

RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL, MBAGATHI KENYA

SITUATION REPORT- JULY 2020

COVID-19 Pandemic School Closure

BACKGROUND

All learning institutions in the country were shut down by a Government directive on the 16th March 2020 after the report of the first Covid-19 infection. Thereafter, there have been speculations on the dates of schools' resumption, but this month, the Ministry of Education communicated that schools would reopen in January 2021.

This report provides a situational analysis of the effect of the pandemic on the school and school community, the current environment, and readiness plans for resumption of school in January 2021.

1. SITUATION ANALYSIS - The Effects of Covid- 19

Education

When schools were shut, the Ministry of Education encouraged learning through local media platforms of television and radio. While this may have been embraced in the initial two to three weeks largely out of fear of venturing outside homes, many children, especially in informal settlements are seen out in the localities, even during the prescribed "lesson time", playing or generally being idle and engaging in social ills.

The Ministry further declared this school year as "lost", with children the nation over expected to repeat this schooling year in 2021, including the current candidates of Class 8 and Form 4, who will not be transitioning as expected.

Although some schools have embraced online learning platforms, the number of children (and homes) that have access to technology and internet are so few, they do not constitute a sample population that can aptly guide policy making with regards to implementing online learning as a recognised platform for learners in the country.

The situation at RSSM is not much different. Most of our children do not have access to advanced technology, and so teachers have had to improvise dissemination of learning activities to those children that they can reach. In effect, not all of our children have been able to be part of the remote learning being carried out by the teachers.

Psycho-Social

Schools' closure has had devastating psycho social effects on learners, teachers and staff of learning institutions mainly in the private sector. In addition to the uncertainty of the actual status of continuity in education owing to the prolonged closure and lack of schooling, there is also the breakdown in the social support systems that schools provide.

At RSSM, there are children whose safety, physical and mental state remains a concern. Their extended stay at their homes only elevates their levels of exposure to undesirable social conditions, which include hunger or lack of nutritious meals, physical and mental abuse, neglect, and a general lack of care. In the Ministry of Health's address on 23.07.2020, the CAS indicated that over 5,000 persons had received medical care for rape during this pandemic, and of these, 70% were children.

Staff and the community in general have shared their concerns. In addition to the above, there is a lot of fear of contracting the virus, seeing our healthcare system, which was already compromised, is now overwhelmed, some facilities are not taking non-Covid-19 patients, and those that are, will not take in non-related cases that require treatment.

There is also fear of social stigmatisation that should one fall ill, even from a non-related condition, the society will shun you and treat you as a hazard to the community. Other concerns raised include potential loss or reduction of salaries, loss of employment because of lack of funds to pay salaries, fear of lockdown or cessation of movement while away from families.

Financial

It was inevitable that with closure of schools and therefore a pause in learning, income from school fees would not be forthcoming. This is how all schools ensure their continuity in meeting their overhead expenses such as rent of premises and salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff, suppliers among others. Many Kenyan private schools have now ceased to exist.

Over 200,000 teachers in private schools have not received salaries since the month of March 2020, and this does not include the support staff. The effects of this can be seen and are shared widely, and include eviction from rental homes, lack of basic necessities, increase in crime-petty and criminal, suicides, family breakdown, reduced disposable income due to supporting families and friends who have lost their income, and countless challenges.

Since the government has declared learning lost in 2020, it is not possible to collect school fees from parents. The government had even directed schools that received school fees in advance for term 2, to return the school fees to the parents. Private schools have been and feel unsupported by the government. RSSM is a member of Kenyan Private Schools Association (KPSA) and they have been fighting hard for private schools' survival and potential support.

For RSSM, we have lost income from school fees for the entire second and third terms of the year, a budget amount of KSh 9.1 million which is 20% of our annual budgeted operational income. Any school fees debts from the previous terms that could have been settled are not forthcoming, and probably will not be.

Additionally, as at the end of the first half of this year, donations from sponsorships were KSh 1.4 million less than at the same time last year. This represents a 15% reduction.

General

Whereas the current situation has presented unforeseen challenges, we have worked to maintain a level of normalcy in the school environment, to ensure the well-being of the children and staff through constant engagement.

As we navigate the way forward for the school, it is important to note that according to Government communiqué, the peak of the virus infections in the country is predicted to be in September. Staff members have shared their fears of what this presents to them, and this shall be considered, especially when planning their engagement within the school premises.

2. CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Extended Learning Support

To keep our children connected and engaged, the teachers have been running an extended remote learning programme, where learning activities are shared with the children through

WhatsApp, the main medium of communicating, texts and phone calls for those who have no access to smart devices.

Teachers are issued with credit to purchase internet data and airtime for their research and class activities, courtesy of donations for our Emergency Covid-19 Support appeal.

In this learning programme, new topics have not been introduced, but rather, new learning activities and revision of what the children learnt in the past. Beginning in April, of our 326 children, teachers have managed to be in communication and work with 79% (258) of our children. 19% (68 children) are unreachable, with the main challenge being their remote location, and/or lack of access to mobile phone facilities.

