

**Safe Reopening and Back-to-School
Social and Behaviour Change (SBC)
good practices series in the
Eastern and Southern Africa Region**

Case studies from the field

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Table of Contents

- Introduction**..... 4
- Eastern and Southern Africa Region** 6
 - Advocating for safe reopening and back to school in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic with faith-based organisations6
- Madagascar**..... 12
 - Fa rehefa resintsika Coronavirus ity, dia mifampisakambina isika fa aleo – “When we defeat the Coronavirus, we'll hug”12
- Kenya**..... 16
 - Civil society-driven data-based planning to improve quality of education facilities and COVID-19 preparedness..... 16
- Malawi**..... 24
 - Ifenso! We Too! Youth in Malawi reclaim their right for violence-free education and livelihoods during back-to-school campaign.....24



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Introduction

Since the first COVID-19 outbreak in Africa in March 2020, the pandemic has evolved further, and with it, the preparedness and response needs to the prolonged crisis. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries in Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) closed their schools for several months in 2020, keeping 164 million children out of school. In October 2021, although all countries except for Uganda, have re-opened schools, an estimated 32 million children are still out of school. School reopening in most countries was delayed for long timespans and accompanied by a fear of putting children, teachers and caregivers at risk and of accelerating the spread of the virus.

UNICEF and WHO strongly advocate for school re-opening and keeping schools open, even in communities with high rates of COVID-19, providing all adequate safety measures, especially ventilation, but also hygiene, distancing and use of masks, are in place.

Building on and aligned with this technical advice and overarching narrative, UNICEF is now rolling out a worldwide safe reopening and back to school (BTS) campaign to ensure that schools are among the first institutions to reopen, and to place the needs of the most vulnerable children at the heart of that process.

In order to accelerate the Social and Behavior Change (SBC) agenda for education, UNICEF ESARO supports country offices to design, implement, monitor and document BTS SBC initiatives, focusing on the strengthening of the community engagement platforms leveraged to ensure that the majority of learners return to school, including the most vulnerable. This compendium provides a look at safe reopening and back to school SBC interventions in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region, and particularly in Madagascar, Kenya and Malawi.

A photograph of a man in clerical attire, including a white collar and a dark suit jacket, reading a book. He is standing in front of a window with purple and white curtains. The background is slightly blurred, focusing on the man and his book.

Eastern and Southern Africa Region

Advocating for safe reopening and back to school in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic with faith-based organisations

The issue

Since mid-2018, UNICEF partnered at global level with the inter-faith network, Religions for Peace (RfP), to launch the [‘Faith for Positive Change for Children’](#) (FPCC) initiative to enhance systematic engagement with faith-based organizations for social and behaviour change at scale. As of February 2020, the FPCC partners agreed to repurpose the 2020 plans and priorities to address the COVID-19 Pandemic through the [‘Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Initiative’](#).

In 2020, the UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa partnered with the continental affiliate of RfP, the [African Council of Religious Leaders-Religions for Peace \(ACRL-RfP\)](#), a well-established pan-African organization that collaborates with national interreligious councils in 15 ESAR countries, to engage faith communities and galvanise the support of religious leaders to accelerate the Risk Communication and Community Engagement component of the COVID-19 response, including to

support the education sector to re-open the schools and bring learners back. At national level, UNICEF has a long tradition of collaborating with faith-based organisations, and in the context of the safe reopening and back to school campaign, UNICEF currently collaborates with the Interreligious Councils in Malawi and Kenya.

High-level multi-country virtual events, capacity building activities and documentation produced and disseminated by ACRL-RfP and UNICEF ESARO have helped catalyse the faith-based dialogue on COVID-19-related issues in Africa and in member countries. Through its partnership with UNICEF, ACRL-RfP has been able to get senior religious leaders from the region to support the COVID-19 response, including by endorsing vaccination efforts and advocating for school-reopening in their respective countries. At national level, faith-based organisations have encouraged learners to go back to school. They have monitored the preparedness and compliance of schools

with safety measures. They have encouraged eligible persons, especially teachers, to get vaccinated, and have provided psycho-social and spiritual support to members of their congregations.

SBC Actions

ACRL-RfP mainly works through regional conferences and workshop for capacity building and experience sharing among religious leaders. ACRL-RfP advocates at global, pan-African and regional level to influence decision-makers on COVID-19 prevention issues and the back-to-school agenda. It coordinates national interreligious councils for their own advocacy, capacity building, social mobilisation, community engagement and media work at national level. It also elaborates and disseminates digital publications and mass media content.

As part of the back-to-school agenda, ACRL-RfP, together with the UNICEF ESARO, virtually convened the [Faith in Education conference on the role of Faith-Based actors in advocating for Safe re-opening & supporting back to school \(BTS\) efforts](#) on October 5, 2021, bringing together Multi-faith Religious Leaders, individuals of diverse religious/faith-based organizations and institutions, Faith-based Scholars/Theologians from seven countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), technical experts, and other partners from UNICEF Regional and Country Offices. More than 140 participants from Eastern and Southern Africa converged for the conference.

During the conference, religious leaders from Malawi and Kenya presented their

experience on the approaches used to ensure that standard operating procedures (SOPs) for safe re-opening are in place and that children are back to school. In late 2020 and early 2021, the Interreligious Council of Kenya (IRC-K) strongly supported the back-to-school campaign in five counties through capacity building of national religious leaders on the action plan on COVID-19 and school re-opening approaches. Following their wide acceptance of this agenda, Christian, Hindu and Muslim leaders came together to speak to parents to send their children back to school. Together with political leaders and UNICEF, they made videos, and distributed them through social media to encourage parents to send their children back to school (see examples [1](#), [2](#) and [3](#)). IRC-K also used data generated through [Social Intelligence and Reporting \(SIR\)](#) from 35 schools spread across five counties for advocacy. See the presentation from IRC-K [here](#).

In Malawi, the Public Affairs Committee (PAC), which is the ACRL-RfP affiliated Malawian Interreligious council, publicly advocated for school re-opening, and raised awareness of parents on the need to send their children back to school. PAC was involved in the COVID-19 Taskforce that developed a list of preventive measures to be implemented at school before school opening. PAC also assisted in distributing face masks in schools. Religious leaders used their platforms to raise awareness of their congregants on COVID 19 preventive measures. See the presentation from PAC [here](#).

SBC Results

The main results of these interventions relate to the onboarding of faith-based leaders at regional and national level on COVID-19 and back-to-school issues, making them strong advocates for the safe re-opening of schools, to encourage all learners to go back to school, and for the vaccination of eligible persons, especially of teachers. It also helped faith-based leaders in getting the right information, or looking for the right source of information, to facilitate their work in their congregations and at community level in awareness raising and debunking false information or fake news. The platform provided by ACRL-R/P gives faith-based religious leaders the safe space to exchange, ask questions and get answers from scientific sources.

Following the Faith in Education conference, senior representatives of interreligious councils, as well as the ACRL-R/P chairs signed a common [statement](#), whereby they committed to publicly advocate for school-reopening in their respective countries and to bring all children back to school.

“Children are safer in school than at home, because the protective measures are better adhered to than at home. Reopening the school will lessen the spread of COVID-19”. - Osbery Kauwo, of the Baha'i Faith in Zambia

In Uganda, the only country that still has full school closure, Rev. Dr. Cornelius Wambi Gulere, Education Secretary of the Uganda Orthodox Church Schools, issued on October 5, 2021 a [statement](#) whereby he pleaded with the

Government of Uganda to re-open schools.

