

Policy Memorandum

Team #23

To: Adamu Adamu (Minister of Education), Dr. Chikwe Ihekweazu (Director of Nigeria Center for Disease Control), Suleiman H. Adamu FNSE, FAEng (Federal Ministry of Water Resources)

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Date: 14th June, 2020

RE: “Recommendations for Reopening Schools Safely Under the COVID-19 Impact”

Executive Summary

As governments plan to reopen their economies, many educational institutions face the challenge of providing safe and sanitary environments essential in curbing the spread of COVID-19. We recommend safe reopening through staggered learning while building handwashing areas and campaigning to promote proper hygiene, sanitation, and social distancing. Knowing that the youth are less likely to return to school over time, effective long-term interventions are needed¹.

Background and the Problem

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria registered the highest number of out-of-school children in the world; a staggering 13.2 million². Amid the pandemic, schools have closed to slow its spread among the students³, putting about 60 million more primary and secondary students out of school⁴. Currently, the government has no clear plan for reopening schools, and marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by school disruptions⁵.

Public schools are hotspots for virus spread as they tend to be overcrowded and lack basic sanitation and hygiene facilities⁶. In an assessment of water, sanitation, and hygiene for schools in South-West Nigeria, “only 10% of the schools had handwashing points but without soap”⁷. To mitigate the spread of the virus, it is imperative that measures are put in place to ensure access to basic sanitation and to enforce social distancing while optimizing current resources in Nigerian schools⁸.

Proposed Recommendations

To improve public health in Nigerian public schools reopening soon, we recommend that the Nigerian government:

1. Collaborate with private companies and non-profit organizations to gather resources to build out hygiene and sanitation stations, as well as boreholes near schools.

¹ <https://www.experienceeducate.org/covid-19-response>

² <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/un-nigeria-13-million-children-out-of-school/>

³ <https://punchng.com/breaking-coronavirus-lagos-announces-closure-of-schools/>

⁴ <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/ng>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-52961886>

⁶ <https://tribuneonlineng.com/in-lagos-public-schools-grow-teachers-students-groan/#https://www.tribuneonlineng.com/in-lagos-public-schools-grow-teachers-students-groan/>

⁷ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298257439_Assessment_of_wash_program_in_public_secondary_schools_in_South-Western_Nigeria

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/why-handwashing.html>

2. Transition to staggered learning to reduce the volume of students at school as a means of practicing social distancing.
3. Launch public health campaigns to educate students on the current situation and preventive measures amid the pandemic.

Our Findings

“Installing handwashing stations in schools can decrease COVID-19 transmission”

Implementing water, sanitation, and hygiene services along with waste management practices within schools helps prevent human-to-human transmission of COVID-19. A combination of accessible and effective intervention strategies can promote handwashing like hand washing stations⁹. WaterAid Nigeria has an established partnership with the WASH Sector COVID-19 Response Coordination Platform at the Federal Ministry of Water Resources to help provide non-contact handwashing facilities and programs that encourage hand washing¹⁰.

“Alternating current resources and schedules to meet COVID-19 safety requirements.”

Social distancing measures can be implemented by reducing the number of students in school. Students’ return to school can be staggered to decrease the volume of students at school. Rising seniors in primary schools should return to school first to better prepare for the next steps in their academic careers. When the pandemic slows, younger children would return as schools should have better implemented public health measures. Class schedules can also be adjusted to maintain social distancing. Students from first to third grade should have classes in the morning, whereas the rest of the students should have class in the afternoon. Moreover, older students should be given the initiative to help younger children by assisting teachers and faculty to monitor public health safety measures. Older students could take shifts in the sanitation stations to ensure all students that are entering the school are properly sanitized and ready to start the day.

“Educating staff and students about COVID-19 and intervention strategies”