Of the 258 children, the level of contact varies from very active to occasional. The learning block schedule runs three weeks on and two weeks off, between 9 and 12 noon, and has worked well. This ensures the children's constructive participation, while also ensuring they do not spend too much time on the phones.

Staff Remuneration and Engagement

All staff have so far been receiving their full salary, and they have expressed their immense gratitude, as this has prevented uncountable psycho-social problems for them, their immediate and extended families, and the school community as a whole. It has been a high priority not to reduce salaries since staff already live on a low salary, and with their children at home, costs of upkeep increase and with increased general demands at this time, it is important to maintain a sense of security and normalcy in the life of the community.

Should management see this is no longer a sustainable option, the salaries will be reduced. This sustainability is wholly thanks to the regular sponsorships we receive, as we currently have no school fees income.

There is a need to uphold the welfare of our staff to ensure their all-round health receives the necessary support, while the school community remains healthy and engaged. This includes developing a staff engagement programme. While regular work in the school office, farm, security, maintenance and renovations, cleaning, and grounds departments continue, staff are assigned to the various engagements, even if the tasks do not fall within their terms of reference.

To mitigate any potential spread of the Covid-19 virus, we have worked to minimise the number of staff on the school premises, through rotation, remote working and being on campus on a need basis. And to ensure the safety and health of staff, all are transported to and from school to prevent their potential exposure through the use of public transport.

Families' Feeding Programme

Many of our parents have lost their sources of livelihood, and the challenges for those who already were not earning an income is only further enhanced.

We have been running a food programme since 20th April, also courtesy of the Emergency Covid-19 Support appeal. In this programme, our vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families who live near the school and general Ongata Rongai suburb are issued with food provisions fortnightly or monthly. We have offered a combination of fresh maize, sweet potatoes, oranges, guavas, greens and milk all from our farm, and beans, maize meal and oil

from a local supplier. 49 families with a total of 77 children have so far benefited from the programme.

From 11th June, we began to work with our children and their families who live beyond the school's location. Payments are made to a shop close to their home and the parents collect the food items. We have reached a further 15 families with a total of 32 children.

The programme had successfully served 64 families covering 109 children from our school, who are now assured of a meal during this challenging season, and sanitary towels for our girls.

Funded Projects - Ongoing

- First Aid house – permits and approval for the project are presently being sought from the County Government before the construction starts
- Farm water tower and tanks – permits and approvals for construction are also being sought from the County Government, However, the fabrication works is in process and the project is estimated to be finalised by the end of August
- Drip system – to begin when the farm tower tank construction is underway
- Greenhouse construction – to begin when the farm tower and tank is underway
- Woodwork room upgrade to be done in August
- Extending the taps outside the dining area to be done in August

Projects in planning and Funding Requirements

- Professional psychosocial support for children and staff
- Purchase of cleaning and sanitisation materials
- Purchase of health and safety materials
- Purchase of tents – temporary classrooms and meal spaces (proposal)
- Construction of fixed and purchase of portable hand wash sinks for the dining hall, classrooms, boarding houses and compound in general
- Construction of additional toilets in girls and boys boarding house in compliance with safety and health regulations
- Furniture repairs
- General renovation and maintenance
- Occupational Health and Safety compliance based on the Ministry of Education's guidelines for schools reopening,
- Farm planning is continuing for the new farm unit which will move locations

Compliance with Government Provisions and Ministry of Education Guidelines for COVID-19

We have been working to ensure the school's legal compliance with all necessary provisions for schools in the standards of education, health and safety, among others.

In addition, the Ministry of Education has issued provisional guidelines for schools to carry out risk assessments vis a vis the Covid-19 virus, to assess levels of preparedness for potential reopening in the coming year. These guidelines largely relate to health, sanitation, social and physical distancing in the premises including classrooms, dining halls, school buses, washrooms and dormitories.

We are keenly monitoring the Government's guidelines to be certain what changes and additions we will require in place before school resumes in January 2021.

A further challenge remains for the planning of reopening schools in reference to age and content in line with Government directives on lost calendar year 2020 and schools opening in 2021

We have the challenge of merging the phasing out of KCPE examination system, the introduction of the CBC new curriculum and running a Waldorf curriculum.

RSSM already delay the KCPE exam and the CBC assessment a year later than government schools and with the lost year this poses a challenge due to the government database NIMIS where all children's data is recorded. The College of Teachers will discuss the different options which takes into account the Steiner curriculum, KCPE which is phasing out and CBC which is phasing in. Ideally it is good if classes can move on a class and catch up with the work, this sounds simple but there are challenges in regard to following the government guidelines, the database system for the children and children who are already entered for the KCPE exam. Before deciding on an option we must know how the government is proceeding.

Our Report

This report can only offer information of the current situation as it is now in Kenya and in our school; it is a changing situation. Guidelines from the Ministry of Education for reopening schools are marked DRAFT, which means they can change, these guidelines are challenging to any school.

During August 2020 we are working on our plan of action and our budgets which will guide us forward through 2020 and into 2021.