“Let Government take full responsibility not of the closure but safe reopening of schools by organizing better with the partners to ensure safety and SOPs are in place.” -Rev. Dr. Cornelius Wambi Gulere, Education Secretary of the Uganda Orthodox Church Schools

In Kenya, advocacy work by IRC-K conducted together with UNICEF and political leaders in late 2020 contributed to convincing the government to reopen the schools in January 2021. As the result of its data collection and analysis work on SIR in five counties and 35 schools, ICR-K could identify the issues that affected the safe re-opening and return to school of learners, and assisted the schools and counties in developing workplans to overcome these challenges. In ICR-K intervention areas, the authorities and communities now know how many learners and who did not go back to school, and why. They have agreed on clear follow up mechanisms that track and document progress in closing each of the identified gaps to ensure sustainability of the gains made. Religious leaders from IRC-K have been engaged to advocate towards the national and county governments and partners in education to invest in COVID-19 prevention in schools to protect children from getting infected.

In Malawi, the advocacy and awareness raising efforts of PAC contributed to the re-opening of schools in September 2020, as well to showcase the great eagerness of learners to go back to school. PAC participated in the monitoring of COVID-19 cases in schools and very few COVID-19 cases were

observed in the learning institutions. They also monitored the compliance of schools with COVID-19 preventive measures. When the schools were re-closed mid-January 2021 for six weeks, PAC could monitor and report on what was happening in boarding schools, which were still open but not teaching, and on the mood of parents and learners, who very much wanted schools to remain open and feared that their children would lose out on learning. PAC could also contribute to highlight to the authorities that there were many issues with the schools' capacities in complying with the COVID-19 safety rules, advocating for more resources to be given to schools.

Lessons learned and way forward

Collaboration of UNICEF ESARO and Country Offices (COs) with religious leaders in the education sector is relatively new: according to the [2014 global mapping of UNICEF engagement with religious communities](#), only five out of 21 COs collaborated with faith-based organizations in the education sector. The foundational work done at HQ level in New York with RfP as part of the global initiative 'Faith for Positive Change for Children' (FPCC) has given a positive framework to foster the collaboration with ACRL-RfP in Africa and with its national branches at national level.

When the COVID-19 emergency broke out, it was easy to get ACRL-RfP onboard, as, by ACRL-RfP's own analysis, school closure had very negative consequences on children. Furthermore, religious institutions play a key role in education in some of the ESA

countries. For example, according to a [2014 World Bank analysis](#), in Malawi, 17.2 per cent of all primary learners are enrolled in faith-inspired schools, and 25.7 per cent in eSwatini. As such, they have a great interest in engaging with the government for the safe re-opening of schools and getting all learners back to school. This engagement clearly came out during the Faith in Education conversation on October 2021.

Also, faith leaders in Africa play a crucial role in public life. For example, according to a [2020 Afro Barometer survey](#), 56 per cent of Kenyans and 55 per cent of Zambians report being active in a religious group. 71 per cent Kenyans, 63 per cent Ugandans, and 58 per cent Zambians are most likely to report contact with a religious leader than other types of public officials. Therefore, religious leaders can be and are powerful advocates for the back-to-school agenda and for the prevention of COVID-19.

The platform set up by ACRL-RfP with the support of UNICEF is able to reach out to religious leaders in at least 15 ESA countries and to change their perception on important issues. For example, the Zimbabwe CO reported that the Faith in Science Conference organized in March 2021 had a positive influence in national endorsement of religious leaders for the COVID-19 vaccine. They identified the COVID-19 vaccination of their congregants as a way to facilitate the re-opening of worship places.

Among the challenges in the collaboration with ACRL-RfP, there is the fact that it is difficult to measure the impact of their work at regional and national level. Only when there is a concrete collaboration with a national inter-religious council, some of the

results of this collaboration can be linked to the FPCC initiative. Another challenge is that there are still many individual or organized faith-groups that have misconceptions regarding the process of reopening of schools and keeping them open.

As UNICEF, we also need to manage seemingly contradictory agenda: as owners of faith-inspired schools, faith-based leaders might also use their advocacy power to advocate for more resources to be able to safely re-open their own schools, whereas UNICEF advocates for the safe re-opening of all schools (public and private), and the return and keeping of all learners in school, especially vulnerable children. A closer look at statistics shows that both UNICEF and religious leaders actually serve vulnerable children, as in many countries, vulnerable children also go to faith-inspired schools.

Feedback from partners and religious leaders

Reverend Allan Kasungami, Zambia Interfaith Networking Group: “There should be two interventions. First: most schools have religious education. COVID has generated a lot of fear of death, and pandemic and religious education should bring the faith aspect in an assurance that we have God who can help us through in times of calamity. To be God’s children means that we have a God who takes care of our situation. Faith instead of fear. Second: counselling in school. Counselling should be made available to children, especially those who lost a parent to COVID. The schools can work out robust counselling programmes that reach out to children in their homes”

Bishop Calistus Barasa, chairman Bungoma County Interfaith in Kenya: “The internet has really been disturbing me but now am getting the information well. Thanks so much our technical teams. This is a very informative meeting.”

Rev. Dr. Cornelius Wambi Gulere, Education Secretary of the Uganda Orthodox Church Schools: “Opening schools and keeping them open is a sign of confidence in the government and health systems. Schools help us measure our productivity as nations.”

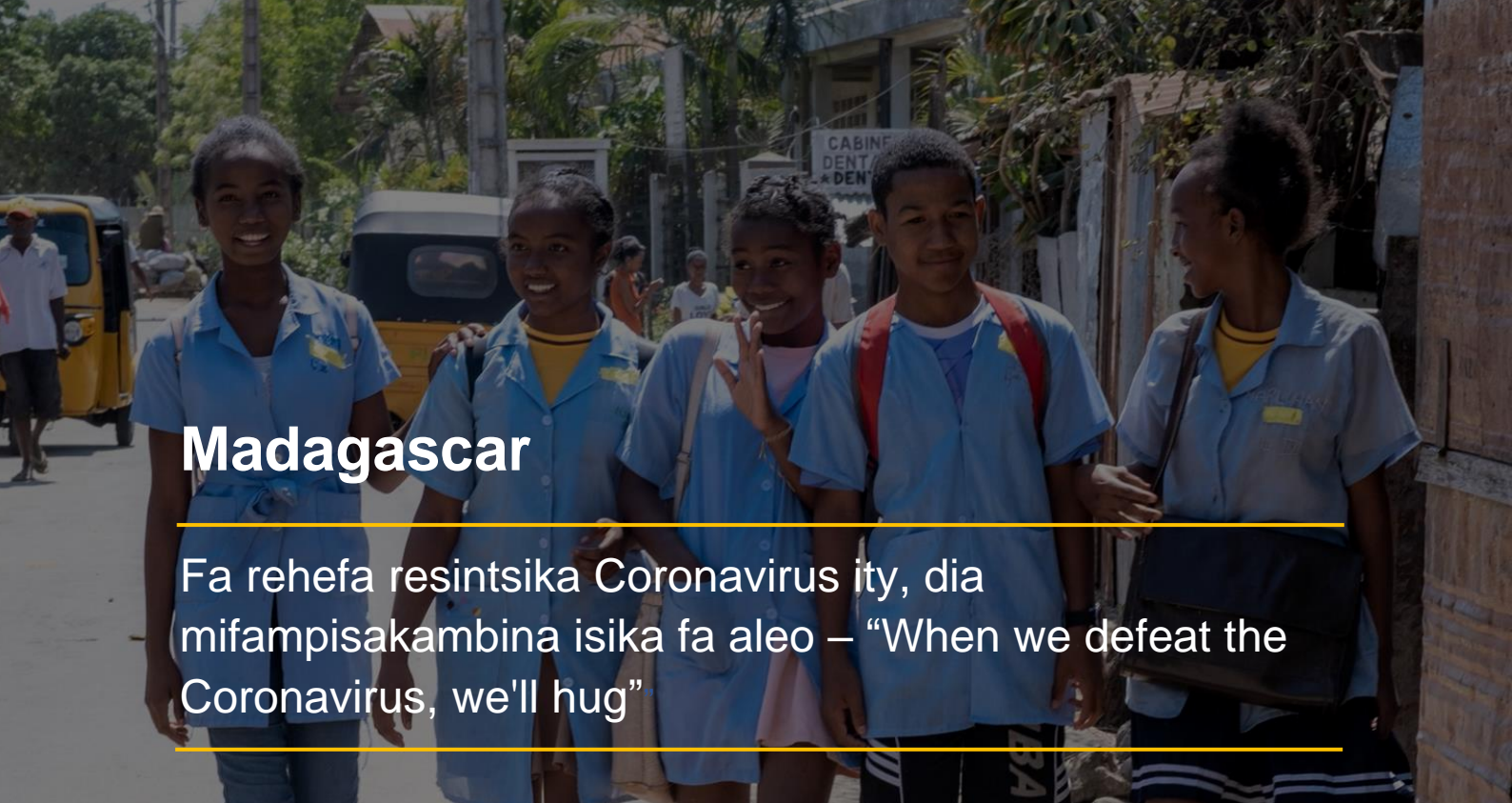
Feedback from partners and religious leaders cont.

