

**MEMORANDA TO THE COVID-19 NATIONAL EDUCATION RESPONSE COMMITTEE**

A submission made by Civil Society actors working in the disability sector pursuant to the provisions of Article 118 of the Constitution and call for public submissions by the education response committee.

21st May 2020

**Contributing Organisations**

Sense International Kenya

CBM Kenya Office

Kenya Association for the Intellectually Handicapped (KAIH)

The Salvation Army

CRESNET CBO

Sight Savers – Homabay Office

Humanity & Inclusion

To the Chairperson

COVID-19 Education Response Committee,

Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD)

Nairobi Kenya

Action for Children with Disabilities is a network of 25 organizations working in the disability sector to advance the right of children with disabilities to benefit from quality education, high standards of health care, social protection, and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect. The network works in collaboration and partnerships with both public and private institutions to carry out policy advocacy, capacity building, and research and knowledge generation.

In response to the call for submission of proposals from education stakeholders, we suggest the following;

1. **Schools reopening**
2. We support the advisory given by Unicef saying that *school reopening must be safe and consistent with the country’s overall COVID-19 health response*, with all reasonable measures taken to protect learners, staff, teachers and their families. The timing of school reopening should be guided by the best interest of the child, and overall public health considerations, based on an assessment of the associated benefits and risks and informed by cross-sectoral and context-specific evidence, including education, public health and socio-economic factors[[1]](#footnote-1)
3. That *partial reopening of schools should be considered and priority given to candidates sitting for national exams* this year to resume first. The rest of the school population can stay at home and continue with remote learning until such a time the curve flattens completely. It is better to have children stay at home for longer and plan to deal with their mental development later than exposing them to the risks of getting infected with the virus as we rush to reopen schools.
4. **Review of the school calendar**
5. The Ministry *to align the schools calendar to the government’s financial year.* ***Term 1 to begin in September – November, School Holiday in December, Term 2 to run from January – March, School holiday in April and Term 3 to start in May – July and school holiday in August***. The schools activities to be reorganised and scheduled to take place within the proposed school terms.
6. **Policy and financial requirements**
7. That MOE *secures funds from development partners and disburse COVID-19 response grants to all schools* for reconfiguration of classrooms to facilitate social distancing, procure sanitation supplies, disinfect schools used as quarantine and isolation facilities, construct/rehabilitate WASH facilities to facilitate effective hand washing practices.
8. The MOE *works in partnership with stakeholders to develop and disseminate relevant guidelines and protocols* for screening of pupils, teachers and non-teaching staff, social distancing, hygiene promotion practices, food preparation and handling, case referral system etc. A small committee comprising teachers and/or parents can be formed at the school level to coordinate and monitor compliance with the established guidelines and protocols.
9. Put immediate measures to *strengthen the capacity of Ministry departments and agencies dealing with special needs education especially the Directorate of Special Needs Education, SNE department at KICD, KNEC, KISE, EARC’s etc by allocating them more funds* to improve on delivery of their mandates and service delivery to learners with disabilities. The continued underfunding of this departments/agency curtails efforts to realise inclusive education for learners with disabilities.
10. The Ministry should *step up measures to implement the strategies outlined in the Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities (2018)* to improve access to quality education, specialized learning resources, assistive devices and technology, community participation and engagement, capacity building and human resource development etc
11. **Protection and psychosocial support**
12. Children with disabilities often have a compromised immunity that puts them at a higher risk of COVID-19 infection. The Ministry to *activate the school feeding programme in all the inclusive schools, special schools and units* to ease financial and logistical pressure on parents and guardians to provide balanced meals to their children and create partnerships with development partners, CSO actors etc to *complement the feeding with a deworming and vitamin C supplement programme for all children with disabilities*.
13. Embark on a massive back-to-school campaign to make sure that learners with disabilities return to school and that their parents felt safe taking them back to school. This in addition to enhancing creation of awareness on the measures to prevent infection and combat stigmatization at the community level. The communication and information materials developed need to be accessible to children and adults with disabilities.
14. Schools should *provide children with vital information on handwashing and other measures to protect themselves and their families; facilitate mental health support; and help to prevent stigma and discrimination* by encouraging students to be kind to each other and avoid stereotypes when talking about the virus
15. Children with disabilities in humanitarian situations: The refugee camps set up is complex and not many parents will allow their kids to resume school if are not assured of their children’s safety. The Ministry of Education *should work closely with and facilitate the humanitarian aid organisations working in the refugee camps and other settlement areas for the internally displaced persons to complement the interventions* on remote learning, rehabilitation of WASH facilities in schools and carrying out community sensitisation campaigns.
16. **On boarding students/pupils when the schools re-open**
17. In most special schools, integrated units and inclusive schools, the ratio of support/auxiliary staff is extremely low. The Ministry should *employ more auxiliary staff/support staff including Learning Support Assistants (LSA’s)* to support meet the requirements of social distancing, high hygiene levels and provision of psychosocial support to children and achieve quality learning outcomes for learners with disabilities.

1. That a *multidisciplinary team* comprising of Quality Assurance and Standards officers, BOM members, Public health officials, Teacher Unions, School Heads Associations, Education Assessment and Resource Centre Officers (EARC’s), and non-state actors *should be formed at the sub county level to jointly inspect the school facilities to establish their safety, and confirm that decontamination has been completed according to the Ministry of Health standards and guidelines*
2. S*upply screening equipment, PPE’s including enough facemasks and gloves* to special schools, units and inclusive schools with learners who always need one to one support with no social distancing. The use of gloves is recommended for Visually Impaired learners who often rely on the sense of touch to manipulate materials and manoeuvre their environment.
3. Most parents of children with disabilities rely on public transport to move their children to and from school on a daily basis. This is a high-risk mode of transport for these children. We urge the *Ministry to arrange for school buses that will ferry children with disabilities to and from schools* to minimise physical contact with the general public and lessen the burden of parents using public transport.
4. Children with disabilities who cannot return to school immediately should be supported to continue learning from home. The *Ministry of Education, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) and other inclusive education stakeholders need to develop accessible learning materials and avail them to parents and caregivers for use to support learners with disabilities at home.*
5. Establish partnerships and agreements with players in the communications sector e.g. the mobile telephone providers to *give free internet bundles* to learners from needy families so that they can also get a chance to continue with their education.
6. **Lessons Learnt and recommendations for future preparedness**
7. COVID-19 has provided an opportunity for digital learning as an alternative mode of imparting education, a concept that had not been embraced earlier by many people. The Sector Policy for Learners and Trainees with Disabilities identifies home-based education as a teaching and learning approach for persons with severe multiple disabilities who may not otherwise attend an institution of learning regularly due to the nature of their disability. The lessons presented by the pandemic is a wakeup call for the Ministry of Education and KICD to put measures for promoting home based education for learners with complex disabilities who may not be able to access the classrooms but can learn through digital modes.
8. There is hardly any online platform or content specifically popularized for children with intellectual disabilities. These may be attributed to the *scarce data on the kinds of disabilities existing among learners in the country and their specific education and ICT use potential*. The Ministry of Education should *take steps to generate and share accurate data on learners with disabilities with e-learning innovators and service providers* and encourage them to develop modalities of delivering a curriculum to all children in line with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
9. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) should also take this opportunity *to re-look at its curriculums and policies* to ensure that they are adaptive to support children with intellectual disabilities.
1. <https://www.unicef.org/media/68366/file/Framework-for-reopening-schools-2020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)