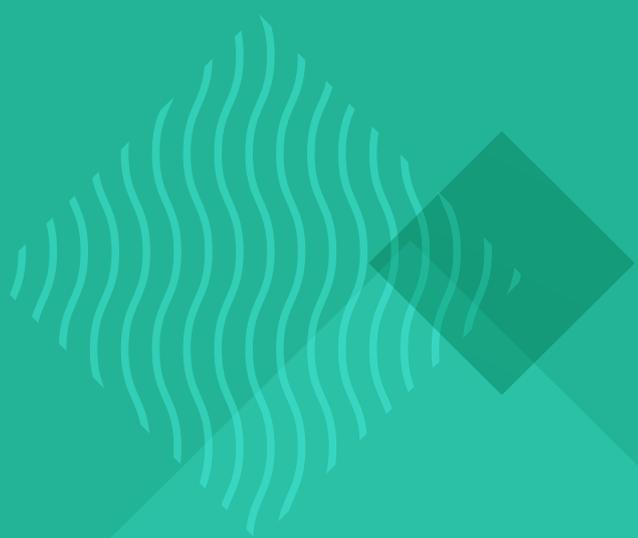


Programmatic approaches to the gender-related impacts of COVID-19 on education: Lessons from 2020

Case study: Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda

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Case Study: Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda

Promoting girls' education and gender
equality during the COVID-19 pandemic





About the MoES-Uganda

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda has been at the forefront of fighting gender inequalities in the education sector since the early 1990s. The MoES is responsible for the delivery of equitable, relevant and quality education, training and sports services for all. In a bid to ensure equitable and quality education, the Gender Unit was established in 2012 to spearhead gender mainstreaming in the Education Sector.

The mandate of the Gender Unit includes supporting the coordination and consistency of approaches to gender mainstreaming in MoES; developing structures for linking and networking the different activities on gender that are being implemented by different departments; strengthening the Ministry of Education and Sports linkages with all ministries, development partners and NGOs as far as gender issues are concerned; and supporting specific and targeted gender programmes to tackle issues of social cultural norms including early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation, and abduction of girls and violence against children in schools all of which hinder girls' attendance and completion of school.¹

¹ [Ministry of Education and Sports The Gender Eye Newsletter](#), Issue 1



COVID-19 Context

Uganda registered its first case of COVID-19 in March 2020. The closure of schools and institutions was one of the first measures to be taken up by the government to curb the spread of the virus, affecting more than 15 million learners (of which almost 52% are adolescent girls aged 10-19 years) and 548,000 teachers across education levels. Though necessary, the measures to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic have had adverse effects on education, especially for girls. Emerging and anecdotal evidence suggests that school closures have increased learners' vulnerability to various forms of gender-based violence and exposure to sexual abuse. Girls in particular are also facing a greater burden of household labour and child-rearing responsibilities, leaving them with less time to learn, play and build their social skills as would be in the normal child development process². Uganda is still largely a cash economy and most of the population is employed in the informal sector with no guaranteed job security. With the limited social safety nets in place in Uganda, families have an increased risk of negative coping strategies, with adverse effects for adolescent girls in particular³.

MoES-Uganda response to the gender-related impacts of COVID-19 on education

Leveraging digital and media spaces to deliver awareness-raising programmes

Although the implementation of programme activities was significantly affected by COVID-19 school closures, MoES-Uganda used digital spaces and the media to engage with various stakeholders on a number of issues affecting adolescents, especially girls. For instance, messages targeting parents on positive parenting, psychosocial support and preventing violence against children were developed and disseminated. MoES-Uganda worked with partners to share the messages on various national, local and community radio and TV stations. These messages have also been designed to accompany distance learning materials that were distributed to remote areas.

Strengthening GBV response mechanisms and child protection

MoES-Uganda, in collaboration with UNICEF-Uganda, developed key messages targeting a range of stakeholders including parents and learners on child protection. In addition, sessions on parenting and family care practices have been developed and shared with primary college tutors, with regards to addressing violence against children (VAC) in the community during COVID-19 and prolonged school closures. During the lockdown, survivors of GBV have found their ability to report cases greatly affected⁴. The MoES-Uganda and other CSO partners have been working to maintain essential services for at-risk/survivors of violence, particularly girls. Home and neighbourhood support groups were put in place to empower adolescent girls with critical life and transferable skills to build resilience.

The Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation (TMF)⁵ has also been strengthening the capacity of girls and women to report, track and refer cases of gender-based violence (GBV). With support from Kotido District Local Government, TMF continues to work with various community structures such as grandmothers/

2 [Ministry of Education and Sports The Gender Eye Newsletter](#), Issue 1

3 [Ministry of Education and Sports The Gender Eye Newsletter](#), Issue 2

4 [Ministry of Education and Sports The Gender Eye Newsletter](#), Issue 1

5 <https://trailblazersuganda.org/>

women role models, Girls Education Club (GEC) patrons, teachers, sub-county leaders and adolescent leaders to mentor and support adolescent girls during lockdown. For example, reflection meetings were held with 80 women role models on how to effectively mentor and support adolescent girls during lockdown, including reporting and tracking cases of gender-based violence, with strong adherence to COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Supporting adolescent girls to manage menstruation with dignity

A virtual conference was organised to mark International Menstrual Hygiene Day, May 28 2020, to draw attention to the specific challenges girls were facing during COVID-19. Prior to the conference, MoES-Uganda together with UNICEF U-report⁶ conducted a survey on the experiences of adolescent girls and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) during the pandemic. The survey was responded to by 148,030 U-reporters. According to the survey, many respondents indicated that access to sanitary products was a challenge during the COVID-19 period due to the high cost and limitations on movements. 30% of the respondents indicated that there is limited information in the communities concerning management of menstruation. In addition, 77% of the U-reporters indicated that very few girls discuss MHM issues with their parents. These issues formed part of the discussions during the conference⁷. As a result, MoES-Uganda in collaboration with UNICEF and partners supported training for senior women and male teachers in creating sanitary pads, which can then be replicated to adolescents girls as a sustainable strategy for safe MHM.

In addition to the virtual conference, MoES-Uganda took advantage of various media spaces to create awareness on the importance of supporting adolescent girls to have access to information and services to manage menstruation with dignity. MoES-Uganda held a number radio and TV talk shows as well as discussions on Twitter and Facebook. Other partners such as Uganda Girl Guides, Reach a Hand, Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation (TMF) and Anthill Foundation equally held MHM virtual meetings where the Ministry participated. In addition, MoES-Uganda developed a Menstrual Hygiene Training Manual (2020)⁸ for teachers and other stakeholders on menstrual hygiene management (MHM), which will be used by schools and other development practitioners working with schools and communities on MHM and WASH issues.

Strengthened coordination and cross-sectoral collaboration

Strengthened coordination between district local governments and implementing partners has seen positive outcomes for the advancement of programme objectives. For example, TMF in collaboration with the Kotido District Local Government COVID-19 task force has led to the increased dissemination of advocacy messages developed by MoES-Uganda on child safety, the distribution of learning materials in sub-counties to improve access to learning for children during lockdown, and the running of 2 virtual meetings by Child Protection Coalition Members to discuss gender-specific education concerns relating to Menstrual Hygiene and Management (MHM) and Mentorship. The survey conducted by MoES and UNICEF U-Report has also led to a number of MHM-specific recommendations and objectives which will be pursued by the Ministry in conjunction with their partners and stakeholders.

6 <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/U-Report>

7 [Ministry of Education and Sports The Gender Eye Newsletter](#), Issue 2

8 Menstrual Hygiene Management Training Manual (2020) Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda

Improved cross-sectoral coordination across national, district level and local levels has also resulted in strengthened coordination during COVID-19, ensuring education and adolescents issues are prioritized in the response. Since the COVID-19 school closures, various task teams have been established to facilitate continuity of learning targeting all children, including the Digital Learning Task Team led by UNICEF, the Home Learning and Radio Task Team, and the Education in Emergency Task Team. With support from UNICEF and UNESCO, MoES-Uganda has developed a Digital Agenda policy framework to mainstream educational technology (EdTech) in the education sector. A harmonised Accelerated Education Guideline, which incorporates secondary education, was also developed by MoES-Uganda to facilitate continuity of education for vulnerable out-of-school adolescents, especially child mothers, refugee learners and marginalized learners.

Learnings and challenges

The closure of all education institutions in March 2020 has greatly impacted the implementation of educational programmes. The status quo for education remains fluid and unpredictable, which is challenging for education planning and system strengthening. Extended school closures have created a lot of anxiety and stress among adolescents and parents. This is exacerbated by increased risks to teenage pregnancy and child marriage, sexual violence, HIV and other forms of abuse related the COVID-19 crisis⁹.

A significant challenge during this time was that teachers were not initially prioritized in the COVID-19 response by the government, as the focus was on the Ministry of Health, medical personnel and security. As a result, teachers were not initially mobilised to support continuity of learning at the household level for children struggling to access remote learning, especially girls. Other challenges included difficulties to adapt or pivot education programmes to the digital learning and virtual space, and ensuring access to home learning materials for hard to reach children could not be guaranteed during school closures, leaving some behind. Finally, despite launching nation-wide awareness raising initiatives, emerging and anecdotal evidence suggests that violence against children and cases of teenage pregnancy and child marriage are still rising¹⁰.



