

RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL, MBAGATHI, NAIROBI (RSSMN) -KENYA

REPORT during COVID-19 Pandemic SCHOOL CLOSURE

SEPTEMBER 2020

Covid 19 General Overview In the Kenya

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has confirmed a total of 37,079 cases with 650 deaths and 23,749 recoveries, as of 22nd September. At least 64 per cent of the confirmed cases are male. Of the total cases, 98 per cent are local transmissions. All the 47 counties in the country have reported COVID-19 infections, with Nairobi County reporting 55% of the reported cases, followed by Mombasa County, the second largest and oldest city in the country. Nairobi and Mombasa Counties continue to have the highest infection rates of COVID-19 at 450 and 203.8 per 100,000 population, respectively, compared to the national average of 73.8.

On 26 August, President Uhuru Kenyatta announced the extension of the nationwide night curfew (9 p.m. to 4 a.m) for another 30 days. The prohibition of the sale of alcohol by licensed hotels has been lifted, while bars and nightclubs will remain closed for another 30 days. The number of persons permitted to attend funerals and weddings has been increased to 100, while the ban on the sale of second-hand clothing had been lifted, subject to adherence to the COVID-19 health regulations. The President further directed the establishment of a National Reference Group on COVID-19 to review the efficacy of the response to the pandemic.

According to the President, health experts have advised that the infections have reached a manageable level, with recoveries being more than infections. Hot spots like Mombasa and Nairobi have reportedly begun to stabilize, although the authorities have reported a shift of cases in the counties and rural areas. The levels of positivity rate country-wide have reportedly fallen from 13 per cent in June to 8 per cent in September.

However, WHO has cautioned against the relaxation of measures aimed at containing the COVID-19 pandemic, stating that the reported decline is not necessarily an indication of a national decline in the spread of the disease. According to WHO, the decline closely mirrors trends for Nairobi and Mombasa counties, which account for 64% of the total cases and further the reduction coincided with several factors including low lower laboratory testing, minimal contact tracing and deviation from the national testing strategy as only low-risk groups were tested, according to WHO.

Health institutions continue to report insufficient laboratory testing and medical facilities including, personal protection kits for frontline health workers and community health volunteers, logistical and operational support for field operations. The long turnaround time for relaying laboratory results is causing delay in public health action. WHO has called on the public to adhere to health guidelines and COVID-19 regulations for prevention, as the risk of transmission remains high.

BACKGROUND ON SCHOOLS RE-OPENING STATUS

A recent survey conducted by WHO in 39 African countries found that face-to-face learning has resumed in just 6 countries. Schools remain closed in 14 countries and are partially open for examination classes in 19 countries. In-person learning is planned to resume in 12 countries this month.

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 on March 12th. Thereafter, there have been speculations on the dates of schools' resumption, in July, the Ministry of Education communicated that schools would reopen in January 2021, now in September since the curve is flattening schools could open earlier, especially for the exam class.

Kenyan schools including ours are setting up the infrastructure needed to allow children to social distance and wear masks while sanitising. In addition, our school has to prepare for child welfare in terms of clothing, food and counselling for the children on their return. These costs are extremely challenging and are raised and funded separately.

Guidelines from the Ministry of Education for reopening schools are marked DRAFT, which means guidelines can change, they are challenging to any school.

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.

The Effects of Covid- 19

Educational management

The Ministry of Education declared this school year as “lost”, with children the nation over expected to repeat this schooling year in 2021, including the current candidate class, who will not be transitioning as expected. We are faced with a challenge to align to Government directives, like all schools in Kenya in reference to the ‘lost’ calendar year 2020 and schools opening in 2021

The teachers are discussing the challenge of withholding children back a year, we will maintain the Steiner curriculum, at the same time accommodating the KCPE (Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education) exam which is phasing out and CBC (Competency Based Curriculum) curriculum which is phasing in. There are challenges in our choices since all our children are registered in the government database system (NIMIS) and the candidates are already entered for the KCPE exam. Before deciding on the way forward we must know how the government will handle the situation.

Psycho-Social

Schools’ closure has had devastating psycho social effects on learners, teachers and staff of learning institutions mainly in the private sector. There is also the breakdown in the social support systems that schools provide. At RSSMN, 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.

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 should one fall ill; the fear 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.

Malnutrition levels remain high across the Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) counties such as Kajiado county where our school is located. In urban areas, approximately 1.7 million people are projected to be facing food insecurity in the informal settlements, due to including, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, increased food prices and a decrease in income or the loss of a job.

Financial

Covid-19 has had adverse financial effects on the society. Lack of basic necessities, increase in crime - petty and criminal, teenage pregnancies, suicides, family breakdowns, reduced disposable income due to supporting families and friends who have lost their income.

It was inevitable that with closure of schools, income from school fees would not be forthcoming. Many Kenyan private schools have now ceased to exist. This can be seen through practices such as putting up school property for sale and eviction from rental premises.

For RSSMN, we have lost income from school fees for the entire second and third terms of the year for our 20% of fee-paying parents, which is 20% of our annual operational budget. RSSMN’s saving grace is our sponsors, without which we would drown like our fellow private schools. Our many regular sponsors, who pay monthly have kept our school afloat, have kept our salaries for our 45 staff. Our staff have expressed their immense gratitude to our sponsors for continuing to pay their monthly donations, this situation comes across clearly as the staff describe their neighbours’ plight.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Extended Learning Support

When the schools were locked down and classroom doors closed in March, our teachers did not have computers or laptops to help them to effectively carry on the mission of the school through virtual teaching. A laptop project appeal was launched successfully and funds were raised. Soon the teachers were well equipped to continue with Waldorf pedagogy, nurturing the creative system to bring healing to our children during the difficult Covid-19 times.

To keep our children connected and engaged, the teachers have been running an extended remote teaching 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.

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.

However, parents and children report a certain degree of mental and emotional exhaustion due to the prolonged digital learning program. They really look forward to the in-person (face-to-face) learning where discussion groups/group activities play a major role.

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 heightened.

We have been running a food programme since 20th April, 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 area 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 by mobile money (mpesa) 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.

Status

We are grateful that to date we have been able to maintain our staff salaries. This has prevented uncountable psycho-social problems for our staff, 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, then salaries will have to be reduced.

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 normal working area. Our teachers are reaching out to the children with an extended learning support programme.

To mitigate any potential spread of the Covid-19 virus, we follow the recommended guidelines and minimise the number of staff on the school premises, through rotation, remote working and being on campus on a need basis.

Maintaining survival of our school for six or more months during this closure is challenging. Management is constantly reviewing our 2020 budget as we guide our way through the year.

Thank you sincerely that you continue to support us through this difficult period; your gifts are well noted and cast into our hearts.

On Other News

- Following two consecutive seasons of above-average rains, the number of severely food insecure people in ASAL (Arid and Semi-Arid Land) counties decreased to 739,000 in August 2020.
- Following intense rainfall, multiple lakes in Kenya are at record-high levels, causing displacement and loss of livelihoods for surrounding communities.
- An increasing number of locust swarms were seen in Samburu County in August, while low numbers of immature swarms persisted in Marsabit and Turkana.
- The number of reported daily positive COVID-19 cases has been declining over the past three weeks. However, the number of tests has also declined.

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and

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Sponsorship Officer

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