

Education for Sustainable Development and COVID-19 in Southern Africa

Intersecting perspectives on why water, food and livelihoods matter in transforming education for sustainable futures



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RESEARCHERS CHALLENGE

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

THEME 1: EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE COVID-19 FOOD, WATER AND ECONOMIC (LIVELIHOODS) CRISIS



Purpose: The aim of the research project is to explore the way in which critical issues such as food, water and livelihoods intersect with and influence education and social learning in formal and informal learning spaces. The wider purpose is to learn lessons from the Covid-19 crisis for Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures

OPEN UP YOUR THINKING

READY, SET, THINK!



CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS:

● If you feel that you are able to contribute to the research through your insights / lived experience with regards to water, food and / or economic livelihoods in the SADC region, we would love to hear from you

COVID-19 has disrupted the livelihoods of people working in informal sectors, and many communities are struggling to find adequate resources for feeding their families. It has also led to the closure of schools which provide education, daily nutrition and a safe place for many learners during the day. School nutrition programmes, where these existed, have closed down. Issues of access to clean water in education institutions, communities and at household level in southern Africa are also in focus, especially in the context of needing to wash hands regularly as one of the measures to avoid spreading of the virus; yet this is not possible in households and learning institutions where water supplies are cut off or barely available. We wish to understand how to 'build back better' from this situation, in order to transform education systems for sustainable futures.

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Acronyms and abbreviations


DBE	Department of Basic Education
DWS	Department of Water and Sanitation
ECD	Early childhood development
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
GBV 4	Gender-based violence
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NWSMP	National Water and Sanitation Master Plan
PPE	Personal protective equipment
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADC REEP	SADC Regional and Environmental Education Programme
SGB	School Governing Body
SGD	Sustainable Development Goal
TESF	Transforming education for sustainable futures
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

SECTION ONE

Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF)



1.1 Introduction

 *Preventing COVID-19 requires regular handwashing. However, most communities do not have access to running water. Because of the shutdown the food security and nutrition of families was compromised as most people could not go out to work for their families. The school terms closed early and not yet reopened. Children have gone for months without school. (Questionnaire respondent, 2019)*

Like elsewhere around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic struck southern Africa with almost no warning. In the period of doing this research (April–September 2020), the COVID-19 virus spread into our societies – from travel spread to ever-widening community spread – with daily infection rates growing exponentially. African governments were praised for their rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which came in the form of heavy lockdowns for some countries (e.g. South Africa, Botswana, Namibia). This saved many lives and helped governments to ready their medical facilities and infrastructure. While this has been a positive outcome so far, the COVID-19 pandemic has, sadly, starkly revealed and exacerbated many of the deep-seated historical and structural challenges in our societies across the southern African region. These are most evident in people’s experience of issues such as the rapid loss of economic security and livelihood access, deepening poverty and vulnerability, lack of access to clean water, hunger, food insecurity and nutrition challenges, increased educational inequalities exacerbated by the digital divide, increases in gender-based violence (GBV) and challenges for the girl child, especially. All of these have implications for transforming education systems for sustainable futures as we reveal in this #OpenUpYourThinking Research Challenge report.

We consider these intersecting concerns in their contemporary forms as revealed qualitatively in our study. Through this, we seek to learn from – and inform – an important contemporary area of educational development termed “**Education for Sustainable Development**” (ESD; cf. Box 2) that has lessons to share for southern African social

and education development (Southern African Development Community Regional Environmental Education Programme [SADC REEP], 2012), and which can also be enriched by insights gained from the contemporary challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic period. Our interest is to surface what can be learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic for transforming education systems for sustainable futures (TESF) in a southern African context.

As has been said by many, the COVID-19 pandemic requires us to think in radically new ways about existing systems and how they have been operating. It requires us to ‘build forward better’ giving attention to social justice and sustainability in recovering from the pandemic, and it requires us to act more collectively, systemically and inter- and multisectorally in response to the heightened sustainable development challenges revealed by the pandemic. As said by Secretary-General António Guterres of the United Nations (UN) in his International Mother Earth Day message on 22 April 2020 in which he referred to the intersecting lessons to be learnt from COVID-19 for climate change responses internationally: “The current crisis is an unprecedented wake-up call. We need to turn the recovery into a real opportunity to do things right for the future.”¹

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the interconnected nature of people around the world, illuminating starkly that “no one is safe until everyone is safe”². This amplifies the need for values that emphasise relationality and solidarity, as it will only be through acting in solidarity and in interconnected, multi- and transdisciplinary, and more radical and transgressive³ ways that communities and governments will be able to save lives and overcome what is now recognised as a globally devastating socioeconomic impact on all societies. This has implications for how we “**build back better**”⁴ or “**build forward better**”, and how we consider **educational transformation for more sustainable futures**. The concept of “**just recovery**”⁵ is also useful to think through ways of considering the immediate lessons from COVID-19 for transforming education

1 United Nations: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/earth-day/message>

2 United Nations: <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/covid-19-photo-essay-we're-all-together>

3 Meaning of transgressive: acting against the taken-for-granted, unsustainable norms that hold inequality, environmental degradation and social injustice in place (cf. www.transgressivelearning.org). Transgressive learning means to learn to act against unsustainable norms in society.


4 “Build back better” is a disaster risk reduction concept. In this research report, we adapt it to be more future oriented and use the concept of “build forward better” to signal commitment to doing things in fundamentally different ways (cf. <https://www.recoveryplatform.org/>)

5 A “just recovery” is a concept that signals the need to imagine a different future that is built on environmental, social, gender and economic justice as a way of comprehensively addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Here recovery does not mean going “back to normal”, rather it means the need to prioritise the sustainability of life, peoples’ rights, and the protection of livelihoods and the planet. (cf. <https://350africa.org/just-recovery-report/>)


systems for more sustainable futures. Insights from transformative, transgressive learning research in southern Africa have also shaped how we consider the possibilities emerging from this research (Lotz-Sisitka, Wals, Kronlid & McGarry, 2015). We have worked analytically with these concepts in this study to point to the movement that is possible between the historical, the contemporary, and potential futures that are possible if we take adequate account of how to “build forward better” from the COVID-19 pandemic in our local contexts, education and other institutions, districts, provinces and countries across southern Africa (and more widely) in socially just and more sustainable ways (cf. Box 1).

“Building back better” is a concept from disaster risk reduction discourse and essentially focusses on the empowerment processes needed to support communities to reduce vulnerability to future disaster and risk (Hallegatte, Rentschler & Walsh, 2018). It tends to focus on community resilience and can be usefully complemented by “just recovery”, and “transgressive learning” discourse that also put emphasis on structural and systemic change as well as collective agency at a wider level in short and longer-term frames. Hence, we prefer to work with the idea of “build forward better” to signal progressive forms of action and agency for transformation, rather than just reconstructing or fixing the existing status quo. Within the COVID-19 period, the “build back better” discourse is being reinterpreted and includes a focus not only on the reconstruction of economic livelihoods in more sustainable ways, but also on planetary conditions

that will support the future wellbeing of people and the planet. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicates in its policy brief on COVID-19 and “build back better”:

 *The economic pressures driving biodiversity loss and the destruction of ocean health can have cascading impacts on societies, and may increase the risk of future zoonotic viruses (those which jump from animals to humans) due to the expansion of human activities leading to deforestation, combined with the recent demand for and trafficking of wildlife (Jones et al., 2013). Declines in local environmental quality, including air and water pollution, can influence the vulnerability of societies both to disease and to the effects of a less stable climate, with impacts likely to affect poorer communities more (OECD, 2020b).*

In addressing the focus on sustainability in the process of “building forward better” from the COVID-19 pandemic, we agree with the statement by the organisation, 350⁶ on its website, that

 *as decision makers take steps to ensure immediate relief and long-term recovery, it is imperative that they consider the interrelated crises of wealth inequality, racism, and ecological decline – notably the climate crisis, which were in place long before COVID-19, and now risk being intensified ... This is a time to be decisive in saving lives, and bold in charting a path to a genuinely healthier and more equitable future through a Just Recovery.*

As has been said by many, the COVID-19 pandemic requires us to think in radically new ways about existing systems and how they have been operating. It requires us to ‘build forward better’ giving attention to social justice and sustainability in recovering from the pandemic, and it requires us to act more collectively, systemically and inter- and multisectorally in response to the heightened sustainable development challenges revealed by the pandemic.

BOX 1

“Just recovery”, “build forward better” and transformative, transgressive learning for a regenerative response

The organisation, 3501, outlines some principles for a just recovery, and the OECD (2020a) offers some guidelines for “building back better” within a sustainability-oriented framework. We have considered these, adapted and elaborated on them drawing on decolonial transformative learning research within our commitment to “building forward better” and giving emphasis to the southern African context and people’s experience and voices to guide a framing of regenerative education system responses. This includes giving attention, inter alia, to the importance of the role of education in:

- 1** putting children’s learning, health and wellbeing first

 - 2** providing informal learning, skills and training programmes for economic relief and directing resources directly to previously marginalised people, addressing short-term needs and longer-term conditions for transformation

 - 3** creating educational approaches that help to build resilience and preparedness in the face of future crises through supporting decent jobs that can help power a “just recovery” and that catalyse just transitions to a low carbon future and ensure inclusive sustainable futures

 - 4** building new relationships and partnerships for education and social learning based on advancing solidarity and community participation across borders and institutions in just and democratic ways

 - 5** developing education strategies, systems and transformative, transgressive learning approaches that strengthen peoples’ response-ability, agency and capabilities for addressing immediate challenges as well taking up longer-term opportunities for change and transformation of society

 - 6** adopting an intersectional, historically informed, decolonising and futures seeking approach to proposals for “building forward better”, “just recovery” and regenerative responses.
-

We draw – and reflect critically – on these initial guiding principles throughout this report. Importantly, these principles have helped to guide aspects of interpretation of the findings in this OpenUpYourThinking Research Challenge study. This has helped us to infuse our recommendations for learning from COVID-19 for TEF with a contextually informed critical reading of guiding principles for a more sustainable, just and regenerative recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.


1 <https://350africa.org/just-recovery-report/>

1.2 Education for Sustainable Futures in Southern Africa

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has a long history in southern Africa. In 1984 southern African civil society and government partners established the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA). This association, working across all 14 southern African countries, is one of the longest standing regional associations concerned with ESD in the world. Building on the work of the Environmental Education Association of southern Africa, and with the opening up of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) following the end of colonial and apartheid governance, the SADC Environment and Land Management Secretariat established the SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme (SADC REEP) in 1997 to implement its policy objective on environmental education, training and public participation. The SADC REEP, a 16-year programme of the SADC Environment and Land Management Secretariat, worked closely with the SADC Education Secretariat throughout this period to foreground the importance of environment and sustainable development concerns to education. In 2008 the SADC Executive Secretary, Tomaz Augusto Salomão, said:

 *Today we have come to realise that the environment not only supports our economy, but determines our destiny as a people and as a region. Therefore, environmental issues, both in the region and the wider world, should be addressed at all levels by all stakeholders. (SADC REEP, 2012: 6)*

This builds on the vision of the 1992 SADC Treaty⁷ that

 *expressed a vision to liberate the people of Southern Africa from the impact of the long histories of oppression and marginalisation, and to assist them to create a new future through equity led growth, quality education for all, eradication of poverty and health risk, improved land use management and sustainable environmental management. (SADC REEP, 2012: 10)*

The SADC REEP, aligning with the vision of the SADC Treaty and the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan⁸ that was adopted in 2003, participated in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The SADC REEP became one of the world's leading programmes in ESD, participating in all major policy activities, actively contributing to the

international foregrounding of ESD in education systems in southern Africa and also internationally. Its constant message was that education systems need to transform to enable sustainable futures for southern African citizens, and its mandate was to produce actions that modelled *how* this could be done (see SADC REEP, 2012 for a full overview of this work). The principles that were supported by the SADC REEP include, amongst others: 1) participation, collective action and structural change 2) social and environmental justice (including cognitive justice) 3) a recognition that economic practices are intimately intertwined with social life, the history and politics of inclusion and exclusion under colonial rule, and environmental justice. These principles are what guide our view on how we define and consider ESD in this report and have guided the work of the region's environmental and sustainability educators, with much of their work emerging out of and in tandem with liberation movements in southern Africa⁹.

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, a UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development was endorsed by all attending world leaders, including southern African governments. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development started in 2005 and continued through to 2014, with the SADC REEP and the SADC Education Secretariat championing the importance of integrating environment and sustainable development concerns into education and training programmes across the SADC region based on the principles above. Some progress was made in supporting ESD policy development, capacity building, networking, learning materials development and research (SADC REEP, 2012), and today most education systems in SADC countries have a focus on issues related to environment and sustainability within a social and economic justice framework (although this is at times quite contradictory, especially in the wider context of the influence of neo-liberal proclivities). Given the complex and contradictory contexts in which transformative policies are shaped, there is still much to be done to strengthen implementation and wider political support, as can also be seen across this report.

In 2008 the SADC REEP formed a partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) regional office for southern Africa and undertook regional research


7 SADC: https://www.sadc.int/documents-publications/show/Declaration__Treaty_of_SADC.pdf

8 SADC: https://www.sadc.int/files/5713/5292/8372/Regional_Indicative_Strategic_Development_Plan.pdf

9 This is not to deny the existence of a somewhat conservative conservation education movement under colonial and apartheid rule (Irwin, 1990), but rather to indicate that the liberation movement trajectory for environment and sustainability education was oriented towards these principles (Lotz-Sisitka, 2004).

on the relationship between educational quality and ESD, helping to frame the significant relationship that exists between ESD and educational quality within the region. Their work here emphasised the principle of “learning as connection”, arguing for a stronger sociocultural orientation to education that is inclusive of local cultures, community experience and indigenous knowledge as foundation for expansive learning and transformative change (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2017). Following the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, the SADC REEP and its partners in the region continued to participate in activities of the UNESCO regional office for southern Africa and the UNESCO Global Action Programme for ESD, leading an international flagship programme called “Sustainability Starts with Teachers”, which continues to this day¹⁰. In this programme the emphasis is on collective social learning and institutional transformation. It builds on the years of research and work undertaken in the Environmental Education Association of southern Africa and the SADC REEP, and continues to argue for a stronger situated, sociocultural approach to education in which social and transformative learning are foregrounded, along with the need for wider structural and systemic change.


At the centre of this work is deepening understanding of the relationships that exists between ESD, educational quality and relevance, and building transformative, transgressive learning approaches for building capability and collective agency for sustainable futures in southern Africa. Decades of work in southern Africa have shown that there is an ongoing need to foreground transforming education systems to enable sustainable futures for southern Africa and her people. This is a complex relationship with many dynamics, which are *at the same time* historical, social, political, cultural, and material (i.e. economic and biophysical), as the COVID-19 pandemic is once again highlighting. In 2006, the SADC REEP noted:

 *Policy development processes for ESD will need to be multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary, and be inclusive of the range of stakeholders that are actively contributing to ESD in southern Africa. Multi-sectoral policy development processes require co-operative governance and special efforts to ensure policy synergy. Key sectors that need to be involved in ESD policy-making are: Education and Training, Public Awareness and Communication, Natural Resources and Environment, Social Welfare and Culture, Health and Economic Affairs, and the Energy sector (at the very least). Ideally the Education and Training sectors should act as “lead agents”. (6)*

This report sheds light on the complex systemic relationships that exist when we seek to transform education systems for sustainable futures. It also considers these relationships from a multisectoral policy perspective, shedding further light on the previously mentioned statement from the 2006 SADC REEP policy report in the context of ESD, and what can be learnt for TEF in the current COVID-19 pandemic context (cf. also SADC REEP, 2012).

While this report draws heavily on the voices and qualitative perspectives of southern African students, teachers, young people, government officials and other citizens affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during early lockdown circumstances in seven southern African countries (generated mainly between April and July 2020), it also draws on literature offering depth perspective on the concerns and builds on 35 years and more of coming to understand the relationship between education and sustainable futures in southern Africa. It makes the point that current conditions and challenges are not ahistorical – they have long histories that shape the present.

In opening up these complex dynamics in more detail and with the voices of southern African citizen experiences at this time, it supports further understanding of what is meant by the need to strengthen multi- and transdisciplinary responses and intersectoral co-operation as outlined by SADC REEP in 2006. In doing this, it points to ways forward of establishing and fast tracking the intersectoral co-operation required for education to contribute to all sustainable development goals (SDGs) and indicates further the implications of the following statement in the UN’s SDGs, Goal 4, specifically, Target 4.7, which requires all governments by 2030 to:

 *... ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.¹¹*

In interpreting this statement, we heed the calls by environment and sustainability educators that current iterations of ESD may be at odds with the principles of transformational learning with the caution being put forward that there is a need to ensure that “outcomes from radical approaches to education do not get “bent back” toward the status quo” (Kwauk, 2020: 12).

10 Sustainability starts with teachers: <https://sustainabilityteachers.org/>

11 United Nations: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

BOX 2

What is Education for Sustainable Development?

