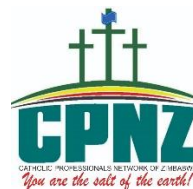# Provision of *Quality* and *Inclusive* Education in Sub-Sahara Africa in the Phase of Covid-19

Summary Report

In partnership with

A PAX ROMANA AFRICA REPORT ON THE PROVISION OF QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN THE PHASE OF COVID 19

INTRODUCTION

COVID 19 is a human-to-human transmitted disease, which emerged from the City of Wuhan, China in December 2019. This disease has not previously been seen in human beings and has continued to strain health systems globally for the past 6 months. On 30th January 2020, the World health organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

The first case in sub Saharan Africa was confirmed in Nigeria on 28th February 2020. Following the rapid increase in the number of cases outside China, WHO characterized COVID 19 as a pandemic on 11th March 2020 In his statement, Dr. Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO regional director for Europe, stated that the number of cases and the number of deaths would continue to rise rapidly and that there was need to escalate the   response and take actions that would help delay the pandemic while giving health care systems time to prepare and assimilate the impact. He further stated that WHO considered that social distancing and quarantine measures needed to be implemented in a timely and thorough manner. At the end of May 2020, more than six million people had been confirmed to have contracted the virus. Many more could be COVID-19 positive but have no idea as they are yet to be tested. More than 360,000 had died from COVID-19 related complications by the end of May 2020. World economies have stalled, many depressed and governments across the world are grappling with how to stimulate them before collapse.

The future generation of global citizens is distressed from the effects of COVID-19 on social lives. Globally, by 18th of June 2020, schools have closed in 191 countries affecting 1.6 billion children and 63 million primary and secondary school teachers since the pandemic was reported in their countries. In Kenya for instance, 37.8 percent of the population are learners (17.6 million as per Census 2019). These learners are spread across pre-school to university level and have since mid-March been at home. In Zambia, 4.4 million learners have been affected by the closure of schools. With the first case being reported on 18th March 2020 in Zambia, schools were closed two days later, which was three weeks before the end of the normal first term school calendar.

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 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 to increase access to education in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there are several challenges experienced. E-learning methodology 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, phone 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[1]. Globally, close to 56 million learners live in areas that are not served by mobile networks, almost half in SSA (*ibid*).

To add to this conversation, Pax Romana Africa, a network of Catholic Professionals, Intellectuals and Academics in Africa, in collaboration with its national affiliates and other organizations, organized an on-line conversation on the Provision of Quality and Inclusive Education in Sub-Saharan Africa in the Phase of Covid-19. The conversation brought a panel of experts, parents, primarily Catholic lay professionals, as well as education stakeholders across Africa. Four education experts were hosted in a 1 hr. 30mins webinar conducted on 30th May 2020. The panelists were:
1. Dr. John Mugo - Executive Director of Zizi Afrique Foundation, Kenya
2. Mrs. Josephine Shamwana Lungu - Education Secretary, Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia
3. Prof. Neil Boothby - Professor and Director, Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child at the University of Notre Dame, USA
4. Fr. Joseph Arimoso S.J, Education Co-ordinator for the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar.
5. Rev. Fr. Leonard Namuvumba, National Education Secretary, Zambia Council for Catholic Bishops- providing introductory remarks and prayers.

At the start of the Webinar, 61 connections had plugged in at the end of the session 58 were still logged in. The conversation was also streamed live on YouTube and Facebook simultaneously. Participants raised questions via chat and Q&A platforms on Zoom. The conversation was to explore the following areas
a) Challenges imposed by COVID-19 on the provision of quality and inclusive education and the mitigation strategies.
b) The response by countries to provision of quality and inclusive education during Covid-19.
c) The effectiveness of online learning in Sub-Saharan countries and the options for delivering quality and inclusive education in the phase of Covid-19.
d) The role of the family in a child's education.
e) The future of learning post COVID-19

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS/FINDINGS

1. Quality of education offered in Sub-Saharan Africa countries

Panelists observed the need to assess the quality of education offered in schools. COVID-19 has not created a new situation; but has dramatized what has been there all the time. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inequalities in our education systems and provided

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[1]World Bank, 2019, World Development Indicators, Washington DC, USA.

citizens the opportunity to rethink and determine if the education being offered is relevant to the needs of the society.

