



SCHOOL CLOSURES IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

An Inequity Impact Assessment of Primary 2 and 3 pupils in Rwanda

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACPHA	Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
BLF	Building Learning Foundations
CPMS	Minimum Standards in Child Protection in Humanitarian Action
CS	Centre Scolaire
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DPO	Disabled People’s Organisation
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EP	Ecole Primaire
F	Female
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoR	Government of Rwanda
GS	Groupe Scolaire
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INEE	Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies
IT	Information Technology
IZU	Inshuti z’Umuryango or ‘Friends of the Family’
M	Male
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education
NECDP	National Early Childhood Development Programme
NUDOR	National Union of Disabled Organisations in Rwanda
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
P	Primary
REB	Rwanda Education Board
S	Secondary
SGAC	School General Assembly Committee
SLF	School Learning Facilitator
ST	Saint
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WLO	Women-led Organisation

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The Building Learning Foundations Programme is implemented by a consortium of three of the United Kingdom's premier not-for-profit leaders in improving education globally: Education Development Trust (co-ordinating), British Council and VSO



Executive Summary

In response to outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, in the country, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) decided to close all schools on 14th March 2020 as part of a packet of interventions to ensure public safety.ⁱ Due to school closures, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) developed a COVID-19 education response plan entitled “Keeping the Doors Open for Learning” – the primary objective of which was to ensure the continuation of learning while safeguarding the health and wellbeing of students and teachers in both the immediate and long- term.ⁱⁱ To this end, the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and its partners pivoted their approach to rapidly deliver remote learning through online platforms.

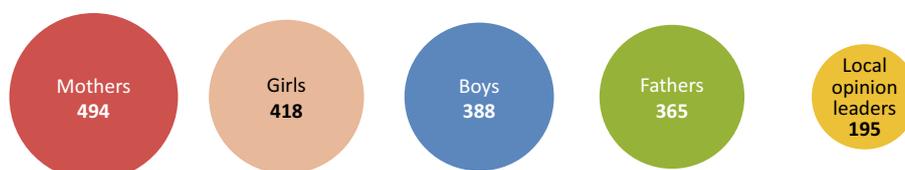
To inform plans to reopen schools in the context of COVID-19, Building Learning Foundations (BLF) commissioned an Inequity Impact Assessment of Rwanda’s primary-age school population. The main objectives that were:

- To assess the extent to which children from vulnerable families have access to and benefit from learning opportunities during the school closure;
- To determine the profile of children who are most disadvantaged in relation to the continuation of their learning in the context of public health measures related to COVID-19; and,
- To determine strategies for government institutions, development partners and the BLF programme that could mitigate against inequities affecting children’s learning.

The research framework followed a descriptive design and involves data collection at the level of households and communities. A mixed methods approach was adopted, entailing the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from various respondents, including pupils, parents or primary caregivers,ⁱⁱⁱ teachers, head teachers and other local opinion leaders at sector and district levels.

A purposive sampling strategy was applied to this study to identify the most vulnerable and marginalised households. In total, 1,860 individuals participated in the research, comprising of 418 girls, 388 boys, 494 mothers, 365 fathers, and 195 local opinion leaders. A total of twelve districts (out of thirty districts in Rwanda) were identified for field-level research. These districts covered all five provinces of Rwanda, including both urban and rural settings. Three sectors per district were identified, as well as one school per sector – totalling 36 sectors and 36 schools.

1,860 research participants:



Key Findings:

1. What learning opportunities were available and accessible in the absence of schools?

Because 98% of the Rwandan population uses radio as a reliable source of information, radio broadcasts were prioritised as means to disseminate lessons to children.^{iv} Radio lessons that align with national curriculum were therefore quickly developed in English, Mathematics and Kinyarwanda.^v Other initiatives were implemented in parallel, including via telephone, television, and web-based channels.

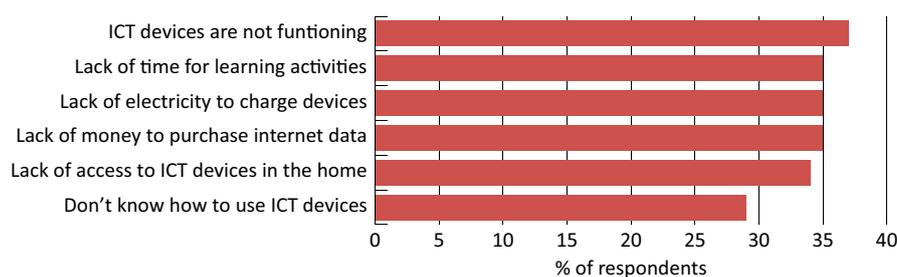
Acknowledging the limited sample size and its purposive nature, this study found that despite the availability of these diverse platforms, the vast majority of parents were unaware of their existence. While 14% were aware of the existence of television lessons, **only 6% of parents surveyed knew of REB's quiz service, 3% knew of REB's e-learning portal, and just 2% knew of REB's YouTube channel.**^{vi} Considerably fewer actually used these platforms, even if they were aware of them, affecting overall uptake.

Direct intervention to raise awareness seems to have been quite limited. **When asked if they had been contacted by headteachers, teachers, SGAC members, local education authorities and/or NGO staff, 64% of parents reported 'none of the above.'**

While radio ownership was thought to be widespread, **only 30% of surveyed families confirmed having a radio device.** Just 6% of those surveyed stated that they had access to the internet. Although 45% of those that had telephones confirmed that they typically used them to listen to the radio, only a fraction said that they used any available ICT equipment in the home for the activities with their children for reasons summarised in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: Non-functioning devices the main reason for why parents did not use ICT equipment for learning at home

Q: If you do not use your ICT equipment for learning activities at home, why not?



Note: Average of responses from 859 respondents in all the regions
Source: Building Learning Foundations

Moreover, only half of the target sample had access to the electricity grid. This may have further restricted the use of ICT technology for the purposes of learning, although access to other materials such as textbooks and manipulatives to support learning was also limited.

Nonetheless, **42% of children – both girls and boys in approximately equal numbers – reported that they had followed radio lessons.** Worryingly, 26% of parents who had a child with a disability said they were not learning at home at all. Although 72% of parents

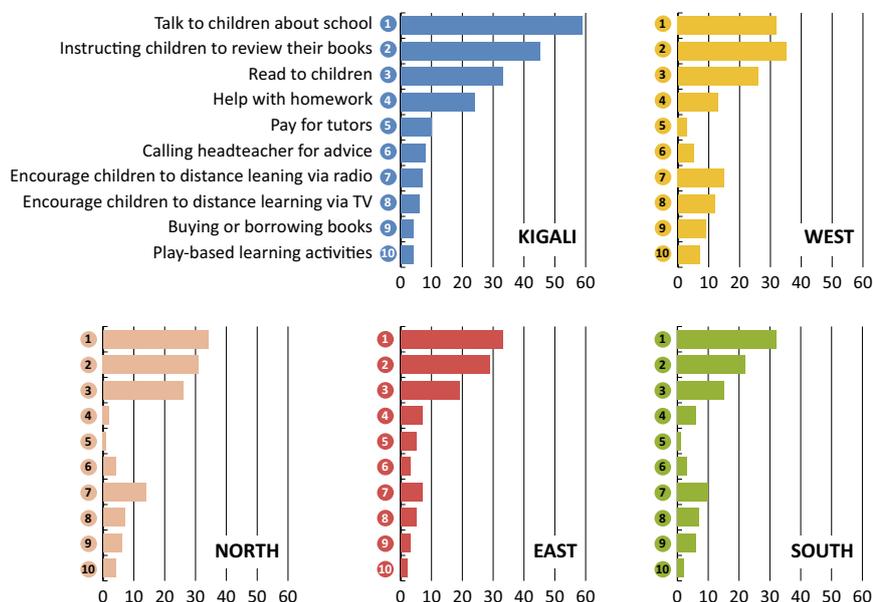
felt that radio programmes had the potential to support learning for P2 and P3 pupils, only 33% of them felt that their children had learned anything new from listening to the available radio lessons.

2. To what extent were parents able to support their children’s learning?

Prior to school closures, 67% of parents reportedly supported their children’s learning at home – at least once per week and sometimes up to three times per week – to supplement their ongoing studies at school. The types of parental engagement during school closures reported by survey respondents are summarised in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: Urban parents twice as likely to talk to their children about school

Q: What are the main actions you take to support your children’s learning while schools are closed? (% of respondents)

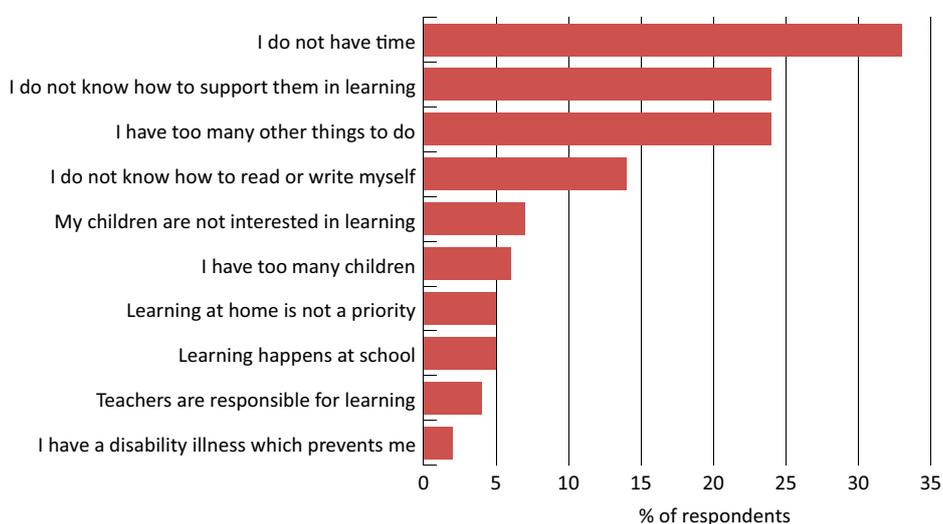


Note: 859 respondents
Source: Building Learning Foundations



While many local opinion leaders felt that parents who had previously supported their children’s learning at home would continue to do so, this sentiment is not borne out by the data. Surprisingly, amongst those surveyed as part of this research, **the proportion of parents supporting their children’s learning at home dropped significantly during school closures**. Just 48% reported that they were doing any type of supplemental learning in the household setting – the majority of whom were based in and around Kigali – despite spending more time at home with their children. This decline in support is likely indicative of the multiple barriers and challenges parents faced during the pandemic that prevented them from supporting their children’s learning at home, as summarised in Figure 3. Many of these factors were presumably more pronounced amongst the targeted research sample given the participant selection criteria.