ESD empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations and is generative of decolonial futures where marginalised cultures are valued. It is about lifelong learning and is an integral part of what quality education must be. ESD is holistic and transformational education that addresses learning experiences, content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by contributing to transformation in self, community and society. ESD gives attention to:

Learning cultures, contexts and learners' experiences

considering the cultural histories and experiences of learners by valuing marginalised cultural experiences and histories while also critically assessing these for principles and practices of social and environmental justice and their power and potential to create futures that will benefit current and future generations; giving attention to the contexts of learners and their existing and historical experiences of learning and education

Learning content

integrating critical issues such as climate change, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable and socially just consumption and production practices and patterns as well as political and economic transformation, cultural change and decolonial thinking and praxis into the curriculum and learning processes

Pedagogy and social learning environments

designing teaching and learning processes in an interactive, learner-centred, creative and transgressive way that enables exploratory, action-oriented and transformative learning and, that contributes to learning environments that are inclusive and enable learners to act for sustainability with others in their communities and society

Societal transformation

empowering learners of any age, in any education setting, to transform themselves and the society they live in to enable greener, more socially just economies and societies, develop skills for green jobs, adopt sustainable lifestyles and become caring, responsive citizens with responsibility and agency to contribute to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, kind and sustainable world

Learning outcomes

stimulating learning and promoting core knowledge, values, competencies and capabilities such as historical, futures and systemic thinking, criticality, collaborative decision-making, an ethic of caring for self, others and the environment, social solidarity (ubuntu) and taking responsibility for present and future generations. Learning outcomes are also collective social learning outcomes at community and societal level.

(adapted from: Sustainability Starts with Teachers)¹²

12 Sustainability starts with teachers: <https://sustainabilityteachers.org/>

Environment and sustainability educators have argued, therefore, that there is a need to heed the work of critical scholars like Paulo Freire, Bell Hooks and David Orr, among others, “whose work set in motion counter movements against modern education systems designed to mass-produce workers who perpetuate an unjust, inequitable, and unsustainable global economy” (Kwauk, 2020: 12). Kwauk goes on to argue that

Q contributions by indigenous, feminist, and human rights scholars and activists have also pushed to ensure the transformational vision of ESD is not only aimed at sparking a deep shift in consciousness about humanity’s relationship with the more-than-human world, but also at dismantling the harmful gender roles, norms, and relations of power fuelling the existing inequities of our current human-to-human and human-to-more-than-human systems of relationships. As such, a gender-transformative ESD would have the potential to cut at the root causes of climate change, unsustainable growth, and gender inequality (2020: 12),

an issue we also take up in this report.

Our contention, as presented across this report, is that the SDGs, SDG 4 and Target 4.7 particularly, are not devoid of engagement with the oftentimes complex array of intersecting contextual realities that shape and influence education and training systems, encompassing teachers’, learners’, parents’, young people’s and education system actors’ experiences of the system as located in place, time and space

relations. Our study argues that taking good account of these offers a platform for identifying meaningful and immediately available “leverage points” for transformation of the education and training system for more sustainable futures. In particular, we consider the point made by the Brookings Institution (Kwauk, 2020) in their analysis of ESD and Climate Change Education – that the global education community lacks a radical vision for education. Kwauk states it thus:

Q Missing, however, is the radical reimagining of the vision of education that could help reorient schools (especially primary and secondary) away from serving a social reproduction function through standardization and assessment toward catalysing social, economic, political, and ecological change through transformative learning. (2020: 12)

We contend that this radical vision should extend to include out-of-school youth as well as all sectors and dimensions of the education and training system, and for this reason we have not focussed only on formal education systems in this study, but have also included informal learning of youth and communities as these may or may not intersect with formal learning systems. Now more than ever, we are aware that it is difficult to contain all educational thinking within the walls of traditionally structured education categories, and there is a need to develop a broader view of what education for sustainable futures might look like after COVID-19. Hence, learning from this period becomes important.

At the centre of this work is deepening understanding of the relationships that exists between ESD, educational quality and relevance, and building transformative, transgressive learning approaches for building capability and collective agency for sustainable futures in southern Africa.

SECTION TWO

Methodology and research questions



2.1 Overall approach

In this report, we approach our understanding of education for sustainable futures from a critical realist systems approach. A systems approach requires us to think relationally about different dimensions of a system. In this research project we drew initial inspiration from the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) who developed a social-ecological systems model that has been widely used in educational research to explain the interconnecting influences on the education and learning of children. This model explains the difference between a microsystem (children, their peers, classroom and family experiences), a mesosystem (relationships that exist with service providers and institutions such as schools and community institutions), an exosystem (referring to wider support institutions such as healthcare, governance institutions, and more that would influence the learner's experience and education, and a macrosystem that refers to wider legislation, political and cultural systems. We drew on this model to develop rich insights into the sub-themes and research questions we were exploring based

on the data that we generated and the literature we were reviewing. We then further enriched the use of this model with critical analysis and reframed it as a critical realist laminated system, which gives more attention to the structural dynamics and processes of emergence than Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological systems model does. This allowed us to add a focus on critical interpretation, identification of absences, and an analysis of leverage points and dimensions of potential transformations.

We further enriched this model the decolonial analytical tools of Bhaskar (1993; 2016) and De Sousa Santos (2014) involving a dialectic of absence (that which is not there yet) and emergence (that which can come into being). A critical realist approach requires us to consider how events, institutions and experiences emerge in open systems in different time-space configurations. It also requires us to consider the world geo-historically, politically, socially and critically as it has an explicit interest in emancipation or transformative change.

Relationally connected levels of a laminated system

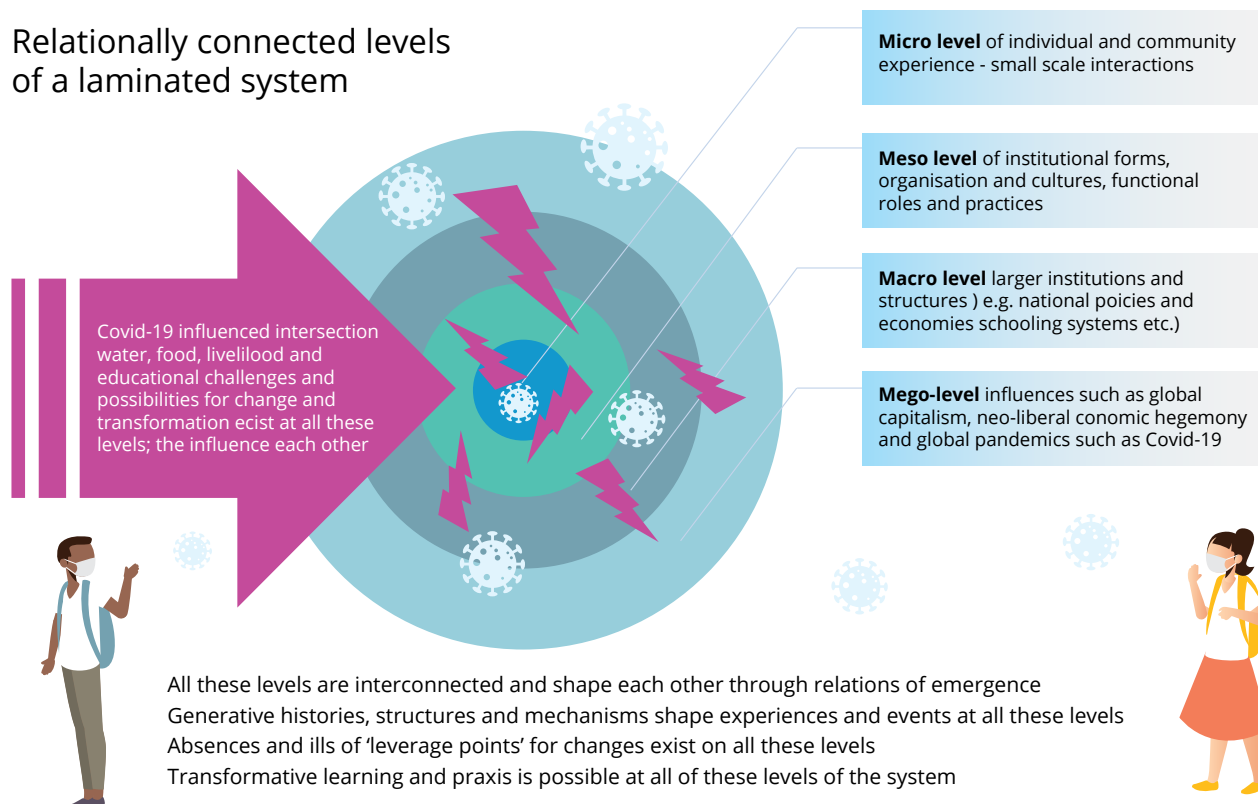


Figure 1: Relationally connected levels of a laminated system (adapted from Bhaskar, 2016).

Note: The purple jagged icons indicate absences, viewed as leverage points, and potential points of emergence or transformative praxis within and reaching across the levels.

Importantly, the critical realist researcher who examines the multi-layered systemic concerns would look for real, viable **“leverage points” for transformation and change**. A good way to do this is to consider what is **absent** or what is not yet present in the multi-layered system that *could* potentially be there, and that would address these problems.

In her work on systems transformation, Donella Meadows made the important point many years ago that leverage points can be found at many levels of the system where changes can be effected. A leverage point, as she explains, “is a place in a complex system where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything ... Leverage points are points of power”¹³. Bhaskar suggests that “absences” in a system could be leverage points because absences are a good indicator of what needs transforming. He calls absences “the great loosener” (Bhaskar, 1993). Both Bhaskar and decolonial sociologist, De Sousa Santos (2014), argue that to transform society, we need to **critically analyse absences** and then **put processes of emergence in place** via strengthening people’s agency and collective learning as this is a transformative pathway to changing structures and systems. We, therefore, also need to look out for what can be done by whom, and what learning processes can help to facilitate such transformations.

While it is important to work at all levels of a system on turning such “leverage points” into transformation processes, a process that Roy Bhaskar (1993) calls “transformative praxis”, it is ultimately critically important to focus our transformation efforts at the level of the dominant paradigm that is holding unsustainability and inequality in place (i.e. the macro and mega levels), while at the same time we effect transformative changes at micro and meso levels, that is, the level of paradigm shifts where real, deep-seated transformation in our society is most needed to build equitable, just and sustainable futures. Because we are interested in transformative praxis, we also adopted a lens focussing on **regenerative possibility**, framed within a past, present and future perspective, which helped us to make recommendations.

Figure 2 shows the analytical framework for the research, which covers past, current and future perspectives. The intention was to recognise that the impacts currently being experienced by children, parents, teachers, young people and communities have a history, and that the COVID-19 pandemic created unusual circumstances in which many historically underlying challenges in society and education were exacerbated and, therefore, became more visible for critical scrutiny. These impacts also produced a crisis situation in which new possibilities for collaboration and rethinking society and education have started emerging, showing new possibilities for “just recovery”, and TESF (cf. Boxes 1 and 2 in the previous section).

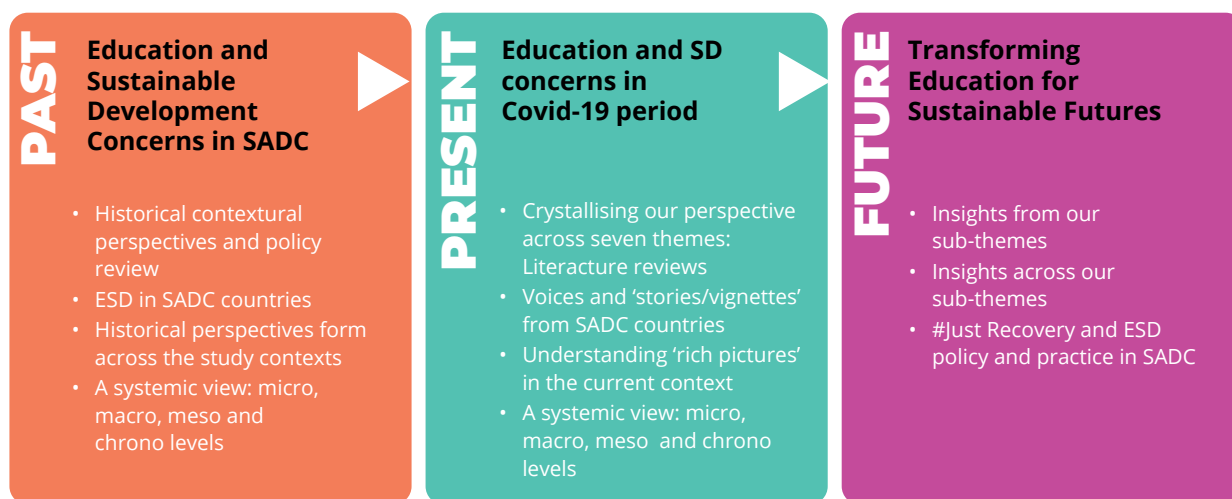


Figure 2: Overall temporally framed research design that accommodates systemic analysis of the current situation, historicity and a futures orientation focussing on “just recovery” and ESD policy and practice in SADC

13 The Donella Meadows Project: <http://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system>

2.2 Research questions

Aligned with this critical realist systemic perspective we framed a number of critical research questions at different levels to enable us to frame our research and recommendations:

Mega-level question

1. **Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic for transforming education for sustainable futures:** What can we learn from the intersection of water, food, livelihoods and education in the COVID-19 pandemic that can inform TEF in southern Africa? This is the broad, overall and question guiding our study

Macro- and meso- level questions involving government

3. **School-community-government partnerships:** How can school-community-government partnerships help to reduce risks and challenges related to water, food, livelihoods and education such as those being faced now under the COVID-19 crisis?
4. **Intergovernmental collaboration on water, sanitation, nutrition:** How are different government departments working together to address water and sanitation and/or nutrition in schools and educational sites during the COVID-19 pandemic? What can we learn from this for what governments can do better?

Micro- and meso-level questions

3. **Acceleration of sustainable solutions at community level:** How can communities accelerate sustainable solutions at local levels in response to the intersecting water, food, livelihoods and educational challenges experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. **Roles of parents, teachers and community members:** What can educators and learners do in response to the intersecting water, food, livelihoods and educational challenges being experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? What are communities and parents doing?
5. **Role of youth, informal learning and response-ability:** What role can youth play in responding to the intersecting water, food, livelihoods and educational challenges being experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? And how can informal education support and grow their response-ability in these times?
6. **Role of gender (including safety of girl children):** How does gender play a role in the intersecting concerns of water, food, livelihoods and educational challenges being experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? What do we need to be attentive to in this regard? How is the situation affecting the safety of young girls?
7. **Implications for livelihoods (including Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) start-ups; new economic opportunities surfacing etc.)** What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young African start-ups and entrepreneurs in relation to lockdown and curfew? What economic opportunities are surfacing and how? What economic opportunities in the field of education have surfaced in the community due to the need for distance learning, if any?

These questions are addressed in detail in our more extended report. In this short version of the report we summarise the main findings and concentrate on the recommendations and transformative praxis pathways identified.

2.3 Research methods

In undertaking the research we used four research tools that we designed specifically for this research:



Tool 1: CONTEXTUAL PROFILING TABLE

We started the research by reflecting on our own experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic which also drew on available regional and national literatures seeking out insights on how it was influencing our contexts, education systems and countries. We mapped these initial experiences and perspectives into a contextual profiling table that reflected mainly on past and current matters of concern. We used this to refine the research questions and to develop the sub-themes. This also gave us a multi-country perspective and helped us to establish which areas we wanted to focus on in more depth as a research team. This took place in week 1 of the Research Challenge: 20–27 May 2020.

Tool 2: DEVELOPING A SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE (critical and regenerative)

To develop a systems understanding of the situation, we then articulated early insights into the research questions and themes using the systems lens described above. Each thematic group undertook literature review work to generate insight into the thematic area in focus. This started in week 2: 27 May–3 June 2020 and was concluded in the final week of the Research Challenge. It was further refined during the writing up period that continued after the initial period of working together.

Tool 3: INTERVIEWING WITH A SYSTEMS LENS (critical and regenerative)

To extend and enhance insight into the thematic areas, each group undertook between four and 10 key informant interviews. Interviewees included a balanced and representative mix of local community members, teachers, parents, learners, young people and government officials. Interview questions were developed and reviewed by the team. Individual research teams undertook interviews and analysed the data based on the thematic research questions. This was started in week 3: 3–10 June 2020 and continued till close to the end of the research period. Ethics clearance was obtained for the interviews from Rhodes University, and ethics tools were shared and used by all who undertook the interviews. A total of 81 key informant interviews were conducted with respondents from eight countries.

Tool 4: QUESTIONNAIRE TO EXTEND INSIGHTS

To extend insights gained from the researchers' observations, the literature reviews and interviews, we also sent out a questionnaire to the SADC ESD network. The questionnaire reached about 400 people, and we had 55 respondents (13.7% response rate). Respondents put a lot of effort into answering the questionnaire, offering rich data and an extended SADC-based picture of the existing situation – how people are being affected by issues to do with water, food, livelihoods and education, and how these issues intersect. Importantly, this group of respondents also offered valuable suggestions on what needs to be done to move into the future and what can be learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic. Ethics clearance was obtained for the questionnaire research as an extension of the first ethics application at Rhodes University. Questionnaire respondents were from nine SADC countries, most were experienced educators from universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), other education institutions and government organisations. As the questionnaire was targeted at an ESD database, we also assume that most of the respondents have expertise in ESD. This, therefore, strengthens the regional SADC ESD input into the research project.

With the above tools and approaches we were able to generate rich qualitative data in a very short period.

ANALYSIS AND PEER REVIEW

Due to the demands of the Research Challenge, the data generation process was extended by one week. This meant that researchers could only begin analysis in the last week of the Research Challenge. Initially we focussed on analysing data in relation to the literature and interview data relevant to each theme with each team of researchers undertaking this first level of analysis.

The first level then fed into a second level of analysis that took place during the finalisation of the report in which the lead author of the report considered all of the findings and sifted them for overlaps and critical leverage points within the wider systemic perspective. This offered a summative perspective on the findings of the sub-thematic study areas and synthesised findings of the study. An initial summary of these was shared back with the research team, and a final analytical meeting was held to consolidate the most important findings of the study. This took place from week 4 onwards: 15 June–5 July 2020. The final report was then constructed.

