



CENTRE FOR AFRICAN JUSTICE, PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

“Education Post Covid-19”

R I G H T T O Q U A L I T Y E D U C A T I O N

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OVERVIEW

ELISABETTA SPOLDI



The Centre for African Justice, Peace, and Human Rights (the CAJPHR) is a foundation in The Hague that aims at promoting justice, peace and human rights through campaigning, education, developmental projects, and training. The CAJPHR was founded on the strong belief that development and growth can be achieved in Africa through capacity building and awareness. Therefore, the Centre focuses on strengthening the communities to advance long-lasting solutions towards “working together to grow together”.

Six teams are at the core of the CAJPHR: Sexual Violence team, Right to Quality Education team, Capacity Building team, Women Empowerment team, and the Administrative and Social Media teams.

In particular, in many African countries, the right to education is not always fulfilled as schools lack the proper facilities that would allow a safe educational environment. Therefore, the Right to Quality Education (hereinafter the RQE) Team collaborates with several African stakeholders to provide the essential school infrastructure for students in impoverished communities.

The Centre and its partners are driven by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 and they work towards “building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability, and gender sensitive in order to provide a safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environment” (UN, 2018).

One of the goals of the team is to reduce the dropout rate and ensure that students have basic access to drinking water and sanitation, in order to better their standard of living, which would lessen the likelihood of social inequalities. However, safe, non-violent, effective learning environments encounter numerous challenges in African countries, including conflicts, lack of resources and a deficiency of basic infrastructure as well as a lack of professionals that can provide a quality education.

The RQE team aims at improving public knowledge and creating awareness of the key issues faced by African children and students through social media platforms and publications. Moreover, the RQE team’s mission is to acquire funding and support from NGOs, international communities, companies and individual donors that enable the implementation of developmental projects, such as building much needed toilet facilities and washrooms in different schools across the continent.

These projects aspire to reach to as many students and communities as possible and achieve quality education, the development of peoples, resources and institutions and reduce the poverty rate, so as to close the gap between the standard education that children receive in impoverished communities and the quality education received in the rest of the developing world. One of the regular projects within the CAJPHR is the publication by all the teams of a quarterly magazine with a different focus and theme.

For this issue, the RQE team decided to focus on how education changed throughout the on-going global pandemic of Coronavirus (Covid-19). The first known case of the disease was identified in December 2019, it spread across the whole world, and it was declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO). Covid-19 is a contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome and the symptoms often include fever, cough, fatigue, breathing difficulties and loss of smell and taste.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about an unprecedented social and economic disruption on a global scale and has interrupted essential services including education. In Africa, research shows that school closures resulted in the aggravation of existing inequalities and the students that were already at risk of being kept out of quality education have been most impacted.

Among the many difficulties of providing education during the pandemic, many African children could not receive feedback or instructions and had sparse interaction with teachers, which led to fewer topics and less content being studied. The lack of access to computers, internet, radios or television meant that many students were unable to continue education in online learning. Moreover, the lack of contact with the other students and the school community caused students to feel isolated, anxious and stressed, increasing their vulnerabilities.

Now that the vaccine distribution has started and is spreading, the world has begun to imagine and plan the return to a “new normal”. Thus, the RQE team has decided to dedicate this Issue to the status of education after Covid-19 in Africa. The articles will focus on the costs that the pandemic had on education, on the current needs of the stakeholders; they will assess the impact of inequalities in rural communities by pointing at health services and education, and will explore the issue of water and education during the pandemic from a gendered point of view. Finally, the magazine will include two interviews to the founders of relevant organisations for children’s rights in Nigeria and Zambia, and will provide the readers with Covid-19 timelines, to better understand how the spread of the disease affected different countries in the continent.

With this Magazine, the RQE Team aims to provide the reader with a more profound knowledge of how education and communities were impacted during the pandemic and how the region is trying to recover and reinstate a safe education of quality.



1. World Health Organisation (March, 11 2020). WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>

2. World Health Organisation (n.d.). Coronavirus. Available at: https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

3. Human Rights Watch (31 August - 4 September 2020). Impact of Covid-19 on Children's Education in Africa. Submission to The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/26/impact-covid-19-childrens-education-africa>

THE COST OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON EDUCATION

By: Melissa Philippou

During the past year, the coronavirus pandemic has forced governments in 188 countries to temporarily close down their educational institutions, heavily disrupting the education and learning process of more than 1.7 billion students across the globe.

By the end of March 2020, UNESCO estimated that 161 country-wide school closures had forced out of school over 89% of the total population of students enrolled in school or university, representing 1.54 billion students globally. Figure 1 demonstrates that school closures became a reality in most countries by May 2020, with only a handful of countries maintaining school doors open. This figure fluctuated throughout the year, reaching its lowest level at the end of December with only 8.6% of total enrolled learners being affected by 11 country-wide school closures, representing approximately 150 million students worldwide.

However, the year 2021 started off with another round of national lockdowns and temporary school closures, further exacerbating the harm posed on education during the past year. From March onwards, government efforts to curb the spread of the deadly virus have passed through various phases, enabling at times the use of distance learning as the default learning process. Yet, with UNICEF calling for the urgent prioritization of school openings in mitigation plans in its most recent [press release](#), the questions that need to be raised are, is distance learning effective enough? And, to what extent have school closures impacted the education of children and youth in different parts of the world?

The closure of schools across the world due to the coronavirus pandemic did not only affect students, but also the students' families as well as teachers and society as a whole. It has brought to light various social and economic consequences, namely, student debt, digital learning, food insecurity, and homelessness. Further, it has imposed grave obstacles to the access to childcare, healthcare, housing, internet access, and services for people with disabilities.

1. World Health Organisation (March, 11 2020). WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>
2. World Health Organisation (n.d.). Coronavirus. Available at: https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab-tab_1
3. Human Rights Watch (31 August - 4 September 2020). Impact of Covid-19 on Children's Education in Africa. Submission to The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/26/impact-covid-19-childrens-education-africa>
4. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/education-and-covid-19-focusing-on-the-long-term-impact-of-school-closures-2cea926e/>
5. <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-school-closures-around-world-will-hit-girls-hardest>
6. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>
7. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures/consequences>



In several countries...school closures are closely linked to the rise of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation of girls...

Most importantly though, school closures have had a greater impact on less privileged children, as consequences for this group of children include interrupted learning, reduced food availability, childcare problems, and financial costs for families who could not work because of the pandemic. Specifically, in low-income countries where only 34% of children complete school, the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly exacerbated existing inequalities in education.

Therefore, in commemoration of the International Day of Education, it is important to identify, analyse and evaluate the short- and long-term implications of school closures to develop a deeper understanding of the limitations the pandemic has posed on education.

Short-term consequences

School closures have generated multiple social and economic implications for different social groups, hitting the most marginalised and vulnerable children or young adults the hardest, along with their families. First, the interruption of the learning process during the transitional period from physical to digital learning led to the deprivation of opportunities for students to grow and develop. This is particularly true for underprivileged students who oftentimes do not possess many educational opportunities and resources beyond those provided by the school. In fact, it is estimated that for more than 500 million students worldwide, distance learning remains out of reach.

8. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/student-loan-debt-relief-offers-support-to-an-economy-battered-by-coronavirus-11584735842>
9. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures/solutions>
10. <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/20/818300504/schools-race-to-feed-students-amid-coronavirus-closures?t=1610203373544>
11. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/03/17/coronavirus-closings-can-strand-poor-foreign-homeless-college-students-column/5054621002/>
12. <https://time.com/5804176/coronavirus-childcare-nannies/>
13. 000000
14. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/23/coronavirus-on-campus-students-face-food-insecurity-housing-crunch.html>
15. 0000
16. 0000
17. <https://www.thetelegram.com/news/world/coronavirus-deprives-nearly-300-million-students-of-their-schooling-unesco-419714/>
18. Couédard, P., B. Pont and R. Viennet (2020), "Education responses to COVID-19: shaping an implementation strategy", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 224. <https://doi.org/10.1787/8e95f977-en>.
19. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>
20. https://www.edge.co.uk/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19_report_final_-_web.pdf pg 20
21. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>
22. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>
25. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7473764/>



During this transitional period, maintaining connections between teachers and students has proved to be problematic or uneven, thus having serious consequences on students' education. Moreover, the learning process of several students across the world was disrupted by the unpreparedness of some parents for distance learning and homeschooling, especially for those with limited education and/or resources

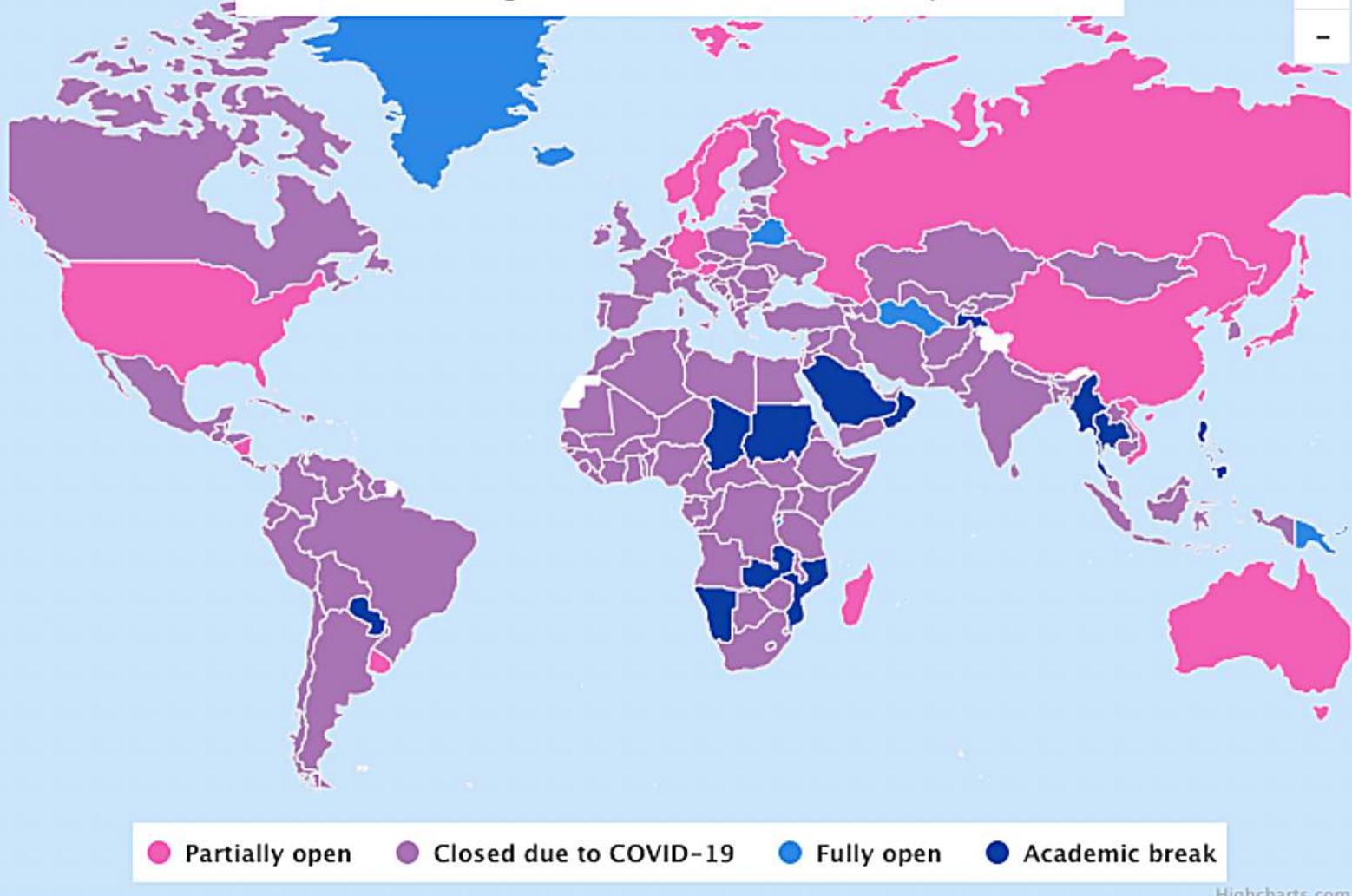
Second, many working parents were forced to leave their children alone at home in the absence of alternative options, which could lead to an increase of substance abuse, peer pressure, or social isolation. Indeed, a sharp increase of mental health issues was recorded among students during the first months of the coronavirus pandemic.

According to a survey conducted in the United States (US), the COVID-19 outbreak contributed to the rise of stress, anxiety, depressing thoughts, fear about their own health and that of their loved ones, difficulty in concentrating, disruptions to sleeping patterns, and greater concerns for their academic performance. Nonetheless, the opposite has also been a recurring phenomenon. Many working parents have missed work to take care of their children, having short-term economic impacts from wage loss as well as long-term negative impacts on productivity. In the case of health workers, for example, childcare obligations indirectly put unintended yet additional strain on national healthcare systems.

