

Jaslika and AEI Recommendations to the National COVID-19 Education Response Committee

22 May 2020, Nairobi

Background

On 12th May 2020, the Ministry of Education constituted the National Covid-19 Education Response Committee to explore the best possible strategies for the basic education sub-sector. These recommendations, presented jointly by Jaslika Consulting (henceforth referred to as Jaslika) and Access Education International (AEI), is a response to the call by the Dr Sara Ruto chaired Committee to all stakeholders and the public submit their views on the best possible national response in line with the above Terms of Reference for the basic education sub-sector. This is pursuant to article 10(1) and (2) of the Constitution and section 4(l) of the Basic Education Act, No. 14 of 2013. (The full call is presented in Annex A of this document.

Jaslika Consulting and Access Education International as stakeholders and interested parties in the human rights of children, young people and the teaching community in Kenya, has put together this document based on the views and inputs from their multi-generational membership, including former children's assembly cabinet members.

About Jaslika and AEI

About Jaslika: A Nairobi-based firm, [Jaslika Consulting](#) became operational in December 2016 to provide holistic, multi-sectoral services to tackle developmental challenges that affect communities. Jaslika conducts innovative research and training across the Education, Child Rights, Environment and Technology sectors. Gender, human rights and values are cross-cutting areas of interest.

At Jaslika, passion and professionalism combine to deliver quality and timely services to inspire change. Founded on the principles of ethical business practices, its emblem reflects its worldview and the values and principles that guide its practice. The Jaslika emblem is inspired by African cosmology. It is designed as concentric circles, signifying the interconnectedness of life and humanity and expresses the idea of perpetuity, continuity

and infinity. The dotted lines radiating from the core draw attention to connecting the dots, seeing life as an interconnected whole and not as disconnected silos.

About AEI: AEI is a professional non-profit organization that seeks to empower the youth to achieve their potential through direct engagement. The organization believes that the direct engagement of the youth is the shortest route to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview and General Recommendations

Every cloud has a silver lining. As much as the COVID - 19 pandemic has disrupted all aspects of our lives, it has also drawn attention to the critical gaps in our health, education, water & sanitation, environment, transport and infrastructure sectors among others. It has drawn attention to huge socio-economic inequalities in society, and to the unequal distribution of resources and provision of services. To say that the Covid-19 virus does not discriminate is not entirely true; those economically endowed have better chances of mitigating some of the impacts of the pandemic, and protecting themselves than those who are economically disadvantaged and marginalised. It has also thrown the spotlight on the power of fake news in informing and reinforcing negative mindsets and values, and discriminatory behaviour among the citizenry.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Education Sector. Here we would like to highlight two impacts of the COVID-19 on children from poor and marginalised communities.

The closure of schools have meant that the majority of children who are accessing schools prior to the pandemic, are now excluded from learning. According to one source, 8 in 10 children who are now confined to their homes have no access to digital learning. Even with the pronouncement by the Cabinet Secretary that teachers will start teaching classes from where they left off once schools reopen, won't level the playing field between the haves and the have-nots because of the disparities in learning opportunities.

Children, especially girls, are vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence by people well known to them - their fathers, uncles, cousins and brothers living in and around their impoverished households and men in the community. The Kenyan Judiciary has reported a 41% increase in sexual abuse cases coming before the courts since the schools closed.

<https://jaslika.com/webinar-series/justice-martha-koome-gbv-webinar-segment>

The majority of schools, with all their flaws, did provide safe spaces for the girls before the closure. There is real fear now that many girls may not return to school after the crisis has been contained. Deepening economic hardships at the family level means that more girls could get married off or even trafficked in exchange for monetary gains. Post Ebola studies also indicate similar trends.

<https://jaslika.com/webinar-series/megan-odonnell-gbv-webinar-segment>

In view of these insights, we would like to propose the following:

1. Coordination and collaboration between the education, health, protection, economic sectors must continue and strengthen post-COVID 19 to ensure that the school gets the resources and support it requires for the safety and security of the child.
2. There is absolutely no reason why resources are so inequitably distributed. Instead of trying to get back to the “normal” - that is to the way things were before the pandemic, from the ashes let’s build something that is better and more effective, and produces better learning outcomes and opportunities for all.

Specific Recommendations

1. On reopening schools in Basic Education institutions

- i. Learning institutions reopening starts with teacher training colleges and adult institutions followed by secondary school candidate classes and the later primary schools. This should be done after meeting certain non-negotiable conditions captured under the health and safety section below.
- ii. Pre-Primary to stay at home longer to protect the learners.
- iii. Primary schools reopening is pushed to July 2020 and after when the curve for positive testing of covid19 will have significantly flattened out. Primary to reopen with examination classes, first then Std 5, 6 and 7 in September.
- iv. Schools reopening dates be staggered. Because counties have been disproportionately affected (Nairobi and Mombasa for example are the worst hit) schools in those areas are opened at different times even as testing and advice from the ministry of health progresses.
- v. Secondary schools to reopen with examination classes first, then form 3 and 4 in September
- vi. Teacher Training Colleges to reopen as proposed
- vii. Adult Education Institutions to reopen as proposed
- viii. During the proposed opening time, schools, teachers’ quarters and neighbouring communities should be fumigated; materials for hand washing and sanitizing put in place; reorganize classrooms, dormitories, dining halls, laboratories, libraries and workshops to implement social distancing.

