REPORT OF CASE STUDIES
ON RESPONSES TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN AFRICA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

Produced by:

- Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)
- African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC)

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Report of Case Studies on Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa's Educational Systems

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This report is one of a series produced through the KIX COVID-19 Observatory. The series aims to provide decision-makers, development partners and education practitioners with emerging evidence on education policy and practice responses to the pandemic in Africa.

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The Observatory is monitoring the policy and practice responses to COVID-19 in the educational systems of 40 GPE partner countries in Africa and is collecting emerging research evidence on the topic. It focuses on the pandemic's impact on the functioning of education systems and the well-being of learners.

The Observatory is implemented by a consortium consisting of ADEA and African Union International Center for Girls and Women's Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA). Technical support is provided by APHRC and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

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Abbreviations

ACERWC	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AFD	Agence Française de Développement/French Development Agency
APHRC	African Population and Health Research Center
AU	African Union
CAP	Centres d'Animation Pédagogique/Pedagogical Animation Centers
CBC	Competency Based Curriculum
CEMASTEA	Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa
CIEFFA	African Union's International Centre for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DLS	Distance-Learning Solutions
DODMA	Department of Disaster Management
EAA	Education Above All
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GLEE	Girls Leadership and Empowerment through Education
GoM	Government of Mali
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KII	Key Informant Interview
KNSPWD	Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities
LIDF	LifeAnchor International Development Foundation
MINEDH	Ministry of Education and Human Development
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PRONAE	Programa de Alimentação Escolar (PRONAE)/School Feeding Program

SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SMASE	Strengthening of Mathematics and Science Education in Africa
SMC	School Management Committee
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TaRL	Teaching at the Right Level
TFP	Technical and Financial Partner
ToT	Trainer of Trainers
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
TSC	Teachers Service Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VI	Visual Impairments
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization
WFP	World Food Programme
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
YA	Youth Ambassador

Executive Summary

This report presents case studies from **seven** African countries (i.e., Burkina Faso, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, and Nigeria) that implemented programs and innovations in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education systems. The report provides insights into building resilience within Africa's education systems for the future. The case studies fill existing knowledge gaps on promising practices and add value to discussions on the contextual drivers that facilitated the implementation of the interventions, including active government involvement in mobilizing and supporting the initiatives. The programs include the PRONAE national school feeding program in Mozambique, the online teacher professional development program in Kenya, teacher training in Niger, back-to-school campaigns in Malawi, basic education training in internally displaced camps in Burkina Faso and Niger, and initiatives addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Mali. The case studies also seek to examine the extent to which the interventions addressed gender, equity, and inclusion. For the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) partner countries, these case studies provide valuable information regarding the operations of education systems and the well-being of learners.

Methodology

We used a qualitative case study approach to explore education innovations and responses in seven GPE partner countries. We generated primary data from Key Informant Interviews (KII) and secondary data from document analysis on the programs, practices, and innovations implemented in the study countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Case studies were identified based on earlier work by the Observatory that was documented in synthesis reports. We selected the countries using a framework that included geographical coverage, government involvement, and the extent to which equity and inclusion approaches were applied in the different interventions. We used a purposive sampling technique to identify the KIIs, guided by the selection criteria.

Findings

The findings revealed that countries responded to the disruptions in education with a number of interventions. Concerning **teacher training**, Kenya provided teachers with online professional development opportunities while Niger's focus was on teaching students at the right level. In Malawi, for **school re-entry**, the government employed back-to-school campaigns to encourage school re-opening, improvised learning spaces, and staggered learning to ensure classroom decongestion. On school feeding and ensuring provision of **nutritious** school meals, countries developed innovative alternative approaches to alleviate over-reliance on food imports, including local initiatives such as strengthening the food production system in Mozambique. During school closures in Mozambique, the Ministry of Education provided household meals, ensuring that students received nutritious food. Governments in the study countries collaborated with development partners in funding, mobilizing, and implementing the interventions. Related to **providing support to displaced persons**, in Nigeria, the government liaised with development partners to provide learners in camps for internally displaced persons with resources, while in Mali, to promote overall **learner well-being**, the interventions equipped girls with resources to increase awareness of gender-based violence. Despite these collaborative efforts, the responses overlooked vulnerable student populations across the seven countries.

Key challenges

Cross-cutting challenges were infrastructural, logistical and socially related across the countries. Infrastructural challenges included an under-developed digital infrastructure that constrained engagement in online teacher training initiatives and the provision of academic instruction via a variety of platforms. Inadequate resources including electricity, water and learning spaces interfered with the delivery of interventions in different contexts, for instance, the staggering of classes and adapting existing learning platforms to fit special needs education. Logistical challenges slowed down service delivery and the uptake of innovations. In Mozambique, limited data mechanisms including the unavailability of information on parents and students caused delays in delivering meals. Insufficient food quantities and poor quality of food disrupted meal distribution. Prolonged school closures complicated school re-opening efforts as learners would often be engaged in non-school activities when they were supposed to have returned to school. In terms of socially related challenges, some girls were compelled into early marriages. Notably, the design of interventions overlooked vulnerable populations, leading to their exclusion from education opportunities. This was primarily because they were not prioritized in the design of the interventions. Vulnerable populations included children with special needs, girls, children from low-income households and children in internally displaced camps who received limited or no interventions.

Conclusion

Contextual drivers within the different countries included government efforts to develop and disseminate information to ensure the success and overall implementation of the interventions. These efforts were bolstered by partnerships with development and community partners who facilitated scale-up efforts and efficiency in service delivery. Some interventions that existed before the pandemic (e.g., PRONAE, the National School Feeding Program in Mozambique) continued to be effective during the pandemic and offered a foundation for recovery efforts. The effectiveness of the existing interventions alleviated the need to build from the ground and allowed the countries to use resources in alternate ways. Overall, interventions overlooked vulnerable populations in their design and implementation. Going forward, there is a need for more inclusive intervention designs that consider all vulnerable groups in the response efforts.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the findings:

- First, to increase the benefits of online teacher professional development, governments should build and strengthen existing infrastructures. Infrastructures include broadband internet access, electricity grid, and access to devices.
- Second, governments should prioritize providing all learning institutions with basic resources including access to clean water.
- Third, governments and development partners can emphasize inclusive planning, developing special programs for vulnerable groups, and monitoring systems to track vulnerable populations' progress to ensure their inclusion.
- Fourth, up-to-date records in schools are necessary to reflect accurate student and parent information.

- Fifth, governments, development partners and the private sector should develop anonymous and confidential hotlines that provide support and allow victims to report incidents of gender-based violence. These mechanisms would be made accessible and publicized through mass media, local hospitals and public spaces to ensure maximum reach and usability.
- Finally, there is a need to develop action plans for crisis preparedness by developing information, data sharing, and communication mechanisms.

1 Introduction

Current research on the development of resilient education systems in Africa, specifically in the context of COVID-19, is ongoing. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the need for available data on successful interventions for building resilience in various in-country contexts among African nations. This lack of evidence hindered effective decision-making and appropriate policy responses. This report presents an in-depth examination of seven case studies from GPE partner countries, providing critical information on teacher training, nutrition, school re-opening, overall learner well-being, and support for displaced persons. The introductory sections below provide contextual information on the education systems, and learner well-being in these countries.

The selection of the countries was based on the tracking of evidence, policies, and practices. The countries were distributed evenly across the Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone regions and included Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, and Nigeria. The selection criteria for the case studies included evidence of promising practices, policies, and innovations that support the operation of education systems and overall learner well-being, and incorporated government's involvement in the implementation of the interventions.

Operations of education systems

Teacher training

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, some schools provided teacher training on various topics throughout the academic year. However, education systems in GPE partner countries were not extensively employing or providing training on distance-learning solutions (DLS) and related resources (African Union, 2021). This situation necessitated an immediate response to enhance teachers' proficiency in DLS following the outbreak of the pandemic. The lack of emphasis on the adoption of contemporary teaching practices that reflect current learner needs, such as the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and digital-aided learning contributed to the skills gap among teachers at a time when these skills were most needed (Teacher Task Force, 2020). The pandemic aggravated this situation, rendering DLS approaches inadequate and inaccessible to many learners, including those living with disabilities (Ngware & Ochieng, 2021). Pervasive inequalities in internet access and resource availability hampered the use of learning technologies for instruction. Beyond these structural constraints, the unpreparedness of teachers regarding the use of learning technologies in instruction contributed to their underutilization (Hennessey et al., 2010). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation, as DLS approaches for learning proved insufficient and inaccessible to large sections of learner populations, including those living with disabilities (Ngware & Ochieng, 2021). These factors underscored the urgent need to address the gaps in using DLS, learning recovery, teaching at the right level, and learning gaps because of the pandemic.

In response to this, governments in GPE partner countries undertook deliberate efforts to bolster teachers' capacity in the development and use of DLS. It was essential to equip teachers with sufficient training and support that would enable them to deliver quality teaching and learning. After the pandemic began, one aspect of teacher training focused on the use of learning technologies (ADEA, CIEFFA, & APHRC, 2022). For instance, in Kenya and Niger, governments rolled out both in-person and virtual training programs to equip teachers with skills to ensure continuity of learning.

Teachers needed appropriate materials and resources that would accommodate the needs of all learners, including those living with disabilities (Education International, 2020). Learning occurred during the pandemic (ADEA, CIEFFA, & APHRC, 2022) but there is an absence of data on learning for vulnerable populations.

School re-opening

Government agencies, led by the Ministry of Health in the respective countries, required schools to implement health and safety guidelines before they could re-open. Numerous guidelines, such as those on social distancing and hand sanitization for teachers and students, were put in place following the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures were instated to stem the spread of the virus and maintain the continuity of learning.

African governments, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized the importance of safely re-opening schools, citing both the immediate threats to children's mental and physical health, and the long-term effects of sustained learning losses (UNICEF & WHO, 2020). Given the difficulties posed by distance learning systems globally including GPE partner countries, school re-opening was the only viable solution to reaching vulnerable learners, and to preserving the safety of schoolchildren, especially girls. Extended school closures led to a decline in enrolment, particularly for girls who were forced into early marriages and pregnancies (Musa et al., 2021; Yeboah & Yaya, 2023). The necessity for school re-opening became increasingly clear with a rise in incidents of violence against schoolchildren and learning gaps which were particularly difficult to ascertain due to the multiple school closures. deficits. School re-opening provided **learners** with the opportunity **to** compensate **for the** numerous **missed learning opportunities.** Governments, through their ministries of education, devised innovative strategies to facilitate school re-opening and to ensure learning continuity (ADEA et al., 2021c). For instance, Malawi's Ministry of Education orchestrated back-to-school campaigns. However, even with such innovations, education systems in several GPE partner countries in Africa experienced difficulties in re-opening, particularly for vulnerable children such as girls who had become pregnant due to stringent policies related to expectant girls and the stigma surrounding the girls.

Overall learner well-being

Nutrition

School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the loss of access to school meals and related nutritional benefits. To alleviate these negative effects, Mozambique's government implemented a policy change which mandated that families should continue receiving food from school feeding programs. By 2022 the National School Feeding Program (PRONAE) covered 995 schools (7.65%) out of more than 13,000 schools, and 555,639 (7.8%) of 7,096,089 children enrolled in 2021.

Nutrition and health are interlinked, as access to nutrition can have long-term effects on individual development and learning (Jukes, 2005). School feeding programs and initiatives, therefore, play a vital role in meeting children's health and nutritional needs. GPE partner countries were part of a Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition where they contributed evidence and guidance related to programs intended to rebuild national school meal programs. GPE supplemented funding from organizations such as the World Food Programme (WFP) directed towards developing school

feeding programs in various countries. These programs support school enrolment, return to school impact of the food program, tracking and safety while at home, development of resilience, and provide a social safety net, especially during crises.

Support for displaced persons

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than a quarter of the world's 33 million migrants and displaced persons lived in SSA, where less than half of the refugee children were enrolled in school (United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020a; You et al., 2020). Prior to the pandemic, countries responded to the needs of displaced persons by providing basic needs, such as food and shelter. This mode of crisis response is reflected in literature on displaced persons which has mainly focused on pressing and immediate needs, using the lens of emergency (Verwimp, & Maystadt, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the effects of the compounding crises from war and famine, and the subsequent negative impacts on children's well-being.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with support from the governments of Germany, Switzerland, Japan, Sweden, Canada, the European Union, the United States and the United Kingdom as well as donors like the Central Emergency Response Fund, and the National Committee of the UNICEF, provided support to reach internally displaced persons in various locations across Nigeria. Subsequently, more than 600,000 boys and girls living in refugee populations have gained access to education (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, UNICEF and its partners worked to improve access to education for an estimated 149,235 conflict-affected children, most of them from the Borno and Yobe States in northern Nigeria (UNICEF, 2021). The initiatives included the provision of teaching and learning materials, essential and school supplies, early childhood development kits, Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), and recreation kits. Teachers received training on psychosocial support and volunteer teachers were trained in the Kanuri Arithmetic and Reading Intervention (TaRL, 2023).

Psychosocial and mental health support

Schools provide some learners with safe places and protective services. These services were disrupted during the pandemic, mostly due to school closures. World Vision estimates that about 85 million girls and boys worldwide were likely exposed to physical, sexual, or emotional violence while confined in their homes during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Akmal et al., 2020).

In a country like Mali, the pandemic exacerbated the existing challenges of inter-communal conflict and violence that have been disrupting education. These conflicts caused students to leave school as they sought safety, and had negative effects on children's mental health, safety, access to education and their psychosocial well-being due to increased psychological distress. These conditions also place girls and vulnerable populations at high risk of gender-based violence and the termination of their education (Joining Forces for Africa, 2021); World Vision, 2020)). Additionally, the increase in the number of out-of-school children has dented Mali's efforts toward developing a skilled population capable of contributing to the country's development agenda (Plan International, 2022).

The political and security crisis in Mali negatively affected all development sectors across the country, including education. The state of insecurity led to the closure of 1,261 schools in March 2020, affecting 370,000 students and 7,500 teachers (Amnesty International, 2021). School closures from conflict with armed gangs occurred before the closure of all schools, including community learning centers and temporary learning centers, due to COVID-19. The conflict made the school closures worse

because learners and teachers had to find refuge and security. Survival and safety were the main focus and schools were also affected which interrupted learning. The government anticipated that school closures would result in increased school dropout rates, a resurgence of early marriages among schoolgirls, increased cases of child labor, economic exploitation, physical and sexual violence including domestic violence, demotivation and psychosocial challenges for children and parents. The risk of forced recruitment of out-of-school children into armed groups also increased (World Vision, 2020). School closures led to the suspension of school feeding programs which constitute an important social safety net for low-income families.

