

# REPORT SUMMARY

July 2020

## COVID-19 IMPACT ON EDUCATION IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new reality that necessitates a rethink of how quality education can be effectively delivered in an inclusive and equitable manner, and the role of technology as one of the key enablers. Inequality and exclusion are some of the perennial ghosts haunting most African countries. The pandemic has shown how the current education setup has further deepened inequalities and how the prevailing socioeconomic status is a target that is constantly in motion. Governments can, however, turn this ‘unusual situation’ into an opportunity through out-of-the-box ideas and strategies, least of which is the deployment of a multi-pronged approach in ‘leaving no learner behind’. On its part, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) has been engaging African countries since March 2020 on their strategies and level of effectiveness in ensuring that learning continues in a manner that is as inclusive as possible, and their thoughts regarding the reopening of learning institutions and the future of this key social sector. This engagement has highlighted some key working initiatives as well as issues pertinent to the education sector now and in the future’s “new normal”.



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countries while others are using different methods like introducing pre-reading activities for parents to supervise the learners at home, deploying cartoon-based television lessons and distributing weekly publications on COVID-19 lessons to parents, caregivers as well as health and social workers. There is evidence of the involvement of private actors in providing lessons for this group. Learning in primary and secondary schools continues through radio, television and online platforms with varying levels of success. For the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education sub-sectors, countries are using different strategies for the continuity of learning, from digital courses to the use of radio and television broadcasts. Many learners are still excluded from getting the right education. The non-formal education domain continues to be a challenge in most African countries, worsened by the current situation.

**Recording of protection-related risks to learners (such as domestic violence, sexual exploitation, early marriage, and female genital mutilation) is not consistent and evidence of remedial action is limited.** COVID-19 has prematurely reinforced these retrogressive social practices leading to psychological and health consequences as well as gender discrimination, and the risk of the learners to become the biggest victims of the pandemic through a lifelong impact on their education and safety. It is therefore important for governments to institute appropriate gender-sensitive responses to the current and future educational challenges.

**Use of new online and offline learning tools, platforms, and materials is positive but still benefits a comparatively smaller number of the learner population.** Overall, learners and teachers in learning institutions have expressed some degree of satisfaction, enthusiasm, and commitment in adapting to the new model of education, with a gradual development of online research skills by learners and teachers. But most teachers and learners either have limited, or do not have, internet access coupled with the challenge of remoteness and affordability of data. The provision of reading materials has helped to reach vulnerable groups and has contributed to greater public awareness on the importance of TVET.

## Managing the current situation

The gradual reopening of learning institutions commenced in June 2020, especially for learners in the examination classes, with some countries planning to reopen either later in the year or in January next year thereby counting 2020 as a 'lost year'. Whichever is the case, the situation continues to widen the exclusion and inequality gap.

**National strategies put in place for remote learning have generated mixed results.** Countries have deployed single strategies or a combination of strategies, like the use of radio and television channels incorporating sign language, coupled with the distribution of print support educational materials for self-study for learners not reached by tech-enabled solutions in non-urban areas and marginalized communities. Many of the strategies for learners with special needs tend to focus mainly on learners with hearing and vision impairment, with a few that include adapting and interpreting broadcasted lessons, teleconsulting with physiotherapists and involving occupational therapists in providing television lessons. At the pre-primary level, no learning taking place in some



**Additional financial support to the education sector for managing the COVID-19 impact has largely been from the national stimulus or special fund as well as external.** Most countries rely on external financing already mobilized or at the stage of processing, mainly for preprimary, primary, and secondary education sub-sectors.

**Most countries do not have a sector-specific crisis management framework for education and particularly for guiding remote education.**

There is often an institutional set up for the management of the impact of COVID-19 in the form of crisis units, coordination units, inter-governmental coordination entities, task forces or education clusters.



countries have put in place policies depending on their education context and organization, and followed by concrete implementation procedures around: (i) preventive measures like disinfection of school every day, respect of social distancing, provision of masks to administrative as well as teaching staff and students, (ii) sensitization of parents, students, teacher, and communities, (iii) and reduction of class size.

