



## Policy Brief

# COVID-19 & its Impacts on Children's Education in Zambia

July 2020

### Context

Since March 18, 2020, when Zambia recorded the first case of COVID-19, education for more than 4.4 million children and adolescents got disrupted<sup>i</sup>, potentially regressing progress made in attaining Sustainable Development Goal number 4<sup>ii</sup>, including the attainment of high quality primary and secondary education. Children's routine is also not the same, resulting in unprecedented stress among many. The most vulnerable, including those living with disabilities and migrant children are most affected by the impacts of COVID-19 because they face additional vulnerabilities<sup>v</sup>, as access to education is entirely in jeopardy during this period when gatherings and school access is limited.

So far, the Government of the Republic of Zambia has developed an Education Contingency Plan to respond and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on learners<sup>vi</sup>. Some of the measures devised include adopting distance learning mechanisms, to mitigate short-term and longer-term effects of school closures on learners<sup>vii</sup>. Schools have re-opened for examination classes to ensure that end of year examinations continue as planned. Schools have also been sanitised and provided with handwashing facilities and soaps, though there is still a need for more supplies, to continue averting the effects of the coronavirus. These are commendable efforts and will keep children informed and to a large extent, not

disrupt the normal learning processes during the period of school closures for examinations classes.

Online learning platforms and accessing lessons on Television and local radio stations are currently supporting continuity of learning for children in non-examination classes that are still not able to access schools. However, in remote and rural areas, including among migrant children, such distance learning measures are far from ideal as learners without Television sets, radios and internet services cannot access such lessons. In some areas, the lack of electricity to power electronic gadgets further reduces access to distance learning platforms currently made available. The risk of gaps widening in learning is higher now among children from families that can afford and those that cannot afford to access facilities that enable distance learning modalities. Poor and vulnerable children will continue to lag in education access.

Further, distance learning platforms currently, are working effectively in Private Schools, as most schools adopted such measures early enough as the COVID-19 pandemic started. Moreover, Private Schools are better equipped to apply distance learning modalities because they generally have resources to fund access to online platforms. In Government Schools, however, funds are limited

to purchase computers and other equipment to support distance learning, particularly in rural areas. Also, there has been a lag in preparing courses for lower Grades, a situation that leaves children in Grades 1 to 4 still without access to distance learning platforms. Further, there is no system in place to monitor the effectiveness of the lessons delivered among higher Grades accessing online, Television and radio platforms.

## World Vision's Response

World Vision's focus is on the well-being of children and improving the lives of the most vulnerable. To enhance the delivery of literacy in schools, World Vision builds capacity in teachers with core literacy models<sup>viii</sup>, in line with the Government's Primary Literacy Programme. World Vision also supports schools with reading materials to enhance the reading culture among school-going children. By 2019, the proportion of Grade 3 children that could read increased to 26%, compared to only 14% recorded in 2017, at the start of World Vision support to literacy programming in its operational areas<sup>ix</sup>.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, World Vision has

not relented in its support to ensure children's continuity in education. Working closely with the Ministry of General Education and in collaboration with members of the Education Working Group Cluster, World Vision has been providing support to the airing of online literacy lessons on community radio<sup>x</sup>. World Vision also trained teachers to deliver lessons on the radio to meet the educational needs of children during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>xi</sup>. Further, World Vision is working with its volunteers to lend out storybooks to children for continued reading<sup>xii</sup>.

World Vision also supported schools with enhancing sanitation, in preparedness and sustaining the re-opening of examination classes<sup>xiii</sup>. Schools were also provided with hygiene supplies and safe water to strengthen infection, prevention and control measures. World Vision also embarked on awareness-raising through poster messages in schools to educate children about COVID-19 and how they could protect themselves from contracting COVID-19 in and out of school<sup>xiv</sup>. Awareness-raising has also be extended to radio and television platforms, including online, to reach out to the broader population.

## World Vision's Recommendations

Although distance learning platforms for non-examination classes are in place, some children are still unable to access lessons delivered through radio, television and online platforms. World Vision is concerned that children that still lack access to distance learning, particularly those in rural communities and most vulnerable will continue to lag in education, a situation that will ultimately widen the socioeconomic gap among children, with the less susceptible placed at an advantage. World Vision is also concerned with the risk of high school dropouts among children that have no access to learning opportunities now, as some parents may lose interest in supporting children's education. The risk of child marriage is also high among girls that sit idle at home with limited access to learning opportunities. Moreover, schools have always provided a safe place and a referral pathway for children. Continued closure is compromising safety and denying children a platform to be heard.

