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**Section 1: Challenges and barriers that girls have been facing in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**

**The COVID-19 pandemic is considered to be the greatest existential threat impacting society on a global scale since the 1918 Spanish flu outbreak. COVID-19, without question, has insidiously wreaked havoc on individuals’ lives from all sectors, such as the economy and employment. In this report, I will be discussing the education system on a global scale and its subsequent ramifications on girls’ overall well-being and holistic development.**

**According to UNICEF, UNESCO, and other United Nations entities, school closures impacted about 1.6 billion school-age children, and of those 1.6 billion students, 1 billion of these affected students were heavily concentrated in low-income and middle-income countries. As a result of schools being closed, educators had to quickly pivot to online teaching. COVID-19 has laid bare the wide gaping inequities in global education. One example of a disparity that manifested from the pandemic was the unequal lack of access to electricity and connectivity to remote learning tools on a consistent basis. Another prime example of an inequity that stemmed from COVID-19 was the limited availability of online/remote education tools for children living in low and middle-income countries. A digital divide phenomenon is a new dimension of inequity that has been at the forefront throughout the pandemic. Students in high-income nations, such as the United States, were readily able to readily access online/remote learning tools at their disposal to maintain the integrity of their education.**

**Prior to the pandemic, school accessibility worldwide was out of reach for many children worldwide, namely in low and middle-income countries. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region alone, the out-of-school rate for female students varied among countries within the area. The Bahamas, Puerto Rico, and Honduras are the top three countries with the greatest number of girls out of school at the primary level, with the Bahamas being the highest contender of the most females out of school at the primary level (22.7%) or approximately 23%. In contrast, the LAC country with the lowest out of school rate for female students at the primary level was Belize at about 1.20% or approximately 1%. Honduras has the highest out-of-school rate of females out of school at the lower secondary level at 37.1% or about 38%. The other top two countries with the largest number of girls out of school at the lower secondary rate are Guatemala and the Bahamas, which comprise 32.8(33%) and 29.5(30%), respectively.**

**Conversely, Dominica has the lowest out-of-school rate of females out of school at the lower secondary level at 1.03% or 1%. Guatemala has the highest out-of-school rate of females out of school at the upper secondary level at 61.3% or 62%. The other top two countries with the highest out-of-school rate of females out of school at the upper secondary level are Honduras and Panama, which consists of 49.5, or 50% and 41.3, or 42%, respectively. In contrast, Barbados had the lowest out-of-school rate of females out of school at the upper secondary level at 0.91% or 0%.**

**Overall, The West and Central Africa region boasts a considerable out-of-school rate of females at the primary school level. Equatorial Guinea has the highest out-of-school rate of females at 54.8% or 55% at the primary level; Sierra Leone has the lowest out-of-school rate of females at 1.54% or 1% at the primary level. Cote d’Ivoire, Mali, Guinea, the Central African Republic, Niger, and Chad collectively have the highest out-of-school rate of female students at the lower secondary level, out of school at 50.5(50%), 56.3(57%), 59.8(60%), 66.4(67%), 69.1(70%), and 70.1(70%), respectively. Cameroon, Senegal, Mauritania, Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Chad, Niger, and Central African Republic, as a whole, have the highest out-of-school rate of female students, at the upper secondary level, respectively.**

**East Asia and the Pacific region, collectively, had fairly low rates of girls out of school at the primary school level; the Marshall Islands has the highest rate of girls out of school at 22.6% or 23%; on the other hand, Fiji had the lowest out of school rate of girls out of school at the primary level at just 1%. Tuvalu, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, and Marshall Islands all ranked high with the highest rate of girls out of school at the lower secondary level at 22.9(23%). 25.5(26%), and 31.7(32%), consecutively. Papua New Guinea, Nauru, and Tokelau together have the highest rates of girls out of school at the upper secondary level at 51.4(52%), 60.1(60%), and 78.6(79%).**

