



UNESCO



United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
Organization

Middle School General Assembly

Background Guide

Virginia Invitational

V I M  N C

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VIMUNC XII



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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the twelfth annual Virginia Invitational Model United Nations Conference. As the MUN year winds down, we hope to provide the best experience yet, with paramount service and attention to detail that creates the greatest conference. From ancient civilizations and mythological conflict to broad UN organizations and regional bodies, this year's VIMUNC features committees that truly serve every interest. With experienced chairs, czars and staff, we will ensure that every delegate truly has a positive experience, and we simply hope that you can enjoy your experience with us.

VIMUNC's 22 committees and over 1100 delegates is the largest edition of our conference ever, and we look forward to expanding our outreach across Virginia to continue to provide a wonderful experience for all delegates. With a large MUN team that has years of experience and accolades, we hope that every ounce of effort we put in this year's conference is met with every single minute of the committee being filled with substantive and invigorating debate that will create learning experiences that last for years to come.

It has been the absolute dream of my time in high school to lead my club to this very day, and so much hard work has been put into every single crisis update, background guide and dossier. We sincerely hope that the work and care placed in every single aspect of this conference is displayed in its highest quality. If at any time you feel something about the conference is unsatisfactory, please don't hesitate to talk to your chairs, a staffer, or a member of the Secretariat. So whether it be solving 'unsolvable' letters from the Zodiac killer himself, casting spells to make your presence known in one of our 3 Harry Potter JCCs, or handling the tricky maneuvers of Space Pirates, I know deep in my heart that we're ready for VIMUNC XII. Now, the question becomes: Are you?

Thank you so much for your commitment to VIMUNC XII, and best of luck in your committee, future conferences, and ambitions.

Sincerely,

Matt Tam

Secretary-General, VIMUNC XII

UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

TOPIC A: *Increasing Access to Quality Education in Rural Areas*

TOPIC B: *Addressing the Digital Divide in Education (esp in LDCs)*

Overview of the Body

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), founded in 1945, is a general assembly of the United Nations dedicated to the establishment of proper and equitable education, acceptance and celebration of various cultures, and overall exchange of ideas and information including the sciences between countries.

After the CAME (Conference of Allied Ministers of Education) in 1942, a UN conference was held in November of 1945 in the aftermath of WWII. Countries' educational structures remained broken, museums and libraries destroyed, and heightened levels of anti-semitism and racism remained. As a result, UNESCO was founded to mitigate these problems as a group promoting "peace" and "morals" in human society.

Since its establishment, UNESCO led the creation of the Universal Copyright Convention and the European Organization for Nuclear Research in the 1950s, which remains a landmark scientific research center. In 1960, they funded the effort of preserving Nubian monuments, and in 1970, they supported the culmination of a World Heritage List of areas in need of government guardianship. In recent years, they have founded the Global Education Coalition in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the Greening Education Partnership focused on education in climate change in 2023.

UNESCO can help address and solve viable education access in rural areas and educational technology resources through its values in education and systemic connections to a multitude of UN states. Through UNESCO, it's imperative that states shall be able to conjunct and establish policies to not only construct a framework but spread awareness to modern society.

TOPIC A: Increasing Access to Quality Education in Rural Areas

Topic Background

Quality education remains one of the most vital components in almost all aspects of life. Proper education provides various opportunities that enable children and people to build stable lives, communicate with others, and most importantly, create an identity for themselves as an active citizen in society.. Unfortunately, most rural areas are home to impoverished and indigenous communities that have jobs that do not pertain as much to education compared to neighboring wealthier populations that have higher demand for education. Therefore, distribution of countries' educational resources are not equal and are expended more on rich, urban zones.. This leaves rural areas with insufficient educational devices, services, and an overall learning experience. In such rural populations, access to learning can prevent both domestic and international problems including poverty and greater gender inequality. Teachers in rural areas are devoid of proper training, which can lead to students not receiving the utmost educational validity and treatment. Unfortunately, the employment of equipped teachers in rural areas is painfully small. Moreover, many rural students are more susceptible to dropping out. This may be due to lack of cultural connection with the learning material or the material being taught in a foreign language, leading to disinterest in schooling, or discrimination, racism, or verbal abuse from peers.

As a result, children in lower-income countries, which is made up of certain rural areas, have greater learning setbacks including lower reading comprehension and math scores. According to the World Bank, in 2023, the number of children that were unable to understand primary school books was over 90%.