Third, in countries where schools provide free or discounted meals for students, the nutrition and eating habits of many students were compromised once school closures were in effect. Fourth, school closures can lead to the increased exposure of children and youth to exploitation and violence. For instance, in several countries, namely, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, school closures are closely linked to the rise of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation of girls, of early or forced marriages, of teenage pregnancies, of child soldier recruits by militia, and of child labor exploitation.



t29. [tps://qz.com/africa/543354/how-ebola-led-to-more-teenage-pregnancy-in-west-africa/](https://qz.com/africa/543354/how-ebola-led-to-more-teenage-pregnancy-in-west-africa/)
30. <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-school-closures-around-world-will-hit-girls-hardest>
31. https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/20/10/cost-pandemic?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=hgse_organic
32. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>
33. <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-school-closures-around-world-will-hit-girls-hardest>
35. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>
37. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>



Highcharts.com

Figure 1: Global Monitoring of Schools caused by COVID-19, 9 May 2020.

Long term consequences

Although the full extent of the impact of school closures during the past year might take years to be fully substantiated, adapting learning practices to the COVID-19 era has revealed a number of long term implications on the existence of and access to quality education. Perhaps the most important implication has been the accumulated burden placed on school funding. As countries around the world enter a third lockdown, it is still uncertain if schools will be able to weather the fiscal uncertainty looming over them. Governments and school leadership boards have already been faced with a surge of additional costs directly related to COVID-19 response measures, such as purchasing new equipment to support distance learning (i.e. laptop, software programs and IT specialists) and implementing health safety and social distancing measures.

Furthermore, as national economies are going through recession periods, there is limited funding available to be poured into the education sector. At the same time, financial uncertainty itself can lead to the rise of school dropouts, which can drive down national and international educational standards. UNESCO underscored that this phenomenon tends to occur as a result of “protracted closures and when economic shocks place pressure on children to work and generate income for financially distressed families.” Subsequently, the fall in national revenues and the increased cost pressure have caused schools to take strenuous decisions and make difficult financial cuts, including laying off members of the staff. This could negatively impact not only the economy, but most importantly, it could affect student performance and achievements.



...school closures due to epidemics or pandemics have already forced over 4 million young girls out of school...



Nonetheless, it is essential to note that school dropouts as a result of the economic strains posed by COVID-19 have disproportionately affected adolescent girls, further entrenching gender gaps within education. This is often the case for young girls and women in the Global South, where only limited social protection mechanisms are in place, given that “economic hardships caused by the crisis will have spill-over effects as families consider the financial and opportunity costs of educating their daughters.” For example, in countries that have one of the lowest enrollment rates and completion rates for girls, namely, Niger, Mali and South Sudan, school closures due to epidemics or pandemics have already forced over 4 million young girls out of school. In addition, this is also true for refugee or internally displaced girls who are already at a disadvantage, being only half as likely to enrol to school as their male counterparts.

Lastly, school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have posed serious challenges on measuring and validation systems. Notably, tests and examinations that determine student performance, admission to higher education and advancement to new education levels and institutions. In numerous countries including the United Kingdom and the United States, final examinations were postponed or canceled in 2020, considering that online examinations continuously raise concerns about fairness, in particular “when access to learning becomes variable.” Such disruption to assessment results lead to uncertainty for the future, thus causing more stress for students, which could potentially trigger further disengagement from the school learning process.

Evidently, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on education has been and continues to be severe. With approximately 90% of students being kept out of school as a result of mitigation practices to limit the spread of the virus, years of progress in line with SDG 4 are progressively being reversed, while concerns that more than 200 million children will still be out of school in 2030 rise day by day. As UNICEF highlights, “if children are faced with another year of school closures, the effects will be felt for generations to come.” Thus, more efforts should be directed to mitigating the overwhelming impacts of the current pandemic on education, in order to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.



ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

BEFORE COVID-19

PROGRESS TOWARDS
INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION WAS TOO SLOW



OVER 200 MILLION CHILDREN WILL STILL BE OUT OF SCHOOL IN 2030

COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS



SCHOOL CLOSURES KEPT
90% OF ALL STUDENTS OUT OF SCHOOL
REVERSING YEARS OF PROGRESS ON EDUCATION

INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION ARE EXACERBATED BY COVID-19

IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES, CHILDREN'S SCHOOL COMPLETION RATE IS



79% IN RICHEST
20% OF HOUSEHOLDS



34% IN POOREST
20% OF HOUSEHOLDS

REMOTE LEARNING REMAINS
OUT OF REACH FOR
AT LEAST
500 MILLION STUDENTS



ONLY 65% OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS
HAVE BASIC HANDWASHING FACILITIES
CRITICAL FOR COVID-19 PREVENTION

ATTEMPTING TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF STAKEHOLDERS: OBSERVATIONS FROM COVID-19

By: Carolyn Brown



Source: UNICEF/UNI280305/Côte d'Ivoire

Since The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11th, 2020, countries across the continent of Africa have taken measures to both curb infection rates and support vulnerable communities. Upon reports of the first cases emerging, countries shut down their borders, implemented social distancing and lockdown measures, and began to increase the amount of supplies and testing facilities with the help of both the global community as well as civil society and nongovernmental organisations.

While these measures, which adhere to the WHO guidelines, have aided countries in containing the spread of the virus, it left vulnerable communities in a precarious situation. With limited economic activity, as well as the closing of schools in favour of distance learning initiatives, families and their children have struggled to meet their basic needs. Many children receive nutritional support through school feeding programs throughout the continent, and with schools closed down, those families that benefit most from those programs are faced with hardship. 2020 saw increased reports of a rise in child labour, teenage pregnancies, and, in some cases, a drop in those returning for another year of school.

However, several initiatives have been introduced since the beginning of the pandemic to curb the hardship facing families, such as cash-assistance programs and a renewed effort to adhere to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) guidelines through the installation of handwashing stations throughout schools in the region.

1. AN: All information here is cited from the COVID timeline, provided by Brown, C.

2. "WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020" <<https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19--11-march-2020>>

3. Bouhlila DS, "Education in Tunisia: Past Progress, Present Decline and Future Challenges" (Arab Barometer March 25, 2021) March 25, 2021 <<https://www.arabbarometer.org/2021/03/education-in-tunisia-past-progress-present-decline-and-future-challenges/>>

4. The World Bank, 'Appraisal Environmental And Social Review Summary Appraisal Stage (ESRS Appraisal Stage)' (The World Bank 2020) <https://ewsddata.rightsindevelopment.org/files/documents/66/WB-P174166_BFKkv99.pdf>



The pandemic placed strains on both governments and communities alike, and communities have come together to address the issues and concerns of stakeholders on the continent. This article will expand upon the COVID-19 timeline to highlight the ways in which the pandemic has affected the region and its responses to the various stakeholders.

Challenges and Efforts Made for Stakeholders

As a result of the United Nations Development Goals (SDGs), programs targeting nutrition and education have been implemented throughout the continent to meet these challenges through the partnerships between the various governments and organizations, such as United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF) and the World Food Program (WFP). When COVID-19 hit the continent, many of these programs, which addressed nutritional and hygienic concerns, became inaccessible as schools closed down. While some distance learning programs were introduced, there was limited access to online instruction, particularly for children located in rural areas, as seen in Tunisia. Some countries, such as Togo, utilized radio and television for education, although access was limited for vulnerable populations.

Many countries featured on the timeline resumed in-person learning in September and October 2020 following a decrease in cases, which led to easing of restrictions. WASH supplies were installed prior to reopening, which was aided by organisations such as UNICEF. In Cameroon, the hygiene materials provided allowed more than 402,000 children in 7,144 schools to regularly wash their hands with soap. Countries, like Nigeria and Cameroon, held training in safety protocols to ensure safe resumption in education that followed COVID-19 prevention measures. Programs like the WFP aided in ensuring that feeding programs could be reimplemented in schools to meet the needs of the community.

For example, WFP worked with the Ministry of Education in Zambia to develop a plan to establish 15 school gardens across 5 districts. By the end of the month, the program reported that more than 2,000 school children had already benefited from the locally grown food. The plan is expected to benefit around 8,000 school children.

5. 'UNICEF Cameroon, 'COVID-19 Situation Report No. 14: 26 June to 9 July 2020' (UNICEF Cameroon 2020) <<https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-covid-19-situation-report-14-26-june-9-july-2020>>

6. Ibid; Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education, 'National Survey On School Resumption During COVID-19 Pandemic' (Federal Ministry of Education 2021).

7. African Development Bank, 'Zambia: Lusaka'S Water Point Ambassadors Turn The Tap To Protect Residents From Covid-19' (African Development Bank 2021) <<https://reliefweb.int/report/zambia/zambia-lusaka-s-water-point-ambassadors-turn-tap-protect-residents-covid-19>>

8. UNICEF Mauritania, 'Humanitarian Situation Report No. 5: 1 January To 31 December, 2020' (UNICEF Mauritania 2020) <<https://reliefweb.int/report/mauritania/unicef-mauritania-humanitarian-situation-report-no-5-1-january-31-december-2020>>

9. 'Africa: Millions Of African Children At Higher Risk Of Child Labour Due To Covid-19 - Business & Human Rights Resource Centre' (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020) <<https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/africa-millions-of-african-children-at-higher-risk-of-child-labour-due-to-covid-19/>> and 'Uganda: Covid-19 Pandemic Fueling Child Labor' (Human Rights Watch, 2021) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/26/uganda-covid-19-pandemic-fueling-child-labor>>

10. République Togolaise, 'Mesures Prises Par Le Gouvernement - 1 Avril 2020' (2020) <<https://covid19.gouv.tg/#mesures>>



In Mauritania, UNICEF, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and private donors aided the Ministry of Health in acquiring 120,000 masks and 5,000 radios to aid in the back-to-school program. Thanks to funding provided by the public and private sector donors, UNICEF met 61 percent of its targeted fundraising for the Humanitarian Action for Children 2020 campaign as of January 2021.

Despite the gains made in ensuring children have access to safe education, the enrollment rates across several countries declined from the previous years. In Nigeria, the 'National Survey on School Resumption during COVID-19 Pandemic' provided data and information received from surveys across the country regarding the readiness of schools to safely resume classes in accordance with prevention measures. In assessing whether or not the schools waste management plan was perceived as adequate, a majority of respondents representing the public schools stated that they either believed the status to be inadequate or stated they were unsure.

In addition, the survey questioned participants on the ongoing catch up classes, and over 50 percent of the respondents replied that they were uncertain about the status of these classes or believed they did not exist. The report also alluded to lower enrollment rates in the current school year, particularly in kindergarten levels and tertiary institutions. It is believed by parents that the safety protocols and measures will not be enforced in primary schools, while lower enrollment rates in tertiary education is a result of most of the students moving on to trade work to support themselves economically.

In Zambia, a report conducted by the Ministry of General Education was released in September regarding school readiness, which involved several other organisations, such as the Zambian National Education Coalition, UNICEF, and Zambian Open Community Schools. The report had some encouraging numbers, such as over 78 per cent of the 501 schools surveyed had hand-washing stations in every classroom, and 67 per cent had access to latrines. Social distancing was generally adhered to, and most teachers and children had masks. However, concerning figures were present as well. It was reported that less than 23 percent of children had access to alternative learning methods, and that children from rural communities had little to no access to these modes due to infrastructure and lack of access to digital technology and radios. Additionally, the country saw an increase in pregnancies and a higher number of child marriages.

Countries, such as Uganda, Ghana, Malawi, and Zimbabwe, also saw a rise in child labour as a result of the shrinking economies and limited access to education. According to a report from Human Rights Watch regarding the situation in Uganda, many children feel as though they have no choice but to choose work over school in order to support their families. This has not gone unnoticed by governments and public and private donors.

To combat the economic strain on families, several government programs, with the assistance of UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR, the World Bank, and private donors, have instituted some form of cash-assistance program to help vulnerable families afford basic necessities. Other countries, such as Togo, introduced a waiver program targeted at social housing to suspend all water and electricity bills for a period of time to relieve the financial burden facing these families.

Renewing Our Commitment to Human Rights

Globally, the pandemic highlighted areas that need urgent attention, particularly towards situations affecting vulnerable populations. The African continent is no exception. Thanks to public-private partnerships, many of these problems are starting to be addressed. With vaccine programs rolling out across the continent, while some are reluctant to participate, the overall hope is that schools and economic activities can resume. It must not be forgotten, though, that access to basic fundamental human rights is still limited, despite an increase in efforts to mitigate the extended damage of COVID-19. As a global community, we must remain committed to achieving the UN development goals.



Source: Johannes Plenio - Pexels



Health Services and Education: Impact of Unaddressed Inequalities on People Living in Rural Communities

By: Kean Smith

The theme of World Health Day 2021 is “[b]uilding a fairer and healthier world”. This theme encompasses Goals 3 and 10 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages and Goal 10 is to reduce inequality within and among countries (see infographics for these goals below). The UN SDGs that were adopted in September, 2015 by Heads of State and Government and High Representatives comprise of 17 Sustainable Goals and 169 targets which were designed to be comprehensive, far-reaching and people centred. In the remainder of this article, I will share some insights into the challenges people living in rural communities face with accessing health services and education.

Impact of very low income

All over the world, some people struggle to make ends meet with little daily income, have poorer housing conditions and education, fewer employment opportunities, experience greater gender inequality, and have little or no access to safe environments, clean water and air, food security and health services. This leads to unnecessary suffering, avoidable illness, and in some cases premature death. Ultimately these consequences of little daily income harm our societies and economies. For example, in 2019, “... 34% of rural schools had a basic hygiene service and 41% had no hygiene service. The lack of such hygiene service results in increased risk of contracting and spreading viruses and bacteria that cause COVID-19, Ebola and Diarrhoea.