Education Model

Some of the panelists felt there has been an assumption that education plays the same role across the world. It was observed that education plays different roles in different places and therefore Africa and Africans need to look at different approaches to education. It was felt that the African nations had adopted educational models similar to those of western countries despite the differences in context.

Quality of the Teacher

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the quality of the teacher in the classroom. Looking at the education programs available on television and online platforms, it was observed that there is low quality and inaccuracy including spelling mistakes, which paints the picture of what the learners are exposed to while the adults are not watching. There is need to look at the quality of training for teachers.

Measure of success in our education systems

What is the measure of success in our education systems? Education cultures seem to define education as certification, ignoring the practicality of skills offered. There is need to define what education is for a child that is practically-oriented and a child that is theory-driven. It is unfair to use the same measure of intelligence on children irrespective of their backgrounds. Panelists indicated the need to also look at the needs and type of education required through the lens of the children and begin to modify the type of training. For example, a child from a rural area would have better practical knowledge in fishing and agriculture in comparison to one in the urban area who may not be exposed to these experiences.

The challenges being faced by learners in the education systems of SSA cannot be addressed in the same manner they are handled in developed countries, in Sub-Saharan Countries, 89% of the households don't have computers while 82% don't have access to Internet or cell phone networks. That creates a challenge to emulate a country like USA where 90% of its learners have access to Internet.

2. Governments' response to Coronavirus pandemic disruption on education

Education systems were unprepared for the current situation as it was unprecedented. There is also an imbalance in financial resource provision for education in most countries as highlighted by the impact of the pandemic as most institutions were ill prepared to respond

adequately to this pandemic. While large-scale closure of schools maybe new for some societies, it is not unprecedented for learners since on average over the last 10 years, 75 million children around the world have lost up to a third of their normal school time due to natural disasters, conflicts and pandemics. This means, had governments   learnt lessons from such situations, they would have been in a better position to respond to the effects of a pandemic.

Several governments and private providers of education across Sub Saharan African countries have shifted to digital learning (e-learning) where learning is provided with the aid of technology.

Kenya's Response to Schools Closure

In Kenya, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), which had been offering radio-based learning for decades, has since the pandemic,scaled up its services for a larger reach. In collaboration with the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, KICD started to broadcast lessons for learners at different grades.

There have been many innovations with some teachers connecting with the learners through WhatsApp and other social media platforms. The government set up a committee to collect public views, which attracted an estimated 3,000 submissions from different education stakeholders. The Ministry of Education had initially indicated that schools reopening had been postponed until 4th June 2020 but in May the Education Cabinet Secretary indicated that would not happen soon and that the process of reopening schools will be a carefully thought out process that must guarantee the safety and health of learners, teachers and staff.

Zambia's Response to Schools Closure

In Zambia, the Ministry of Education got a team of experts to give guidelines on how to deal with the current situation. Certain measures were put in place, for example, a Television station was established to specifically provide education programmes. An education-broadcasting unit under the Ministry of General Education, which had been dormant, is now active providing education programmes through television. Other methods were encouraged through the use of Whatsapp groups and a smart television website for access to examination papers through the National Examining Council.

It was reported that Zambia was scheduled to reopen schools on 1st June 2020 ,amidst anxiety from parents, teachers and learners ,only for pupils in examination classes, while non – examination classes would continue with e- learning   . There had been concerns over the path the pandemic takes once institutions begin to resume school attendance.

The government in consideration of the tough economic times and dwindling resources has made it free to access online examination revision materials. This however   is a challenge

for some families because not all the families have mobile phones and in some cases the vulnerable families have to choose between buying food for the whole family and getting data bundles for a few members of the family who are in examination classes.