Schools were eventually reopened in June 2020, for exam year students to participate in the end-of-year exams. As contextual factors are an essential element that must be considered during planning for all levels of education, the school re-opening guide from Mali's Ministry of Education noted the need to set up a referral system that would make it possible to report and/or monitor relevant cases for protection from violence and exploitation.

Case study objectives and research questions

This report presents selected initiatives that GPE partner countries in Africa implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic to support the operations of education systems (teacher training and school re-opening) and the well-being of learners (nutrition, support for displaced persons, psychosocial support and support against sexual and gender-based violence). The initiatives include Kenya's professional development program and Niger's remediation training for teachers. In Mozambique, we focus on the PRONAE national school feeding program, in Malawi, we examine back-to-school campaigns, while in Burkina Faso and Nigeria we focus on camps for internally displaced persons (IDP). Lastly, we highlight the responses to promote overall well-being, specifically addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Mali.

The following research questions guide the case studies:

1. How did the selected initiatives respond to the disruptions in education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. To what extent was the government involved in mobilizing support, implementing interventions, and disseminating information?
3. How did the responses address disruptions in education among vulnerable student populations, and how effective were the responses to their needs?

In the following sections of this report, we discuss the methodology and present the findings of each case study, followed by a cross-case analysis and discussion. We then present the conclusion and recommendations.

For GPE partner countries, responding to the research questions above provides valuable information on policies and practices in the education sector that guided the responses, in terms of school system operations and learner well-being. Understanding the extent of government involvement in supporting the interventions can provide insights into their general uptake and help in the identification of catalyzing factors for long-term sustainability of these interventions. Additionally, exploring whether the initiatives were inclusive and equitable can provide information on appropriate responses for vulnerable student populations.

2 Methodology

Overview of the research approach

This study employs qualitative research methods to explore initiatives implemented by GPE partner countries in Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives aimed to enhance learner well-being and improve education systems.

We adopted a case study approach, as it allows for an examination of a case within a real-life, contemporary context (Yin, 2009). The research team conducted a thorough investigation of the deep dive interventions and responses implemented by governments, aiming to identify crucial contextual and programmatic factors contributing to the success of these initiatives. We also sought to identify key processes and relationships among actors.

Case studies were identified based on research papers generated by the Observatory on COVID-19 in Education in Africa and selected in agreement with ADEA and AU-CIEFFA. The two primary domains under the Observatory's focus (i.e., operations of education systems and learner well-being) were divided into five themes for this report: teacher training, school re-opening, nutrition, overall learner well-being, and support for displaced persons. Within each of these themes, we explore cross-cutting topics of gender, equity, and inclusion.

Our research approach comprises both cross-country (inter-case) and cross-sectional (intra-case) analyses. Cross-country analyses were based on countries with similar themes. For instance, Kenya and Niger provided inter-case analyses as they focused on teacher training. Cross-sectional analyses were across cross-cutting topics among the countries. These analyses aim to gather and synthesize documented information and primary qualitative data. The advantage of this approach is that it enables the collection of in-depth information that describes the interventions. It also facilitates a comprehensive examination of the interventions, such as the relationships between actors and the correlation between intervention uptake and contextual factors. Moreover, it provides opportunities to formulate hypotheses for future studies.

The cross-country nature of the case studies helped the research team se understand the role of policy environment and foster learning across countries. We analyzed various types of documents, including policy and program documents, journal articles and newsletters. Data triangulation was completed by using available grey literature, multiple transcribers and discussion among the research team.

Sampling criteria

Case study identification:

The case studies were selected based on policy and/or practice responses, specifically interventions, projects or programs that the GPE partner countries implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The selection of countries for the case studies was predicated on the following criteria:

a. Demonstrable promising or successful practices, policies and innovations that support the operation of education systems and/or improve overall learner well-being.

b. Geographic distribution across GPE partner countries in Africa. Selection was based on geographical region, including West, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, and Indian Ocean islands. Language orientation (Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone) was also a factor in country selection.

c. The level of government involvement in interventions compared to interventions from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

d. The scale of the innovation, intervention or program, whether at a macro or national level, cross-border (spanning more than one country), or at a micro-level (within a single country). Other considerations included the degree of mainstreaming into existing systems, and the availability of documented information.

In accordance with the aforementioned criteria, ten GPE partner countries in Africa were chosen for the case studies, with two countries per case study topic. Unfortunately, primary data collection in three of these countries was not successful. As a result, the five case studies in this report cover interventions from seven countries: Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, and Nigeria. Table 1 Provides a breakdown of the countries and how they matched the selection criteria.

Table 1: Matching case studies with selection criteria

Case study criteria	Promising practices	Geographic spread	Government involvement	Scale of the innovation
Burkina Faso	Yes	West (F)	Yes	Micro
Kenya	Yes	East (A)	Yes	Macro
Malawi	Yes	South (A)	Yes	Macro
Mali	Yes	West (F)	Yes	Micro
Mozambique	Yes	South (L)	Yes	Micro
Niger	Yes	West (F)	Yes	Micro
Nigeria	Yes	West (A)	Yes	Micro

Notes (1): A= Anglophone; F = Francophone; L= Lusophone

By design, the case studies followed a multiple-case study approach, each featuring at least two distinct contexts for each. This was critical because a multiple case study approach is suitable when interventions differ between two countries, as suggested by Gustafsson (2017) and Martens & Carvalho (2016). For example, while Burkina Faso and Nigeria both targeted support 'support to displaced persons', each country deployed its unique strategy intervention, necessitating a multiple case study approach. A similar situation occurred for Kenya and Niger with teacher training. This approach facilitated case comparisons and elucidated 'what' and 'how' GPE countries implemented similar interventions or programs. However, due to unsuccessful primary data collection in three of the selected countries, school re-opening in Malawi, nutrition in Mozambique, and psychosocial support in Mali are presented as single case studies. As stated by Yin (2017), single case and multiple case studies share the same methodological framework, hence our overall approach (for single or multiple cases) was uniform.

Certain interventions (cases) consisted of both major and supplementary components. For instance, Kenya and Niger offered multiple case studies on teacher training. In Kenya, the focus was primarily on skills applicable to distance-learning solutions (DLS), while Niger emphasized Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL). It is crucial to acknowledge the additional components that complemented these interventions. For example, while TaRL was the primary focus of teacher training in Niger, this intervention was supplemented with purposefully designed remedial instruction. Therefore, our respondents found it difficult to differentiate responses for TaRL from the complementary aspects of the intervention. This phenomenon was not confined to Niger as we observed similar situations in the case studies on school re-opening in Malawi and provision of support to victims of sexual and gender-based violence in Mali.

Data Sources

Primary data was gathered from key informant interviews (KII) with educational stakeholders in the target countries. The KII study guides contained questions to explore in-country responses, policies, practices, and innovations emerging in the education sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We tested the KII guides with a select sample of key informants for validation before the actual data collection began. In-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders directly involved in implementing the interventions. These included regional and state directors, national directors of education, and senior technical personnel or their representatives. To complement the KII data, we reviewed relevant policy and country documents concerning the operation of education systems and the overall well-being of learners in the different countries. These documents encompassed a range of grey literature, such as newsletters, blogs, government reports, working papers, opinion articles, and policy documents on various topics.

Key Informant Selection criteria

We employed purposive sampling to select informants, as this method facilitates the identification of knowledgeable respondents. Informants from each country included a diverse array of stakeholders such as government officials, particularly from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and its national and sub-national agencies, development partners, program staff involved in implementing the identified responses, community leaders from the area where the response or intervention was deployed, and intervention beneficiaries.

The selection criteria for the KIIs included regional and state directors responsible for programs that focused on the specific themes and initiatives, national directors of education and senior technical persons or their representatives, as well as program implementers and intervention recipients.

The number of KIIs conducted during data collection varied based on the country and related logistical issues, including attrition and availability of respondents. In total, 108 respondents were reached from Burkina Faso (n=12), Kenya (n=12), Malawi (n=17), Mali (n=15), Mozambique (n=27), Niger (n=10), and Nigeria (n=15). The sample distribution is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Selected countries and the number of respondents

Country	Number of key informants
Burkina Faso	12
Kenya	12
Malawi	17
Mali	15
Mozambique	27
Niger	10
Nigeria	15

Recruitment of focal persons in each country

APHRC collected, synthesized and analyzed data and information on COVID-19 responses in both primary and secondary education, with the goal of informing education practice and policy in GPE member countries. APHRC scrutinized the COVID-19 responses through the lenses of equity, gender, and inclusion, with the intention to shed light on whether and how COVID-19 pandemic addressed and fulfilled addressed the needs of vulnerable population categories.

In order to accomplish this, APHRC appointed highly qualified education specialists in each country to act as focal leads. These individuals, serving as local liaisons, assisted the APHRC team in securing ethical approvals from the pertinent authorities. They orchestrated the recruitment, training, and supervision of field teams, as well as translation of the instruments from English to local languages, where necessary. They were also responsible for identifying suitable key informants based on specific criteria. The focal leads contacted key informants and arranged interviews with them. They oversaw fieldwork and conducted spot checks to ensure quality data collection, transcription, and coding. They also compiled a project report based on the study findings. Each focal lead was equipped with PhD training and was employed at a higher education or research institution.

Data Collection Process

Data collection in the targeted countries was conducted from May to August 2022. The field interviewers (FIs) conducted key informant interviews that were tailored to the focal thematic area. Interviews were conducted either in person or virtually, after the respondents provided informed consent. Data collection included interview recordings, which captured the respondent's information (e.g., name and role). The KII guides were translated into local languages to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the questions and were administered by interviewers fluent in the local language (e.g., Chichewa in Malawi and Portuguese in Mozambique). In all countries, data collection was preceded by ethical approval of the research protocol from the relevant authority.

Data Analysis Approach

The recorded interview data were meticulously transcribed verbatim. When necessary, transcriptions were translated into English and subsequently coded. To ensure consistency in the coding process, the research team developed a code book for the analysis of the findings. Two trained coders and transcribers performed the transcription and coding of the interviews. Coding was performed using

NVivo. We used thematic analysis, employing both deductive and inductive approaches, to analyze the KII data and identify themes and meta-codes from the data. Specifically, the thematic analysis was conducted by examining the interviews based on established guidelines (deductive) and emerging areas of interest (inductive), with the aim to identify similarities and nuances in cross-country themes and sub-themes (Levy, 2008).

3 Acknowledgement of Study Limitations

This study, although rigorous, has a few limitations that warrant mention, including the following:

- The deployment of a qualitative approach, utilizing KIIs and small sample sizes, naturally incorporates subjective elements. This poses the risk of inadvertently overlooking critical aspects of the topic and sample due to selection bias (Levy, 2008). To mitigate this, we endeavored to include a diverse array of KIIs to represent a varied sample.

- The coding process carries similar risks when it comes to identifying themes and analyzing findings. In this regard, we were guided by earlier work and synthesized reports, which enabled us to pinpoint salient topics.

- It should be noted that seven African countries cannot adequately represent the entirety of the continent. Therefore, the findings of this study are not universally applicable to contexts beyond the study area. Nevertheless, the findings provide illuminating insights into practices and responses to similar challenges in diverse contexts.

- Given the variations in extraneous variables such as education systems, education policies, language, and contexts, interpretations of the questions and findings may not be consistent across different countries and contexts. These existing differences pose challenges when making inter-case and intra-case comparisons. We are cautious to acknowledge these differences when making comparisons.

- Gauging the scale of the intervention was challenging due to the scope of the study areas in different contexts. In some instances, the scope of the data collection was determined by factors such as security concerns and logistics. Hence, we strived to measure the intervention's scale using the information at our disposal.

- Some of the interviews were conducted virtually, which may have resulted in challenges stemming from limited human interaction. In these cases, we conducted virtual interviews using preferred platforms that offered the KIIs a degree of flexibility.

- The case study research design does not facilitate the identification of causal relationships, and instead relies on correlational analysis. This limitation restricts the extent of statistical analyses. To bolster the reliability of findings, we ensured data quality mechanisms were in place, including the triangulation of the data.

4 Presentation of Case studies

The findings from the case studies are presented under the five predetermined themes.

- The domain, 'operations of education systems', encompasses two themes:
  i. Teacher Training and Support.
  ii. School Re-opening.

- The domain on 'well-being of learners', comprises three themes:
  iii. Nutrition.
  iv. Support for Displaced Persons.
  v. Overall Well-being (Psychosocial Support).

The unit of analysis, also known as the cases, are represented by the specific theme.

In the subsequent sections, we delve into findings derived from the key informant interviews and content analysis of the interventions detailed in grey literature. This analysis aims to identify promising practices, the scope of interventions, and key stakeholders.

The findings shine a light on policies, practices, and innovations in the seven GPE partner countries, the contextual drivers of success, and the extent of government involvement in implementing responses and disseminating information. Additionally, we scrutinize how the responses addressed disruptions in education among vulnerable student populations, with a particular focus on gender, inclusion, and equity.

4.1. Operations of education systems

The following section discusses two case studies on operations of education systems, with a focus on two themes, namely teacher training in Kenya and Niger, and school re-opening in Malawi.

Case 1: Teacher training

Teacher training practices and responses aimed to support teachers to adapt their teaching practices and apply them in spaces outside their regular classrooms. Additionally, teachers received training on how to utilize and provide instructions using various technology platforms.

Kenya

Country context:

Kenya has a population of 56 million persons. The Ministry of Education oversees basic education while the sub-national (county) governments manage early childhood education. Education has been compulsory at the primary level since 1984, and the access to secondary education has expanded significantly over the years access to secondary education has expanded. English and Kiswahili are the principal languages of instruction. The academic calendar runs from January to December; however, it was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Kenya employs 220,744 primary school

teachers and 120,279 secondary school teachers (KNBS, 2022). Teachers in public schools are employed by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) while in private schools, they are employed by the individual schools. Pre-service teacher training provides a crucial foundation, equipping trainees with sound teaching practices while in-service professional development enables them to stay up to date with the best instructional practices.

