Zimbabwe Education Cluster
Humanitarian Response & COVID-19 Sitrep: 04 Sept 2020

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Key figures

- **853,032** learners (ECD to Grade 7, ages 3 to 12) targeted under the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) through Education in Emergency support across 33 districts with severe needs.
- **3.5 Million** learners are currently affected under the COVID-19 pandemic. The cluster is targeting to reach these learners with various activities to address their needs.
- **105,252** people have benefitted from activities related to the HRP and **398,023** people have benefitted from COVID-19 related activities as of August 2020.
- Cluster Partners are appealing for **US $41 Million** through the Humanitarian Response Plan 2020 and **US $10.26 Million** to meet the emergent needs outlined in the COVID-19 Addendum.
- **20** operational partners within the cluster have planned, ongoing or completed activities.

Humanitarian needs

- The education system in Zimbabwe was already stretched before the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of multiple crises, including the impact of Cyclone Idai last year, the economic crisis coupled with hyperinflation and the ongoing drought. Before the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic, estimates by the Education Cluster were that of the more than 3.4 million children of school going age (3 to 12 years), at least 1.2 million (35 per cent), would need emergency and specialized education services in 2020. This includes more than **853,000** children in acute need, such as: children not enrolled in school; orphans and other vulnerable children (OCV), including children with disabilities and children living with HIV; and those in need of school feeding.

- The combined effect of the humanitarian crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have far-reaching implications for the demand and supply of education services. While Zimbabwe closed schools on March 24, 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19 and to protect school populations, school closures have disrupted the education of more than 4.6 million children, with adverse impacts on the protection and well-being of children as well as their readiness for school, attendance and participation in learning.

- While the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) successfully conducted June national examinations for Forms 4 and Form 6 from June 30, 2020 to July 23, 2020, the planned reopening of schools, which was tentatively scheduled for 28 July 2020, was postponed. In August, Cabinet announced schools will reopen for examination classes Grade 7, Form 4 and Form 6- from September 14, 2020 for those sitting for the Cambridge examination classes followed by classes for local Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) examinations on September 28, 2020. Local ZIMSEC examinations are expected to begin on December 1, 2020.

- While schools are expected to reopen, school children have missed a whole school term (about 92 days) of teaching and learning, with serious implications for the well-being of children and their academic growth. The prolonged school closures are likely to have a major and negative affect on children’s learning, physical, social and mental health and well-being threatening hard-won educational achievements for years to come. Prolonged school closures will likely exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and inequalities among children, especially girls, children with disabilities, those in rural areas, orphans and vulnerable children, as well as those from poor households and fragile families. School closures
have the potential to widen learning disparities and increase the risk of some learners permanently dropping out of school.

- While the MoPSE is prioritizing the health and well-being of learners, teachers, staff and school communities, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted both the health and economic systems. To add to these challenges, schools, which traditionally fund their daily operations from user fees will likely be resource-constrained because of the inability of parents to pay school fees. Ensuring that all the pre-conditions for the safe re-opening of schools, including infection prevention and control measures, the provision of hygiene facilities and personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as adherence to physical spacing, and social distancing considerations in a context of increasing cases loads and a fragile economic context also represents significant risks. Without a well-resourced education and health systems, reopening schools remains a significant challenge. At the same time, protecting the right of every child to learn has never been more urgent.

- The cluster is targeting 3.5 million learners at ECD to secondary school level through prioritization of activities.

**Humanitarian response**

- As of end of August 2020, a total of 105,252 people have benefited from various activities implemented by the cluster partners as part of the Humanitarian Response Planning 2020.

- A total of 398,023 people have benefited from COVID-19 related activities related to the overall education cluster strategy and the Humanitarian Response Plan COVID-19 addendum for the period March to July 2020. Additionally, through support from different partners the following activities are currently ongoing at field level as parts of the efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **UNICEF** continues to support alternative learning through radio lessons. Cumulatively, 485 primary radio lessons have been developed with 323 lessons broadcasted. UNICEF WASH Section and implementing partners have repaired boreholes in seven schools and provided handwashing facilities to 74 schools reaching 121 schools with age-appropriate information, education and communication (IEC) materials to strengthen infections prevention and control (IPC) measures in schools.