FIGURE 3: Lack of time cited as the main barrier preventing parents from supporting home learning
Q: What factors prevent you from supporting your child in learning at home?

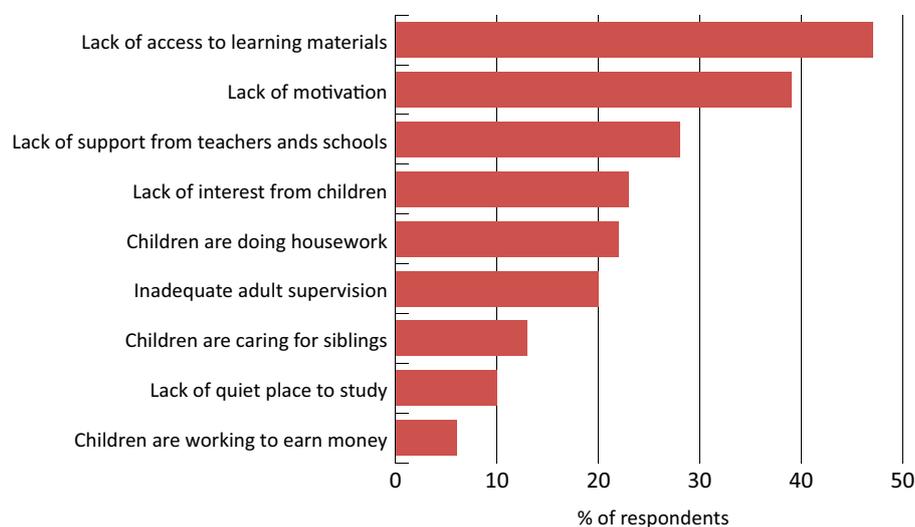


Note: Average of responses from 859 respondents in all the regions
Source: Building Learning Foundations

Gender norms have also played a significant role in determining which parent takes primary responsibility for supporting their children’s learning. Both parents and children confirmed that **mothers were twice as likely as fathers to support their primary-age children’s learning** – with older siblings also playing a significant role in some families. Yet mothers were also the least likely to have completed tertiary studies or attended formal education at all.

In effect, there were many reasons that children did not spend more time on their education during school closures. The main reasons highlighted by parents are summarised in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4: Lack of access to learning materials cited as the main barrier to children learning at home
 Q: What are the main reasons children in your household are not spending more time on education during this time while schools are closed?



Note: Average of responses from 859 respondents in all the regions
 Source: Building Learning Foundations

3. Which primary-age children were the most heavily impacted by school closures and why?

It must be acknowledged that primary-age children, particularly those in early primary grades, are the least able to study independently. **Only 50% of parents thought that children of this age range were capable of learning without a teacher.** Children whose access to learning has been hampered during school closures will be at higher risk of loss of learning, falling behind, repeating class or abandoning their studies altogether. According to local opinion leaders, the most impacted are likely to include children who were not able to obtain learning materials and/or following available distance learning options due to various personal and infrastructural barriers – in addition to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds many of whom may have lacked access to, or control of, ICT infrastructure (such as telephones, radio, television, internet, electricity) or learning support materials (textbooks, storybooks, and other manipulatives).

Girls, particularly those of pre-adolescent and adolescent age, are in danger of being left behind when schools resume. School closures can increase the propensity of girls to either sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), or engagement in risky sexual behaviour.^{vii} Compounded by limited availability and access to contraception during an outbreak,^{viii} **the likelihood of unwanted, forced or early pregnancies is high. This of particular concern in light of the fact that pre-adolescent and adolescent girls make up an important subset of the primary school population in Rwanda.**

Children with disabilities are widely acknowledged by research respondents to face additional infrastructural and societal barriers. During a pandemic of this nature, **children with disabilities face compounding risk factors beyond their access to education alone.** Much of this is further exacerbated by economic exclusion since **disability is both**

“a cause and a consequence” of poverty,^{ix} and children with disabilities are generally over-represented amongst the poorest households.^x

The system-wide economic shock triggered by COVID-19 can create push-pull factors that cause children to engage in income generating activities, many of which can be harmful in nature. At least 5% of parents surveyed confirmed that their children have been working in exchange for money since schools closed and **boys were twice as likely to work than girls.**

As families confront food shortages and economic uncertainty, women and girls are likely to be the last to eat.^{xi} While school closures, and parallel suspensions in school-feeding programmes, can compound the nutritional precarity of all children, girls are likely to be most impacted.

Parenting during a pandemic is rife with challenges. Many local opinion leaders agreed that the prolonged period at home alongside additional stress factors facing parents may have led some to discipline their children with greater frequency and/or with harsher punishments. **Approximately 70% of parents agreed that their children have required discipline more often since schools closed.**

An additional risk factor within the home has been increasing rates of alcohol abuse, and inversely, alcohol withdrawal amongst fathers – both of which may have been exacerbated by movement restrictions, economic scarcity, and extended closures of pubs and bars.^{xii} As a result, **children may be more likely to witness intimate partner violence and/or be exposed to physical abuse themselves.**^{xiii} Local opinion leaders also indicated that children may have engaged with **alcohol or substance abuse** due to school closures. 26% of parents reported concerns that their child would get involved with drugs because they had too much free time.

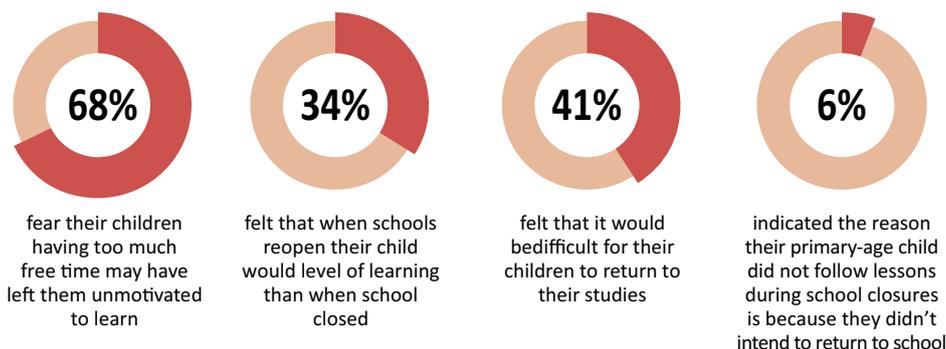
According to local opinion leaders, many parents have been less present in the home since lockdowns eased. Neglect may have worsened over this period, as local opinion leaders confirmed the presence of unaccompanied children on the streets and children with poor hygiene in many localities across the country.

Not all children may return to school

While the Government of Rwanda makes plans for a safe return to schools, there are already indications that not every child will want or be able to go back:

- 68% of parents have expressed fears that their children having too much free time may have left them unmotivated to learn.
- Only 34% of parents felt that when schools reopen their child would have the same or better level of learning than when school closed.
- 41% of parents felt that it would be difficult for their children to return to their studies.
- Approximately 6% of households surveyed indicated that the reason why their primary-age child did not follow lessons during school closures is because they did not intend to return to school at all.

Of the surveyed parents...



Strategic recommendations to mitigate against rising inequities

Because of its purposive nature, this study allowed for the formulation of recommendations based on the specific consideration of children from the most vulnerable and marginalised households. In preparation for school opening, targeted interventions will be required to ensure the most vulnerable return to their education as quickly as possible. Key strategic recommendations therefore include:

- **Dedicated parental engagement efforts** to build their motivation and capacity to support the learning of children, including those with disabilities, at home combined with targeted support to the most marginalised households to ensure parents are aware of specific incentives such as school-feeding programmes in order to send their children to school as soon as they resume;¹
- **Back-to-school campaigns** specifically designed for a young audience, focusing on the importance of education to attract children who may have become accustomed to working for money, have lost interest in their studies and/or need additional motivation to return;
- **Parallel support is provided by community volunteers** to conduct door-to-door identification, sensitisation and mobilisation of the most vulnerable households;
- **Provision of practical assistance** through daily nutritious meals, school uniforms and scholastic materials for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and menstrual hygiene kits to facilitate the return of pubescent girls who are at higher risk of abandoning their studies; and,
- **Targeted interventions to ensure that expectant or lactating girls are still able to attend school** and sit examinations as per national policy, combined with localised efforts to reduce stigmatisation.

The cyclical nature of the virus will likely mean that public health measures will need to be periodically escalated from time-to-time depending on the level of community spread in any given site. This means that lessons learned from the current school closure might be applicable again at some point in the future. These include the need for continuous parental engagement and support, community mobilisation, as well as, adaptive and inclusive distance learning strategies.

¹ See BLF (2020 – forthcoming), Guidance on getting children vulnerable to dropout back to school.

Access to education in the context of COVID-19

In response to outbreak of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, in the country, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) decided to close all schools on 14th March 2020 as part of a packet of interventions to ensure public safety.² When schools were first closed, the provisional plan for reopening was slated to be September 2020 at the earliest.³ At the time of writing (November 2020), schools in Rwanda continue to be closed although more detailed plans are in progress to allow for a safe reopening for Upper Primary, Secondary and Tertiary schools and universities in the coming weeks. At present, Pre-Primary through to Primary 3 classes will be delayed until at least January 2021 according to the most recent communications from the Government.⁴

Due to school closures, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) developed a COVID-19 education response plan entitled “Keeping the Doors Open for Learning” – the primary objective of which was to ensure the continuation of learning while safeguarding the health and wellbeing of students and teachers in both the immediate and long-term.⁵ To this end, the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and its partners pivoted their approach to rapidly deliver remote learning through online platforms including radio, television, and other web-based channels.

As a key development partner, Building Learning Foundations (BLF) joined forces with the GoR by adapting its programming. During the school closures, BLF was responsible for scripting, developing and broadcasting remote lessons in both English and Mathematics for school children in Primary 1, 2 and 3 (P1, P2 and P3). These lessons have been aired via radio on a weekly basis since mid-April 2020 to date.

Beyond delivering radio lessons, BLF also adapted its monitoring approaches in order to assess the extent to which Rwandan primary-age children have been able to access and benefit from remote learning opportunities. Early indications pointed to barriers at household and community level. Some children were not able to follow radio lessons, or indeed have access to other online learning opportunities. Children from vulnerable families, marginalised children and/or those with disabilities (specifically children with sensorial impairments to their hearing or vision) appeared to be especially impacted according to monitoring data.

