education and one for teacher training - both enabling off-line sharing between digital devices without internet and inclusive education functionalities such as talkback and video subtitle support.

• Building on national assessment conducted last year, the modeling low-cost devices (tablets and single board computers) is underway in pilot schools with an inclusive education focus.

• The established teacher innovation centers facilitated the development of high-quality content such as multimedia lessons to be used through digital devices and national TV (2000 lessons developed covering national curriculum).

Expanding Connectivity

• Digital school mapping is undergoing and will update school connectivity data on project connect platform. This data is being used to develop a business/investment case for low-cost internet with mobile operators in partnership with MoES and Ministry of Industry and new Technology.

• Unique to Tajikistan context, UNICEF partnership with EU procured 14 servers and are establishing a LAN network that will allow zero rate for accessing developed resources hosted into national servers and intranet between local regional hubs.

Bridging school-to-work transitions by investing on digital skills - the example of Distance Employment Hubs

Investing in education technology and digital skills allow adolescents and youth (15-24 age) a second chance in their lives. UNICEF has introduced a successful transition from school to work facilitating access to employment through Remote jobs based on impact sourcing approach.
5 Remote jobs Learning Centers are being established with certification of training programme for digital outsourcing jobs developed jointly with Agency of Employment of the MoLMPE.

Leveraging partnerships for digital learning and skills

• Since the onset strategic partnerships have been forged towards a common vision, as linked to national priority of digital transformation.

• Additional financing has been achieved by leveraging IFIs and larger education coalitions such as the Global Partnership for Education with over 70USD million to finance digital transformation and education reform.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

i) What were the key triggers for transformation?

ii) What worked really well - what facilitated this?

iii) What did not work - why did it not work? *

Ensuring digital transformation is a long road to travel requiring joint vision and coordination with Development Partners, especially International Financial Institutions and the private sector.
Ad-hoc solutions are not scalable in low-income environments as they need to be sustained by systems-level reforms and resources.

- Flexible approach is required focusing on quality standards adapting to national context.

- Need to address teachers and parents' perceptions about technology.

- Along with digital skills we need to invest on market aligned skills and competencies leading to job opportunities.

- Finally, beyond technical and capacity building solutions, it is important to ensure that national education policy prioritizes marginalized areas and ensure that financial resources are adequately allocated for low-cost options and devices.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a "best practice". What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented "best practice" or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

Quality education is a critical component for ensuring that children and young people do actually acquire the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that are critical for them to become active members of the society and promote sustainable development. In order to ensure sustainable interventions towards digital transformation of education, Tajikistan has provided an example on how to look at the enabling environment addressing policy standards, infrastructure, digital resources and overall ICT capacity of teachers to achieve scale and sustainability. This best practice also includes addressing the digital divide and ensure that children and families could have increased access to internet and benefit from technology-enabled learning.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the "best practice" for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

Available upon request.