As school remains a persistent concern for children now, World Vision calls on the Government, NGOs and UN agencies to take the following measures:

### Government should:

- Pre-position Education Preparedness Plans. Prevention preparedness from COVID-19 is ongoing among children in examination classes. However, there is still a risk of children contracting COVID-19 as they travel to and from school, more especially now that COVID-19 cases have skyrocketed to 2,980 as of July 19, 2020<sup>xv</sup>. Government should make it mandatory for the public to wear masks to protect children that come in contact with them on the way to school. Government should further enforce the law of wearing masks in public places to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- Most schools have been provided with soap, sanitisers, hand washing facilities and clean

water to protect children in examination classes against COVID-19. Going forward, Government should increase the allocation of funds to schools to include the purchase of sufficient hygiene and sanitation items required to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Funds should also be disbursed consistently to allow schools to have needed funds to fight the COVID-19 disease.

- The Government should perfect the art of visual dispensation of the education curriculum. Video recordings of lessons should be enhanced to limit the shock on children of getting used to new ways of learning as opposed to seeing teachers faces delivering classes.
- In rural areas where children lack television sets and internet to access lessons, Government should enhance the monitoring of progress on lessons delivered on the radio to ensure that children have adequate material provided on community radios.
- The Government should put in place monitoring systems to see to it that children are absorbing lessons as intended and that children are attending classes. Further, the Government should ensure that teachers are not relenting in offering courses as required. There will be a need for the Government to set up online roll calls to make sure teachers are accountable for their time and delivering as agreed.
- The Government to ensure that teachers conduct remote daily or weekly follow up with students to ensure that work outputs as delivered using the proposed mediums of learning are achieved. This will not only keep teachers informed of children's progress but will also keep children engaged in the lessons and provide feedback on challenges they are facing.
- Children living with disabilities are among those most dependent on face-to-face services. The Government should prioritise inclusiveness for children living with disabilities and devise means that would equally be beneficial to access education using distance learning solutions.
- The Government should expedite the process of completing television and radio lessons for children in lower Grades so that they too don't lag far behind their lessons.
- Curriculum developed for distance education administered, via television, radio, and the internet should include the provision of life skills education. This increase the scope of skills for adolescents and children from vulnerable families.
- Though distance learning has been necessitated by the stay at home orders to minimise the spread of Covid-19, research is showing that such kind of education is increasing retention of information on the part of learners and takes less time to administer on the part of trainers. As distance learning may be a practice for a long time, government should increase the national budget allocation towards education to meet and sustain the digital learning platforms and hygiene requirements that have emerged as a result of Covid-19.

#### UN Agencies and NGOs should:

- Support the Government in equipping schools with tools such as computers and solar panels to dispense distance-learning formats of classes effectively. Currently, many schools have no computers and video cameras that are required to capture lessons for dispensation to learners. Schools not connected to the national electricity grid require alternative power solutions such as solar energy to deliver digital lessons to learners.
- Support the Government to develop educational content for children with special needs and support the delivery of relevant education materials and equipment.
- Build the capacity of adolescents to hold Government accountable for improved education services and COVID-19 education norms.

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<sup>i</sup>GardaWorld News Alert: Zambia: Country confirms first cases of COVID-19 March 19/Update 1. <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/324641/zambia-country-confirms-first-cases-of-covid-19-march-18-update-1>

<sup>ii</sup>United Nation COVID-19 Emergency Appeal, Zambia. May to October, 2020. [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ZAMBIA\\_%20COVID-19\\_Emergency\\_Appeal.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ZAMBIA_%20COVID-19_Emergency_Appeal.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup>UNESCO. COVID-19 is a serious threat to aid to education recovery. Policy Paper 41, July 2020

<sup>iv</sup>OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). Tackling Coronavirus (COVID-19): Contributing to a Global Effort. Combatting COVID-19's effect on Children. <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/combating-covid-19-s-effect-on-children-2e1f3b2f/>

<sup>v</sup>Ibid

<sup>vi</sup>Education Contingency Plan for the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) developed of the Ministry of General Education. April, 2020. <https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/en/2020/education-contingency-plan-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-6946>

<sup>vii</sup>Ibid

<sup>viii</sup>WorldVision – Zambia. Annual Report, 2019

<sup>ix</sup>Ibid

<sup>x</sup>WorldVision – Zambia. Situation Report. 1st to 30th June, 2020.

<sup>xi</sup>Ibid

<sup>xii</sup>WorldVision Zambia. Op cit.

<sup>xiii</sup>WorldVision – Zambia. Water Sanitation and Hygiene. <https://www.wvi.org/zambia/water-sanitation-and-hygiene>. And WorldVision – Africa: COVID-19 Situation Report #3. 20th April, 2020. [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/World%20Vision%20-%20Africa%20COVID-19%20Situation%20Report%203%20FINAL\\_English.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/World%20Vision%20-%20Africa%20COVID-19%20Situation%20Report%203%20FINAL_English.pdf)

<sup>xiv</sup>Ibid

<sup>xv</sup><https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/zambia/>

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[www.wvi.org](http://www.wvi.org)

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

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