Best practices and recommendations for digital inclusion through resilient infrastructure

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Making Higher Education Truly Inclusive

- Theme: Digital Inclusion – Education
- Presenter: Michael P. Cañares, Step Up Consulting

Presentation Outline

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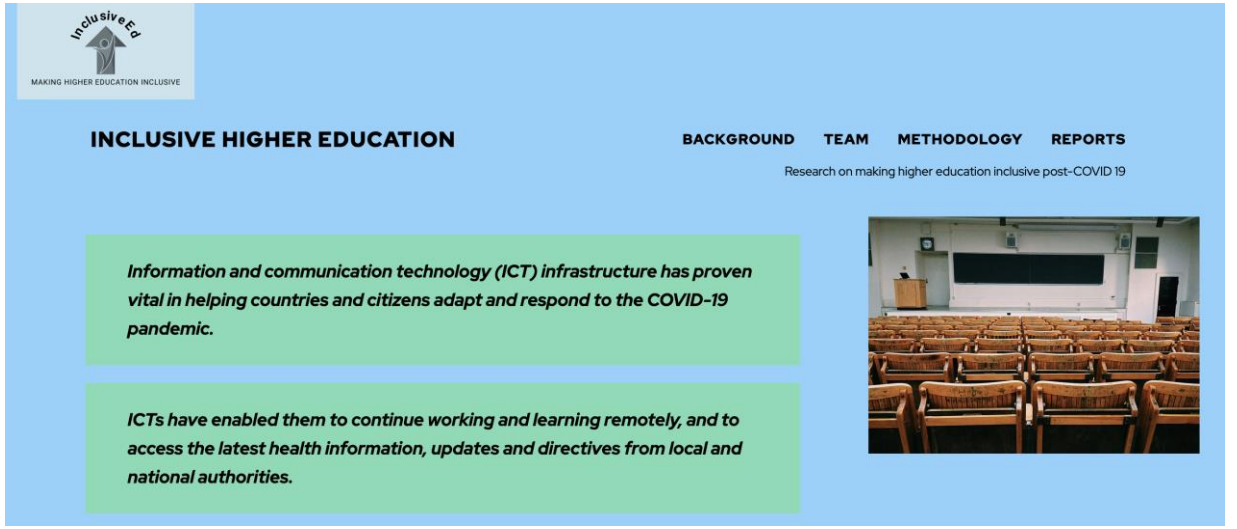

https://inclusive-higher-ed.com/

Research team

- Michael Cañares, Step Up Consulting

- François van Schalkwyk, Stellenbosch University

Introduction

- Developing countries worldwide were forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to resort to technology-enabled delivery of higher education. While ICTs have enabled teachers and students to continue working and learning remotely, it nevertheless exacerbated pre-pandemic inequality, where those with access to internet and devices could adapt more productively compared with others.
- This paper covers three specific topics related to the issue of the relationship between the reliance in higher education on ICTs during the COVID-19 pandemic and the immediate and possible longer-term effect on social inclusion in higher education.

Research methodology

The research adopted a case study approach. Case studies have the greatest potential to reveal the socio-technical complexities at play in creating inclusive networked systems. Case studies are also easily replicated across multiple contexts to build a context-sensitive knowledge base.

Three countries –

- the Philippines and South Africa –they present relevant cases in terms of countries dealing with the challenges of growing inequality combined with expectations for their higher education institutions to contribute to national development.
- Australia was selected because it presents a more developed and less unequal society as a reference point,

Research findings and outcomes

South Africa

- Neither technology nor open resources necessarily lead to the anticipated democratisation effects. In highly unequal societies an increase in the uptake of technology and open resources is more likely to exacerbate existing inequalities
- The pandemic has made the invisible visible – historical, geospatial, and economic inequalities

Philippines

- well-resourced, well-connected, and strategically-located actors were more able to transition to new modes of education delivery
- Education policies in the country have not considered capacity differences, leaving actors to respond and cope on their own.

Australia

- perilous position of international students stranded in Australia due to the international travel ban– government response seen as unsympathetic
- how Australian universities will reinvent themselves in response to a decline in international students, including the pivot to online and hybrid modes of teaching to maintain (or possibly increase) delivery to remotely-located international students

Recommendations

ICT Infrastructure and Access	• In a context where access to technology, not only to the internet but also to devices, governments should strengthen broadband infrastructure, on the one hand, and access to learning devices, on the other.
Learning Pedagogy	• There is a need to formulate policies and programmes that transition teaching, learning and assessment from a highly collectivised and traditional system to one that allows individual learning journeys aided by technology
Teaching Competencies	• The competency framework for higher education teachers should include using digital technology to design, deliver, and assess teaching and learning outcomes.
Targeted Education Support	• Higher education policies and programmes should provide targeted education support to institutional providers, teachers, and students based on income and/or deprivation levels to transition towards better use of technology in education.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the rapid deployment of technology by various stakeholders is possible. Theoretically, the availability of technologies to a broader segment of the population should result in greater inclusion. However, the evidence provided in this report shows that without the capabilities – many of which are non-material and do not relate to technical skills or access alone – and without an acknowledgement of the social dynamics of systems and networks, parts of the population will always remain excluded.

We have taken a step towards making more explicit the actual conditions and their effects on specific segments of the higher education student populations in South Africa, the Philippines and Australia. By providing an account of how the responses of governments, institutions and the private sector impacted on students with limited resources or abilities, this report has shown the limitations of an overreliance on ICTs for education purposes. As such, it should contribute to a reassessment of common-sense solutions that may entrench rather than address the exclusion of marginalised communities from access to higher education.

It is hoped that further research will address the limitations of case studies analyses without losing sight of the contextual conditions which shape the outcomes of a greater reliance on ICTs for the delivery of higher education.