



KIX Observatory on
COVID-19 Responses in
Africa's Educational Systems

April 2021



FINANCING EDUCATION IN AFRICA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Produced by:

- Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)
- African Union's International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA)
- African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)



Financing Education in Africa during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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This report is one of a series produced through the KIX COVID-19 Observatory. The aim is to inform decision-makers, donors and education practitioners with emerging evidence on education policy and practice responses to the pandemic in Africa.

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Suggested citation

ADEA, AU/CIEFFA, & APHRC (2021). *Financing Education in Africa during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Abidjan, Ouagadougou, Nairobi: ADEA, AU/CIEFFA, APHRC.

Authors' Acknowledgements

This synthesis report was written by a team of researchers from the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) led by Moses Ngware. Members included Maurice Mutisya, Vollan Ochieng' and John Muchira. Reviews and additional evidence were provided by Albert Nsengiyumva, Shem Bodo, Stefano De Cupis and Mamy Razafimahatratra of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and by Rita Bissoonauth, Simone Yankey-Ouattara and Ian Kaliwo of the African Union International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA). Our thanks to Serhiy Kovalchuk and Hamidou Boukary of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for their support. Lastly, we would like to thank other APHRC researchers who supported the synthesis at various stages, through brainstorming sessions and internal reviews. The authors alone take responsibility for the views expressed in this report.

About the Observatory

The KIX COVID-19 Observatory is supported by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX), in partnership with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of GPE, IDRC or its Board of Governors.

The Observatory is monitoring pandemic responses in the education systems of 41 GPE partner countries in Africa and is collecting emerging research evidence on the topic. It focuses on the pandemic's impact on the operation of education systems and the well-being of learners.

The Observatory is implemented by a consortium of [ADEA](#) and [AU/CIEFFA](#). Technical support is provided by [APHRC](#) and the [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#).

For More Information

Website: www.adeanet.org/en/kix-observatory

Contacts: kixobservatory@adeanet.org and kixobservatory@cieffa.org

Photo: GPE/Ludovica Pellicoli, Sierra Leone, January 2019.

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Executive Summary

This report synthesizes available evidence on the education priorities of 41 African partner countries of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in responding to the impacts of COVID-19, and how these countries have financed their responses. It also addresses how these measures are meeting the education needs of vulnerable and marginalized children, especially girls, children with disabilities and those living in hard-to-reach areas. It identifies education financing gaps and challenges, and emerging evidence on what education systems in these countries are experiencing as a result of COVID-19 and persistent funding constraints. The report concludes with five recommendations for GPE partner countries and development actors.

Methods

Using rapid scoping reviews, evidence mapping, and the team's expert knowledge of health and education issues in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), we tracked education financing policies and practices and emerging evidence on the topic. We did so through searches of published literature, reports and data from various online libraries, education databases, and key institutional websites of national, regional and global education stakeholders. The evidence was tracked using a live [spreadsheet](#).

Education Priorities during COVID-19

Synthesis results show that education funding in the 41 GPE partner countries has been focused mainly on four key interrelated areas:

- Distance learning during school closures;
- Teacher training on the use of distance learning technologies, instructional delivery, and remedial teaching;
- Provision of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) materials, personal protective equipment, and other resources to prepare schools for reopening; and
- Support to vulnerable populations, such as children with special needs, girls from marginalized areas, and refugee populations.

The proportion of funding devoted to each priority varies from country to country and by stage of response. While distance learning solutions, such as through radio and television, took center stage during school closures, school reopening has more recently taken priority, as more education systems return to on-site learning. In addition to WASH and personal protection measures, some funding for school reopening has supported expansion of infrastructure, such as the construction of more classrooms. Funding has also been needed to support teacher training on distance learning technologies and instructional delivery skills, and more recently, remedial teaching skills. Teacher training has also focused on providing psychosocial support to learners — especially vulnerable populations — adjusting to “the new normal”. Financing for COVID-19 education responses has also covered gender-sensitive and more inclusive approaches to education, such as to better address the needs of adolescent girls, who are most at risk from falling behind as the result of the pandemic. In some cases, financing for existing gender or girl-focused programs has been directed to mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19 on such vulnerable groups. GPE partner countries have also financed gender-sensitive, protective and preventive approaches to safeguard learners from violence, with a particular focus on girls who are at-risk of not returning to school.

Funding Sources

Financing of these education priority areas has come from a mix of internal and external sources, including reallocations from within government budgets, revisions to programming, and assistance from development partners — mainly GPE, the World Bank, UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait.

The African Development Bank has provided grants or loans to several African countries in response to COVID-19, but such funds are not necessarily earmarked for the education sector. Most received funding to plan for emergency responses to COVID-19 in the education sector from GPE and other external agencies.

Households and private sector entities have also played a role in financing education responses to the pandemic. Parents are paying school fees, providing masks, and covering meals previously provided through school feeding programs. In some cases, private sector companies are making in-kind contributions. Information and technology providers, for example, have partnered with ministries of education to provide free airtime for school broadcasting or digital learning tools.

Emerging Evidence on the Impacts of COVID-19 Education Financing

Recent research points to both positive and negative impacts on education systems and affected learners. On the positive side, some countries are using their COVID-19 response to address strategic education priorities, including improving infrastructure and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups. However, the inadequate resourcing for education during this crisis is causing significant disruption in education systems and risks long-term damage — including the closure of low-fee private schools that serve low-income families, leading to learner displacement and a loss of employment for teachers.

Challenges to Financing Education Priorities

Countries have faced numerous challenges in trying to fund their education systems during school closures and re-openings. Key challenges include:

- Inadequate resources to support the continuity of learning during school closures, and prepare schools for reopening;
- Over-reliance on external funding for emergency responses, especially in hard-hit economies;
- Budget reallocations to public health that have led to cuts in education and other sectors;
- Debt repayment and other competing national priorities that impede financing of education; and
- Pre-existing challenges that have hampered the allocation of resources to the education sector.

