



## G20 Interfaith Forum High-Level Dialogue on Youth-Proposed Education Policy Brief Held on Zoom on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2021

### Brief Report

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The G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20) offers an annual platform for religious, faith and interfaith organisations communities to constructively engage with the agendas set by the G20 leaders. For 2021, the G20's agenda focuses on **People Planet Prosperity**, and the IF20 dedicates its reflection and dialogue on the theme of **A Time to Heal**.

#### Global Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in worldwide educational systems. In particular, during the mass school closures, and the attempted shifts to hybrid modes of learning, significant inadequacies and drastic global disparities in students' access to quality education have been brought to light. Alongside these concerns is recognition of sufferings (material, physical, social-emotional, mental, spiritual) endured by children and young people throughout the lockdowns and a striking gap in the provisions of online learning facilities and resources between higher and lower income countries. All these have further aggravated an existing epidemic of youth ill-being, not least amongst those who are already at the margins.

#### IF20 Global Listening Initiative 2021

To understand how education can contribute to the above challenges, the IF20 Education Working Group partners launched a **Global Listening Initiative (GLI)**. The aim of the **GLI** was two-fold: (1) to ground policy inquiry in existing global proposals, (2) to understand the lived experiences of children and young people in diverse contexts and engage them in identifying actions for educational transformation.

The **GLI** consisted in two parts: an extended Desk Review to *listen to* the widespread calls to action from diverse international organisations, global educational commissions, religious communities, grassroots movement and scholars; and a global consultation to listen to young people and engage with their perspectives. Over two thousand adolescents (aged 14-19) from 26 countries across five continents took part in online and/or in-person workshops hosted by NGOs, schools, and faith-based organisations. Adolescents from diverse backgrounds were invited to reflect on their experiences of life and education during the Covid-19 pandemic; identify who and what have been most supportive to their learning and well-being; and propose educational policy priorities that can explicitly support their healing, learning and flourishing. Participants' insights were drawn out through a deep listening and dialogic process, and immersive data analysis, bringing together themes arising from structured and unstructured facilitators' and youth's reports, images, drawings, and quotes from participants. Both processes have yielded rich understandings of the potentials to work purposefully through education programmes as ways to advocate for and advance equity, inclusion, and well-being. Conceptions of healing and well-being rooted in faith, indigenous and other spiritual traditions played an important part in guiding the **GLI**'s reflection.

#### IF20 Education Policy Brief and Priorities Proposed by Global Adolescents

In the light of policy priorities outlined by G20 leaders, and the emergent insights from the **GLI** processes, the IF20 Education Working Group partners support five key interconnected recommendations to address global challenges:

1. **Safeguard healing and well-being as a cornerstone of education**
2. **Engage youth in educational decision-making**
3. **Ensure equitable and consistent access to quality education for all**
4. **Embed global and ecological concerns in curricula agenda**
5. **Prioritise teachers' well-being and their capacities to facilitate blended learning**

#### IF20 High-Level Dialogue on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2021

On 28<sup>th</sup> September, an IF20 high-level dialogue took place on Zoom, chaired by the IF20 Vice President, Professor Katherine Marshall. National politicians, interfaith leaders and international educational directors drew on their expertise and experiences and explored how these priorities and proposed action might be meaningfully integrated in relevant contexts. Most importantly, selected young people who took part in the Global Listening Initiative joined global leaders and shared their voices and their rationales for such policy priorities and subsequent action. This was regarded as a unique opportunity for global leaders to engage directly with young people in co-imagining and co-creating educational ecosystems that nurture both human well-being and the well-ness of nature.

#### Key Reflections from High-Level Leaders

All leaders who were present at the dialogue expressed their appreciation for the young people's efforts, and fully endorsed the educational policy priorities emergent through the IF20 **Global Listening Initiative**. It was recognised that the more foreboding our plenary emergencies, the more complex our global challenges, the greater the need for dialogue, listening, love, care and human fraternity. IF20 Educational Working Group partners cherished many ideas, advice and guidance provided by the global leaders. Pertinent to the young people's interests include:

