

Executive Brief - MEDIA & PUBLIC [27 May 2020]

H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta - vide *Executive Order Number 2 of 2020* - established the National Emergency Response Committee on Coronavirus as a framework to upscale and coordinate Kenya's level of preparedness and capacity to prevent, respond to and contain COVID - 19 pandemic.

Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), Universities Academic Staff Union (UASU) and Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) in collaboration with the Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists & Doctors Union (KMPDU), Forum for African Women Educationalists - Kenya (FAWE - Kenya) and Elimu Tuitakayo Network - [*enriched by significant inputs from Parents of Children with Disabilities who felt non-represented with the exclusion of Kenya Institute of Special Education*] - have put together this report to inform debate and decision making in Education sector regarding reopening and management of schools, colleges and universities in the face of COVID-19.

We submit this report to the National Emergency Response Committee on Coronavirus in good faith, to inform discussion and decision making on managing Education sector within this COVID - 19 period, and particularly when matters of re-opening of schools, colleges, universities and guiding teaching and learning are on the table.

The report benefits from incisive desk analysis by a panel of experts, raw data analysis of responses from across the country by teachers, lecturers, non-teaching staff, frontline human rights defenders, doctors and health experts in the field of corona virus. It has taken on board useful analysis of relevant information and experiences from global contexts including international health expert opinions, multi-state agencies' guidelines, and unions from other countries and jurisdictions.

We appreciate the leadership of KNUT SG Hon Wilson Sossion, KHRC ED Mr George Kegoro and UASU SG Dr Constatine Wasonga in this process.

We are grateful to Prof Florentius Koech & Team, Prof George Osanjo & Team, Boaz Waruku, Dr. Chibanzi Mwachonda & Team, Ms Jedidah Rutere,

Mr. John Machio, Ms Terry Otieno, Mr. Wycliffe Etole Omucheyi and John Matiang'i, among others, for the respective roles played in the process.

Critical factors under consideration

1. On determining when and how to re-open schools, colleges and universities, the report calls for an objective, inclusive and comprehensive data-driven process of ascertaining how schools, teachers, lecturers, non-teaching staff, pupils, students and communities are coping with closures and the pandemic.
2. Basic considerations should be placed on the best interest of the child, teachers, Education service personnel and overall public health considerations, as informed by assessment of the associated benefits and risks and cross-sectoral and context-specific evidence, including education, public health and socio-economic factors.
3. Enhanced support and flexibility to teachers, lecturers, non-teaching staff, especially those who work in remote areas or marginalised communities, to ensure that disadvantaged children do **NOT** miss out on quality education in the wake of Coronavirus pandemic.
4. Trends in COVID-19 infections, containment measures, search for vaccines and cure, and the pattern of spread, especially with projections of peak seasons in Kenya and surrounding countries expected in August 2020.
5. Level of preparedness and capacity to prevent, respond to and contain COVID - 19 pandemic, by the government of Kenya.
6. Experts advise - scientific facts and considerations

Our recommendations to the National Emergency Response Committee on Coronavirus -

1. Ensure that the COVID - 19 curve of infections is flattened first, as per Prof Koech's advisory, to assure safety of teachers, lecturers, support personnel and learners before re-opening of schools, colleges and universities. Experts do project that the peak of the curve is in August. Viably, schools can not re-open until September 2020.

2. Based on the UNESCO guidelines for school reopening, the decision on reopening of schools should be guided by *the best interest of the child and overall public health considerations*, based on an assessment of the associated benefits and risks and informed by *cross-sectoral and context-specific evidence*, including education, public health and socio-economic factors. No evidence is available at present to confirm that the government is in compliance or moving towards being compliant with this provision.
3. That the government should do mass testing for all students and teachers of boarding schools before re-opening schools once the pandemic is contained and those who are sick be allowed to stay home until full recovery before resumption of learning.
4. That an elaborate and solid plan on ***Occupational Safety and Health Assessment*** for all schools by Safety Consultants from the Directorate of Occupational Safety and Health.
5. That periodic risk assessment of the teachers based on the WHO guidelines for risk assessment for health care workers.
6. Set up treatment facilities to handle any cases that might arise to ensure access to health services by teachers, lecturers, non-teaching staff and learners.
7. A decision on reopening schools is a step-wise process that requires skilful, careful and cautious selection to deal with situations prior to re-opening, during the process of re-opening and management of the schools once they are reopened. An inclusive, objective and NON-DISCRIMINATORY framework for managing this process should be set up immediately.
8. Prior to re-opening of schools, the government with the support and particularised inputs of stakeholders need to prepare critical policies, procedures and financing plans needed to improve schooling, with a focus on safe operations, including strengthening remote learning practices.
9. As part of the re-opening process, the government needs to adopt proactive approaches to reintegrate marginalized and out-of-school

children, invest in water, sanitation and hygiene to mitigate risks and focus on remedial education to compensate for lost instructional time. This becomes more so apparent in the North Eastern Kenya where public schools started the year with huge shortage of teachers due to security-related challenges.

10. With schools re-opened, a mechanism to actively monitor health indicators, expanding focus on wellbeing and protection, should be implemented. The government should invest in strengthening pedagogy, and appropriate teaching and learning, including knowledge on infection transmission and prevention.
11. While considering the above, an objective, inclusive and comprehensive data-driven process of ascertaining how schools, teachers, non-teaching staff, students and communities are coping with closures and the pandemic remains a critical pre-requisite to any determination of schools' re-openings. Rapid response surveys of school and local leaders, teachers, students and parents can help provide this information, and the multi-agency process rolled out by KNUT, UASU and KHRC is an example that can guide the country on schools' re-opening.
12. With the inconclusive evidence around the infection risks related to school attendance as of now, the government needs to assess how learning and wellbeing can best be supported, the mechanisms for psycho-social support for the learners, teachers and other school workers on re-opening, in addition to other safeguards against risk factors related to reopening and running of schools during COVID-19.
13. National examinations should be pushed to the 1st Quarter of 2021.
14. Reopening of schools, colleges and universities must be transparent, phased and coupled with clear communication by Government and public universities, colleges and schools, with the input of public health professionals, frontline healthcare professionals, educators, academic staff and the unions. Every public learning institution including university will require to be aligned with public health requirements designed to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

15. Based on the available scientific evidence, we recommend a phased, stepwise approach to reopening of the higher education institutions and universities, and schools, after a demonstrated reduction in the number of confirmed new cases of Sars-Cov-2. *It is advisable to maintain the closure of Kenyan educational institutions and universities until the number of new cases stabilizes or declines for at least 14 consecutive days, before considerations for phased re-opening begins.*

Immediate steps prior to re-opening

1. Meaningfully and effectively engage teachers, non-teaching staff, parents on whether and how to re-open schools.
2. Promote World Health Organisation's recommended safety facilities in schools.
3. Provide sustainable supply of Personal Protective Equipments for teachers, workers and students.
4. Provide adequate space for social distancing at school, colleges and universities.
5. Train and support teachers and lecturers on Coronavirus COVID - 19 Compliant Pedagogy including support for gender, disabilities, vulnerabilities, and COVID-19 survivors.
6. Recruit more teachers and school workers to support the expected intensive teaching and learning.

Without any of the outlined measures undertaken, schools should not be re-opened. Plan well, save lives.

Thank you

KNUT, UASU, KHRC, KMPDU, FAWE-K, ELIMU TUITAKAYO