Overview of the remote learning teacher training in Kenya:

The Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEA) is an agency within the Ministry of Education (MoE). It receives financial and management support from MoE to implement specific programs and interventions, especially in mathematics and science instruction. The TSC is an agency within the MoE that is mandated with teacher management (i.e., hiring, deployment, and professional growth). Agencies within the ministry work collaboratively to deliver MoE programs. During the pandemic, CEMASTEA worked with the TSC employees (i.e., teachers) to implement interventions such as training for remote learning.

In the context of our case study, CEMASTEA provided an intensive online *Teacher Professional Development* (TPD) program, targeting science and mathematics teachers throughout the country to deliver remote learning or DLS (CEMASTEA, 2021a-b). The theme of the training was 'Enhancing teachers' competencies in remote learning techniques for effective teaching and learning of mathematics and science'. This in-service training program existed before the pandemic, but it gained momentum during the pandemic when teachers were required to teach, even with school closures. Training was conducted over eleven days, from October 18-29, 2021, which was timely as it was during the pandemic when teachers needed support on alternative teaching approaches. Teachers who wanted to enhance their remote teaching skills submitted their email addresses and phone numbers to CEMASTEA through their respective schools to assist in logistical arrangements and related planning.

The teacher training and support program included three training modules or units across various content areas: (i) Training on the use of Google Classrooms, Microsoft Teams, Zoom and WhatsApp in teaching and learning; (ii) Training on various aspects of the competency based curriculum (CBC) that teachers would have to emphasize in their teaching as well as the curriculum's implications for classroom instruction; and (iii) training on the use of various ICT tools, including virtual laboratories and use of animation and simulations in teaching science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

The objectives of the training were to help participants: (a) Develop capabilities on use of online platforms (e.g., Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams) in classroom instruction for science and mathematics; (b) Exhibit comprehension of CBC for ease of execution; (c) Demonstrate capabilities on use of virtual laboratories, simulations and animations in teaching and learning specific topics in science and mathematics; (d) Acknowledge and accept the use of different ICT tools in virtual/online lesson delivery; and (e) Understand the significance of TPD.

During the training, teachers received instructional manuals, and financial support to purchase airtime and attend the sessions. The training modules enhanced teachers' ability to implement innovative teaching approaches including the recording of lessons and making them available to students offline. Teachers also received training on how to incorporate various tools to better reach students. For instance, teachers were trained on how to use Google Meet as a conference tool, as well as use of

the WhatsApp platform to interact with students during question and answer sessions. The following sections elaborate on important features of the remote learning teacher training intervention in Kenya.

Important features of the remote learning teacher training in Kenya:

There were three key features of the remote learning teacher training intervention: (i) Access and practical experience in using online platforms such as Google Classrooms; (ii) Development of skillsets on how to support children once schools re-opened (i.e., provision of psychosocial support); and (iii) Cascading the training framework to widen scope, reach and consistency.

Using online classrooms during remote learning sessions: Teachers were exposed to practical experiences, learning theories and instructional methodologies which formed the main training component. They also received training on online teaching platforms such as Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams. Mathematics and science teachers had the opportunity to learn more about virtual laboratories and the use of animation in teaching and learning of selected topics. The training provided teachers with opportunities for skills development on incorporating inquiry-based approaches into their teaching practices.

The knowledge and practical experience gained by teachers during the TPD training enhanced their ability to reach students remotely. One of the participating technical advisors highlighted how teachers were exposed to remote learning training opportunities, enabling them to reach their students (or students to reach their teachers) remotely:

> "This kind of collaboration was supported by the World Bank. Currently, Safaricom Foundation is supporting the e-learning program. Right now, we are working to reach out to primary schools in this program of digital learning. This intervention was meant to help students who could not physically reach their teachers at that particular time." [KII-9-KENYA]

The TPD program equipped teachers with skills on how to use novel digital tools. For instance, teachers recorded lessons for the students via WhatsApp, and during Zoom-based lessons. This cross-shared teaching and learning facilitated and enhanced home-based learning. Teacher training on remote learning facilitated teacher-parent interactions, for instance, parents with opportunities to work from home were involved in providing their children with learning support using pre-recorded content. The following remarks from one of the government officials show the various collaborative engagements among parents and teachers.

> "COVID-19 has really made the education sector rely on the…use of technology…The second one is parental involvement, where parents were more involved with their children because the parents were more now with their children…we came up with the training of teachers on how to handle remote learning methodologies." [KII-3-KENYA]

In total, =8,688 STEM teachers participated in the program. The overall number of teachers reached was even larger. All these teachers demonstrated improved usage of online platforms such as Google Meet and Microsoft Teams to set-up lessons, invite learners, and undertake synchronous virtual meetings as well as deliver virtual presentations (Makanda & Mumbi, 2022).

Enhancing skillsets on how to provide support to children: In addition to training on learning technologies, teachers also received training from the Ministry of Education, through CEMASTEA, on

the skillsets needed to support learner wellbeing once schools re-opened. The training covered how to go about creating a positive learning environment by addressing learners' psychological needs. This would help ensure that students' emotional needs are met so they could go on with learning. The responses below from ministry officials focus on the gender-specific aspects of the TPD.

> "Not only gender violence, female mutilation and…radicalization and things like that. The teachers were taken through first to identify and then how do you counsel a learner in that situation?" [KII-1-KENYA]

> "...like our teenage program, there is what we call mentorship and coaching. All those issues have been put in place to empower the teachers. The teacher needs to be empowered before he handles the learner." [KII-3-KENYA]

A cascading training framework: CEMASTEA worked with the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) to cascade a train-the-trainer framework for teacher training. Unlike CEMASTEA, the TSC has strong structures at both national and sub-national levels, and these were used to anchor the CEMASTEA-led training on remote learning. National level facilitators trained master trainers who trained more trainers, who then trained teachers. Facilitators were drawn from the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (another agency within MoE responsible for curriculum development), TSC, and CEMASTEA. They were responsible for developing the training curriculum, training the teachers and monitoring progress. This model increased the scope and speed of the training.

Training focused on distance and remote learning approaches, including use of radio, television, and various online platforms. Through this cascading, train-the-trainer framework, master trainers received virtual training at the national level, became champions and trainers of trainers, and then were deployed at zonal and county levels to train smaller groups of teachers in face-to-face and virtual five-day training sessions (spread over a period of 11 days) at various locations. The responses below by a Kenyan participant and technical advisor, explain how the cascading model worked:

> "The institution organized for the training of at least four teachers per school. The selected teachers attended training on remote learning methodologies. The trained teachers then went back to school and trained their peers on the same - remote digital learning. The commission [TSC] first developed a module with funding from the World Bank then trained the first lot of pioneer master trainers, who in turn trained other trainers. We were calling them Trainer-of-Trainers (TOT). It is the TOTs who conduct training at the school level. So TSC planned and implemented the teacher training on eLearning." [KII-9-KENYA]

The cascading framework enabled trainers to reach many teachers within a short period of time. It also ensured that teachers did not have to travel to a distant, centralized training venue. The cascading approach also highlighted how a multi-agency approach within the education sector can successfully deliver an intervention during an emergency.

Challenges in implementing teacher training interventions in Kenya:

Stakeholders were asked to comment on the challenges experienced during the remote learning teacher training intervention. Two broad challenges emerged from the data analysis, related to program implementation, and contextual issues.

First, training focused more on secondary school teachers, and less on primary school teachers. Second, it was difficult to implement interventions using existing learning platforms not designed for students with special needs.

Secondary versus primary school teachers: Teachers at secondary-level were better coordinated than primary-level teachers and more of them received the training. This was partly because primary school teachers had fewer qualifications than secondary school teachers. Further, secondary school teachers in Kenya are university graduates and earn more than primary school teachers. This may have given them prior opportunities to access technologies such as online applications, making them better targets for training on remote learning. CEMASTEA has historically had an ongoing in-service teacher training focused on mathematics and sciences in secondary schools, and this may have made it easier to reach more secondary school teachers. The response below by a technical advisor in Kenya showed the discrepancies and logistical differences between secondary and primary school teachers:

> "There were also lessons for primary schools, although they were not coordinated like the online learning programs developed for secondary schools. At the primary school level, teachers were left to organize themselves and conveniently deliver tuition to their pupils at their discretion... but for the training, all teachers were trained, primary school teachers and secondary school teachers alike. The only difference is that more secondary school teachers were trained compared to primary school teachers. Out of the 116,000 teachers trained, 60% were secondary school teachers whereas 40% were primary school teachers." [KII-9-KENYA]

Adapting existing learning platforms to fit special needs education: The 2007 Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities (KNSPWD) data estimates that 4.38% of Kenyans are living with disability and approximately 3% of school-age children live with disability. Similar studies found that household surveys identify small numbers of people with disability (Filmer, 2008). More broadly, the remote learning teacher training did not consider instruction for students with special needs. In Kenya, Document analysis showed that there is limited data on TPD (remote or otherwise) focused on special needs education. Institutions experienced difficulties in adapting training programs to orient teachers working with students with special learning needs. This was partly because prior to the pandemic, these learners were integrated into the regular system, and they did not receive adequate support based on their learning needs as mentioned below by various stakeholders.

> "Okay…maybe what I can only say is that we didn't have a structured way (teacher training) of maybe handling these vulnerable student populations. There were no structured ways." [KII-11-KENYA]

> "For a fact that was the most challenging bit…during that time, except the teachers who teach in the special needs institutions, the others were a bit difficult in adaptation [no adequate training]. But the ones who teach in the special needs, some were even having learners in the institutions and others were having learners at home. Those ones we are sure were able to adapt using the methodologies. But the others it was a bit…challenging." [KII-1-KENYA]

Overall, the challenges in implementing the interventions were due to existing disparities that contributed to the challenges encountered, including pre-existing disparities in access to quality education (in urban, rural, and peri-urban areas), the digital divide, and systemic resource limitations. On learning outcomes, according to (ADEA, AU/CIEFFA, & APHRC, 2022), it was difficult to monitor

and assess student learning during school closures during to non-existent guidelines and education systems that were under-prepared to respond to assessment during crises and beyond the classroom.

Niger

Country context:

Niger has a population of 26 million persons. The Ministry of Education oversees basic education which is compulsory for the six years of primary school. The academic calendar runs from January to December and French is the language of instruction. The COVID-19 pandemic combined with incidents of conflict and insecurity disrupted the regular academic calendar. Schools closed in March 2020 following the outbreak of the pandemic, and heavy flooding in August and September 2020 delayed their re-opening, initially scheduled for October 2020. Niger is also experiencing food insecurity due to climate change. All these challenges have weakened the education system and strained its resources. Niger's education sector has a national education financing fund which is a pooled fund that provides education services in the country, including continuing education for teachers to improve teaching practices. The pooled fund includes contributions from various countries and organizations such as Canada, France, GPE, Luxembourg and Switzerland. In 2021, Niger had 96% trained teachers at the primary level compared to 12% at the upper secondary and 20% at the lower secondary level (UIS, 2022).

Overview of the training on learner-centered pedagogical approaches in Niger:

In Niger, teacher training focused on learner-centered pedagogical approaches including what is described as TaRL). This is a learner-centered pedagogy that originated in India and is quickly spreading within Africa. Training on learner-centered pedagogy was implemented between July 2020 and December 2021 (18 months), with support from the French Development Agency (AFD) amounting to €11 million (USD 13.6 million) (French Development Agency, 2021). Although this was an existing program, our analysis examined how this teacher training program responded to the disruptions caused by COVID-19.

Training in Niger included modules on remedial instruction so teachers could provide learners with opportunities to cover or catch up on the curriculum content missed during school closures. Training on the TaRL approach helped teachers acquire skills and knowledge to provide learners with targeted instruction according to their academic ability. Some teachers were equipped to contribute toward improving the quality of the education system through training.

The training on learner-centered pedagogy also allowed teachers to initiate high-level dialogue focused on three areas: learning improvement, with a special focus on numeracy, reading, and writing; making governance of education systems more effective and efficient; and, reducing inequalities in access to education between rural and urban learners as well as between boys and girls. The teacher training program targeted and supported learners at the highest risk of dropping out, especially those from rural areas, early primary level learners, and girls. Teachers were also trained in how to use learner-centered pedagogy through radio broadcasts, and they received airtime for remote monitoring of learning activities among students. The section below elaborates on important features of Niger's learner-centered pedagogical intervention.

Important features of the learner-centered pedagogy in Niger:

There were two key features of Niger's learner-centered pedagogical training: (i) Establishment of structures to monitor implementation of the training program; and (ii) Utilization of existing communication platforms.

Implementation of learner-centered pedagogy: Teachers in Niger received training on TaRL to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic. While implementing this intervention, some teachers administered assessments to students to identify their instructional levels in mathematics and reading. Once the student's instructional level was identified, teachers used that data to group students at similar levels together. They then provided instruction to these student groups based on the curriculum. The Ministry of Education distributed student workbooks for mathematics and reading in schools which the students could complete at their own pace. Teachers and community volunteers monitored students' progress over time and used the data to provide students with instruction at their level.

GPE and UNICEF funds were used to provide teacher training in Niger. Teaching and learning materials were also developed for different subjects for first-year secondary school students. Making these resources available to teachers and students ensured learning continuity. This exercise required several stakeholders including teachers and school inspectors. Individuals in the school management committees (SMCs) were elected through a secret ballot, and school action plans were approved in community meetings. This process offered the whole community opportunities to share information. Local people were also engaged in the education and support for children's learning, tailored to each child's level of understanding and proficiency.