- ix. Examinations can be moved to December giving the candidates an opportunity to cover content.
- x. Remaining classes can resume in January 2021.
- xi. Each institution should put up COVID-19 testing equipment with the support of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health and strengthen sanatoriums so as to take temperatures every morning & keep record; handle and refer any arising case/s urgently and respectively.
- xii. Common gatherings should be banned such as parades, assemblies, interschools' sports, drama & music and instead reinforce class communications and activities respectively.
- xiii. Maintain school breaks for health purposes.
- xiv. Reinforce guidance and counselling to reassure, learners, teachers and support staff.
- xv. Restrict visitors from visiting schools unless otherwise.

2. On reviewing and reorganising the school calendar as part of the COVID-19 post recovery strategy.

School calendar to be made flexible in the first instance and to revert back once things have normalized/stabilized. I propose that schools reopen from July and proceed through to the month of August without midterm break. Schools can then close for one weekend of August and term three starts in September. Note that in Africa, no country has reopened schools this far.

3. Advise the Cabinet Secretary on ways of on-boarding students/pupils when the schools re-open.

All boarding schools to be disinfected before students can resume classes more especially those that were used as quarantine centers. Remember the other schools were safe by the students were going home hence for such schools conducting general cleaning and maintaining the same may suffice in the meantime

4. Document all COVID-19 related matters, lessons learnt and recommendations for future preparedness.

Because we don't know for how long we shall live with corona disease, the MOE needs to urgently explore other teaching/learning strategies so that in the event this persists, learning will go unhindered. Other countries in the world simply shifted to online learning with minimal interruption to curriculum delivery. The school laptop project needs to be fast-tracked and teachers encouraged moving to virtual classes for content delivery.

5. Advise the Cabinet Secretary on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the demand for education by poor households and suggest mitigation measures.

Many poor households that have no access to smart phones and wifi access have been left behind in matters education as their compatriots from richer backgrounds continue learning

using alternative learning modes. This has exacerbated inequality. I propose that broadband be made accessible and that online learning platforms be explored as the new normal in delivery of lessons. This is the best time to zero-rate computers, phones and laptops so that as many families as possible can buy them as transition measures to the new online teaching strategies.

6. Advise the Cabinet Secretary on the Health and Safety measures to be put in place for the pupils/students, teachers and entire school community.

- i. Provide protective equipment to all schools.
- ii. All schools must have running water to promote handwashing and general hygiene. Provide ample points for hand sanitizing/washing with soap.
- iii. Classes and dorms must ensure social distancing rule, disinfected.
- iv. Conduct mass tests on teachers and learners to ascertain that all is well before allowing them to mingle.
- v. Ensure all schools have medical personnel/public health personnel knowledgeable on handling corona related infection.

7. Priority given to candidates

The next step to be done is ensuring the safety of the students even after entering the aforementioned learning institution(s). There is need to identify the areas that could most probably be hotspots for a possible contagious spreading. These include the hostels, washrooms, dining halls, and even the school canteens. This marks the reason why we mentioned earlier that priority be given to candidates awaiting national exams until the whole situation is declared under total control. The hostels should be allocated in a way that one person is assigned one room, with his/her fixed resources and zero sharing to minimize contact. In the case of dormitories, the bed allocation should as well ensure physical distancing. The same should be applied in classes and all other places where contact is most likely to occur. Therefore, the institutions should be able to utilize their space as much as possible to ensure social distance policy environment is adhered to at all times.

8. Institutions strengthening of response units

It is important that in this context the institutions strengthen up their response units. Any suspicious case should be reported immediately without putting the other students or anyone else, who is not a certified medical practitioner, to risk. For instance, a student is not required to escort one with suspicious symptoms to the school clinic for assistance.

9. Localization of measures

Same measures used to curb the pandemic nationally that can be used at local level need be implanted and replicated in schools. For instance, before and after getting to class or labs or even hostels, there should be water at such strategic points where proper sanitization needs to be done. It should also be a requirement that everyone has their personal sanitizer at hand, face masks when out of the hostels and so on.

10. Approach to examination

Question now arises as to the fate of those other students not anticipating national exams. Unlike in 1918 during the outbreak of the Spanish Influenza, we are endowed with technology. The National Government now needs to intervene to create some time on National TV and radio platforms to provide some guide on the learning processes. This should be synced to enable even those students who are unable to afford a television set to get the same content, and at the same time range. In the case of upper school students upto the universities, it should be made mandatory for teachers and lecturers to avail notes in the school portal and be doing frequent monitoring of the same and ensure that learning is taking place. All this is aimed to reduce possible contamination as it is almost impossible to monitor such large masses in dense schools and universities on a daily basis.