Recommendations

To mitigate the challenges brought on by the pandemic, strengthen education system resilience, and support greater inclusivity of vulnerable populations, countries need to take key decisions and actions. We recommend that GPE partner countries and development actors:

1. Allocate more domestic resources to create sustainability in financing emergency responses.
2. Demonstrate how all emergency funding responses enhance equity and inclusion in education.
3. Seek and support major investments in education technology and distance learning infrastructure in remote areas and fragile states where learners have little or no access to off-site learning.
4. Consider cancelling external debts or making them conditional on supports to education (such as by swapping external debt for learning investments) to help struggling economies channel more resources toward equity and inclusion in education.
5. Direct financing to improve human capacity in education systems to respond to crises such as COVID-19.

1 Introduction

The declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic in March 2020 led to the closure of schools around the world, affecting some 1.6 billion learners (UNESCO, 2020a). With a gradual return to on-site learning taking shape in most countries, there are now calls for “building back better” — strengthening education systems and infrastructure that were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These improvements, however, will require high levels of financial support.

With many African countries already facing shortfalls in education funding, this synthesis report documents the additional challenges COVID-19 has imposed on school systems and learners in 41 countries involved in the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). In addition to categorizing the education areas that national governments and international donors have prioritized for financing to ensure learning continuity and safe school reopening, we examine the main sources of funding to support these responses, and the funding gaps and challenges these countries face. We also examine what recent research on education finance, mainly by multilateral organizations, can tell us about how these African countries are responding. Based on our analysis of these gaps and challenges, a series of recommendations is provided in section 6.

This report is one of several outputs of the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) COVID-19 Observatory, which aims to provide policymakers in GPE partner countries with actionable evidence to inform their decisions. The Observatory collects, synthesizes and mobilizes evidence about COVID-19 responses in primary and secondary education systems in GPE partner countries, focusing on both the operations of these systems and the well-being of learners. Policies and practices related to education finance in GPE partner countries in Africa are tracked, and continue to be updated, using a live [spreadsheet](#).¹ The Observatory also tracks emerging research on COVID-19 education responses, including on interventions being tested and evaluated.

The authors of this report applied a systematic and exploratory approach to identify, gather, analyze and synthesize information on policies and practices from multiple sources. Through scoping reviews, we sought to understand what past and emerging policies and practices and financing strategies have been used by various countries to respond to COVID-19 education-related challenges. The report covers the period from about the first quarter of 2020, when schools initially closed, to the first quarter of 2021, when most GPE partner countries had begun reopening schools.

Sources of information included planning, policy and programming documents of:

- Ministries of education and health in GPE partner countries;
- Regional and global organizations, including the African Union, KIX regional hubs in Africa, GPE, the International Development Research Centre, UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, USAID and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; and
- Civil society organizations involved in educational programming, such as Plan International and the International Rescue Committee.

¹ This KIX COVID-19 Observatory Tracking Tool is available at: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Q4fsFK18pvb0aOwYx-Oijit21AHGn9pa/edit#gid=1775476430>

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Education Priorities and Funding Sources for Responding to COVID-19

Priority Areas

Our analysis of available evidence shows that financing efforts in the 41 GPE partner countries have been primarily focused on four interrelated areas (GPE, 2020a-k):

- Distance learning during the school closure period and school reopening;
- Teacher training on the use of distance learning technologies, instruction delivery, and remedial teaching;
- Provision of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) materials, personal protective equipment, and related resources to prepare schools for reopening; and
- Support to vulnerable populations, such as children with special needs, girls from marginalized areas, and refugee populations.

Funding Sources

Countries are using a mix of domestic, international, private, and household funding to support their education systems during the pandemic. According to the global Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures (UNESCO, UNICEF & World Bank, 2020), nearly all countries (95%) that responded had received additional funding – domestic or international – to address COVID-19-related costs in education. In at least 75% of low- and lower-middle-income countries, most of this additional funding was from development assistance.

About 71% of responding countries devoted extra government funding to help in responding to the pandemic. Domestic funding sources have included reprogramming and budgetary reallocation within governments to the ministries of education, either as part of their emergency response measures or within their usual budgetary allocation cycle, with a special provision for COVID-19 responses in education.

International funding came in the form of grants or loans from, among other agencies, GPE, the World Bank, African Development Bank and civil society organizations. Financing of education activities during COVID-19 has come as packages focusing on several areas of need (such as a combination of distance learning solutions, teacher training and WASH) at the same time, and not on a single area of need. Almost all funding packages include support to distance learning solutions.

Traditionally, agencies such as GPE and the World Bank support both standalone projects and national education budgets. New and ongoing supported projects were reprogrammed to respond to the COVID-19 situation. Funding from international NGOs and foundations, such as Education Cannot Wait, Plan International and the International Rescue Committee, have targeted specific projects such as girls' and refugee education during COVID-19, but they also work closely with local authorities within a country.

The World Bank is a major funder of the education sector in Africa. Table 1 details its funding to various regions over 2020, and projected funding for 2021. Within sub-Saharan Africa, most 2020 World Bank funding targeted West and East African countries, which accounted for 66% of funding to the Africa region. However, projections for 2021 show a reduction of 62% in funding to West Africa, while allocations to East Africa will nearly double, with an increase of 98%. Overall, the Africa region faces a decline of 13%, which highlights the need for more efforts to mobilize domestic resources.