Rev. Dr. Cornelius Wambi Gulere, Education Secretary of the Uganda Orthodox Church Schools: “Private schools are among the main contributors towards education services in the region. However, following the two-year lockdown, most schools are highly indebted and may not adequately meet the requirements for opening. Government must come in to cover the gaps in every school.”

Fungai Timverevct in Malawi: “This campaign really helped pupils in Malawi but a lot has to be done, as many people in rural areas think this COVID 19 is for rich people and town-based people. The Ministries of Health, Information and Education have to work hand-in-hand in giving information of the vaccine, importance of going back to school after giving birth or while girl child is pregnant, and also emphasize safety measures on this COVID 19, although it is now going down. The past months Malawi government has encouraged people like teachers, health workers and security officer to be vaccinated as these people are at higher risk of getting the virus of COVID 19.”

Acronyms

ACRL-RfP	African Council of Religious Leaders-Religions for Peace
BTS	Back to school
ESAR	Eastern and Southern Africa Region
IRC-K	Interreligious Council of Kenya
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
RfP	Religion for Peace
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures



Madagascar

Fa rehefa resintsika Coronavirus ity, dia mifampisakambina isika fa aleo – “When we defeat the Coronavirus, we'll hug”

The Issue

In Madagascar, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and following the declaration of the sanitary state of emergency, schools were fully closed from March 30 until April 15, 2020, affecting more than four million children. Schools partially reopened on April 15, 2020, but only fully reopened in November 2020. They have been open ever since.¹ A survey from September 2020 showed that 96.4 per cent of children whose school had reopened actually went back to school.² While most parents did send their children back to school, many of them feared that the extended school closure would affect their children's learning and performance, and they would eventually lose the academic year.

In areas where COVID-19 transmission was high, caregivers and learners also did not necessarily trust their children would be safe in school. Other factors

kept some parents from sending their children back to school, among others, financial issues, the inability to pay for school fees, and the non-adaptation of the academic year to the harvesting calendar. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the drop-out rate was already alarming: according to the MICS 2018, 22 per cent of learners did not finish primary school and 36 per cent did not finish secondary school. The main reasons for drop-out were strikes or absence of teachers (80 per cent) and natural disaster (69 per cent), but also the perception that over-aged children should not be sent to school, economic issues and distance to school.

In order to encourage parents and guardians to send their children back to school in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a social and behaviour change (SBC)/communication for development (C4D) approach was

¹ [Epicurves and school reopening status](#)

² [UNICEF / Instat Madagascar \(2020\), Enquête rapide sur l'impact du COVID-19 sur la situation socio-économique des enfants à Madagascar \(ERISC\).](#)

implemented in the six Education Subdistricts (CISCO) of Analanjirifo in the first semester of 2021. Analanjirifo was chosen due to high number of COVID-19 cases, and due to the fact that enrolment was already an issue. Also, the existence of C4D platforms and the fact that this region is already part of the Child Friendly School programme and the Program Contract for School Success (CPRS), were potential success factors of the planned approach. The intervention combined inter-personal communication and community dialogue, social mobilization and media activities, with the result that more than 1,200 out-of-school children went back to school.

SBC Actions

UNICEF Madagascar Country Office (CO) worked with the regional communication platform of Analanjirifo (also called SRCA platform) that was put in place in 2014 to harmonize, coordinate and reinforce C4D/SBC activities in all sectors and implement essential family practices. For this intervention, the SRCA platform worked together with the Regional Directorate of National Education (DREN) of Analanjirifo, as well as with the Regional Directorates of Communication, and Sport and Youth. Together, they organized advocacy and orientation meetings with Administrative and Pedagogical sub-officers (ZAP directors) of the six CISCO to engage them in mobilizing schools and communities for the back-to-school agenda. The ZAP directors were trained in community dialogue techniques. The SRCA platform also met with local media - radio and television - to engage them with the back-to-school agenda, provide them with media material for them to adapt, produce and broadcast media

content, working also with the Young Reporters Club.

Each ZAP director developed their own communication plan based on the reality of their zone, with the objective of reaching all parents and learners. Using the interpersonal communication and community dialogue approaches, ZAP directors, together with school directors, village heads (Fokontany chiefs), community leaders (Tangalemena), religious leaders, and heads of families (Ampehikeliny) prepared and held general assemblies of parents' and teachers' associations (FEFFI), home visits, and educative talks with parents and learners, using print materials developed by DREN. To announce these meetings, numerous ZAP directors used the "Dalala", or "Hallo, Hallo", a traditional way to announce a meeting in an emergency situation, especially in rural areas and peripheric urban zones.

ZAP directors explained COVID-19 related safety measures put in place in school and the importance of education. They also focused on remedial classes that have been put in place to target specifically out-of-school children. The objective was to encourage caregivers and community leaders to send back all learners to school, including vulnerable ones and those out-of-school for the last one to two years. Learners were specifically engaged through drawing (for 8-12 years old) and storytelling (for 13 years old and above) contests, giving them the possibility to express their concerns around COVID-19 and school-closure, and showcase the right prevention measures to be implemented.

The ZAP directors have been tasked with monitoring that communities hold their commitments regarding sending their

children back to school and regarding the implementation of the action plans. The SRC platform of Analanjirofo put in place a steering committee that did supervisory visits to ZAPs, assessed their work and did recommendations.

SBC results

Eighty-six ZAP directors were involved in six districts of Analanjirofo, covering 193 schools under their supervision.

Interpersonal communication activities reached out about 10,000 persons.

Before this initiative, an estimated 2,930 learners were out-of-schools, and thanks to the mobilisation of communities, about 42 per cent of them, 1,229 learners, went back to school.

Schools and ZAPs now know what the main issues are with regards to implementation of COVID-19 preventive measures and the return of out-of-school children, and communities proposed solutions. The main issues identified were supply-related issues like the quality of education (high repetition rate, frequent absence of community teachers, lack of adequate infrastructure, lack of training and low pedagogical supervision of teachers, high number of community teachers hired by parent-teachers associations compared to government contractual teachers), but also demand-related, like frequent absence of some learners, lack of birth certificates, difficulties to pay for community teachers, teenage pregnancy and child labour during harvesting season.