3. Challenges affecting online learning

Globally, close to 56 million learners live in areas that are not served by mobile networks, almost half of them are in in SSA where 89% of the households don't have computers and 82% don't have access to internet or cell phone networks. In Kenya there's a significant economic divide between the rich and poor, urban and rural. In some counties like Turkana and Tana River, some of the children barely attend school.

Access to Internet

Governments have continued to encourage e-learning during the Coronavirus pandemic so as to enhance physical distancing. The main challenge has been accessibility to Internet. Most of the households are struggling to get basic needs during this time of a pandemic out of which massive job losses and tough economic times have prevailed. Access to Internet is therefore not a priority. Many areas in SSA still remain without mobile network coverage while some that are connected experience slow Internet. Lack of electricity also appears to be a common challenge across Sub-Saharan Africa countries.

Inclusivity in E-learning

Panelists felt that online learning has failed to consider people living with disabilities. There has been little space to innovate so as to reach learners with visual impairment, hearing impairment and those that learn through different aids.

Mode of Education Delivery

With the use of technology, the delivery of education has completely changed. It is not possible to duplicate the whole classroom setup timetable as it appears to be too hectic for content developers. There is a lot of work that goes down before a teacher delivers content online which goes beyond just researching content but the actual recording of the content for use on radio, TV or online platforms. Most of the teachers are really challenged with technology. In SSA it was observed, some teachers have taken up teaching not because of passion or desire but because it is available. What is being offered online is not compatible with the normal exams that are administered to the learners. This pandemic has shown that the education sector requires educators who have passion for the ministry and not those who see it as a job.

Funding for Schools during COVID 19

A lot of schools in Sub Saharan Africa are struggling with funding especially faith-based institutions including Catholic schools. These schools are run with very low profit margins making it difficult to sustain the education systems they have maintained over the years. It has become difficult to convince parents who are spending more time with their children at home to pay fees. This affects the teacher who lacks motivation to keep in touch with the learners at no pay or reduced salaries.

Child Safety and Protection

Cases of child labour that are also associated with poverty levels have been reported in SSA communities. For instance in societies where a child has to go to work to afford basic needs like health and food. The closure of schools has resulted in pupils spending a lot of time at home at the risk of many vices in the society and lack of formal supervision especially where adults are absent. This has inevitably seen an increase in the cases of teenage pregnancies, child abuse and early marriages for girls. The online learning does not adequately protect the child from these vices .In addition, the surge onto online learning in SSA does not have enough technical policies and personnel to safe guard the children from cybercrime. There are also cases of teenage pregnancies and early marriage that have been reported, meaning a good number of children may not be in a position to go back to schools when they reopen. Reaching out to these learners via digital learning is almost impossible. "A society that does not protect its children is a society without a future", a panelist observed.

4. **Education at home**

The Role of the Household in child development

Panelists agreed that the household plays a significant role in child development as it acts as the first school for children. It was noted that 80% of a person's intellectual capacity is created in the first 1,000 days of life. What takes place in the households for example nutrition and social interactions builds a child's cognitive ability.

In comparison, a child growing up in a middle class family in Kenya is likely to be exposed to 20 to 30 million more words than a child from a poor family. This makes that formative period a key target and spells out the importance of being introduced early.

The Role of Parents

Parents and guardians have left the role of instilling values and building of character of children to schools. There is very little the school can do as compared to the role that households play. One panelist associated the failure of education to the failure of parents.

These remarks were supported by other attendees via chat. Some of them, teachers pointed out that parents have relegated the responsibility of education solely to the teacher.

Traditionally in the African culture, there were story-telling sessions to educate children which have since been abandoned for the sophisticated western model of imparting knowledge. This may not necessarily address needs of the African society.

Participants concurred on the need to transform the narrative that examinations are a key measure of success in education so that parents can take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic season when children are at home to teach them what they have always wanted to teach them but were unable to.

Education beyond the Curriculum

Participants were called to think about education beyond the classroom, teachers and the curriculum and look at the household school and church as some of the most functional learning systems. Healthy children cannot be raised if they are raised in brutal environments .There was need to support the parents especially those with modest literacy skills to help them engage their children with regards to education.