Table 1: World Bank (WB) contribution to the education sector, by region

Region	2020* total new commitment (US\$, m)	2021* total new pipeline	% Change	Portion of 2020* WB education funding devoted to COVID-19 response (US\$, m)	Regional allocation as % of total 2020* WB COVID-19 education response
Africa region	1801	1570	-13%	467	10%
Africa East	767	1522	98%	989	21%
Africa West	427	164	-62%	187	4%
East & Central Asia	379	419	11%	467	10%
Latin America & Caribbean	350	200	-43%	168	4%
Middle East & North Africa	335	473	41%	782	17%
South Asia Region	1234	1836	49%	1669	35%
Total	5290	6183	17%	4728	100%

Source: World Bank (2020d)

* Refers to fiscal year

The private sector, mainly for-profit companies, also made significant contributions to COVID-19 responses, especially in-kind. For example, in some GPE partner countries, companies in the Information and Technology sector partnered with ministries of education to provide free airtime for radio and TV school broadcasting; others provided digital learning tools or subsidized Internet costs that enhanced access to distance learning.

Last, but not least, are households, which contributed in-kind and through direct payments to cover regular school fees and additional expenses that came with COVID-19 containment measures as schools reopened. During school closures and nation-wide lockdowns, parents stayed home with learners and provided food, personal protective items such as face masks, and child care — to the extent possible. In areas previously served by school feeding programs, this responsibility shifted to households at the height of lockdowns in many GPE partner countries.

In low- and lower-middle-income countries, the education funding advanced by both development assistance agencies and governments' supplementary funding during the COVID-19 period has gone largely to support distance learning solutions. For instance, the reported funding aided all African Union (AU) member countries to provide continued distance learning through radio and television, which offer guidance and teaching-related support (UNESCO, UNICEF & World Bank, 2020). Considering that up to 75% of the population in 25 AU member countries have no Internet access (UNICEF, 2020a), the funding has helped to bolster Internet provision or offer alternative learning solutions, and to develop teacher capacities for distance teaching (Government of Kenya, 2020; GPE, 2020d; Government of Rwanda, 2020; Save the Children, 2020). For the school reopening period, the funding continues to play an integral role in providing students, teachers and parents with psychosocial support services and WASH-related support (UNICEF, 2020a).

As an example, Figure 1 details key areas of development assistance funding by GPE — one of the major funders of education in Africa — and what the funds are supporting. The lion’s share is devoted to school reopening (SR), which aims to bring normalcy (effective continuation of learning) back into the education system, while creating safe space for children and enhancing inclusion and equity of access. Some additional funding for WASH materials (WP) may be included under school reopening (SR). Despite the heightened incidence of violence — especially against girls — learning supports to vulnerable populations (LS) such as children with special needs, girls from marginalized areas, and refugee populations appear to receive the lowest proportion of funding. However, it could be that funding for special needs is incorporated across other areas, such as equipping schools for distance learning and reopening, to ensure equity is addressed in all education responses.

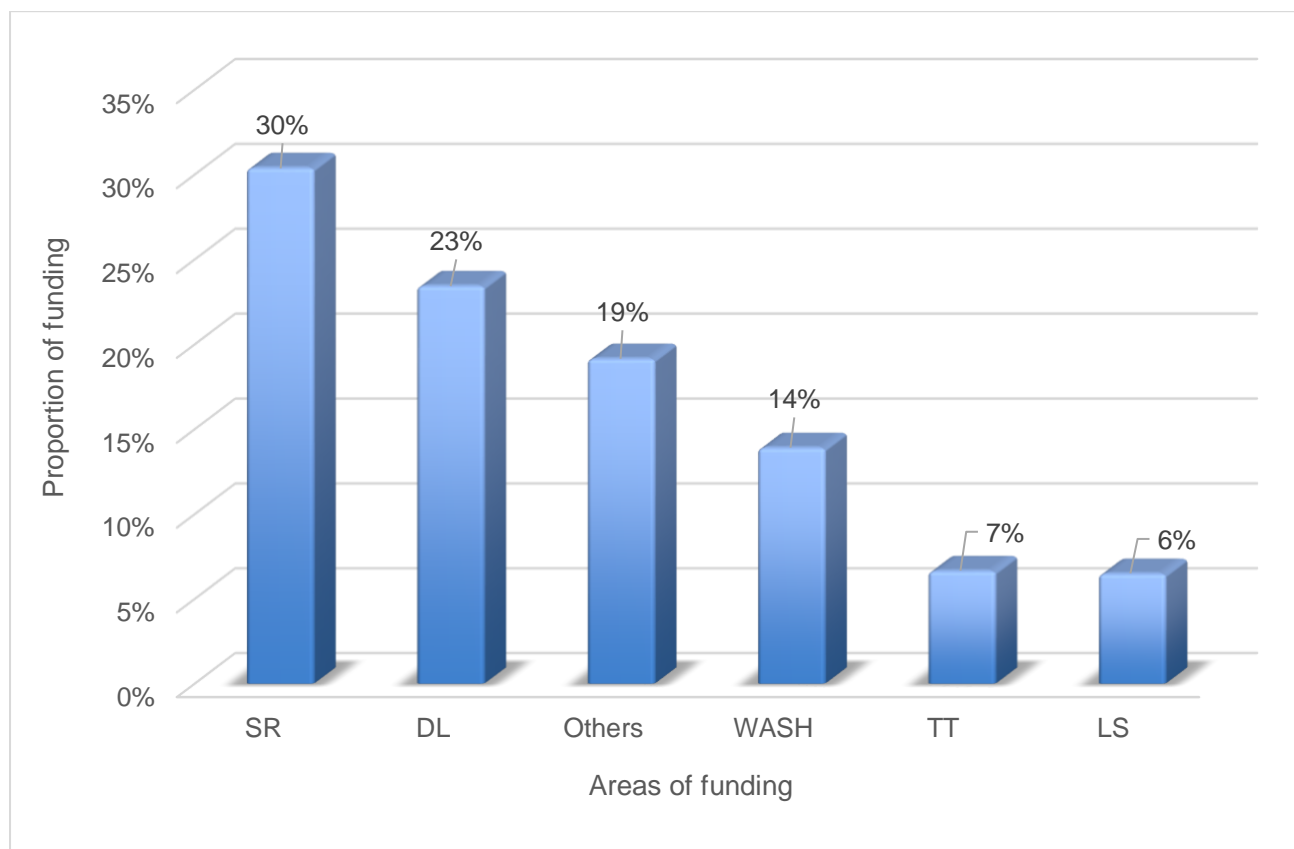


Figure 1: GPE areas of funding to partner countries in Africa

Source: GPE (2020a-o)