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4. World Health Organization. (n.d.). World Health Day 2021. Retrieved March 26, 2021, from <https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2021>
5. World Health Organization & United Nations Children's Fund. (2020). Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools: Special Focus on COVID-19. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO). <https://washdata.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/jmp-2020-wash-schools.pdf>
6. United Nations General Assembly. (2020, July). Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://undocs.org/A/75/189>
7. United Nations General Assembly. (2020, July). Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://undocs.org/A/75/189>
8. United Nations General Assembly. (2020, July). Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://undocs.org/A/75/189>
9. Kiemy, M., Evans, D. B., Schmets, G., & Kadandale, S. (2014). Health-system resilience: reflections on the Ebola crisis in western Africa. Organisation Mondiale de La Sante. <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/92/12/14-149278.pdf>
10. United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2020, April). Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. <https://undocs.org/en/E/2020/57>

Poverty in rural areas

While global progress in poverty reduction has been remarkable, poverty is still far from eradicated. The proportion of the global population living in extreme poverty (living below \$1.90 a day in terms of the 2011 purchasing power parity) fell from 36 per cent in 1990 to 10 per cent in 2015, yet 736.7 million people still lived in extreme poverty in 2015.

Based on the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day, the share of rural inhabitants in developing countries that live in extreme poverty is three times higher than the share of those living in urban areas. When considering moderate poverty, over 46 per cent of the global rural population is poor, compared with approximately 16 per cent of the global urban population.

In least developed countries, a significant majority of the poor live in rural areas. Based on national poverty lines, more than 80 per cent of the poor live in rural areas in Afghanistan, Lesotho, Madagascar, Myanmar, the Niger, Nepal and Zambia.

Challenges accessing health services

Poor people living in rural areas face greater challenges than their urban counterparts in obtaining access to health services, in particular in developing countries. Rural areas have fewer and less adequate primary care services. There are weaker referral systems, insufficient numbers of experienced and qualified health professionals, including doctors and nurses. They also experience poorer working conditions for public health workers, inadequate social security, deficient laboratory networks and underdeveloped inter-sectoral action in support of health. Together, these undermine the health of the rural poor.

11. United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2020, April). Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. <https://undocs.org/en/E/2020/57>

12. United Nations General Assembly. (2020, July). Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://undocs.org/A/75/189>

The Ebola virus disease outbreak in western Africa highlighted how an epidemic can proliferate rapidly and pose huge problems in the absence of a strong health system capable of a rapid and integrated response. The outbreak began in Guinea in December 2013 but soon spread into neighbouring Liberia and Sierra Leone. By early August 2014, Ebola was declared an international public emergency.

At the time the outbreak began, the capacity of the health systems in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone was limited. Several health-system functions that are generally considered essential were not performing well and this hampered the development of a suitable and timely response to the outbreak. There were inadequate numbers of qualified health workers. Infrastructure, logistics, health information, surveillance, governance and drug supply systems were weak. The organisation and management of health services was sub-optimal.

Government health expenditure was low, whereas, private expenditure – mostly in the form of direct out-of-pocket payments for health services – was relatively high. In 2017, only around one third to half of the global population was covered by essential health services. The proportion of the population spending more than 10 percent of its household budget on out-of-pocket payment for health services increased continuously, from 9.4 to 12.7 per cent (927 million persons), between 2000 and 2015. This resulted in nearly 90 million persons being pushed into extreme poverty owing to out-of-pocket medical expenses.



Source: RF Studio - Pexels

13. United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2020, April). Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. <https://undocs.org/en/E/2020/57>

14. United Nations General Assembly. (2020, July). Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://undocs.org/A/75/189>

Challenges accessing education

In the past 50 years schooling has expanded dramatically. Years of schooling completed by the average adult in developing countries more than tripled between 1950 and 2021 - from 2 to 7.2 years.

Previously marginalised groups, especially girls, are now much more likely to start primary school; however, the likelihood of completing school remains low in some countries.

Exclusion due to poverty, gender, ethnicity, disability and location persists. In sub-Saharan Africa, poor rural girls are seven times less likely than non-poor urban boys to complete school, and less than 1 in 20 of these girls is on track to complete secondary school. Other barriers include a lack of accessible facilities and inclusive education for students with disabilities.

IN 2017, ONLY AROUND ONE THIRD TO HALF OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION WAS COVERED BY ESSENTIAL HEALTH SERVICES.

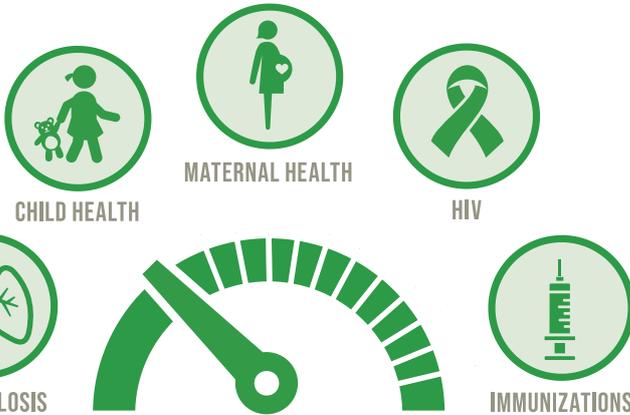




ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

BEFORE COVID-19

PROGRESS IN MANY HEALTH AREAS CONTINUED, BUT **NEEDS ACCELERATION**



THE PANDEMIC HAS **INTERRUPTED CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMMES IN AROUND 70 COUNTRIES**



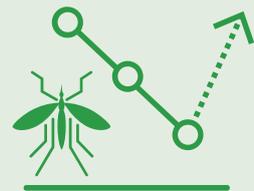
COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS

HEALTHCARE DISRUPTIONS COULD **REVERSE DECADES OF IMPROVEMENTS**



HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF ADDITIONAL UNDER-5 DEATHS MAY BE EXPECTED IN 2020

ILLNESS AND DEATHS FROM COMMUNICABLE DISEASES WILL SPIKE



SERVICE CANCELLATIONS WILL LEAD TO **100% INCREASE IN MALARIA DEATHS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

LESS THAN HALF OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION



IS COVERED BY ESSENTIAL HEALTH SERVICES

[2017]



Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goal 3 infographic
Source: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>

Low educational attainment levels, coupled with scant opportunities to acquire job-specific skills and on-the-job training, continue to constrain job opportunities for many rural people seeking productive work. Additionally, rural transport and roads have an important role in facilitating access to essential services, including education and health, as well as to markets and income-generating opportunities.

In 2019, less than one half of primary and lower secondary schools in sub-Saharan Africa had access to electricity, the Internet, computers and basic hand-washing facilities, key basic services and facilities necessary to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for all students.

The closure of schools to slow the spread of COVID-19 is having an adverse impact on learning outcomes and the social and behavioural development of children and young people. It has affected more than 90 per cent of the world's student population, 1.5 billion children and young people. Although remote learning is provided to many students, children and young people in vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, such as those living in remote areas, in extreme poverty, fragile states and refugee camps, do not have the same access thereto. The digital divide will widen existing gaps in equality with regard to education.

About 8 in 10 people worldwide who lack access to basic drinking water services live in rural areas, as do 7 out of 10 people lacking basic sanitation services. (pg 9) Access to adequate health services and education are necessary for the development and improvement of life in rural communities. Low income and proximity from urban areas are two factors that may lead to inadequate and poor delivery of services. More broadly, it is the inequality of the provision of services that negatively impacts residents of rural areas. Not only do many residents earn little money and are unable to afford health services and education, these services may be limited and from far distances from their homes. If we build a fairer world, then people who live in rural areas will benefit from improved services like health and education.





REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES

BEFORE COVID-19

INCOME INEQUALITY WAS FALLING IN SOME COUNTRIES

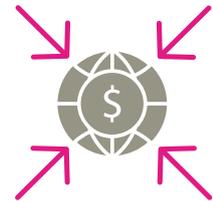


GINI INDEX FELL
IN 38 OUT OF 84 COUNTRIES
(2010-2017)



THE **GINI INDEX** MEASURES INCOME INEQUALITY AND RANGES FROM 0 TO 100, WHERE 0 INDICATES THAT INCOME IS SHARED EQUALLY AMONG ALL PEOPLE, AND 100 INDICATES THAT ONE PERSON ACCOUNTS FOR ALL INCOME

GLOBAL RECESSION COULD SQUEEZE DEVELOPMENT AID TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



RESOURCE FLOWS FOR DEVELOPMENT

\$420
BILLION
(2017)



\$271
BILLION
(2018)

COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS

THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS ARE BEING HIT HARDEST BY THE PANDEMIC



OLDER PERSONS



PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



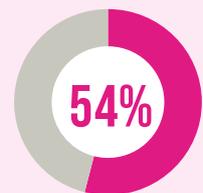
CHILDREN



WOMEN

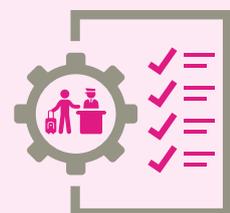


MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



54% OF COUNTRIES

WITH DATA HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE SET OF MIGRATION POLICIES





ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

BEFORE COVID-19

DESPITE PROGRESS,
BILLIONS STILL LACK
WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES



2.2 BILLION PEOPLE
LACK SAFELY MANAGED
DRINKING WATER
(2017)



4.2 BILLION PEOPLE
LACK SAFELY MANAGED
SANITATION
(2017)



TWO IN FIVE
HEALTH CARE FACILITIES
WORLDWIDE HAVE
NO
SOAP AND WATER OR
ALCOHOL-BASED
HAND RUB
(2016)



COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS



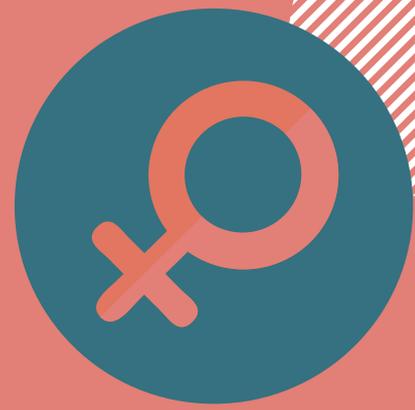
3 BILLION
PEOPLE WORLDWIDE
LACK BASIC HANDWASHING
FACILITIES AT HOME
↓ ↓ ↓
THE MOST EFFECTIVE METHOD FOR
COVID-19 PREVENTION



WATER SCARCITY
COULD DISPLACE
700 MILLION PEOPLE
BY 2030



SOME COUNTRIES EXPERIENCE
A FUNDING GAP OF 61% FOR ACHIEVING
WATER AND SANITATION TARGETS



WATER AND EDUCATION AMID THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC - THE GENDER LEFT BEHIND

By: Cynthia Atuchukwu



Water & Uganda

Water is Life. It is an essential natural resource, yet about 2.2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water (see Appendix I), and 785 million people living in rural areas lack access to it. The Republic of Uganda is a landlocked country located in East Africa, whose capital is Kampala. Its landscape encompasses the snow-capped Rwenzori Mountains and Lake Victoria. In Uganda, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported on 21st March 2020. As millions of people are trying to navigate the new COVID-19 era with the added challenge of living without access to safe water, sanitation, and quality education. Now, more than ever, access to water is critical to every family's health in Uganda, especially for those 1 in 9 people who lack access to safe water and the 1 in 3 people who lack access to a toilet. According to the 2020 World Economic Forum report, in terms of short-term risk global shapers and global risk impact on society, the water crisis is 86% and 5th compared to other indicators.

Since the coronavirus outbreak, no country has been left untouched in its wake and has set an unprecedented global impact. The COVID-19 pandemic reveals that billions of people worldwide still do not have access to safe water and sanitation, especially in the least developed countries, proving that the world has not yet achieved the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG) 6.

The UN SDG 6 is crucial in society's sustainable development. Sanitation and access to safe water are human rights; therefore, access to these services, including water and soap for handwashing, is an integral part of human well-being. It is essential to clearly state the difference between "water rights" and "human rights to water and sanitation."

Water rights are given to an individual or organization through property rights, land rights or a negotiated agreement between the state and landowners. It is usually regulated by national laws, temporary and can be revoked. On the contrary, the human rights to water and sanitation are neither temporary nor require state approval as these rights cannot be withdrawn. Water is essential for improving nutrition, preventing diseases, and ensuring women and girls' full participation in school activities. It is crucial in managing risks related to famine, disease epidemics, inequalities, and natural disasters.

Although the coronavirus is a health pandemic, its impact transcends health, impacting both the economy and society's welfare. The containment of this virus has further led to a slowdown in Uganda's economic and educational activities. The country's water and sanitation services have been stressed due to the high population growth resulting from its economic growth in the past two decades, leading to large population movements from rural to urban areas. About 8 million Ugandans do not have access to safe water, and nearly 27 million do not have access to sanitation facilities.



Due to disparities in access to water in Uganda, many urban people living in poverty pay as much as 22 percent of their income to have access to water vendors and services. Moreover, spending a substantial part of their income on water reduces their household income, thereby limiting their chances of saving and breaking the cycle of poverty.

The world has been witnessing the highest levels of human displacement on record. Armed conflict, persecution, and climate change, in tandem with poverty, inequality, urban population growth, poor land use management, and weak governance, are increasing the risk of displacement and its impacts. Women and children make up the majority people found in the internally displaced people (IDPs) camps. Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting African country, and it is estimated that by the end of 2021, the country's refugee population would be 1,484,356. Women in these centers face barriers to access essential sanitation services, water supply, and education.