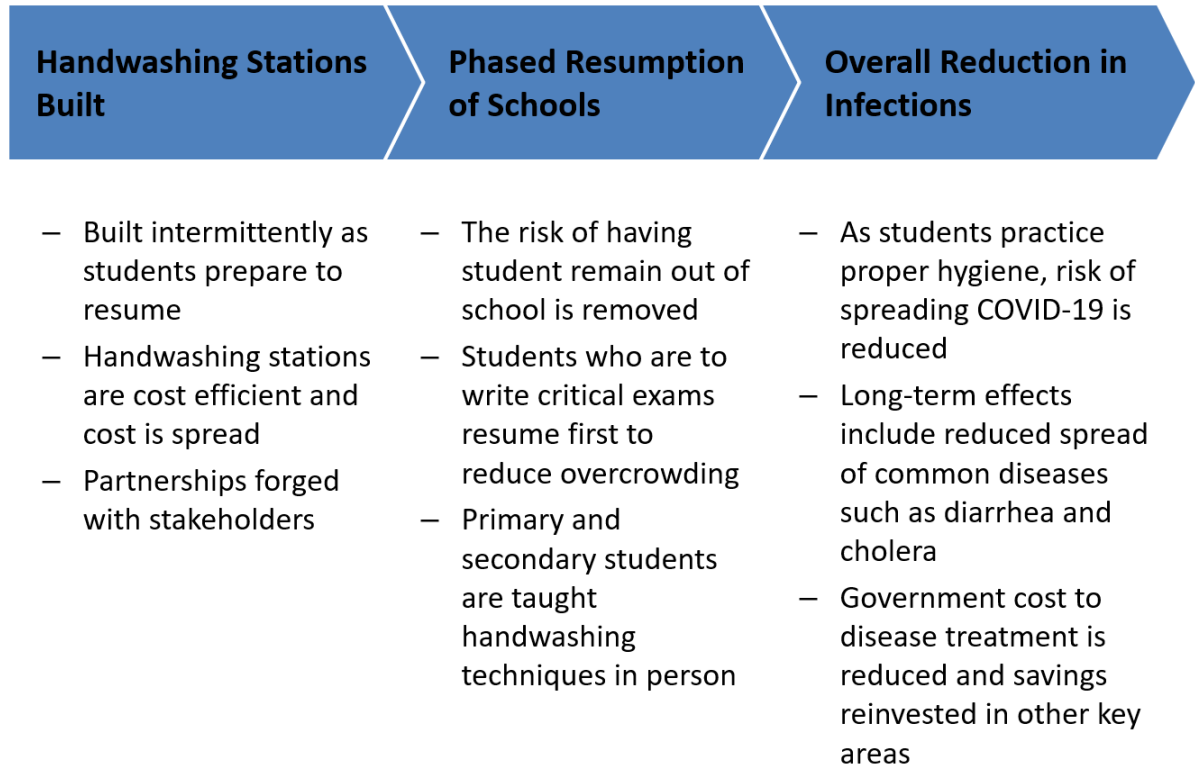
Africa has experienced its fair share of public health crises amid poorly-resourced healthcare systems. It is against the backdrop of crises like HIV/AIDS and Malaria that we are able to make recommendations on education campaigns and mass awareness in preventing the spread of COVID-19¹¹. Public health campaigns and mass education have previously been effective in reducing the transmission of HIV/AIDS and the prevention of malaria. Education efforts must consider the socioeconomic background of the intended audience to be inclusive and effective¹². Education can include conversations and exercises about COVID-19, health, and hygiene guided by the needs of students and recommendations from school, government, and trusted global health organizations. By teaching students COVID-19 information and prevention strategies, educators can maintain a safe learning environment that protects the health of staff and students.

⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/water/brief/wash-water-sanitation-hygiene-and-covid-19>

¹⁰ <https://www.wateraid.org/ng/covid-19>

¹¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23213285/>

¹² <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-teachers-can-talk-children-about-coronavirus-disease-covid-19;>
<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/329531/9789289054508-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>



Plan for Implementation

The first step is to allocate resources to build sanitation stations. We have identified *mo-Wash* and *Wateraid Nigeria* as organizations for the high possibility of investment and collaboration with the department of education. To complement the build-out of handwashing stations, and for sustainability, boreholes should be drilled near each school as potential water sources¹³. Additionally, we encourage collaborations with *The Water Projects*, for this project. Nearing the reopening of public schools, it is hoped that periodic installation of handwashing stations begins, and once school resumes through staggered learning, the project would continue, improving public health safety in schools over time. Concurrently, we plan to launch an education campaign across the school districts to promote hygiene and sanitation protocols, with a priority on handwashing techniques. The manpower to carry out the construction and spread information among community members can be provided by The National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The immediate response to COVID-19 in the education sector was to quickly turn towards remote learning through the internet or TV. After some time, it became clear that these interventions unintentionally excluded students from impoverished communities. Our memo is

¹³ https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/CFS_WASH_E_web.pdf

was made in recognition of the necessity of continuing education for marginalized communities. Moreover, we acknowledge the need to prevent further transmission of COVID-19 especially in crowded spaces like schools. We, therefore, propose safe reopening of schools through partnerships with organizations like *Mo-Wash* which would promote hygiene and sanitation in schools and recommendations for social distancing measures like staggered openings.

Appendix

THEORY OF CHANGE

Preparing for Schools to Reopen in Nigeria

School Transition

Switching from remote learning to staggered learning



Hand Washing Stations Built

Installation of stations over time, and finding/creating sources of water



Education on Hygiene

Demonstrate and practice hand washing techniques in primary and secondary schools



Short-term Benefits

Reduce transmission of COVID-19 upon reopening of schools



Long-term Benefits

Increased hygiene and decreased cases of viral infections