**Additional financial and/or material resources (sector or ministry budget) devoted to reopening of schools and other learning institutions vary in availability and adequacy.** They include 30% of the Ministry budget, face masks, hand and shoe sanitizers, infrared forehead thermometers, liquid soap and disinfectant, gloves for cleaners, disinfectants, provision of additional taps where needed, and general cleaning and disinfection of learning institutions. Governments have developed standard operating procedures for learning institutions including double-shift systems with one-meter social distancing in and outside the classrooms, placing of handwashing materials at the entrance of the learning institutions, wearing face masks, and classroom disinfection.



## **Reopening of learning institutions**

**Most countries are grappling with getting the right balance between saving the economy or life when considering reopening the different sectors.** This is due to the strong nexus between the level of a sector's economic relevance and the infection risk level for COVID-19. Opening of service sectors such as education is most likely to pose a high risk of infection even though their immediate economic relevance may not be as high when compared to low-infection risk sectors like agriculture and manufacturing. Thus, reopening the education sector requires careful planning – a major dilemma for countries considering the resources required to meet the stringent measures and protocols set by Ministries of Health – and a phased approach may be the best option to allow governments to put in place all that is necessary for a full reopening, depending on the readiness of their health systems to cope with increased severity resulting from the spread of the pandemic.

**There are no specific policies for the reopening of learning institutions, but these are drawn from the core education policies, with the procedures and protocols in place aligned to the sector policies – the challenge is in their implementation.** In most of the countries, the policy for reopening learning institutions is guided by the risk level in the country. However, all the



## Preparedness of education for the future

Africa should turn the COVID-19 crisis into an opportunity for accelerating its digital transformation as this will have an impact on key sectors such as education. This needs to be accompanied by a sustained momentum on regional integration. As pointed in the first ADEA report in May 2020, Africa’s education sector needs a well-resourced Ubuntu or Utu Education Plan to insulate the sector from disruptions due to disasters and emergencies. This plan could comprise many aspects, including having a benchmarking tool or framework guiding preparations for remote education.

**There is a need to develop a comprehensive remote education policy.** Some countries already have such a policy in place, while others are either reforming existing policies or are planning to formulate one. Strategic partnerships remain instrumental in launching effective remote learning projects.

**Strategies for incorporating critical aspects of the COVID-19 experience related to remote education in Education Management Information System (EMIS) are necessary to inform education sector reform.** It is vital to promote an understanding of EMIS that is holistic and sector-wide, and that goes beyond the infrastructure utilized for the collection, management, analysis, and utilization of data. Such EMIS should encompass the entire ‘data ecosystem’ at all levels of a national education system.

**Governments should leverage the lessons learnt from the successful and failed partnerships and collaborations during the COVID-19** to improve their future engagement with stakeholders in times of crisis. First, it is vital to address the education needs of communities affected by, and disposed to, crises. Secondly, public private partnership is of crucial importance in this kind of emergency (e.g. to help in the cost of ICT infrastructure and internet access for both teachers and learners). Finally, development cooperation partners, civil society, and faith-based organizations have been vehicles for raising awareness and agents promoting the implementation of barrier measures against COVID-19.

**There is some evidence of monitoring of psychological and psychosocial support for the well-being of teachers and learners, particularly those affected by COVID-19, but it is not robust enough.** Countries have deployed several ways to monitor psychological and psychosocial support to learners and teachers that include collaboration with other ministries, training and focus group discussions, social support, use of human resources in the learning institutions, and deployment of multimedia in community engagement. These efforts need to be intensified, considering the reports of increased alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, pregnancies among teenagers, and depression among teachers and learners.

**Strategies for assessments, examinations, and evaluations require review based on the COVID-19 experience.** It is time to deliberately look at assessments, and less at examinations, as a way of determining authentic demonstration of knowledge, skills, and competences.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Among the key recommendations for the new education delivery model is a review of the overall policy and regulatory guidelines to mainstream digital technology, greater involvement of parents, especially for early learners, and strengthening teacher professional development. This will also entail the adaptation of new curricula and assessment models. It is important to explore alternative funding models while embracing greater peer learning and knowledge exchange amongst countries.

## CONCLUSION

ADEA and its partners hope that this report summary will help inform and enrich the ongoing discourse around 'leaving no one behind' even with remote education and mitigate crises such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.



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