Communities proposed solutions like retroactive birth registration and issuance of a copy of a birth certificate or organising general assemblies or home visits to raise awareness of caregivers

about the necessity of sending all their children back to school. Taking ownership of this process, communities committed to provide the resources needed to implement these actions, and to meet with the regional directorate to assist them with the birth registration. The recommended action will be added to the school improvement plans that are developed and implemented by the school management committees (FEFFI) and parent's associations (FRAM), with the assistance, in some cases, of the local youth association.

Lessons learned and way forward

The existence, capacity and functionality of regional C4D/SRCA platforms contributed greatly to the success of this project, as they managed to mobilize the ZAP directors who then, in turn, could be deployed rapidly on the field. The SRCA platform of Analanjirofo is headed by the governor of the region, which enhanced its legitimacy and visibility.

Working with local actors, who know how to mobilize the different communities in their region, when to do what kind of meetings, who the most influential leaders are, is also a strong success factor of this approach. For example, in most communities, meetings were preferably held on Tuesday or Thursday mornings, considered to be "bad" days, therefore people would stay home and not go to work. Also, liaising with the local radio or the Young Reporter Club proved to be useful to give a chance for communities to listen and participate in the broadcast.

The intervention cost UNICEF 41 million Ariary, a little over 10,000 USD. This

amount was managed by the C4D regional platform, which contributed to the project with human resources and engagement. The UNICEF contribution amounts to an efficiency rate of 0.058 USD per learner (calculated on the basis 177,303 learners according to the 2018/2019 educational statistics). Therefore, this approach can be replicated in other regions.

The remaining challenge will be how communities will manage to implement the action plans they developed for each

school, and make sure that returned children remain in school. Also, the payment of school fees remains a challenge for many parents: when the government announced in 2020 that school would be free, many parents enrolled their children, not knowing that they would still need to pay for other costs like overheads, community teachers and so on. Thanks to the intervention and close communication parents, all children in Analanjirofo managed to finish school.

Acronyms

CISCO	Circonscription Scolaire / Subdistrict Education Office
CPRS	Contrat programme de reussite scolaire / Program Contract for School Success
CRAN	Cours de remise à niveau / Remediation classes
DREN	Direction Régionale de l'Education Nationale / Regional Directorate of National Education
EPP	Ecole Primaire Public / Primary Public School
FAFF	Fiaraha-miombona Antoka ho Fampanandrosoana / School Management Committee
FEFFI	Fiombonan'Ezaka ho Fampanandrosoana ny Fanabeazana Ifotony / Participatory School Management Committee
FRAM	Fikambanan'ny Ray Aman-drenin'ny Mpianatra / Parents' Associations
MEN	Ministère de l'Education Nationale / Ministry of National Education
OEMC	Office de l'Education de Masse et du Civisme
SRCA	Regional Communication Platform / Structure Régionale de Communication Analanjirofo (or Atsinanana, ou Anosy ou Androy)
ZAP	Zone d'Administration Pédagogique / Administrative and Pedagogical Zone



Kenya

Civil society-driven data-based planning to improve quality of education facilities and COVID-19 preparedness

The Issue

The first COVID-19 case was declared in Kenya on March 13th, 2020. Two days later, the government announced the closure of schools to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. As a result, 18 million learners in pre-primary, primary and secondary level education had their learning interrupted.

In response to the onset and subsequent waves of COVID-19 cases in Kenya, schools were closed from March 2020 to January 2021, and again for the month of April in 2021. In preparation to reopen, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) finalized COVID-19 guidelines on Health and Safety Protocols for Reopening of Basic Education Institutions in September 2020, including protocols on physical distancing, hygiene and safety, hygiene

and sanitation as well as psychosocial support.

With the support of UNICEF, the MoE launched a Back to School (BTS) campaign in the first quarter of 2021, to ensure that every child already enrolled before school closures will return to school and that children who never went to school or had dropped out before COVID-19 are attracted to enrol or go back to school. Indeed, before COVID-19, more than one million primary school aged children and 530,000 secondary school aged children in Kenya were already out-of-school.³

Among others, UNICEF worked with the Interreligious Council of Kenya (IRC-K) under the BTS campaign. The Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRC-K) is the Kenyan chapter of Religions for Peace (RfP) international.⁴ It is the national

³ 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Survey, Vol IV, p. 137

⁴ Religions for Peace (RfP) is an international multi-religious organization with affiliated and legally registered multi-religious leadership platforms around the world. Membership within these 90

national and six regional Interreligious Councils (IRCs) is built on the principle of religious representativity, reflecting the fabric of religious demography on those levels. More information: www.rfp.org.

umbrella body for the main religious organizations in Kenya, whose aim is to mobilize faith communities for common action. Religious leaders in the IRC-K understand their role as moral custodians who have a duty to ensure that their congregants take their children back to school regardless of their social or economic status.

The purpose of the collaboration was to diagnose quality of education facilities and school preparedness in five counties, as well as to identify the gaps explaining why some children did not go back to school, using the Social Intelligence Reporting (SIR) tool.

The SIRs reports are a result of participation of the communities and interactions between a mix of independent observers and participants from the civil society organizations, social services providers, facility managers at the service delivery levels and the ‘claim holders’ – largely children, women, young people, elders and members of communities. IRC-K has conducted many SIR activities in several counties.

SBC Actions

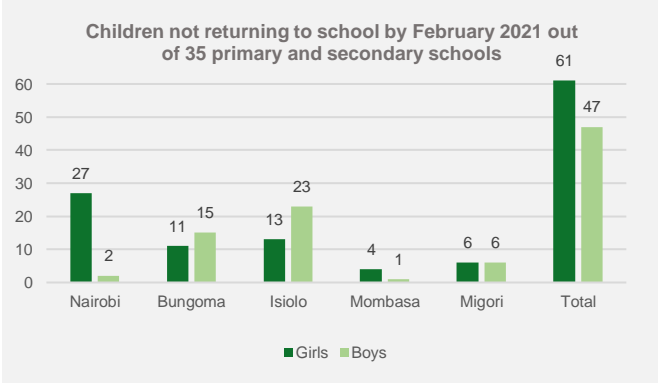
Together with the MoE and UNICEF Kenya Country Office (CO), IRC-K selected Nairobi, Mombasa, Isiolo, Bungoma and Migori counties to participate in the SIR exercise, on the basis that in these counties there was a strong county inter-faith network to drive the intervention process and monitor the situation in schools. Two of the counties are urban (Nairobi and Mombasa) and three are rural (Isiolo, Bungoma and Migori).

The Social Intelligence Report (SIR) tool

The SIR tool is used as a part of the Social Budgeting Initiative launched in Kenya in 2005. Since 2010, the principles of public participation in the development process have been enshrined in Constitution of Kenya.

The Social Budgeting Initiative is part of UNICEF’s approach to influence Domestic Public Finance for Children (PF4C). PF4C aims at empowering citizens, including children and adolescents, communities and civil society organizations to track spending and participate in national and subnational budgeting processes. It also aims at speeding up the realization of socio-economic rights by creating an accountability mechanism to engage, review and demand rights fulfilment in a transparent and inclusive manner (UNICEF, 2017. UNICEF’s Engagements in Influencing Domestic Public Finance for Children (PF4C). A Global Programme Framework).

