

Country in Focus: Suriname

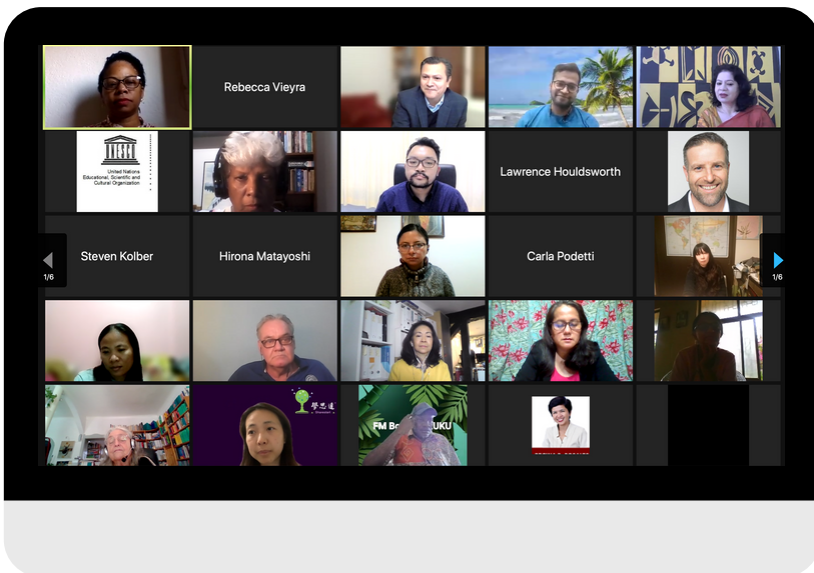
On 8 April 2021, **Cindy Leeflang**, an **ITEN Project Team** member of **Suriname**, represented ITEN teachers at the series of *Virtual Conversations on Teaching During Covid-19* promoted by the **OECD, UNESCO**, and the **Teacher Task Force**.



Each conversation brought together a panel of teachers around a common theme to talk more about the challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they have responded in innovative ways.

Cindy participated in the panel "**Learning Continuity**", in which **she discussed what changes need to take place for policymakers to better support teachers for learning continuity and innovation**, and how teachers can get more involved in policy discussions.

Among many insightful thoughts, Cindy mentioned that **policymakers should provide school leaders and teachers with enough autonomy to test innovations**.



155

teachers from around the world attended.

Currently, in collaboration with the Department of Research and Planning of the Ministry of Education, Cindy is in **providing training on professional digital administration for headmasters and assistant headmasters from rural areas** of Suriname. The training will focus on Google Suite Apps, and, due to the pandemic and schools' closures, students' progress will be assessed through alternative methods, such as Google Classroom tests and presentation of articles and posters.

An interview with Cindy Leeflang:

What changes do you think need to take place for policymakers to better support teachers for learning continuity and innovation?

What do you think that teachers can do to get more involved in policy discussions?



What we see happening now is a bottom-up approach: that **a lot of teachers want to be involved in educational changes** and many have even started to implement changes without the knowledge of policymakers. This indicates that the top is not meeting the need of teachers...

Policymakers must realize that education is not a ballast for the government budget but an asset. Policymakers do not realize that education and economy are very much related to one another. If low- and middle-income countries want to improve their income, they have to dare to invest in education on all levels. Governments must invest in teachers to keep on producing the much needed workforce. **Durable innovations in education call for effective leaders who do not see themselves mainly in the formal top-down approach, but also as leaders that can have a positive impact on the spreading of change.** The focus should be on those involved who can work on a lasting educational change. Teachers and the community can work together to ensure there is a support base and carrying capacity for educational change, ensuring sustainability for educational change.

One of my professors ones ask us why we wanted to change the educational system when we are clearly a product of education. There is nothing wrong with us after all: we made it! Of course, this is a trick question. We can hardly remember that as students we also had to adjust to educational changes that were necessary at the time. And if we hardly can remember them, maybe our teachers did a good job? Without undergoing necessary changes, education would not be relevant today. We do face other challenges, but **what should strengthen us is that those who educated us clearly made an effort. Now it our turn as policymakers, educators, community members to keep investing in the next generation.**

Policy makers should give school leaders and teachers more autonomy to try out their own innovations. The Ministry of Education could also have a department of educational innovation to oversee the innovation which will produce much needed data about what works and what doesn't. Teacher leaders can then use the clusters in their region to not only discuss what is wrong with the system and what challenges they are facing every single day, but to also discuss best practices within their school. **If there is a teacher who successfully came up with an innovation, let us recognize the importance of this.**