1.1 Why an Inequity Impact Assessment?

To inform plans to reopen schools in the context of COVID-19, BLF commissioned an Inequity Impact Assessment of Rwanda’s primary-age school population. This study falls under BLF’s research agenda which has been adapted to respond to the evolving realities of the prolonged school closure in Rwanda. Research results will also guide BLF in the

² Ministry of Health, Republic of Rwanda, (14 March 2020), Statement on New Measures to Prevent COVID-19 Coronavirus Transmission, available at: <https://twitter.com/RwandaHealth/status/123886882408312834/photo/1> ³ See comments by Prime Minister Eduard Ngirente in Lavie Mutanganshuro (21 July 2020), COVID-19: MPs raise concerns over school reopening in September, The New Times, available at: <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/covid-19-mps-raise-concerns-over-schools-reopening-september> ⁴ Ministry of Education, Republic of Rwanda, (April 2020), Keeping the Doors Open for Learning: Response Plan of Ministry of Education to the COVID-19 Outbreak, available at: https://mineduc.gov.rw/fileadmin/Documents/Report/Education_Sector_COVID_Plan_Rwanda.pdf ⁵ Ministry of Education, Republic of Rwanda, (April 2020), Keeping the Doors Open for Learning: Response Plan of Ministry of Education to the COVID-19 Outbreak, available at: https://mineduc.gov.rw/fileadmin/Documents/Report/Education_Sector_COVID_Plan_Rwanda.pdf

development of its safeguarding interventions as well as the planning of remedial activities.

An Inequity Impact Assessment investigates how children from different backgrounds have been able to access and benefit from learning opportunities during this period, and the factors that have affected their learning. It also seeks to identify strategies to reduce inequities affecting children's learning.

Research objectives

The main objectives that underpin this Inequity Impact Assessment are:

- To assess the extent to which children from vulnerable families have access to and benefit from learning opportunities during the school closure;
- To determine the profile of children who are most disadvantaged in relation to the continuation of their learning in the context of public health measures related to COVID-19; and,
- To determine strategies for government institutions, development partners and the BLF programme that could mitigate against inequities affecting children's learning.

Key research questions

In order to assess the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequities amongst the primary school population in Rwanda, this Inequity Impact Assessment seeks to explore the following key research questions:

- What are the profiles and needs of children who have been more heavily impacted by lockdowns, school closures and other public health measures related to COVID-19?
- What learning opportunities are available within households and communities and how have these changed due to the outbreak of COVID-19?
- What factors affect children's access to remote learning opportunities?
- To what extent do children of different backgrounds have access to newly available online learning opportunities?
- How have parents and educators supported learning in the context of COVID-19 to ensure vulnerable children are not further marginalised?
- What strategies could be adopted at community, schools, and system levels to reduce the identified inequities?

It is envisaged that the proposed research framework will eventually encompass a second phase, entailing the collection of data at school level once schools have re-opened. This second phase would likely focus on questions related, but not limited, to:

- How have inequities created during school closures resulted in learning loss and drop out levels once schools reopen?
- To what extent were inequities created within professional development opportunities for teachers?

This Inequity Impact Assessment has therefore been designed to track the same pupils during household surveys and school learning assessments by using a set of unique identifiers.

Research framework

The research framework follows a descriptive design and involves data collection at the level of households and communities. A mixed methods approach was adopted, entailing the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from various respondents, including pupils, parents or primary caregivers,⁶ teachers, head teachers and other local opinion leaders at sector and district levels. While quantitative data can be used to understand scale and scope, qualitative data is powerful in highlighting on the ground perspectives including those of girls and boys, as well as their parents and caregivers.

2.1 Methodological approach

The following methods were used:

1. **Desk review:** A desk-based review of relevant literature was undertaken to provide background and context to the research findings. Sources primarily included grey literature from in-country education stakeholders as well as Government of Rwanda policies, plans and communiqués.
2. **Household surveys:** Survey questionnaires were administered to parents of P2 and P3 children at household level to gather primarily quantitative data related to key areas of inquiry, including:
 - » Socio-economic characteristics;
 - » Parental engagement in children’s learning particularly their attitudes and behaviours towards supporting their child’s education, as well as their personal capacity to support learning – with due consideration of their age, gender, level of education, socio-economic status, and geographical location, as well as any disabilities;
 - » Facilities for learning within the household setting, including availability of learning materials and existence of Information Communication Technology (ICT) devices and/or infrastructure to support remote learning at home, amongst others;
 - » Opportunities and challenges for children to continue their learning at home – with due consideration to their age, gender and any disabilities or learning difficulties, as well as their family and household dynamics (i.e. presence and number of adults (parents or other relatives) or older sibling to support learning, allocation of time to learn at home, as well as number of children in the home amongst other factors); and,
 - » Community support for remote learning, including whether families had access to information about remote learning, whether parents were accompanied to support their children’s learning, as well as other community-based factors which can impact learning such as the existence of child labour or other harmful practices.

⁶ For ease of reference, the term ‘parent’ is used throughout this report to encompass biological and/or adoptive mothers and fathers, as well as, other primary caregivers within the household setting. Consequently, ‘mothers’ may include other adult female caregivers in the home, while ‘fathers’ can mean other adult male caregivers within the home.

- 3. Individual consultations with children:** One-on-one interviews were also held with P2 and P3 pupils within the same targeted households to gather qualitative data about their experience of school closures. Child-friendly participatory methodologies were employed to facilitate discussion.
- 4. Focus group discussions with local opinion leaders:** Mixed gender focus group discussions (FGDs) were also held with local opinion leaders, including local authorities, religious leaders, School General Assembly Committee (SGAC) members, head teachers, amongst others. These were designed to complement data collected from pupils and parents.
- 5. Feedback and validation:** Preliminary results from the field were shared with targeted stakeholders at national level – including both representatives of key government agencies, donors and development partners – in order to gather feedback on initial research findings. These were integrated into the report prior to finalisation.

Data collection instruments for the household survey questionnaire for parents, individual consultations with children and focus group discussions with local opinion leaders can be found in the annexes of this report. Questions were designed to collect data on the key research questions outlined above.

Although data collection instruments were developed in English, they were utilised at field level in Kinyarwanda. To ensure that the question guides gathered relevant information, they were piloted in a similar setting prior to the commencement of formal data collection. Feedback from the pilot was discussed during a joint debrief session, and necessary changes made to the data collection instruments.

All data was collected, collated and cleaned by the BLF Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) team and field-based School Learning Facilitators (SLFs). Technical oversight was provided by BLF's Education Technical Lead. The research design and data collection instruments were co-created with an Independent Consultant who was also responsible for analysing and reporting on the final datasets.

2.2 Sampling strategy

A total of twelve districts (out of thirty districts in Rwanda) have been identified for field-level research. These districts covered all five provinces of Rwanda, including both urban and rural settings. Three sectors per district were identified, as well as one school per sector – totalling 36 sectors and 36 schools.

A purposive sampling strategy was applied to this study. Key criteria for the selection of both locations and research participants are set out in more detail below. Because the research questions sought to understand the profile of children and families who have experienced new or exacerbated inequities during the course of school closures, it was necessary to invest additional time in targeting individual research participants, particularly amongst pupils and their parents. In order to identify and mobilise respondents who

matched the key selection criteria, data collectors worked in close collaboration with teachers, SGAC members and other local leaders to pinpoint the children and families who were most impacted by school closures at each site. Additional time invested in the joint identification of research participants yielded benefits in terms of the diversity of data that could be collected and analysed as part of this research design.

Key criteria in the selection of targeted districts, sectors, and schools included:

- Locations that demonstrated a consistent pattern of low listenership to radio lessons delivered by BLF;⁷
- Locations that represented geographical diversity in terms of urban, rural and remote settings;
- Locations with lower socio-economic status and higher levels of poverty;
- Locations with limited ICT access and/or infrastructure; and,
- Locations with higher rates of reported sexual and gender-based violence, teenage pregnancies and/or child labour.

The final selection of districts, sectors and schools are summarised in Annex I.

Key criteria for the selection of households was based on a combination of individual and household characteristics of children and their parents.

At the level of children, the following parameters guided the sampling strategy:

- Age (although children attending P2 and P3 grades are typically aged 8 to 9 years old, there are often some pupils in these grades who are younger or older which could be correlated with different risk factors);
- Gender (i.e. equal numbers of girls and boys);
- Disability (i.e. approximately 15% of the sample aimed to include girls and boys with varying disabilities and learning difficulties);
- Children from families with lower socio-economic status, child-headed or single-parent households, parents with disabilities; and,
- Children who live in remote locations with limited ICT access and/or infrastructure and/or a long distance from their schoolteachers or peers.
- Similarly, parameters related to parents included:
 - Age (i.e. significantly younger or older parents or those with a large age difference between them);
 - Gender (i.e. equal numbers of mothers/female caregivers and fathers/male caregivers);
 - Disability (i.e. approximately 15% of the sample aimed to include females and males with varying disabilities);
 - Parents with lower levels of education, lower socio-economic status, single-parent households, elderly guardians; and,
 - Parents who live in remote locations with limited ICT access and/or infrastructure and/or a long distance from local authorities and services.

⁷ As per monitoring data collected by BLF's Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) team in April 2020.

Key criteria for the selection of local opinion leaders included:

- Local authorities at district, sector, cell or village level;
- Religious leaders;
- Leaders of local civil society organisations (CSOs), including women-led organisations (WLOs) or disabled people’s organisations (DPOs);
- Head teachers of primary schools;
- P2/P3 teachers; and,
- SGAC members of primary schools.

2.3 Sample size

The targeted sample size relative to the actual sample size is summarised below:

Category of Respondents	Targeted	Actual	Rate
Parents	864 (432F, 432M)	859 (494F, 365M)	99%
Pupils	864 (432F, 432M)	806 (418F, 388M) ⁸	93%
Local Opinion Leaders	216 (108F, 108M)	195(80F, 115M)	91%
Total	1,944	1,860	96%

2.4 Methodological challenges and mitigation strategies

While the response rate was high at 96%, researchers found that certain individuals were not available for focus group discussions at the indicated time. For local opinion leaders, this was often linked to their involvement in classroom construction activities. At the household level, researchers found that pupils were sometimes not at home during their visit and so were unable to conduct the consultation as planned. For the most part, however, the overwhelming majority of respondents were able to participate as planned.

The purposive sampling strategy was designed to strike a balance between the breadth and depth that a household and community level research of this kind requires. The research design allowed for a vertical investigation of the key research questions, by speaking with both pupils and parents that met the key selection criteria. The sample size was sufficient to achieve conceptual saturation of some of the core themes explored within this study.

The strength of qualitative research of this kind is that it enables the examination of the important ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions related to rising inequities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It draws on the expertise and insight of individuals and groups who have intimate knowledge and experience with the issues at play. One challenge is that

⁸ 229 girls and 202 boys in Primary 2, and 189 girls and 186 boys in Primary 3.

because people experience the pandemic differently, based on a multitude of individual and contextual factors that shape their views, their perspectives can vary greatly. They can be influenced by their own personal characteristics such as their gender, age, disability, geographic location, position of authority, and so on. While this can be read as a limitation, it can also be seen as a strength in that this diversity of views allowed for the identification and exploration of the various complexities facing children and their parents in the context of COVID-19 and related school closures. This also allowed for the formulation of targeted recommendations and strategies to mitigate against rising inequities.