Most importantly, women and children's access to these resources is limited due to the pandemic and mass displacement, which further strains water resources and related services. Women in these centers deserve to receive higher-quality water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, especially during this pandemic as it is their basic human right. It will also help stop the spread of the virus at the facilities.

"Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting African country, and it is estimated that by the end of 2021, the country's refugee population would be 1,484,356."

EPIDEMIC & EDUCATION

In recent years, Uganda's educational system has changed significantly, thus, it is still lacking in many areas. Uganda has made steady progress towards achieving the UN SDGs by ensuring that more children have access to quality education, live in clean environments, and are kept safe from violence and exploitation. The Uganda government recognizes the importance of education as a basic human right and it continues to strive to provide free primary education to all children in the country (see Appendix II). However, the rapid influx of refugees, urbanization, increasing poverty, droughts, floods, and disease outbreaks continues to pressurize the governments need to improve in security, education, and health sectors across the country.

UNESCO reports estimates that by late March 2020, more than 190 countries had to shut schools to slow the spread of COVID-19, disrupting nearly 1.6 billion students' education. A study on past school closures shows that any interruption in education, including regularly scheduled breaks, can result in a significant learning loss. For example, in Malawi, the transitional interruption from grade 1 to grade 2 and grade 2 to grade 3 resulted in a 0.4 drop in the average standard deviation of the four different reading skills.

Many scholars note that measuring school closures' impact due to extreme weather conditions, natural disasters, and disease epidemics point to severe learning consequences for students, especially those in the least developed countries. For instance, in Maryland, United States, for each day schools were closed due to snow, the number of students who performed satisfactorily on state reading and mathematics evaluations diminished by 0.5

percent. After the Pakistan earthquake in 2005, the school was closed for 3.5 months, causing learning losses, equivalent to 1.5 school grades. The Ebola outbreak in 2013-2014 in West Africa led to the prolonged closure of schools that severely caused an impact on education, such as reduced school attendance, increased dropouts, and effects on other critical child-related outcomes such as increased risks of violence and abuse, teenage pregnancy, and child labor. Uganda is also experiencing the impact of long-term school closures on education. Due to the closure of schools in more than 51,000 institutions in Uganda because of Covid-19 outbreak, approximately 15 million children, including 600,000 refugee children, are out of school. These children especially young girls are at increased risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse.



WATER & EPIDEMIC

Since the 1980s, due to the combined effects of population growth, socio-economic development, and changing consumption patterns, the world's water consumption has increased at a rate of approximately 1% every year. It is estimated that by 2050, the global water demand will continue to grow at a similar rate, accounting for 20% to 30% of current water consumption, mainly due to the growth of industrial and domestic water demand.

For at least one month of the year, more than 2 billion people live in countries with severe water shortages, and about 4 billion people suffer from severe water shortages. As water demand increases and the impact of climate change intensifies, stress levels will continue to increase.

In terms of both storage and supply delivery and improved drinking water and sanitation services, the lack of water management infrastructure plays a direct role in the persistence of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. People living in rural areas account for about 60% of sub-Saharan Africa's total population, and many remain in poverty. However, providing this growing population with access to WASH services is not the only challenge for Africa, as the demand for energy, food, jobs, healthcare, and education will also increase. Population growth primarily occurs in urban areas, and without proper planning, this might lead to a dramatic increase in slums. These slums will be filled with women, young girls, and children who still lack safe water and sanitation, making them vulnerable to diseases.

About half of the people drinking water from unprotected sources live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Six out of ten people do not have access to safely managed health services. However, these global figures mask significant inequities between and within regions, countries, communities, and even neighbourhoods.

According to the UN Water Report (2020), the global cost-benefit outlined shows that WASH services provide good social and economic returns when compared with their costs. It has a global average cost-benefit ratio of 5.5 for improved sanitation and 2.0 improved drinking water. The benefits of improved WASH services for vulnerable groups would change the balance of any cost-benefit analysis that accounts for changes in these groups' self-perceived social status and dignity.



According to the 2020 UNICEF situation report in Uganda, the moderate to heavy local rainfall in April, May, and November 2020 caused widespread floods across the country, including around Lake Victoria, Lake Albert, Lake Kyoga, and southern Karamoja. The flood destroyed houses, crops, infrastructure, and disrupted livelihood activities. The disaster displaced nearly 102,671 people, and approximately 799,796 people were affected. As a result of the floods, infectious diseases broke out in the country, including an outbreak of cholera and an increase in malaria cases.

The value and impact of water on epidemic outbreaks in the society can be seen in its use in the containment of the Ebola outbreak in Africa. In August 2018, the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, led to several associated and imported cases of the epidemic in Uganda. The epidemic further puts additional strains on Uganda's already overstretched social services given the sporadic outbreaks of cholera and Congo-Crimean Hemorrhagic fever. In collaboration with UNICEF, Uganda's government provided infrastructure development, capacity building, WASH supplies, and about 5,600 portable hand-washing equipment and renewable supplies to facilities and schools, including over 26,000 kg of soap to stop the spread of Ebola in the country. Therefore, it is crucial to address the global water crisis as safeguarding this resource is beneficial to society and essential in containing the spread of COVID-19 in the world.



THE GENDER LEFT BEHIND

In society, discrimination can happen in indirect or direct ways, and for varied reasons. Direct discrimination occurs when people are discriminated against by policies, laws, or practices that deliberately exclude them from providing services or equal treatment. On the other hand, when policies, regulations, or procedures appear to be neutral on the surface; in reality, such discrimination has the effect of precluding the provision of essential services. This is termed indirect discrimination. Women and girls often face discrimination and unequal treatment concerning their human rights to safe drinking water, sanitation, and access to quality education in many parts of the world, especially in Africa. There are many reasons for discrimination, but poverty usually accounts for a large proportion. Women and young girls in poor rural areas are not covered by water and sanitation services. In these areas, water infrastructure remains extremely sparse.

Although the global water crisis and lack of access to quality education affects all groups in society, the impact on women and girls is much greater. It increases gender inequalities and threatens their health, well-being, livelihoods, and education. In times of drought, women and girls are likely to spend a long-time collecting water from more distant sources, putting girls' education at risk as it reduces their attendance. Women and girls are exposed disproportionately to the dangers of waterborne diseases during floods due to lack of access to safe water, the disruption of water services, and increased water resource contamination. Integrating gender in early warning systems is essential, as women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster, experience violence and exploitation. In many regions, inadequate WASH facilities', and social and economic burden lies disproportionately on women and girls. For instance, due to water collection tasks and shame about toilet use and menstrual hygiene management; women and young girls are likely to lose job and educational opportunities. However, this gender discrimination can be bridged by providing similar facilities in schools. The provision of safe drinking water and sanitation facilities at home, schools and the workplace can reduce absenteeism, especially among adolescent girls and improve women's productivity and health.

CONCLUSION:

The global pandemic has revealed that women's and children's rights to quality education, safe water, and sanitation must be prioritized and protected by law more than ever. This article asserts that loss in foundational learning is the most difficult to recover, hence the need to promote, develop and refine methods of learning in and outside of school, especially in the least developed countries such as Uganda. It is essential to promote multiple delivery channels for better inclusivity regardless of technological constraints. Every human being deserves to define their future, and access to water and education make that possible. Water connects all aspects of life. Providing and accessing safe water and sanitation facilities, especially for women and children, can give them time to go to school and work and improve their health. In this new COVID-19 era, access to safe water can protect and save many lives, especially those in the developing countries and at the same time, unlocking economic prosperity and improving young girls' school attendance.



6.1.1 DRINKING WATER

2 billion people



26% of the world's population

lacked safely managed drinking water services in 2020



6.2.1a SANITATION

3.6 billion people

46%



lacked safely managed sanitation services, and 494 million people practised open defecation, in 2020



6.2.1b HYGIENE

2.3 billion people



29% of the world's population

lacked a basic handwashing facility with soap and water at home in 2020



6.3.1 WASTEWATER

Globally

44%

of household wastewater is not safely treated



6.3.2 WATER QUALITY

The lack of water quality data for

over **3** billion people

means that they are at significant risk because the health of their rivers, lakes and groundwater is unknown



6.4.1 WATER-USE EFFICIENCY

Since 2015 water-use efficiency has increased by



9%

globally

6.4.2 WATER STRESS



2.3 billion people

live in water-stressed countries

of which 733 million live in high and critically water-stressed countries

6.5.1 INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT



107 countries

are not on track to have sustainably managed water resources by 2030

Globally, the current rate of progress needs to be doubled

6.5.2 TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION

Only

24 countries



reported that all the rivers, lakes and aquifers that they share with their neighbours are covered by operational arrangements for cooperation

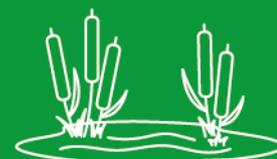


6.6.1 ECOSYSTEMS



1/5 of the world's river basins

are experiencing rapid changes in the area covered by surface waters



6.a.1 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Official development assistance (ODA) commitments to the water sector increased

9%

from 2015 to 2019, but disbursements showed little change



6.b.1 PARTICIPATION



Only

14 out of **109** countries

report having high levels of participation by communities in water and sanitation decision-making



Appendix II



23% OF YOUNG CHILDREN ATTEND PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL

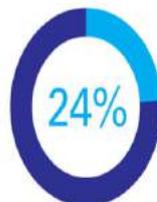


96% OF CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE ARE ENROLLED IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

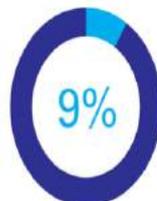
BUT...



ONLY 67% OF CHILDREN COMPLETE PRIMARY SCHOOL



24% OF ADOLESCENTS ARE ENROLLED IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS



9% OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ARE ENROLLED IN PRE-PRIMARY, PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS



MORE THAN 60% OF TEACHERS ARE NOT IN THE CLASSROOM TEACHING

UNICEF, *Situation Analysis for Children in Uganda*, 2015; Government of Uganda and UNICEF, *Country Programme Action Plan 2016–2020*, 2016.

MANY CHILDREN ARE DEPRIVED OF CLEAN WATER



33% OF CHILDREN DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO SAFE WATER



60% OF CHILDREN LIVE 30 MINUTES WALKING DISTANCE FROM A WATER SOURCE

ACCESS TO SANITATION IS LOW

3 OUT OF 10

UGANDAN HOUSEHOLDS DO NOT HAVE A LATRINE

8%

OF MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN UNDER 5 HAVE SOAP AND WATER READILY AVAILABLE FOR HAND WASHING

10%

OF UGANDANS PRACTISE OPEN DEFECCATION

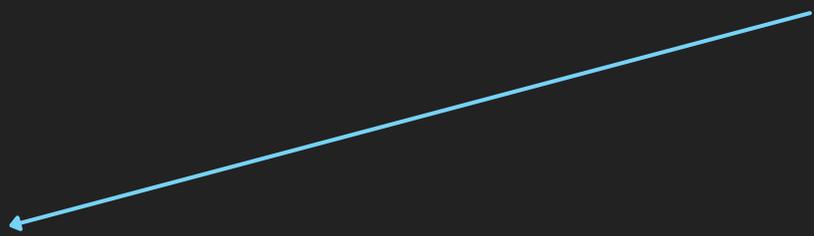
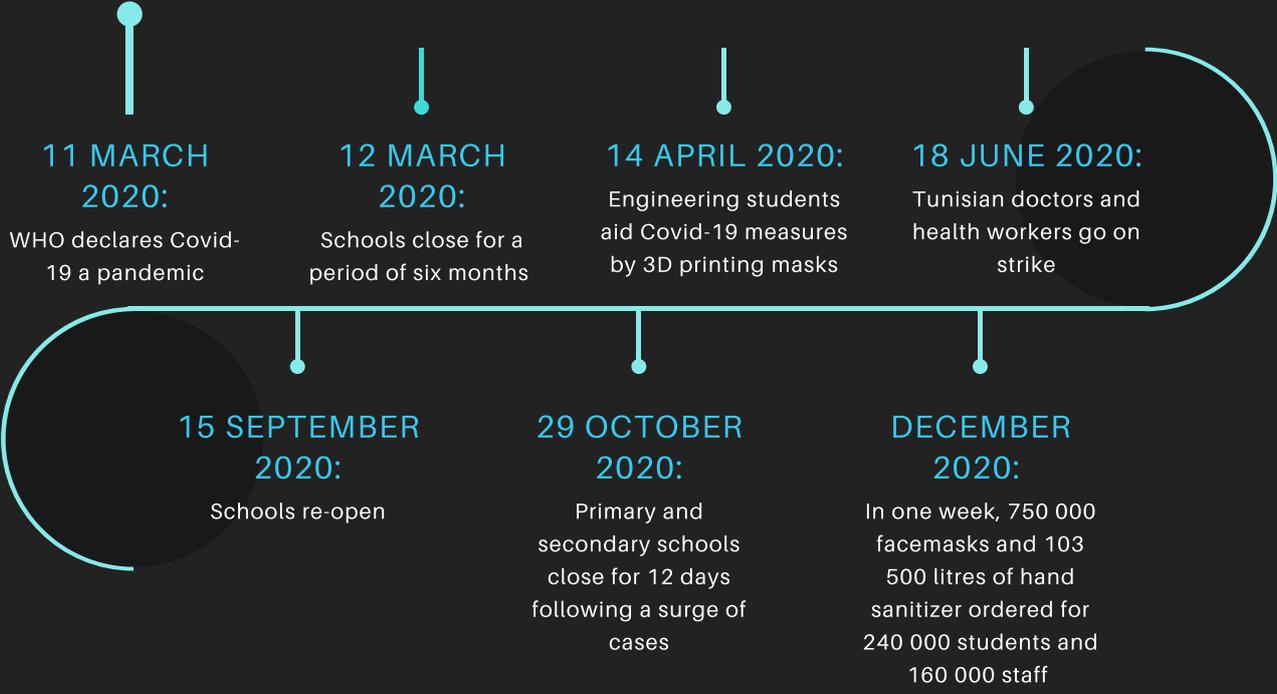
Source: UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children in Uganda*, 2015.