Utilization of existing communication platforms: Use of distance-learning platforms for teacher training and support efficiently maximized available resources in terms of time and funds, by keeping costs low. Teachers received training from their homes, cutting down on the time used by them and their trainers to get to the training venues. Additionally, use of these platforms allowed for increased scale-up of interventions in terms of wider coverage of geographical locations. To strengthen existing initiatives such as the TaRL approach, Niger's Ministry of Education in collaboration with development partners like the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), trained teachers on the use of online platforms to conduct after-school, weekend, and evening classes, as well as study groups to help children strengthen their foundational numeracy and literacy skills. Teachers were also introduced to the use of online platforms to monitor students' progress and achieve the TaRL program objectives. These responses from curriculum and teaching experts show the role of technology platforms in increasing efficiency and expanding coverage:

> "Even today with our partners, if we have to do training, we often do videoconference…and so since covid-19, now we no longer have to move ourselves or the partner [trainer] to move…to Niger, to train us." [KII-03-NIGER]

> "We had created WhatsApp groups where we put all the teachers. And in principle, these groups were supposed to make it possible to exchange with each other with the trainers, with the colleagues." [KII-03-NIGER]

Challenges in implementing learner-centered pedagogical training in Niger:

There were some contextual challenges in implementing learner-centered pedagogical training in Niger. Key challenges included: (i) Access to quality teaching resources, (ii) Limited and delayed distribution of training materials due to underdeveloped infrastructure, and (iii) Unsustainability of interventions with the departure of development partners.

Access to quality teaching resources: Distribution of math workbooks for the TaRL program was postponed for one school year because of delays in printing and purchasing relevant materials. A curriculum and teaching expert noted that there was a need to update the teacher training manuals:

> "The training of trainers needs to be updated. Those fellow trainers and even their teachers must be trained in the new technologies. Because we realize that there are times when these technologies will be very important for the continuity of education." [KII-03-NIGER]

The government also contracted teachers for the extra classes created to decongest learning spaces. However, these contract teachers were not exposed to appropriate training and their working conditions were poor, impacting the quality of instruction as noted in the remarks below by one of the education sector stakeholders:

> "The third aspect is the contractualization of education in Niger. Contractual teachers are very badly treated and as a result this has a great impact on the quality of the teaching given." [KII-04-NIGER]

Underdeveloped infrastructure: The school management committees (SMCs) did not work as planned. Local leaders (chiefs) were representatives within the committees which made it difficult to ensure transparency and led to distrust among the locals (JICA, 2022). Further, delivery of teacher training modules using social media platforms faced several infrastructural challenges. Training therefore reverted to use the more available hard copy learning materials.

> "I know for the team that did the work … they had a little support. Initially it was a question of whether the project had continued to see to what extent we could give connection fees to teachers so that they could interact with the students because normally the work had to be done by WhatsApp, and therefore at the start that was it … we had planned in this case to give a fixed connection bonus for the teachers so that they could get in touch with the students. But afterwards there were problems because we said to ourselves that we shouldn't exclude children of a certain social level, and that's what caused instead of breaking into WhatsApp communication or WhatsApp exchanges, we preferred to put booklets instead." [KII-04-NIGER]

Durability of the learner-centered pedagogical training: Another challenge was the sustainability of the training program. A curriculum and teaching expert mentioned the lack of program continuity once development partners left.

> "Perhaps another lesson is me saying the state should not wait for all partners to come to it. Since we saw, we started to do very interesting work that everyone found interesting, but from the moment the partners suspended their contributions a little, it's over, we no longer have any possibilities of doing (it). I think that in the future the State must also invest in planning

> since it is as if there is no planning. It's as if we are there to act just when we have difficulties. While it was necessary to prevent these difficulties." [KII-03-NIGER]

Case 2: School re-opening

Malawi

Country context:

Malawi has a population of 18.6 million people. The education system is centralized, with the Ministry of Education in charge of basic education. Since 1984, education has been compulsory for the first six years of the primary level, and there has been expanding access to secondary education since 1999. The language of instruction is Chichewa in primary school to Grade 4 and English from Grade 5 and above. The COVID-19 pandemic and weather-related crises (e.g., Cyclone Idai) disrupted the academic calendar which runs from September to June. The onset of the pandemic saw schools in Malawi close for eight months, from March-October 2020, and then again in mid-February 2021 to mid-March 2021. Primary school enrolment was 5,420,000 in 2019-2020 while in secondary school, it was 4,815,000 in 2021. The students were spread across 1,411 secondary and 6,065 primary schools (MoE, 2021).

Overview of school re-opening in Malawi:

In Malawi, COVID-19 containment measures included decongesting spaces, practicing regular handwashing, sanitizing, social distancing, and wearing facemasks (UNICEF, 2021). In addition, to better utilize the extra classes necessitated by the decongestion measures, Malawi's Ministry of Education contracted trained auxiliary teachers and engaged in back-to-school campaigns. These preparations facilitated school re-opening in Malawi.

The Government of Malawi received a US$ 10,000,000 grant to support the COVID-19 response in the country's education sector (Ministry of Education Science and Technology [MoEST], 2020). These funds were partly used to support school re-opening efforts such as: hiring additional teachers (on short contracts) to support existing teachers in handling the increased number of classrooms; creation of temporary structures like tents; and construction of new permanent classrooms. The extra learning spaces were necessitated by the need for social distancing to reduce the spread of the virus. As part of its preparations for full-scale school re-opening, the Government of Malawi through the MoE hired 3,320 auxiliary teachers. The GPE COVID-19 emergency response funding supported salaries for 30% of the teachers at schools with additional classes, in line with COVID-19 protocols (Munthali, 2021).

Another practice worth noting was the staggering of classes to allow for teaching in shifts once schools re-opened, in adherence to COVID-19 protocols (including social distancing). Schools were advised to make their own arrangements in terms of their preferred shift system. For instance, one school could decide that Grade 3 and 4 learners would attend afternoon classes once Grade 1 and 2 learners left their morning classes, while another school could opt for learners from other grades to attend school in the afternoon. The design of the shift system was left to the discretion of the school management. Besides morning and afternoon shifts, some schools opted for staggered attendance that would see students from a specific grade attend on Monday, another on Tuesday and so on.

Others would stagger the streams within the same grades, for instance, Standard 1A would come on one day, Standard 1B the following day, and so on. There was flexibility in the implementation of the shifts and staggering system, as each school was left to choose the option that best suited them.

The hiring of new teachers, an increased number of classrooms, provision of support to teachers by stakeholders, introduction of shifts, and adherence to the COVID-19 mitigation protocols facilitated school re-opening in Malawi.

Important features of school re-opening in Malawi:

The **three** key features of school re-opening initiatives in Malawi included: (i) Adherence to health guidelines, (ii) Back-to-school campaigns, and (iii) Stakeholder engagement. These practices ensured safe school re-opening and demonstrated the government's commitment to mitigating the negative effects of prolonged school closures such as decreased enrolment, especially for girls.

Adherence to health guidelines: Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, class sizes were at least three hundred students per class (Chiwaula et al., 2021). To allow for safe school re-opening, class sizes were decongested and reduced to forty students to minimize spread of the virus. Schools with high enrolments introduced double shifts and other schools staggered classes, which allowed students to attend classes on different days.

The MoE recruited 3,320 auxiliary teachers to handle the extra classes necessitated by social distancing. Noteworthy, these auxiliary teachers were trained teachers with teaching qualifications but not yet employed by the government due to challenges at the Human Resource directorate. Auxiliary teachers helped ease the teaching load by supporting existing teachers with the temporary classrooms, some of which were in tents, and helped ensure that learning opportunities continued to be available for students. Further, selected teachers were trained to use a system that regularly updated COVID-19 data and information from the schools. These innovative approaches helped ensure continued learning during the pandemic.

Back-to-school campaigns: Organizations such as Save the Children supplemented the government's efforts to sensitize communities on the need to send their children back to school. Mother groups, which typically consisted of 10 women, acted as a key resource and liaison between schools, homes and communities. These groups worked closely with schools and the MoE to provide support in ways that would enhance the chances of success for learners, especially girls, in their education (ACT, 2017). Mother groups encouraged parents to send their children back to school. They would also sometimes follow up with schoolgirls who had gotten married to return to school. These organizations and communities leveraged their existing networks and relationships, ultimately increasing the uptake of the efforts in the various communities. This quote from a program implementer shows how existing relationships helped in the development of a communal spirit and encouraged students to return to school.

> "We also implemented a program last year, 2021, which was more like attracting children back to school. We did it within the framework of what we called the '*safe back-to-school'* campaign. It was also a global Save the Children campaign, and we were part of it, within this safe back-to-school campaign. Our focus was making sure that we identify learners who are having problems returning to school or have returned to school but are lagging." [KII-16-Malawi]

Stakeholder engagement on school re-opening: Before schools re-opened in Malawi, the ministry conducted sensitization sessions in all the educational districts, reaching out to key stakeholders at district and school levels on how to contain the spread of the virus and ensure that all teachers and learners would be safe once they returned to school. Multiple stakeholders, led by the Ministry of Education, collaborated to support the school re-opening efforts. The ministry with funding from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Department of Disaster Management (DODMA), and other development partners, constructed 383 low-cost classroom blocks to enable decongestion and accommodate learners. Organizations such as UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP), and Red Cross procured tents to serve as classrooms. These collaborative efforts contributed to the saving of time and resources.

Malawi succeeded in responding to the pandemic due to the support provided by DODMA, its development partners, and strong coordination between the MoE, the Ministry of Health, and various stakeholders. With this coordination and support, the Ministry of Education was able to implement policies and practices that helped contain the spread of the virus in schools. Different ministries drew various lessons from the different initiatives implemented. Some of the lessons learned include the need for timely information sharing, strategic coordination of partners, efficient management of resources in response to emergencies, and establishment of structures for remote learning. These lessons will contribute to the development of effective strategies in response to future pandemics. Some of the sentiments about inter-ministry coordination from the Department of Basic Education are captured below.

> "We have never seen this type of coordination before where different Ministries would come together and work together like nobody's business in an effort to ensure teachers and children were safe in schools. We could rely on each other and call each other even at midnight to make sure that the situation was calm in schools. The Ministry of Health designated health personnel to be visiting schools on a regular basis to monitor the situation". [KII-1-Malawi]

Similarly, according to a respondent in the teacher education and development department, COVID - 19 did not only enhance inter-ministerial coordination, but also effective coordination and communication among the various departments and directorates within the Ministry of Education itself.

> "It's not like a directorate responded on its own to the COVID-19 pandemic, we had what I can describe as Ministry of Education sector-wide approach largely coordinated by the directorate of planning. So, what happened is when COVID-19 hit during that period, I remember very clearly that almost for 2 weeks, every evening like literary every evening we had situation analysis meetings convened by the secretary for education. So, in that analysis meeting, what was happening was that every directorate was supposed to report. It was like central intelligence. So, every directorate reported the situation of COVID in their respective directorate as of that day. Yeah, so if you are from basic education, you are from secondary, from higher education, I am from teacher training perspective, everybody was feeding into the national intelligence system of what is happening across the country every day. So, the ministry was kept informed of the situation on the ground to base its decisions on. Such interface enhanced effective response to the issues before us for example, if we had a case, a student was sick at a certain boarding school or a lecturer was sick, or someone has died or whatever it was, then we could coordinate response in relevant structures for that particular point based on what was received that day." [KII-3-Malawi]

Challenges in implementing Malawi's school re-opening program:

The school re-opening program faced three sets of challenges: (i) Staggering of classes/shift system; (ii) The future of auxiliary teachers; and (iii) Out-of-school children.

Staggering classes and shift system: The staggering of classes was quickly abandoned largely because this practice limited teaching and learning time. Staggering classes resulted in additional classes for students which in turn required more teachers. The shortage of classrooms, as well as an inadequate number of teachers in most Malawian schools, rendered the staggering of classes untenable. The system also seemed complicated for young learners, especially those in rural areas, who could not understand it and would attend school on days they were not supposed to.

Auxiliary teachers: The future of auxiliary teachers remains uncertain as they were recruited on a contract basis and funds are no longer available to retain them in schools. Auxiliary teachers possess teaching qualifications but have not been employed by the government due to resource constraints, as one MoE official commented:

> "We are in a dilemma as far as auxiliary teachers are concerned. The system needs them as you know, there are shortages of teachers in the schools, but there is no money to support their continued stay in the schools." [KII-2-Malawi]

Out-of-school children: Despite the back-to-school campaigns and concerted efforts to encourage school re-opening, dropout rates increased in Malawi between February 2020 (before the first school closure) and March 2021 (after the second school re-opening). Dropout rates increased almost threefold (from 1.3% in the 2019-2020 academic year to 4.3% in 2021), based on integrated household data from the National Statistical Office and data collected from the same households. Data from the Education management Information System (EMIS) also shows an increase in dropout rates during the two academic years from 3.4% in 2019/2020 to 4.4% in 2020/2021 (Ministry of Education, 2010 - 2021). Evaluations of the back-to-school campaigns are currently unavailable, but arguably the situation could have been worse without these campaigns.

The high incidence of pregnancy and marriage during the first school closure, corroborates reports from both government and civil society organizations which pointed to alarming school dropout rates among girls due to pregnancy or marriage, particularly in rural areas (Mbewa, 2020). This quote from a program implementer lists the various factors that contributed to students not returning to school:

> "Social-economic status, poverty, level of education of parents and cultural issues were flagged out as having worsened the decisions of those children who never got back to school after the schools re-opened." [KII-16-Malawi]

Malawi deployed various school re-opening initiatives to ensure learning continuity. These initiatives highlight what worked well and the challenges encountered in implementation of back-to-school interventions, such as staggering of classes and increased dropout rates.

4.2. Overall learner well-being

The following section discusses overall well-being of learners, with a focus on three themes: (a) Nutrition in Mozambique, (b) Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Mali, and (c) Support for displaced persons in Burkina Faso, and Nigeria respectively.

Case 3: Nutrition/School feeding program

Mozambique

Country context:

Mozambique has a population of 31 million people. The country's Ministry of Education oversees basic education, and primary education is free and compulsory. The government has abolished school fees and provides direct support to schools as well as free textbooks at the primary level. The government has also made investments in classroom construction. The language of instruction is Portuguese. The education sector consistently received high budget allocations before the escalating conflict in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This case study focuses on Mozambique's school feeding program (PRONAE), implemented by the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH). The main implementer of the program was MINEDH with support from World Food Programme (WFP) and several NGOs – Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and Counterpart International. The arrangement provided US$ 40 million for school feeding in Mozambique from 2018 to 2021. The funds are dedicated to expanding PRONAE to a total of 150,000 students in all ten provinces in Mozambique (South-South Galaxy, n.d). As of 2021, PRONAE covered 10 schools in Cabo Delgado province, in the districts of Metuge, Chiúre and Namuno. With proper planning, meal distribution can be scaled to more students and schools across the country.