We also received feedback during the process – valuable critical comments and inputs from our reference group members, which guided the construction of the study, its analysis and reporting. For example, Alexander Leicht from the UNESCO Paris office joined the team towards the end of our engagement and provided insight into the UNESCO initiatives around ESD and their work on ESD and COVID-19. This global vantage point helped us to interpret and locate the findings of the study better. The study was also presented at a SADC-level inter-ministerial meeting, where the point about changing the UN disaster risk reduction discourse from “build back better” to “build forward better” was made by a senior policy official. We have also been engaging with the unfolding of the ESD Agenda 2030 of UNESCO¹⁴ in order to focus our findings for relevance to this unfolding agenda in the SADC Region.

14 UNESCO: https://www.unesco.de/sites/default/files/2018-08/unesco_education_for_sustainable_development_goals.pdf

2.4 Dynamics influencing what could and could not be done

There were seven main dynamics that affected the research. Some may see these as limitations, but from our perspective we view them as dynamics of the type of research we were undertaking, that is, a rapid study on a complex issue in just more than one month across borders and via virtual communication in a context where knowledge of a phenomenon is emerging rapidly in a variety of forms during the research investigation. The seven dynamics were: 1) limited time for the research; 2) the research team were all new to one another, and came from different countries, disciplinary backgrounds and research experience; 3) time was needed to aligning interests and expertise of the researchers to the focus on ESD; 4) all of the research interactions were conducted online because of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown regulations, with some internet connectivity challenges experienced during the period; 5) the research was being conducted during a rapidly emerging pandemic that was changing and 6) around which very little was known at the time of the research. And, 7) the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown regulation procedures being implemented as the pandemic was unfolding were changing almost daily in a diversity of ways as we were doing the research. Some countries were experiencing hard lockdowns with very strict regulations, while others were experiencing lighter lockdowns with less stringent measures in place. In all countries, however, the reality of balancing lives and livelihoods was a strong feature of experiences, policy discourses and practices, with significant influence on education and learning systems.

One of the consequences of such a rapidly shifting context and researching a rapidly emergent phenomenon, is that there is very little substantive research existed on the object of study at the time of this research. While this is the case, there were a range of reports and analyses emerging rapidly in social media, newspapers and blog formats. This forced us to make use of news items for our research and to give careful attention to those news channels most recognised for their quality of reporting. We also viewed some contemporary webinars by recognised researchers, giving us access to some of the more up-to-date analyses of the situation as it was unfolding. This epistemic context creates a challenge for researchers to differentiate between high quality sources and poorer quality sources, even between the truth and fake news or erroneous news or between various ideological perspectives. Science and culture are also yet to align successfully in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. To deal with this, we discussed what constitutes high quality sources and worked through a process of double checking the quality of the sources we worked with. We also relied on peer reviewing to help assess the quality of included material.

While these dynamics can be seen to be limitations to traditional forms of research, when viewed from the perspective of the OpenUpYourThinking Research Challenge programme and its construction and intentions, these are all realities of undertaking research across traditional borders and boundaries in a rapidly changing pandemic, across country borders and online within a short time frame. Seen from this perspective it is also possible to see the massive amount of creativity and responsiveness that is possible from researchers in times such as these.

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SECTION THREE


COVID-19 and intersecting
concerns: water, food,
livelihoods and education



3.1 Intersecting issues in the context

In this study, we chose to focus on COVID-19 and a particular set of intersecting concerns: water, food and livelihoods, and their relationship to – and implications for – TESF. The rationale for this focus is because these were three of the most visible issues impacting on the experience of marginalised communities in southern Africa as the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures were put into place, other than the digital divide that is dealt with in another study of the #OpenUpYourThinking Research Challenge. Interestingly, though, it was the digital divide that attracted most attention in educational responses and commentary, with other situational concerns being less emphasised.

While all of these issues were prominent in southern African society *before* COVID-19, we noticed during the initial scoping phase for this study that the various intersecting dynamics between these sustainability issues and education became more pronounced as the pandemic measures unfolded. It was this **increased prominence** that led us to explore these issues in more depth, especially their relation to education and TESF. The quotation below from a respondent in Zambia highlights not only the historicity of the issues, but also their increased prominence in relation to COVID-19.

 *Most compounds in Zambia go for weeks and even months without water. Now, with the advent of COVID-19 this situation has worsened. To access water regularly in order to wash our hands and to maintain hygiene is a far-fetched concept. Even where I stay in Chilenje Township, as a family we buy water every week from Lusaka Water and Sewerage Company. We are connected to the above-mentioned company, but we seldom receive this commodity. (2020)*

We reasoned that an in-depth, qualitatively rich, and systemically oriented exploration of these intersecting concerns in the moment of COVID-19 could surface potentially useful recommendations for “building forward better”, “just recovery” and TESF (cf. Box 1). In this way, we sought to situate this study on education and the COVID-19 pandemic in the context and realities of everyday life.

We undertook the research from May to July 2020, soon after the onset of the pandemic, and as we write this report, health, food, water, economies, livelihoods and education systems have been heavily impacted upon by the rapid lockdown strategies implemented by governments to curtail the spread of the pandemic and by the actual impact of the pandemic itself. Importantly for this study and for the transformative intent of ESD, these issues have highlighted how COVID-19 exacerbates the fault lines of inequality that already existed before the pandemic. Issues regarding adequate access to health, sustainable livelihoods, access to water, and a robust informal sector came to the fore during the early days of the pandemic in ways that cannot be ignored; they continue to be a major concern even as this report is being finalised.

The COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, gives us an opportunity to face untenable aspects of our society and asks us to strengthen the work that can supersede limited visions of the future. It also challenges us to look into – and beyond – policy statements and goals; it challenges us to look into the hearts of our societies and educational settings where transformation can emerge.

In 2010 the UN officially recognised access to safe drinking water as a basic human right. Access to water and sanitation is one of the SDGs (SDG 6). The COVID-19 crisis has raised issues of access to clean water at household level in southern Africa, especially in the context of needing to wash hands regularly as one of the measures to avoid spreading the virus. Yet this is not possible in households and learning institutions where water supplies are cut off or barely available. This issue also affects education. For example, in South Africa it was not possible to open schools until such time that schools had access to adequate water and sanitation facilities to deal with the COVID-19 risks. There were massive backlogs in the provision of water and sanitation facilities, impacting on the health and safety of children in many countries. Furthermore, water scarcity is exacerbated by climate change in the southern African region (SDG 13).

The COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, gives us an opportunity to face untenable aspects of our society and asks us to strengthen the work that can supersede limited visions of the future.

The COVID-19 crisis is also revealing a significant crisis in access to food for many people. SDG 2 promotes the resolution of hunger, but the COVID-19 pandemic is, however, revealing cracks in this objective. Many people who are affected by poverty generally have precarious livelihood options. Constraints on movement and activity during the COVID-19 lockdowns shut down these livelihood options and are creating an impending humanitarian crisis that is leaving many more families hungry and without safety nets, and thus in more precarious situations than before the pandemic. A study undertaken in the early days of the pandemic by Ranchhod and Daniels (2020) pointed out that the first lockdown period in South Africa saw an “unprecedented decrease in employment” in which “1 out of every 3 people that were employed in February in their sample lost their job because of the lockdown, or did not work and received no wages during April ... with extremely large implications for poverty and welfare”. Significantly, these job losses followed inequality patterns, affecting women, Black Africans, youth and less educated groups, all of whom have been “disproportionately affected” (Ranchhod and Daniels, 2020). This issue has not been limited to South Africa alone – , the global economy has been badly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting the most vulnerable disproportionately.

In the education sector in some southern African countries, school feeding schemes that were

supplying daily nutrition to learners were cut off, and families at the time of the research were struggling to provide adequate food and nutrition for children at home, who were also having to learn with parental support, a situation that put enormous pressure on parents, grandmothers and other caregivers. During the research period, some were arguing for opening schools so that children could receive food support and learning support. Yet opening schools would present significant health risks due to the virulent transmission of COVID-19, a situation that would be exacerbated by inadequate water and sanitation facilities in schools and other learning centres.

At the time, arguments were also raging in the media as to whether it was safer to send older or younger learners to school, and whether it was more important to focus on young children or school leavers first. Single mothers, in particular, were struggling to maintain the capacity to earn a living while also having to teach their children. Some young children did not even have a chance to learn at home because their parents do not have an education. Many support programmes were put online, but these assumed access to Internet resources, printing resources and other technologies that may not be present in many southern African households. The digital divide quickly became visible as an impediment to successful learning and thus deepened the inequality divide in schools, vocational education and training settings and in universities.

3.2 How SADC communities were experiencing the impacts of COVID-19 from March 2020 to July 2020

One of the key findings of this project is that there is a seriousness to these intersecting issues as experienced by communities in the SADC region. They are not just academic or policy concerns; they affect the lives and experiences of people across the SADC region. There is a body of work emerging that is beginning to analyse the intersecting concerns arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as that illustrated in Figure 4 below by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs,¹⁵ which considers the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, Figure 3).

Our data also shows similar patterns of impact from COVID-19 in relation to the SDGs (Figure 3) to that illustrated by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs in Figure 4. For example, we have found clear evidence of loss of income and

increased poverty (SDG 1); disruptions in food production and distribution (SDG 2); increasingly devastating impacts on health outcomes and health systems and their abilities to cope with the emerging COVID-19 pandemic (SDG 3); disruptions in schooling for millions of children across the SADC region; disruptions in the school system itself that has struggled to ready itself for learners’ return; youth training programmes and opportunities and more, affecting learning opportunities for young people across the region (SDG 4). We found a strong link between children’s abilities to learn during COVID-19 and inequality – those with resources are more able to access online systems and learning opportunities, while those without have lost many months of learning time (SDG 10).

¹⁵ United Nations: <https://www.un.org/en/desa>

We found that water supplies (SDG 6) were disrupted and many communities and schools were without access to clean water – yet the requisite handwashing, as indicated by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, is one of the most important preventative measures for COVID-19. We found disruptions in energy supply affecting online learning opportunities (SDG 7), and we found that many people’s livelihoods were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (SDG 8) because economic activities were suspended in early lockdown periods. As trade patterns are affected by border closures, many are without work, and unemployment is rising with economic systems generally in heavy decline (SDG 8). We also found that people living in high-density areas, in informal settlements and those unable to implement social distancing measures because of overcrowding and inadequate housing and transport facilities are more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection, hunger and other related concerns.

Climate change (SDG 13) emphasis has waned in national and regional discourse, even though there are efforts being made to link the COVID-19 crisis to the immanent crisis conditions being caused by climate change. We found some respondents linking the climate change crisis to the water crisis and to

the broader challenges of sustainable development, sustainable living practices and sustainable systems. In terms of partnerships (SDG 17), we found that many respondents referred to the importance of partnerships and to the lack of adequate intersectoral co-operation necessary to combat the worst impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, even though our focus has been on water, food, livelihoods and education in this study, data points to the full scope of the SDGs and their intersectionality, and the need for multidisciplinary, multisectoral and transdisciplinary engagement and co-operation.

We therefore draw on the SDGs not only in making sense of our data, but also in terms of the recommendations in this report. In our recommendations, we point towards actions relevant to these SDGs but more importantly, we point to actions for TEF that are *necessary across all SDGs and where relevant, we also point to responses beyond what is stated and framed in the SDGs*. In doing this, we are not only wanting to understand the aforementioned intersecting concerns and how they are impacted on in terms of their relationship to the SDGs, but we are also wanting to develop a deeper level of analysis that looks towards structural and systemic transformation of education that would benefit work across all of the SDGs and beyond.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Figure 3: Sustainable development goals (United Nations: www.un.org)



Figure 4: COVID-19 patterns of impact in relation to the sustainable development goals (Source: UNDESA¹⁶)

3.3 Issues that were experienced by SADC communities and educators

We sought to understand more fully the manifestation and nature of the actual experiences of people in SADC communities, including educators, parents, young people, educators, education sector officials, and students as the COVID-19 pandemic was unfolding. Of the 136 research respondents (including all the interviewees and the 55 questionnaire respondents), one of the most striking findings was the extent of the experienced realism of these issues as they affect people's lives. This will

be apparent across our report. Here we share just a few of the perspectives from research respondents to illuminate the multidimensional nature of the intersecting and deeply systemic crisis that has shown up in the COVID-19 period. These quotations from the questionnaire data shared below, show not only the issues as experienced, but also their intersecting nature. They also show that different people are experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic differently.

Of the 136 research respondents (including all the interviewees and the 55 questionnaire respondents), one of the most striking findings was the extent of the experienced realism of these issues as they affect people's lives.

Livelihoods



Tanzania: *The partial lockdown resulted into hardships on the livelihoods of many small-scale informal sectors. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

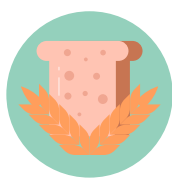
South Africa: *Livelihoods have been disrupted due to this pandemic. Most SMEs have died due to closure of their businesses, such as small restaurants, saloons, barbershops etc. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

Eswatini: *The tourism industry has been hard hit by the virus as establishments have completely closed. Even if we can open up the economy, they will remain hardest hit because they rely on overseas tourists. The manufacturing industry has also been affected resulting to thousand thousands losing their jobs. Small-medium enterprise have also been hit hard and continue to be hit hard as the requisite for government relief is for registered entities which are also tax compliant. The 70% capacity in public transport is also affecting the transport industry coupled with the fact that the cross-border transport is not working at all. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

Namibia: *The tourism industry in Namibia is collapsing. As one of the major sources of income, especially for rural communities, this is having a significant impact on the wellbeing of families. Evidence is high level of unemployment and former tourism employees attempting to enter different markets. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

Family budgets have been overstretched. Food and other essentials in my town are between 50 and 100% higher. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Food insecurity

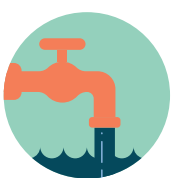


Eswatini: Some families now have one meal a day, and others sleep on an empty stomach. Eswatini, being a country with a poverty rate of 39.7%, has a large number of families experiencing food insecurity even before COVID-19. With more people laid off from work and others not being able to do piece jobs has resulted to high shortages of food, notwithstanding that the food prices have also increased. With the closure of schools, learners depending on the school feeding system do not have access to food. The status of the school food is also questionable. After such a long time there might be a need to buy new stock. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

South Africa: Food insecurity is by far the worst impact on people in our rural communities whose siblings or parents worked somewhere and now do not have an income due to some being laid off, others being on unpaid leave. People have had to scrape through for food. In our own community initiative, identification of households in need of support revealed that there were way too many people who needed assistance in terms of food parcels, and our running club has only scratched the surface with its food drive. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Lesotho: Estimates are that as result of COVID, nearly 900 000 people (about half of the population of Lesotho) will be experiencing a serious food shortage. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Water



Namibia: However, I realised that while my water bill is N\$980.00 on average, I now pay close to N\$1400.00 because of the wash your hands initiative to stop the spread of the virus. In remote areas both in the city and at villages, the issue of washing hands with clean running water is impossible or sometimes very difficult because of the scarcity of water and the long distance that people have to walk in order to collect water. Sometimes the water collected is not even clean but already contaminated. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Eswatini: There are areas which traditionally do not have access to water supply and with the current situation, the problem has been exacerbated the water shortages problem. Government has tried to distribute 5000l water tanks to such areas, but still the elderly and the sick have a challenge. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

South Africa: In the light of handwashing and hygiene concerns to curb the spread of diseases, many communities struggle with access to clean water. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Zimbabwe: The already hard areas are in dire need of intervention during this crisis. Areas such as Glenview in Harare and Mkoba 19 in Gweru still go for weeks without tap water. Residents then defy the call to stay indoors as they go to fetch water from boreholes, negating all the physical distance awareness efforts. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Education



Zimbabwe: When we talk about education, this is the worst hit during this pandemic. Schools were closed abruptly and we didn't complete the term's work. This situation has inconvenienced the education system. The education system is made up of private and public schools. However, I have observed that the private schools have been hit hard in the collection of fees. Parents did not complete paying the fees. Also, when we are trying to teach online, we encounter a lot of problems such as lack of electricity, bundles, network unavailability, and sometimes even the gadgets we are using are not responding to the tasks being given. Thus, parents are unable to pay the reduced fees. Private schools are unable to pay teachers and consequently decide to close schools. All the above mentioned are interrelated because without the other it is difficult to operate. This takes us to the naked reality of climate change. Scarcity of water and food. The SMEs are just surviving in an environment that has no water and no nutritious food and no purchasing power to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic impacts. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

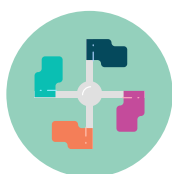
Namibia: The government, through the Ministry of Education, has instructed schools to resume face-to-face classes, but the measures of controlling COVID-19 have to be observed. This means: 1.5 metre distance between learners; thermometers and sanitisers supplied to schools to monitor children temperature; and promote regular handwash; and children are encouraged to have at least two face masks. This is being done

in phases. Phase 1: Grade 11 and 12 start school. Phase 2: Grade 1–3 start school. Phase 3: Grade 4–5 and 8–10 start or something like that. The problem is that will the young ones be able to keep the distance as required? Can they take care of their masks and not lose them and use them properly? In order to keep the 1.5 metre distance will mean that a room that used to host 45 learners will now have to host 30, for example. What will you do with the rest of the learners? This means more classrooms must be made available. The moment you have additional classrooms, you will need additional teachers and additional resources, including personnel salaries. The same is inevitable at the hostels. These are unexpected but necessary expenses that were not budgeted for. Where is the money amidst the economic hardship? This is bad. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