SR=School reopening; **DL**=Distance learning during school closure; **Others** include monitoring and evaluation activities, and other unspecified activities/items; **WASH**=Provision of WASH materials, personal protective equipment, and related resources to help schools prepare for reopening; **TT**=Teacher training on the use of distance learning technologies in instructional delivery; **LS**=Learning support to vulnerable populations such as children with special needs, girls from marginalized areas, and refugee populations.

Even though governments, international actors, private sector entities and households have mobilized different amounts of funding, this funding is not adequate to address the effects of the pandemic on the education sector and allow for safe school reopening, particularly in low- and lower-middle-income countries. As we will explore further in section 4, these countries have been experiencing different challenges with education financing, before and during COVID-19, depending on their stability, their sources of financing, and governments’ resetting of priorities, especially in the areas of health and social protection.

3

Education Financing in Select GPE Partner Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

Here we look at specific country-examples that illustrate how key financing strategies, drawing on domestic and external funding, have been put in place to support the four interrelated education areas during the COVID-19 pandemic. More detail on the scope and evolution of funding for COVID-19 response in the 41 GPE partner countries in Africa can be found in the [KIX COVID-19 Observatory spreadsheet](#).

Financing Distance Learning during School Closures

At the onset of school closures, distance learning solutions took center stage to ensure continuity in learning. GPE partner countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have financed various aspects of distance learning solutions with resources that vary considerably from government to government. In Ghana, for instance, the government and its partners have financed the content development, curation, and delivery of distance learning, and enhanced digital library services (World Bank, 2020a), while in South Sudan, Kenya and Zambia, the governments supported lesson delivery through radio and television, and the use of tablets (GPE, 2020l, m; Ministry of General Education, 2020; UNESCO, 2020c).

Several other countries have secured financing and put in place systems to support distance learning:

❖ **Burkina Faso** received notable development assistance from GPE and Education Cannot Wait, which was used to support distance learning through radio and related ICT educational programs, in addition to providing remedial programs for learners, and supporting on-site learning through procurement of WASH materials to protect learners. Specifically, the GPE funds were distributed to support distance learning (US\$2,141,382) and school reopenings (US\$5,137,041), with girls' return to school receiving US\$ 2,220,234 [2]. While Education Cannot Wait's funding does not detail the amounts going for specific COVID-19-related activities, it gave US\$11.1 million to support continuation of learning for over 800,000 children and adolescents in regions of the country affected by COVID-19 school closures (Education Cannot Wait, 2021).

❖ **Cabo Verde's** external grants from GPE, through UNICEF, supported strengthening capacities for the use of radio and educational technologies in distance learning. These have addressed: the development of educational content, capacity development for teachers in using digital platforms, the provision of learning materials for those unable to access online learning, provision of WASH materials in schools, and provision of solar TVs to students in remote areas with no access to electricity. The funding was distributed as follows: US\$393,862 to enable distance learning access and retention of learners, including related training for 700 teachers, the development of 120,000 sets of teaching materials, and provision of tablets for distance learning; US\$310,112 to develop 620 sets of distance learning materials and disseminate them to learners; US\$136,049 to acquire 20,000 sets of audiovisual/ assistive equipment to support families with special needs children; and US\$83,750 to support school readiness for reopening through provision of WASH resources. Administrative overhead of US\$70,000 went to UNICEF, as the program's administrator (GPE, 2020b).

- ❖ **Eritrea's** funding is being used to promote distance learning for children, via radio and television, and capacity building to enable teachers and other education stakeholders to support learners as needed. It has also provided students with textbooks and other learning resources. Some 270 public service announcements (including through sign language) on education and health have been developed and communicated in nine ethnic languages, covering over 70% of national radio and television air waves. Additionally, over two million posters, stickers, and pamphlets on education and COVID-19 have been given to learners, schools and health facilities (UNICEF, 2020b).

Financing Teacher Training on Distance Learning Technologies

With distance learning being used to support the continuity of learning at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, ministries of education in GPE partner countries allocated some available financial resources to train teachers in the use of these technologies and approaches, and in helping learners — including vulnerable populations — adjust to the “new normal”. The financing equipped teachers with relevant skills for conducting lessons and accessing their learners remotely. In Uganda, through a collaboration between the Belgian Development Agency Enabel and the national teachers colleges, teachers were introduced to ICT tools, educational practices, and skillsets through the Teacher Training Education Sandbox project (UKFIET, 2020). This training enabled teachers to use educational technology for distance learning during the pandemic, maintain communication with students, and continue tapping students’ creativity to deliver educational content. Other countries where similar training has been funded include Kenya, Ghana, South Sudan and Zambia, to mention just a few.

- ❖ **Central African Republic** has directed funding to support a wide range of education responses to COVID-19, including the provision of distance learning solutions through radio-based learning kits. The funding, which runs from mid-2020 to mid-2021, covers the development of interactive radio programming for distance learning, targeting some 907,850 students. This includes remedial programming, targeting 81,184 students, and the provision of solar radios to support distance learning for 14,951 students in remote areas. Learning kits are being distributed to 532,120 learners in public schools to prepare them to return when schools reopen. To address the trauma that many students, especially girls, are experiencing with school disruption, 6000 teachers are also being trained on gender-based violence and in addressing learners’ psychosocial and mental health needs (GPE, 2020c; UN-OCHA, 2020).