Social intelligence reporting goes beyond a survey or data gathering exercise. SIR triggers community involvement on problem identification and solving with clear mechanisms and techniques for engagement and documentation of the process. The SIRs reports are a result of participation of the communities and interactions between a mix of independent observers and participants from the civil society organizations, social services providers, facility managers at the service delivery levels and the ‘claim holders’ largely children, women, young people, elders and members of communities.



IRC-K started the SIR process at a national level with a virtual stakeholder’s meeting between standing

commissioners, staff and representatives of inter-faith networks from the five counties. It was agreed that inter-faith members identify five to six schools in their county, with a mix of primary and secondary, public and faith-based/private, and special needs schools to participate in the SIR process.

At the county level, stakeholders met to agree on SIR teams, clarify the process and agree on identified schools and school visits. In all the county stakeholder's meetings, representatives of the MoE, parents' associations, head teachers/principals and religious leaders were present.

A total of 35 schools (18 secondary, 15 primary and two special needs schools for deaf children) participated in the SIR data collection process. In each county, the five selected schools were visited by IRC-K in two days of February 2021 and engagement with stakeholders, data collection, and compilation of information and generation of SIR was done through administrative records and observations from the selected schools.

For each education facility, IRC-K collected data on learners – enrolment by grade, possession of a birth certificate, drop-out, suspensions, all disaggregated by gender. They also collected data on resources – capitation (amount received per learner), toilets, water points, washing stations, classroom, staffing, chaplains, as well as COVID-19 specific resources like isolation room, thermo-guns, health personal, counsellors, and referral mechanism.

To see whether all children have gone back to school and compare data, IRC-K collected data from the first school term of the school year 2020 and of the school year 2021. Data available at inspectorate level was cross-checked with data available at schools and vice-versa. After data collection, IRC-K undertook an analysis of the data and emerging trends were presented to participating stakeholders for validation. Findings and observations were validated with stakeholders in April and May, 2021. IRC-K produced an analytical report with recommendations for action,⁵ as well as facility and county level workplans that listed the issues, the required action, the responsible and timeline.

Examples of activities in the workplan to address the issue of pregnancy were the initiation of counselling in schools and places of worship, or the initiation of sex education dialogue between boys and girls on implications of early pregnancies. Regarding the issue of birth registration, actions involved addressing parents in places of worship to encourage them to obtain a birth certificate for their children and empowering the council of elders, tasking them with addressing the issue of birth certificates. Regarding the issue of insufficient number of teachers, the plans propose to lobby budget holders to prioritise education and build human capital; or to develop programmes through the Parent Teacher Associations for alumni professionals to mentor students at an early age. Regarding COVID-19 preparedness, they proposed to lobby the county government to procure adequate COVID-19

⁵ IRC-K / UNICEF Kenya (2021), Social Intelligence and Reporting (SIR) report on IRCK/UNICEF action plan on covid-19 and school re-opening project, March-May 2021

preparedness materials and to seek funds from partners with COVID-19 components to support prevention programmes in schools. Religious leaders also acted directly and raised awareness of parents, school management boards, children and communities on the need to ensure that all children need to be back in school.

SBC Results

In the five counties, 0.3 per cent of learners (108 learners out of 29,796) dropped out of school, of which 56 per cent were girls. According to IRC-K,

“There were more girls dropping out of school (61) than boys (47) from January to March, 2021, with majority of the girls failing to resume learning due to pregnancy or having given birth. [...] Across all the counties, it emerged from the report that in some schools, over fifty percent of children in primary schools did not have birth certificate. [...] The assessment also revealed that majority of the land in which schools are built do not have title deed thus risking the school land to possible grabbing.”

IRC-K could show that in terms of enrolment, there was actually a slight increase in 2021 compared to 2020, with 29,786 learners enrolled in 2021 compared to 29,089 in 2020.

The enrolment ratio girls to boys was slightly more favourable to girls in two counties and favourable to boys in three other counties.

While pregnancy was the most quoted reason for girls to drop-out of schools, data collected by IRC-K showed that overall, there were less pregnant girls at the time of data collection in 2021 than in 2020, except in two counties, namely in Mombasa, where

the number of pregnant girls more than doubled from 5 to 14 and in Migori, where it went from 12 to 33.

Regarding equipment that already existed in 2020, IRC-K could show that access to water point and handwashing stations had tremendously improved, going on average down from 85 to 45 learners per water point, and from 95 to 45 learners per handwashing station, with Bungoma and Mombasa counties having more than halved the number of learners per water point. On this front, it seems that the authorities and partners delivered in terms of improving access to handwashing equipment.