South Africa: Although some teachers tried hard to reach every learner during lockdown, this was impossible as some of the learners did not have gadget such as cell phone and laptops to use. Some learners did not have Internet access. Some teachers were eager to send work to learners could not also do so as they were not trained to use the platforms such as Zoom and Google classroom. Most learners and parents too struggled to use the same platforms. So even if their parents wanted to help their children, it became very difficult. Although there was a lot of teachings through various media such as radio and television on the awareness of the disease, for me it seemed teachers were the best for children to understand the disease and its impact. This impacted badly on our children. Some are still in denial as they don't see their parents role modelling. Most informal settlements do not have running water in their houses, so the whole community depend on few outside taps. Distancing and washing of hands is not fully practised in these areas because of that. In most cases children are at risk. Most school are structured and learners are taken care of. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Malawi: Some of my students lost their opportunity of part-time job or their parents lose the job. So their income is decreasing, and they are struggling with getting fund to continue their learning in my university. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Intersecting nature of the issues



South Africa: Shortage of water for domestic use, income-generating activities blocked, education facilities inaccessible due to COVID 19 lockdown. All contribute to deteriorating life standards. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

South Africa: Since the outbreak of COVID-19, many businesses such as running of schools, bars and restaurants, sports activities like football were/are closed down. People are encouraged to stay home where they do not make money in any way, which has contributed to increased poverty levels in various families. This poverty at family level has affected food security, education, access to clean water and many other needs of human beings. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Zimbabwe: Currently I am working in a community involved in market gardening for livelihood but experiences water shortage even for domestic consumption. Since the water required for handwashing is supposed to be moving, larger amounts of water are therefore required for WASH activities and while the constant water is not available. The borehole supplying water to distant community garden is not yielding the required amount of water and the people usually augment this supply with hiring vehicles to source water from the nearest town. However, the town is now reserving all available water for the local residents as part of the town's strategy to combat COVID-19. At the end this community has lost its crop due to lack of water for irrigation while at the same time there is shortage of water to allow appropriate washing of hands. All of this is happening while children are out of school, putting pressure on the little food and water supply available to the households. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Namibia: Many of these issues are interrelated. One, for example, is the tourism industry on education. Many schools and NGOs providing education or nutrition for schoolchildren receive donations from tourism companies and/or tourists. This has now stopped. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

South Africa: Some learners who come from disadvantaged families depended on daily meals from the school. During most part of the lockdown period they couldn't access this. This led to them going to malls begging for food, and they did not have protective clothes such as face masks as well. Many children fell behind in terms of education. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Zambia: The economic livelihoods of the people has been generally negatively affected. This has led to a chain reaction causing education institutions to as well be affected. For example, returning students have all not been able to report back to school in the semester following the COVID-19 pandemic. This, in turn, has also affected the remunerations for the faculty and staff in education institutions. Further to that, Zambia, for example, being a landlocked country, has not been able to access some of the essential commodities that are mainly imported from other countries, hence affecting food deliveries, and naturally this has caused food to be expensive. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

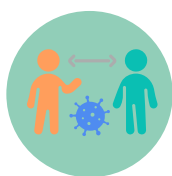
Water shedding has affected the hygiene standards of the communities, especially the issue of washing hands and washing of masks. Most of the people are self-employed and now cannot access basic commodities since they no longer have income. The unavailability of basic commodities in their locality has resulted in people leaving their places of residence and to go and crowd in central business district supermarkets, and this has caused crowding, which compromises social distancing. This threatens the spread of COVID-19 among people. The whole education sector has been negatively affected. The attempt to embark on online teaching in all levels of education has created a gap between those who have and those learners who do not have. Access to Internet connectivity, laptops and smart phones has become a challenge to both students and educators. Getting affordable data bundles from service providers for online teaching and learning has become a challenge for students and lecturers. This has compromised achieving inclusive and equitable education among learners. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

South Africa: The closure of schools has meant that millions of pupils could not access the national school nutrition programme. A significant gap in government interventions was not to use the NSNP [national school nutrition programme] logistical and supply chain system to feed their children or to provide groceries to their families. A big concern is corruption during this COVID period. There is concern about large sums of money being paid for certain items, such as masks, when these could be purchased at a lower cost. Who benefits from government procurement of masks, sanitisers etc., and how procurement has actually happened needs to be investigated. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

The abrupt closure of academic institutions has affected the morale of learners, which, in turn, will take longer to be recovered. Some learners have gone into early marriages with hope that this will create a lasting solution to their problems. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

South Africa: Many families are experiencing hunger because parents were not paid salaries during lockdown and some lost their jobs completely. The schools were closed and the youths and the children suffered because of lost school time. Only a few families were able to afford Internet connection for their children to study online. Violence in families escalated due to lockdown as reported in the daily police press conferences in the country. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Changes in life as we know it



Namibia: The good of COVID-19 is that during lockdown and abolish of unnecessary movement and alcohol sales, zero crimes were reported during the entire time. Road accidents were minimal, which is a good thing for a small country as Namibia that had a high record of crime rates and high road accidents report. Despite all the worry about the future of our education, we could not have known about e-learning had it not been for COVID-19. Something good came of it. Social lives have also been improved as families got to spend a lot of time together and played or socialise together and ultimately strengthened family bonds. Others capitalised on the restricted movement time to find new hobbies, plan new projects, finish projects, take up new courses or finish already started courses (I finished an online course during this time). We, too, became more religious, comparing the stay indoors situation to that narrated in the Bible for Christians. But there is still the uncertainty of what will come after COVID-19 pandemic. Will it be the end of the world as we know it? Will goods get so expensive that life will be really difficult? Will countries have to rebuild economies from scratch or will there be something remaining to build on. Will e-learning remain the only mode of instruction? Will we still attend classes? (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

Deepening inequality and impacts on the most marginalised



Botswana: *Because of higher cost of living in terms of water bills and foodstuff, the economic livelihood had been negatively impacted because I had to spend part of my savings on food and daily sustenance of my family. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

South Africa: *Due to economic contraction and job insecurity as well as a lack of political power or voice when people lose their jobs, they can't access products and services provided by the market. Without money people are completely excluded. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

Zambia: *Most individuals' livelihoods have been affected greatly as businesses have closed due to the COVID-19. In Zambia a huge number of people are in the informal sector who depend on small daily basis businesses to sustain themselves and their families. However, with the coming of the COVID most of the people with the buying power who support these businesses are either staying home in isolation, and their incomes have been reduced such that they have also cut on certain expenditures, thereby having a ripple effect to those selling in markets and on the streets. Food security is severely affected, especially to the people who depend on hand-to-mouth businesses – they cannot afford to put decent food on the table even before the COVID-19 came. Therefore, the COVID has exacerbated the people's ability to provide for their families, especially in the peri-urban areas – mostly shanty compounds. Due to COVID-19 schools were also closed among many other businesses such as gyms, restaurants, saloons, barbershops. Due to school closures, it means that children have to stay home every day all day, thereby putting pressure on their already struggling parents to provide food for them as well as entertainment at home. In addition, some parents need to provide a safe environment for the children in this COVID era. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

Interregional dependency and impacts



Lesotho: *There is a lot of dependency on neighbouring states for food, which led to shortage of most supplies during the lockdown. There was also a clear indication that most people are only consumers and not taking part in production, which was evident when lockdown measures were enforced, leading to some families going without food before the government food basket could be supplied to them. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

In many ways, the quotations above reflect the interconnected nature of the issues affecting people in the SADC region when it comes to COVID-19. They all point to the need for deeper understanding of these experiences in order to conceptualise meaningful and substantive responses. We begin by probing the historicity and anticipated impacts

of the COVID-19 pandemic a little more, drawing on questionnaire data. This presents a more general backdrop to the rest of the study, where we “dig deeper” and seek to uncover more insights into experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic at the interface of water, food, livelihoods and education in order to consider implications for TEF¹⁷.

In many ways, the quotations above reflect the interconnected nature of the issues affecting people in the SADC region when it comes to COVID-19.

17 Note: The full detail of the thematic analysis is contained in the longer version of this report which provides many more in-depth perspectives on people's experiences, and the educational situation as influenced by the intersectional concerns highlighted above.

3.4 Historicity and impacts

As has been noted by many respondents to the questionnaires, and as can be seen from the quotations above, many of the issues reported on are not new. What is clear, however, is that the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating these issues in the social context: putting the vulnerable, especially, at higher risk of falling deeper into poverty; children dropping out of school or not being able to catch up; families struggling to feed children; and schools struggling to respond to the sudden challenges of e-learning and/or adapting to new circumstances that require space for social distancing and measures for ensuring health and safety, such as water for washing hands. This vignette from the Ndumo Community Project in northern Maputaland illustrates the long histories of some of the challenges being experienced, as well as the contemporary situation in which difficulties experienced earlier due to poverty and lack of adequate support systems and resources are now exacerbated, putting the poor and marginalised more at risk:

As the Manager of the Ndumo Community Project (northern Maputaland, South Africa), I have observed the following constraints this rural community is currently facing. The teachers, school learners and their parents are facing huge socioeconomic constraints, and this is affecting the natural environment. These constraints have only got worse since the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic. The government keeps telling people to wash their hands regularly with soap and water. This is NOT happening at Ndumo, as most of the community have no or limited running water. The community is reliant on the local rivers and/or the community's JoJos [tanks] for water. The community is in dire straits as the municipality is not delivering the water regularly, and this leaves the community to become reliant on the local rivers for their daily water supply. Some try harvest rainwater as a means to an end. In some cases, many live far from rivers. COVID-19 measures state that one must regularly wash hands with soap and water. Soap is another constraint as the community is living far below the poverty line and therefore cannot afford the luxury of soap. Many have also lost their jobs due to COVID-19. Ndumo has become reliant on the social grant system to survive.

The schools, like Mpolimpolini Primary School, has sanitisers but limited water supply. They are one of the lucky schools who has a borehole. They are also harvesting rainwater. Most schools have a huge water issue. This leads to the question: How can the learners wash their hands with soap and water if there is a water supply issue? The learners also have a far distance to walk to and from school. They walk in groups, and this has affected the issue of "social

distancing". ... These children are also reliant on the schools' daily feeding scheme. During level four and five, these learners did not receive any nutritional support. Currently only the Grade 7s are being fed. This is a major issue as there are many orphans and vulnerable children who are reliant on the school feeding scheme for survival. Then the issue of "online" learning: How does a teacher (no matter how dedicated the teacher is) teach a learner who has no access to technology? These children have no access to even cell phones. Maybe a few high school learners and their parents only have access. The teachers state they are so far behind now as there was no way to try educate the learners at Ndumo. "We could teach under the trees, but then afterwards the learners gathered in groups to walk home."

Education is a right, but how does one teach without the necessary tools? Many teachers do not own or have access to a computer, so the issue of teaching the Ndumo children is just not viable. Then there is the toilet issue – lack of sanitation. As a lecturer I have also experienced many other educational issues. Many students do not own laptops, and this is hampering their studies and their futures. Many live in rural areas (like Ndumo) and have limited or no signal. Quite a few live below the breadline and support themselves. The university has now succeeded in getting free data to all students, but they still need the necessary tools to access this data. Normally we lecture students face to face, and we are not one hundred per cent equipped to teach online. This is a huge learning curve as we as lecturers need to learn new online technological skills. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)

In terms of impacts of the issues experienced, questionnaire respondents were particularly concerned by the loss of learning time for children who were staying at home, and who were not able to access electronic teaching and learning tools and support. They were also concerned about the general impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational access and continuity, as well as quality, because of the switch to online learning when few were well prepared for this. Other "emergency" education measures put in place are also being questioned about their quality and relevance to the context, as outlined by this respondent from Lesotho:


The dominant use of TV and radio programmes to teach primary and secondary students has encountered challenges of quality and accessibility: the quality and content taught on TV has, for instance, been brought to question, and not all students have access to TVs and radio. HEIs [higher education institutions] have responded by advancing online learning; however,

there have been reports of many HE students from deprived backgrounds experiencing difficulties obtaining and making [use] of required facilities, for example, laptops. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)


There was concern about: the lack of stimulation and social interaction for children; the fact that many parents struggle to put together stimulating educational activities for their children due to the pressure of having to work during this time; and/or the parents' own lack of education. Many young children are left in front of the television set for long periods or roam the streets. There was also concern about early childhood care, as early childhood development (ECD) centres have closed due to loss of income because parents have not been able to pay school fees due to salary cuts and loss of personal income. Families are facing significant additional financial and childcare pressures.

Additionally, because of economic concerns and families losing income-generating power due to job losses and economic activity shutdowns, youth at secondary and tertiary levels are not able to pay fees because their parents have been dismissed from their employment. This is because employers do not have the resources to pay the workforce and is one of the important relations that exist between livelihoods and education, that is, parents' abilities to afford supporting children in their learning needs (e.g. fees or technical resources), which have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in SADC countries.


The above concern relates also to concern about the increase in poverty levels as production of – and access to – economic activities has been restricted. This leaves people without adequate income for basic commodities, affecting food security which, in turn, also affects the health of children and families. One of the respondents stated the impact of the current situation as follows:

 *As a result of poverty, many families are having less meals of poor diet than usual. Many youths are into sexual activities among themselves and with older people to earn something to sustain themselves, Children are mentally thinking that whatever they are seeing now is how life will be forever, and they are lacking education because many parents do not teach their children outside the box. Education is stuck despite the provision of electronic learning; not every person in education sector has access to the Internet. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

Here there was specific concern for the youth, and a recognition that they tend to end up being most marginalised in the current economic climate:


 *The youth have been the worst hit. Most of the companies have been laying off workers, most of whom are the young people. Loss of employment has been great challenge among the young people in a region where unemployment rates are already very high. So the job losses add on the unemployed youths on the streets searching for jobs. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

Additionally, there was concern about the inadequate access to clean water and the associated problems for managing the COVID-19 pandemic in schools and communities. The lack of water in schools is particularly affecting the ability of schools to reopen, as stated by one respondent: "Schools are not able to open as they do not have the PPEs [personal protective equipment], and many schools have not been able to open because they do not have water or sanitation provisioning due to historical backlogs. (2020)" The infrastructure supply crisis leading to inadequate water services and supply to schools remains an issue, and there was concern that even the short-term measures of, for example, supplying tanks to schools was an inadequate response.


 *Even when tanks get donated, the issue of filling them up with water remains a challenge because it costs money to fill up the tank. Also, due to climate change rural areas are not getting enough rainfall. Rainfall patterns have shifted significantly towards coastal regions. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*


This statement indicates that more sustainable solutions to the water crisis in schools are needed, and that these should take both economic dynamics and climate change patterns into account.


There was also concern about the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's health and wellbeing as articulated by one respondent:

 *The main issues are both physical stress and social stresses on individuals and communities as a whole ... economic livelihoods and education challenges cause mental and social stresses. The hopes, aspirations and short-term plans for earning money are negatively affected due to the lockdown. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*


And the longer-term hopes for successfully becoming educated are negatively affected by the disruptions. Respondents commented specifically on the stress being experienced by parents as schools open and the levels of anxiety in families as the indefinite closure of schools affects learners' chances of success:

 *Stress. Fear. Schools have reopened. My children will soon have to go back to school. I managed to keep them safe so far, but how do I know that the other children are safe and corona free. Apparently, as children go back to school, parents should sign indemnity form to say that should the children fall sick with the coronavirus while at school, the parent will take full responsibility and not the government or school. I am afraid of my children falling sick with the virus because I don't know whether they will recover or not. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*


 *There is a high level of anxiety among families, which may lead to stress-related illnesses. Education could not be offered since institution had to be closed for an indefinite period of time. We are in June, and there is no hope of institution resuming education programme yet. Even when institution eventually opens, the students' performance is likely to be sub-standard due to their anxiety and the teacher educators' anxiety as well. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

 *There is also a sense of despair and anxiety among the youth. Small children are becoming irritable and demonstrating signs of anxiety. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*


Another respondent stated:

 *Although people are showing enormous courage and stoicism, times are tough and demoralising for many. ... There is also a rise in domestic violence because of the tension in the household. The youth are exposed to bad habits like smoking, drinking alcohol. The academic future also remains in limbo. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*


There was concern about the impact that the pandemic is having on families:

 *I think there is a lot of extra pressure on families – financially and as the schooling system is shut down. Very few people are knowledge workers who can earn a livelihood working online and from home. Also, poor families can struggle to connect digitally due to a lack of resources. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*


An additional concern was for the extra home-based work burden that was being placed on women. As one respondent put it:

 *I have noticed that the burden of cleaning and chores and house management has really had to be carried by women who work but live with more traditional roles. Those who are conscious, clean fastidiously, constantly reduce the family's exposure by making everything from scratch. With everyone home, the cleaning increases, (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

The quotation above indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has gendered impacts, an issue that we elaborate on further below. Added to this was concern for the wellbeing of families' mental and social health because of the increased time that people were forced to stay at home, with one respondent indicating that this led to an increase in domestic violence, child abuse and so on. And there was concern for the longer-term economic impact on families as consumption at household level increased during the lockdown period, and families were drawing on savings to cushion this rapid shift in household consumption.