Another challenge was the possibility of a positive response bias. In other words, there may have been little incentive for respondents to share difficulties related to a programme of online learning from which they have benefitted in some capacity and/or wish to see continued in future. In order to mitigate this, data collectors stressed that the overall aim of the research is to understand the multiple ways in which key stakeholders at national and community level can identify and address inequities to improve learning outcomes for all primary- age children. During data collection, the importance of informed consent, verbal assent and confidentiality was also underscored.

2.5 Ethical considerations

Research of this kind is strongly rooted in the overriding principles of ‘do no harm’ and the ‘best interests of the child.’ Complete compliance with any requirements in relation to informed consent, verbal assent and confidentiality policies and practices, particularly in relation to the safeguarding of children, as per BLF’s safeguarding policy, was therefore emphasised – including:

- Informed consent was sought from adult research participants;
- Verbal assent was sought from child research participants, in addition to informed consent from their parents or caregivers;
- Age- and ability-appropriate consent and assent processes based on reasonable assumptions about comprehension of individuals involved in the research were used;
- Confidentiality of those participating in research and anonymity of all the information they share was assured;
- Protocols were in place in the event of disclosures of abuse or exploitation by participants, including reporting and referral pathways;
- Data protection and secure maintenance procedures for personal information were employed;
- Adaptations were made to ensure inclusion of and accessibility for diverse, often marginalised and/or excluded groups and individuals; and,
- Physical safety, public health procedures in line with measures to contain and prevent transmission of COVID-19, including strict adherence of social distancing, wearing face masks, using hand sanitiser and/or washing hands regularly with soap, were put in place.

Key characteristics of surveyed households

Given the selection criteria and purposive sampling strategy, the resulting demographic profile of children and their families within the research sample consisted of several key characteristics, including:

- 36% of children were between 6 and 8 years old, while 40% were pre-adolescent children between 9 and 10 years old, and the remaining 24% were early to middle adolescent children between 11 and 15 years old;⁹
- 14% of children identified with having a disability, including 6% with a physical impairment, 5% with a sensorial impairment, 2% with an intellectual impairment, while 1% reported anxiety, depression or other behavioural issues;
- 16% of children also had parents with some form of disability, ranging from physical impairments (8%), chronic illness or medical condition (7%), sensorial impairment (2%), anxiety, depression or other behavioural issues (2%) or intellectual impairment (0.5%);
- While 74% of children came from two-parent homes, another 11% had parents who were widowed, 10% divorced or separated and 5% came from single-parent homes (of which the majority were single mothers);
- 8% of targeted children had parents or primary caregivers who were between the ages of 61 and 90 years old; and,
- 18% lived in families with adopted children, and 7% with stepchildren.

The socio-economic profile of targeted households included the following key characteristics:

- 17% of fathers had no formal education at all, while 54% had only primary level and 9% had secondary level and 3% had tertiary education;¹⁰
- For mothers, the highest level of educational attainment for 60% of them was primary level, while 10% had secondary level and 2% had tertiary education. 20% of mothers had no formal education at all;¹¹
- 16% of families surveyed were in Ubudehe category 1, 44% in category 2, 39% in category 3 and 0% in category 4;¹²
- 58% of families stated that their primary source of income was self-employed farming, 28% relied on seasonal employment, 6% were public servants, 5% were involved in small trade, 2% had another type of employment with a fixed monthly wage, while 12% were unemployed.¹³

⁹ In accordance with the 2019 edition of the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS), available at: <https://www.alliancecpha.org/en/series-of-child-protection-materials/2019-edition-cpms>, ages of children should be broken down into the following categories for data collection and analysis purposes: Early childhood (Babies and toddlers: 0-2 years old; Pre-school age: 3-5 years old; Early school age: 6-8 years old) and Adolescence (Pre-adolescence: 9- 10 years old; Early adolescence: 10-14 years old; Middle adolescence: 15-17 years old). ¹⁰ The remaining 17% was unknown or non-applicable if the father was unavailable during the survey. ¹¹ The remaining 8% was unknown or non-applicable if the mother was unavailable during the survey. ¹² The remaining 1% of families stated that they did not have an Ubudehe category or did not know what category they were in. ¹³ Survey respondents were asked to 'tick all that apply' which is why the percentages are not designed to add up to 100%

Continued learning at home? Key findings¹⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a public health crisis. It has both immediate and far-reaching implications for children and their families worldwide. At its peak, early childhood, school and university closures affected 90% of the world's student population – an estimated 1.5 billion children and youth.¹⁵ While truly global in nature, the impact of the crisis has been felt locally with nearly 3.6 million children out-of-school in Rwanda.¹⁶ Of these, 2,512,465 are primary-age students, including 1,243,469 girls and 1,268,996 boys, 1% of which are known to have a disability or learning difficulty.¹⁷

“ If I am not mistaken, there are children who have never touched a book since the schools closed ”

– Local opinion leader

While the swift and comprehensive reaction of the Government of Rwanda to control the spread of the virus were broadly praised by the global community,¹⁸ school closures threaten to reverse gains made in recent years. In Rwanda, the net enrolment rate of primary-age children has increased year-on-year to near universal enrolment – with a reported rate of almost 95% in 2018¹⁹ (up from 82% in 2002).²⁰ Gender parity between girls and boys has been achieved and sustained over the past decade or more with relatively equitable access across various parts of the country.²¹ With just ten years left to deliver on Agenda 2030, the country's capacity to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all children and adolescents has been put in jeopardy.²²

Although the terms 'inequality' and 'inequity' are sometimes used interchangeably in common discourse, the distinction is important. For the purposes of this research, inequality is understood to refer to the uneven distribution or access to educational facilities, while inequity relates to avoidable differences resulting from poor governance and social exclusion – often resulting in unfair or unjust outcomes for the most marginalised.²³ Inequities are therefore preventable. They will also frequently relate to societal disparities that are more qualitative and harder to measure.²⁴ The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines two dimensions of equity in education, including:

¹⁴ All quotes in text boxes have been taken from focus group discussions with local opinion leaders across the target districts. Locality and names have not been included to preserve anonymity. ¹⁵ UNESCO (23 October 2020), Global Education Coalition for COVID-19 response: #LearningNeverStops, available at: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition> ¹⁶ Global Partnership for Education (3 June 2020), Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Rwanda builds a resilient education system, available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/amid-coronavirus-pandemic-rwanda-builds-resilient-education-system> ¹⁷ Figures taken from Ministry of Education 2019 Education Statistics ¹⁸ NPR (15 July 2020), Why Rwanda is doing better than Ohio when it comes to controlling COVID-19, available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/07/15/889802561/a-covid-19-success-story-in-rwanda-free-testing-robot-caregivers?t=1603624470129> ¹⁹ Trading Economics, Rwanda – School Enrolment (5 Net), sourced from World Bank data in November 2020, available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/rwanda/school-enrollment-primary-percent-net-wb-data.html> ²⁰ World Data Atlas, Rwanda – Net enrolment rate in primary education, available at: <https://knoema.com/atlas/Rwanda/topics/Education/Primary-Education/Net-enrolment-rate-in-primary-education> ²¹ UNICEF Rwanda (2017), Situation Analysis of Children in Rwanda, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/media/396/file/Situation-Analysis-of-Children-in-Rwanda-Main-Report.pdf> ²² For more information, see United Nations, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> ²³ Borgen Magazine (26 September 2017), The Crucial Difference between Inequality and Inequity, available at: <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/difference-between-an-inequality-and-an-inequity/> ²⁴ Grammarist, Inequality vs inequity, available at: <https://grammarist.com/usage/inequality-inequity/>

1. **Fairness** – i.e. ensuring that personal and social circumstances do not prevent students from achieving their academic potential; and,
2. **Inclusion** – i.e. setting a basic standard for education that is shared by all students regardless of background, personal characteristics or location.²⁵

Not only do school closures disrupt learning, they can trigger a whole host of other ramifications. Children lose out on the protective factor that schools provide, while quarantines and social isolation can result in increased exposure to protection risks such as abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation.²⁶ School closures and confinements can mean that children are locked in with their abusers.²⁷ These risks are further compounded by the multitude of stress factors affecting parents during a pandemic of this nature, including economic uncertainty, additional childcare burdens and health concerns.²⁸

Children simultaneously suffer from limited access to informal social support networks as well as formal protection services during lockdowns, potentially impacting their mental health and emotional wellbeing.²⁹ Teachers and other school personnel can no longer fulfil their unofficial role of detecting indicators of abuse amongst their pupils.³⁰ As children and adults spend more time online, so too does the risk of online sexual exploitation and abuse.³¹ With out-of-school children relying on the internet for both educational and recreational purposes – combined with limited adult supervision and increased social isolation – children increasingly susceptible targets to online predators.³²

The impact of school closures therefore transcend education alone. Schools provide an entry point for children to enjoy many of their other fundamental rights, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)³³ and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).³⁴ For example, 310 million children – nearly half of the world’s schoolchildren – depend on their school for a daily nutritious meal.³⁵ In Rwanda, 182,678 primary-age children in 17% of all primary schools benefitted from school-feeding programmes prior to the pandemic.³⁶ The longer schools remain closed, children’s nutritional outcomes continue to be at risk. Already, some 38% of Rwandan children under age 5 are stunted – with boys in rural locations and children with lower socio-economic status amongst the most adversely affected.³⁷ Food-related

²⁵ OECD (2018), *Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility*, available at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264073234-en.pdf?expires=1605166318&id=id&acname=guest&checksum=D984FB876C262FB5050AD54C4AA8E7A5>

²⁶ The Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) & the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (ACPHA) (2020), *Weighing up the risks: School closure and reopening under COVID - When, why, and what impact*, available at: <https://inee.org/resources/weighing-risks-school-closure-and-reopening-under-covid-19>

²⁷ ACPHA (2020), *COVID-19 synthesis #1: Sexual and gender-based violence*, available at: https://www.alliancecpa.org/en/system/tdf/library/attachments/1_evidence_synthesis_covid-19_cp_may_1-22_final_10june2020_0.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=38841

²⁸ ACPHA (4 May 2020), *Technical Note - COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home*, available at: <https://www.alliancecpa.org/en/child-protection-online-library/covid-19-protecting-children-violence-abuse-and-neglect-home>

²⁹ Shweta Singh et al. (24 August 2020), *Impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents: A narrative review with recommendations*, available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7444649/>