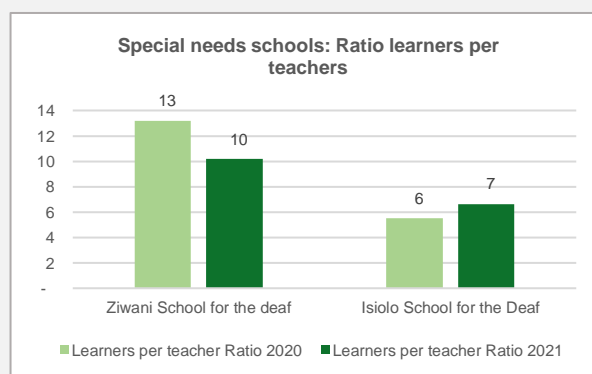
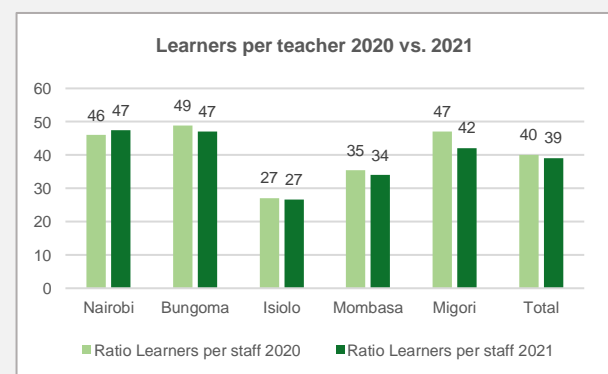
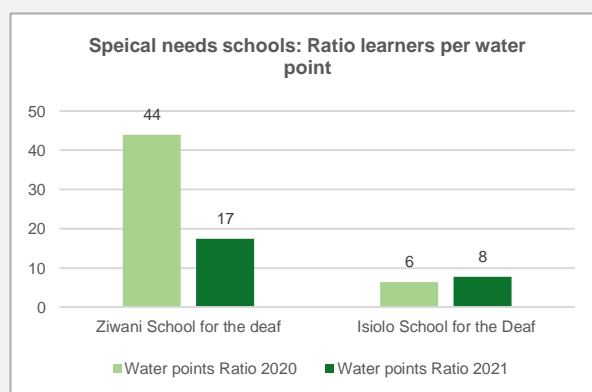
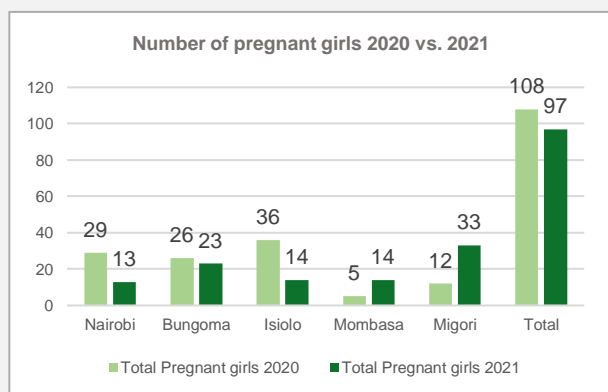
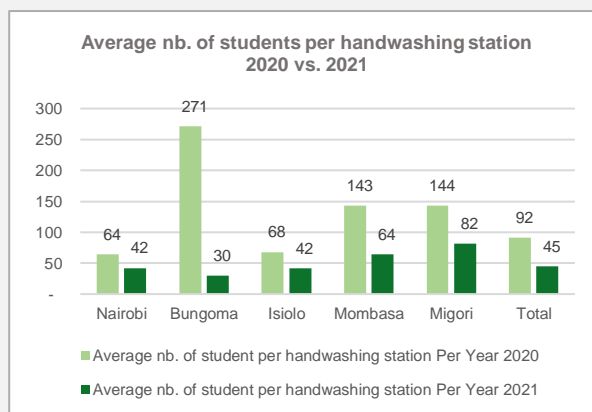
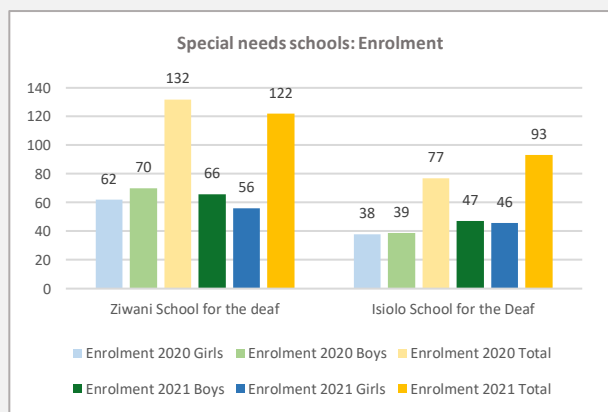
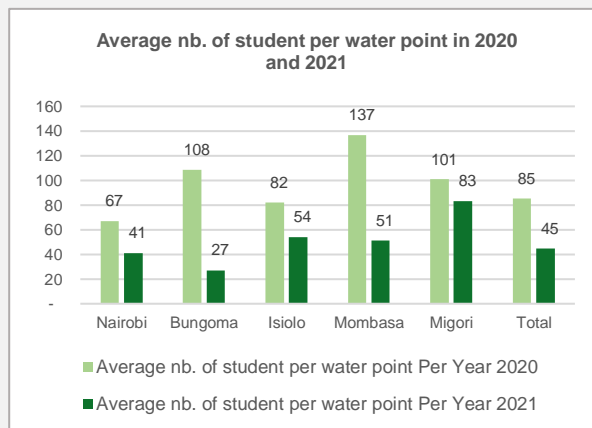
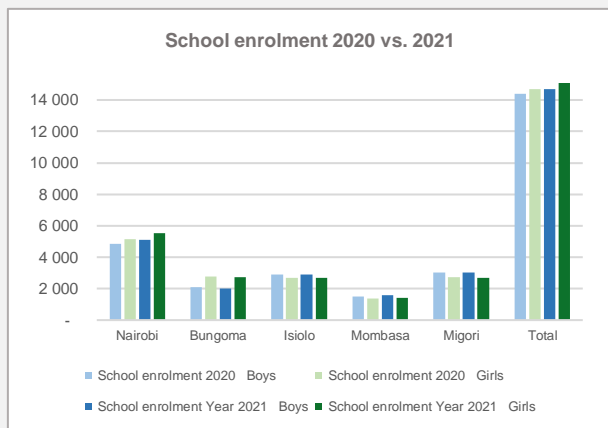
IRC-K developed an index to measure what they called education facilities' and counties' COVID-19 preparedness, adding the number of thermo-guns, isolation rooms, counsellors, health personnel and handwashing stations, and dividing it through the school population. It shows that Bungoma was comparatively better prepared than all other counties, including the two urban ones.

Other data collected by IRC also uncovered that social distancing was not really possible in schools, as the number of students per classroom and per teachers remained almost the same in 2020 and 2021.

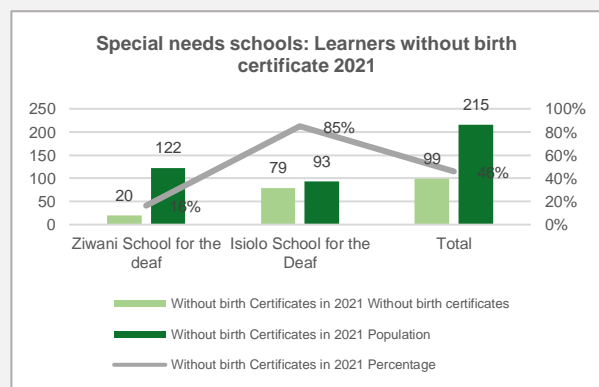
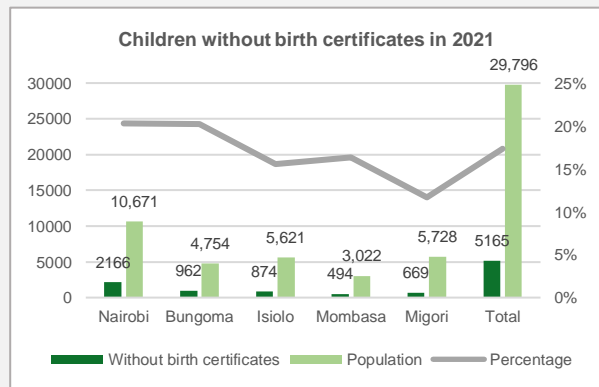
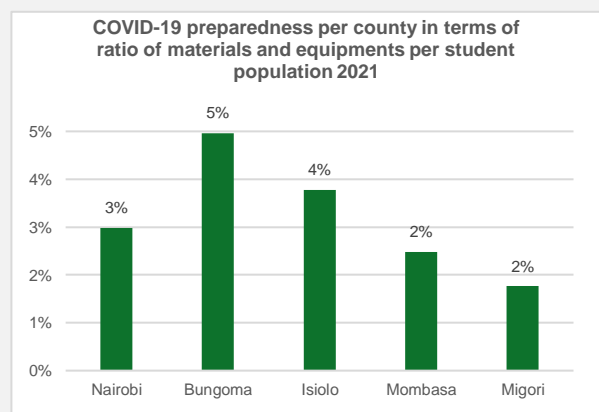
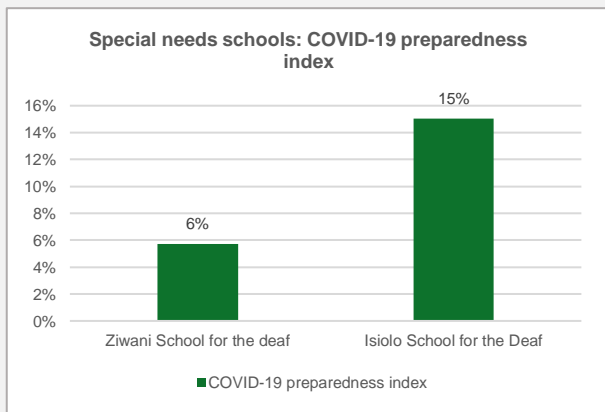
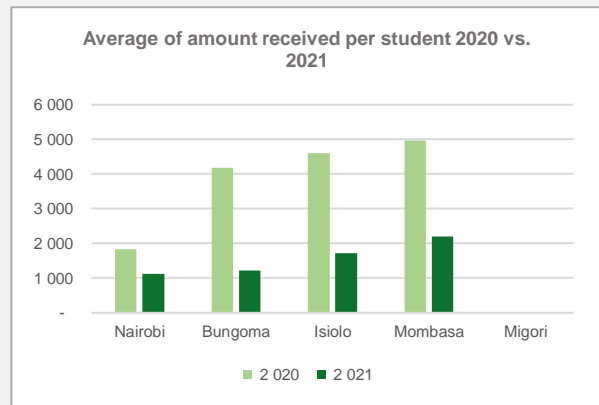
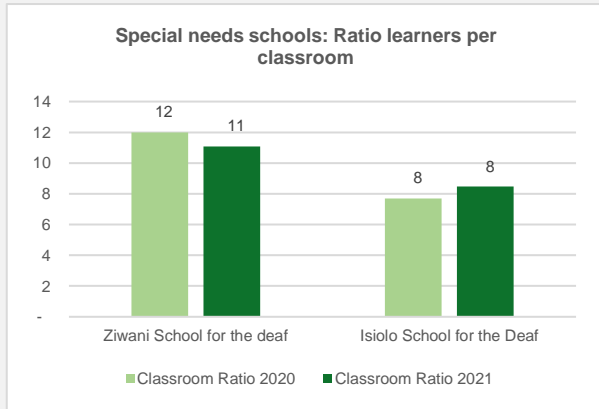
One of the main issues is that the amount of Government financial resources received per student dropped significantly in 2021 compared to 2020. Furthermore, an average of 17 per cent of the learners do not have a birth certificate.

