



## The Education Sector interventions during the Corona Virus (COVID-19) Pandemic: How can they be more inclusive?

### Overview

Globally, the Corona Virus (COVID-19) Pandemic has affected education services leading to near total closure of schools, universities and colleges. According to the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) monitoring report, 192 countries have implemented nation-wide closure of educational institutions impacting about 99.9% of the World's Student Population.

The closure of educational institutions impacted not only students, teachers and families, but have far reaching economic and societal consequences such as digital learning, access to child care, disability services among others. The impact is more severe for disadvantaged children and their families causing interrupted learning.

In response to school closure, UNESCO recommended the use of distance learning programmes, open educational applications and platforms that schools and teachers can use to reach learners remotely as a way of ensuring continuation of learning.

In Uganda, up to 15 million learners are now seated at home and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in its response plan to the pandemic indicated the use of distance learning on media among other strategies laid out. This paper highlights the likely impact of the pandemic on the education service delivery.

### Introduction

In Uganda, about 15 million learners were affected by closure of educational institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only had a short term impact on the continuity of learning but also in the long run might affect the structure

### Key Issues

- **Remote learning is being adopted to ensure continuity of learning but the effectiveness of the lessons through media cannot be ensured.**
- **The inequality gap will be widened given the digital divide between urban and rural areas.**
- **The expected parental support to learners may be limited for illiterate parents.**

of schooling and learning including teaching and assessment methodologies.

The tradition in- person classroom learning will be complemented with electronic learning modalities such as live broadcasts and educational influencers which could see higher integration of ICT learning in schools.

On the other hand, the prolonged school closures could have a disproportionately negative impact on the most vulnerable students as they have fewer opportunities for learning at home, and their time out of school may lead to dropouts.

To this effect, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) has come up with a number of strategies/responses to ensure the continuity of learning and these include;

### Sector Responses

- a) **Remote Learning**



On the 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020, the First Lady and Minister for Education and Sports noted that the Ministry had produced a framework to guide the process of continuity of learning. Basic concepts, harmonized learning packages/materials were identified and guidelines prepared for Local Governments to ensure effective learning. These would be delivered on radios and televisions and will mainly focus on P.1 to P.7 effective Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020. In addition, self-study materials were developed and will be handed over to the District leadership led by Resident District Commissioner (RDC), Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and the District Education Officers. These will distribute the materials to the Sub county chiefs who will in turn hand them to Parish chiefs for onward distribution to Local Council One to give them to learners in the different homes.

Furthermore, the MoES together with UNICEF and the National Information Technology Authority have introduced a free of charge and easy to use digital learning platform-Kolibri with educational content approved by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) in Science and Mathematics for secondary school learners and inclusive education for primary.

## **b) Parental involvement on informal and non-formal learning**

At a time like this, the role of parents and family which has always been extremely important, is critical in the task of ensuring children continue to learn even when away from classrooms. To this effect, the First Lady and Minister for Education and Sports has appealed to parents and families to help learning take place by

involving the learners in their home activities to give them skills for life such as cooking, cleaning, gardening, looking after animals, physical activity among others. These would help learners make a craft or develop innovation which can be required later on.

The strategies have however created mixed reactions among parents and educationalist on their efficacy. The MoES needs to critically assess the readiness of these interventions/strategies to minimize as much as possible, the negative impact that could arise. For instance;

i) **The effectiveness of the lessons through media** ; the MoES needs to examine how effective this mode of delivery would be and how many pupils/students are likely to benefit given that only 45.2% and 17.4% of Ugandan households owned a radio and TV respectively(National Household Survey Report 2016/17). Few learners particularly in rural areas have access to mobile phones to access information or even connect with their teachers. Nearly 90% of students currently out of the classroom do not have access to a computer and 82% do not have access to internet at home and therefore may not access digital books and other learning materials.

