

STRATEGIES FOR SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE RE-OPENING OF EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Introduction:

As you are aware, education institutions were closed on 20th March 2020 to in a bid to avoid the possible rapid spread of new infections of COVID-19 if schools were to remain open. This measure resulted in the closure of more than 73,200 schools and institutions affecting more than 15 million learners and 548,000 teachers.

In recognition of the impact of pandemic on the education system in Uganda, Ministry of Education and Sports constituted a sector response task force to strengthen the education sector preparedness and response measures to mitigate the impact of the outbreak of COVID-19 on Uganda's education system.

Working with all key stakeholders, the sector developed and approved a sector response plan that had three (3) key objectives: (1) to ensure continuity of learning; (2) prepare for reopening of schools; (3) building resilience in the education institutions to manage emergencies.

The Government has over the period made efforts to ensure continuity of learning through lesson broad cast on TV and radios and provision of self-study materials to learners'

The reopening of education institutions started in October 2020 with candidate and finalist classes. This continued in a phased manner until the second lock down of

June 2021. However, in his last address, H/E the President assured the nation that schools will be opened in January 2022.

The MoES Taskforce for COVID 19 and the entire MoES have been working closely and consulting with other sectors including Ministry of Health, MoGLSD, MoLG, MoI&NG and other departments and agencies, and held discussions with other key stakeholders including the Foundation Bodies and Private schools owners. Arising from these discussions, we have made the following proposals based on key principals.

General Principles for Safe and sustainable Reopening of Education

Institutions:

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- 1) The response to Covid-19 pandemic should involve both care for life and care for livelihoods and social wellbeing.
 - 2) Reopening of education institutions in a safe and sustainable manner is an urgent matter of national importance.
 - 3) Ensuring safe reopening of education institutions is a shared responsibility for all sectors and stakeholders, not just MoES.
 - 4) Preparations for safe reopening of education institutions should take the whole-government approach, with clear responsibilities for key sectors and stakeholders.
 - 5) Re-opening of Education Institutions must be safe, sustainable, and resilient in the face of reasonable rates of community transmission of COVID-19.

Justification for the strategies

- a) The moral imperative of equitable access to formal learning for all learners.
- b) Preventing and mitigating against clogging of the formal education system especially the entry levels at P.1, S.1., and S.5.

- c) COVID-19 has been here for close to two years with no pre-determined end in sight. Therefore, the formal education system needs to be adapted to living with COVID-19 by tailoring learning delivery to various approaches that are contextually feasible within our means as a country.
- d) Learning from past mistakes and not allowing such mistakes to hold us back.
- e) Prolonged stay out of structured schooling is worsening the possibility of attainment of learning outcomes in the basic and secondary education levels whose outcomes were not satisfactory nationally even before COVID-19.
- f) The longer children stay away from school, the more likely that they will lose interest in school, or not return to school at all.
- g) The current situation is widening the already existing inequality and inequity between learners from poor households and those who are better off. This is a recipe for future unemployment and subsequent disgruntlement in a society with a high youthful population.
- h) Uganda will suffer a decline in human development index and investment competitiveness because of unsatisfactory human capital in the medium to long term.
- i) Out of school young people are more vulnerable to adopting risky behaviours and vices to the extreme. This has both socio-economic and security implications given the geopolitical context of Uganda in the Great Lakes Region.

Strategies for safe and sustainable opening

Based on the above principles, it is proposed that the following strategies be adopted to prepare and ensure safe re-opening and operations of education institutions.

1. Vaccination of Staff and Learners against COVID-19

- a. Ensure that only vaccinated teaching and non-teaching staff are allowed to work in education institutions.
- b. Mobilize teaching and non-teaching staff for Covid-19 vaccination through both administrative structures such as Local Governments and Associations of DEOs, Heads of Institutions, Staff, and labour Unions.
- c. Work with MoH and MoLG to strengthen the collaboration and coordination of Education and Health departments in local governments, and identify schools to be used as vaccination centres for education institution staff. This has been done.

2. Re-opening Education Institutions

- a. Ensure that your institution meets the BRMS to run in these COVID 19 circumstances.
- b. Ensure observance of SOPs which include WASH facilities, social distancing, temperature measuring, etc (As provided in the signed SOPs from MoES).
- c. Prioritize classes of learners that have had the least amount of time for in-person attendance of learning at School. These include the current Primary One to Primary Three pupils, and Senior One and Senior Two students.