³⁰ Save the Children (2008), *Child Protection Training Manual: Facilitator’s Guide For Teacher Training*, available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/child-protection-training-manual-facilitators-guide-teacher-training> 31 WeProtect Global Alliance (2020), *Impact of COVID-19 on online child sexual exploitation*, available at: [https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2020/04/24/child-exploitation-complaints-rise-106-to-hit-](https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2020/04/24/child-exploitation-complaints-rise-106-to-hit-32)

³² James Grierson (2 April 2020), *Coronavirus lockdown raises risk of online child abuse, charity says*, *The Guardian*, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/02/coronavirus-lockdown-raises-risk-of-online-child-abuse-charity-says> 33 United Nations (20 November 1989), *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/> ³⁴ Organisation for African Unity (29 November 1990), *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, available at: <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-rights-and-welfare-child> ³⁵ Global Partnership for Education (3 June 2020), *Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Rwanda builds a resilient education system*, available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/amid-coronavirus-pandemic-rwanda-builds-resilient-education-system> ³⁶ Figures taken from Ministry of Education 2019 Education Statistics ³⁷ UNICEF Rwanda (2017), *Situation Analysis of Children in Rwanda*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/media/396/file/Situation-Analysis-of-Children-in-Rwanda-Main-Report.pdf>

interventions of this kind are not only life-saving. They help children to learn better and realise their full physical and cognitive potential.³⁸

For developing countries like Rwanda, the question of human capital is critical.³⁹ Despite robust economic growth and rigorous poverty reduction efforts over the past 25 years, almost **40% of the Rwandan population still lives below the poverty line**. Education provides a solid foundation to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty. School closures come at a huge opportunity cost, particularly when there were existing concerns about the extent to which primary-age children were academically on track even prior to the pandemic. According to analysis from UNICEF, children aged 8 and 9 had the lowest rates for promotion to the next grade (58% compared to a 71% national average for schoolchildren of all ages).⁴⁰ Data shows that 26% of children aged 8 and 9 repeat the same academic year again.⁴¹ School attendance is also an issue with absenteeism at 20%.⁴²

While early fatality statistics imply that children may generally be spared from the virulence of COVID-19, socio-cultural determinants and drivers remain a critical factor.⁴³ With more families restricted to home due to public health measures, the likelihood of other serious violations on children's rights – resulting in far-reaching secondary harms – is higher. Social isolation removes the protective layer of schools, teachers and peers – increasing the propensity for sexual and gender-based violence against girls specifically. Existing barriers to accessing education have only been exacerbated by the pandemic for children with disabilities, as well as children originating from poor socio-economic backgrounds more generally. Even if the immediate crisis is brought under control through virus containment measures or vaccinal protection, the most marginalised children will continue to bear the brunt long after the crisis is over.⁴⁴ Future outbreaks across the country may necessitate further localised public health measures, including possibly school closures. An analysis of the impact of school closures requires an unpacking of different factors of vulnerability amongst children and their families to fully understand which children are likely to have been the most affected and why.

4.1 What learning opportunities were available and accessible in the absence of schools?

In the immediate aftermath of the Government's decision to close schools, MINEDUC, REB and major education development partners pivoted their approach to rapidly develop and deploy a home learning initiative to minimise the impact of the national lockdown on the education sector. Because 98% of the Rwandan population uses radio as a reliable source of information, radio broadcasts were prioritised as means to disseminate lessons to children.⁴⁵ Their high listenership rates as well as the broad

³⁸ Global Partnership for Education (3 June 2020), Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Rwanda builds a resilient education system, available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/amid-coronavirus-pandemic-rwanda-builds-resilient-education-system>

³⁹ Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Republic of Rwanda (2016), Early Childhood Development Policy, available at: http://www.ecd.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Policies/EARLY_CHILDHOOD_DEVELOPMENT_POLICY_2016.pdf⁴⁰ UNICEF Rwanda (2017), Situation Analysis of Children in Rwanda, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/media/396/file/Situation-Analysis-of-Children-in-Rwanda-Main-Report.pdf> 41 UNICEF Rwanda (2017), Situation Analysis of Children in Rwanda, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/media/396/file/Situation-Analysis-of-Children-in-Rwanda-Main-Report.pdf> 42 UNICEF Rwanda (2017), Situation Analysis of Children in Rwanda, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/media/396/file/Situation-Analysis-of-Children-in-Rwanda-Main-Report.pdf> 43 See, for example, France 24 (8 May 2020), How does Coronavirus affect children?, available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/20200508-how-does-coronavirus-affect-children>⁴⁴ Hoda Baytiyeh (3 April 2018), Online learning during post-earthquake school closures, Disaster Prevention and Management, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/DPM-07-2017-0173>

⁴⁵ Building Learning Foundations (July 2020), BLF Digest: Remote Learning, Issue #5, available at: <http://buildinglearningfoundations.rw/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BLF-Digest-Issue-5.pdf>

availability and affordability of radio devices, meant that radio broadcasts quickly became the backbone of efforts to offer equitable options for distance learning. In the absence of other ICT infrastructure and/or equipment such as laptops, tablets or smartphones, radio provided a pathway to reach poorer households, including in remote and rural areas. Lessons broadcast via radio were seen as an “inclusive and accessible model” to mitigate against the risk of growing educational inequities in the context of COVID-19.⁴⁶

Radio lessons that align with national curriculum were therefore quickly developed in English, Mathematics and Kinyarwanda.⁴⁷ BLF, for example, developed scripts for radio broadcasts that are estimated to have reached some 2.6 million learners.⁴⁸ These were created by expert content developers and were especially designed for P1-P3 pupils to follow at home. Although parental engagement could further enhance learning, lessons were designed to be able to be followed without the help of parents or caregivers. Twenty-minute lessons were aired on five radio stations every week.

Apart from radio broadcasts, other initiatives were implemented in parallel. Audio-visual materials were developed for television audiences, in addition to users of REB’s official YouTube channel.⁴⁹ REB’s existing e-learning platform was adapted to allow students and teachers to access textbooks, lessons and assessments online.⁵⁰ Parental engagement was encouraged through targeted text messages to communicate information and reminders about distance learning schedules. A helpline was also made available to answer queries, alongside a text message quiz service.

According to GoR plans, radio and television lessons were meant to be mandatory to assure the continuity of learning. However, our research found that this did not happen in practice – at least for the most vulnerable and marginalised households that were purposively sampled for this study. Despite the availability of these diverse platforms, the vast majority of parents were unaware of their existence. While 14% were aware of the existence of television lessons, **only 6% of parents surveyed knew of REB’s quiz service, 3% knew of REB’s e-learning portal, and just 2% knew of REB’s YouTube channel.**⁵¹ Considerably fewer actually used these platforms, even if they were aware of them, affecting overall uptake.

While 55% of parents confirmed that they found out about remote learning opportunities through official radio announcements, another 19% also said they found out by chance (as opposed to being informed or sensitised by local and national authorities, headteachers, teachers and SGAC members, or religious leaders, for example). 72% said they were either unsure or did not know the timetable for radio

⁴⁶ Building Learning Foundations (July 2020), BLF Digest: Remote Learning, Issue #5, available at: <http://buildinglearningfoundations.rw/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BLF-Digest-Issue-5.pdf> ⁴⁷ Sharon Kantengwa (23 July 2020), Teaching in the face of a pandemic: An educator shares her experience, The New Times, available at: <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/lifestyle/teaching-face-pandemic-educator-shares-her-experience> ⁴⁸ Building Learning Foundations (July 2020), BLF Digest: Remote Learning, Issue #5, available at: <http://buildinglearningfoundations.rw/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BLF-Digest-Issue-5.pdf> ⁴⁹ Rwanda Education Board, REB elearning platform, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCSm2s9wZC8B611SisUWg/videos> ⁵⁰ Building Learning Foundations (July 2020), BLF Digest: Remote Learning, Issue #5, available at: <http://buildinglearningfoundations.rw/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BLF-Digest-Issue-5.pdf> ⁵¹ While survey respondents were not asked about their awareness or use of REB’s helpline as part of this study, other organisations have monitoring data specific to the helpline. Save the Children, for example, has bi-weekly monitoring reports related to the awareness campaign on children’s reading and learning at home through the school closure period.

lessons to be aired. Amongst those that said they did know the timetable, approximately 18-24% of parents indicated incorrect times or days when asked for further details about English, Mathematics and Kinyarwanda lesson timetables.

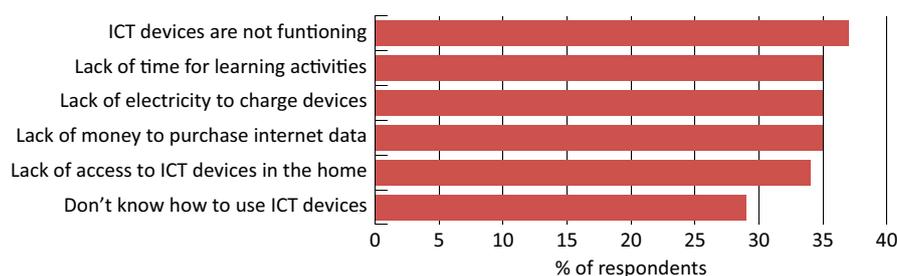
Direct intervention to raise awareness seems to have been quite limited. **When asked if they had been contacted by headteachers, teachers, SGAC members, local education authorities and/or NGO staff, 64% of parents reported ‘none of the above.’** Just 16% of parents had been contacted by their children’s schoolteacher, 10% by the head teacher and 5% by a SGAC member. Nonetheless, parents reportedly received reminders to support their children’s learning by neighbours and friends (16%), local leaders (8%), and other members of their household (7%) – reinforcing the role of localised awareness-raising efforts.

While ICT infrastructure in Rwanda has diversified and expanded in recent years to encompass mobile telephones, internet, television and radio, personal access to and control of telecommunications technology continues to be determined by socio-economic factors. These can render certain online learning platforms untenable for different segments of the general population.

While radio ownership was thought to be widespread, **only 30% of surveyed families confirmed having a radio device** (compared to 44% with telephones,⁵² 10% with televisions, 1% with computers and 0% with tablets). Just 6% of those surveyed stated that they had access to the internet. Although 45% of those that had telephones confirmed that they typically used them to listen to the radio, only a fraction said that they used any available ICT equipment in the home for the purposes of learning activities with their children. The reasons behind this appear to be multifaceted and overlapping, as summarised in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: Non-functioning devices the main reason for why parents did not use ICT equipment for learning at home

Q: If you do not use your ICT equipment for learning activities at home, why not?