Specifically after the COVID-19 pandemic, all countries saw a setback in education, especially lower-income and developing countries, which includes some of these rural areas. Not even 50% of all citizens in 90% of all lower-income countries had access to the internet during the pandemic. Eventually, 1.6 billion students were forced to drop out of school in April of 2020, amounting to an estimated year of global setback in education.

Current Situation

The UN has furthered outlined the need for free and compulsory education with the fourth goal of the 30 Sustainable Development Goals, which stands for “Quality Education”. In relation to the issue of quality education access in rural communities, the fourth goal aims to help rapidly build and refurbish schools for a greater working environment. The supply of properly trained professional teachers as well as prohibiting and disposing of all discriminatory, racist, or offensive teaching against certain groups are other sections under the fourth goal’s agenda.

Possible/Past Solutions

The UN and its affiliates including UNESCO have implemented several facets to increase educational resources in rural areas. Beginning at its creation, the UN has established the undisputed right of “free and compulsory education” in the Universal Declaration of Rights, The

International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Under these concrete rights that apply to students in rural areas, the UN has instituted several acts, especially in recent years. Constructed in 1990 and reaffirmed in the 2000 World Economic Forum, the Education for All goals were created to address the need for equitable, free, and universal education and was further expanded upon in the 2007 Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All Framework. They also drafted the Education for Rural People in 2002 as part of their Millennium Development Goals. With the cooperation of Australian and Indonesian governments, UNICEF spearheaded the development of the Education Programme Initiative for Remote and Remote Areas in Papua and West Papua Provinces from 2015-2019, which resulted in improved quality in teaching and literacy scores. Beginning in 1997, UNESCO has delved into the absence of pre-schooling in rural communities with the 2018-30 Education Sector Plan, which has allowed younger ages to begin schooling as well as more access for girls.

Other countries including Argentina have implemented certain tactics in their respected rural areas. For example, Argentina worked with UNICEF funds and the World Bank to improve primary and secondary rural education through renovating schools and training teachers and administrators in a plan called PROMER II. This led to increases in percentages of students completing all the way to upper secondary education to 74.1% from 63.3%. A widespread problem to reach such rural populations will require a systematic approach addressing the many independent causes at the root of education disadvantages. Foremost, the institution of a database

in domestic and international settings to consult information that can determine the specific needs of rural communities, whether that be renovations, infrastructure, or absence of schooling. This will ensure that these areas are getting targeted attention and that governments refrain from excessive urban influence. Reforms in the educational curriculum in rural classrooms may be necessary to help adapt lessons to the appropriate languages and cultures that rural students can relate to. This relates to promoting safer and positive school environments through a better curriculum to prevent discrimination and/or racism in the classroom. Furthermore, establishing quality, extensive training for all teachers in rural areas and hiring of teachers, offering new benefits and amenities for teachers in the rural workforce.

Through UNESCO, adapting communications and cooperations between other countries' government educational agencies will be critical for the understanding of these steps and provide the necessary funds equally across multiple rural areas.

Questions to Consider

1. What are specific tactics and/or benefits that will be provided to allow the insertion of qualified teachers into rural areas?
2. How will government agencies be able to ensure equity in the quality of education for rural communities in regards to urban populations?
3. How will local governments be able to address extensive travel distances in rural areas for students?

4. How can education systems be structured in order to enable a full thirteen-year experience and allow a seamless transition between primary and secondary education, including pre-primary/preschool schooling?
5. What does your country's specific background may affect rural areas' ability to receive quality education?
6. How might governments be able to monitor the effectiveness of educational agencies and the possible need for certain reforms to allow specialized attention per country?

TOPIC B: Addressing the Digital Divide in Education (esp in LDCs)

Topic Background

Access to quality education is fundamental in shaping the future of individuals and societies. Education serves as a powerful tool for personal empowerment, economic growth, and social cohesion. However, this transformative power is not equally distributed across the globe, especially in low-income countries (LDCs). Rural areas in these nations often face significant challenges in accessing education, which hinders their residents from fully participating in both local and global economies. In many LDCs, educational resources are disproportionately concentrated in urban centers, where wealthier populations and industries demand higher levels

of education. This imbalance results in rural communities being left with inadequate infrastructure, outdated learning materials, and insufficient support services.

In these areas, the digital divide is a prominent barrier to education. While urban centers increasingly rely on technology to enhance learning, many rural regions in LDCs still struggle with limited access to the internet and modern educational tools. The lack of digital devices and connectivity prevents students from engaging in online learning opportunities, further perpetuating the cycle of educational disadvantage. Teachers in these rural schools also face significant challenges, often lacking proper training and resources to deliver quality education. This exacerbates the already existing gaps in educational achievement, leading to lower literacy rates, reduced math scores, and a general decline in academic performance.