Use of the TVs and Radios to deliver lessons seems to be more teacher-centred than learner centred as there is little or no interaction with learners. Learners cannot ask questions for clarification of concepts and teachers' pace may not cater for individual differences among learners more so the slow learners. The sessions aired on TV are not making provision for sign language for the benefit of learners with special



needs. On the other hand, use of teaching learning aids particularly visuals by teachers for more in depth learning would be limited when lessons are conducted on radios or where pre-recorded or self-study materials are distributed to learners, yet these are key in the learning process.

Additionally, findings of the Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit in the MFPED FY 2018/19 indicated that children missed school in the planting and harvesting especially between March and April; July and August.<sup>1</sup> Considering that the pandemic has come at a time when the planting season is on, the number of beneficiaries might be limited especially in the rural areas. Use of continuous assessment recently introduced under the new curriculum for lower secondary would be difficult to assess and grade the students.

ii) **Widening the inequality gap given the digital divide;** the above notwithstanding, urban based learners with access to mobile phones, radios, TVs and the internet will more likely be able to interact with their teachers compared to their rural counterparts therefore benefitting more and in the end have better learning opportunities. The result of all this, is inequality in education outcomes among the learners in Uganda.

iii) **Availability of accurate statistics of learners may limit effective distribution** of the printed materials; there is an ongoing concern on the accuracy of the available statistics. The

MoES Education Management Information System might not provide reliable statistics given that it dates as far back as 2017. In addition, the UBOS statistics (2019) might not depict the real picture on the ground, given that some learners might not be in the current places where the available data places them as indicated by the Director Basic Education-MoES.

iv) **Parents' ability to guide the learners;** whereas the pandemic brings in an opportunity for parents' involvement in their children's education, the fate might be different for children whose parents cannot read and write. Given that, literacy level is at 70%, the Ministry should consider some parents' ability to guide the learners. The MoES has previously had experiences of low parental involvement in children's education especially in provision of meals at schools.

v) **Slowdown in infrastructure development;** as part of the education service delivery, infrastructure is a very critical component of educational institutions. But with the pandemic at hand, the likelihood of reduced or no progress for a number of projects in the Education sector is almost inevitable.

By February 2020, the Education sector registered poor performance for a number of development projects due to non-receipt of fund and poor planning. For instance, works the Uganda Petroleum Institute Kigumba stalled due to non-receipt of funds, John Kale Institute of Science and Technology project stalled due to a court case regarding landownership, and Emergency Construction of Primary schools where 10 of the 11 schools planned for half year

<sup>1</sup> MFPED, "Semi-Annual Budget Monitoring Report FY 2018/19."



had not received funds. In addition, 50% of the Universities monitored were still at procurement of service providers/contractors<sup>2</sup>.

Considering the prevailing situation, the MoES should assess other forms of service delivery other than classrooms such as use of ICT (online) as a tool of teaching. In 2014, the Uganda Communications Commission using Rural Communications Development Fund in partnership with the MoES implemented a programme for ICT integration in the Education sector by providing computers and related software. However the integration over the medium term has been affected by the lack of computers, lack of electricity in a number of schools and lack of internet or slow connectivity.

## Conclusion

The pandemic has the potential to worsen education outcomes as the lockdown will not be eased for this sector soon. However, the sector could improve on the innovative solutions being undertaken for inclusiveness. Furthermore, \*government has an opportunity to make the education system at all levels ready for e-learning by making the necessary investments in e-technology.

## Recommendations

i) The MoES should create a feedback platform for learners to seek clarification on concepts taught using the different media platforms.

ii) The education programmes aired on TVs should make provision for sign language so that learners with special needs also benefit.

iii) As a future strategy, the MoES together with National Information Technology Authority and Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development should ensure internet connectivity and power supply of all government aided schools in a phased manner as a way of promoting e-learning methodologies.

## References

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<sup>2</sup> MFPED, “Semi-Annual Budget Monitoring Report FY 2019/20”