Note: Average of responses from 859 respondents in all the regions
Source: Building Learning Foundations

Moreover, only half of the target sample had access to the electricity grid, while another 12% relied on solar power, 14% had paraffin lamps, and 15% used alternative sources of energy in the home. This may have further restricted the use of ICT technology for the purposes of learning, although access to other materials to support learning was also

⁵² Of those that had telephones, only 10% said they had smartphones.

limited. While 49% of households reported having access to Kinyarwanda textbooks, only between 25% and 21% had access to Mathematics or English textbooks. 37% of parents confirmed that they could borrow books from school, while only 1% could borrow them from a community library. Dramatically fewer had access to storybooks or Mathematics manipulatives – just 4% and 1% of households, respectively.

“ Who can find 500 RWF to buy batteries [for the radio] so often? ”

– Local opinion leader

Nonetheless, **42% of children – both girls and boys in approximately equal numbers – reported that they had followed radio lessons.** This finding was confirmed by parents – 53% of whom said that their children had never listened to radio lessons and 56% reported that both girls and boys were spending less time on learning during the school closures. Worryingly, 26% of parents who had a child with a disability said they were not learning at home at all.

“ The children just sit in front of the radio with their eyes open but not paying attention. They tell you...how can they follow lessons when they are not seeing the person teaching? ”

– Local opinion leader

Of those that did use the radio for learning, 31% of the listenership followed Kinyarwanda lessons, 29% for Mathematics and 17% for English according to parents. Frequency of listenership seemed to vary, with 38% of parents reporting that their child had followed radio lessons anytime between the past week and past month. While 14% of parents felt that listenership had decreased over time, 18% of felt that there had been a positive change in terms of the frequency of their children’s participation in radio lessons over time. The main reasons given were increased sensitisation (12%), understanding the importance of radio lessons (11%), reminders to follow radio lessons (8%), and children asking to listen to radio lessons (5%).

Although 72% of parents felt that radio programmes had the potential to support learning for P2 and P3 pupils, only 33% of them felt that their children had learned anything new from listening to the available radio lessons. Parents and local opinion leaders alike shared feedback that they found the lessons to be quick-paced, making it difficult for younger learners to follow along, particularly without adult assistance or opportunities for clarification of questions. English lessons appeared to be amongst the most challenging for both pupils and parents. According to local opinion leaders, low English language proficiency levels and/or literacy levels amongst not only pupils but also parents may have inhibited their capacity to adequately follow English lessons, despite them consisting of grade-level curricular content.

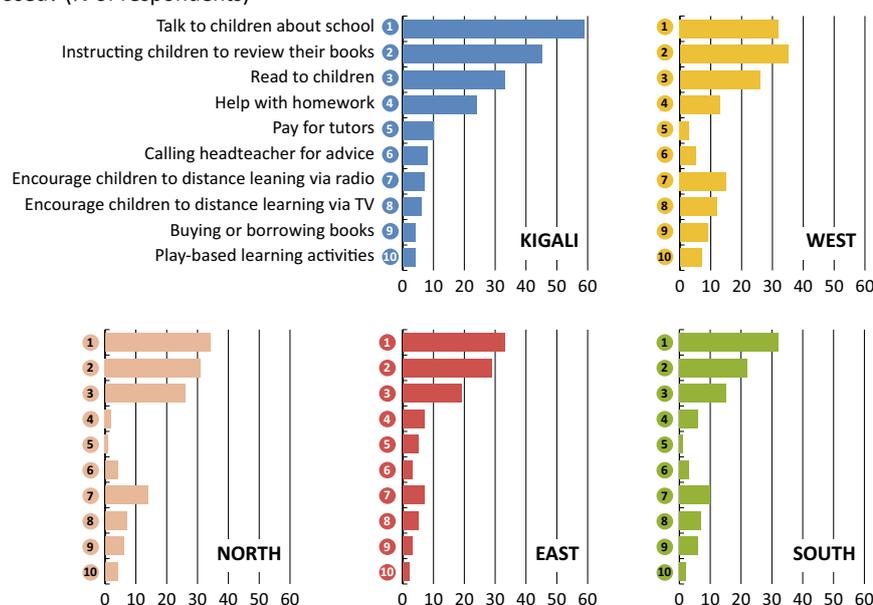
4.2 To what extent were parents able to support their children's learning?

Parents were caught unaware by the rapidity of school closures. Within a week of the first confirmed COVID-19 case in country, the GoR decided to take swift measures. Announcements related to school closures were released on a Saturday, leaving parents little time to prepare for having their children at home full-time, let alone taking on additional home schooling duties. Timing was also a factor that may have influenced parental decision-making throughout the crisis.⁵³ At the start of the crisis in Rwanda, parents were expecting children to remain at home for an initial period of two weeks. This has been extended incrementally, culminating in a closure of more than six months for all students and likely much longer for lower primary students who are now scheduled to return as of January 2021. Had parents known at the outset the length of time that schools would remain closed, their attitudes and behaviours towards supporting children's learning at home may have been different from the beginning.

Prior to school closures, 67% of parents reportedly supported their children's learning at home – at least once per week and sometimes up to three times per week – to supplement their ongoing studies at school. It is possible that parents felt inclined to overreport due to positive response bias as previous studies in Rwanda have shown that the level of parental engagement may have been lower prior to the pandemic.⁵⁴ Acknowledging the limited sample size and its purposive nature, the different types of support offered by parents across the five provinces of Rwanda are summarised in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: Urban parents twice as likely to talk to their children about school

Q: What are the main actions you take to support your children's learning while schools are closed? (% of respondents)

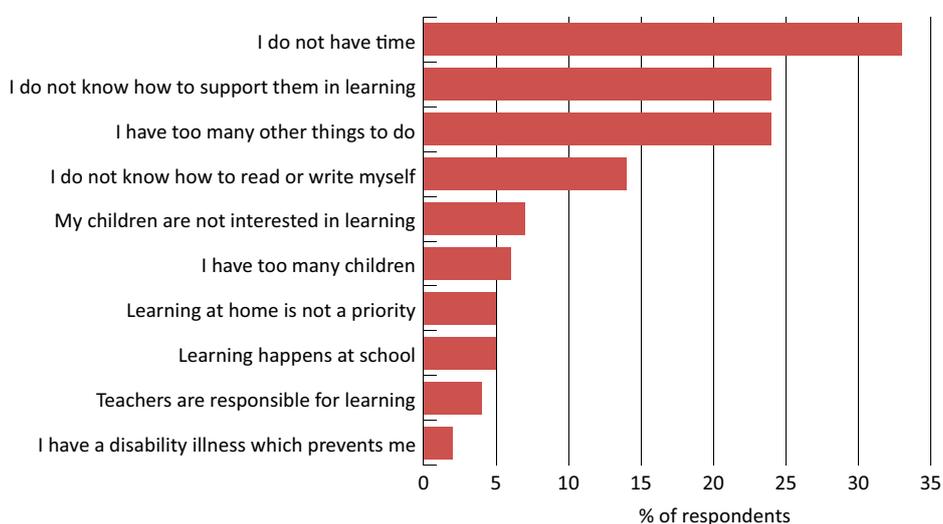


Note: 859 respondents
Source: Building Learning Foundations

⁵³ According to key informant interviews conducted in Rwanda by Nidhi Kapur for a forthcoming scoping study examining the impact of school closures on educational and child protection outcomes in the context of COVID-19, on behalf of the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) & the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (ACPHA). ⁵⁴ Timothy P. Williams and Nidhi Kapur (2019), Mureke Dusome Performance Evaluation, USAID Rwanda.

While many local opinion leaders felt that parents who had previously supported their children’s learning at home would continue to do so, this sentiment is not borne out by the data. Surprisingly, amongst those surveyed as part of this research, **the proportion of parents supporting their children’s learning at home dropped significantly during school closures**. Just 48% reported that they were doing any type of supplemental learning in the household setting – the majority of whom were based in and around Kigali – despite spending more time at home with their children. This decline in support is likely indicative of the multiple barriers and challenges parents faced during the pandemic that prevented them from supporting their children’s learning at home, as summarised in Figure 3. Many of these factors were presumably more pronounced amongst the targeted research sample given the participant selection criteria.

FIGURE 3: Lack of time cited as the main barrier preventing parents from supporting home learning
Q: What factors prevent you from supporting your child in learning at home?



Note: Average of responses from 859 respondents in all the regions
Source: Building Learning Foundations

Gender norms – many of which are socio-culturally prescribed and deeply entrenched – have also played a significant role in determining which parent takes primary responsibility for supporting their children’s learning. Generally speaking, the bulk of childcare – especially for younger children – has fallen to mothers. In Rwanda, fathers have historically left this responsibility almost entirely to their wives.⁵⁵ In the context of the pandemic, this has meant that mothers have been disproportionately impacted relative to fathers. Research shows that during times of trouble, pre-existing gender inequalities and traditional gender norms can become increasingly regressive.⁵⁶ One of the spaces in which this is most apparent is within the home.

⁵⁵ A 2018 Save the Children summary paper on Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes highlighted the challenge of securing male caregivers’ participation in children’s learning despite deliberate efforts to engage them in programming for children aged 0 to 6 in Rwanda. This harmful trend resulting from cultural norms around gender and parenting roles has been recognised widely and discussed in joint meetings with National Early Childhood Development Programme (NECDP). A joint research between Save the Children and the NECDP, led by Nidhi Kapur, into male engagement in ECD in Rwanda is currently underway. ⁵⁶ Nidhi Kapur (2020), Gender, Age and Conflict: addressing the different needs of children, Save the Children, available at: <https://www.savethechildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SC-Gender-Age-and-Conflict-report-final.pdf>

“ *I get fathers at school who cannot remember their children’s names* ”

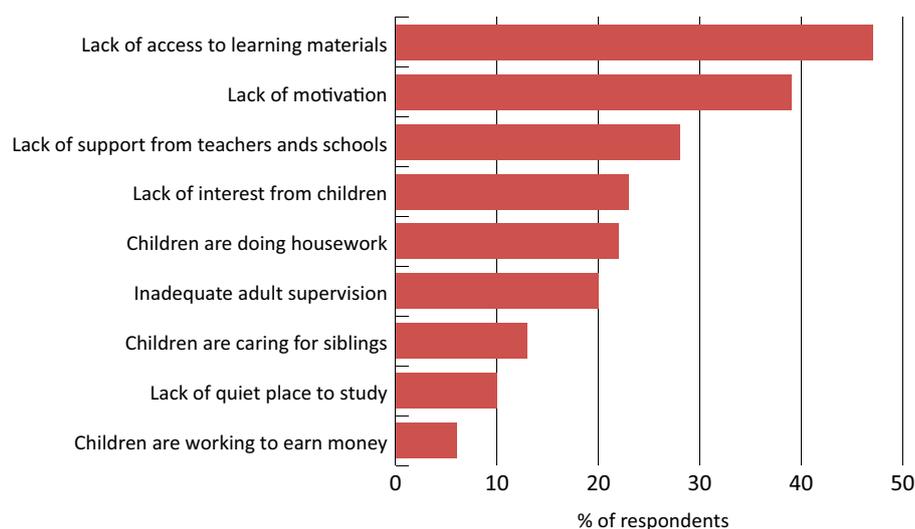
– Local opinion leader

Where women routinely took on the majority of household chores, their physical, mental and logistical burden has likely only increased since the onset of the pandemic. Because of the way gender norms dictate attitudes and expectations, mothers have been forced to ensure the full-time care for their school-age children, adopting additional home schooling duties. According to the household survey respondents, both parents and children confirmed that **mothers were twice as likely as fathers to support their primary-age children’s learning** – with older siblings also playing a significant role in some families. Yet mothers were also the least likely to have completed tertiary studies or attended formal education at all.