 *Sadly, there was also concern about stigmatisation and the psychological and physical impacts of stigmatisation emerging in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. One respondent reflected: "I think more serious problem is the discrimination and/or bashing against the people who are confirmed to have the COVID-19 infection. Some people has been forced to commit suicide or move to outside of their community" (Questionnaire respondent, 2020).*

There was also concern about the quality of public education and the approach taken to education and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been linked to people experiencing stress and physical and emotional suffering. A respondent stated this concern in this way:

 *Worse still is the nature of lockdowns which came with regulations that have not been explained. People of all ages are disillusioned. The regulations were implemented using uniformed forces but lacked the education component. The education which was evident is the use of social and public media. These are messages which were well delivered but lacked deeper educational and learning engagement processes. (Questionnaire respondent, 2020)*

This quotation points to the importance of *how* public education is managed during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the quotations above provide a good overview of the experiences of people in SADC countries in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we approached these issues from a wider range of perspectives to deepen our understanding of what was taking place "on the ground" in the SADC countries at micro levels, and we sought to consider macro- and meso-level responses. We, therefore, deepened our investigation into the issues emerging via a set of research sub-themes that are reported on in more depth in the longer version of this report. In this shorter version of the report, we share mainly a summary of these findings, and make recommendations.

SECTION FOUR

**Macro- and chrono-level perspectives
and recommendations for
transforming education for
sustainable futures**



4.1 Macro-and chrono-level perspectives

COVID-19 is changing the social and economic landscape of local communities around the world, including communities in the southern Africa region. While industries are aiming at building sustainable resilience to the impact of COVID-19, governments are also mobilising resources to safeguard communities (SADC Secretariat, 2020), and communities themselves are mobilising in new ways to form partnerships, develop their agency for change, form new coalitions and develop new practices. As shown briefly here, but also in the longer version of this report, the COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health problem. It is also exposing issues of inadequate water supply, shortage of food, unstable livelihoods and poor education, amongst others, as well as the need for more substantive and sustainable relationships and partnerships between different government departments, civil society organisations, communities and international organisations, local and national business organisations and other mediating institutions such as the media.

Most starkly, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the threat of hunger, with which some SADC countries have been struggling since before the pandemic. The rising number of food-insecure and undernourished people has been known, for a long time, to be a serious challenge in most African communities. For example, in the 2019 Global Hunger Index, Eswatini ranked seventy-fourth of 117 countries with a food and nutrition situation that was classified as “serious” (Global Hunger Index, 2019). There are ongoing reports of food insecurity across the region, which is reaching serious proportions in some countries. This shows that some people have always been hungry, a situation exacerbated by the current pandemic, especially amongst those who are in precarious forms of work, unemployed, or not in school, training or work. During the pandemic, many have been pushed to hunger because they lost jobs (e.g. from the travel and tourism industry) and are no longer making an income, while others in the informal economy have suffered greatly from loss of income streams, shutdowns and lack of border movement and regional trade options. For example, across southern Africa, tourism facilities that were affected include hotels, lodges, camps, guesthouses, bed and breakfast facilities, mobile safaris, transfers, traditional boat cruises, motor boating, travel agents and tour operators. In most SADC countries this important sector that provides millions of jobs, was brought to its knees.

There have also been reports of increased food prices, exacerbating an already emerging challenge affecting SADC citizens at all levels, especially the poor, as can also be seen in the micro- and meso-level data reported on in previous sections of this report. An example of this is a report on the cost of hunger in Malawi by the WFP (2015), which observed that the increase in global food prices, followed by the economic and financial crisis, had pushed more people into poverty and hunger. Even though the number of undernourished people had reduced globally from one billion to 868 million in the last 20 years, Africa had fallen back, reporting an increase in the number of undernourished people from 175 million to 239 million. According to the report, Africa’s share in the world’s undernourished population had also increased from 18% to 28%, calling for stronger efforts to improve food security and nutrition on the continent (WFP, 2015). Sectors of food, health, water and general social and economic issues are interconnected. Women are significant actors in – and key drivers of – these sectors, especially in securing household food security through household food production and engagement in local and informal trade sectors. Therefore, any further hardships associated with this sector will also potentially impact negatively on the lives of girls and women, as has also been shown by the micro- and meso-level data previously in this report. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, any mission of ensuring that food supply is safe, nutritious, and sustainable should be amplified and extended into all aspects of ESD if TEF work is to be meaningful in the region.

The global COVID-19 pandemic within the context of the SADC undoubtedly continues with adverse impacts on the sociopolitical and economic spheres, threatening to erode the region’s already fragile “shock absorbers” that enable resilience and adaptability measures. It is therefore imperative that COVID-19 responses be contextually grounded and fit-for-purpose in responding to the needs of the most vulnerable communities across all sectors, including the education sector.

SADC member states have committed to a collective education vision through a process of policy harmonisation. This vision, according to the SADC Policy Framework document on Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (SADC, 2015), aims “at ensuring comparability and standardisation of responses to common regional objectives and

barriers to realisation thereof, as well as compliance with regional standards and principals” (1). However, it is important to note that despite the region’s acute attempts to respond to the vulnerability of children by strengthening core elements of the education system, the SADC Policy Framework document on Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (SADC, 2015) states that “much of this support has been project-based, short-lived, fragmented and largely unsustainable” (11).

On the positive side, in the last 50 years SADC has experienced exponential increases in basic education enrolment levels. The SADC Education and Skills Development sector, in their Status of Education reporting, highlight that within the period of 1960 to 2010 “enrolment rates in primary education increased at an average annual rate of 1.5%”¹⁸. The SADC Education Sector also reports that approximately 20% of children enrolled in primary schools across the SADC region do not complete their education (SADC, 2015) – showing this to be a vulnerability facing many children and families which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the inequalities of access to digital solutions during the pandemic. SADC countries also experience significant drop in net enrolment rates between primary (85%) and secondary (40%) education, highlighting more than 45% of dropout rate between primary and secondary education within the region (SADC, 2015). Furthermore, UNESCO (2011, cited in SADC, 2015) reports that the region collectively accounts for approximately 20 million adolescents of lower secondary school age who are out of school. As indicated in our study, youth are one of the groups that have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for young people’s well-being, opportunities for development, and continued capability to participate in education and learning opportunities is therefore a critical issue to be dealt with in any efforts at “just recovery” or “building back better” in TEF work going forward.

The SADC Secretariat (2020) reported that SADC member states closed schools and other centres of teaching and learning in response to the pandemic. As shown across this report, while this issue has historical roots, it is likely to impact on future human resource capacity. Micro- and meso- level data in this study shows this to be a critical concern experienced by parents, communities, education sector actors and learners themselves. On the positive side, some SADC countries have made substantive efforts to introduce and support alternatives of learning. For example, in Eswatini, the Ministry of Education and Training introduced home learning programmes on

broadcast media (television and radio), the Internet (YouTube) and national newspapers (Times of Eswatini and Eswatini Observer). However, most of these efforts have been focussed on examination knowledge, which has reduced educational experiences significantly (UN International Children’s Emergency Fund, 2020).

Our research also pointed out that there is a major problem with the “digital divide”: (at all levels of the education system), which is currently exacerbating already deep-seated inequalities. Communities in the rural areas, in particular, do not have privileges of frequent access to television, radio and other technology because there is no electricity for access to Internet and data services, laptop computers and Internet modems. The cost of data is also high. And in some cases, buying newspapers is a mammoth task because there are no shops nearby (Times of Eswatini, 2020). The normal school calendar has been negatively affected by the lockdown in all SADC countries. There were also educational challenges because of the unequal way in which the digital divide impacts on communities. Many parents also experienced stress because they lost the capacity to pay school fees and also had to struggle with the high cost of data for online learning. As indicated by The SADC Secretariat (SADC, 2020), COVID-19 has affected all levels of the education system from preschool to tertiary education. An estimate by UNESCO (2020) shows that close to 900 million learners across the world have been affected by the closure of educational institutions. COVID-19 has impacted negatively on mobility resulting in schools no longer being able to provide free school meals for children from low-income families. It has also had a significant impact on childcare costs for families with young children and has put working mothers under pressure to provide home schooling while also providing for the family. Child-headed households have been left stranded with little support, and families with inadequate access to literacy have not easily been able to assist children with home schooling. Thus all of these multidimensional aspects of the impact on the education system will require careful and strategic analysis and responses in “just recovery” and “building forward better” within TEF work going forward.

The pandemic has exposed an issue that has always existed in the SADC region: water shortage in rural and local communities. Therefore, to uphold handwashing hygiene practices, SADC member states have prioritised water supply and accessibility in all communities and schools. For example, the government of South Africa made efforts to install water tankers at schools as well as deliver potable

18 SADC: <https://www.sadc.int/themes/social-human-development/education-skills-development/>

water to schools where there was a shortage of water (SADC, 2020). But as pointed out across our report (see longer version of the report), these efforts at times appear to be “too little too late” and lack longer-term systemic and strategic response potential if not carried forward with serious ongoing efforts to resolve the historical backlogs and inequalities on this front.

Our research findings repeatedly point to the intersectional nature of concerns in the SADC region. Shortages of food and water pose serious *implications for the education system*. Many people lost their jobs during the pandemic, leading to a lack of food in their households. Moreover, in some rural areas there are places with no water. In such situations where there is reduced food at home and possible lack of water, students may be unable to concentrate or focus in school. Students need basic needs to be fulfilled if they are to be fully co-operative in class. Furthermore, as also highlighted in our research, extra attention and care needs to be given to the role of the girl child, who may be more seriously affected by the impact and fallout of the pandemic in relation to educational continuity opportunities and options. The research has also pointed to the urgent need to give more and vigorous attention to the unemployed youth in the region and to support their efforts at organising and mobilising in their communities – they have potential to play an important contributing role in solution mobilisation. But this should not be done without giving attention to their needs for learning new skills for economic opportunity creation and advancement, raising the issue of giving attention to a wider range of viable livelihood opportunities and for supporting both informal and more formal forms of work and learning.

Overall, our findings confirm the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs in southern Africa, as visualised and captured by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs¹⁹, in Figure 4 above, showing also the interrelated nature and intersectional dynamics of the impact of COVID-19 on the many dimensions of life and livelihoods.

Governments across the SADC region have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in various ways that address the intersecting issues outlined in this report. For example:

- The **Malawian** government took some measures to control the pandemic – the appointment of a Special Cabinet Committee and later the Special Presidential Committee to look at all top-level matters concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and provide policy guidance; the country was declared a state of disaster; banning of street vending, public gatherings including religious gatherings, wedding ceremonies, open pubs; closure of all schools and colleges in both public and private sectors; closing land borders and restricting air flights with special announcements to suspend all international flights; awareness campaigns about prevention and control measures such as wearing masks, washing hands with soap and water, use of sanitisers and reporting to the nearest hospitals if experiencing unusual symptoms; self-quarantine measures for all visitors who arrive from high-risk areas. Malawi also benefits from international bodies to control Covid-19. These bodies include the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development, the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund, and the governments of Norway and Germany. These bodies provide a wide range of support, including provision of guidelines, local surveillance, crafting radio and television programmes.
- The government of **Zimbabwe** declared the pandemic a national disaster. While Malawi simply introduced some restrictions, the government of Zimbabwe implemented a lockdown for 21 days, starting on 30 March 2020. Only essential movement related to seeking health services, to the purchase and procurement of food and medicines, and for other essential supplies and critical services was exempted. The Zimbabwean government banned all non-essential travel (excluding returning residents) and traffic both inbound and outbound (except for movement of cargo). There was a ban on entertainment, sports and recreational activities. All nightclubs, bars, movie houses, swimming pools, gymnasiums and sporting facilities were closed. In addition, public gatherings could not exceed 50 people in the following: religious fellowship, weddings, conferences, workshops and funerals. Hospital visits were reduced to one visit per day involving one relative per person.

19 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs: <https://www.un.org/en/desa>

- The **South African** government implemented hard lock down measures early on which had massive impacts on the educational system. The consequential impact of COVID-19 on education, children’s well-being, and teaching and learning have raised the urgent need for transdisciplinary and inter-sectoral responses where different government departments were forced to collaborate with municipalities and local communities to address child hunger, and to provide water services in schools (amongst other measures). These responses, premised on bilateral and multilateral forms of engagement, that engage the micro, meso and macro structures simultaneously, showed that it is possible to establish systems and structural mechanisms to enable co-operation and support. This is critical in delivering high quality primary and secondary education in future, given the many challenges facing the education sector. This type of co-operation was most visible in the rapid distribution of over 7000 water tanks to schools, although this did not go as smoothly as was anticipated.
- The outbreak of COVID-19 caused the **Eswatini Kingdom** to distribute 40 tanks to different communities with water shortages so that they could have continuous access to water (Government of Eswatini, 2020). In Botswana, with the little water supplied by Water Utilities Corporation through bowsers, priority was given to the clinics and schools, sadly, leaving some communities stranded. In Botswana 88 emergency water bowsers as well as water in large tankers were distributed in water scarce areas early on in the pandemic, and water tanks were installed into some schools.

These responses, together with some of the agency-based responses shown by communities, parents, learners, and state and civil society organisations reported on in the more detailed micro- and meso-level data in the more extensive version of this report, point to taking time to fully assess the agency-centred approaches that are emerging as possibilities for regenerative approaches to “just recovery” and “building forward better” and to consider these within a longer-term window as a significant sustainable development opportunity across the region. There is diversity in the range of opportunities and responses: supporting the organising capability of young people as it is being generated on their own terms; recognising the power and potential of combining indigenous knowledge and experience of farmers and communities in responding to the many challenges facing society; infrastructure provisioning (e.g. water systems); dealing with corruption; creating support platforms for women and girl children, advancing access to e-learning technologies and tools for all; strengthening intergovernmental partnerships and partnerships between government and civil society; and valuing community activism in the wider system of transformative change towards more sustainable futures and TEF work are amongst some of the agency-building possibilities that were shown to be emergent in our study data.

The global COVID-19 pandemic within the context of the SADC undoubtedly continues with adverse impacts on the sociopolitical and economic spheres, threatening to erode the region’s already fragile “shock absorbers” that enable resilience and adaptability measures.

4.2 Recommendations for TESF work from the seven sub-themes for macro- and meso- level support and intervention (i.e. transformative systems building)

As indicated in the more detailed version of this report, we developed in-depth understandings via case study methods, in-depth interviewing and other tools into specific contexts and thematic areas within, and across countries. From this work, there

were many emerging implications for TESF work moving forward within a 'build forward better' and "just recovery" orientation. These are synthesised below for ease of use according to the thematic areas in focus in our research questions.

Sustainable solutions at local level

This thematic area focussed on the need for – and emergence of – sustainable solutions at a local level, as observed at micro- and meso- levels in communities in SADC countries. The recommendations below respond to the findings in the study that pointed out the challenges found at grassroots level with inherent food insecurities, the precarious nature of income for food, and the acute food shortages – food shortages that were there before but became heightened and critical as the COVID-19 pandemic broke, and as lockdown measures rapidly cut off sources of precarious income for many.

- **Food systems education, training and social learning:** There is a need for education that gives more attention to sustainable food systems, and more support is needed for food gardens and smallholder farming systems to ensure stronger local level food system development. Food system education should focus on inherent and historically inherited food insecurities and the precarious nature of income for food, food production, food system marketing and communication, food relief distribution systems efficacy and fairness, and accountability at the point of food sales. There is also the need to give attention to dealing with ambivalence and mixed messages in poor communications around food security. Additionally, food system education should focus on ways of dealing with shocks and aggravations in the food system, and lastly, but also importantly, corruption needs to be dealt with in the food system. The issue of land and access to land also has to be focused on in order to ensure longer-term food system security and food sovereignty and resilience in the food system. Food security, food sovereignty, and social justice in food systems are key concepts that need to be developed. From a skills and practice point of view, strategies for sustainable local food production need to be strengthened across the region, and from a values and ethics point of view, stronger commitments to social justice, accountability, avoidance of food waste and anti-corruption are needed. There is also the need to give attention to the ecological dimensions of the food system, as southern Africa is a dryland region with many challenges associated with climate change, droughts and flooding that are disrupting food production.
- **Water education, training and social learning:** Systems and structures to ensure continuous water supplies to households and schools are needed in all communities; education is needed for local governments to ensure sufficient and sustainable water supply to all communities. Strategies for rainwater harvesting and conservation are also needed to support local solutions and food production in schools and communities.
- **Health education, training and social learning:** Adherence to – and deeper knowledge of – health regulations is needed across communities and in school and other educational settings. There is a need to roll out education, training and social learning programmes to address stigma, trauma and fear and to strengthen adherence to regulations such as social (physical) distancing, mask wearing and handwashing. There is also a need for psychosocial

programmes to support health workers who are under extreme stress and programmes in communities to appreciate the work, role and contributions of health workers in society. Consideration should also be given to provide for on-site healthcare workers at schools to support teachers who now also have to take on a significant healthcare role.

- **E-learning in school and formal and informal learning settings:** There is an urgent need for more equitable and accessible supply of – and investment in – innovation and technology and ICT for learners in schools, teachers and community members (e.g. farmers).
- **Indigenous knowledge systems:** There is also the need to recognise and draw more on indigenous knowledge systems for building resilience and for local adaptation and development of sustainable solutions.
- **Strengthen emergent agency of communities, health workers, educators and farmers:** The study showed that despite the massive shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, communities, health workers and educators mobilised their agency to respond to the crisis at local levels. TESF work should focus on strengthening and expanding transformative agency at local level amongst all members of the community, local governments, and formal and informal education and health institutions.

Role of parents, teachers and children in health and safety

This thematic area focussed on the changing role of parents, teachers and children. Recommendations focus on how TESF work can strengthen and support the important role that parents, teachers and children play in ensuring and supporting health and safety as identified by respondents in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study showed that the role of parents and teachers were changing rapidly in the face of the crisis. Parents were being forced to find alternative means of survival and were also forced to become much more involved in their children's education. Teachers' roles were changing as they had to take on much greater responsibility for the health and safety of learners, and teachers also rapidly had to adapt to use online learning approaches where these were possible. A significant finding of the study was that new relationalities were emerging between teachers, parents, children and young people in efforts to collaborate on responses to the pandemic.

