**Introduction**

As many as 1.5 million schools remained closed during 2020 due to the coronavirus lockdown, which saw the study opportunities of 247 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in India damaged, a UNICEF report has found.

The report stated that online education is not an option for many children, as only one in four has access to digital devices and internet connectivity. Pre-COVID-19 crisis, only a quarter of households (24%) in India had access to the internet and there is a large rural-urban and gender divide, the [study says](https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/schools-more-168-million-children-globally-have-been-completely-closed) (UN).

“In India, closure of 1.5 million schools due to the pandemic and lockdowns in 2020 has impacted 247 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary schools. In addition, there are over six million girls and boys who were already out of school even before the COVID-19 crisis began,” - UN

While the Covid-19 pandemic has made online education the buzzword, a recent report by the global education network Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) says that the Indian internet infrastructure is still far from ready to support the shift. Only 24 per cent households have access to the internet, according to a 2019 government survey. In rural India, the numbers are far lower, with only 4 per cent households having access. A 2018 NITI Aayog report revealed that 55,000 villages in India did not have mobile network coverage. A 2017-18 survey by the ministry of rural development found that more than 36 per cent of schools in India operated without electricity. The emphasis on technology-driven education is also alienating many children from the underprivileged sections, preventing them from continuing their studies. Even other stakeholders are struggling. Teachers are not always trained and equipped to transition to online teaching.

**Challenge**

As e-learning becomes the "new normal", the authorities have been taking steps to make digitisation of education accessible and affordable for all. Subsidized Broadband connectivity in gram panchayats is expected to help rural schools provide online education to students who do not have internet access at home. Besides building the digital infrastructure, training has to be given to the teachers to use the system to provide authentic and seamless education to the students. Successful delivery of education is also in question because learning in colleges varies from that in schools. Digital education cannot be applied the same way at every level.

If the Indian education system has to transit to online learning without creating a digital divide, the Centre and state governments must raise the spending on education to at least 6 per cent of GDP. At present, central and state allocations to the sector is less than 3 per cent. Ironically, the education ministry's budget for digital e-learning was slashed to Rs 469 crore in 2020-21-the year Covid struck-from Rs 604 crore the previous year.

In a study conducted where, the income slab of Rs 5,000 to Rs 20,000 per month makes 19.8% of the entries (36 entries) out of which 27.77% of children are not attending the online classes. The major problems faced by 61.11% of this slab are, unavailability of gadgets required for online education for all the children (in case of more than one child), increase in fees charged by the schools plus the high rates of internet connection and the cost of gadgets, poor network connection and difficulty in getting used to the online platform of education.

**Solution provided by VIDYA**

**Summary**

The fundraiser targets to donate 15000 devices towards all VIDYA students who are involved in all schemes in Bangalore, Mumbai, and Delhi to continue their online classes. Our students are hardworking with visions of achievement and social progress. We do not want any student left behind and ensure that they continue education. We want to ensure that our students continue to pursue their dreams unhindered with the same diligence and enthusiasm.

**Challenge**

The emergence of virtual education during the lockdown seems to have further created a ‘class division’ among the rich and the poor, especially those from the economically weaker section (EWS). According to the Delhi government, in private schools about nearly 10 to 15 per cent of students from the EWS do not have access to the digital medium to attend the online classes. But private schools have claimed that 90 to 92 per cent of their students have access to digital platforms, and most students from the EWS managed to attend the classes. While online learning has opened doors to continued education and innovation in teaching for many, students from lower socio-economic strata, like the ones associated with VIDYA, are losing out on the opportunity to learn and grow. 80% of our students cannot attend online classes due to the absence of smartphones. Seldom, the family has only one phone used by the parents, and the students have to wait till they come back home. To administer our online classes and reach out to more students, we have a massive smartphone requirement.

**Solution**

The donation drive will help children and students, who do not have digital resources to get learning opportunities at their homes, with their teachers or volunteers. Apart from this, it will also help in our efforts to overcome the learning deficiencies of all those students who are learning at home through various alternative online mediums. VIDYA plans to provide 15000 devices and ensure seamless education for these students. Funding from the fundraiser shall be used to obtain smartphones from the identified vendor and be equipped to 5000 VIDYA beneficiaries. A smartphone is a critical need in order to continue their studies. A digital device could be a valuable game changer for children, youth and women of the less privileged communities across India and transform their future.

**Help us make this a reality for 15,000 beneficiaries who have lost their touch with education and are in ardent need.**