The digital divide in education has become even more apparent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. With schools forced to close globally, students in LDCs, particularly those in rural areas, experienced a severe disruption in their learning. In many countries, less than 50% of rural populations had internet access during the pandemic, exacerbating educational disparities. As a result, millions of students were unable to continue their education, contributing to a global setback in learning outcomes, especially for those in lower-income and developing regions. Addressing the digital divide is now more critical than ever, as it holds the key to ensuring that all children, regardless of their geographical location, have the opportunity to access quality education and build a brighter future.

Current Situation

The United Nations has further emphasized the importance of education as a fundamental right through the fourth goal of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is focused on achieving "Quality Education" for all. This goal seeks to address the disparities in education, particularly in rural communities, by promoting inclusive, equitable, and quality education opportunities. A key component of the fourth goal is the commitment to rapidly build and refurbish schools, ensuring that children, especially in rural and underserved areas, have access to a safe and conducive learning environment. This infrastructure development is critical in overcoming the challenges faced by rural communities, where many schools are often outdated, overcrowded, or lack basic amenities.

In addition to improving the physical learning environment, the fourth SDG also emphasizes the importance of a well-trained teaching workforce. The goal stresses the need for properly qualified and professional teachers, as effective teaching is one of the most crucial factors in determining educational outcomes. The UN recognizes that teachers are pivotal in shaping the educational experience, and by investing in teacher training and professional development, particularly in rural areas, the quality of education can be significantly enhanced.

Possible/Past Solutions

The United Nations (UN) and its agencies, such as UNESCO and UNICEF, have long recognized the importance of providing equitable access to education, particularly in rural areas, as a means to combat poverty and promote sustainable development. From its inception, the UN has championed education as a fundamental human right, enshrining the principles of "free and compulsory education" in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and further solidifying

these principles in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These agreements emphasize that all individuals, regardless of their geographical location, have the right to receive an education that empowers them to participate fully in society.

In response to the pressing need for educational reform in rural communities, the UN has initiated a series of strategies aimed at expanding access to education and improving the quality of learning experiences. The Education for All (EFA) goals, established in 1990 and reaffirmed in the 2000 World Economic Forum, sought to address the need for equitable, free, and universal education across all regions. These goals were further developed with the 2007 Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All Framework, which focused on fostering inclusivity and addressing the specific challenges faced by marginalized populations, including rural communities. In 2002, the UN also launched the Education for Rural People initiative as part of the Millennium Development Goals, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to support rural students and educators.

Of the solutions that could close the gap in digital divide in rural education, investment in infrastructure and increase in access to technology is paramount. That means prioritizing the expansion in rural areas, as access to the internet has become one of the core bases of modern education. These public-private partnerships-where the government, in cooperation with a private company, sometimes supported by an international organization, pays to subsidize the costs for students and schools-could make it happen. The other direction in mobile technology could also provide access via smartphones and relatively low-cost data plans to get to learning

resources. Renovating and building schools with the right technological infrastructure could also create an effective learning environment, which would ensure that technology is integrated into education.

The other important solution involves teacher training and community involvement. Teachers in rural areas need training on how to use technology and digital tools to upgrade their teaching methodologies. Professional development programs for teachers in digital literacy, blended learning, and remote education strategies will help them adjust to the changes that have been occurring in education. Besides, the involvement of local communities-parents and community leaders-is very important in supporting education projects. Their involvement could ensure the continuity of educational projects, as ownership and accountability are achieved. In this respect, revival of rural education would no doubt call for strong partnerships among teachers, communities, and the government. It is here that inclusive learning would be effective and possible.

Questions to Consider

1. What innovative strategies can be implemented to improve access to technology and the internet in rural areas where infrastructure is limited?
2. How can governments and international organizations collaborate more effectively to ensure equitable distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas?
3. What are the most cost-effective methods for training teachers in rural communities to ensure they are equipped to provide quality education in both traditional and digital formats?

4. How can we overcome cultural and language barriers in educational content to ensure that it is relevant and accessible to students in diverse rural communities?
5. What role can local communities and parents play in supporting education initiatives, and how can their involvement be encouraged to improve educational outcomes for rural students?
6. In what ways can we ensure that digital learning tools are designed to be inclusive and meet the needs of marginalized groups, including girls, indigenous populations, and students with disabilities?

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