**INFOGRAPHIC COVID-19
TIMELINE:
(March 2020 - May 2021)
By: Carolyn Brown**



NORTHERN AFRICA

TUNISIA



14 JANUARY
2021:

Tunisia orders four-day nationwide lockdown; schools to be closed until 24 January 2021

15 JANUARY
2021:

Young people protest over economic and social hardships despite lockdown; met with pressure from police

15 APRIL 2021:

Closure of all schools

5 MAY 2021:

Doctors and healthcare workers go on three-day strike



MAURITANIA



11 MARCH
2020:

WHO declares Covid-19 a pandemic

13 MARCH
2020:

First COVID case confirmed

29 MARCH
2020:

Government imposes restrictive measures to contain the spread, including the closure of schools

9 APRIL 2020:

Government is reported to have received an estimated 40 000 testing kits donated from both the private sector and civil society

31 JULY 2020:

The World Bank approves a USD 70 million grant to support Mauritania in its fight against COVID; the money will go towards medical supplies and the affordability of food stuffs

16 NOVEMBER
2020:

All schools officially begin the 2020-2021 school year

15 OCTOBER
2020:

Global Handwashing day is celebrated by UNICEF partners in the country with the theme, "hand hygiene for all"

OCTOBER
2020:

Students in the Mbera refugee camp attend catch-up classes to supplement distance learning and complete the previous year's course

1 SEPTEMBER
2020:

Schools are set to reopen, although several schools were unable to due to flooding

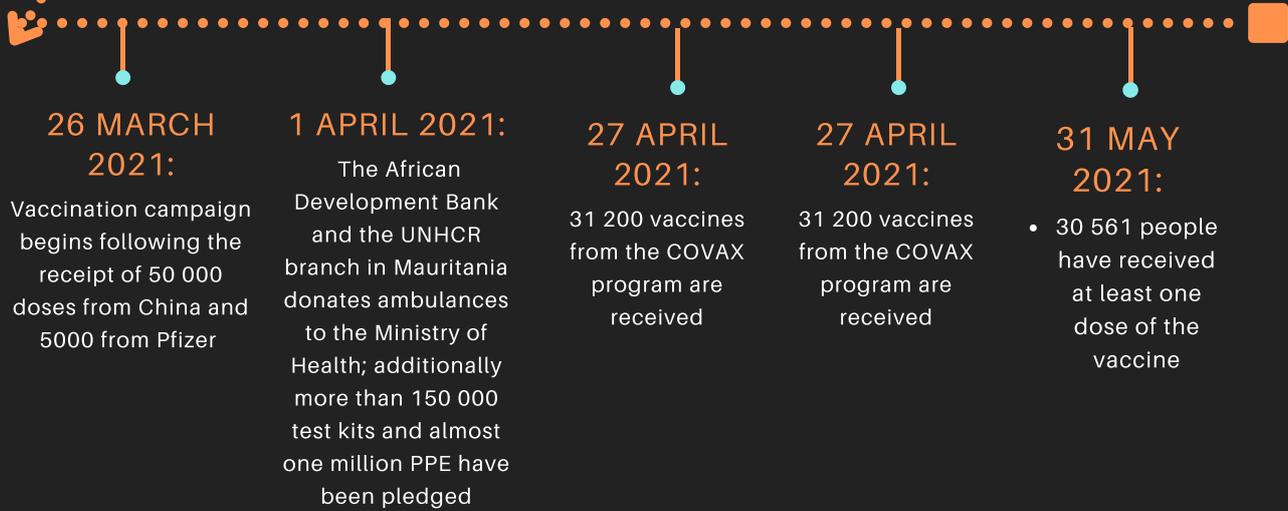
13 DECEMBER
2020:

Restrictions are re-imposed following a rise in cases; schools are closed once more

11 JANUARY
2021:

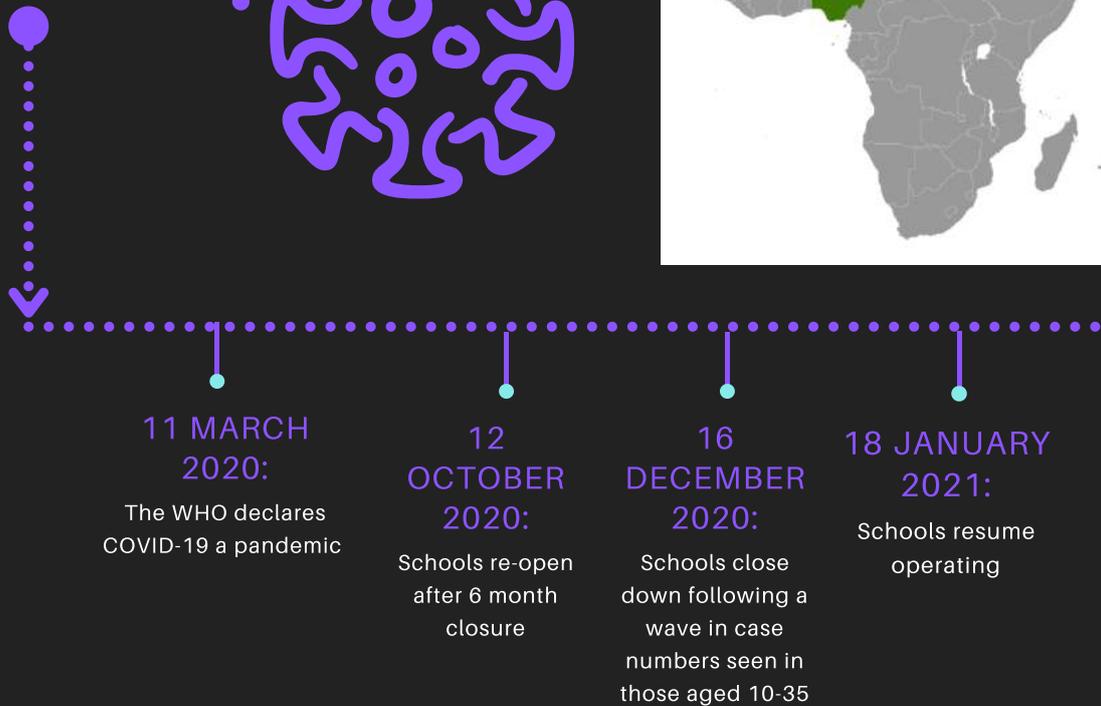
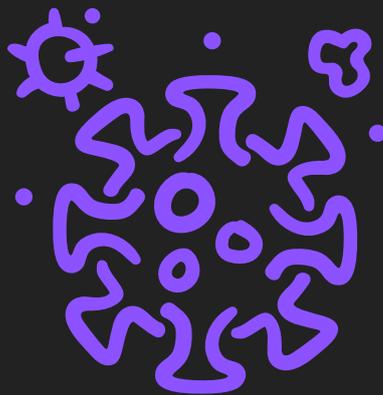
The country sees a lull in cases; schools reopen