- ❖ In **Kenya**, with development assistance funding provided by GPE, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of ICT (through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development) has provided training in interactive distance learning to 150,000 head teachers (or their deputies), teachers and curriculum support personnel (Government of Kenya, 2020; OECD, 2021). The funding is expected to benefit about 60% of primary and secondary school students who will be supported through distance learning. It will also equip caretakers and parents with distance learning skills, and offer psychosocial support services to students (GPE, 2020e).

Financing WASH Materials and Related Resources to Increase School Readiness for Reopening

As schools reopen, some of the measures instituted globally to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 include social distancing and hand washing. As governments decide to reopen education institutions (partially or fully), WASH materials such as water, sanitizers and face masks are essential. Schools' readiness to receive students after reopening is based on the availability of such materials (UNICEF, 2020c). In Burundi, UNICEF's US\$7 million contribution to COVID-response measures includes constructing and supplying WASH stations in schools, and sensitizing people on how to prevent COVID-19 (GPE, 2020a). Chad's financial support from Education Cannot Wait covered also covers COVID-19 response activities such as building WASH facilities (UNHCR, 2020). In Ethiopia, the government partnered with the World Bank to raise about US\$15 million to, among other things, support the installation of WASH equipment and first aid kits in public primary and secondary schools (UNICEF, 2020d).

In most GPE partner countries, WASH programs in response to COVID-19 pandemic have taken a multi-sectoral approach. For instance, in Mauritania, the country's COVID-19 response has mostly been directed towards the rural poor, whose education participation is low and expected to worsen due to the pandemic. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), facilitates the feeding of approximately 320,000 and 60,000 learners in primary and pre-primary schools respectively (UNDP, 2020a). Pooling resources to respond to the effects of the pandemic entails cross-sectoral collaboration: MOET works with UNICEF and WFP to facilitate feeding in schools, and with the Ministry of Water and various NGOs to support WASH programs in the schools (Kingdom of Lesotho Ministry of Education and Technology, 2020). Togo's US\$7 million in grants from UNICEF and GPE covers a range of pandemic-response measures, including promoting hygiene and providing personal protective equipment for teachers and students in public schools. Part of this money paid for 2,000 masks, 2,000 bottles of disinfectant, and 100 handwashing stations (UNICEF, 2020e).

❖ **Sierra Leone's** funding from partners supports WASH resources and practices, as well as distance learning initiatives targeting one million learners and 12,000 teachers. WASH resources were provided to 3,500 schools help them prepare for reopening. The funds are also to be used to assess the contributions of distance learning solutions (radio, Internet, television, books and other reading materials) on learning outcomes. About 60% of beneficiaries are targeted for this assessment (GPE, 2020i).

❖ In **Mozambique**, the World Bank has fostered a collaborative approach between different sectors — including education, health, water, and sanitation — to facilitate the safe reopening of schools. Its Mozambique Urban Sanitation Project has helped finance WASH supplies and measures, including improving toilets to cater for the needs of girls and people with disabilities, and providing sanitary towels for the girls (World Bank, 2020b). The country also received US\$140 million from GPE to increase girls' school enrolment, and support their transition through various levels of education.

Financing Inclusion of Vulnerable Populations in Education

The financing of education during COVID-19 has also had to address diverse learner needs and characteristics. In most GPE partner countries, funding to increase gender equality and inclusivity in education during the pandemic is integrated with funding for other priority areas.

For instance, addressing gender equality and inclusivity has been factored into education funding for teacher training. This is evidenced in countries such as Kenya, Mali, the Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe where gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches are implemented by building teachers' capacity to support adolescent girls, including helping them cope with menstrual hygiene (GPE, 2020h,k,n). Such initiatives are intended to motivate adolescent girls to continue with both home and school learning.

Existing gender or girl-focused programs have also been strengthened or scaled up to respond to their education needs during the pandemic. In Nigeria, the Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) project, which promotes girls' secondary education, has been adapted to enhance distance learning (World Bank, 2020c). AGILE combines the use of digital technology, TV and radio to reach girls in remote areas. The project aims to make the school environment safe and inclusive, and enhance secondary school completion rates among girls from low-income backgrounds, by increasing and improving school infrastructure. AGILE also gives scholarships to girls and sensitizes communities on the harmful practices that undermine girls' education and empowerment.

In Mali, as part of the budget for continuation of learning (US\$2.73 million) and preparations for school reopening (US\$3.86 million), the government and its development partners are financing a gender-sensitive, protective and preventative approach to safeguarding learners from violence, with a particular focus on girls, who are most affected (GPE, 2020h,k,n). This involves a psychosocial support program that entails messaging to adolescent girls and their parents on how to support better learning outcomes for these girls. In Zimbabwe, with a budget of US\$3.89 million, some 2,933 low-resourced schools were targeted to enable them to offer gender-sensitive remedial programs. This initiative aims to reach about one million learners from disadvantaged families (GPE, 2020k). Zimbabwe has also financed an initiative to provide large print learning resources, supportive learning materials, and psychosocial support to some 26,356 learners with diverse special needs, at a cost of US\$1.5 million (GPE, 2020k).

Other activities that have attracted financial support during the pandemic to enhance gender equality and inclusiveness in education include:

- Gender sensitization and support to students at risk of dropping out in Benin (Education International, 2020), as part of the World Bank's assistance of US\$7 million;
- US\$1.5 million from Education Cannot Wait to the Government of Cameroon to ensure continuity of children's learning in crisis-affected areas, reaching 3.9 million children (of whom 2.2 million are girls) and 8,600 teachers (60% of whom are women) (Education Cannot Wait, 2020) ; and
- Togo's US\$7 million from GPE and UNICEF to support back-to-school programs, particularly targeting girls (GPE, 2020o).

