

The Opportunity: ICT for a Sustainable Post- Covid Future in Sri Lanka

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World population stands around 7.8 billion today. There are over 264 million children who don't go to school. There are over 250 million children in school but not learning due to various difficulties ranging from lack of trained teachers, basic infrastructure, sanitation facilities or basic human needs such as food, water and clothes to wear. Covid-19 pandemic further deepened the inequalities in access to education around the world. While the "developed world" shifted to a "virtual" classroom, the underprivileged and poor in our part of the world are deprived of the basic opportunities to thrive in learning in a "digital world". Every day we see on the media how our own sons and daughters are risking their lives climbing trees or mountains in rural areas to catch a phone signal to attend a virtual classroom. As per United Nations Covid-19 has wiped out 20 years of education gains with an additional 101 million or 9% of children in grades 1 through 8 fell below reading proficiency levels just in 2020. Especially where Sri Lanka is at right now from a socio, economic and political standpoint, do we believe that we can "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"? Education, that I have highlighted above, which is near and dear to you all at KDU and for me sitting at the intersection of education and technology, is the most important yet only one aspect in development of a country. IT/BPM sector developed immensely in Sri Lanka over the past two decades. Today over 80,000 young professionals contribute to our economy being employed in IT/BPM sector which stands as the fifth largest export earner for the country. Potential and opportunity for ICT sector in Sri Lanka post the pandemic is mammoth. However, I believe it is time that as Sri Lankans we take stock of where we are at right now, re-think how we leverage technology in developing our nation for a better future, sustainably.