9 [The impacts of COVID-19 make it more critical than ever to address child marriage in Uganda](#) (2020) Girls Not Brides

10 [Kitgum leaders fear schools may not have female students after lockdown due to teenage pregnancies](#) (2020) UNICEF Uganda

Finding opportunities for progress during challenging times

Despite many of the negative impacts on education interventions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, there have also been some positive impacts. The Guidelines for Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings (2020)¹¹ were fast-tracked and approved after persistent discussion on promoting re-entry. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Guidelines have been appreciated by the top leadership of MoES-Uganda and other stakeholders. This is due to the urgency presented by the increased risk of sexual violence to adolescent girls during the lockdown, meaning that many of them may never get a second chance to re-enroll back to school. The guidelines provide the necessary support and direction for the re-entry of teenage mothers once schools reopen, and for future generations of female learners.

In order to strategically respond to the key issues raised during the MHM Virtual Conference (2020), the Ministry of Education and Sports, with funding from the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), conducted a situational analysis on MHM in Uganda. The Situational Analysis report¹² has informed the development of an MHM Strategic Plan and a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Several other resources are being developed to respond to the recommendations of the situational analysis study, including a training manual on MHM for out-of-school adolescents, Menstrual Health and Hygiene Guidelines for schools, and sensitisation messages on HIV prevention and GBV.

“For the first time as a country, we are strategically positioned to handle MHM issues in the next five years”

Rosette Nyanzi, Gender Technical Advisor, Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda



11 [Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings in Uganda](#) (2020) Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda

12 [Situational Analysis Study on Menstrual Hygiene Management \(MHM\) in 14 Districts of Uganda](#) (2020) Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda

Looking beyond the immediate COVID-19 crisis

The learning and information gathered during this period is being used to inform the Education Sector Strategic Programme (ESSP) process, and the development of the National Inclusive Education Policy is under approval. Communication for Development programmes and media campaigns are being scaled up, and the MoES and MoH have developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and guidelines on school reopening¹³. Extensive engagement with stakeholders on school reopening is ongoing to ensure a safe return to school for learners with additional support to girls, especially those who became pregnant during school closures, to re-enrol.

Taking a more innovative approach to learning

Going forward, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown a need to take a more innovative approach to learning, and to embrace ICT learning technologies starting from primary level, with a blend of distance learning or virtual classes and competence-based assessments. Schools should be equipped with electricity and internet services starting at primary level to facilitate this shift. Additionally, alternative education and accelerated learning programs must be supported, and functional adult literacy programmes for parents should be revived in order to build the capacity of parents and caregivers to support children's learning and adolescent life skills.

Finally, as the government seeks to alleviate the effects of the lockdown brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasis should be placed on ensuring that coordination between health, education, and protection systems are strengthened, particularly for girls and women. This is the focus of the Government of Uganda/UNICEF Country programme 2021-2025. At the same time, MoES is partnering with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) Uganda and UN partners to implement the EU-supported Spotlight Initiative for Ending Violence against Women and Girls, taking a cross-sectoral approach to tackle gender-based violence in Uganda.



13 [Guidelines for the Reopening of Education Institutions and Implementation of COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures](#) (2020) Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda

More resources to explore:

[Ministry of Education and Sports The Gender Eye Newsletter](#) (Issue 1, April 2020)

[Ministry of Education and Sports The Gender Eye Newsletter](#) (Issue 2, Oct 2020)

[Ministry of Education and Sports The Gender Eye Newsletter](#) (Issue 3, December 2020)

[Situational Analysis Study on Menstrual Hygiene Management \(MHM\) in 14 Districts of Uganda](#) (2020)
Ministry of Education and Sports Uganda

[Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings in Uganda](#) (2020) Ministry of Education and Sports Uganda

[Guidelines for the Implementation of the Roles and Responsibilities of the Senior Women and Senior Men Teachers in Uganda](#) (2020) Ministry of Education and Sports Uganda

[Guidelines for the Formation, Management and Strengthening of School Clubs](#) (2020) Ministry of Education and Sports Uganda

[Guidelines for the Reopening of Education Institutions and Implementation of COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures](#) (2020) Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) Uganda

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Page 6 - © UNICEF/UN0384132/Ntabadde. Primary seven pupils (2020) of Buludandi Primary School in Iganga District, eastern Uganda.

Page 7 - © UNICEF/UN0385457/Bongyereirwe. A female learner receives a referral from the Peer Educator at Bondo Straight Talk Club. The peer to peer session is part of the out of school club activities of Bondo. Through such activities, adolescents get an opportunity to discuss issues that concern them as well as finding solutions to address them. They are also sensitized on reporting pathways of violence.

Page 8 - © UNICEF/UNI358296/Emorut. Sisters Abigail and Blessing, pupils of Mvara Junior Primary School, keep studying on their own as schools remain closed during the COVID-19 lockdown.



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