- **Elevate Trust** has expanded its outreach to Matabeleland North province through the Safer Schools Campaign. This is in partnership with Travereze Travel, Nutri Foods and the Rotaract Club of Borrowdale Brooke. Total donations provided include 1,000 face masks and 100 litres of sanitizers to four schools from Mbembesi, namely: Sojini High School, Mqwashini High School, Madelela and Cameroon with key needs remaining for reusable face masks. So far, the organization has supported 44 schools with these donations.

- **HOSPAZ** is procuring 8,596 textbooks for 4,298 Children (both primary and secondary) in Makonde, Zvimba, Chegutu and Mhondoro-Ngezi districts. The textbooks will be key in facilitating home and community schooling for the vulnerable learners.

- **CARE International** facilitated district stakeholders’ meetings in Chivi and Mberengwa districts promoting continuous learning through alternative learning strategies with key actions agreed on for supporting the role out of the strategies. CARE is supporting 210 individuals (64 males & 146 females) in Mberengwa and Chivi districts to help them participate in virtual meetings using WhatsApp platforms. CARE conducted a case conferencing in Chivi district where a report of follow up on four (4) child marriage cases was given by ZRP(VFU). However, delays in turnaround time for some urgent abuse cases is still a concern.

- **Catholic Relief Services (CRS)** through the Pathways project aims to provide age and appropriate services that promote positive child, adolescent and youth health, wellbeing and development. With that, 5,404 children and caregivers were reached with parenting messages through the Sinovuyo Caring Families Programme for Parents and Teens sessions which were conducted virtually through phoning and SMS messages in Bulawayo. A total of 3,199 people received stationery to support children participating in national radio lessons and other studies during the time schools are closed. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy was conducted to 1,928 school children in Guruve, Mazowe and Matobo. In addition, a total of 2,693 children received textbooks in Nkayi, Gweru and Mazowe.
• **UNHCR** through its partner Terre des Hommes-Italy continues to support information dissemination to encourage refugee children in Tongogara Refugee Camp to participate in lessons through community-based education volunteers on the national radio programmes. Information updates on the radio lessons were disseminated during the monthly WFP food distribution to encourage refugee parents to support their children in radio access.

• **UNESCO** developed an interface for the “Zimbabwe Educonnect” resource portal for teachers and provided training and data bundles to staff from the ICT department in MOPSE to upload resources.

• **Higherlife Foundation** facilitated a disaster risk reduction preparedness workshop in Manicaland province for 5-days. A total of forty-five participants attended the meeting which constituted heads of Ministries from Primary and Secondary Education, Agriculture, Local Government and National Housing, as well as community leaders from Buhera, Chipinge and Chimanimani districts.

• **Mavambo Orphan Care** through a Mary’s Meals International supported project, contributed to the alleviation of food insecurity and provided monthly food humpers to 6,132 orphans and vulnerable children in Harare, Chitungwiza and Goromonzi. The beneficiaries received Corn-Soya Blend (porridge) and soap to use when washing hands as a mitigatory measure to fight COVID-19. In addition, through USAID support a total of 12,345 caregivers were reached with COVID-19 awareness messages through virtual platforms.

• **FACT Zimbabwe** procured textbooks for 15,005 under Children Tariro Education Assistance for primary and secondary school Orphans and Vulnerable Children to use while at home. The distribution of these resources is set to commence soon to children in Buhera, Chipinge, Makoni, Mutare and Mutasa districts in Manicaland province, and Gutu district in Masvingo Province. In addition, simple smart phones capable of WhatsApp, Google and radio reception have been ordered for 8,319 learners to enable continuous learning in the same districts.