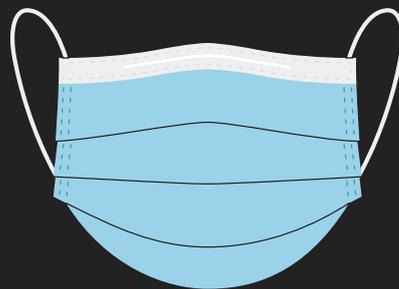




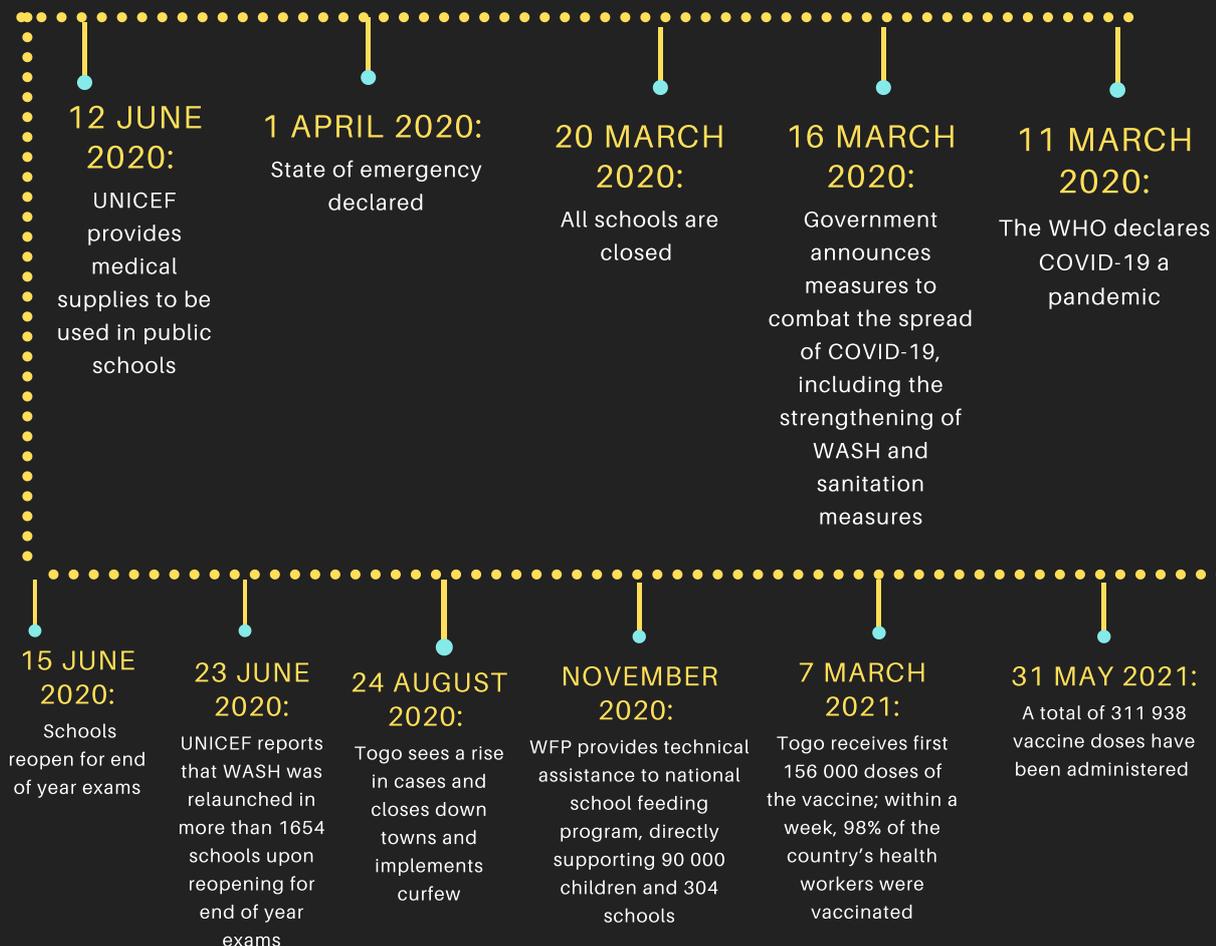
WESTERN AFRICA

NIGERIA

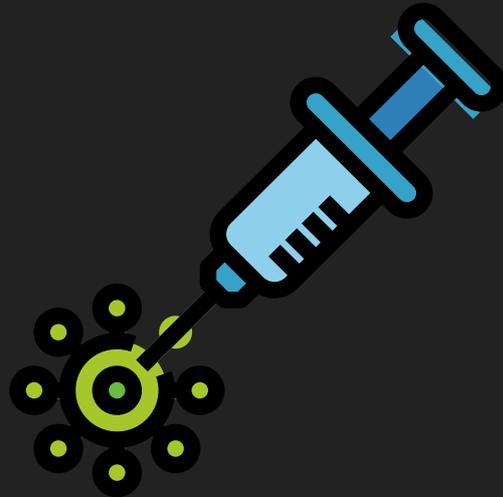




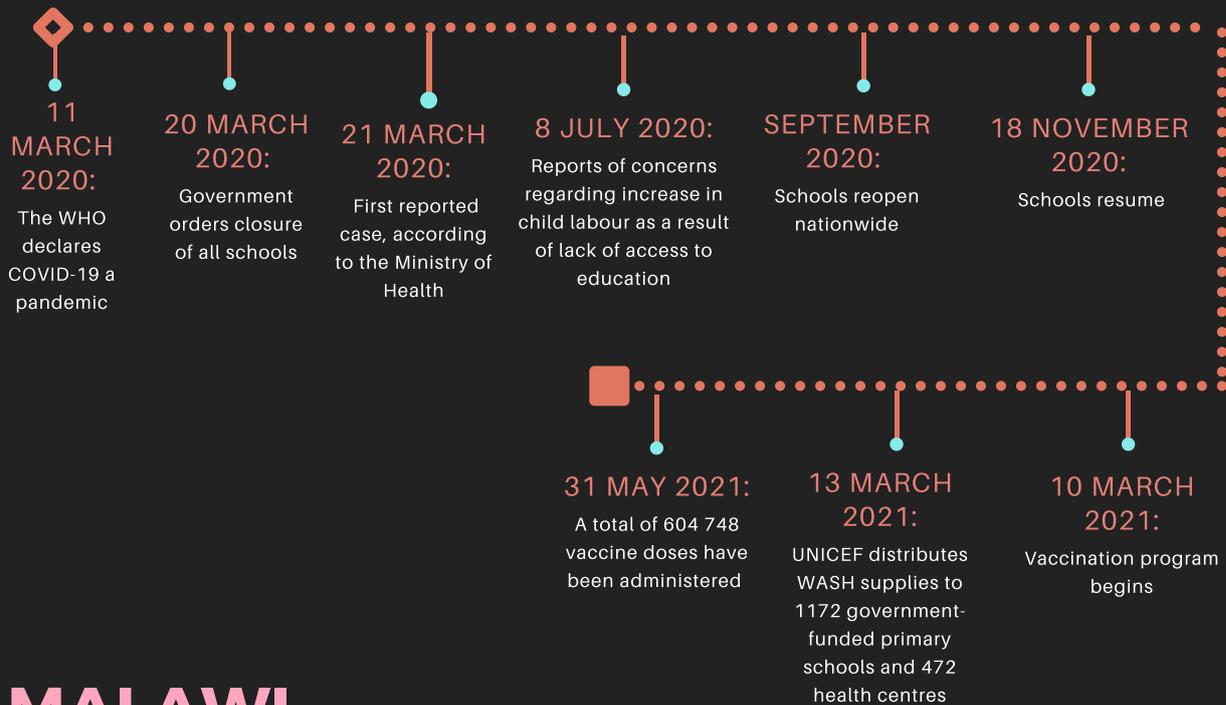
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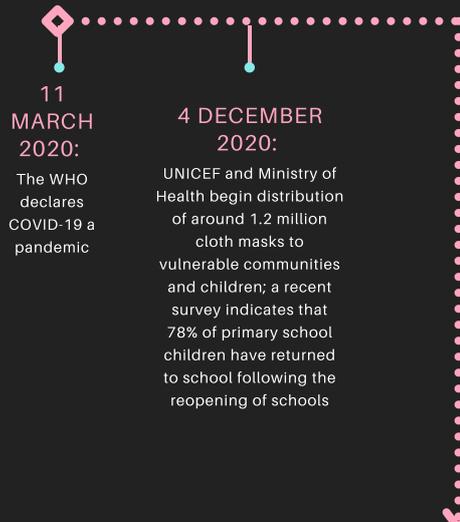
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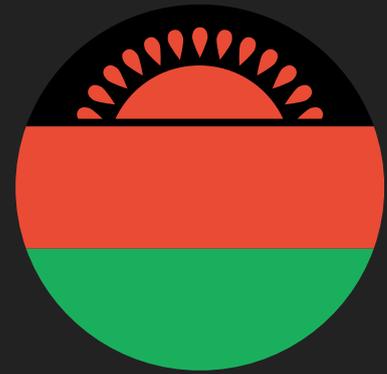


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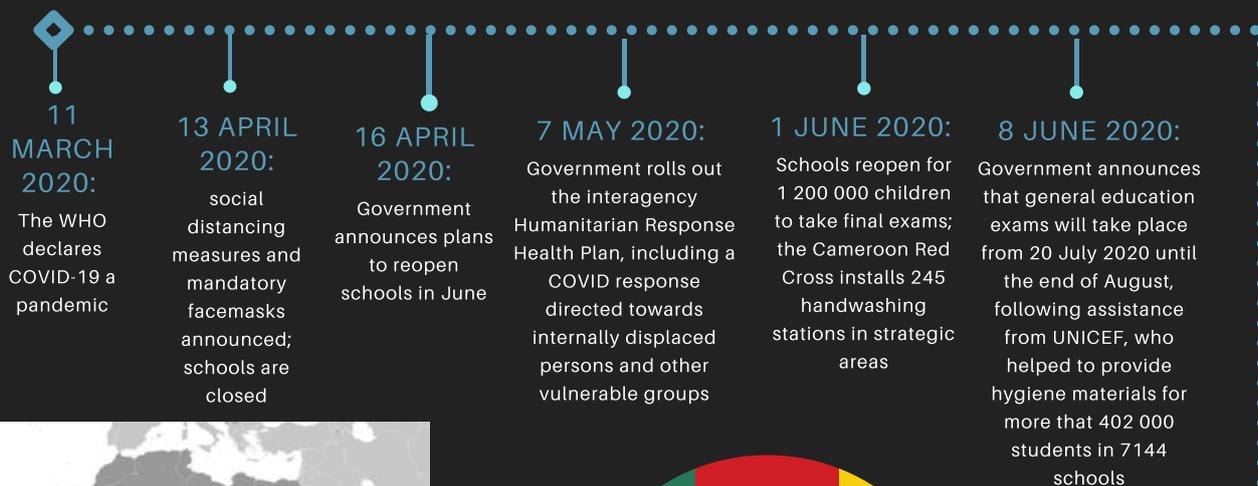
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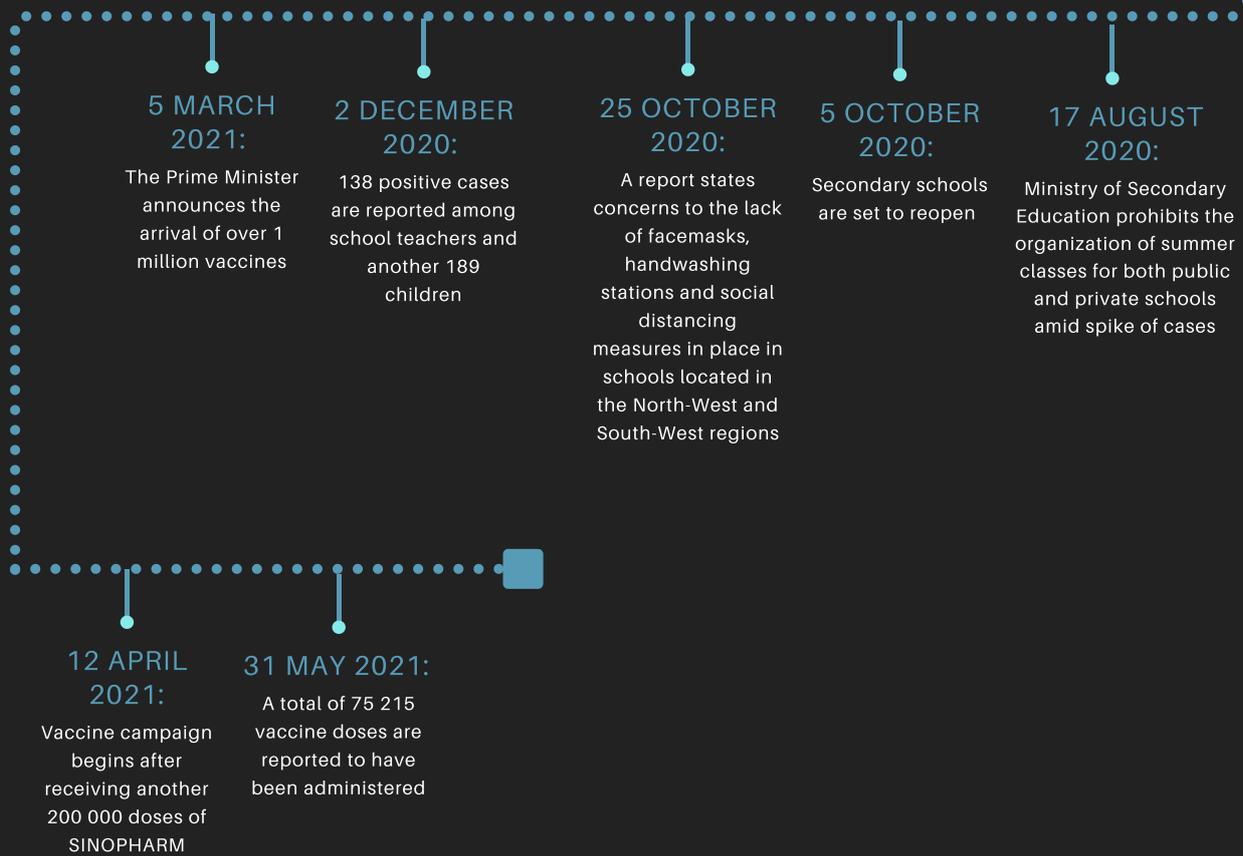




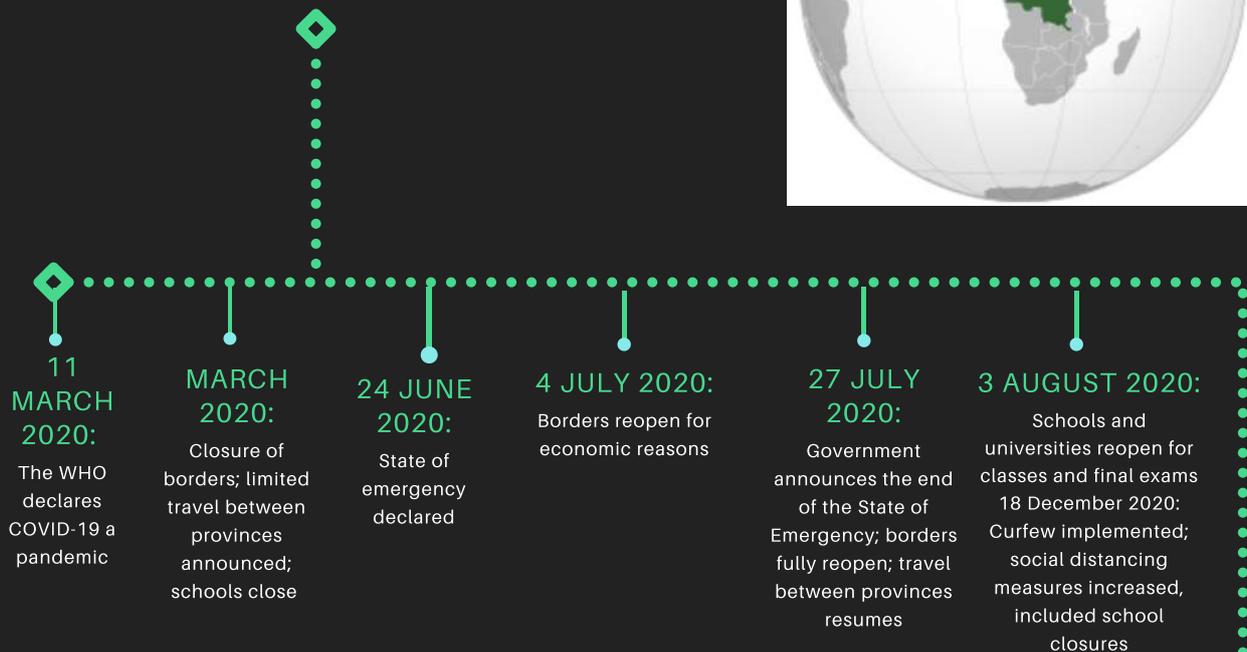
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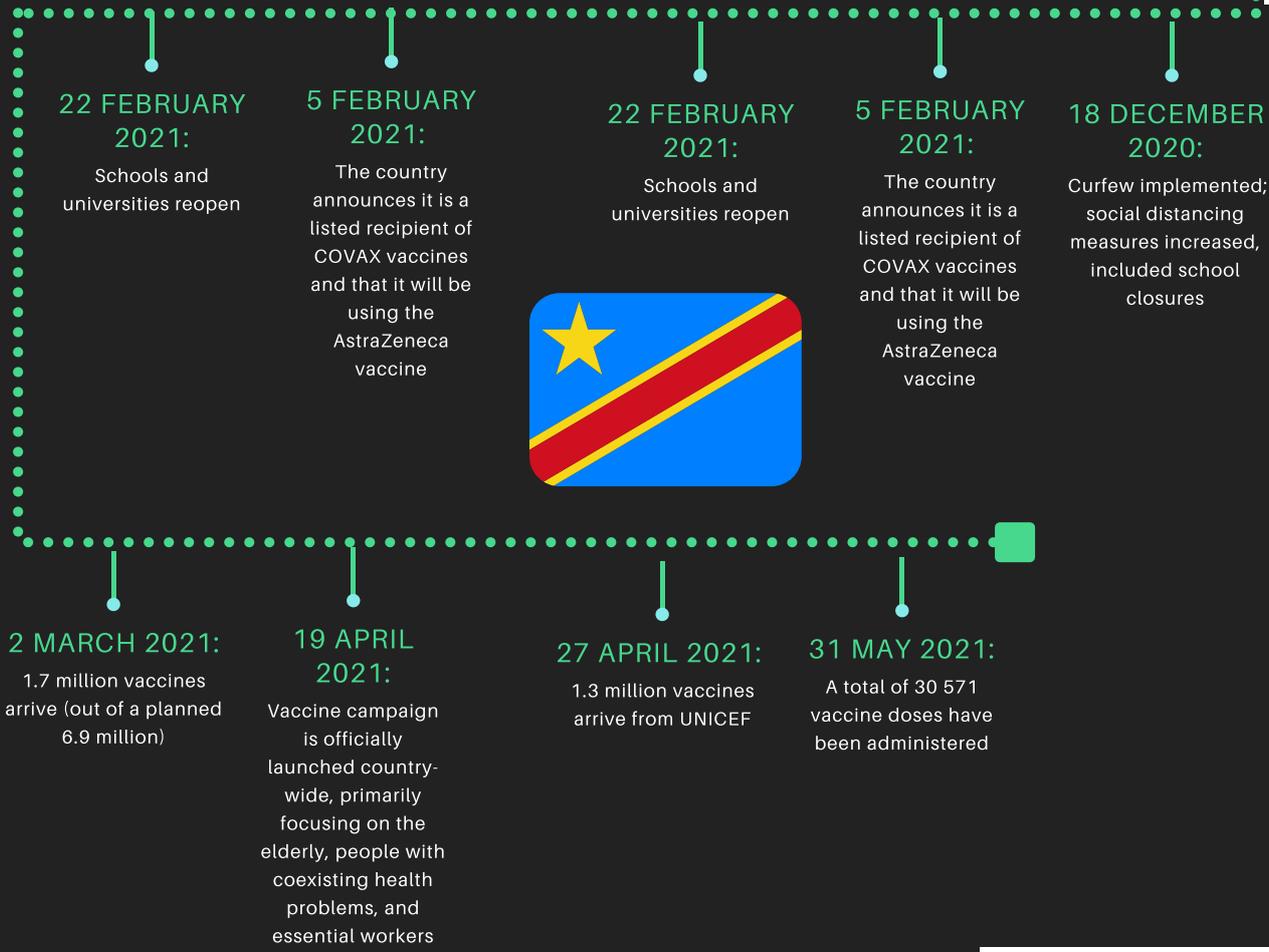
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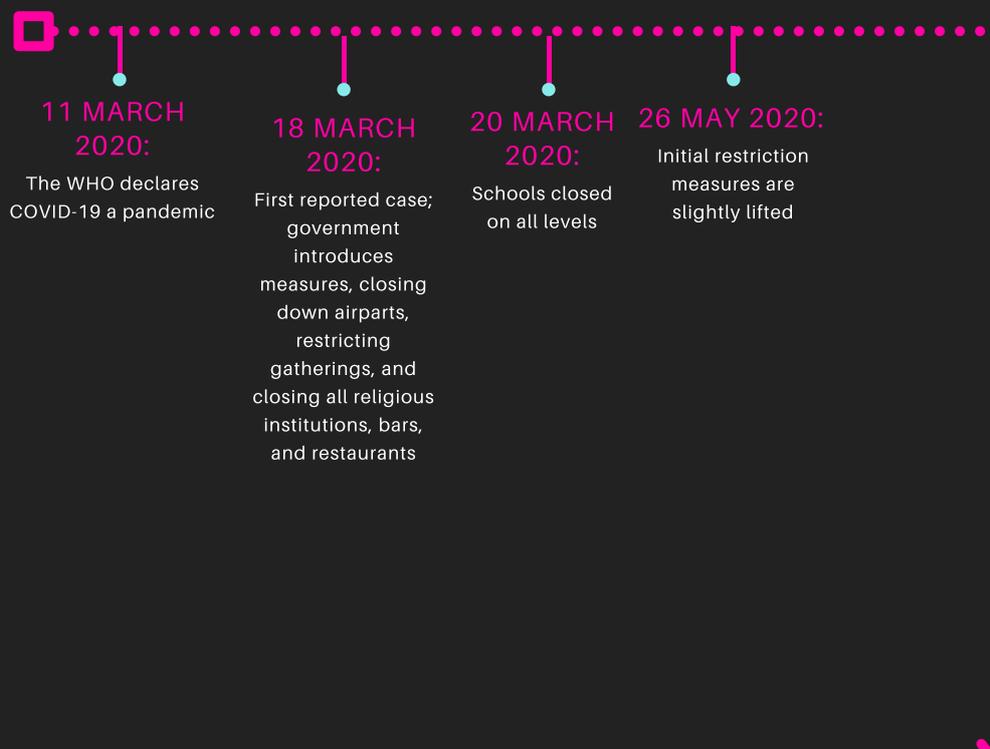