11. The school calendars

There really is a bone of contention in relation to the school calendar but suppose the above suggestion is implemented there could be a possibility that all that is supposed to be taught will be covered at the right time and the school calendar left intact. Any form of possible contacts through mass opening of the schools may end up endangering the lives of many of our brothers and sisters and so propose the use of technology and electronic media as we have said above.

12. Coverage of the syllabus on time

Question arises on ensuring the coverage of the syllabus on time. Here, there is an added duty on the backs of the government and teachers. On the teachers' side, they should be able to provide a guide that facilitates easy understanding of the underlying concepts in the best way possible. This now is only possible if the pre-meditated campaign of one student, one textbook comes into place. This squarely becomes the government's responsibility to add up onto the existing number of the approved curriculum textbooks. The use of the contingency funds could help so as to enable all the candidates get access to the same syllabus textbooks for ease of referral. Frequent assessment checks as mentioned earlier now come at this point, via the channels of national information such as radios and TV. The designing of formative questions, tests and exercises that monitor these students' progress ought to be made a priority. This

will aid in the process of apt and prompt syllabus coverage. The government officers should ensure that the teachers are doing their work and come up with methods of not only supervising but ensuring that work is given, marked and graded.

13. Vulnerable groups of students

Vulnerable groups of students should not be left behind during this process. These include those living with disabilities, the poor and the marginalized. For the latter two, it is really important for the government to decentralize the learning facilities. As a matter of fact, they should be given priority to reduce the possibility of them not accessing these facilities, such as textbooks. We believe that almost every household in Kenya is able to afford at least a radio but discipline from all learners will be required. This will help them to access the same curriculum at the same time with the other students.

14. Conversion of local areas to special schools

Where possible local areas be converted into special schools. Special teachers could be posted to these areas and be aided to help this group of not only vulnerable but disadvantaged learners. We propose that more special care be given to this group as the gadgets they use could aid the spread of the disease more.

15. School fees waiver

The economy is weakening, meaning that almost all Kenyans are finding it difficult to get their wages. The poor who are hard hit are now even spending more money on feeding their children who are now studying at home. There is a need that the government considers waiving fees at this time or to a reasonable enough amount that can ensure all these students access quality education and more so the candidates. We propose that the parents be helped to shoulder the shock of dealing with the pandemic until such a time when normalcy is restored both for public and private school children.

16. Possible School going formula

These said and done, it is only then that the government could be able to restore school learning and thereafter order the opening of the schools. Should the pressure be on the government to open the schools in a manner that it succumbs, we suggest that different days be assigned to different classes to ensure that the children are well protected from their elder brothers and sisters. This is to say that lower primary children could be made to attend school on Mondays and Tuesdays and the rest of the school on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. The same could apply to schools that have large populations to ensure that the social distancing policy is maintained at the institutions of learning.

Compiled by: Declan Magero, Jaslika Associate

**with Fadhili Rajab and Vinter Isaranwa
SDG4 Ministers**

Annex A: CALL FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

On 12th May 2020, the Ministry of Education constituted the National Covid-19 Education Response Committee to explore the best possible strategies for the basic education sub-sector. The Committees terms and conditions are as follows:

1. Advise the Cabinet Secretary on the reopening of Basic Education institutions (Pre-Primary, Primary, Secondary Schools, Teacher Training Colleges and Adult Education Institutions).
2. Review and reorganise the school calendar as part of the COVID-19 post recovery strategy.
3. Advise the Cabinet Secretary on ways of on-boarding students/pupils when the schools re-open.
4. Document all COVID-19 related matters, lessons learnt and recommendations for future preparedness.
5. Advise the Cabinet Secretary on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the demand for education by poor households and suggest mitigation measures.
6. Advise the Cabinet Secretary on the Health and Safety measures to be put in place for the pupils/students, teachers and entire school community.
7. Identify institutions that may have been adversely affected by COVID-19 and advise on mitigation and recovery measures.
8. Submit regular reports to the Cabinet Secretary on the progress of implementation of COVID-19 related programmes.
9. Any other related duty that may be assigned by the Cabinet Secretary.

Pursuant to article 10(1) and (2) of the Constitution and section 4(l) of the Basic Education Act, No. 14 of 2013, the Committee now invites all stakeholders and the public to submit their views on the best possible national response in line with the above Terms of Reference for the basic education sub-sector.

Written memoranda may be submitted to the Secretariat, National COVID-19 Education Response Committee by e-mail to covid19erc@kicd.ac.ke or through P.O. Box 30231-00100, Nairobi to be received on or before 22nd May 2020 by 5:00p.m.