Overall, the findings of the IRCK-led report showed that schools were not prepared for reopening as they could not meet the safety standards due to insufficient financial allocations from the MoE. This feedback was given to the communities, school leadership and parents to create awareness about the gaps in the fulfilment of their rights. Simultaneously, this report started a dialogue with county education administrators on the gaps in the action to

IRC-K data collection results



IRC-K data collection results cont.



ensure safe school operations and contributed to putting these issues on the government agenda.

Following this exercise, County Governments have addressed most of the issues raised in the SIR, such as hygiene practices and supporting girls who became pregnant during school closures and all other children to return to school, in particular via follow up advocacy meeting with religious leaders in Isiolo, Bungoma, Mombasa and Kwale.

Special needs schools

Regarding the two special needs schools, they show about the same trends as the other schools in terms of enrolment, with one school, located in an urban county, showing a slight drop of enrolment rate in 2021 compared to 2020 and the other school, located in a rural county, showing a light raise in enrolment. No learners dropped out of Ziwani school (urban), but seven, out of which three girls, dropped out of school in the Isiolo school. No pregnancy case was recorded for both schools.

Both schools had already better ratio than other schools in 2020 regarding learners per water point and per class, and they improved them tremendously, showing in 2021 the best ratio that all other schools. The ratio learner per teachers is also better than in other schools, but it only improved in one of the two schools. Both schools have also better COVID-19 preparedness ratio than other schools, but the good scores are pulled up because Isiolo school has a very good learners per handwashing station ratio. Both schools have no health personnel, and only Ziwani school has one thermo-gun (Ziwani school is reported having four isolation rooms, which might be a data error, as it has only 11 classrooms).

As with other schools, but somewhat even stronger, the biggest issue in the two special needs schools is the lack of birth certificate: in Ziwani school, 16 per cent of the learners have no birth certificate, and in Isiolo school,

79 learners out of 93 (85 per cent) have no birth certificate.

Lessons learned and way forward

The data collection exercise is a good opportunity for stakeholders to stimulate dialogue around the issues of education in their community around data. The considerable social and political influence of religious leaders on local leadership, and on their followers and organizations, gives this process is a guarantee that they will be heard when presenting data and making recommendations to communities and local authorities. The IRC-K is a trusted source of information which can sanction certain behaviours or actions in their localities and among their followers.

While this exercise is a good start to improve accountability and foster dialogue between education right holders and duty bearers, it needs to continue and to be deepened: for example, since no data were available on the number of learners out of school in 2020, it is not possible to know whether there were more drop-out learners in 2021 than in 2020. Furthermore, the report does not give an explanation why the capitation dropped out so significantly in 2021 compared to 2020, or what drives high level of pregnancy in certain schools.

Still, the SIR exercise did show that most of the students went back to school, despite low COVID-19 preparedness of schools, and it laid evidence for longer term issues, like the high number of learners without a birth certificate, especially learners with special needs, or the issue of school not having title deeds for the land they are built on, for which communities and local authorities can mobilize to find local solutions.

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Acronyms

BTS	Back to school
CO	Country Office
ECD	Early Child Development
IPC	Infection Prevention Control
IRC-K	Interreligious Council of Kenya
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
PF4C	Public Finance for Children
RfP	Religions for Peace
SIR	Social Intelligence Reporting



Malawi

Ifenso! We Too! Youth in Malawi reclaim their right for violence-free education and livelihoods during back-to-school campaign

The issue

In Malawi, the first school closure due to COVID-19 happened on March 23, 2020. The country re-opened fully in mid-October 2020, to fully reclose again in mid-January 2021. The closure of schools disrupted learning for 7.7 million school-aged pupils in Malawi, including 2,014,820 preschool learners, 5,303,188 primary school-age learners, 387,569 secondary school-age learners and 8,404 learners that have various special education needs.

Schools have now been fully re-opened since March 2021. Ninety-seven per cent of the female and 95 per cent of the male learners who had been enrolled in school before the COVID-19 crisis had come back to school when they reopened in 2020 (UNICEF ESARO 2021, School reopening status matrix, November and December 2020).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic started, Malawi had already been facing challenges with children dropping out of school, especially girls. Among the

highest contributing factors to girls' dropout are adolescent pregnancies and child marriage, as reflected in EMIS 2017. In primary school, 7.7 per cent of girls dropped out due to marriages, and 5.9 per cent due to pregnancies, while 41 per cent of all girls' dropout in secondary education were attributed to marriages and pregnancies. Worldwide, Malawi has one of the highest rates of child marriage with approximately 42 per cent of girls marrying before the age of 18 and 9 per cent below the age of 15 (University of Zurich et al 2018), while nationally, teenage pregnancies is at 29 per cent.

Before reaching the age of 18, one in five girls and one in seven boys experience sexual violence; two in three boys and two in five girls experience physical violence; one in three boys and one in five girls experience emotional violence; and one in four children experience multiple forms of violence (Violence Against Children Study VACS, 2013).

In November 2019, UNICEF Malawi Country Office (CO), in collaboration with

the Civil Society Organisation Parent and Child Health Initiative (PACHI), launched a programme called “Education and Adolescent Integrated Communication for Development” under pillar three “Prevention and Social Norms” of the [Spotlight Initiative](#). The Spotlight Initiative, funded by the European Union, is part of the Government of Malawi’s efforts towards elimination of violence against women and girls, including Harmful Practices (HP) and toward the promotion of Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR). Following the school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, COVID-19 awareness activities were integrated in the programme, thanks to a grant from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).

SBC actions

The “Education and Adolescent Integrated Communication for Development” programme is implemented in the six Spotlight priority districts Dowa, Ntchisi, Machinga, Nsanje, Nkhatabay and Mzimba. The work is done through [Ifenso platforms](#), meaning “We Too” in the local language Nyanja, and is a young adolescent information sharing, learning and accountability platform providing opportunities for dialogue for adolescents’ improved livelihoods. Between March 2020 and May 2021, 338 awareness raising campaigns were conducted in all project districts targeting communities in 35 Traditional Authority (T/As) of which 154,969 people (62,743 females) were reached with COVID-19 and gender-based violence (GBV) messages. The issue of drop-out children was discussed during many Ifenso meetings, and communities took

action and managed to bring back dropped-out adolescents to school.