❖ In **Senegal**, the Girls Out Loud (GOL) program was launched in 2019 to create digital safe spaces for girls (Plan International, 2020). Through socially-supportive Facebook groups, GOL gives girls an opportunity to connect with trusted female mentors and peers, and to learn about and discuss key issues affecting their personal lives. In an environment of social distancing and lockdowns, this digital space provides girls ongoing connection with their peers and access to information and social support. It allows girls in need to privately message a group moderator. Moderators are trained providers of psychological "first aid" and can direct the girls to other available support services. The GOL Facebook pages are also being used to disseminate COVID-19-related health information. Responses from participating girls show a lot of enthusiasm to engage with program activities, and plans are underway to scale GOL to other countries.

❖ **Malawi's** funding from GPE and UNICEF has been used to support distance learning solutions to reach learners from marginalized areas and vulnerable populations with limited access to the Internet or electricity. It offers distance learning solutions to pre-primary, primary and lower secondary school children through radio, television, and digital platforms (GPE, 2020g). UNICEF's grant specifically supports 66,993 children with distance learning solutions targeting those from marginalized and vulnerable populations (UNICEF, 2020f).

❖ **Republic of Congo's** funding from partners has also been used to provide distance learning solutions across the country. The funds have supported 327 daily radio programs and 25 television channels for distance learning. The government has also used the funds to procure and distribute 225,424 workbooks in 11 provinces, and 6,708 solar powered radios to vulnerable children in 17 provinces (UNESCO, 2020c). Funding obtained from Education Cannot Wait and UNESCO's Capacity Development for Education Programme supports distance learning through radio with the aim of reaching over four million learners. The funds have helped to build the capacities of 120 community radio stations and 240 radio and television broadcasting staff members (GPE, 2020b).

4 Education Sector Financing Challenges

The COVID-19 education financing situation in Africa is made worse by pre-existing challenges. According to the World Bank (2020d), even before COVID-19 hit, 258 million primary and secondary-school learners were out of school, with more than half of all 10-year-old children in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) unable to read and understand a simple text. In sub-Saharan Africa, this “learning poverty” figure was close to 90% (World Bank, 2020d). This underscores the need to use emerging lessons from the use of distance learning solutions to reach out-of-school children, including those who may not return when on-site learning resumes.

Furthermore, learning loss is likely to create demand for more financial allocations to education. An analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on learning (Al-Samarrai, 2020; Azevedo, 2020) shows that its impact is likely to push 10 out of every 100 school children into the learning poverty bracket in LMICs.

Across the GPE partner countries in SSA, there are some common challenges in financing education responses to COVID-19. These challenges are more acute in countries that were already experiencing development-related resource shortfalls due to a range of factors. These include, among others: poor economic performance and disruptions of national service delivery systems (as seen in Liberia and the effect of Ebola); internal conflicts that have weakened education system service delivery (as witnessed in Cameroon and South Sudan); and protracted conflicts and fragility (as seen in parts of Central Africa, northern Nigeria and Somalia). The onset of COVID-19 exacerbated the financing challenges in such countries.

Each GPE country developed a costed COVID-19 response plan for the education sector. Figure 2 shows the total budget for the costed response plans at the time of planning (around April-May 2020) and the internal funds available at that time. We estimate available funds were only sufficient to cover about one-quarter of the needed resources. However, the situation may have changed due to increased external support, especially from GPE, World Bank and Education Cannot Wait, and internal budgetary allocations from governments.

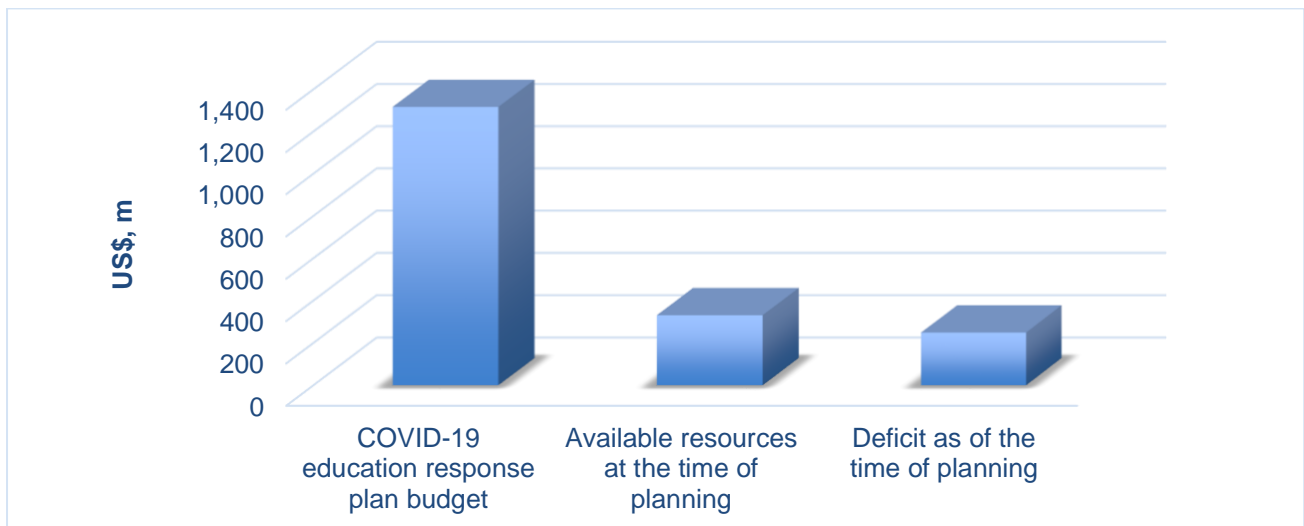


Figure 2: GPE partner countries in Africa: Budgets for education response plans vs. available funds

Source: GPE (2020a-o)

The main cross-cutting financing challenges include:

- Inadequate resources to reach all children in need of infrastructure to support continuity of learning, provision of WASH facilities, and expansion of spaces as schools reopen.