Overview of the school feeding program:

In this report we define well-being broadly to include physical and psychosocial dimensions, access to sexual and reproductive health services, and access to food and nutrition (ADEA, CIEFFA & APHRC, 2021). Access to nutrition is important for a learner's cognitive development and physical well-being.

Implementation of the National School Feeding Program (*Programa de Alimentação Escolar (PRONAE)/School Feeding Program*) started before the COVID-19 pandemic and continued once schools re-opened. The program's objective was to improve access to education by addressing the effects of food insecurity. PRONAE aims to motivate parents to enroll their children in schools and encourage them to continue with their education (Muchanga & Sambo, 2020). In January 2021, WFP provided technical support to members of MINEDH in the preparation and facilitation of Training of Trainers for School Managers from the provinces and districts. Those trainers then facilitated workshops with headmasters, school feeding managers and administration staff involved with the planning, management, accountability, and reporting in the new 192 schools of the National School Feeding Programme (PRONAE).

To alleviate the negative effects of school closures, the school feeding policy was updated so that families could continue receiving food. The PRONAE school feeding program was the main intervention, and this was bolstered by additional nutrition-related initiatives. In one of the southern provinces, NGOs adopted new strategies to reduce the dependency on supplied food. They met with school directors and decided to create a school farm to produce food locally. In partnership with the government, they defined strategies for the three months without school feeding. Parents were notified to go and receive food rations from the school, based on approved lists.

Important features of the PRONAE nutrition-related intervention in Mozambique:

Three key features of the PRONAE intervention stand out: (i) Policy changes to meet learners' nutritional needs, (ii) Strengthening of food production systems, and (iii) Stakeholder collaborations. These three features show that Mozambique implemented proactive approaches to promote learners' health through nutrition.

Meeting learners' nutritional needs during the COVID-19 pandemic: Food distribution was based on school enrolment ratios and done through the national government's devolved systems. Provincial education directorates, district education services, and school boards organized food distribution processes. Distribution was done in this manner to ensure that learners across the country receive the rations. Additionally, distributing food supplies at the local level helped to ensure accountability and increased the response rate. School menus were revised to enhance the nutritional value of meals by including more vegetables and fruits, as well as increasing meal portions to accommodate various family sizes. This was confirmed by a key informant who remarked:

> "The take-home ration was a good decision. It was very much appreciated." [KII-1-Mozambique]

Strengthening the food production system: Development partners collaborated with the government and provincial education directorates in Nampula, Inhambane, and Zambézia provinces in additional initiatives to ensure food availability. These initiatives adopted new strategies to reduce food dependency through implementation of sustainable measures that encouraged local communities to participate in efforts to boost food production and improve nutritional levels.

Some of the initiatives were the establishment of school farms to produce food locally and inexpensively, cultivation of vegetable gardens and poultry farming. Surplus produce was sold in the local markets, and the income generated was used to buy food that could not be produced locally. For instance, an NGO in northern Mozambique donated seeds to families for the schools' collective farms. The impacts of drought in Mozambique have forced many students to drop out of school. Therefore, 30% percent of the food produced from these farms was given to support the most vulnerable schoolchildren and increase retention in school. In addition, production was intensified, and vulnerable groups (orphans, girls, poor households) were prioritized to receive food assistance.

Stakeholder collaborations: The school feeding program is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) and various NGOs such as, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and Counterpart International. These initiatives demonstrate the positive impacts of coordinating collaboration between the government and development partners to promote learners' health. Additionally, local food production is an initiative that can promote sustainability and reduce Mozambique's dependence on food imports, strengthening food security.

Challenges in implementing nutrition-related interventions in Mozambique:

The PRONAE intervention faced three main challenges: (i) Limited coverage; (ii) Distribution delays; and (iii) Weak monitoring and evaluation system.

Limited coverage: The program's coverage is still very limited due to logistical challenges in procuring food supplies and funding availability. By 2022 the National School Feeding Program (PRONAE) covered 995 schools (7.65%) out of more than 13,000 schools, and 555,639 (7.8%) of 7,096,089 children enrolled in 2021.

Distribution delays: There were delays in food distribution because many school boards had not prepared lists of the students and parents who were eligible to participate in the program, delaying the delivery of meals. Furthermore, the availability and quality of food was interrupted by incidents of insecurity and conflict, as well as inconsistent weather patterns, which interfered with timely food distribution. The respondent below mentions the delays brought about by the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic and communication about it.

> **"**Schools were not well organized to rapidly provide lists of students for the take away ration distribution during the school closures. The first delay in food distribution was due to the expectation that the pandemic and the school closures would last only (a) few weeks. There were no specific (directions) on what to do. Decisions came about three months later, and some food (had) deteriorated in (the) meantime." [KII-2-Mozambique]

A weak monitoring and evaluation system: Inadequate human resources at various levels, poor coordination and weak multi-sectoral participation contributed to PRONAE's limited results and impacts (Mechanisms for monitoring and accountability are needed to control finances and prevent corruption and the mismanagement of resources around the procurement of food and non-food items from suppliers.

Case 4: Psychosocial support

Mali

Country context:

Mali is a low-income country in West Africa. Primary education lasts six years, and secondary education is split into two three-year cycles. School enrolment rates were low even before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic with 69% of primary school-age children enrolled in primary school, and 36% of secondary school-age students enrolled in secondary school (UNESCO Institute of Statistics). Mali has a long-term education and cultural plan, the Ten-Year Education and Culture Program, which is in its second phase (2018-2028) and has a dedicated focus on building the resilience of the education system. The ten-year program also has a response plan to strengthen education continuity. In addition, Mali has implemented programs to provide psychosocial support, counseling, and mental health support to both learners and teachers. For instance, the Girls Leadership and Empowerment through Education (GLEE) initiative, builds on other programs to support and leverage efforts by the Government of Mali (GOM) and civil society to increase educational opportunities for girls both during

and after. The project, Justice, Prevention and Reconciliation for Women, Minors and Others Affected by the Crisis in Mali, focuses on increasing access to justice for people affected by gender-based violence. The project addresses the root causes of gender-based violence by engaging multiple actors in different ways and works to ensure that peoples' rights are respected.

Overview of interventions:

Existing programs provided launch pads for responding to the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Mali, the development partner, USAID worked in conjunction with the government to support learners with psychosocial support. This partnership continued during the pandemic with some adaptations that included provision of shelter for displaced persons, distribution of masks and teacher training.

Psychosocial support provides individuals with the emotional care and soft skills that promote their overall well-being. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Government of Mali facilitated social welfare measures through the education system and the Department of Social Development and Solidarity-based Economy. The government provided psychosocial support mechanisms which included: community mobilization; participatory capacity building implemented through refined training-of-trainer models which enabled local trainers to train participants on providing emotional support using a hands-on approach; mentorship and peer learning through recruitment and training of GLEE mentors and Youth Ambassadors (YAs) to serve as role models, peer educators and student advocates. The GLEE project is a USAID-funded initiative that has been running for three years (2018-2023). It builds on other programs to support and leverage the efforts of the Government of Mali (GoM) to boost gender-based awareness, increase reporting pathways and empower girls. Students were sensitized and trained on SGBV, reporting systems, and codes of conduct. For example, GLEE developed a harmonized code of conduct with other implementing partners in Mali who are working in the education sector. The objective of this code was to put all programming efforts together and obtain validation at the local and national level. The reporting mechanism is intended to show the reporting system for SGBV cases and where (the different administrative levels) to refer victims once they have initiated contact.

Additionally, through GLEE, relevant teaching and learning materials (such as visual aids, maps, blackboards and quick reference guides for teachers) were provided to schoolteachers and administrators to enhance teaching of psychosocial issues in schools. Supplies to GLEE mentors for use in study groups, as well as Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) information material was provided to health workers and YAs. The government also conducted psychosocial awareness-raising through media campaigns that sought to destigmatize seeking support for mental health and provided financial support to the population through training and distribution of posters, protection kits and food. Further, the Department for the Promotion of Women directed SGBV victims to counseling centers supported by partners including USAID, Norwegian Refugee Council. School heads ensured that the measures decreed by the government to contain the pandemic were respected without compromising the psychosocial needs of learners. NGOs such as Group d'Animation Action au Sahel (GAAS) Mali trained teachers in psychosocial support through the GLEE project, so that they could provide first aid before specialists arrived.

The Government of Mali also provided social welfare support to vulnerable populations, specifically girls and women who were victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

Important features of the GLEE intervention in improving overall learner well-being in Mali:

Three key features of GLEE which focused on enhancing overall well-being of learners through psychosocial support were: (i) Community awareness, (ii) Opportunities for social support, and (iii) Collaboration among stakeholders. These features highlight the government's proactive efforts to curb SGBV and promote overall learner well-being.

Community awareness: GLEE focused on raising awareness about SGBV as a critical first step in addressing and reducing incidences of violence. The Government of Mali and development partners such as USAID, integrated GLEE with other educational initiatives that raise awareness about SGBV and equip girls with informational resources. This approach helped provide a rapid and continuous integrated response in education, protection, mental health and psychosocial support for children in emergencies.

To promote community awareness, the GLEE program targets six school districts (Centres d'Animation Pédagogique or CAPs): Bandiagara, Douentza, and Bankass in Mopti region and Rive Droite, Rive Gauche and Kéniéba in Kayes region. School-to-School International collaborated with EdIntersect and Malian research firm, CERIPS, to assess the project's approaches that are working well in each region, as well as the factors required for adolescent girls to access education and transition into formal schools.

In addition to the GLEE program, the Government of Mali provided training to teachers and school principals on psychosocial support for SGBV using a cascading approach, to increase sensitization within the communities. These initiatives worked to ensure comprehensive responses that addressed concurrent needs. For instance, in response to the general need for information on SGBV, messages were disseminated in the media to raise awareness among students and parents. This integrated approach is described below by different stakeholders:

> "Massive training of teachers in psychosocial (support), vaccination, cascading training (central, decentralized, local level), awareness-raising through focus group media, talks, debates, local radios." [KII-1-Mali]

> "For psychosocial support, awareness and information campaigns have been organized in ministerial departments, leisure spaces, school spaces and this through advertisements, sketches, debates in the media. Regarding protection against sexual violence and GBV, there are awareness campaigns through radio and television broadcasts. Model lessons have been given in classrooms to raise awareness among teenagers. School authorities have sent circular letters to schools to draw teachers' attention to the risks of aggravation of GBV during this pandemic. Parents have been made aware by the media (radio, TV, social networks) so that they are more vigilant with regard to vulnerable children." [KII-2-Mali]

> "Students were made aware and received training on GBV, whistleblowing systems and codes of conduct to follow." [KII-5-Mali]

Opportunities for social support: GLEE had the benefit of being anchored in other social support resources in the country. For instance, the government established psychosocial support mechanisms linked to the pandemic and offered protection for the most vulnerable groups with

provision of education and training. Girls in the GLEE program had opportunities to access psychosocial care centers which offered emotional support to SGBV victims. The centers supported the sustainable economic and social development of women and young people through promotion of social entrepreneurship. The centers also worked on strengthening the case management system for survivors of violence, including girls.

The different opportunities and interventions addressing sexual and gender-based violence are discussed in these remarks from multiple stakeholders:

> "To facilitate the general well-being, our leaders have alleviated the suffering of the populations by lowering the price of electricity for low-income households, in addition to the subsidies granted to traders. Exemptions were also granted to many traders." [KII-2-Mali]

> "To facilitate the general well-being (nutritional and psychosocial support, protection from SGBV) of learners during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Mali has decided to give a lump sum to diminished families. These policies have been implemented (through) the census of these families through the district chiefs, the town halls, the village chiefs. [KII-4-Mali]

> "… the government through social safety nets granted a sum (of 90,000 Francs) to the poorest people as well as food (cereals, oil, sugar, milk, etc.)." [KII -2- Mali]

Collaboration among stakeholders: Mali's government collaborated with development partners and civil society organizations to ensure delivery of GLEE-related services. These development partners include UNICEF, WHO, and NGOs as described below:

> "There were partnerships between civil society organizations and UNICEF which strengthened protection services, including psychosocial support and alternative care for children affected by COVID-19." [KII-2-Mali]

> "The government informed the populations of the measures dictated by WHO/UNICEF through press releases disseminated in all the national languages retained in Mali." [KII-2-Mali]

> "There was the setting up of a committee for the support and defense of victims (SGBV) ... By listening to complainants and providing support through NGOs, the beneficiaries are women and often men." [KII-4-Mali]

> "To facilitate psychosocial support there was the creation of associations responsible for the protection of children. There is protection and support for social reconstruction by keeping contact with their peers and teachers which is both a preventive measure in case of potential gender-based domestic violence and helps to create a sense of social belonging during isolation. These practices are implemented through NGOs (funded by partners) who fight against GBV for the care of victims and the prosecution of the accused. The beneficiaries are underage girls, children and women sexually abused without their consent." [KII-4-Mali]

Challenges in implementing GLEE and other similar interventions that improve overall learner well-being in Mali:

The psychosocial interventions in Mali were marred by two key challenges: low community participation, and resource constraints. Initially, the interventions were delayed due to the reluctance from members of the public to explore the effects of the pandemic on SGBV and overall well-being for learners. Additionally, socio-cultural constraints and limited financial resources contributed to implementation delays. The few counseling centers were not sufficient to meet the existing needs. These different factors combined to slow down the spread of interventions, as noted here:

> "Only a few teachers have received this training (psychosocial support). These teachers were able to create a group on WhatsApp allowing an exchange between teachers (and) students." [KII-1-Mali]

> "Especially the lack of adequate means to meet the needs of the population, when we know that Mali is vast and is going through a multidimensional crisis." [KII-2-Mali]

> "The lack of preparation (in) the education sector, the fragility of the education sector is aggravated, the weak infrastructures (including poor internet connectivity), lack of teacher training on education in emergencies. Our country has done its utmost to meet these challenges by organizing distance courses … and by providing vulnerable student populations with radios equipped with USB keys with the educational program." [KII-4-Mali]

Case 5: Support for displaced persons

Burkina Faso

Country context:

Burkina Faso has a population of 20.9 million people. The Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy oversees primary education, literacy, and non-formal education. The Ministry of Social Affairs leads pre-primary education while secondary education, higher education, and scientific research fall under the Ministry of Secondary, and Higher Education, and Scientific Research. The primary school cycle lasts six years, the lower secondary lasts four years, and upper secondary lasts three years. French is the language of instruction in Burkina Faso. The academic calendar begins in October and ends in July. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in disruptions and school closures. Additionally, Burkina Faso has been experiencing increased conflict and insecurity.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than a quarter of the world's 33 million migrants and displaced people lived in SSA, where less than half of the refugee children were enrolled in school (UNHCR, 2020a; You et al., 2020). Burkina Faso has a large population of internally displaced persons. In Burkina Faso, 1,761,915 people are displaced, 2,600,000 children are in need and 163,000 women are malnourished (UNHCR, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the negative impacts of crises from war and famine on children's well-being and access to education and protective services.