## Healing and well-being through spirituality and education

Judge Mohammad Abdulsalam (Secretary General, High Committee for Human Fraternity) evokes the imperative of healing the past wounds and well-being through spirituality and education. The significance of spirituality through interreligious and interfaith learning in enabling the flowering of every child's full potential is equally highlighted by Prof Anantanand Rambachan (Co-President, Religious for Peace). The spiritual vision of education is further echoed in Argentina National Deputy Victoria Morales Gorleri's and Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh's (Chairman of Nishkam Group of Charity Organisations) reflection on humanity's oneness and the role of spirituality in education in enriching and nourishing human fraternity and solidarity as the basis to confronting global challenges and ensure co-flourishing of all. Lord John Alderdice (UK House of Lords) draws on Shruthi's (18, India) words about younger generations as the bearers of humanity's dreams, and proposes that faith communities have a key part to play in supporting all children and youth. He also adds that this requires people of faith to listen deeply and learn to appreciate the gifts we bring to each other. Professor Italo Fiorin's (Senior Advisor, Catholic Congregation of Education of the Holy See /Advisor, Italy National Ministry of Education) resonates with this wisdom of deep listening and shares the three key aspirations that His Holiness Pope Francis advocates through the University of Meaning: to listen, to create and to celebrate. Like Lord Alderdice, Professor Fiorin stresses that deep listening leads us to the pathways of mutual bonding, the discovery of life's meanings, and the offering of the gifts of life to one another.

## Innovative approaches to healing, well-being and educational transformation

Dr Pilvi Torsti (Finland State Secretary) encourages more attention to be paid to students' engaging in co-curricular service programme as a way to connect learning with lives in the communities and empower young people to take responsibilities for a better world. Ms Mary Kangethe (Director, Kenya National Commission for UNESCO) emphasises that education must be relevant to the challenges confronting our local and global communities, such as SDGs, and climate change, through project-based learning, and teacher leadership. João Costa (Portugal Deputy Minister of Education) suggests that nurturing key competencies, building inclusive learning environments, and promoting citizenship education be key focus. Ella (18, UK) points to the need for self-inquiry to cultivate our unfolding self and regards inner journey of self-discovery to be interdependent to learning to live and contribute to a life of co-flourishing. Raihana (14, Indonesia) reminds us of the critical importance of hybrid approaches to cultivating listening, empathy, collaboration and dialogue, termed as 'soft' and social emotional skills. Alun (14, Indonesia) adds that integrating ethical ways of learning, being and acting are central to students' learning and holistic well-being.

## Global ecosystem for education

Dr Dominic Richardson (Chief, Social and Economic Policy, UNICEF Innocenti Centre) urges us to review and renew educational assessment/evaluation, curricula contents, teachers' professional development, and community engagement so as to instil spiritually inspired global ecosystem for education, supported by research. Developing and monitoring a global exchange platform that keeps track of worldwide innovative practices. Ahmed Aljarwan (President, Global Council for Tolerance and Peace) advocates teachers professional development spaces for mutual learning. Young people point out that youth leadership capacities must be at the core of global transformation. Leadership should be rooted in a spiritual vision, nurtured by interreligious and interfaith education and dialogue.

## The power of deep listening and dialogue

Both high-level leaders and the young people present at the dialogue were profoundly inspired by the power of deep listening and deep dialogue. They suggest that it allows us to dwell in where human spirits reside, within us, in our encounters with others, and in our being-with each other, and with all things in nature, and the transcendent. Young people feel that deep listening from high-level leaders provides them with an experience of being valued, cared, 'received', accepted. Deep dialogue helps open ourselves to difference, e.g. faith, power, class, and age difference, and enables us to share life experiences, concerns and aspirations. Together, deep listening and dialogue contribute to healing past wounds, and the emergence of a co-creative, co-constructive, relational present and future.

Ella (18, UK) says: *"I want to leave with a paradigm of hope. This dialogue affirms the oneness of our being, as in Ubuntu and the mantra 'soham', and that we are because of each other, including our non-human friends, and our structures. We create and we have the power to change through this awareness of our oneness, love and peace."*

Roy (16, Lebanon) says: *"After everything we have been through in Lebanon, everyone nearly lost hope in education... However, this dialogue has restored my faith and showed that global leaders do care about children and young people, and are willing to work together and support a better education for us and for future generations."*

Sushmitha (18, India) says: *"I am thankful for you all, creating such safe space for us and listening to us. My hope is that we don't go back to pre-pandemic ways of education. The only justice is to build forward differently, ensure that this new education system as we have imagined together will empower young people to thrive collectively."*

## Conclusions

This high-level dialogue has helped consolidate the IF20 Education Working Group partners' commitments to two major global initiatives: (1) Supporting teachers' learning and professional development; (2) Nurturing youth leadership and transformative competencies. Both high-level leaders and young people in this dialogue have stressed that both are spiritual endeavours and require active engagement of global religious and faith communities.