- d. Prioritise incoming candidate classes to enable them to complete the syllabus and prepare for end-of-cycle national assessment.
- e. Teachers should use the first days to re-orient the learners into the system by causing them to reflect, write and discuss the lessons learnt (Academic and non-academic) and how they will help them in class and in life.

3. Progression to the next level

- a. Allow all learners that have attained six years of age to join **Primary One** irrespective of whether they have been through Early Childhood Programs or Pre-Primary programs.
- b. Commit as much time as possible to teaching and learning so that all learners can fully understand the concepts and complete the work set for that term and year.
- c. Progress non-candidate learners to the next year of study within the given sub-sector by carrying out continuous school-based assessment without subjecting such learners to end of year promotional exams as is usually the practice as schools open.

4. Enhance Continuity of Learning

- a. Provide appropriate home-study materials to cover the holiday period for learners upon completion of their in-person attendance. The materials shall cover the period when the learner was away from school until the next session of in-person attendance.
- b. Schools in the basic education levels may have used online platforms as a supplementary part of their continuity of learning interventions. However, schools that used this supplementary mode shall ensure that none of the learners is left behind because of inability to utilize or access online learning

platforms the school chooses to use. Schools should start the face-to-face learning from the syllabus point where they stopped before any class went on recess to ensure all learners benefit equally.

- c. A shift system of in-person attendance (Morning and afternoon sessions) and staggered system of in-person attendance (alternate day attendance for different classes) can be implemented during the phased re-opening in schools without adequate infrastructure capacity. This ensures that at any one-time, social distancing is fully observed and more learners benefit.
- d. Provide formative assessment frameworks for the respective levels of the Education system. These frameworks shall be a resource for Institutions of Learning to determine the level of remedial learning that cohorts of learners who progress to the next year of study may need to undertake to bring them up to speed.
- e. Develop mechanisms to provide psycho-social support to both teachers and learners.

5. Reviewed and Abridged the School Curriculum

- a. NCDC has reviewed and abridged the primary and secondary education curricula by extracting the content that is core and can be delivered through the shortened school calendar under the context of Covid-19. It will soon be available for use.
- b. Review the current formative and summative assessment systems to ensure integration of continuous assessment in a home-study setting and summative assessment that is aligned with the reduced scope of the Curricula.
- c. Ensure Re-orientation of Teachers to be able to deliver abridged curricula, implement continuous assessment, and remedial learning in Basic and Secondary Education levels.

6. Strengthening COVID-19 Surveillance System in Schools:

- a. We have agreed with Ministry of Health on a Covid-19 school based surveillance mechanism for early appropriate screening, early identification and reporting of suspected cases. We are now working on strengthening local government capacity to ensure effective Covid-19 surveillance in education institutions.
- b. Ensure Training of Education Institutions staff about the COVID-19 SOPs and surveillance in Education Institutions.
- c. We shall hold the Head of the education institution accountable for effective implementing of SOPs in the institution, supervising disease surveillance and ensuring timely reporting, and that only vaccinated teaching and non-teaching staff are allowed to work in the institution.
- d. Appoint a Covid-19 focal-point person in each education institution who will be responsible for surveillance, and submitting daily reporting to the District Taskforce on matters of Covid-19.
- e. Ensure your institution is linked to the Health Centre IIIs for close support to the Covid-19 focal person in the school in the short term.
- f. School based Covid-19 surveillance system will be supplemented with active surveillance and monitoring through the sub-county structures. The sub-county school COVID-19 surveillance and monitoring teams will be comprising of Sub-County chiefs, parish chiefs, the Inspector of Schools, GISO, Health officer, Community Development Officer (CDO) to reach each Education Institution at least once in two weeks.
- g. Work with Ministry of Health to implement the digital disease surveillance system (M-Track) in all institutions of learning to expedite reporting and follow up of Covid-19 alerts in affected schools.

Conclusion

The Ministry greatly values your contribution in providing education in Uganda. This has to be done in a safe learning environment. The vigilance with which you will ensure adherence to the vaccination requirement and observance to the SOPs will to a big extent determine the sustainability of re-opened schools. We are banking on you as Directors to make this happen. It is possible if all of us do our part. I am confident that you will be committed to it.

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DIRECTOR EDUCATION STANDARDS

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