Overview of the intervention to support displaced persons in Burkina Faso:

This case study focuses on understanding how the government provided support to displaced persons, including schoolchildren. It examines responses and practices implemented by the government to support the large population of internally displaced persons.

The interventions included development of piloting tools, mobilization of financial resources from technical and financial partners (TFPs) and stakeholder engagement. A plan was developed for education during emergencies and capacity strengthening provided for the Technical Secretariat for Education in Emergencies. Additionally, there was also the development of a pandemic response plan, creation of specific mechanisms for Education in Emergencies, production and dissemination of content for distance-learning (educational radio and television programs) and an awareness center.

Important features of the intervention to support displaced persons in Burkina Faso:

Two key features of this intervention were: (i) Training on foundational learning and health behavior, *through stakeholder collaboration*, and (ii) Technological innovations to support learning. These features demonstrate the concerted efforts by government and development partners to provide education and resources to support learners in internally displaced camps.

Training on foundational learning and health behavior for displaced persons: Collaboration among stakeholders was key in providing support to displaced persons in Burkina Faso. NGOs such as Creative Associates and the Civil Service Organizations (CSOs) facilitated support programs that provided a conducive environment for foundational learning activities within the IDP camps. The support programs included provision of shelter and life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable, such as children and SGBV survivors. Training on foundational learning focused on numeracy, literacy, and health-related skills. This ensured that learners who were out of school in the IDP camps had opportunities to return to school and also gain skills that they could use to earn a living and improve their lives. The support also included equipping teachers with the skills to respond to learners' strengths and needs. In addition, parents received training to help their children cope with life within the IDP camps.

To promote foundational learning in the IDP camps, 40,000 yearbooks were developed and distributed among the students. This was in addition to the purchase of radios and television sets as well as the distribution of sanitary kits (soap, masks, and toilet paper) among the students.

> "There was the distribution of radios to households with learners to enable them to follow lessons that were broadcast from the radio stations remotely. There was a boomer radio that was on and available in centers. At the time of the broadcast of the lessons, the learners gathered around the boomer radio to listen to the teaching broadcast." [KII-6-Burkina Faso]

Refugees and host community teachers were recruited to teach the children during the lockdown. Special foundational learning classes were also organized for children in the lower grades.

Technological innovations to support learning for displaced persons: Use of solar panels addressed constraints around limited access to electricity and the internet, increasing learning opportunities for vulnerable students.

> “The ministry made solar panels especially available to displaced students so that they could follow lessons. This is because generally when they arrived at school, they lacked adequate conditions. They were mainly from the outskirts, which are not well-lit. This is why we distributed solar panels so that they could work independently at home.’ [KII-4-Burkina Faso]

Challenges in implementing interventions to support displaced persons in Burkina Faso:

The support for internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso was limited by financial and human resource constraints. Limited financial, technical, material, institutional and human resources made access to education and other services more difficult. Use of alternative educational approaches such as radio and television have not eliminated the need for face-to-face learning as they often have limited reach or exclude vulnerable populations. These alternative approaches have proven ineffective in improving or maintaining school performance as examination success rates have been declining. According to the MILO study, in Burkina Faso, there was a significant increase in the proportion of students at the end of primary school who met the minimum proficiency levels in mathematics, rising from 18% in 2019 (before Covid-19) to 24% in 2021, during COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2022). It is unclear if this information includes vulnerable populations.

> “There were distance lessons via TV and radio… Though a large portion of the society could not follow because they had no means even to access radio, the network coverage could not encompass the whole region.” [KII-5-Burkina Faso]

From the beginning, the lack of communication and stakeholder sensitization (e.g., teachers and parent-teacher associations) contributed to limited support for displaced people. Additionally, the support was not differentiated by gender and the psychosocial needs of this population. Support was also characterized by an insufficient focus on the most vulnerable segments of those displaced.

Nigeria

Country context:

Nigeria is a lower middle-income country located in West Africa with an estimated population of 217,376,000 people. There are more than 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria and English is the official language. Local languages are the medium of instruction during the early schooling years. The Federal Ministry of Education oversees the country’s education system which consists of one year of pre-primary, six years of primary, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary, and a minimum of four years of tertiary education (1-6-3-3-4). The academic year starts in September and ends in July. Education is compulsory for all children aged 6 to 15 years. In 2019, the gross enrolment rate was 68.3% for primary schools and 54.4% for secondary schools. COVID-19 lockdown measures negatively impacted children's school attendance across Nigeria, increasing with the learner’s age, gender and socio-economic status (Dessy et al., 2021). Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria struggled with a humanitarian crisis caused by the persistent conflict and violence in Northern Nigeria. The militant group, Boko Haram, has killed thousands of people as well as abducted thousands of women and children. About 2.5 million people have been displaced by this conflict. Between 2005 and 2021, over 8,000 people lost their lives in clashes between farmers and herders across Nigeria, with hundreds of thousands also displaced. Approximately 60% of internally displaced persons in Nigeria are children living in camps. These children are vulnerable to

abuse, violence, and malnutrition. They also lack access to education, healthcare, and a safe environment, among other basic amenities. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis among the internally displaced in Nigeria.

Overview of the intervention to support displaced persons in Nigeria:

Support to displaced persons in Nigeria was provided by various actors. UNICEF in collaboration with other donors and development partners including Germany, Switzerland, Japan, Sweden, Canada, the European Union, the United States, the United Kingdom, the Central Emergency Response Fund, and the National Committee of the UNICEF collaborated with the Federal Government of Nigeria in providing support to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in various locations across Nigeria. This support came as a package consisting of several elements including food and resource distribution, dissemination of information and improved access to education for an estimated 149,235 conflict-affected children. The initiative also included provision of teaching and learning materials, essential supplies, school supplies, early childhood development kits, TaRL and recreation kits. Support activities were concentrated in Borno and Yobe States and included teacher training in psychosocial support. Teachers, including the volunteers among them, were trained in Kanuri Arithmetic and Reading Interventions to support children among the displaced communities. School-based management committee members were trained on preparation of school improvement and development plans, emergency preparedness as well as conflict and disaster risk reduction.

Plan International provided elements that targeted education and child protection, as well as the mainstreaming of gender equality in alternative schooling activities within Borno State. They also set up protective learning centers that offered children counseling support. Key activities included provision and facilitation of an inclusive education approach within the learning centers, support for learners to catch up with homework or remedial classes, and food distribution to more than 56,000 families.

The NGOs, Education Above All (EAA) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), collaborated to improve access to quality primary education for out-of-school children affected by the crisis in Nigeria's conflict-affected regions. They also received funding from the Qatar Fund for Development. The IRC project, Educate A Child, sought to increase student enrolment and attendance rates among vulnerable populations such as returnees who were formerly displaced, those who were currently displaced, and others. The project, which has been implemented over two years, seeks to provide learning opportunities to 20,000 children, with the ultimate goal of transitioning them into mainstream schools. Project implementation activities include ensuring that non-formal learning centers are safe and functional, have secure school routes, and that parents can afford regular school attendance for their children. Through localized, contextually relevant content for learners, the initiative also makes education more accessible by supporting the use of culturally relevant content and pedagogy for learners. These alternative schooling options allow out-of-school children to continue learning and developing core skills.

Important features of the intervention to support displaced persons in Nigeria:

Five key features of the intervention were: (i) Strong partnerships to enhance joint and coordinated responses, (ii) Formation of education clusters within refugee communities, and (iii) Foundational learning (literacy and numeracy), (iv) Teacher recruitment from the refugee communities, and (v) Financial relief through cash transfers. These five features show the concerted efforts by government and development partners to provide education and resources to support learners in IDP camps.

Strong partnerships to enhance joint and coordinated responses: The Federal Government of Nigeria collaborated with development partners to extend support to internally displaced persons. One of the avenues for collaboration was the development of clusters which provided a mechanism for coordinating responses in the IDP camps.

Formation of education clusters with refugee communities: There were various new interventions put in place by the government to promote learning. Development partners also set up education clusters within the refugee/IDP settlements. Teachers were recruited from the refugee and host communities to provide instruction to children during the lockdown and special classes were organized for children in the early grades. Collaboration likely contributed to widening the reach of interventions to benefit a larger proportion of learners in IDP camps. The comments below explain the working of the clusters:

> "The organization set up education clusters within the refugee/IDP settlements. Teachers among the refugees and host community population were recruited to teach Mathematics, English, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Economics, Commerce, and Geography. Students were given number codes to access various classes." [KII-2-Nigeria]

> "We were unable to establish a functional training system with the IDPs, but there was the provision of mobile training on numeracy and literacy for them so that they wouldn't be left out of training and the teachers in the IDP camps were retrained, but we could not go far because of the lockdown." [KII-11-Nigeria]

The comments below highlight the opportunities for training and capacity development provided to teachers and parents. Training covered numeracy and literacy as well as basic safety procedures such as hand-washing and social distancing. However, the large number of children (over 600) made delivery of the intervention difficult. Parents of the children in IDP camps were also educated on the dangers of COVID-19. The Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) program was introduced among the displaced children in the Northeastern states of Nigeria and teachers received training on how to facilitate the program. These capacity-building efforts were jointly anchored by the State Universal Basic Education Board and education ministries at the state level. The quotes below from a ministry official capture the various aspects of the intervention.

> "Regarding learning, we had an intervention for the displaced persons in the Northeastern in collaboration with Creative Associates Nigeria before and after the lockdown. Learners in IDP camps that were out of school/unable to continue with their education were identified and categorized into adolescents and youths and provided with income-generating activities that they could use to sustain themselves in the communities they found themselves. For those within school age but not in school, we had an intervention with them for nine months, and they were taught numeracy and literacy learning." [KII-5-Nigeria]

> "We organized a home learning program for 316,000 students in 638 communities. We had numeracy and literacy training online on how teachers can develop resources since they were finding it difficult to get resource materials for teaching." [KII-5-Nigeria]

Foundational learning (literacy and numeracy): The Federal Ministry of Education developed an e-learning site called INSPIRED which has about 15,000 videos for learners. The ministry also

developed a site for teachers called IGNITE which contains lesson plans for teachers on all topics across all levels. For the rural communities and IDP camps, most of the interventions put in place for continuous education during and after the lockdown were essentially on basic numeracy and literacy using radio programs and mobile learning. However, only a few IDP camps received interventions and many of them were completely left out. While basic skills are foundational and necessary, focusing on them solely limits the potential for students to develop higher-order thinking skills. A rigorous curriculum and teacher training in different content areas is therefore needed to facilitate richer learning. This focus on basic skills learning is noted below by multiple stakeholders:

> "We worked with about 100 Community Educational Volunteers in the communities who have the minimum of NCE qualification to teach in primary schools and were engaged in teaching the learners on Basic Numeracy and Literacy… and the intervention also captured out-of-school children." [KII-7-Nigeria]

> "… (An) alternate home and community-based learning program was put in place for the children who were at home and unable to have access to learning… and radio programs were used for remote learning." [KII-6-Nigeria]

> "Mobile educational support was given to the IDP camps and also to the orphanage homes, and learning materials were also given." [KII-11-Nigeria]

Teacher recruitment from refugee communities: During the lockdown, teachers were recruited from the refugee and host communities to instruct schoolchildren in refugee and IDP camps. Special classes were organized for kindergarten, mid-primary, and primary six children. A program implementer explains more about the innovative approaches used to provide students with educational opportunities:

> "The organization worked with the Federal Ministry of Education to draw up an education response plan so that learning can continue even though students were out of school. The education response plan focused on remote learning for the children within the community. We had an Alternate Home and Community-based Learning Program that was also put in place for the children who were at home and unable to have access to learning. The radio program that was used for remote learning and catch-up program/remedial program was organized on numeracy and literacy learning." [KII-7-Nigeria]

> "We partnered with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to provide educational interventions at the IDP camps in the border towns in Adamawa State. We brought in different methods of teaching that teachers can use to engage students, and this showed significant improvement among the students. We developed a structure with School-Based Management Committees in all the local government areas where we had the interventions. We looked at that as something we can leave behind and even at our exit, they can continue to use it." [KII-7-Nigeria]

Financial relief through cash transfers: Development partners supported learning in IDP camps through cash transfers that provided learners with financial resources to meet some of their needs. Cash transfers were introduced because of the high poverty levels. Addressing poverty also has trickle-down effects such as reducing the incidence of violence.

> "We established and strengthened the School-Based Management Committees at different IDP Camps. We had a household support program called cash transfer where 200,000 naira cash was transferred to each household three times in the IDP camps. We organized a home learning program for 316,000 students in 638 communities. We had numeracy and literacy training online on how teachers can develop resources since they were finding it difficult to get resource materials for teaching." [KII-5-Nigeria]

Challenges in implementing interventions to support displaced persons in Nigeria:

Four main challenges and barriers contributed to inadequate service delivery: (i) Under-developed infrastructure; (ii) Multiple crises and inadequate access to distance-learning approaches among vulnerable children; (iii) Difficulties in accessing children in conflict-afflicted areas and little attention given to IDPs by the federal government; and (iv) Poor communication among (within) collaborators.

Underdeveloped infrastructure. Vulnerable people in rural communities and from low-income households, children with disabilities, and learners in IDP camps experienced the largest learning setbacks due to limited access to distance-learning solutions. While evaluating the impact of radio and TV learning as well as other distance-learning solutions was difficult, education outcomes for vulnerable populations worsened during the pandemic.