According to respondents, learning dynamics have not been static. Instead they have evolved as the crisis deepened. Many reported that parents were more motivated to assist their children’s schooling at the beginning. As the crisis has persisted, the morale of parents may also have been affected.

In effect, there were many reasons that children did not spend more time on their education during school closures. The main reasons highlighted by parents are summarised in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4: Lack of access to learning materials cited as the main barrier to children learning at home
Q: What are the main reasons children in your household are not spending more time on education during this time while schools are closed?



Note: Average of responses from 859 respondents in all the regions
Source: Building Learning Foundations

“ *Can we continue to assist children when we do not know when this will end?* ”

– Local opinion leader

4.3 Which primary-age children were the most heavily impacted by school closures and why?

While all primary-age children have been significantly affected one way or the other from the school closures, it is important to first remember that children are not a homogeneous group. They encompass girls and boys of varying ages and (dis)abilities – in addition to children from single-parent homes; children with parents with little to no literacy levels; children with parents with disabilities; children with elderly guardians; orphaned children; urban, rural, remote or refugee children, amongst many others.⁵⁷ Their individual experiences of the pandemic and its attendant school closures depend on a number of variables.⁵⁸ The risks faced by girls and boys will be distinct and differentiated. They will also vary with age. Pre-adolescent and adolescent children will confront different challenges than younger children. Disability can also lead to intersectional forms of discrimination, creating additional layers of vulnerability amongst children.⁵⁹

The intersectionality of age

It must be acknowledged that primary-age children, particularly those in early primary grades, are the least able to study independently. Their development stage and level of educational attainment requires adult accompaniment. According to local opinion leaders, children from child-headed households, single-parent households or with elderly guardians, children from families with a higher child-to-adult ratio in the home, and children with parents with low literacy and numeracy levels likely experienced greater difficulties in continuing their learning – particularly if they were slow learners, were already behind in their studies and/or had any compounding disabilities or learning difficulties themselves. Only 50% of parents thought that children of this age range were capable of learning without a teacher.

Children whose access to learning has been hampered during school closures will be at higher risk of loss of learning, falling behind, repeating class or abandoning their studies altogether. According to local opinion leaders, the most impacted are likely to include children who were not able to obtain learning materials and/or following available distance learning options due to various personal and infrastructural barriers – in addition to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds many of whom may have lacked access to, or control of, ICT infrastructure (such as telephones, radio, television, internet, electricity) or learning support materials (textbooks, storybooks, and other manipulatives).

⁵⁷ Nidhi Kapur (forthcoming), “The Gendered Dimensions of Infectious Disease Outbreaks: Lessons from Past Ebola Epidemics for Today’s COVID-19 Pandemic,” *The Girl in the Pandemic* (book collection), Berghahn New York. ⁵⁸ ACPHA (2020), COVID-19 Synthesis #3: Education, available at: https://www.alliancecpa.org/en/system/tdf/library/attachments/evidence_synthesis_covid-19_fp_education_final.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=38841

⁵⁹ UNICEF (April 2020), Child disability and COVID-19, available at: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-disability/covid-19/>

The potential gender gap

While primary school enrolment in Rwanda has become increasingly equitable in recent years – with parity amongst primary-age girls’ and boys’ net enrolment rates prior to the pandemic⁶⁰ – gender differentiation was already apparent in later years. Only 34% of girls attend upper secondary school and only 8% graduate.⁶¹ Similarly, girls and boys with disabilities are enrolled in mainstream primary education in almost equal numbers while the number of girls with disabilities in secondary school falls to 5% compared to 8% amongst boys with disabilities.⁶² In the absence of targeted interventions, these evolving gender disparities are likely to be further exacerbated by the pandemic. **Girls, particularly those of pre-adolescent and adolescent age, are in danger of being left behind when schools resume.** This is because they are exposed to compounding risk factors during school closures that are directly tied to their age and gender.

Lessons from past Ebola epidemics validate the particular vulnerability of pre-adolescent and adolescent girls during infectious disease outbreaks.⁶³ School closures can increase the propensity of girls to spend unstructured time with men and boys, leading to greater probability of either sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), or engagement in risky sexual behaviour.⁶⁴ Globally, out-of-school children and families have reported an increase in sexual violence committed by relatives and neighbours during the pandemic.⁶⁵ Compounded by limited availability and access to contraception as well as other sexual and reproductive health services during an outbreak,⁶⁶ **the likelihood of unwanted, forced or early pregnancies is high.** In West Africa, teenage pregnancy spiked by as much as 65% in some areas with prolonged school closures during the 2014-15 Ebola crisis.⁶⁷ Of the 14,000 girls who became pregnant in Sierra Leone, 11,000 were previously attending school.⁶⁸

In Rwanda, teenage pregnancy was already widespread prior to the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in country. Data shows that 7.3% of adolescent girls were pregnant in 2015 (up from 6.1% in 2010) – and 49.6% of teen mothers had their first pregnancy between the ages of 12 and 17 years old.⁶⁹ Policies and practices vary across countries, but in many places, expectant girls or young mothers are expelled from school, barred from sitting examinations or face long wait times for re-entry, compounded by stigmatisation and childcare burdens.⁷⁰ Rwanda’s Girls’ Education Policy provides for the compulsory re-entry of girls who drop out due to pregnancy, however the extent to which this is done in practice is not clear.⁷¹

⁶⁰ UNICEF Rwanda (2017), Situation Analysis of Children in Rwanda, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/media/396/file/Situation-Analysis-of-Children-in-Rwanda-Main-Report.pdf> ⁶¹ Rwanda Girls Initiative, Who We Teach, available at: <https://www.rwandagirilsinitiative.org/model/who-we-teach> ⁶² National Institute of Statistics in Rwanda (2014), Fourth Population and Housing Census Thematic Report: Socio-economic Characteristics of Persons with Disabilities, available at: <https://www.statistics.gov.rw/publication/rphc4-thematic-report-socio-economic-characteristics-persons-disabilities> ⁶³ Nidhi Kapur (January 2020), Gender Analysis: Prevention and Response to Ebola Virus Disease in the Democratic Republic of Congo, CARE International, available at: https://www.care-international.org/files/files/Ebola_Gender_Analysis_English_v2.pdf ⁶⁴ World Vision (2020), COVID-19 Aftershocks: Access Denied – Teenage pregnancy threatens to block a million girls across Sub-Saharan Africa from returning to school, available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-access-denied> ⁶⁵ Upcoming Alliance paper – check reference once published ⁶⁶ World Vision (2020), COVID-19 Aftershocks: Access Denied – Teenage pregnancy threatens to block a million girls across Sub-Saharan Africa from returning to school, available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-access-denied> ⁶⁷ United Nations Population Fund (June 2017), Recovering from the Ebola Virus Disease: Rapid Assessment of Pregnant Adolescent Girls in Sierra Leone, available at: <https://sierraleone.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Rapid%20Assessment%20of%20Pregnant%20Adolescent%20Girls.pdf> ⁶⁸ UNFPA Sierra Leone (February 2018), Recovering from the Ebola Virus Disease: Rapid Assessment of Pregnant Adolescent Girls in Sierra Leone, available at: <https://sierraleone.unfpa.org/en/publications/recovering-ebola-virus-disease-rapid-assessment-pregnant-adolescent-girls-sierra-leone> ⁶⁹ United Nations Rwanda (10 January 2020), Tackling teenage pregnancy in Rwanda with youth-led innovation, available at: <https://rwanda.un.org/en/31433-tackling-teenage-pregnancy-rwanda-youth-led-innovation> ⁷⁰ World Vision (2020), COVID-19 Aftershocks: Access Denied – Teenage pregnancy threatens to block a million girls across Sub-Saharan Africa from returning to school, available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-access-denied> ⁷¹ Ministry of Education, Republic of Rwanda (2008), Girls’ Education Policy, available at: https://mineduc.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Girls_Education.pdf

“ *I know up to eight children who have gotten married and up to thirteen who are pregnant. Some were in primary grades* ”

– Local opinion leader

While empirical data is still emerging, the experience of previous infectious disease outbreaks indicate that fear of infection and/or movement restrictions may mean that pregnant girls avoid or limit their utilisation of health facilities for appropriate prenatal care and counselling, potentially leading some to redirect towards risky behaviours such as traditional medicines or underground abortions.⁷² Generally speaking, girls – including but not limited to survivors of sexual violence – may be at elevated risk of early marriage, although further research would be required to establish prevalence levels.

The heightened risk of pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and other long-term implications are of particular concern in light of the fact that **pre-adolescent and adolescent girls make up an important subset of the primary school population in Rwanda**. Although children are normally scheduled to start their schooling at age seven according to national policy, many begin much later, while others may resume their studies after a period of absenteeism. Without appropriate mitigation measures, it is reasonable to expect that girls in this age range will be amongst the most heavily impacted. Already national officials have indicated that GBV hotlines have received “hundreds” of calls per day, including from teenage mothers who faced confinement with the same abusers who had forcibly impregnated them.⁷³

The compounding effects of disability

Children with disabilities are widely acknowledged by research respondents to face additional infrastructural and societal barriers. They are often the last to be seen or heard. Yet disabilities can also vary greatly in terms of type and severity, encompassing a wide range of different conditions and impairments.⁷⁴ In terms of accessing distance learning options via radio or online during school closures, children with sensorial impairments that affect their sight and/or hearing were likely to be among the most marginalised. While they merit additional attention, many actors have struggled to identify and/or engage with children with both visible and invisible disabilities. Mainstream learning options have largely overlooked their particular needs. Inadequate response capacity is further exacerbated by the widespread prevalence of discriminatory beliefs surrounding disability within Rwandan society at large.⁷⁵

Perspectives amongst respondents were at times quite disparate in relation to children with disabilities. According to some local opinion leaders, schools provide a refuge for children with disabilities – many of whom are otherwise often isolated. Schools can offer

⁷² UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (May 2020), Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women through the lens of Civil Society and Women's Rights Organizations, available at: https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20untf/publications/2020/external%20brief/impact%20of%20covid-19_v08_single%20page-compressed.pdf?la=en&vs=2705

⁷³ Ange Iliza (18 April 2020), Domestic violence rises during COVID-19 lockdown, The New Times, available at: <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/domestic-violence-rises-during-covid-19-lockdown> ⁷⁴ As defined by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). See: World Health Organisation (16 January 2018), Disability and Health: Key Facts, available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health> ⁷⁵ Handicap International and Save the Children (2011), Out from the Shadows: Sexual violence against children with disabilities, available at: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/out_of_the_shadows.pdf

children with disabilities an opportunity for social interaction with peers, in addition to educational benefits. Some parents may see school as a way to relieve their “burden of care.”