5. Role of the church

The Church considers education as an integral part in the transformation of the whole person and supports the parents in providing an excellent education. Sadly,the Faith based schools have been influenced by the demands of society to focus more on the academic achievement and little or no time for character formation. The component of integral development has been eroded .The faith based schools take more pride in the examination results and position on the school league performance table.

The church has been running good schools over years but has failed to shift its paradigm. Catholic schools have been ranked top nationally but there is still little contribution on the transformation of the children. It appears both parents and schools are focusing more on results.

The church has the possibility to influence people's attitudes and behavior. This can be done by designing messages in sermons about the importance of parents and the role they play in bringing up the children pointing out the responsibility God has bestowed upon them in raising healthy and responsible children. The church has a strong ability to influence people's attitudes and behavior through its wide network and universal links .Its message on why integral formation is important for education provided or received should be embedded in the catechesis.

Observations from findings

It appears that governments and other private education providers have not been satisfactory in the response to provision of quality and inclusive education in Sub-Saharan Africa in the face of COVID-19. From the panelists' submissions, COVID-19 has not created a new situation in the challenges of providing quality and inclusive education but has shone a light on the shadows that this sector is doing especially for the vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society. Several considerations need to be put in place in order to come up with functional education systems that will be different and responsive to the needs of SSA communities during and post COVID 19. These include actions through policy that answer questions among others such as:

a) Where does education begin for an African Child?
b) What is the role of education in Sub Saharan Africa?
c) What kind of education do we need in Sub Saharan Africa?
d) What is the measure of success in SSA education systems?
e) What is the role of the household and the church in educating children?

It was noted that 80% of a child's intellectual capacity is formed in the first 1000 days of life, which is 2 to 3 years. This emphasizes the importance of the household in the development and education of a child. Parents cannot abandon and delegate the responsibility of educating and instilling values to children to schools. SSA communities should apply combined efforts and bring back the African way of building character in children.

Schools are platforms for evangelization. They help transform the society by instilling values to children. It was felt that there was need to balance between Intellectual i.e. examination success and character formation.

Recommendations

a) Having understood that the household serves as the first school for a child, there needs to be progressive effort to make them safe and supportive environments for children.

b) There is also need to look at nutrition, which has been a major problem in Sub Saharan Africa especially at the very young age below 3 years, this will help in building their cognitive abilities.

c) Communities can begin to find solutions that will create continuity of education for the African child both informally and at formal schooling. This can be done by offering skills to the local population to enable them transfer knowledge to the children even when they are out of school. A similar approach has been taken by the health sector

where they used community health workers who were given basic training and were in a position to identify different symptoms in patients and offered great assistance.

d) The Church has a major role to play in child development. With the ability to influence people's behavior, the church needs to build positive parenting messages, bring the parents together when they have young ones for example in baptisms and other church gatherings. They need to understand the responsibility bestowed upon them by God to bring up his beloved children and that violence is not the way to go. This will help get the kids off to a strong start.

e) Church schools need to go back to being the model of what it means to provide quality and inclusive education as shown in its ministry. Education should be for the full formation of a child. This will help the children identify their gifts and talents which will make them greater men and women who will graduate to serve society and the church. By offering value based education, church schools will help transform the society. The church needs to find ways to blend our value systems with 21st century skills.

f) The teacher needs to be motivated to do their job. Parents should support the schools especially during this time of the corona virus pandemic. Teachers should also be encouraged to embrace technology as a way of covering gaps. Training of teachers should also incorporate the use of technology as a mode of education delivery.

g) Communities and private companies can support governments in finding solutions and other means to deliver education to the kids. This can be done through innovations and especially tech companies can create more interesting avenues to make education more appealing to the children. They can do this by making affordable digital devices and make the boring curriculum more fun through gamification and edutainment.

h) Curriculum transformation ought to be an ongoing process to move away from pedagogies that would be considered boring for young learners. The e-learning that is currently being offered on various platforms like television and radio would be revised to have more activities and play-based kind of learning. This will also help in making education more interesting to the children.