> "The inability of some rural communities to access online learning such as the radio and television programs were (related) to internet access and poor power supply. It further expanded the gaps between the rich and the poor, those that could afford digital learning and those that could not." [KII-14-Nigeria]

Co-existing crises. The COVID-19 pandemic was one among several crises in Nigeria. Conflicts in some parts of the country made it difficult for learners to receive any support and learners there were at risk of being left further behind. Additionally, there was an increase in crime rates and incidence of SGBV in the IDP camps, which resulted in learners dropping out of school and girls being pushed into early marriages. There were also heightened levels of mental health challenges.

> "Many schools have closed (and) students displaced and that is why we have some of them in the IDP camps. You see. So, when it comes to implementing these policies, it becomes difficult because some of them have been displaced and (are) not even in IDP camps." [KII-14-Nigeria]

> "In fact, that is one of the biggest challenges we have always confronted in IDP camps. In response to the SGBV, sexual-based violence does occur. That abuse has always occurred again and again and again. Children are being abused. There was a case of a child that was discovered to be pregnant, and it was raising an issue. But we now discovered that it was not in the camp that the girl was actually molested sexually." [KII-11-Nigeria]

Exclusion from national priorities. The federal government did not specifically focus on IDPs when schools closed during the lockdown. Instead, the government focused on the general learning situation in the states and the nation as a whole. Interventions such as distance-learning solutions (radio and TV programs) as well as health and safety measures were implemented by development partners and CSOs. These interventions did not reach all learners across the country although some education stakeholders (e.g., UNICEF, UNESCO, VSO, DOMA Foundation, UNHCR, and LifeAnchor

International Development Foundation), implemented specific new interventions for the IDPs, rural communities and the less privileged, including those in some major cities. The limited support from the federal government was likely due to neglect and oversight, as IDPs are viewed as being the responsibility of state governments and non-state actors.

> "Nothing we did targeted the IDPs. IDPs are not the direct responsibility of the Federal Government, they are (the) state government's problem… nonetheless, some NGOs and CSOs tried reaching them." [KII-1-Nigeria]

Weak systems and networks. The stakeholder collaboration, though it had its successes (as mentioned earlier), experienced some challenges. For example, some of the CSOs were unaware about the interventions put in place by the government to address cases of SGBV in the camps and the rural communities where there is a high prevalence of gender-based violence. This communication breakdown led to frustration and delays in service delivery as noted here:

> "The programs put in place are not making an impact because the system keeps breaking down, the exchange rate keeps going up… we are in a country where the smartest ideas are not flying… I am unaware of many programs targeted at GBV intervention, although a few cases were reported… We had our intervention on social media on early warning and appropriate early response." [KII-9-Nigeria]

> "As I mentioned earlier, (we had) no distance-learning approaches, but we tried to use some approaches like educating the children about sexual abuse, sex education, and gender-based violence through counseling and what to do when faced with such situations. Those who are victims are already subjected to counseling. We created awareness of sexual and gender-based violence and encouraged them to report to the organization when faced with such issues. The organization will take it up from there. However, no psychosocial support has been given." [KII-15-Nigeria]

> "… (Recently), we encountered a situation of a 15-year-old girl who was pregnant and attempted abortion and almost died. However, as an organization, we only reported the case to social welfare in the state, and the child was rushed to Benue State University hospital." [KII-15-Nigeria]

> "Psychosocial support programs are given more to those at the IDP camps. In my organization, we had a robust counseling service for IDPs. There are cases of SGBV in the camps. Where there is an established case of GBV, agencies manage the situation outside the camp, but if it is a case in the camp, being a very dicey situation, it is handled with much caution." [KII-11-Nigeria]

5 Discussion and Lessons Learned

Education systems exist in an ecosystem with multiple layers and actors. During emergencies, robust infrastructures are required, beyond physical structures, to develop resilient education systems (Srivastava, et al. 2020). Infrastructures may include digital networks, reliable data collection and monitoring systems as well as strong partnerships. Additionally, contextual drivers are critical in facilitating the delivery of appropriate interventions (Burde et al. 2015). In the context of education in emergencies, such drivers include teacher training, nutritional well-being of learners, robust data collection systems, safe and protective learning environments, psychosocial support, capacity building and enabling environments (e.g., legislation, accountability) (Nicolai, 2003). Education during emergencies such as pandemics is critical to ensure learning continuity. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, learning came to a halt globally, including in GPE countries, as learners were forced out of schools and key support systems were cut-off. Extended school closures prevented many students from accessing learning facilities, school-led-nutritional support, and child protective services (African Union, 2021; UNESCO, 2020a; UNICEF, 2020a). This situation negatively affected learners' overall wellbeing and increased the magnitude of learning poverty, especially for learners from vulnerable populations (e.g., displaced populations, learners from low socio-economic populations, learners with special needs) (ADEA et al., 2021b).The case studies in this report highlight practices and policies that seven countries in Africa undertook in response to the disruption, the extent to which governments were involved in mobilizing support, implementing interventions and disseminating information, as well as whether the interventions included support for vulnerable populations.

Responding to COVID-19 related disruptions

Professional development frameworks for teachers were unprepared for the massive disruptions that the pandemic would introduce to their regular practices, such as in-person and school-based teacher training. This was as result of haphazard or minimal investment in crisis preparedness. As learning during the pandemic pivoted to spaces outside the brick-and-mortar classrooms, teacher support, and professional development initiatives were implemented to equip teachers with the necessary skills to enable them to continue instructing students using alternative approaches and tools. These tools included technologies such as laptops and tablets, as well as platforms such as Google Classrooms and Zoom. Multiple education agencies collaborated to develop and deliver teacher training initiatives. Kenya's Teacher Professional Development (TPD) program is an example of a multi-agency collaboration where different institutions shared a common vision and targeted outcomes in providing online training for mathematics and science teachers. This program equipped teachers with essential 21st century skills such as digital literacy. The TPD program in Kenya differed from Niger's teacher training initiatives which focused on Teaching at the Right Level, providing students with remedial programs and learner-centered initiatives. These efforts in Kenya and Niger demonstrate coordinated efforts in designing innovative teacher training programs in response to the COVID-19 disruptions (ADEA, CIEFFA, & APHRC, 2022; Ngware & Ochieng, 2021).

Our findings also showed various innovations related to teacher training interventions. These interventions provided teachers with access to and practical experience in using online platforms such as Google Classrooms. They also helped teachers develop relevant skillsets for learning technologies (e.g., laptops, tablets) to support learners once schools re-opened. Some contextual drivers that facilitated these initiatives include a cascading training framework that widened the scope, reach and

consistency of the teacher training. For instance, some of the training was provided using virtual conferencing platforms which maximized the available time and increased the likelihood of implementation delivery scale-up. These scale-up opportunities were made possible by the reduced travel time and wider reach afforded by the virtual technologies. Additionally, the cascading train-the-trainer approach using master teachers, helped teachers in different locations develop their capacity and expertise. It ensured wider coverage for the training within a short period, as teachers shared knowledge with their peers. The decentralized framework also alleviated the challenges related to disseminating expertise to multiple people. The programs in Kenya and Niger provided teacher training at a critical time when schools were forced to shut down. They demonstrated that teacher training can be done through regular professional development and communities of practice both physically and virtually. The interventions also highlighted areas of improvement, for example, teacher training initiatives in Niger showed the need for revision of training manuals to ensure that teachers receive up-to-date information. Uptake of the training on the alternative teaching approaches varied across primary and secondary levels in Kenya. Some teachers, especially those at the primary level, were reluctant to use learning technologies in teaching. These discrepancies show that logistical factors such as coordination, availability of resources, the number of trained teachers, and the quality of training manuals affected teacher training. In Niger, the use of School Management Committees (SMCs), which included school representatives, parents and local community members in developing action plans and providing students with learning remediation, promoted community involvement in children's education. Community involvement increases participation, ownership of initiatives and strengthens ties between home and school for mutual benefit of all involved.

On school re-opening, our findings showed that adherence to health guidelines was pivotal in ensuring the safe return of learners to schools. In Malawi, back-to-school campaigns encouraged learners to return to school after multiple school closures. The Government of Malawi implemented innovative approaches to ensure safe re-opening, such as staggering classes to allow for a smaller number of students at a time and using tents as improvised learning spaces. In addition, hiring auxiliary teachers alleviated the teacher shortage which arose because of the increased need for extra teachers to cater for reduced class sizes and changes to school schedules. However, data from Malawi shows decreased school enrolment as a large percentage of students remained out of school once schools re-opened. Students, especially girls, were pushed out of school for various reasons such as early marriages and pregnancies, as a result of gender norms and stereotypes about gender roles. Gender norms tend to prioritize boys' learning to that of girls and relegate girls to the home, keeping them out of educational opportunities. Other than girls, due to diminished finances, learners sought and engaged in economic activities in order to support themselves or their families. The lengthy school closures provided learners with opportunities to pursue outlets for their creativity or to seek income-generating activities as household incomes declined with pandemic-induced job losses. School closures exacerbated school dropout for all categories of learners, complicated school-re-entry and illuminated the need for teacher professional development to support learning continuity using education technologies (ADEA et al., 2021a; Coflan & Kaye, 2020).

Interventions focused on learner well-being addressed aspects of nutrition sufficiency, supporting internally displaced persons and providing psychosocial support to victims of gender-based violence. School feeding programs help meet a basic human need so that learners can access education. These programs are especially relevant in areas where drought forces learners out of school. Data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), indicates that COVID-19 heightened global threats to food security with Africa showing the highest levels of food insecurity. This was attributed to supply chain disruptions and rising levels of inequality, as well as nature-related factors such as drought (FAO et al.,

2020). Our case studies on enhancing overall well-being through nutrition described the deliberate efforts, including policy changes, made by the Government of Mozambique, to meet learners' nutritional needs and strengthen food production systems. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mozambique encountered the destruction caused by cyclones, droughts, floods and pests affecting millions of people (Arabadgi de Andrade, 2021). Mozambique's PRONAE school feeding program was introduced in 2013 with the two-pronged goal of boosting the economy by increasing local food purchases and reducing food insecurity (Milhorance, 2018). Leveraging such pre-pandemic frameworks for school meal provision was key in ensuring continued nutrition sufficiency, albeit for a smaller number of schoolchildren. To improve the school distribution process, the government can improve the administration and management to better respond to the PRONAE programme. MINEDH and partners in the PRONAE implementation are urged to analyze the gaps based on the last emergencies situations and create better mechanisms to support school councils on proper documentation processes, the school feeding activities and accountability to better respond to learners' nutrition needs.

Researchers have documented the focus on providing emergency support to displaced persons (Roelen et al., 2017; White & Sabarwal, 2014). The case studies detailed how the interventions for children in the IDP camps in Burkina Faso and Nigeria, included an academic component so learners received basic education in numeracy and literacy, which are critical skills for individuals to contribute to society. Teachers also received training on how to handle emergency situations and provide appropriate responses in terms of psychosocial support. Nigeria and Burkina Faso have both faced concurrent crises from conflict, war, and violence. The training was especially relevant for the two countries given the trauma, loss and grief from the multiple overlapping crises that coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. To minimize pandemic health risks, governments and development partners in both countries purchased and distributed sanitary kits (e.g., masks, soap, toilet paper, and hand-washing stations) in schools, provided education on hygiene and sanitation, and developed a module to raise awareness on COVID-19 in schools. Study participants highlighted that the most important lesson during this period was the ability to develop resilience in the face of challenges. In both Nigeria and Burkina Faso, the interventions demonstrated various levels of innovation. For example, use of solar panels enabled continued access to resources such as radio, television and the internet. Other interventions focused on training facilitators on foundational learning and health behavior, reflecting the interlinkages between education and health. The interventions also included innovative use of technology to support learning and the hiring of teachers from refugee and host communities. While many people in the IDP camps lost their livelihoods and sources of income (Ozer et al. 2022), the participants in Nigeria mentioned the provision of financial resources as one of the support mechanisms made available by the government and development partners. Interventions to provide psychosocial and mental health support for girls and women who were SGBV victims included social support, community awareness-raising and stakeholder collaboration. In Mali, the national government, USAID, UNICEF, and community leaders collaborated to create educational opportunities for girls and SGBV victims. These opportunities provided them with relevant skills, and economic empowerment which in turn enhanced their overall well-being.

Government involvement

Our findings demonstrated that governments, through their ministries of education and in collaboration with development partners, developed intentional and creative approaches to school re-opening to ensure learning continuity (ADEA et al., 2021c). Stakeholder engagement and government involvement in mobilizing support were key contextual drivers for school re-opening initiatives. In Niger, the Ministry of Education worked in collaboration with NGOs to provide teacher training on the

Teaching at the Right Level approach. In Kenya, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC), and the Centre for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in Africa (CEMASTEA), among other stakeholders involved in professional development for educators, collaborated to ensure that teachers received adequate training on effective instructional practices. In both Kenya and Niger, the education ministries and partner organizations supported the development and drafting of training manuals for capacity development of teachers.

In Mozambique, the National School Feeding Program (PRONAE), provided learners with a lifeline during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program's main objective is to ensure that students receive nutritious meals as an incentive for them to attend school and remain in school (Muchanga & Glória Sambo, 2020). The school feeding program benefits from multi-stakeholder collaboration, funding and implementation. As students could not access school meals because of school closures during the pandemic, Mozambique's Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) made a policy change that allowed delivery of food rations to people's homes. This enabled students to continue accessing meals and good nutrition. Additionally, changes in the school menu to increase food items including vegetables, was a positive step towards ensuring the consumption of healthy foods by students. In addition, development of school gardens provided sustainable approaches to food security through local production.

Children, especially those who are most vulnerable, need a nutritious and balanced diet. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the governments of Burkina Faso and Nigeria in conjunction with development partners had put in place various interventions within the refugee camps to provide displaced persons with basic resources. One similarity observed in both Burkina Faso and Nigeria was the collaboration between the governments and development partners in providing support to displaced persons. This collaboration ensured that teachers in IDP camps received adequate resources for their safety and helped them adhere to health guidelines. Teachers in Burkina Faso and Nigeria received training on how to provide students with basic education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments introduced policy changes to ensure that learners' nutritional needs were met, and food production systems were strengthened, for instance, through development of food gardens.

