



**REPUBLIC OF KENYA
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE, GENDER,
SENIOR CITIZENS AFFAIRS AND SPECIAL PROGRAMMES
STATE DEPARTMENT FOR GENDER**

**INPUT ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 ON THE REALIZATION OF EQUAL
ENJOYMENT OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION BY EVERY GIRL**

Education is the key to success and as such the ticket out of poverty. Globally, many parents strive to educate their children so as to give them a better future. In Kenya, the government made education a necessity along with food, shelter, and clothing. This led to waiving of tuition fees for all public schools on a primary level thus allowing most children to receive a basic education. The country has made good progress in the sector with more people, even in remote areas, embracing education.

The Kenyan government abruptly closed all schools and colleges on March 15, 2020, in response to COVID-19, disrupting nearly 17 million learners countrywide. The closure of institutions not only affected learners and teachers but it also brought forth numerous economic and social issues, including interrupted and loss of learning, education exclusion, homelessness, nutrition and economic crisis, childcare challenges and increase in teenage pregnancy cases, financial cost implication to households, and sexual exploitation among others. The effects have been more severe for the underprivileged children and their households from the urban poor communities.

The government adopted a remote and digital mode of learning. This strategy was not without challenges, the glaring one being that the learning gap increased and most learners were excluded from online education due to challenges of access to internet and reliable electricity. This further widened the inequality gap and impeded their ability to access quality education. Additionally, smartphones were and still are beyond reach for most rural and the urban poor communities. Even when adults have smartphones, tensions around privacy and children unsupervised internet use render access to learning non-existent. Areas where electricity and technology do exist, the cost of the internet is still prohibitive. Such disadvantages present challenges for the marginalized families and learners who must compete with their more privileged peers during national examinations.

Further, extended online interrupted learning that disengages children from the process has the potential cost of reversing gains in learning results. An even higher

cost comes from the disengagement of students with learning challenges who may not effectively cope with remote learning strategies or cannot access the information. For instance, children from marginalized communities whose parents may have low literacy levels, limited education re-sources and limited time to engage in their child's learning process are at a risk of loss of learning. Not only are these parents frustrated at having to home-school without adequate preparation, they also cannot reinforce their children's learning considering they have limited knowledge. The parents may also focus so much on fending for their families for survival, leaving the children with no one to give guidance on their school work. This further indicates that remote learning cannot entirely replace classroom learning as it is intended to supplement knowledge that children already have.

School closures have also had implications for learners who relied on school feeding programs as a main source of nutrition. With everyone now at home, families' ability to provide food for their children has been even further reduced due to loss of income and jobs. School feeding programmes have always provided both educational and health benefits for the most vulnerable children thereby increasing enrolment rates, reducing absenteeism, and improving food security at the household level.

Remote learning has also faced a lot of challenges due to lack of well-defined infrastructure. With both children and teachers at home the government had limited time for preparation of the sudden change. Most of the teachers and education stakeholders have limited knowledge for online dissemination of knowledge, lack of detailed costs of teaching and preparation of online teaching, online assessment and evaluation. This has further resulted to slack in the implementation of online learning.

Due to loss of livelihoods particularly in low-income households, some children have been forced into income-generating activities to support their families' survival. In such poverty-stricken areas, securing food takes precedence over learning. For instance, children from poor families from disadvantaged neighborhoods have resorted to working as opposed to learning in order to provide for their families. This raises the increase on sexual exploitation with the young girls engaging in transactional sex in order to gain not only access to essential needs like sanitary towels but also to support their families. This has highly contributed to early and unplanned teenage pregnancies that have been projected to be on the rise during COVID-19 thus contributing to loss and disruption in learning.

CHALLENGES

Closure of schools as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that students returned home without a clear timeline of when normal learning would return. Learners stayed out of school for the rest of the year which affected their education process in different ways. The *implications* were, but not limited to the following:

Teenage Pregnancies

The rising cases of teen pregnancies during the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the future of education for the girl child from vulnerable backgrounds. It was quite disappointing that on top of a pandemic, school-going girls were now getting pregnant due to staying at home.