- **Everyone has a role to play** in education and learning together about new challenges and ways of responding to them: parents, teachers, children and young people.
- **Young people** can play a proactive and creative role in contributing new ideas and suggestions towards communities where co-learning is necessary as they can easily move into communities and into homes and educational institutions.
- **Teachers and parents** need to become more e-literate in order to support more flexible modes of education and learning.
- **Parents and teachers can work more closely together** to be prepared for seamless interaction between homes and schools to reduce the “disjuncture” that exists between home and school life for children.
- **Support the new relationalities that are emerging between parents, teachers, and young people** and strengthen these relationalities into the future to enable a seamless relationship between school and community and between young people and their parents and teachers.

School-community-government partnerships

This thematic area of our study probed the nature of – and changes emerging in – school-community-government partnerships. The findings show that these relationships are not linear, but are dynamic, and they manifest in different ways in different settings. This part of the study drew attention to the historical nature of many disjunctures that affect the school-community-government relation. A key finding was that it is important to strengthen and develop this relationship, especially in relation to the intersectional focus areas of TEF articulated in this report – food, livelihoods, water and education. A critical issue surfacing in this part of the study is the importance of trust in the school-community-government relation, and where trust is missing or destroyed, the study found that it is often schools that end up being “in the middle” of the destroyed relationship, affecting the education and wellbeing of children. Examples of failure in providing adequate infrastructure to schools for water and sanitation and the abrupt loss of the school feeding scheme support to children in poverty under the lockdown are two examples of severe breakdowns in this relationship. There was also some emerging evidence of new partnerships being formed between schools, communities and government as the severity of the pandemic became visible, especially its impact on the schooling of children.

- **Strengthen emergent intergovernmental co-operation and partnerships between government departments and community organisations** in dealing with infrastructure backlogs in schools and communities (especially water, sanitation and food systems). More formalised channels for these forms of co-operation are needed.
- More **proactive approaches to including parents** in the school community are needed, and active efforts should be made to include parents in diverse ways in the life of the school and its activities. Strengthen school-community-parent **communication systems** and the role of **SGBs**. The study found that there is a need for parental education and skills and capacity development for SGBs to work with a whole systems approach to TEF.
- Identify and strengthen innovative ways to support and enable **community involvement in food provision to learners in school feeding schemes**. Relying on a top-down structure to provide food schools is unsustainable, as was shown by the loss of the school feeding scheme under lockdown measures. If more localised systems were in operation, this would not have happened, and there could have been more continuity in the food provisioning of children. This calls for more decentralisation and partnerships between government, parents and community structures in the system of providing for school feeding schemes.
- Avoid focusing on technical responses (e.g. water tanks) only. There is also the need to think about **social wellbeing, development of capabilities and psychosocial support** for helping teachers, communities, learners and also government officials to deal with the stress that has been induced by the pandemic and its impact.
- Develop a wider understanding of “education” in society. As shown so clearly by this study, education is not just about the curriculum; it is equally about the support functions and **the whole system** that supports learning for children, parents and teachers. Therefore, there is the need to strengthen a **whole systems approach to conceptualising education**.
- **Strengthen, and value the role of civil society, activist groups, teacher unions and teachers who take an activist stance to mobilise support for attending to the wellbeing of children**. This study showed the importance of activist movements in holding government accountable and for putting pressure on government to reinstate the school feeding schemes, for example, and teacher unions in activating for adequate water supplies in schools. These relationships should be appreciated in terms of their contributions to building a democratic society and for holding government accountable. However, these relationships should also be proactively oriented towards finding ways of supporting government action to address issues where possible.

Youth, informal learning and response-ability

This thematic area of the study focussed on youth experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and their informal learning and response-ability. It highlighted some of the dynamics that are affecting young people at this time and drew attention to their oftentimes hidden, yet important roles in times of crisis, their capabilities and agency for organising, and their agility and creativity. This section is contextualised within the prospect of Africa having the youngest population in the world, with the population of under-30 growing to an estimated 65% of its entire population by 203020. This thematic area points to how the COVID-19 pandemic has shown up contemporary – but often invisible – potential of young people to contribute meaningfully towards curbing the effects of the pandemic in their communities. It acknowledges and celebrates the potential of young people who are at the forefront of asking how we imagine a different future. It challenges perceptions that young people are “junior partners” and instead, puts forward a strong argument for appreciating and strengthening youth agency for organising and contributing to change on their own terms. It calls for a reconstitution of the dominant perceptions of young people, and a “freeing” of their potential from the strictures of outdated and conservative views. Recommendations emerging from this part of the report include:

- Recognise and appreciate that **different contexts have different challenges and possibilities** for young people.
- Recognise, support and enable **the significant role that young people play in self-organisation and sustainable futures creation**; they have significant **response-ability** that is currently undervalued in society. They also have border-crossing capabilities as they are able to move in between generational divides, link younger children’s lives to a range of community members and structures, and challenge stasis in older generations’ views and experiences of the world.
- Address the often limited “normalising gaze” that young people are co-opted into, and allow them space for self-activity and voice, and developing ways of organising in society, that is, **affirm their place in political participation in real and meaningful ways**.
- Young people can find and take **up intermediary spaces and institutional roles that can build their power from below and enable them to “step into their power”**; affirm this transformative agency praxis and create spaces for such flourishing and response-ability to take root in communities and institutions.
- Recognise the power of **multi-dynamic forms of technology and forms of representation and action** from WhatsApp to graffiti – all have a powerful role to play in TEF work.
- Learn from pedagogies of permaculture, community action, and response-ability – and **reimagine the meaning(s) of pedagogy** in ways that follow the tendencies of rising cultures as being generated by youth in their organisations and decolonial transgressive praxis spaces and platforms. This requires moving around across the traditional boundaries of formal and informal learning settings and spaces.
- **Get better at dreaming**, as the future is called up in dreams. This points to being more **open-minded about alternative futures** and leaving open the space to learn what is not yet there in new ways that are generative, creative, open-ended, multidimensional and unpredictable.

Gender concerns and safety of young girls

This thematic area focussed on gender concerns and the safety of young girls with an emphasis on water, food, livelihoods and education. It recognises the impact of COVID-19 on women, given their significant role in the healthcare and education sectors (the majority of nurses and community care workers are women). Women also faced increased pressure as they became rapidly exposed to amplified pressure in the areas of unpaid care and domestic work, and are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 because of their roles in society. The high number of women in the informal economy in southern Africa aggravates the risk and vulnerability of women to the pandemic and its impact.

From the perspective of girl children, many were subjected to increased household duties, provisioning of water, food and other care functions, affecting their ability to continue with their schooling, and in many cases young women were also faced with increased GBV, pregnancy and with few options but to enter early marriages. Thus, it is projected that the educational and gender-based consequences of COVID-19 will last beyond the period of school closures, affecting marginalised girls most severely. The productive life of women has also been more severely affected as women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs and are mostly employed in the informal sector. Extreme poverty has also put women in more precarious positions than before. Recommendations emerging from this section of the report for TESF work going forward include:

- Institute **more flexible models for education** that support women and girls, and make proper provision for wider forms of online learning, data access, and technology support resources.
- Support **services and “care groups” for girl children**, especially those that look out for their safety and opportunities to participate in education, despite early pregnancies and other forces that might impact on their ability to continue with their education.
- Implement **sector-wide awareness of systemic injustices** and higher levels of risk faced by girls and women (including those related to water and food systems) due to their traditionally held care roles in society.
- Raise the level of **response to GVB** in society, and help young women to find alternatives to early marriages as the only means of “making it through” crisis situations.
- Give adequate attention to **continuities in women’s sexual and reproductive health provisioning** amongst shifts to health provisioning for the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact.
- **Seek out options for innovation and change by focusing on the intersectional nature of the issues affecting women:** there is the need to fully comprehend the intersectional nature of the issues, for example, if livelihoods are affected, so are women’s aspirations, morale and chances of education.

Livelihoods, start-ups and economic opportunities

This thematic area focussed on the theme of livelihoods, start-ups and economic opportunity. It is no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the livelihoods of many people in the SADC region. A record 45 million people in the SADC region were estimated to be food insecure before the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of climate shocks such as drought and flooding, and structural, macro-economic and social shocks. Thus it is very clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this already existing situation. It has deepened vulnerabilities at household level and has worsened individuals' food and nutrition insecurities.

This section of the study also pointed out that there are far-reaching consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on economies and livelihoods, and COVID-19 is actually exacerbating already vulnerable and struggling economies in southern Africa. Some of the consequences include private sector companies being forced to downsize, localise and digitalise, with job losses emanating from this. The COVID-19 pandemic is also reversing the trend towards formalisation of employment, making employment more precarious on many fronts. It has affected the financial sector and, overall, is narrowing the already limited fiscal space of sub-Saharan governments in the world economic space as reductions in economic growth are an immediate reality. Cross-border trade has also been affected, with a particularly harsh impact on the 70% of women cross-border traders engaged in informal trade. Additionally, there are an estimated 80 million young people in vulnerable employment and 110 million who are not contributing to the economy in SADC countries. Recommendations from this section point to:

- **Prioritise women and young people** in TEF programmes oriented towards livelihoods and economic agency, and make livelihoods a key priority in TEF work within a sustainable development, social justice paradigm.
- Face the need to **find ways of growing employment and enterprises** for young people in collective ways that build capacity along the way.
- **Foreground creativity, innovation and opportunities for learning to change**, and contribute to sustainable development wherever possible, particularly in local economies where direct benefits can be mobilised for marginalised communities on the ground, but also focus transformative learning efforts on other levels of the system.
- Consider the **latent possibilities in green and circular economies** (and associated skills development) that are still under-developed. Also consider the importance of **access to land** as a key resource for the production of sustainable livelihoods.
- Strengthen research in – and develop – **stronger approaches to support self-sufficiency and locally sustainable economies**, and **develop new economic models** for this that are based on principles of social justice, equity, and sustainability.
- **Support start-up systems in ways that are more sustainable** (e.g. loans/grants). Government support should be sustainably planned, and **strengthen government and business partnerships in innovation development**.
- **Formal education opportunities should interface with real world work opportunities** and informal and workplace learning.
- Give renewed attention to more **sustainable social security systems** and **emergency relief measures**, and **eliminate corruption** in these systems in order to ensure better responses to risk and crisis shocks as experienced by droughts, floods and now the COVID-19 pandemic in the SADC region.

Intergovernmental collaboration on water, food, nutrition and education

This thematic area focussed on the water crisis as experienced mainly by rural communities, with an interest in how this influenced education. This was because it was becoming increasingly apparent that schools with poor water infrastructure and unreliable water were being forced to remain closed due to the higher levels of risk of COVID-19 infection in the absence of access to an adequate and reliable source of water. Schools in rural areas and informal settlements that are not serviced are disproportionately affected by poor service delivery of water, a challenge that not only affects sanitation services in the schools, but also amplifies other impacts on learners. This is because schools in these communities often provide more than education to children – they also provide a nutritious meal for learners daily and a safe place for learners to be during the day. With schools closed, children are exposed to increased food insecurity because they do not have access to the school nutrition programme. In addition, many poor families have experienced loss of income as a result of the lockdown. This theme was particularly interested in exploring if there was evidence of improved intergovernmental collaboration to address these critical issues. Recommendations from this theme are:

- Water supply is not merely a municipal obligation; **water access and management should be based on a participatory approach involving all stakeholders**, involving users, planners and policy makers at all levels. Deliberations on water policy and supply should include community views and needs and aspirations in conceptualising service delivery solutions. This type of **relationship building** should be promoted in TESF work. TESF work can support intergovernmental, intra-governmental and civil society and business sector partnership formation around addressing critical issues such as water access and supply.
- **Support civil society activism and coalitions that can contribute to campaigning and advocacy for action, as well as solution building** in terms of policy implementation around water supply, co-operative governance, and responsible water usage.
- **Promote positive partnership formation, and strengthen and support any efforts for co-operative governance** in the provisioning of sustainable water supplies to schools and communities. It was noted that such co-operative approaches *are* possible, as these were, in some places, mobilised in response to the water crisis in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **The water supply chain must be in full focus in all water education** and water-oriented social learning processes. A deeper understanding needs to be developed of water supply and the inter-linkages of the water supply chain across all organs of state – all departments from local government; all departments at provincial and national level.
- Stakeholders should collaboratively explore ways of **ensuring sustainable supply and access to clean, consistent and adequate water** in schools and communities.
- **Educators, scholars and researchers may also become rich sources of insights** on how communities may work together to improve access to water and conservation and responsible consumption of the resource; they should be consulted and involved in solutions modelling and infrastructural planning.
- **Explore indigenous systems of accessing, purifying and conserving water** as a means of ensuring adequate supply and cutting of costs as a sustainable initiative to complement more formal systems of water supply. More can be done to maximise rainwater harvesting and usage and management of harvested rainwater. Although this may not be a fully adequate solution for a regular supply of water, it can complement existing efforts and do more with less.
- **Water harvesting techniques and solar-powered boreholes** should be part of education and school infrastructure and should be a key feature of the training of engineers, planners and those who are responsible for school and household infrastructure development.

With these more specific recommendations in mind, we conclude the research report in the next section with recommendations for policy and practice and for advancing TEF work in the SADC region across all countries. Even though issues reported on in

this study are country and context specific to a large extent, they are also widely shared across the SADC region. Stronger responses may be possible at country and individual context levels through collaboration and regional solidarity.

4.3 Recommendations for TEF within a “just recovery” and “building forward better” policy and practice framework

In this section we point to policy and practice along transformative praxis pathways that are oriented towards “just recovery” and “building forward better” in the SADC region, learning lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and the intersectional focus of our research.

The past influences the present. Here we add to – and carry forward – this line of thinking as one rationale for transforming policy and practice shifts towards more sustainable futures for all. The present – with its impact from COVID-19 – will be the future’s past, and so this present will influence our future. The future emerges from what currently exists, and so it is helpful to look at the past-present-future relation in order to consider possible pathways forward that could emerge via our efforts to support transformative education and societal change.

What is clear from the data across the study is that the “normal” or the past had its own challenges. The data shows very clearly that the COVID-19 pandemic has starkly surfaced those cracks in our societies that make those most vulnerable even more vulnerable.

The data also shows, however, that there is agency amongst young people, teachers, parents, communities and some government officials, and that there is a clear vision amongst them for what needs to change in society. It is the latter that is significant for considerations of TEF.

Such considerations for building on existing and emerging forms of agency for change should not be ahistorical, or naively constituted, and hence we frame our recommendations for “transformative praxis pathways” as critical pathways that need

to be created in and via praxes from histories of the past and from the present. This needs to be done within a multidimensional and multisectoral environment at policy and practice levels, that is, across the multilevelled system that we have been investigating and, as clearly shown by most of our recommendations above, through a new solidarity relation between government, communities, schools, and economic sector partners. This relation needs to be built, or re-built, as the large number of people left vulnerable indicates a clear breakdown in government and civil society relations in southern Africa. As also noted above, new roles for youth in this partnership building need to be affirmed in order to include them more proactively in mobilising their creativity and agency for change and their capabilities for imagining new futures. Inertia needs to be overcome, and trust relations need to be rebuilt. The voices of all should be respected and included in working out solutions for a more sustainable future. TEF work has a central role to play in this process.

Those involved in the ESD 2030 Agenda for Africa, the SADC Secretariat and national governments should take these recommendations seriously as new partnership models are sought for implementing ESD across schools and communities in the SADC region.

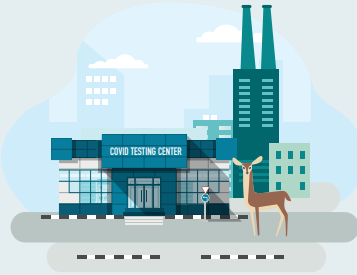
In the section below (with reference to Figures 5 and 6) we summarise the main features of the “normal”/past as captured across this study and the main features of how these were shifted under the COVID-19 pandemic. From this we point to a way forward that embraces a “just recovery” and “build forward together” perspective.

What is clear from the data across the study is that the “normal” or the past had its own challenges. The data shows very clearly that the COVID-19 pandemic has starkly surfaced those cracks in our societies that make those most vulnerable even more vulnerable.

“NORMAL”



COVID



A WAY FORWARD



I can't wait for this to all be over and we can go back to normal!