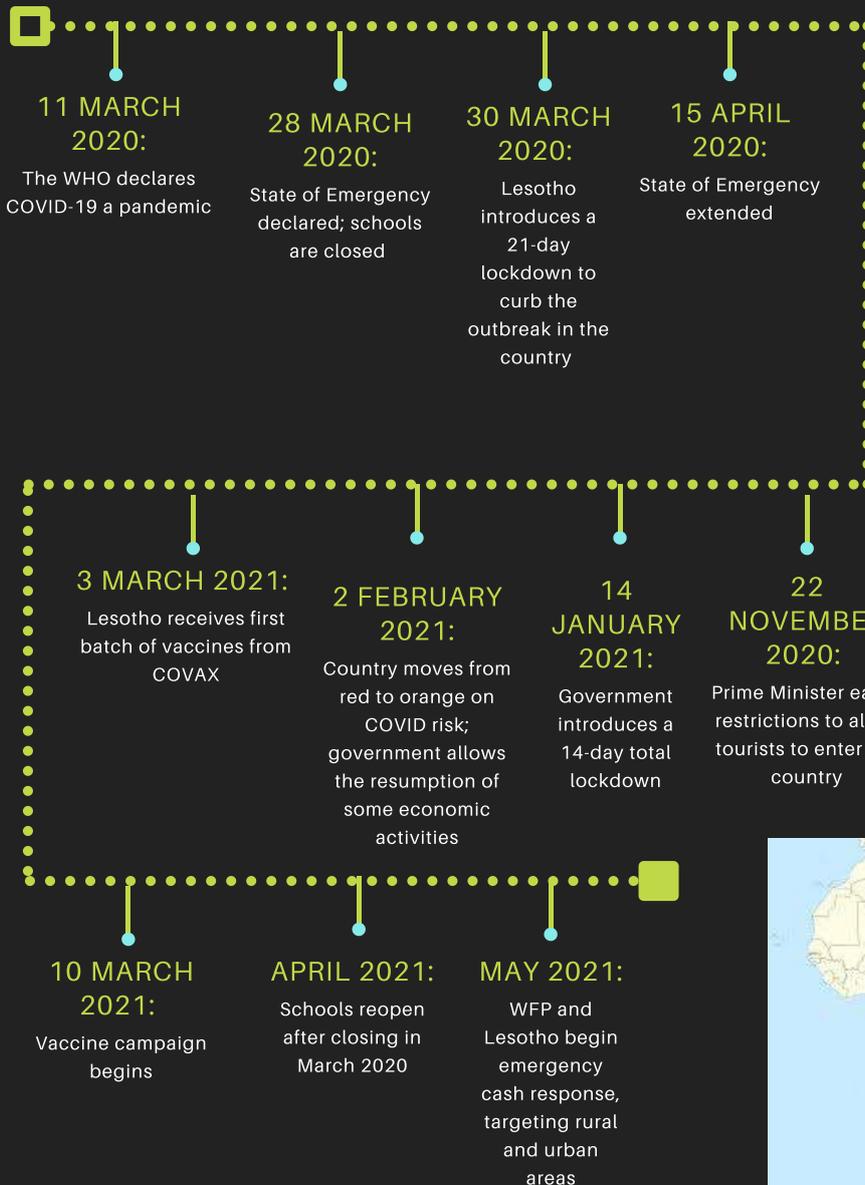
SOUTHERN AFRICA



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LESOTHO



DESIGNING EDUCATION IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA

By: **Melissa Philippou**



SOURCE: KOJO KWARTENG ON UNSPLASH



In the COVID-19 era, long-standing key challenges facing humanity, predominantly, the exercise of each person's right to access quality education on an equal scale, have been magnified. At the same time, the central role that education plays in our interdependent lives has also been highlighted, along with the fact that every dimension of well-being positively impacts others.

The importance of drawing a direct link between education, sanitation and well-being is therefore crucial to any society that aims to flourish through improvements in the quality and accessibility of its education facilities and services. The United Nations Agency for Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) considers public health and public education to be "closely interconnected, as they show the undeniable necessity of collaboration, solidarity and collective action for the common good."

Entering into a new, post-coronavirus era with the re-opening of schools following an almost year-long closure as a result of COVID-19 prevention measures could provide an opportunity to improve education and school facilities, drawing from the lessons learnt of the global pandemic. The importance to do so lies not only in the possibility of another similar outbreak in the future, but, most importantly, in striving to provide access to quality education for all children and young people, regardless of geographical location, nationality, religion, class or gender.

In the implementation of such measures, education authorities would greatly benefit if they work in a coordinated manner with public health authorities. According to UNESCO, each needs the other; each is underscored by a recognition of interdependencies that arise in a public space. Core changes to the education system should hence be attuned to the overlaps and synergies between health and education in respect to ultimate societal well-being.

However, it is also true that in numerous COVID-19 national responses, children and young people have been asked to limit their freedoms and suspend their education to protect the wider population, and specifically, vulnerable people and older generations. Nonetheless, the rights of children and youth to participate in decisions that concern them, particularly those about their future, should not be put on hold. A collaboration and coordinated response between a wide range of stakeholders in decision making and crisis management has the potential to develop mitigation strategies that would have a lasting effect on education.

This article outlines six recommendations for more accessible and sanitation-friendly education facilities and practices in the post-pandemic era. Yet, it is paramount that children and young people are as much consulted in the design of the amendments in education as they would be involved in their implementation. Taking into account the aspects that they enjoy, as well as those that hinder or impede their educational progress, could help governments redefine their educational systems to the needs of their own communities and vulnerable populations.



Adapting Education to the post-COVID-19 era

1) The outbreak of the pandemic and the national lockdowns that followed have made visible the importance of education as a common and accessible good. Education is a significant vehicle that has the capacity to ensure individual as well as societal flourishing. Thus, a strengthened commitment to education would mean greater awareness of the power of education, not just for children and young people, but for entire communities. Specifically, community-engaged and community-led learning should be considered and treated as a key component of education, and therefore, “must be central to any strategy that addresses present and future challenges.” This is particularly true for disadvantaged communities, namely, refugees or those in conflict-related situations.

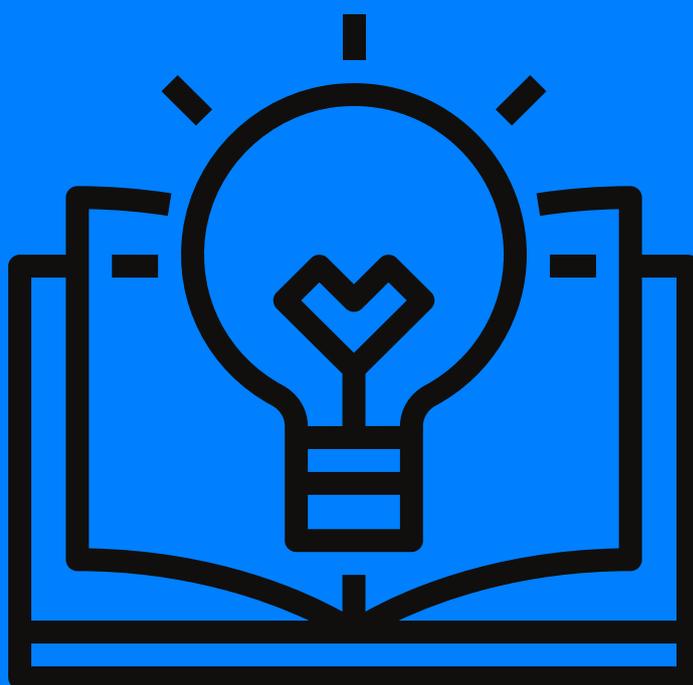
2) More so however, the COVID-19 crisis has underscored the need for the right to education to be flexible and able to be adapted to different contexts, as well as to the needs of changing societies. Hence, broadening and adapting the right to education has evidently become necessary. Prioritizing the identification of the most marginalized children in each context, with particular focus on girls, and then addressing the systemic barriers that prevent their engagement with or even access to education could provide a good starting point. This way, schools will have the resources to offer greater protection to marginalized students and to enhance outreach programs or activities that focus on ensuring that these students exercise their right to access education.



3) For education to become more inclusive and accessible, unconventional learning methods are essential. For example, the use of traditional media, like the radio and television, to support the academic learning of students that are not in a financial or geographical position to physically attend a school. Children in remote communities, for instance, or children who are forced to work to support themselves and their families could largely benefit from this kind of activity. Similarly, children whose financial situations do not allow them to have access to books or even to online materials and platforms, would be able to enjoy equal opportunities and learning experiences without said material.

4) Further, there is an urgent need for greater and more frequent financing for education and child protection, including humanitarian and development aid, which would allow for more equitable remote learning that features inclusivity for all students. There are various ways to achieve this, ranging from providing ongoing training to teachers, school administrators, and caregivers to enhance their capacity to support children's learning, to strengthen education systems and materials, and ensure that materials and distance learning modalities are accessible to all students.