• **World Vision Zimbabwe (WVZ)** launched Grade 7 English and Mathematics study guides together with MOPSE. A total of 57 schools have been reached so far with study guides. WVZ distributed 1,500 posters on COVID-19 to Mudzi, Mutoko and Murehwa districts and conducted an assessment on how the other batches of posters distributed had been received by schools’ authorities. With support from ADH and ECHO, WVZ is also helping to ensure education continues in the face of COVID-19 through mobile lessons with 1,725 ECD learners from 45 schools in Chimanimani and Chipinge districts having accessed and completed the lessons.

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### Gaps and constraints

- **Inadequate Funding to address the educational and protection needs induced by COVID-19:** Despite numerous efforts, funding remains a challenge in the fight against COVID-19. To date, the cluster has only received 8% of its funding requests to address to prioritized critical needs the provision of teaching and learning materials to ensure the continuous learning and prepare for the reopening of schools.

- **Reduced mobility and access to technology for remote working:** The Government, through the Public Service Commission (PSC) directed that only 15 percent must be at their workstations in Ministries. This directive, together with the lockdown regulations, which require all businesses to close at 4.30 PM, have reduced the availability of staff from both partners and Government, with adverse implications for the implementation of response activities. To add to the challenge, staff are facing resource and technical constraints such as lack of computers and poor connection to mobile networks to enable them to work remotely and respond to the needs of learners.

- **Unmet Needs for marginalized learners:** While the Cluster has made significant progress in promoting continuous access to education, through the provision of materials and the development of radio lessons, the cluster has not been able to meet the learning needs of all children, especially children with disabilities, those living in the most remote areas without access to radio signals and children from poor households. These children continue to have unmet learning needs in part because of shortages of
teaching and learning materials at home. To add to the challenge, the worsening food insecurity in most poor households represents a significant challenge, which has the potential to contribute to dropping out school.

**Macro-economic constraints:** Zimbabwe’s fragile economy represents the greatest challenge in the fight against COVID-19. Economic decline has exacerbated the delivery of critical services such as health and the provision of water, which are critical ensuring the prevention of COVID-19. The rapidly depreciating local currency is forcing service providers to increase their prices, with negative implications for preparedness efforts as goods and services are rising each week. Poor public service delivery, and especially the shortage of medical personnel, continues to undermine the confidence of parents in efforts to reopen schools. While most parents are unable to buy learning materials to support learners at home or pay fees to support preparations for the reopening schools, schools face an increased financial burden to implement all the recommended measures to mitigate against the spread of the disease. Similarly, partners also face financial resource constraints to respond to the urgent and emergent learning needs of learners.

- **Wrong beliefs that schools just provide academics has erroneously relegated education to a secondary national COVID-19 priority:** Zimbabwe has prioritized critical needs such as health, water and sanitation, above all other considerations. The beliefs that education is not lifesaving, that schools are for academics, which can be postponed, has left many children vulnerable, unprotected and exposed to risks like family violence and exploitation. To add to the challenge, fiscal constraints and resource challenges mean that the education of children at home, is not receiving adequate national resources. This represents a great constraint in response efforts, to detriment of the educational needs of children.

**Coordination**

- The cluster conducts weekly coordination meetings every Tuesday from 1430Hrs to 1530Hrs. The Cluster has also established WhatsApp groups to ensure regular communication and collaboration around response plans.
- Despite the national lockdown and technical challenges related to communication, partners have continued to convene virtual meetings every week, to discuss and address issues related to the proposed response. In addition, the cluster established Technical Working Groups continue efforts to operationalize the COVID-19 Strategy. These TWGs meet regularly to discuss technical issues and provide updates to the larger weekly cluster meetings on WhatsApp.
- Partners encouraged to visit the cluster webpage on Humanitarian Response to access latest products and resources shared in relation to HRP and COVID-19 Response. Please access the webpage using the following link: ZIM Education Cluster HR Info Webpage.

**Picture from the Field:**

Permanent Secretary – MoPSE, Ms. Thabela applauding a learner for successfully completing a lesson at Bumba Primary.