- Over-reliance on external funding for emergency response, especially for the hard-hit economies. Such resources are targeted (and sometimes ring-fenced) and, while they close critical financing gaps, they cannot be expected to adequately meet all education needs in times of crisis.
- The dampening effects of COVID-19 on economic growth in the majority of countries, and the resulting increase in budget deficits. This is likely to result in budget reallocation to public health areas and cuts in key sectors, including education.
- The pressure of competing national priorities such as debt repayment, health and security, and recurrent expenditures, such as public sector salaries, which hamper effective financial responses in the education sector.
- Other pre-existing challenges, such as conflict or lack of service delivery infrastructure.

Even with the reported education funding for sustained learning during the COVID-19 period, GPE partner countries still grapple with inadequate resources as the funds only partially address their defined education needs (ADEA, 2020). This limits full-scale implementation of education interventions across all levels and categories of learners. For instance, in the Republic of Congo, finances rendered to support learning during COVID-19 school closures provided for, among other things, workbooks in 11 provinces, and solar-powered radios to support learners from vulnerable households in 17 provinces. Other provinces, however, did not receive this support due to limited funding. Other interventions, such as the distribution of books and teacher training, were limited to the provincial capitals, leaving out learners and teachers from remote areas (ACAPS, 2020).

Below are some key examples of challenges faced in selected GPE partner countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Ghana: Despite funding through national development finance institutions and the World Bank's Global Partnership for Results-Based Approaches, complemented by GPE, a significant proportion of school-aged children are not in school. Reaching children in marginalized districts remains a challenge (Lopez, Nagashima & Ackwerh, 2020). State and development partner funding focuses mainly on supporting public schools. Private schools serving the poor population (defined as those who spend 10% of their income on education) face many financial challenges and may not offer continued support to learners during the COVID-19 period (Niazi & Doorly, 2020).

Liberia: By mid-2020, only 50% of the resources needed to respond to COVID-19 had been realized (UNICEF, 2020f). The effects of the pandemic weakened economic growth: it struck just as the country was recovering from the effects of Ebola and ever-increasing inflation. Much of the response therefore relies on external funding, particularly from development partners. Given the low penetration of Internet, radio, and TV, providing distance learning to reach children in remote areas will require huge investments. The lack of adequate resources will likely increase inequalities in education access.

South Sudan: With one of the lowest education budgets in the East Africa region², and weakened by years of fragility, South Sudan is hampered in its efforts to realize inclusive and equitable education (Lahreche & Hobdari, 2020; UNESCO, 2020d; UNICEF, 2019). The onset of the COVID-19 crisis against a backdrop of government instability and internal conflict means that high levels of funding will be required to reach all children — even as the country grapples with dwindling economic growth due to depressed oil prices and increased inflation. The low penetration of radio services will make it difficult to ensure every child is reached, without adequate funding. The success of the planned “Education on Air” initiative, for instance, will depend on additional support to provide radios to poor households.

² Some US\$58 million for the 2018/19 FY at current exchange rates.

Cameroon: With high levels of internal displacement and many refugees from Central Africa, Cameroon also lacks harmonized government systems to deliver quality education at pre-primary and primary levels for all. Responding to the effects of COVID-19 is further compromising funding for essential educational services. In particular, the country's resources are insufficient to address major challenges related to access, efficiency and equity, and COVID-19 is likely to deepen these inequities (World Bank, 2020e). The challenge is compounded by reported instances of misappropriation of funding in education and other sectors during the COVID-19 crisis (Atabong, 2020).

Burkina Faso: Without a comprehensive civil identification and social registry system, Burkina Faso is challenged in providing cash transfers to vulnerable households and schools with the most vulnerable learners to support education, public health and other safety measures (World Bank, 2020f). This has been worsened by the persistent conflicts in the country, which have derailed every effort to put in place a robust identification and social registry system. For instance, a recent security crisis led to the closure of over 2,300 schools and displaced over one million people. With the growing attacks on learning institutions, students and teachers have borne severe consequences. More than 400,000 learners have had their education disrupted due to conflict-motivated school closures (Education Cannot Wait, 2021).

Central African Republic: High levels of domestic and external debt constrain the Central African Republic's ability to finance its development initiatives while responding to COVID-19 and other emergencies. While these debts are slowly declining, and projected to remain sustainable in the medium term (World Bank, 2020g), they leave few financial resources to repurpose to respond to the pandemic. The country relies on both internal and external funding support for COVID-19 responses in health, education, and other social sectors that need cushioning (World Bank, 2020g).

Comoros: While it has received financial aid to support education-related responses during the COVID-19 period, Comoros has inadequate human capacity to respond to a crisis of this magnitude. The country has few resident international development partners to support its recovery path and help it build resilience, including strong local capacity for appropriate response mechanisms (UNDP, 2020b). Even with good financing opportunities, the lack of qualified human resources challenges the country's implementation of its education (and health) responses to the pandemic, and its ability to scale the implementation of solutions.

Tanzania: In addition to Tanzania's lack of transparency in dealing with COVID-19, a presidential decree bars pregnant girls from continuing their basic education, citing a 1960 law and 2002 education policy guidelines for expelling students on "offences against morality" (Human Rights Watch, 2020a). During COVID-19 school closures, there has been a reported increase in violence against girls and a rise in teen pregnancies (World Vision International, 2020). Given this exclusion, Tanzania cannot secure financial resources to support girls' return to mainstream education — during COVID-19 and beyond. This presidential directive undermines the country's progress on its commitment to advance education for all, and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4. It is extremely difficult for education partners in Tanzania to promote equitable and inclusive education at a time when such support is sorely needed to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 (Human Rights Watch, 2020b). Development partners have delayed financial support to the education sector due to Tanzania's policy on schooling for pregnant girls. In early 2020, the World Bank delayed disbursement of a US\$500 million education loan to the country (UNESCO, 2020e). Across SSA, World Vision estimates that over US\$10 billion in GDP could be lost if adolescent mothers are denied an opportunity to return to school after COVID-19 school closures (World Vision International, 2020).