5) Most importantly however, the exceptional measures adopted during the pandemic on a global scale have had serious and potentially lasting repercussions on the mental health and well-being of children and young people. The pandemic has therefore highlighted the need to reshape schools to provide mental health support in order for children to have the necessary means to resume their learning in school facilities. In that, UNESCO stresses that in a post-coronavirus world, there will be "a great need to cure the separations that have arisen as a result of quarantines and distancing restrictions" through reconnecting people. Giving a leading voice to students to design their own learning opportunities could have a lasting impact.





6) In light of the current pandemic, there is a growing need for school facilities to accommodate more sanitary-friendly measures that could facilitate greater protection from the transmission of diseases within school structures. Hence, engaging in ongoing planning to adapt schools to the post-COVID-19 era should involve not only the reduction of class sizes to accommodate social distancing, or building resiliency and readiness to shift to distance modalities, but also improving water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities. In fact, having solid WASH facilities can greatly benefit girls and young women in particular. In certain countries, this would eliminate the threat of exclusion from education due to their menstruation cycles for example, or the threat of gender-based sexual assault in cases where girls have to travel for miles to access a safe WASH facility.

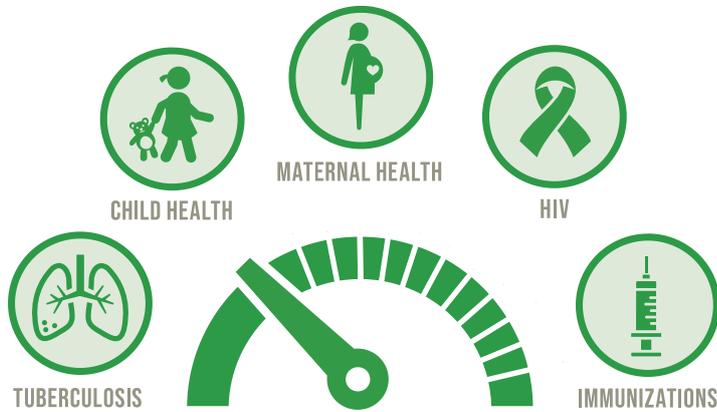
In conclusion, the coronavirus pandemic presented not only real challenges, but at the same time, a real responsibility for solutions or improvements. Any decision made today within the context of the pandemic will largely impact the access to and quality of education of future generations. Ultimately, building on core principles and strengths, and altering the aspects that no longer serve students, professors or the community at large must be given priority. The recommendations presented in this article invite the collaborative engagement, debate and action of a wide range of stakeholders, including national administrations, educational professionals, students, civil society, and international organizations. Most importantly though, this should also be accompanied by a strong commitment to solidarity on a national, regional and international scale, that does not accept or contribute to the inequality levels emerging in today's contemporary world.



ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

BEFORE COVID-19

PROGRESS IN MANY HEALTH AREAS CONTINUED, BUT NEEDS ACCELERATION



THE PANDEMIC HAS INTERRUPTED CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMMES IN AROUND 70 COUNTRIES



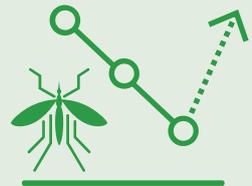
COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS

HEALTHCARE DISRUPTIONS COULD REVERSE DECADES OF IMPROVEMENTS



HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF ADDITIONAL UNDER-5 DEATHS MAY BE EXPECTED IN 2020

ILLNESS AND DEATHS FROM COMMUNICABLE DISEASES WILL SPIKE



SERVICE CANCELLATIONS WILL LEAD TO 100% INCREASE IN MALARIA DEATHS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

LESS THAN HALF OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION



IS COVERED BY ESSENTIAL HEALTH SERVICES

[2017]





**Interview with
Ms. Eedee-Bari NUAH BAWOH –
Founder of
“Voice to The Street”**



1. Ms. Nuah Bawoh, as we begin please tell us about yourself and a bit about your educational background, work experience and volunteering experience?

My name is Eedee-Bari Nuah Bawoh. A 25 years old Nigerian from Rivers State. I have an educational background in Law. I completed my undergraduate studies in Law at the University of Lagos where I obtained my LLB. I then moved to do a LLM in Commercial and Company Law at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am a legal practitioner by profession. I have juggled my career in the legal profession alongside community development. Hence, I have volunteered with various organizations focused on youth development such as Youth Be Inspired and The Blue Awards.

2. You are the Founder of Voice to the Street. What was the motivation behind starting the organization and what is its mission and core objectives?

Yes, I am.

I started Voice to the Street in 2015 alongside my five-man team which has within the years evolved to include Legborsi Sirah Bawoh, Bimpe Abioye Ikujuni, Andrew Kelvin Agidah, Michael Nwachukwu, and Samuel Ajayi (Lowkie). "Voice to the Street" charity organization is a project for the cause of street children empowerment. We take positive steps to make sure that street children are empowered through quality education. We do this by attaching them to an educational institution whether formal, informal, or vocational. We hold the project on a yearly basis at different project communities where we form partnerships with stakeholders, directly and indirectly, involved in the proposed project. These stakeholders include community heads/ chiefs, community schools, the children and parents in the communities, several NGOs with similar directions, volunteers, religious leaders, several donors, sponsors, and partners. The sole aim of this organization is to get street children off the street and make them empowered through quality education. Voice to the Street organizes counseling sessions with children and parents separately to enquire into the reasons for these street children not being enrolled in an educational facility and work closely with stakeholders to see how effectively an outcome can kick start for a positive impact. A strong follow-up is then put in place to monitor the growth of these children.

We also make sure to provide material support to meet the immediate needs of these children. We provide material donations such as clothing materials, food supplies, school supplies, etc. This is achieved through a cloth drive we host every year.

Voice to the Street was created as a result of a need to fill a societal lacuna within Nigeria's under-developed communities which is the gap between social development and that of the future of tomorrow (Children) present in such communities. We seek to address an inadequate provision in terms of financial support and formal educational or vocational facilities to cater for the educational needs of these street children to become viable representation within the polity. This prepares children, young adults, and youth for the challenges to come, having them fully empowered through quality education. This empowers them to think only logical and intelligent solutions to problems instead of the tactics imbibed on the street. It also allows them to participate effectively in nation-building and world growth and development.

We speak our voice of kindness in many languages to meet the needs of these children. In this quest, we will aim to live a life worthy of Love and be remembered by our simple act we may consider insignificantly little but great to the Almighty. We are with a MISSION of empowerment of these children and young adults, using charity as a forefront to speak the message of Hope. We have a focused VISION to reach out to as many lives as we can within the period and hours, we can leave them better than we met them.

3. Does your organization have legal status? If yes, in which country is it registered?

Yes, we have legal status in Nigeria.

4. What is your message to the Corporate Affairs Commission in charge of registering Non-Profits in Nigeria?

We ask that for future registrations, it is important for the Corporate Affairs Commission to help make the process faster. It took us over a year to get our organization registered. We ask for expeditious delivery.



VTS 3.0 Counselling session

5. Who are the major beneficiaries of your projects and which cities or regions of Nigeria do you provide services? How often do you collaborate with domestic and international partners to deliver your projects? What plans do you have for expanding your reach?

Our major beneficiaries are street children in slum communities within Nigeria. Up until this year, we have collaborated with only organizations where we have team members or volunteers present. This is because we only actualized our legal status this year. Hence, we have written to both domestic and international organizations to seek partnerships, sponsorships, and any other form of collaboration.

6. When the term 'street children' is used. What does it mean and what are some of the ways children come to be living homeless on the streets of Lagos?

To us, the term street children involve children who for reasons of poverty, ignorance, absentee parents, distorted belief and perceptions, and other times sheer irresponsibility and misplaced priorities have decided to take to the streets as homes and imbibed all its vices as practices. They have discarded all hopes for education and peradventure hopes to succeed in a decent way.

7. Would you share one of the first projects undertaken by your organization? Have your projects changed since then? If so then how?

Yes.

Our first project was the VTS 1.0 project in 2016.

In 2016 we visited the slums of **Ebute Meta** in Lagos State. Ebute Meta is a waterlogged location, with lots of children prevented from going to school by the outright instructions of their parents or the unfortunate conditions of their parents and environment. During the course of the project, we pulled up to 500 children. We spoke to them in little groups on the essentials of a bright future only obtainable from quality education, whether vocational training or formal education. We enquired reasons for their incapacitated educational conditions and spoke with their parents in a counseling session on the need to release their children to go to school. We had material donations from our esteemed sponsors and contributors on display and distributed the same to the community indigenes. We also had a cloth drive where clothing materials were on display and distributed.

Since then, till now we have held annual projects at different slum communities within Nigeria. Amongst these projects are:

- VTS 1.0 (Ebute- Meta, 2016) where we empowered over 500 street children.
- VTS 2.0 (Ajegunle, 2017) where we empowered over 250 street children
- VTS 3.0 (Makoko,2018) where we empowered over 350 street children
- VTS 4.0 (Oshodi, 2019) where we trained over 250 street children with vocational skills
- VTS 5.0 (Bring the school to you, 2020) where we enrolled 120 street children in school.
- VTS 6.0 (Ikorodu, 2021); this project is currently ongoing.

This year (2021) we decided to start a long-term focused project. In view of this we launched the VTS FOSTER CARE PROJECT which has an aim to permanently lift children off the street and get them paired with foster carers and mentors who will take care of their immediate and future needs. The foster carers will also provide guidance to them.



VTS 3.0 Counselling session



8. Would you describe your projects as effective? How has your organisation impacted communities in Nigeria and/or in other countries? How many Nigerian schools and/or students/children have you impacted?

Yes, I would describe our projects as very effective. We have impacted over 6 slum communities in Nigeria. Aside from this we have started to branch out in over 6 other states within Nigeria. Every year we impact and empower nothing less than 200 street children.

9. Which of the organisation's accomplishments are you most proud of?

I am most proud of our VTS FOSTER CARE PROJECT. Although it is just starting out, I am amazed about the great impact it will cause. I am excited to see it fall piece by piece into realization. We have a current target of lifting 5000 street children permanently off the street. Once this is achieved we will immediately begin our 180,000 street children target.

10. Since 2002, each year on 12 June The International Labour Organisation highlights the plight of child labourers and what can be done to help them. Are children living on the streets at risk of child labour? How do their living conditions affect their access to education and health?

Yes, children living on the street are at the risk of child labour. This is because they thrive to make ends means, they are constantly exposed to vulnerable situations like this. Hence, some would rather be on the street to survive than be in a classroom learning. The harsh conditions of the street and the negative practices they engage in to survive also affects their health.

11. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected homeless children living on the streets?

The Covid 19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill. The shut down in Nigeria heightened the rate of hunger and poverty in Nigeria. This greatly affected street children. It will not be so far-fetched to say that this situation also increased street vices in a bid to survive.

12. What are your future plans in the short term over the next 1 – 3 years?

Like I mentioned earlier we intend to branch out to a long-term sustainable path, hence why we started the VTS FOSTER CARE PROJECT. This will be achieved alongside our year projects. For our annual projects we will set target goals in accordance with the project theme and peculiarities of each project community. This means that for the next 1-3 years we will host three short term projects in three slum communities in Nigeria. In addition, our VTS FOSTER CARE PROJECT will continue to achieve our 5000 street children goal.

13. Do you have a message or any parting words for Nigerian children and/or youth who have been living with the COVID-19 pandemic since it was declared by the WHO in March 2020?

Yes I do. Even when this pandemic changed the course of the world and it brought the world to a standstill which every country is still recuperating from, time did not stop. Hence do not stop creating a better version of yourself because this world needs you.





LEARN MORE ABOUT THE QUALITY TO EDUCATION TEAM'S WORK FROM OUR PREVIOUS ARTICLES AND PUBLICATIONS

You can find them all on the CAJPHR website under "[Resources](#)"

Philippou, M. (March 2021) "WASH, Climate Change and Education: A Closer Look".

Samuelsson Herrera, E. (January 2021) "The Right to Inclusive and Quality Education". Right To Quality Education Magazine, Iss 01 | Vol 3, pp. 34-38

Smith, K. (January 2021) "A short profile of Uganda". Right To Quality Education Magazine, Iss 01 | Vol 3, pp. 20-26

Philippou, M. (January 2021) "The Reopening of Schools Amid Covid-19: Mitigation Strategies and Trends". Right To Quality Education Magazine, Iss 01 | Vol 3, pp. 27-32

Samuelsson Herrera, E. (January 2021) "How Does Lack of Access To Toilets and Poor Sanitation Affect Women and Girls". Right To Quality Education Magazine, Iss 01 | Vol 3, pp. 40-43

Smith, K. (January 2021) "Reducing Bacterial and Covid-19 Infections through Sustainable School Wash Project". Right To Quality Education Magazine, Iss 01 | Vol 3, pp. 44-46

RQE TEAM

Project Manager:
Kean Smith

Project Officers:
Melissa Philippou;
Carolyn Brown;
Elisabetta Spoldi;
Lisanne Rohde

Contributor:

Ms. Eedee-Bari Nuah
Bawoh,
Founder of:
"Voice to the Street"

EDITORIAL TEAM

Team Leader & Editor:
Gwendolene Roberts

Team Assistant & Editor:
Catalina Hurtado



@Centrefor
africanjustice



@Centre
Rights



@African
justice



@Centrefor
africanjustice
peace and
human rights



@Centrefor
africanjustice
peace and
human rights

PHONE: +31 687968845

WEBSITE: WWW.CENTREFORAFRICANJUSTICE.ORG