**South Asia, broadly speaking, has varying levels of girls out of school at the primary level. Pakistan has the highest out of school rate of female students out of school at 31.3(32%), whereas India has a rate of only just 1% of girls out of school at the primary school level. At the lower secondary level, Pakistan continues to rank high at the largest amount of girl students out of school, which is 32.2(33%); there is no huge significance between both out-of-school rates of the respective school levels. Bangladesh ranks at number two with the biggest rate of girls out of school, which is 25.7(26%) at the lower secondary level. The top three South Asian countries with the largest number of girls out of school are Afghanistan (69%), Pakistan (57%), and India (49%), consecutively.**

**All regions share various commonalities in terms of the various challenges and barriers that students, namely girls, have been enduring in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, school-age children missed approximately four months during 2020. Students missed about 66% of a regular school year. In total, about 500 million children from all of the grade levels ranging from pre-primary to upper-secondary school had little to no access to remote learning platforms. Astoundingly, 75% of these students come from poverty-laden households and rural communities. Females, heavily concentrated in rural, poor households were burdened by excessive amounts of domestic work.**

**The second kind of challenge that primarily impacted female students were participating in remote/online education on a regular, consistent basis attributable to a myriad of sociocultural factors, such as unequal access to digital learning platforms, gender norms embedded in patriarchy that unduly impedes their innate right to access and utilize technology to continue their education at all levels of schooling. In general, girls are the most susceptible to encounter many potential risks, such as child marriage, unintended teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, and so forth due to their gender and harmful gender stereotypes.**

Section 2: Concrete measures countries have implemented to eradicate challenges endured by girls

**Overall, countries have taken the great initiative of employing multi-modal learning modalities with dexterity and promptness, primarily low-income and middle-income. Educators in high-income countries were fortunate to automatically pivot to digital learning platforms, although the decision to shut down schools was so unexpected and unprecedented. A few strengths emerged from government officials’ utilization of multi-modal learning methods (low-tech and no-tech), such as television and radio. One positive strongpoint was the consideration undertaken to widely reach more children. A second highlight that had emerged from the implementation process was the acknowledgement and assistance provided to educators for a smooth transition to teach pupils remotely.**

**On the contrary, the multi-modal pedagogical approach presented a few drawbacks. One setback that emerged from this practice was the paucity of resources and opportunities for teachers to acquire fundamental knowledge on pedagogical best teaching practices to effectively and meaningfully facilitate learning with students remotely. A second setback stemming from the usage of the multi-modal learning approach was the scant attention that government leaders devoted to gender equity and to children from marginalized groups, such as teenage and expecting mothers.**

**An example of a concrete measure undertaken by a governmental entity is Ghana’s design and implementation of their COVID-19 Coordinated Education Response Plan incorporates specifically tailored gendered parlance to strongly emphasize girls’ access to education at all levels. Rwanda is another example of a country that had taken the liberty of incorporating gendered terminology in their respective COVID-19 Recovery Response Plan to take into consideration the intersectional dimensions, e.g., migration status, socioeconomic status, etc. that forms girls’ identities.**

**The second example of a concrete measure that was geared toward improving accessibility to education is the *Accessible Reading Materials initiative*, established back in 2014 by Bangladesh. The central objective of this initiative is the provision of literature in varying formats to assist students with disabilities. Another important aim of this initiative is the distributing supplemental learning assistive technological tools, such as laptops to ensure educational equity among children with disabilities.**

**The third example of a concrete measure that ensured continued access to education geared toward girls was the *Somalia Girls’ Education Promotion Program-Transition (SOMGET-T*). During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, students were given printed learning resources(no-tech) and assistance with tackling mental health issues that have been exacerbated during the pandemic. The SOMGET-T program utilizes an inter-disciplinary collaborative approach to address non-academic challenges, such as mental health issues, violence, and other miscellaneous child protection problems.**