What if we went forward instead



Figure 5: A drawing showing the shift required from past to future (adapted from a drawing by Brenna Quinlan)

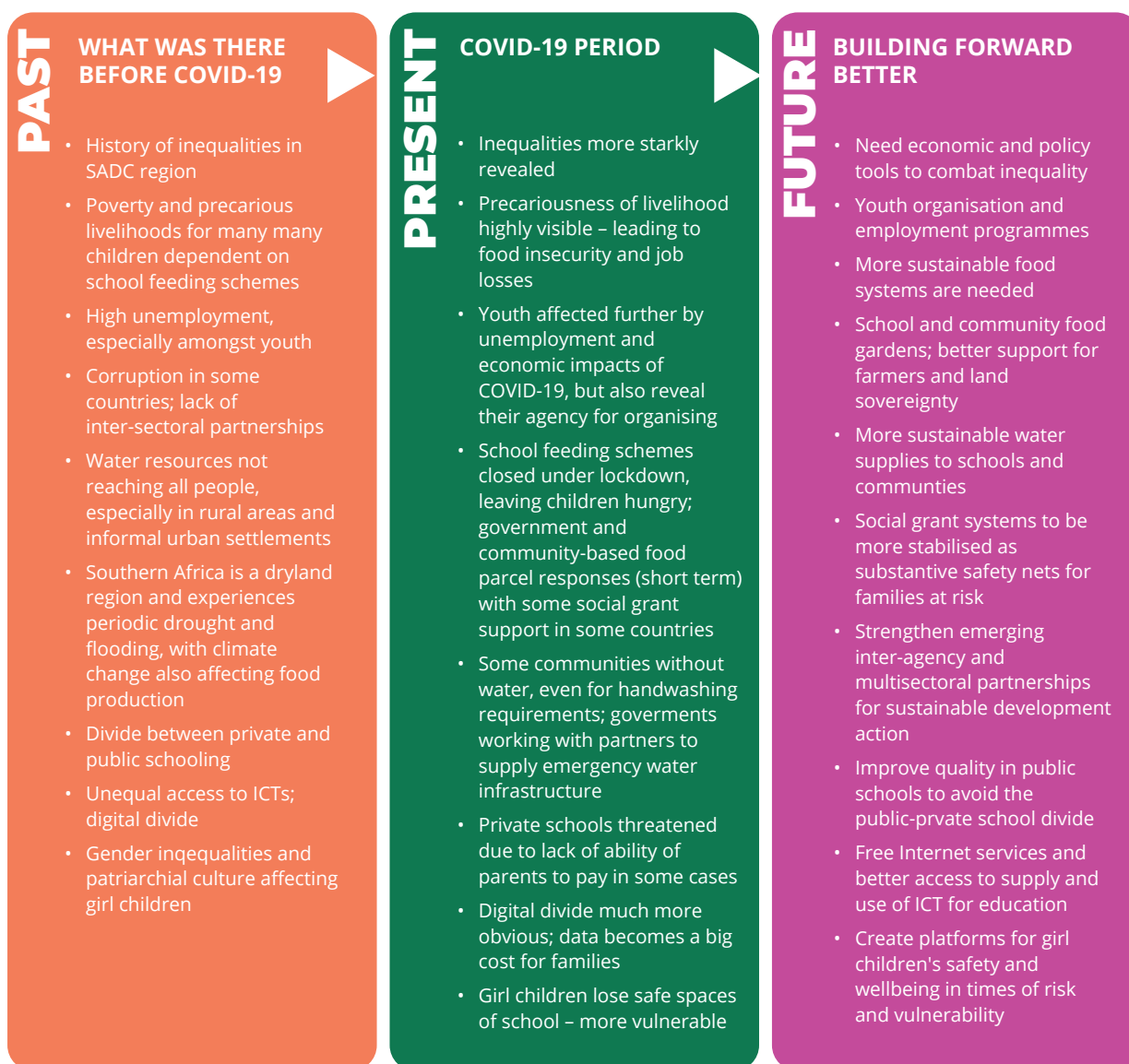


Figure 6: An overview of the findings of the study from a past, present and future perspective

Viewing the findings on past, present and future in Figure 6 above, it is possible to see that that which is needed in future is also an absence in the present. It is something that is not there yet and needs to come into being within a “just recovery” or “build forward better” trajectory. This is necessary if we want to avoid sinking back into those aspects of the past that were not working well for people in southern Africa, if we want to strengthen our agency for change and if we want to mobilise TESF work in ways that can help communities, teachers, government officials, business partners, and all societal actors to work tightly together to consider – and put in place – alternative ways for contemporary ills as revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As indicated in the study, **agency for change** (individual and collective) was present in all research sites, even in spite of the difficult histories and,

at times, dire conditions. Interestingly, one of the features of this agency for change during the pandemic was the **formation of new partnerships, relationships and coalitions at both community and intergovernmental levels**. “Building forward better” together, based on this important finding, can help to chart a pathway forward for transformative praxis that is grounded in the realities of people in the here and now, and that can be taken up at multiple levels of the system as per the conceptual framework guiding this study.

In the series of diagrams below, we illuminate each of the transformative praxis pathways that have been revealed through the study and share some key insights gained from the different sections of the study relevant to these transformative praxis pathways.

TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 1:

Contribute to rethinking and reimagining economic models that are more inclusive and sustainable

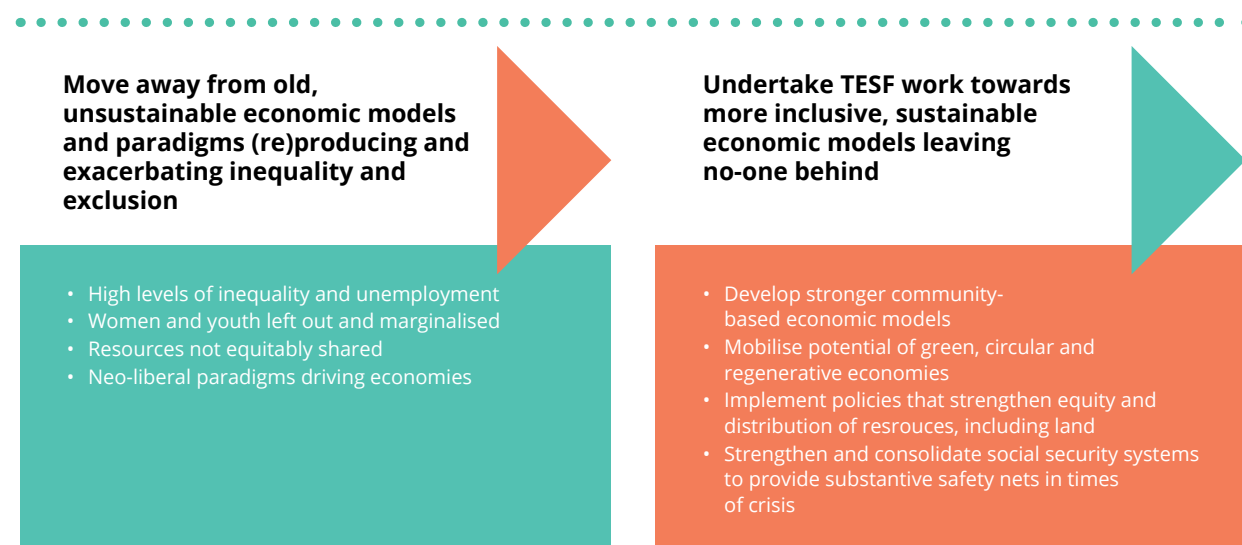


Figure 7: TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 1: Contribute to rethinking and reimagining economic models that are more inclusive and sustainable

The first TESF transformative praxis pathway (Figure 7) relates to moving out of and away from the economic decline and fallout of historical economic models and practices that are not serving the majority of people well, that exclude and marginalise women, and that continue to exacerbate inequalities. Within a TESF framework, there is need to invest in education, training and social learning that is oriented towards more inclusive, sustainable economic models that leave no-one behind. Such economic models should be more strongly community based and strengthen local economies, as well as mobilise the potential of green, circular and regenerative economies. A global movement that conceptualises such economic alternatives and the implications of these for education is emerging. SADC communities and societies, and educators

involved in economics education and all other forms of education should investigate and contribute to the development of these models of economy to help to break the deadlock of existing neo-colonial and neo-liberal economic models that are producing and exacerbating inequalities and marginalisation, as shown by the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social grant systems or a more egalitarian and democratic instrument such as a basic income grant needs to be instituted and/or more stabilised to ensure more substantive security and /or safety nets for families at risk in times of crisis, and these should be managed in ways that make them safe from corruption.

The first TESF transformative praxis pathway relates to moving out of and away from the economic decline and fallout of historical economic models and practices that are not serving the majority of people well, that exclude and marginalise women, and that continue to exacerbate inequalities.

TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 2:

Contribute to the emergence of more sustainable food systems for all

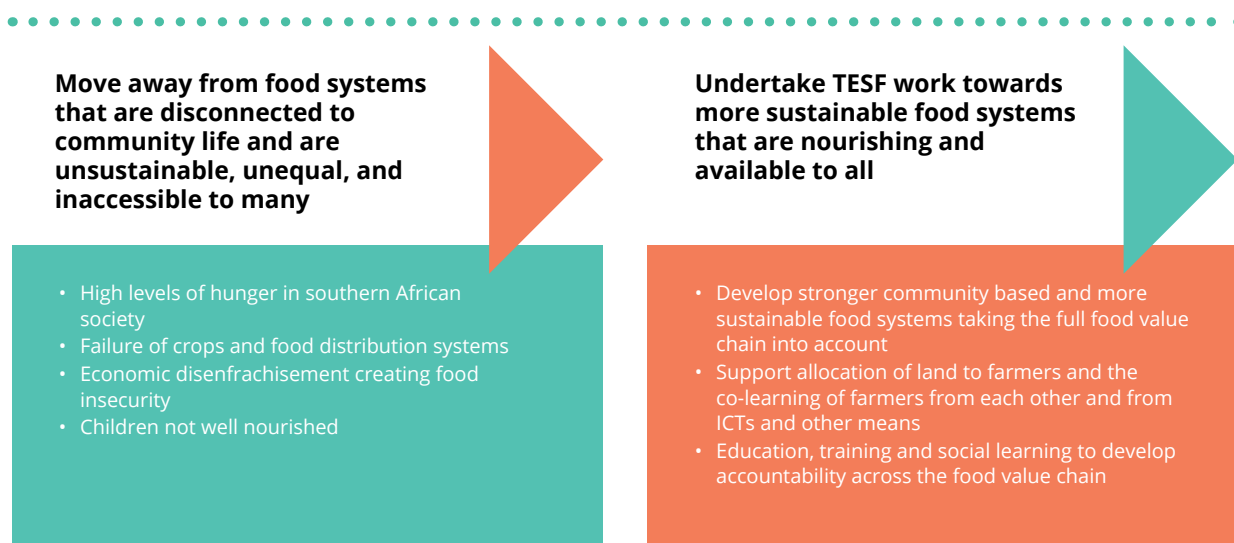


Figure 8: TEF Transformative Praxis Pathway 2: Contribute to the emergence of more sustainable food systems for all

The second TEF transformative praxis pathway (Figure 8) focusses on TEF work to support the emergence of more sustainable food systems that are accessible and available to all. As indicated in the recommendations above, this should involve a new model and approach to food system education in education, training and social learning systems. It should develop knowledge of the entire food system and the food value chain and help to develop active production praxis of farmers, including education to address land access and access to the resources and knowledge for improving farming and food production at household and community levels. Additionally, there is a need for education along the food value chain – in marketing, distribution and supply systems – to strengthen ethics and accountability across the food value chain. A whole systems approach oriented towards sustainability,

inclusivity, fairness, human dignity and access to adequate food is needed. Agro-ecological approaches and food sovereignty principles need to be part of this approach to food system development, as do anti-corruption approaches and values. Food system education should include more focus on the impacts of – and adaptation strategies for addressing – climate change and uncertainties arising from climate change in relation to food systems in southern Africa. It should also include an understanding of the ecological dynamics of food systems and more sustainable alternatives that can assist with enabling and ensuring diversity to avoid risks associated with mono-cultural praxis in the food system. Such education and learning about the food system should include a stronger focus on indigenous – and multiple forms of – knowledge.

The second TEF transformative praxis pathway focusses on TEF work to support the emergence of more sustainable food systems that are accessible and available to all.

TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 3:

Strengthen interagency and multisectoral partnerships for sustainable development action and service delivery

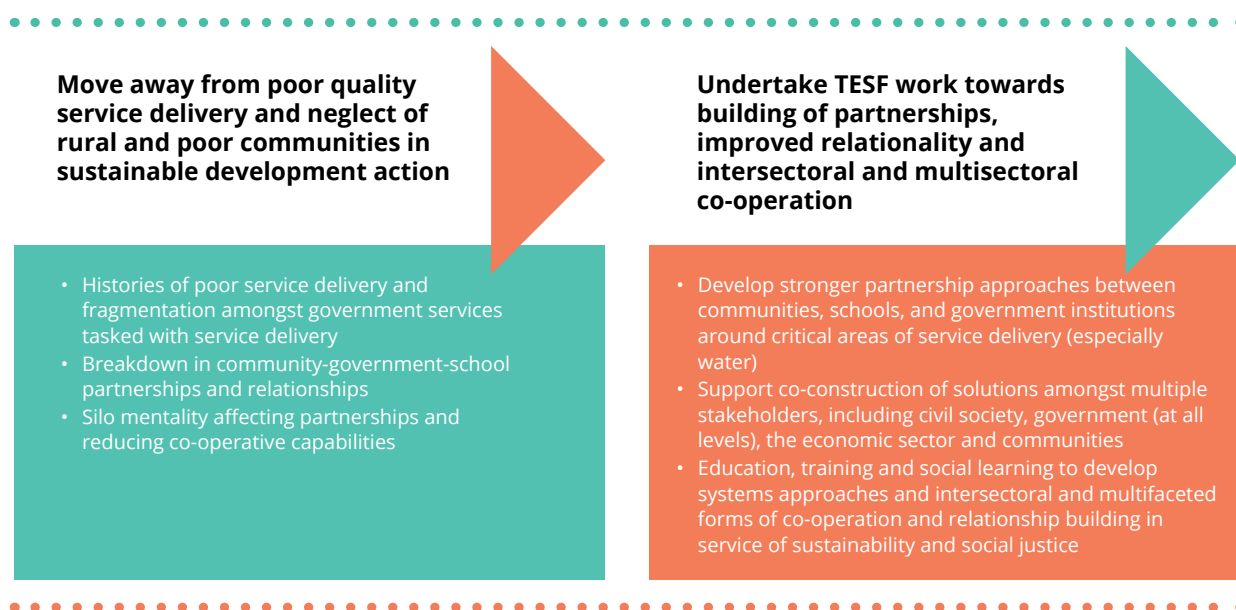


Figure 9: TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 3: Strengthen inter-agency and multi-sectoral partnerships for sustainable development action and service delivery

The third TESF transformative praxis pathway (Figure 9) focusses on strengthening interagency and multisectoral partnerships for sustainable development action and service delivery especially related to water. As shown across this report, the lack of a sustainable supply of clean water impacted heavily on communities' and schools' abilities to respond adequately to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were many impacts across the system, including longer than necessary closures of schools, which, in turn, impacted on school nutrition schemes and exacerbated food insecurity. This same problem

also affects health workers, teachers and families who are challenged by inadequate access to a clean, sustainable supply of water. New, innovative strategies that build on community knowledge and indigenous practices should be introduced into interagency and multisectoral partnerships, such as use of solar pumps and rainwater harvesting practices. Communities should be consulted when planning interventions meant to facilitate sustainable development action and service delivery, and should be included in co-creating these solutions.

The third TESF transformative praxis pathway focusses on strengthening interagency and multisectoral partnerships for sustainable development action and service delivery especially related to water.

TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 4:

Strengthen quality education in the public education sector and facilitate access to ICT and stronger parental participation

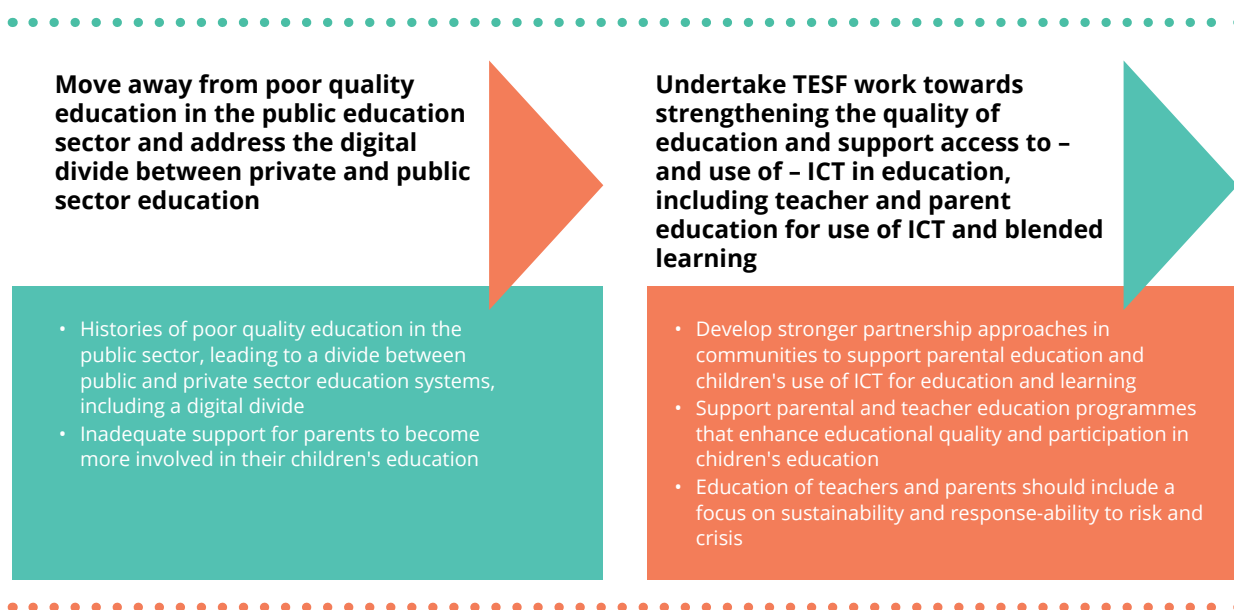


Figure 10: TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 4: Strengthen quality education in the public education sector and facilitate access to ICTs and stronger parental participation

The fourth TESF transformative praxis pathway (Figure 10) focusses on the need to strengthen quality education in the public sector to address the current divide between public and private education. As reported across this report, one of the most obvious divides between public and private education is equitable access to – and use of – ICT in education. This particularly affected children from poorer households and in rural areas where access to – and use of – ICT for online learning was limited. Addressing the current divide will require setting systems in place for providing free Internet services and better supply of – and access to – ICT devices and tools. It also involves providing support for teachers to design and develop online learning

approaches. The study also showed that multiple approaches to online learning are required as not all children can easily access Internet services or support. The high cost of data also affected many families. Improving education quality also requires investing more in parental education and support and their involvement in the education of their children. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many parents to become more involved in the education of their children, but this was not possible for all parents, many of whom themselves have not had access to education. Therefore community-based approaches to supporting children's education in times of crisis are also needed.