Stakeholder collaboration was a key contextual driver in ensuring coordination of activities, distribution of resources and delivery of services. Collaboration reduced redundancy and increased efficiency as the different institutions shared a common vision and targeted outcomes. In Mali, the government collaborated with development partners to implement interventions across the country while in Malawi, multiple stakeholders collaborated to provide services that ensured schools adhered to the Ministry of Health guidelines for decongesting classrooms. This was achieved by hiring trained auxiliary teachers to meet the demand for additional instructors that emerged with the extra classrooms, incorporating staggered learning days, and improvising learning structures (e.g., using tents). Both Malawi and Mali engaged in building community awareness to support delivery of interventions. This was seen in Malawi's back-to-school campaigns and the promotion of SGBV resources in Mali.

Vulnerable student populations

A striking omission in all the cases was the omission of vulnerable populations in the design and implementation of interventions, particularly government-specific ones. This oversight contributed to the limited focus of the interventions on girls, students with special needs, displaced persons, and learners or teachers in low-income and marginalized areas. In both Burkina Faso and Nigeria, the

interventions did not focus on vulnerable populations, including students with disabilities, thereby widening the gap between these students and their peers without disabilities. One exception to this was in Burkina Faso where the respondents (e.g., support stakeholders) prioritized internally displaced persons (IDP) in areas such as the Central Nord region. Notably, the level of government involvement varied, as seen in the limited support for IDPs at Nigeria's federal level. Although Mozambique's school feeding program provided household meals to schoolchildren, its scope was limited and a large number of children was left out (Muchanga, & Sambo, 2020). These included children in hard-to-reach areas, rural areas, and those in IDP camps. Similarly, data on school re-opening efforts were not disaggregated, and so could not show the groups of students most affected by the school closures and still likely to be out of school.

Lessons learned

Based on these findings, we draw several lessons. African GPE countries **implemented various interventions** during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure learning continuity. Innovations such as the use of community learning centers, recorded lessons, and tech-based applications such as WhatsApp, provided alternatives for teachers to deliver instructional content away from regular school settings. Use of these alternatives contributed to continued access to learning opportunities among students. The tech-based options, when available, allowed for a wider reach in teaching, learning outcomes and service delivery. These initiatives were evident in Kenya and Niger through teacher training initiatives. Due to inadequate infrastructure, and distance, remote learning opportunities were inaccessible to the majority student populations particularly in Africa (Coflan & Kaye, 2020; Major & Francis, 2020; Ngware & Ochieng, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic presented health challenges which had negative effects on the wellbeing of teachers and learners. **Teachers' access to psychosocial support** was critical in ensuring continuity of learning as they received training on various coping strategies and shared them with their learners. Specifically in Mali, teachers were trained on ways to provide students with emotional support upon returning to school.

A key contextual driver that facilitated the success of the various interventions was needed **collaboration among various stakeholders** (e.g., state and non-state actors, private and public sectors). The multi-stakeholder collaborations also included parents and community members to ensure timely and effective intervention delivery. This local involvement strengthened mobilization and implementation as there was enhanced communication at the local level.

Innovation was another contextual driver. For instance, in Kenya, teacher training programs adapted a cascading train-the-trainer model to maximize resources. In Burkina Faso and Nigeria, some refugee camps turned to the use of solar panels to address the effects of limited resources including electricity. In some instances, like in Kenya, the private sector subsidized internet fees to improve accessibility to online teaching and learning resources. Local alternatives also provided solutions to the pandemic-induced challenges. For instance, school gardens contributed to food production to address the over-reliance on imported foods.

Countries **prioritized community safety and instituted measures** to ensure adherence to health guidelines. In most countries, the pandemic further limited the little support provided to vulnerable student populations. This was because interventions either overlooked or were not ready to address the needs of vulnerable student populations.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic had a mix of positive and negative impacts on education. One positive impact was increased sensitization on health and hygiene practices and the revamping of learning technologies to ensure educational continuity. Online teacher training programs supported teachers in acquiring the skills needed to incorporate alternative teaching approaches. Government efforts to implement initiatives and disseminate information were a key contextual driver in ensuring the overall success of interventions. These efforts were bolstered by partnerships with development and community partners that facilitated scale-up and efficiency in service delivery. Back-to-school campaigns increased awareness about school re-opening, despite decreased enrolments. Provision of household meals gave learners access to nutrition during school closures, ensuring their well-being. Governments and development partners provided psychosocial and mental health support in the internally displaced camps, along with basic education training in numeracy and literacy. Lastly, some interventions that existed before the pandemic (e.g., PRONAE, the National School Feeding Program in Mozambique) were instrumental during the pandemic and offered a foundation for recovery efforts. Several countries shared similar crises-related challenges besides the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria faced insecurity due to terrorism and conflicts that led to the displacement of millions of people, both internally and externally. Such existing challenges complicated timely responses to the pandemic as resources were strained by multiple, overlapping crises.

In summary, various interventions were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic in response to the disruptions in the education sector to ensure learning continuity. Innovations included the use of community learning centers, recorded lessons and technology-based applications such as WhatsApp. Possible contextual drivers that facilitated the success of the various interventions include access to psychosocial support for learners and teachers, collaboration among various stakeholders (e.g., state and non-state actors, private and public sectors), teacher training using a cascading train-the-trainer model and subsidized internet fees. Governments in the different case study countries collaborated with development partners and local community members to ensure effective and timely delivery of interventions. On learning outcomes, the Monitoring Impacts on Learning Outcomes (MILO) study by UNESCO shows little impact arising from the COVID-19 pandemic on the proportion of students in Kenya, Burkina Faso, Zambia, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire who met minimum proficiency levels in both reading and mathematics (UNESCO, 2022). Safety was prioritized and measures put in place to encourage adherence to the health guidelines. In most countries, the pandemic further strained the limited support provided to vulnerable populations. Interventions overlooked or were unprepared to respond to large populations and specifically, vulnerable student populations. However, in some countries, there were positive responses for students with disabilities. For instance, in Kenya, some schools serving with students with disabilities remained open during the COVID-19 school closures, to ensure that students were safe and protected. Overall, interventions that focused on gender-based violence focused on gender, while the bulk of the interventions overlooked vulnerable populations in their design and implementation. Additionally, future research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. Contextual drivers within the different countries included government efforts to develop and disseminate information to ensure the success and overall implementation of the interventions. These efforts were bolstered by partnerships with development and community

partners who facilitated scale-up efforts and efficiency in service delivery. The findings provide rich insights for GPE partner countries for developing action plans for crisis preparedness as wells as strengthening education systems for regular programming.

6.2. Recommendations

In the following section we propose policy recommendations for the two domains of education system operations and overall learner well-being.

Operations of the education system

Teacher training:

There was an emphasis on rethinking teaching and learning approaches to ensure learning continuity. In designing and developing new initiatives, stakeholders incorporated creative decentralized models to increase efficiency. Stakeholders collaborated in their efforts to provide teacher training and support, thereby increasing the scale of interventions and maximizing the use of available resources. However, these benefits were restricted to teachers and learners with internet access, and resources that facilitated use and engagement in online teacher professional development. Based on these findings, we provide the following recommendations for strengthening teacher training during emergencies and during periods of non-emergencies.

- **Action for online professional development:** Pre-pandemic professional development frameworks for teachers relied on in-person options and were largely unprepared for the disruptions. Moving forward, to increase the options and benefits of online teacher professional development, the government should liaise with the private sector to build and strengthen existing internet infrastructures. These structures would provide access to training opportunities in different settings (i.e., rural or arid areas, IDP camps).

- **Action for curriculum development for teacher professional development:** Our findings showed that there was a need to update the teacher training manuals. Therefore, it is imperative for stakeholders including teacher training institutions and education ministries to engage teachers in the development of teacher training programs at the earliest stage possible. This engagement provides stakeholders, including decision makers, with relevant information to inform policy development. Stakeholders should strengthen the online professional development curriculum for teachers to include training in different content areas. This training can be done using online and offline opportunities to build teachers' capacity in different content areas Most importantly, training should be focused on differentiated instruction for students learning at different levels to ensure all students access the curriculum.

- **Action for continuous learning:** Our findings did not provide information on monitoring and evaluation of the teacher training interventions which can provide important information on their effectiveness. Assessing the components (e.g., theory building, practical experience, leadership development) of the teacher training programs should be an ongoing practice, in order to evaluate the drivers of success and strengthen the programs. Education ministries in conjunction with teacher training institutions should collaborate to develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

School re-opening:

Our analysis surfaced evidence of collaboration and partnerships among various institutions in service delivery. Additionally, adherence to health guidelines was critical during the re-opening of schools to ensure learner and teacher safety. While some aspects of school re-opening initiatives went well, there were some shortcomings related to ensuring that students return to school. For instance, decongesting classrooms to ensure small class sizes was a challenge. The unavailability of clean water compromised hand-washing initiatives and prolonged school closures, contributing to decreased enrolment. We propose the following recommendations to sustain and build on the positive aspects and address the challenges around school re-opening.

- **Action for basic infrastructure:** In some areas, basic WASH facilities compromised the implementation of handwashing initiatives that were instrumental in back to school efforts. Therefore, governments should prioritize provision of basic resources and infrastructure including access to clean water. Where possible, boreholes can provide a potential source of water supply.

- **Action for retaining talent:** Decongestion of schools led to the need for more teachers which prompted hiring of auxiliary teachers as a solution. However, as the pandemic waned and the need for decongestion measures reduced, the government in Malawi could not retain the teachers. Auxiliary teachers who were contracted during the COVID-19 pandemic should be considered for hiring as permanent teachers to reduce the teacher-student ratio and enable the maintenance of low-class sizes. The government should work with the licensing bodies to develop a process that creates a pathway for auxiliary teachers without credentials to obtain them. Additionally, the government should liaise with ministries to create the funds needed to permanently employ the auxiliary teachers.

- **Action for lifelong learning:** Increase in financial responsibilities was one reason that kept learners away from re-entering school. To draw and motivate learners back to school, stakeholders (e.g., teachers, curriculum specialists) should consider incorporating job skills and school-to-work pathways in the curriculum to motivate students to return to school and also students' transition of to the world of work.

- **Action for community involvement:** Schools in Malawi worked closely with the community to encourage students' return to school. Beyond the pandemic period, governments can borrow and adapt initiatives such as turning to mother groups to serve as key liaisons between the home, school, and community, especially for girls pushed out of school.

Overall learner well-being

Nutrition:

The school feeding initiative funded and supported by multiple stakeholders ensured the delivery of household meals in Mozambique. However, this initiative only served a few students and more accurate data on parents and children was needed to make it more effective. Relatedly, our findings showed that the manual on the school feeding program was ready for dissemination. Based on these findings, we propose the following recommendations:

- **Action for data management:** There was a need to have accurate records for the meals distribution. Routinely, schools should update their records to accurately reflect information about

students and parents. This will enable a quicker response for distribution of meals. More accurate information will also help ensure that students are not left out of meal distribution during crises.

- **Action for local initiatives:** Reliance on food imports in Mozambique resulted in delays with distribution of school meals. Therefore, governments should provide incentives to schools that engage in developing school gardens. These incentives can include the provision of necessary equipment, seeds, and support with maintenance costs.

- **Action for economic empowerment:** High poverty levels contribute to disenfranchised learners and communities. Limited access to basic needs negatively impacts participation in learning. Governments in conjunction with development partners can provide a universal basic income or cash transfer program to equip families with financial resources to enable their access to basic needs or to meet school-related expenses.

- **Action for scaling up:** The school feeding programme was implemented on a small scale. To increase it is benefits to larger population of learners, understanding the components of the school feeding program that have worked well can help stakeholders to scale it up to larger populations. Governments through ministries of agriculture, development partners and local communities can identify key drivers of the program's success and enhance the reach of best practices in different contexts.

- **Action for innovative communication:** To further increase the visibility of the school feeding initiatives, stakeholders (e.g., government agencies and development partners) can use multiple platforms to disseminate information promptly.

Psychosocial support:

Interventions based on quality educational opportunities can provide an avenue for discussing the deleterious effects of SGBV and equip girls and boys with the necessary information and resources to empower themselves. Additionally, poverty reduction programs such as cash transfers can empower girls economically and lower their risks for SGBV, by providing safe options to source an income.

- **Action for community awareness:** Limited information on sexual and gender based violence perpetuates the harm on the individuals affected. Communities should be targeted with critical information about available resources and the importance of ensuring that the rights of girls are protected.

- **Action for reporting mechanisms:** Availability of reporting channels, made it difficult for girls to seek redress following acts of violence. Governments, development partners and the private sector should develop anonymous and confidential hotlines that provide support and allow victims to report incidences of gender-based violence.

- **Action for economic empowerment:** Limited girls' opportunities to advocate for their rights contributed to dependence on and search for financial resources that may keep them out of school. Governments, development partners and the private sector should provide courses on entrepreneurship and pathways for economic opportunities for girls.

Support for displaced persons:

Learners in IDP camps received basic education training in numeracy and literacy. Stakeholder collaboration among development and community partners ensured that these learners received training and necessary supplies. Innovations such as using solar panels provided them with access to basic resources to facilitate their learning. However, the pandemic also widened inequalities in access to education and learning outcomes. We propose the following recommendations for governments and stakeholders.

- **Action for government:** Fast response and recovery efforts following a crisis such as a pandemic can benefit from strategic plans. These plans were largely absent across the board but more so for displaced persons. To this end, governments need to develop action plans on crisis readiness by developing mechanisms for sharing information, data and communication. For smoother transition to regular programming, governments should reduce barriers by building robust education systems and internet infrastructure. Additionally, governments should strengthen the technical, material, and financial capacities of different government agencies. This includes equipping and training personnel involved in policy implementation.

- **Action for curriculum specialists:** Learning in IDP camps was impacted by lack of adequate resources. To increase access to quality educational opportunities in the IDPs, specialists need to review curriculum materials and develop pedagogical innovations that contribute to learning, especially in IDP camps.

- **Action for government and development partners:** Learners in IDP camps were required to improvise and operate with inadequate resources, there is a need to improve learning environments for learners in IDP camps by providing adequate resources, including trained personnel. Also, they should develop sustainable approaches to increase ownership of solutions at the local level.

- **Action for interventionists:** The pandemic brought to the fore the need for psychosocial support. Stakeholders and specifically individuals who design interventions should prioritize psychosocial support and gender-based violence in the interventions.

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