



International Network of Educational Institutes (INEI)



STATEMENT ON THE GLOBAL CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

July 10, 2020

We, the members of the International Network of Educational Institutes (INEI), are issuing this statement in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic. The mission of INEI is to meaningfully impact education locally and globally by shaping policy decisions, research, and interventions. Consequently, we believe that it is our compelling obligation to reflect upon the new challenges facing us and to contribute to the re-envisioning of educational policies, practices, research, and interventions so they better respond to this crisis and prepare us for a post-pandemic world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to countless personal and social losses. Across the world hundreds of thousands of people have died, and before the pandemic ends, it will claim many more lives. In many places around the world, lockdown measures have been undertaken as a means of preventing the virus from spreading. Many primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities have suspended regular classes and have moved to teaching remotely or, where internet access or technological infrastructure are lacking, not teaching at all, and in many regions economic activity has dropped to critically low levels. These changes to modes of communication, teaching and learning, and social and economic interaction, challenge our natural sociability as human beings and exacerbate existing educational and economic inequalities in our societies. In these circumstances, it is crucial that we commit ourselves to a set of concerted actions for the post-pandemic landscape, especially in terms of what education can do. It is imperative that INEI provides a perspective on the pandemic and the post-pandemic challenges from the vantage point of leading international institutions in higher education involved with the work of teacher education and education research.

The pandemic has forced a majority of educators globally to shift to remote teaching, which is likely to continue for some time. Access to alternative modalities for teaching and learning is deeply unequal and is likely to reverse some of the gains that have been made to increase quality of, and participation in, education. This momentous shift has the potential to enlarge the scope for privatization and marketization in public education where an emphasis may be placed on commercial or technological expertise and interests rather than educational expertise and interests. As university-based specialists in education whose work draws on and is premised on the development of the best available theories and research, we stress that educational expertise is key to ensuring that the gains made in education prior to the pandemic are not lost, but survive to be built upon in the future.

Education is more necessary than ever in pandemic times, not only because our physical and social wellbeing relies on a comprehensive understanding of our situation, but because the post-pandemic world is bound to be one in which the education of present and future generations will need to be enacted differently. **Therefore, we wish to reiterate the utmost aim of education, which is to nurture and support individuals and groups in the development of their social, physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing through processes of inclusive and responsive teaching and learning. We also commit ourselves, as educators, to undertaking the necessary intellectual and practical research work that must continue for the purposes of knowledge production and human development in a post-pandemic world.**

These pandemic and post-pandemic challenges call for the forging of a new social contract between society and the natural world, and between the state and civil society, in order to prioritize the collective economic, environmental, and social wellbeing of people and affirm the vision of education as a public good. Education empowers individuals and groups to take meaningful and informed action and plays a critical role in this new social contract. Education is the foundation to enhancing people's lives, and it is essential to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially SDG 4, which pledges inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. As educators who are tasked with preparing present and future generations to become members of societies in an interconnected world, we call upon policy makers and leaders to focus on the building of ecologically-sustainable, socially-inclusive, and maximally-cooperative societies.

Based on the premise that everyone in the world has the right to life, education, and equality of opportunity, we believe that the COVID-19 pandemic calls for new ways of meeting the collective challenges that we face. Tackling the enormous disparities that exist within regions and across the world is imperative. As INEI is rooted in the principles of collaboration, inclusion, and innovation, this statement restates our ethical commitment towards a more sustainable, just, equitable, inclusive, healthy, and collaborative post-pandemic world. Although social realities and local demands diverge considerably across regions, and personal life conditions have been altered in different ways, never has the role of education been more crucial. Education should be supported and developed to mitigate the unequal impacts of COVID-19 across populations, in particular on those disadvantaged and vulnerable groups most adversely affected. At this critical time, we wish to issue a united call for all policy makers, higher education institutions, and interested parties to collaborate and connect and, in so doing, bring together our common interests in forging a new and positive means of meeting this crisis and creating a better future for all.

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