The fourth TESF transformative praxis pathway focusses on the need to strengthen quality education in the public sector to address the current divide between public and private education.

TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 5:

Strengthen interventions that support the inclusion and safety of women and girl children, and youth agency for change

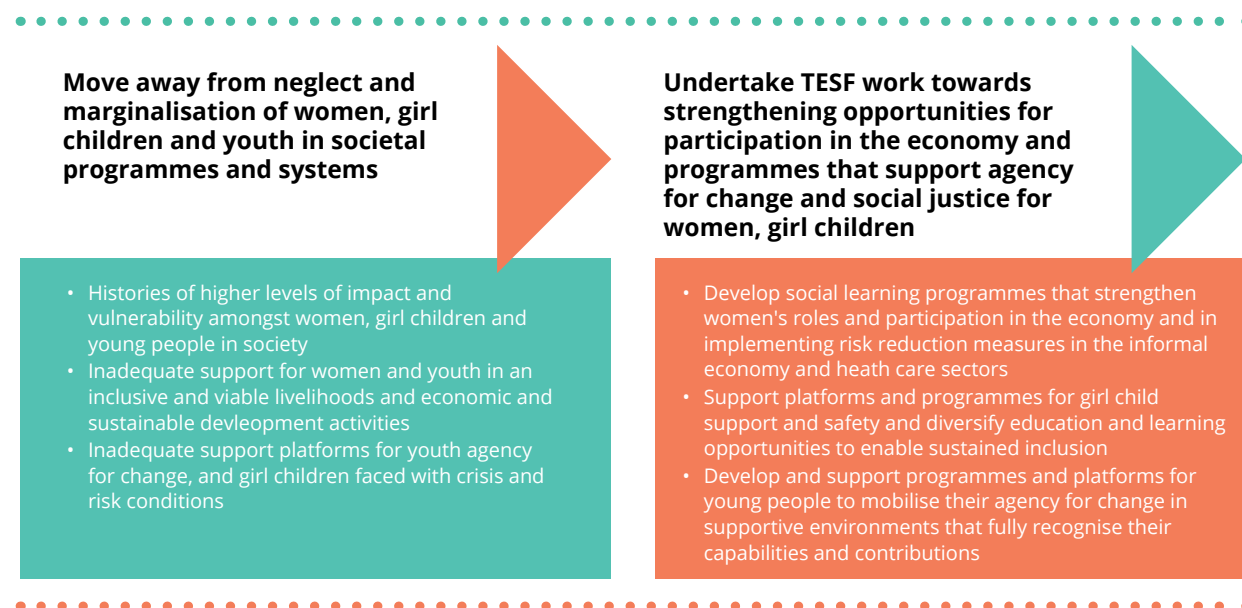


Figure 11: TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 5: Strengthen interventions that support the inclusion and safety of women and girl children, and youth agency for change

The fifth TESF transformative praxis pathway (Figure 11) focusses on the strengthening of interventions that support the inclusion and safety of women and girl children in education and learning for sustainable futures and that validate and create spaces for youth agency for organisation and change. As pointed out across this report, women and girl children emerged as being some of the most vulnerable in society and were also most at risk of losing economic security. They were most impacted upon due to their traditional roles as caregivers in society and in the healthcare sector. Many women are also engaged in the informal economy and were most heavily impacted on by the economic crisis that was precipitated and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is, therefore, the need for TESF programmes to strengthen women's roles and opportunities and their safety and wellbeing in the informal economy and in the healthcare and care professions sectors. Additionally, women were also most impacted on by the additional care responsibilities as children were not able to attend school, and girl children were drawn into additional household responsibilities lessening their ability

to attend to their education. Risk of increased pregnancies and early marriages also affected young women, posing a threat to their longer term participation in education.

The study also pointed to the often 'invisible' role of young people, in that their participation potential in building forward together is not fully recognised or 'seen'. The study showed that they have capacity for imagining alternative futures, and agency for organising, crossing boundaries in their communities and contributing to multileveled and multifaceted forms of awareness-raising and public education. The study also showed that many young people are facing the spectre of permanent unemployment, and there is therefore a need to give attention to programmes and spaces for young people to access resources and platforms that can better support their agency for change. There is a need to give attention to the boundary zones between formal and informal education and new modalities of learning that can be made available to young people, particularly through coalition building and use of ICT.

The fifth TESF transformative praxis pathway focusses on the strengthening of interventions that support the inclusion and safety of women and girl children in education and learning for sustainable futures.

TESF Transformative Praxis Pathway 6:

Strengthen multisectoral and multidisciplinary policy interventions to strengthen sustainable development of society at all levels

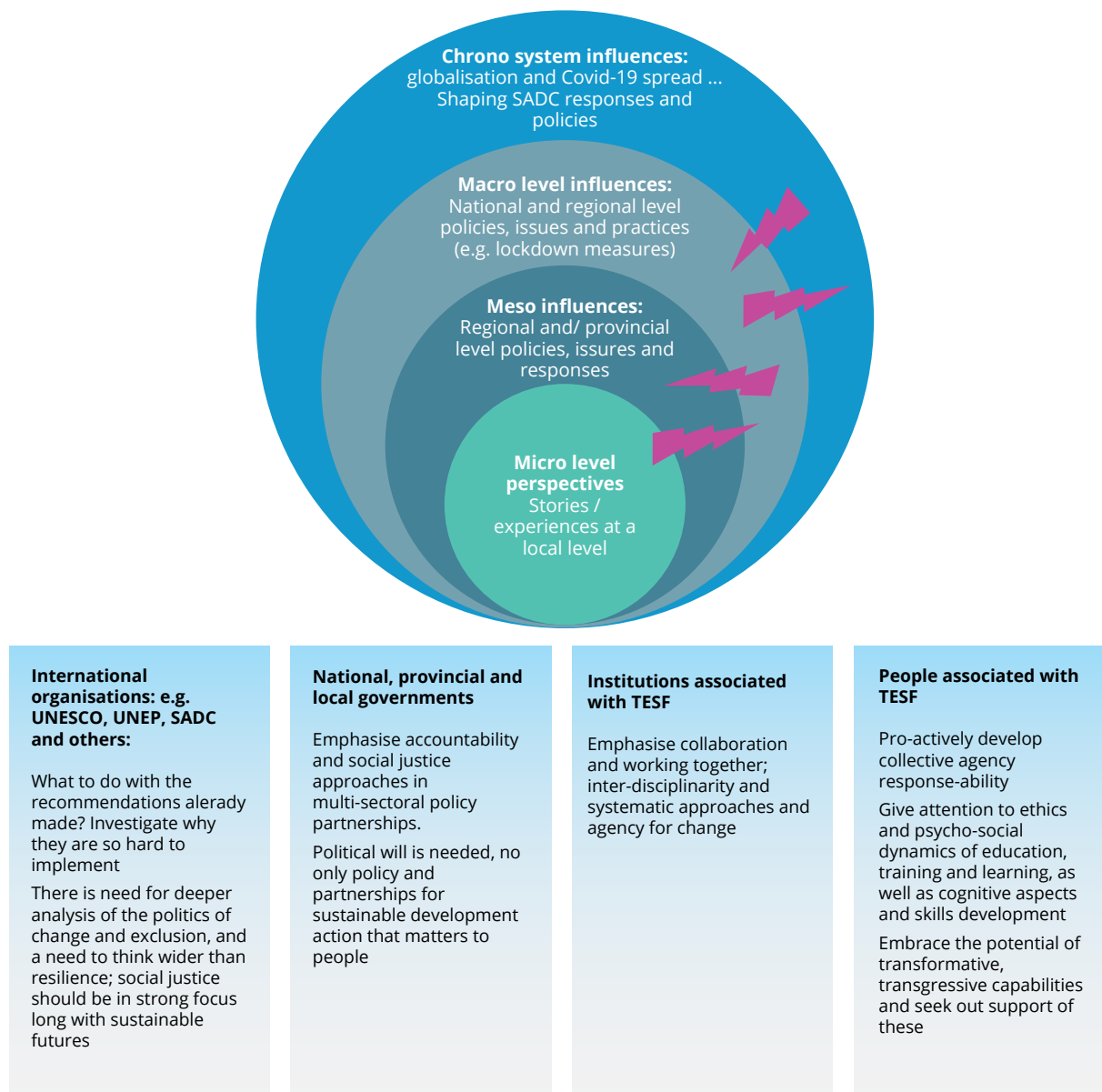


Figure 12: Multi-level recommendations for policy making and interventions at different levels of the system

(The 'red' jagged icons indicate leverage points that represent opportunities for transformative change.)

Policy development processes for ESD, and thus also TEF work going forward, need to be multisectoral and multidisciplinary (SADC REEP, 2006), as has also been strongly revealed across this report. Such policy development processes require that the range of stakeholders include – but not be limited to – education sector actors, water, food and livelihood development actors, gender activists and other actors concerned with human wellbeing, social justice and

wider concerns such as sustainable development in the SADC region. Co-operative governance and special efforts are needed to ensure policy synergy. As we found across this study, policy disjuncture between water and food systems, or water and education systems, or education and social welfare systems can have extreme adverse effects in times of crisis, and “building forward better”, enabling “just recovery” and moving TEF forward should adopt

multisectoral and joint approaches to policy within a wider social justice and sustainable development framework that is oriented towards addressing historical marginalisation and ensuring equity of opportunity for all.

Our study has shown that issues in education are intersectional, and in order to address the region's education development agenda that seeks to achieve a harmonised education sector in ensuring "sustainability, integration, resource allocation and effective realisation of the objectives of improved access, retention and educational outcomes" (SADC, 2015: 12), there is a need to adopt a multisectoral approach to education and sustainable development.

SADC (2015) also indicates that it aims to help integrate, enhance and promote principles of ethics and care in "teaching and learning, increasing access to quality education and training, and supporting regional integration across the region" (15). As shown across this report, this is a complex process with relationships of many dynamics (i.e. it is not just about policymaking within the education sector, but rather policymaking in synergy with the education and other sectors) that is *at the same time* historical, social, political, cultural and material (i.e. economic and biophysical). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted this need for better intersectoral and joint multilevel policymaking starkly, as has the data shared across this study. For this TEF work transformative praxis pathway, we offer the following recommendations for the multileveled system:

The diagram above indicates some of the leverage points that were identified for transformative change at the different levels of the system.

- **At international and regional levels**, it was noted that there are already many documents and agreements with recommendations to governments. However, it was also noted that it appears very difficult to have these recommendations implemented. This points to the need to investigate why they are so hard to implement, despite the good intentions and the many deliberations and forums that are associated with developing and signing up for the recommendations. TEF work, at this level, could focus on developing a deeper understanding of the politics of change and exclusion, and how it is enabling/constraining advances towards transforming education for sustainable futures at transboundary levels. It was also noted that the international tendency in disaster risk reduction discourse (e.g. climate change discourse) is to rely on the concept of

resilience as a core concept to shape responses. Researchers in this study felt, however, that stronger concepts such as social justice and sustainable futures building should be used to avoid a conservative response associated with resilience discourse. Additionally, as indicated at the start of this report, a "build forward better" discourse is needed in place of "build back better" discourse. This needs to be combined with "just recovery" discourse and discourses that embrace transformation and regenerative agency for change. These recommendations are necessary to ensure that transnational policymaking takes full account of the histories of marginalisation and exclusion and the deep structural dynamics of these, as is also recommended in the UNESCO ESD 2030 Agenda intergovernmental agreement (UNESCO, 2019)²¹.

- **At national, provincial and local government levels of the system**, there is a greater need to take seriously and to strongly orient policy initiatives and interventions towards true social justice commitments that emphasise accountability and eliminate corruption. For this to happen, political will oriented towards sustainability and social justice is needed at all levels of the system, and it was recognised that this needs to be developed in society. TEF work could include a focus on education for policy actors, politicians and policymakers with this in mind. Putting people first, especially those most marginalised, lies at the heart of sustainable democracies. This means including the voices of all concerned in decision-making at all levels of the system. More effort needs to go into building a deep understanding of participatory democracy and its implications for sustainable action and sustainable development of society, and TEF work could adopt a focus on these aspects of education, training and social learning.
- **At the level of institutions and organisations associated with TEF work** (e.g. NGOs, education institutions, civil society groups, social movements and those working on development of e-learning programmes), there is the need to develop approaches that can strengthen relationship building across multiple actors in society. These approaches should be oriented towards facilitating co-learning, partnership building, inclusion of people's voices, and agency for change at all levels of the system. Institutions and organisations associated with TEF work are potentially important mediators

21 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370215>

of change in and across a diversity of settings. Interagency co-operation, multisectoral co-operation and new partnerships between civil society, economic partners, the environmental, water and food sectors, the education sector, and the governance sector can be facilitated in and through TESF work, based on principles of social justice, sustainability and solidarity with the most marginalised and excluded members of society and with current and future generations. As indicated in the report, young people's movements have potential to be strong actors in this work, given the space for showing up and stepping into their power to take up strong roles in this work.

- **At the level of individual people or community groups associated with TESF**, there is the need for all to “step into their power” to take up agency for change and their response-ability. The potential for this was shown across the report when parents, teachers, healthcare workers, farmers, young people, government officials “stepped up” to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis situation and exercised their agency for change, helping children, sick members of society and others to cope with the situation, and being part of reimagining a different future for all. As indicated in this report, our agency for change should include: technical solutions (e.g. putting in water tanks), ethics (e.g. calling out corruption, or showing care for others), psychosocial dynamics of learning, (e.g. helping each other to work through marginalisation, anxiety, oppression

and stress) and cognitive aspects (e.g. learning new approaches and solutions). The report also pointed to the need to respect – and give space for – each other's roles in societies and our diverse knowledge (including our traditional and indigenous knowledge) in “building forward better” and together within a “just recovery” and regenerative and transformative orientation. Ultimately all SADC citizens will need to be willing to continue to embrace transformative and transgressive capabilities to move out of the histories of oppression and marginalisation that still plague too many people in our region. The SADC community has a history of such capability as expressed in and through the long struggle for political freedom. Now the challenge is to achieve equity, social justice, and sustainable futures for all.

As pointed out at the beginning of this report, such a focus in TESF work can help to make regional and local sense of SDG 4.7 and give meaning to ESD under the ESD Agenda 2030 programme²² intended to guide ESD across the world. This report has provided a contemporary contextual vantage point on what this means in a southern African context at this time in our history, which has been characterised by the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bearing in mind that this context has deep roots in unjust paradigms and approaches to economic praxis, the consideration of more socially just, sustainable futures can help to shift the outdated discourses and development paradigms that are (re)producing inequality and marginalisation, and that no longer serve the people of the SADC region.

Our study has shown that issues in education are intersectional, and in order to address the region's education development agenda that seeks to achieve a harmonised education sector in ensuring “sustainability, integration, resource allocation and effective realisation of the objectives of improved access, retention and educational outcomes” (SADC, 2015: 12), there is a need to adopt a multisectoral approach to education and sustainable development.

22 UNESCO: https://www.unesco.de/sites/default/files/2018-08/unesco_education_for_sustainable_development_goals.pdf

Conclusion

This report has shed light on the complex systemic relationships that exist when we seek to transform education systems for sustainable futures. It has considered these relationships from a multisectoral policy perspective in the context of ESD conceptualised within a “just recovery”, “build forward better” and regenerative approach to creating a future out of the present and the past. Our intention was to identify what could be learnt for TEFW out of the current COVID-19 pandemic context.

Our report purposefully sought out the qualitative voices of those most affected by the pandemic from a diversity of perspectives and vantage points. We have offered recommendations that can inform a multileveled response and a wider systemic response to the intersecting challenges that were revealed so starkly in ways that also offer clear transformative praxis pathways for TEFW work going forward in the SADC region.

In giving meaning to SDG 4.7, we therefore argue that ESD should not be conceptualised as a technical or pedagogical process, but rather that it should be fully embraced as a **systemic and emancipatory transformation process**, and should

be conceptualised and embraced as such. This, we argue, can give meaning to the SDG target as outlined below, and we would encourage TEFW work in the SADC region to embrace this meaning as we proceed with interpreting this target in our monitoring and evaluation and implementation programmes.



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



... ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

We conclude this report by articulating a transformative direction for ESD in the SADC region, one that embraces a “just recovery”, “build forward better” together and a transformative and regenerative orientation as we begin to move towards a post-COVID-19 future (even though this remains to come in a while).

ESD Transformative Direction: “Just recovery”, “build forward better” together, embrace transformative and regenerative oriented approaches

In doing this, we need to recognise the importance of the role of ESD and TEFW work going forward in:

1. Putting children's learning, health and wellbeing first;
2. Providing informal learning, skills and training programmes for economic relief and directing resources directly to previously marginalised people (women and young people especially), addressing short-term needs *and* longer-term conditions for empowerment, agency for change and transformation
3. Creating opportunities, approaches and policy systems that help to build resilience for future crises in ways that meaningfully power a “just recovery”, catalyse just transitions to a low carbon future, and ensure inclusive sustainable futures,⁴) building new relationships and partnerships for education and social learning based on advancing solidarity and community participation across borders and institutions, in just and democratic ways;
4. Developing education strategies, systems and transformative, transgressive learning approaches that strengthen people's response-ability, agency and capabilities for addressing immediate challenges as well as taking up longer-term opportunities for change and transformation of society;
5. Adopting an intersectional, historically informed, decolonising and futures seeking approach to proposals for “building back better”, “just recovery” and regenerative responses.

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