Evidence shows that girls from rural areas and informal settlements are most likely to be used to earn some income for their families. Therefore, some may resort to selling their bodies without knowing the risks of pregnancies and diseases. Though there are policies that provide for the re-entry of pregnant girls to complete their education, the girls still face stigma in society. Additionally, it may take a while before such policies are fully implemented¹.

Nutrition

Nutrition was also greatly affected once schools were abruptly closed due to COVID-19. Most children from needy families in rural and informal settlements rely on school feeding programs for their daily nutrition. Their parents struggle to make ends meet with or without a pandemic. As such, when schools closed, they were left without an assured source of food. The government stepped in to donate foodstuff to needy families in some areas. However, it was still a concern that most parents would prioritize securing food over education. This disrupted the children's learning process while at home.

Home-schooling

Home-schooling isn't a new concept but it became more popular once normal schooling was shut down. Parents were encouraged to provide learning materials for their children and offer assistance in learning. As such, many media outlets started airing educational programs for students who might not have access to the internet.

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) also provided timetables for students in primary and secondary levels. It acted as a guide for parents and students in planning their classes. The timetable was easily accessible to everybody whether they had an internet connection or not.

However, having an internet connection was an added advantage during homeschooling. Students and parents were able to access a wide variety of

¹ WAD Report2021

resources. They were also able to conduct virtual classes with their fellow learners through zoom and skype.

Delayed Exams

Given that schools closed even before the first semester was over, questions arose as to whether students would have to repeat classes once learning resumed. Education CS Magoha issued a statement saying that all learners except those who were sitting for their final examination (K.C.P.E and K.C.S.E) would remain in the same class once schools reopened. Of course, this was met with a lot of resistance from parents. They had to bear the financial burden of educating their children twice.

Psychology experts also came to their defense opposing the government's decision to force students to repeat a class. They suggest that such a move could have a negative impact on the child's psychology. Since the pandemic had already demoralized them, repeating classes could further dampen their spirits. Instead, they suggest that students should be allowed to join the next class and learn whatever they didn't in the previous class while in the new one.

In higher learning institutions, classes resumed back in September 2020 and the President issued a directive to review the 2021 academic calendar for the remaining students. Students in primary and secondary school would resume classes in January for their second term then break in March 2021 to allow K.C.P.E and K.C.S.E candidates to sit for their exams. They will then return to school to complete their third term.

School Re-Adjustments

There was a common concern of widespread coronavirus infections once schools reopened. As such, the government issued safety guidelines to avoid an outbreak in schools. First, students had to go through a rigorous screening before admittance. Every school is required to have a thermal gun, washing station, and extra masks. In the school compound, students, teachers, and other staff are required to wear masks at all times. Classrooms have also reduced in numbers so as to allow social distancing between learners. However, headteachers and principals have expressed concern that they're not adequately funded to fully implement these guidelines.

Learning has resumed in the country and things look like they're getting back to normal. There hasn't been any spike in COVID-19 cases since schools re-opened which shows that the institutions are following strict guidelines to ensure the students' safety

PART OF THE SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF KENYA TO PROTECT THE GIRL CHILD'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION

In realization of the negative effects of FGM on 4th June 2019 at the Women Deliver Conference in Vancouver, Canada, His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta declared to the delegates from across the globe of his readiness and commitment to eliminate FGM in Kenya by the year 2022. He later reinforced the commitment during the ICPD25 and at State House, Nairobi during the High-Level Elders Forum which was attended by religious and cultural elders from the 22 counties with high FGM prevalence. The said declaration has achieved the following, among others:

- a. Aggressive end FGM campaign targeting the Community Leaders, Youth and Practitioners through public fora, print, broadcast, and online media.
- b. Regional Declaration on ending cross border FGM in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Somalia. A joint action plan for the countries has been developed and is currently being implemented.
- c. Developed various strategic documents to aid in elimination of the FGM. These include: National Policy for the eradication of FGM, Guidelines for conducting Alternative Rights of Passage, Guidelines for conducting community dialogues, FGM resource Handbook, stakeholder mapping document and simplified version of the Prohibition of FGM Act, 2011 in both Kiswahili and English versions.
- d. Multi-sectoral approach to programming. Enhancing coordination through formation of national multi-agency technical team and county anti-FGM steering committee involving state and non-state actor. This would ensure involvement of all stakeholders and sustainability of the campaign.
- e. Costed acceleration plan was prepared, validated and approved by Cabinet.
- f. The second report to the PDU was submitted in December 2020. The coordination structure recommended within the National Policy on Eradication of FGM should be established and operationalized within 6 months;

- g. The establishment of a multi-sectoral Think Tank/Task force incorporating among others: the Ministries of Interior and Coordination of National Government, Health and Education as well relevant members of society and development partners, to give baseline data appropriately disaggregated along practicing communities which will form the basis of reporting progress; and that
- h. FGM related indicators must be incorporated into routine reporting by key duty bearers such as County Commissioners, Health and Education workers.
- i. Launch of Generation Equality Forum Kenyan chapter. On 28th May 2021, H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta launched the Generation Equality Forum. During the launch, Kenya made commitments under the global Generation Equality Forum GBV Action Coalition to end all forms of GBV and FGM by 2026. The Kenyan commitments included:
 1. Commit to full implementation of GBV laws and policies.
 2. Commit to investing USD 23 million for GBV prevention and response by 2022.
 3. Commit to ratify ILO convention 190 on eliminating GBV and harassment in the world of work by 2026 in close partnership with the private sector.
 4. Commit to introducing a module on GBV in the 2022 Kenya Demographic Health Survey.
 5. Commit to develop a GBV management and information system by 2022.
 6. Commit to invest USD 1 million annually for GBV research and innovation.
 7. Commit to integrating GBV services.
 8. Commit to scaling up the national police service integrated response to GBV.
 9. Commit to establishing a GBV survivor's fund.
 10. Commit to GBV prevention and response in crisis situations.
 11. Commit to strengthen collaboration with non-state actors.

12. Commit to adopting and institutionalizing the multi-sectorial GEF Leadership structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a country, there is need to navigate through these challenges and ensure continued access to provision of quality, equitable and inclusive education as cited in Article 53 of the constitution during and after the pandemic.

1. The government should develop measures and policies that are practical to each and every member of the society to ensure inclusion of all. As the total number of deaths from the pandemic continues to rise, it is still not clear when schools will resume, therefore remote and digital learning might be permanently and fully embraced.
2. Government must include digital learning as part of new policy interventions necessitated by the pandemic, otherwise it will be difficult to sustain education in the country if left to parents only.
3. Consider the gender digital divide and ensure girls are trained with the necessary digital skills and knowledge to stay safe online;
4. New online learning materials being developed should include appropriate messaging and information on sexual and reproductive health, menstrual hygiene management, gender and SGBV risks for both boys and girls;
5. Red flags should be initiated in order to promote and build capacity on safe internet use as children adapt to internet-based learning – this will protect learners from the lure of sexual predators
6. Upon school reopening, ensure that there is a viable gender monitoring mechanism to ensure the numbers of girls and boys are traced by developing a system to track trends in school participation for online learners and regularly analyse trends in sex and age to determine those at risk of dropout and take immediate actions to follow up and get them back to schools;
7. Utilize flexible learning approaches and processes as well as protections against stigma and abuse through implementation of

gender-sensitive policies to assist girls returning to class when schools reopen, including those who are pregnant and adolescent mothers.

8. There is need for the government to support the County and Sub-County Anti FGM activities and coordination meetings to complement what the partners are doing rather than relying fully on the partners who also have their priorities. There is need to have Gender Based Violence Recovery Centres / rescue centres with trained counsellors to take care of the psychological needs of the survivors
9. Coordinating all Girl Child Rights campaigns under one structure. The best way is through the County Gender Technical Working Group which brings together the two levels of Government and CSOs. It will eliminate duplication, wastage of resources and disjointed efforts currently experienced. This will result into a proper utilisation and mobilization of resources, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and finally enable proper utilisation of inadequate human resource.