



## Concept Note:

# Provision of *Quality* and *Inclusive* Education in Sub-Saharan Africa in the Phase of Covid-19

## On-line Conversation

*In partnership with*



## 1. Introduction

**Education is one of the sector negatively affected by the Covid-19 epidemic.** Due to this epidemic, schools shut all across the world with over 1.2 billion children remaining out of the classroom. In response, governments and private providers of education have shifted to digital learning (e-learning) where learning is provided with the aid of technology. While this quick response by the governments and other actors is laudable, there are several concerns related to digital/e-learning, especially in Sub Sahara Africa (SSA).

**While e-learning is a capable means increase access to education in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there are several challenges on the way.** E-learning has not been fully experimented for children in pre-primary, primary and secondary education. E-learning requires access to necessary means and tools including access to electricity, reliable internet connectivity, a computer, a laptop, TV or a radio. While this is the case, nearly 90 per cent of learners in SSA do not have household computers while 82 per cent are unable to get online<sup>1</sup>. Globally, close to 56 million learners live in areas that are not served by mobile networks, almost half in SSA (*ibid*).

**In particular, e-learning has the potential to enhance inequalities to education.** A review of the status across the region shows that high end private schools have the basic backbone to support e-learning. Majority of these schools are currently conducting e-learning for their learning. However, these high end private schools account for less than 20 percent of children attending pre-school and basic education (primary and secondary schools) in SSA. A large share, close to 70 percent (according to World Bank estimates)<sup>2</sup>, of children in SSA are attending public schools while a good percent attend low cost private schools located in informal settlements<sup>3</sup>.

**While majority of the children in SSA attend public schools and low cost private schools, their access to e-learning opportunities remains low.** Most of these children are relying on government sponsored e-learning lessons provided through radio, TV and e-clouds. However, the governments across Africa are heavily constrained in terms of infrastructure to support e-learning. In addition, children attending public schools and low cost private schools are more likely to come from households from: *rural areas* (for public schools), *low socioeconomic background*, *urban informal settlements* (for low cost private schools) and *households with parents with low level of education*. These categories of households have limited access and ownership of means and tools such as electricity, computer, a laptop, TV or a radio to support e-learning. In addition, these households depend on daily wage for their living as parents have to work and therefore might not have time to support the e-learning of their children. Even if they had access to online learning tools, parents in these households might not effectively support the e-learning of their children due

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<sup>1</sup>World Bank, 2019, World Development Indicators, Washington DC, USA.

<sup>2</sup>World Bank, 2011, Education in Sub-Saharan Africa Comparing Faith - Inspired, Private Secular, And Public Schools, Washington DC, USA.

<sup>3</sup>For a survey of the literature review on the scope and impact of low cost private schools in developing countries, please see, among others: (i) Wamalwa, F. M., and Burns, J. (2018). Private Schools and Student Learning Achievements in Kenya. *Economics of Education Review*, 66 (2018): 114-124; (ii) Tooley, J. and Longfield, D. (2015). The role and impact of private schools in developing countries: A response to the DFID-commissioned rigorous; (iii) Heyneman, S. P. and Stern, J. M. (2014). Low cost private schools for the poor: What public policy is appropriate? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 35:3-15.

to low level of education.

**Even for the children currently following the e-learning, it is not clear whether e-learning, as a pedagogical method, is an effective method of teaching.** Mounting e-learning requires well trained teachers who can leverage and integrate technology to deliver learning. Generally, teachers in SSA struggle with the rapid transition to digital learning, even those in countries (and schools) with reliable infrastructure and household connectivity. Also the curriculum is not pedagogically designed to be delivered through e-Interface. The effectiveness of online learning varies amongst age groups. Generally, young children, children falling behind in learning and children with disabilities are less likely to benefit from learning that is not characterized by face to face interaction with the teacher.

**In effect, with the Covid-19, the learning of more than 85 percent of pre-primary, primary and secondary school going children in SSA remains comprised.** This has huge implications to the individual children, their families, their communities and their respective countries. Evidence gathered over the past 40 years demonstrates that education is important pathway out of poverty. To the individual child, education can lead an increase in his/her productivity, further leading to better earnings. To their respective countries, education leads to higher economic growth, improved health status and reduced crime among other non-monetary outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. A Dialogue: Provision of Quality of Education in SSA in the Phase of Covid-19**

**To add this conversation, Pax Romana Africa, a network of Catholic Professionals, Intellectuals and Academics in Africa, in collaboration with its national affiliates and other organizations, is organizing an on-line conversation on this topic.** The conversation will bring a panel of experts, parents- primarily catholic lay professionals, as well as education stakeholders across Africa. The participants will particularly be invited to reflect and suggest ways in which the government and other private education providers including the Church, can increase access to quality and inclusive education, especially in the phase of Covid-19. This conversation will explore, among others, the following questions:

- What the challenged imposed on Covid-19? What are the mitigation strategies? Is learning online as effective?
- Have countries adequately responded to provision of quality and inclusive education during Covid-19?
- What are some of the options for delivering quality and inclusive education in the phase of Covid-19? What is the future role of technology in enhancing teaching and learning?
- What does the Covid-19 mean for future of learning? What does this mean for education providers- especially the governments and the Church?

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<sup>4</sup> For a deep dive into the importance of education, some references are provided here: (i) Mincer, J. (1974). Schooling, experience, and earnings. *human behaviour & social institutions no. 2*; (ii) Psacharopoulos, G. and Patrinos, H. A. (2004). Returns to investment in education: a further update. *Education economics*, 12(2):111- 134; (iii) Lochner, L. (2011). Non-production benefits of education: Crime, health, and good citizenship. Technical report, National Bureau of Economic Research; (iv) Hanushek, E. A. and Woessmann, L. (2008). The role of cognitive skills in economic development. *Journal of Economic Literature*, pages 607-668.

- What is the future role of technology in enhancing teaching and learning?
- What is the role of other stakeholders, especially the church in mitigating the challenges of Covid-19?
- What three priorities can the Church and Catholic professionals do to enhance quality and inclusive education during and post-Covid-19?

### **3. Organisation and Set-up.**

- *Dates* – 23<sup>rd</sup> May 10, 2020 or 30<sup>th</sup> May 2020.
- *Format*- A team of three education experts who will be hosted to discuss more on this topic. Other participants will be invited to follow the discussion, raise questions (through the moderator). In particular, questions may be raised on the social media platforms and also on the chat section of the platform (Zoom) during the session. The structure and outline of discussed will be shared shortly.
- *Time*: the on-line discussions will be organized once in a month, preferably during the last week of the month, on a Saturday, 11:30 GMT.
- *Platform*: Zoom
- *Languages*: French and English with a possible simultaneous translation.