



COVID-19 and the Global Impact of School Closures

Education Response to COVID-19 in Kenya

Preliminary Findings, April 8-17 2020

Between April 8 and April 17, the Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child's global team conducted four interviews with NGOs, educators, and community leaders about COVID-19's impact on education in Kenya.

Summary

On Sunday, March 15th, after the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Kenya, the government announced the closure of schools until further notice. Due to the quick and unexpected nature of the school closures, there was very little, if any, preparation. No guidance had been prepared or disseminated, so schools closed abruptly without plans for next steps. Students could not return to school after the weekend to pick up books and materials. Especially in the rural areas of Kenya, teachers and supervisors had limited methods to communicate with students and parents to get them materials. For most, school has completely closed down, and until children can be back in the classroom, organized education has stopped.

“90% of parents did not go past primary school [in Mugunda], so *they do not know the importance of education*, so they are not able to push their kids to do private studies.”

Mary Wangui, Program Coordinator,
Juhudi Youth Initiative

“Maybe it will be *the opportunity to actually break this divide* that has been in the country, where schooling is seen as a matter for teachers, but now parents are being forced to be together, and *perhaps this will be what leads to that new education.*”

Dr. Sara Ruto, Chief Executive Officer, PAL Network

Common elements experienced in the school sector in Kenya as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

Continuity and Enrollment

- Parents have individually been seeking learning resources for their children, but not in an organized manner with teachers and the school system. As many parents do not have the resources or the training to continue their children's learning, children are on an extended school holiday. In rural areas, children play or help with daily chores rather than maintaining a learning schedule. If there's any learning, it's centered primarily around life-skills and work to support the household.
- The closure of schools has reflected gaps in resources. Many government schools closed without the possibility of distance learning while some private schools were able to organize digital learning resources shared via text and WhatsApp. However, even when learning is offered, students have varying access to electricity, internet, and smartphones, limiting the accessibility of digital resources even when shared. In Nairutia, a small town in Nyeri county, one interviewee estimates that one third of households have a TV, and this number drops as you move outside the town. In households with radios, family hierarchy can mean that children get the least time with a TV or a radio compared to elders and heads of household.
- A high proportion of Kenyan parents in rural areas have a low level of education themselves (many have not gone beyond primary school); therefore, parental capacity to support remote learning is limited.
- Additionally, schools in Mugunda have no clear systems of communication. Parents have shared that it is difficult to create moments of learning when the kids are not in the classroom.

Distance Learning Programs

- In response to COVID-19, the Ministry of Education has increased radio and television education programming. The following digital resources are available to learners:
 1. Kenya Education Cloud (KEC) managed by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)
 2. KBC-TV provides lecture-based learning for older learners in grades 6-8. This is particularly geared towards students preparing for their final exams.
 3. Non-profit TV stations for learners such as Akili TV and Ubongo TV are geared towards young learners.
 4. KBC Radio has revamped its programming, increasing the number of hours they provide programming and areas who receive the programming. They now offer 6 hours of instruction in English and an added 1 hour of instruction in Kiswahili.
- In addition to these national programs, a regional education learning initiative is currently working to develop some value-based education on 1) routine building within families and 2) community service performed by the family unit. Actors are also working on programming for youth who are not in an education program but are confined at home due to COVID-19.
- Interviewees have anecdotally shared that the curriculum programming shared through the radio and television has some challenges. Because the curriculum is lecture based, it can be dry and difficult for learners to stay engaged with. Additionally, much of the TV and radio programming is geared towards older learners, leaving primary and pre-k children with few resources. Additionally the TV channels and radio stations do not reach all of the corners of Kenya, leaving some learners without access to any digital resources.

“This is not the moment to hold anything...we are all in this together.”

John Mugo, Director, ZiziAfrique Foundation

“ COVID-19 has shown us that *without the physical classroom*, there is not much learning that can go on...especially in the *rural areas*. ”

Samuel Mukundi, Community Development Consultant and Strategist

Other Considerations

- As in any situation of increased stress where families are spending more time at home, children are at increased risk for domestic violence. In Mugunda, there have been reports of child abuse and an increase in sexual solicitations as lower income generation has driven the most vulnerable to seek food and income in other ways.
- One interviewee noted that civil society organizations have an important role to play in identifying and supporting families and marginalized learners during school closures. Additionally, civil society organizations can work at a faster speed and bring agency and urgency to issues in ways that government agencies are unable to do.

Complementary Services

- At the moment there are no government-organized programs for children to meet needs outside of academics like social and emotional well-being, nutrition, and healthcare. Local organizations have been working to meet some basic needs. For example, the Juhudi Youth Development Initiative in Mugunda has been conducting workshops on handwashing and how to make soaps from home. Some television shows, like Akili TV address social and emotional skills such as coping with stress.

Teacher and Staff Support

- All government employees have remained employed. Educators in private schools, which is a much lower number than those in public, have been receiving reduced salaries.

Next Steps

- Additional interviews that will improve our perspective:
 - Rural/urban Teachers
 - Urban parents
 - MOE or other government representatives
 - Representatives for NEET youth



Innovative Ideas

- In the absence of materials provided by the school, parents and communities have been finding new ways to continue their childrens' education. Some parents have been acquiring 'test revision papers' or worksheets for their children to complete, and then either grading them themselves or finding a friend or colleague who can. Some have recruited family members or neighbors to help with tutoring or organizing study groups via WhatsApp.