The partner organisation, PACHI, supported schools and communities in establishing Ifenso platforms. Ifenso is a platform of young people (10-24 years) who organize themselves to drive accountability issues on adolescent health and development. During a preparation phase, PACHI mapped out capacities of youth clubs and support structures, developed the Ifenso facilitators manual, trained school and community-based structures, as well as School Health and Nutrition (SHN) teachers, on community mobilization and social mobilisation, on their role in the facilitation of ifenso meetings, and on GBV prevention, child rights, Water and Sanitation (WASH), HIV/AIDS, Iron and Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation, education and menstrual hygiene.

PACHI helped establish 135 Ifenso platforms in the six intervention districts (114 in schools and 21 out of school). Gender-balanced Ifenso committees were elected by young people in schools and communities. The role of Ifenso groups is, among others:

- to promote transparency on health, education and social related issues amongst themselves and within the community, such as GBV and school dropouts;
- to strengthen systems and actively participate on policy development and planning on issues related to health, education and social needs; to advocate and mobilize resources;
- to create an adolescent friendly milieu for interactions amongst

themselves with evidence over adolescent health, GBV, drug abuse, school dropouts;

- to promote adolescent activism over health, education, population and social issues concerning them through role modelling, drama, songs, etc.;
- and to disseminate information on young people's health, education and social wellbeing for accountability to fellow young people and devise mechanisms of how to monitor and improve issues.

Part of their role is also to strengthen school stakeholders in promoting equity and equality between boys and girls in schools. They work with Parent Teachers' Associations (PTAs), School Management Committees (SMCs), and mothers' groups. They organize interface meetings with these stakeholders to address the needs of girls in particular, and other vulnerable children, advocate for girl-friendly facilities, curricula, and teaching and learning processes, to address issues of sexual harassment, and to promote female educators as role models.

Between December 2020 and January 2021, Ifenso platforms conducted interface meetings in order to discuss challenges facing them, among others COVID-19 issues, and approach relevant to authorities in their school/communities/ district. More than 2,400 Ifenso members attended these meetings (among them, more than 1,500 were out of school children and about half were girls).

PACHI supported district councils to conduct communication campaigns in



Likhubula Ifenso platform sensitizing the community by showcasing most common form of GBV; child marriage



Police officer role playing her duties on GBV DHO drama group at Kapalakonje primary school in Nsanje



Mthawira Ifenso platform executive members

March-May 2020, then again in January-March 2021, to raise awareness of the communities and adolescents on COVID-19, Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), HIV/AIDS, Nutrition and WASH. They developed radio jingles and programmes, distributed Information, Education and Communication (IEC) documents, 13,000 reusable facemasks, and integrated COVID-19 related messages to be used in Ifenso interface meetings and other activities (mobile vans, peer educators).

15 traditional leaders (of which were six females) and 23 other influential people (of which nine females) comprised of faith leaders, government officers, VDCs and ADC (Village and Area Development Committee) members disseminated key messages to their fellow citizens, using the peer education model.

SBC results

During interface meetings conducted between December 2020 and January 2021, Ifenso members and communities discovered that during the closure of schools due to COVID 19 pandemic, a number of girls and boys dropped out of school and entered into child marriages. This issue affected adolescents in all project districts. For example, in Machinga at Likhubula, Chimwankhwazi and Kamwendo primary school, 39 adolescents got married, of which 24 were girls and 15 were boys. It was discovered through focus group discussions, that parents initiated these marriages for their own gains, like financial gain from their in-laws, especially those living in South Africa.

Ifenso members discovered that during the farming season, parents encourage their children to drop out of school to

assist them with farming activities. Furthermore, children are asked to help parents in making or transporting charcoal from the mountain to markets or to their homes in Machinga, are being sent to lake to look for fishing in Nkhatabay, and are working in farms in Mzimba.

With the closure of schools due to COVID-19, some adolescents lost interest in school, and they did not report to school after the school were opened. For example, in Nsanje, 24 adolescents dropped out of school in Mthawira, Kapalakonje and Phanga.

Regarding COVID-19, members of the Ifenso platforms discovered during the training of peer educators, that cultural beliefs practiced in the communities contributed to the spread of the disease, for example funerals, how they attend to the sick, how they greet one another. As a follow up to the training, the peer educators were tasked with the duty of sharing the information/knowledge they had gained to their peers in the communities.

As a result of the discussions and analysis of root causes, Ifenso platforms took action. Some Ifenso platforms organized interface meeting with Group Village Headmen and Village Heads, where they presented issues of adolescent drop out of school due to child marriages, early pregnancies and child labor. Other Ifenso platforms engaged duty bearers (Chiefs and community leaders) on child marriages. An Ifenso platform also engaged service providers (police and social welfare) on how they handle sexual aggression cases. In many cases, they managed to bring back teenage married girls back

home, and in some cases, even back to school.

Through Ifenso platforms, some adolescents who dropped out from school are now back to school through follow up of mother's groups and Ifenso members. There is an increased community awareness on GBV and knowledge on where to report. Hygiene and sanitation in schools has been uplifted as stakeholders are able to provide PPE materials. Members of Ifenso platforms are able to demand things from duty bearers after being trained on social accountability and advocacy. Overall, the coordination of GBV actors between the district, school and community level has also been strengthened.

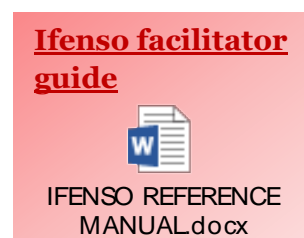
Lessons learned and way forward

During review meetings with Ifenso members, facilitators (SHN teachers, patrons, youth club chair persons), and school and community structure representatives, the Ifenso stakeholders concluded that the model has demonstrated to be an effective strategy to engage adolescents, young people and their communities. Apart from acquiring knowledge during interface meetings with facilitators, adolescents are now taking a leading role in raising the awareness of their fellow adolescents on issues affecting their livelihoods, and they had a chance to meet with duty bearers to discuss their concerns. The project has recorded an increase in reporting and follow up of GBV cases, and more and more platforms are

holding duty bearers accountable. The programme has also recorded a natural diffusion of the model into non-programme supported areas. There is a good collaboration with other platforms at local level, e.g. child protection workers, mothers' groups, Chiefs, PTAs and SMSc. All platforms are now working together in addressing GBV.

The project showed that it is possible to hold meetings in the communities or schools without using a lot of resources, especially when the meetings are called by community members. While PACHI workers used to go themselves in the communities to reach out to adolescents with key messages, when COVID-19 broke out, PACHI had to devise strategies like the peer education model and door-to-door approaches with the help of adolescents themselves and community structures to reach out to more people in the community, while at the same time adhering to COVID-19 guidelines, which was ultimately successful.

The project brought out many stories that have been nicely documented, but there is a need for better documentation of Ifenso meetings, as well as a better monitoring of how many children actually dropped out of school and how many went back, and to report back to community, schools, and district education authorities.



Acronyms

ADC	Area Development Committee
CO	Country Office
EMIS	District Education Boards
GBV	Gender-Based violence
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HP	Harmful Practices
IEC	Information Education Communication
IFA	Iron and Folic Acid
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoE	Ministry of Health
PACHI	Parent and Child Health Initiative Trust
PPE	Personal Protection Equipment
PTAs	Parents' and Teachers' Association
SGBV	Sexual Gender-Based Violence
SGVH	Senior Group Village Head
SMC	School Management Committee
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health Rights
T/As	Traditional Authority
VDC	Village Development Committee
WASH	Water and Sanitation Health

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United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)

Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) section