

**Concept Note for Virtual Side Event during the High Level Political Forum 2022
hosted by the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate, VIVAT
International and Loretto Community**

**Title: Quality Education and Gender Equality: Keys to Building Forward to
achieving the SDGs**

When: July 13 at 7:30 - 9am (EST), 1:30pm (South Sudan), 7:30pm (Philippines)

Background:

Quality education is a transformative right that transcends and informs all other rights and freedoms. It is a powerful tool in the development of people and in breaking down cycles of exclusion. It is the main infrastructure of development, including in the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, in any country and an important investment for any government.

Covid 19 laid bare to all of us the extent of inequality in our society. Informal workers, people living in poverty and indigenous were most affected by the pandemic with the loss of lives, jobs and falling back into extreme poverty. Furthermore, access to education for families struggling to meet their basic needs became an issue when schools were closed and pivoted to online classes.

UNICEF reports that more than 1 billion children are at risk of falling behind due to school closures aimed at containing the spread of COVID-19. A [2021 report](#) from the World Bank estimates that the number of children aged 10 and below, from low and middle income countries, who cannot read simple text has risen from 53% prior to the pandemic to 70% percent today.

To keep the world's children learning, countries have been implementing remote education programs. Yet many of the world's children, particularly those in poorer households, do not have internet access, personal computers, TVs or even radio at home, amplifying the effects of existing learning inequalities.

However, even before the Covid19 pandemic happened in 2020, our world was already facing not only a global education crisis but a crisis of inequality. According to UNICEF, in 2017 there were 262M children and youth aged 6-17 that were out of school. 12 million children will never see the inside of school, two out of three of whom are girls.

Female children in South Sudan face extreme adversity in the pursuit of academic success where even a basic education is a right denied to many. Young girls and especially young women are less likely to enrol and more likely to drop out. In 2017, South Sudan was ranked as the world's most difficult nation for girls to receive an education. Of the nominal 37% of girls who will enrol in an educational program in South Sudan, only 7% will graduate from Primary School and only 2% will enrol in Secondary School.

Similarly, in the Philippines, in spite of economic progress, many children still face multiple and deep-rooted deprivations and vulnerabilities that impede their education

and development. Only 78% of children complete basic education, which in itself is plagued by low investment over the last decade, outdated teaching methods, and inaccessibility for vulnerable groups of children, including indigenous children and children living with disabilities, as per UNICEF.

The digital divide in the country has only exacerbated this inaccessibility. Only 17.7% of Philippine households had their own internet access at home, according to a 2019 National ICT Household Survey. Another report by UNESCO highlights that the current rise in school dropout rate was less a factor of the tuition cost than by lack of gadgets and access to internet connectivity required for online learning.

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters)/Congregation of Jesus and VIVAT International have been educating and collaborating with local communities for over 400 years. Faith-based Organisations have been playing a vital role before and during the pandemic by providing access to digital technology and/or providing alternative learning facilities ensuring that children continue to have access to education.

The Loreto Sisters were invited to establish a girls' secondary school in Rumbek and Sr. Orla Treacy IBVM travelled to South Sudan in 2006. The Loreto Girls Secondary School in Rumbek has grown from an initial class of 39 girls in 2008 to 1,600 students from different ethnic backgrounds, both primary and secondary. Since 2008, Sr. Orla and her team have implemented projects alongside global partners to provide what each child desperately needs to succeed in school. Due to the extreme poverty, violence, food insecurity, and a general lack of access, Loreto Rumbek not only provides education but also offers scholarships, nutritious meals, access to water and sanitation facilities, health support, protection and advocacy. Loreto Rumbek programs are committed to working to achieve the SDGs.

Fr. Benigno P. Beltran SVD, Parish Priest of the Risen Christ Catholic community in Smokey Mountain, Tondo, Manila established the Sandiwaan Centre for Learning (SCL) in 1987. This centre assisted the people to empower themselves, create change, and improve their socio-economic status. In 1995, the SCL initiated a program with the Department of Education's Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS) to give out-of-school youths an opportunity to complete their high school education, initially offering traditional classroom style learning and later moving to a more successful model of basic digital skills learning software, and using computers in the classrooms. The Sandiwaan project aims to pave the way for access, especially for marginalised youth, to inclusive and quality education by means of the Internet, with its capacity to hold an infinite number of resources.

Education is the primary gateway to address all other development issues, including gender equality, environmental preservation, and the rest of the SDGs. Both the Loreto School Rumbek and Sandiwaan Centre for Learning contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in their countries by providing quality education.

Sr. Orla and Fr. Beltran will share how through providing quality education their organisations are also addressing most of the SDGs, in particular SDG 5 - gender equality and how critical it is to collaborate with the community, leaders and governments. We will also hear stories of resilience and how they were able to adapt

to the challenges posed by Covid 19. We will also hear from two graduates, Helena and Maria, about the impact of quality education in their lives. Through their experiences, we hope to see the important linkages of the SDGs, particularly access to quality education, gender equality, life on land and working in partnership with local and global stakeholders.

Speakers:

- Keynote Speaker: Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason - In August 2017 Ambassador Nason was appointed as Ireland's permanent representative to the UN in New York. She was the Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) for 2018 and 2019, the first time that an Irish person has taken on the role.
- Sr. Orla Treacy IBVM - is a member of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters) and is currently the Director of Loreto Rumbek. She was one of three sisters originally sent to develop the school and has remained a constant in the community for 16 years. She is a recipient of the 2019 International Women of Courage (IWOC) Awards and the Hugh O'Flaherty International Humanitarian Award in 2016.
- Fr. Benigno P. Beltran SVD - He studied engineering, philosophy and theology in Manila and Rome. Over 30 years, he worked with slum dwellers on "Smokey Mountain" in Tondo while at the same time teaching theology in the SVD Faculty and elsewhere. He is CEO ("Chief Empowerment Optimist") of Veritas Social Empowerment, Inc. President and CEO (1987 to present) of Sandiwaan Center for Learning (SCL) and Lead Coordinator (2012 to present) of Philippine Sustainability Challenge.
- Helena Rial Isaac is Graduate of Loreto Rumbek, graduated in 2017. She is among one of the first females from her community to complete Secondary School and go to University. Helena holds a degree in Sustainable Human Development from Catholic University of Eastern Africa, graduating in Nairobi in 2021. Since graduating Helena has returned to work in Loreto Rumbek as a program assistant.
- Maria Angelica Solomon is Graduate at Sandiwaan Center for Learning, Philippines. She has a Bachelor in Hotel and Restaurant Management and is currently employed at Bread Talk.