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**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

**State Department of Early Learning and Basic Education**

*Directorate of Policy, Partnerships and East African Community Affairs*

**IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 ON THE REALIZATION OF EQUAL ENJOYMENT OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION.**

The impact of COVID-19 global pandemic is far reaching, with devastating effects on individuals, communities and societies across the world. Education was the hardest hit since learning and other activities were disrupted and all learning institutions were closed to reduce the spread of the virus.

Consequently, learning institutions were expected to implement online instruction using technology and the Internet. Teachers were advised to prepare work for the learners to do at home. However, lack of connectivity to the national grid, broadband Internet, electronic gadgets and the cost of Wi-Fi in some remote areas limited the amount of e-learning available to learners. As a result, nearly 70% of the school children in Kenya who live in rural areas could not access e-learning while 25% of learners living in urban settings could access virtual classes amidst challenges of connectivity.

Lack of access to technology or fast, reliable internet and connectivity in most areas in the country prevented learners in rural areas and from disadvantaged families to access learning/learning platforms and educational applications.

Parental capacity to teach/guide learning, mark and transmit assessment online was challenging. Some parents’ education level was way too low to that of their learners and therefore could not adequately support their learners. In addition, parents could only assist in areas they were competent in.

Access to libraries was impossible due closure of public libraries resulting from MoH containment measures. This impacted on the ability of learners to access textbooks and study materials.

The education sector was seriously affected as millions of learners stayed at home for unspecified period of time following the closure of learning institutions in Kenya. The disruptions touched people across communities, but their impact was particularly severe for disadvantaged boys and girls and their families especially in hard to reach areas, urban informal settlements, pockets of poverty in rural areas, IDPs and refugees.

**CHALLENGES OF COVID-19 ON GIRLS EDUCATION.**

Schools play an important role in the protection of children especially girls in poor, vulnerable and marginalized communities. Young and adolescent girls are twice as likely to be out of school in crisis situations and face greater barriers to education and vulnerabilities such as domestic/gender-based violence when not in school.

During the pandemic over 32,000 schools closed and over 18 million pre-primaries, primary and secondary school learners and over 150,000 refugees were confined at home. These schools’ closure coupled with restricted movements with acute challenges around space among poor households exacerbated cases of exposure to pornographic materials, drug and substance abuse, increased rape, Gender Based Violence (GBV) including defilement of children.

Similarly, schools play a vital role in social protection and in particular the provision of basic needs for children from poor, vulnerable and marginalized communities. Many children in ASALs, urban slums and pockets of poverty in Kenya rely on school meals and sanitary towels provided by government and partners. With the closure of schools, children who relied on them for these basic needs experienced hunger and suffered detrimental nutritional effects. The interruption of learning processes further increased anxiety and uncertainty regarding the National Examinations leading to increased psychological trauma among learners.

Learners with Special Needs and Disabilities faced more challenges and were exposed to abuse, discrimination and neglect. This predisposed them to possible psychosocial challenges, including mental health.

Additionally, prolonged closure of schools led to child labor, school drop outs, and early marriages among girls. This could have been as a consequence of lack/minimal parental supervision, peer pressure and too much idle time.

**MEASURES TAKEN TO RESPOND TO CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS FACED BY GIRLS IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19.**

## Production of Learning Materials

The government through Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) embarked on the production of learning continuity programs broadcasted through radio, TV, and online, and also the provision of resources such as radios, textbooks, study guides and equipment for learners especially those from marginalised and vulnerable households. The government further supported learners, teachers, caregivers and parents with digital books and equipping of select community centres in informal settlements with technology to deliver digital education.

1. **Provision of Scholarships for boys and girls**

Gender equality in education has substantial proven impacts on many other Sustainable Development Goals, including economic growth, health, nutrition, agricultural productivity and reduced inequality. As part of disaster response, there was need to improve learning opportunities and outcomes of about 500,000 of the country’s boys and girls mostly from vulnerable households which include children from previously marginalized communities, urban slums, pockets of poverty, informal settlements including those in refugee camps. Access to good quality education gives learners the chance of a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities. Some of the interventions done by government include Provision of Secondary Scholarships for boys and girls, mentorship and psychosocial programmes for boys and girls and survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV), Community mobilisation and lobbying for support of girl’s education, Construction of private latrines and additional classrooms in selected schools, Development of a database and support for disabled girls, Organized remedial classes – targeting low achieving girls, Distribution of solar lamps, sanitary towels, uniforms and other back to school kits , Liaising with the Department of social protection to provide additional assistance to beneficiaries of Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable children and scale up of the transfers to beneficiaries not already being covered for sustainability.

1. **Health, Safety and wellbeing of all learners**

The safety and wellbeing of learners including children with Special Education Needs and disabilities during and post Covid-19 school reopening was given a centre stage by the government. Some of the efforts include the strengthening of WASH and Child protection programs in schools, Introduction of School-based health programs, Enforcement of social distancing in schools, Provision of appropriate psycho-social support to children and teachers, Increased facilities for children with Special Educational Needs and disabilities (desks, toilets, staff), Enhanced collaboration with Department of Children Services to promote safety and protection of children and increased awareness of reporting protocols for incidences of child abuse and neglect. Further the government conducted awareness-raising campaigns and community discussion groups to address socio-cultural factors that promote and trigger Gender-based violence.

1. **School Feeding Programme**

There is a generally improved education outcome through School Health and Nutrition Interventions. Poor health conditions of school children in developing countries hinder their access and participation in school. School health programs can prevent and treat common childhood conditions and, thus, increase participation in school. The school feeding programme targets the poorest and most marginalized children and those from informal settlements and slums. The government strengthened the supply chains to support the effective delivery of food supplies to schools while Retargeting and expanding the school meals programmes to more schools/learners due to increased needs as a result of COVID-19.

1. **Provision of Psychosocial Support to Learners, Teachers and School Communities**

During and after the pandemic children, teachers, parents and other education stakeholders faced challenges of psychological trauma and other emotional disturbances due to the experiences. This called for development of content on COVID 19 awareness and safety measures, Sensitization of learners, teachers and education managers on COVID 19 response mechanisms, Development of protection systems including counselling and supportive referrals that responded to the mental health and psychosocial needs of learners, strengthening of guidance and counselling departments and programmes in schools and providing Psychosocial support to children affected by COVID-19.

**Back to school campaigns** were also conducted for the recovery of learners through the enforcement and implementation of the School Re–entry guidelines.

## Uninterrupted Learning during Emergency and Crisis for Basic Education in Kenya

As part of long term measures there is need for the government to build the resilience of Broadcasting of Education Content to continue providing e-learning platforms during and after crisis. This will provide lifelong learning opportunities for all. There is need to also advocate for zero rating of fees of e-learning platforms and devices for all learners including refugees to make e-learning affordable and accessible to all learners especially the vulnerable.