5

Emerging Evidence on the Impacts of Education Financing during the COVID-19 crisis

Despite the challenges, there is some evidence that the education response to COVID-19 may have some positive impacts overall. Research by the World Bank indicates some progress in funding areas of critical need during the pandemic to allow students to continue learning and help schools prepare for safe reopening. This has entailed more focus on distance learning solutions and WASH — both taking into consideration vulnerable populations, including children with special needs and girls from low-income backgrounds. Countries such as Rwanda and Ethiopia took the opportunity in their COVID-19 response to implement infrastructural projects such as the construction of classrooms to reduce overcrowding and enhance social distancing. This implies that some GPE partner countries are funding the implementation of aspects of their strategic plans that best address the challenges brought by COVID-19 (GPE, 2020b; World Bank, 2020b).

In contrast, a recent study by UNICEF highlights the potential long-term damage that the inadequate resourcing for education may produce. It stresses that COVID-19 school closures have caused education market disruptions, putting at risk the continuity of learning for millions of children at the bottom of the income pyramid who have access to low-fee private schools (Alam & Tiwari, 2021). The report argues that some of those fee-dependent schools may close permanently, causing learner displacement and a possible surge of enrolment in nearby public schools. This will also mean lost employment for teachers, exacerbating the existing employment problem in many countries where low-fee private schools are common. This calls for fiscal interventions by governments in support of the private school sector as it complements the supply of schools in the public sector.

Emerging evidence also shows that parents and private sector education providers have a key role to play in financing education during this COVID-19 period. For instance, in Ethiopia, in an attempt to reduce pressure on public schools (due to transfers in from private schools where families struggled to make payments), the government called upon private schools to find ways to put fee payments on hold and give parents time to figure out how to pay (World Bank, 2020b). Anecdotal evidence from Kenya shows similar discussions on financing between parents and private sector education providers are taking place.

6

Conclusion and Recommendations

Education financing efforts have primarily focused on four key interrelated areas outlined in the plans developed by governments to respond to the COVID-19 disruptions. These areas include the shift towards distance learning during school closures; training teachers on the use of distance learning technologies and instructional delivery to better support their learners; provision of WASH facilities as schools prepare for reopening; and support to vulnerable populations such as children with special needs, girls from marginalized areas, and refugee populations.

The finances to support these and other areas of response have come both from government budgetary allocations, including from reprogramming, and assistance from development partners, mainly GPE, the World Bank, UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait. One widely funded response to COVID-19 was the shift to distance learning solutions to ensure continuity in learning during school closures. For school reopening, most budgets support WASH-related activities. In a few countries, infrastructure such as classrooms have been funded by both governments and private philanthropy.

The magnitude of investments in learning continuity varies considerably from government to government, dictated by the aspects of distance learning solutions financed. For instance, in Ghana, the government and its partners financed content development, curation, and delivery for distance learning, and an enhanced digital library, while in Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Kenya, South Sudan and Zambia, governments supported lesson delivery through radio television, and the use of tablets. The various governments appreciated that while the pandemic affected both boys and girls, the effects on schooling and well-being are potentially very different, with girls being at high risk of falling behind. Consequently, almost all the budgets in the four priority areas have mainstreamed inclusivity to ensure children from marginalized and low-income backgrounds – especially girls – are not left behind. The Central African Republic, for example, supported teacher training on gender-based violence, and psychosocial support, to address the unique needs of adolescent girls.

Key financing challenges encountered in GPE partner countries include the endemic problem of inadequate resources to support existing needs; over-reliance on external funding for emergency responses; budget reallocations to support the hard-hit public health sector, debt repayment and other competing national priorities; and pre-existing financial and other challenges that have hampered the allocation of resources to the education sector.

From this synthesis, the following policy recommendations emerge:

1. More domestic resources are required to create sustainability in financing the emergency response. Such resources could come from reprogramming within the available frameworks and from partnerships with local entrepreneurs, including distance learning solution service providers.
2. Given the importance of equity and inclusion in education, as one of the key long-term objectives of education systems in Africa, governments and funding partners should adequately demonstrate how their funding mechanisms will enhance education for their most vulnerable learners. In particular, funding should reach children living with disabilities, girls at risk of exposure to violence, and children and youth in remote, marginalised or fragile areas.
3. Huge public and private investments in education technology and distance learning infrastructure (such as Internet bandwidth) are needed, especially in remote geographical locations and in fragile states where learners had little or no access to off-site learning during school closures. This will not only go a long way to support out-of-school children with alternative pathways to learning, but will improve education systems' resilience and preparedness for future disruptions of on-site learning.

4. Targeted or conditional external debt cancellation (such as swapping external debt for learning) should be considered to help struggling economies channel more resources into addressing equity and inclusion in education during the COVID-19 crisis. Conditionality is critical in ensuring the finances reach the most vulnerable, including children and youth with special needs, girls at risk of violence and of not returning to school, and children and youth in hard-to-reach areas. Such consideration could trigger greater allocations of domestic resources to enhance inclusivity in education.
5. Financing to improve system-level human capacity would go a long way to strengthen crisis response and post-crisis management of disrupted education services. Such funding—which was scarcely observed in our research—could enhance system resilience, preparedness and planning for continuity of learning in a way that minimizes the negative effects of existing education challenges, especially on equity and inclusion.

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