During a pandemic of this nature, **children with disabilities face compounding risk factors beyond their access to education alone.** Past research from neighbouring countries in the region shows that 90% of children with intellectual impairments have experienced sexual violence⁷⁶ and that girls with sensorial impairments – especially hearing impairments – are four times more at risk than their peers.⁷⁷ While boys with disabilities may be able to enjoy the same freedoms typically accorded to their gender, such as playing outdoors with other children, their female counterparts may face far stricter limitations impacting on their degree of marginalisation.⁷⁸ Increasing social isolation and confinement at home in the context of COVID-19 is particularly worrying when evidence indicates that the majority of violations experienced by girls with disabilities are perpetrated by people known to them.⁷⁹

Children may also acquire disabilities for the first time subsequent to an incident of sexual violence. This is particularly relevant in light of the presumed uptick in sexual violence during school closures. Child survivors of all genders may face a range of challenges, including obstetric or anal fistula, psychological trauma, or lifelong debilitating illnesses such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) – all of which can and should be considered under the umbrella of disability.⁸⁰

At least 9% of households surveyed confirmed that they had a child with either a disability or chronic disease that negatively impacts their child’s ability to access education – even prior to the pandemic. Because existing barriers for children are often further compounded by disability, it is critical that plans for a safe return to school consider the distinct needs of children with varying types of disabilities. Children who require more personal assistance, for example, may be marginalised by social distancing guidelines that prohibit close physical proximity. Children with partial or full hearing impairments who rely on reading lips will be further hampered by the widespread usage of masks. Much of this is further exacerbated by economic exclusion since **disability is both “a cause and a consequence” of poverty**,⁸¹ and children with disabilities are generally over-represented amongst the poorest households.⁸²

Economic aftershocks

The system-wide economic shock triggered by COVID-19 can create push-pull factors that cause children to engage in income generating activities, many of which can be harmful

⁷⁶ Von Muriel Mac-Seing and Dorothy Boggs (October 2014), Triple discrimination against women and girls with disability, available at: <https://www.medicusmundi.ch/en/bulletin/mms-bulletin/addressing-sexual-violence-and-hiv/addressing-gender-based-violence/triple-discrimination-against-women-and-girls-with-disability> ⁷⁷ Handicap International and Save the Children (2011), Out from the Shadows: Sexual violence against children with disabilities, available at: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/out_of_the_shadows.pdf ⁷⁸ Handicap International and Save the Children (2011), Out from the Shadows: Sexual violence against children with disabilities, available at: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/out_of_the_shadows.pdf ⁷⁹ Handicap International and Save the Children (2011), Out from the Shadows: Sexual violence against children with disabilities, available at: https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/out_of_the_shadows.pdf ⁸⁰ See, for example, World Health Organisation/The World Bank (2011), World Report on Disability, https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf; ⁸¹ Joining Forces (June 2019), A Second Revolution: Thirty years of child rights and the unfinished agenda, available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15389/pdf/2019_06_14_jf_crn_a_second_revolution_global_report_final_eng_embargoed-compressed.pdf ⁸² NUDOR (July 2018), Rwanda Alternative Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to be submitted to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the National Union of Disability Organizations in Rwanda available at: <https://www.nudor.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Rwanda-alternative-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-CRPD-Final-Signed-by-NUDOR.pdf>; and, World Health Organisation (March 2020), Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak, available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Disability-2020-1>

in nature. At the global level, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has estimated that an additional 66 million children have engaged in labour as their households struggle to survive the pandemic.⁸³ When faced with economic hardships, pubescent girls are also more likely to rely on – or be targeted because of – their sexuality for survival. Adolescent girls are especially at risk of being forced to resort to transactional sex or domestic servitude as a means of subsistence, although boys are not immune to sexual exploitation and abuse either.⁸⁴ Indeed boys can face particular risks during school closures due to the intersection of their gender and age, although in different ways than girls. Because of prevailing social norms related to masculinity, boys – especially older boys – may face pressure to contribute to household income. At least 5% of parents surveyed confirmed that their children have been working in exchange for money since schools closed and **boys were twice as likely to work than girls**. According to local opinion leaders, boys especially have been involved in various forms of labour outside the home – including working on rice plantations, in sand mining, in restaurants, construction sites, looking after cattle, as well as, scrap metal sales, hawking and other small commerce, amongst others.

“ *I now have six rabbits and one sheep. Why should I come back to school?* ”

– Local opinion leader

Propelled into these adult roles by crisis, children – especially adolescents – must adopt a level of responsibility typically reserved for adults within the household.

The gender-driven division of roles and responsibilities between men and women in the domestic space is often mirrored in the tasks assigned to girls and boys. For girls this can mean helping their mothers with care work and chores within the home, while boys can often be sent outside the home to search for income. During an infectious disease outbreak of this nature, access to water can become increasingly important to control hygiene and sanitation in the home. Fetching water is a task that is typically assigned to children in 70% of households surveyed as part of this research. Of these, only 11% had a water source at home while 32% had to travel more than 30 minutes (and sometimes more than 1 hour) to find water. **These additional tasks divert children – both girls and boys – from their learning.**

The **inextricable link between education and nutrition** has been well documented elsewhere.⁸⁵ For girls, schools not only provide a daily meal. Education provides a foundation to ensure positive nutritional outcomes as they progress to motherhood in later life, impeding the cycle of inter-generational poverty and malnutrition amongst any future offspring.⁸⁶ Yet, discriminatory gender norms often privilege the health, nutrition and welfare of men and boys.⁸⁷ **As families confront food shortages and economic uncertainty, women and girls are likely to be the last to eat.**⁸⁸ Past infectious disease

⁸³ International Labour Organisation (2020), COVID-19 crisis and the informal economic: Immediate responses and policy challenges, available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743623.pdf ⁸⁴ UNICEF (17 May 2018), Recent study finds that over 50% of children in Rwanda are victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/press-releases/recent-study-finds-over-50-children-rwanda-are-victims-sexual-physical-or-emotional> ⁸⁵ See, for example, World Bank Economic Review, The Impact of Health and Nutrition on Education, available at: <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1093/wbro/11.1.23?journalCode=wbro> ⁸⁶ Ministry of Health, Republic of Rwanda (2014), National Food and Nutrition Policy, available at: http://www.moh.gov.rw/fileadmin/templates/policies/National_Food_and_Nutrition_Policy_.pdf ⁸⁷ World Food Programme (14 April 2020), Gender & COVID-19, available at: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/gender-and-covid-19> ⁸⁸ Yasmin Noone (8 March 2018), The mother is the last to eat in developing countries, available at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/food/health/article/2018/03/08/mother-last-eat-developing-countries>

outbreaks have shown that women and girls are often the first to adopt coping strategies such as restricting the quantity or quality of their food intake.⁸⁹ While school closures, and parallel suspensions in school-feeding programmes, can compound the nutritional precarity of all children, girls are likely to be most impacted.

Parenting during a pandemic

Parenting during a pandemic is rife with challenges. Many parents have been demonstrably concerned about the health and wellbeing of their children, particularly in relation to COVID-19 infection control measures. 88% of parents expressed concern about their children having too much free time as a result of school closures. When it comes to disciplining their children, parents have adopted different approaches. Some parents – already overwhelmed by the public health crises and accompanying social and economic shocks – have been more *laissez-faire* towards their children. Some have tried to exercise greater control over their children’s behaviour. Of the parents surveyed as part of this research, 37% confirmed that they had changed the way they discipline their children since schools closed – particularly towards their sons.

“ *If a child used to ask for body oil from the parents and now they have money to buy it for themselves, how do you expect them to respect their parents?* ”

– Local opinion leader

Many local opinion leaders agreed that the prolonged period at home alongside additional stress factors facing parents may have led some to discipline their children with greater frequency and/or with harsher punishments. **Approximately 70% of parents agreed that their children have required discipline more often since schools closed.** With more time together, parents may bear witness to their children’s perceived “bad behaviour” or vices, including “having too much freedom” or “an abundance of free time.” Parents reported concerns that their children would become lazy (67%), become involved in criminal activity (32%), or use drugs (26%).

Some parents and community members felt that children had lost the discipline they routinely acquire at school. Depending on their age, girls may have been given additional briefings and/or greater restrictions on movement outside the home due to the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. Some 23% of parents feared that their daughters would get involved in sexual relations, potentially leading to unwanted and/or early pregnancy.

The types of discipline varied across different parents, ranging from positive parenting approaches to corporal punishment. 37% of parents said that they try to give their child good advice, while 18% reported that they had a conversation with their child to explain what was wrong about their behaviour. In addition, 9% said that they talked to their spouse to assist them in maintaining positive attitudes towards their children and 7%

⁸⁹ World Food Programme (14 April 2020), Gender & COVID-19, available at: <https://www.wfp.org/publications/gender-and-covid-19>

said they prayed for their children. 30%, however, reported that they punished their child when they misbehaved.

It was felt that harmful disciplinary efforts could be worse for children from families who were already in conflict prior to the pandemic – a problem that appears to be relatively widespread in the country. According to research by UNICEF, nearly half of all children are exposed to verbal or physical conflict in a typical week.⁹⁰ Conflict may also have arisen between children and their parents for different reasons, including disproportionate expectations regarding the completion of domestic chores.

An additional risk factor within the home has been increasing rates of alcohol abuse, and inversely, alcohol withdrawal amongst fathers – both of which may have been exacerbated by movement restrictions, economic scarcity, and extended closures of pubs and bars.⁹¹ **As a result, children may be more likely to witness intimate partner violence and/or be exposed to physical abuse themselves.**⁹² Local opinion leaders also indicated that children may have engaged with alcohol or substance abuse due to school closures. 26% of parents reported concerns that their child would get involved with drugs because they had too much free time.

According to local opinion leaders, many parents have been less present in the home since lockdowns eased. Many parents faced economic hardship due to the lockdown, particularly those who rely on a daily wage to support their families. Consequently, local opinion leaders felt that many parents – both mothers and fathers – were understandably keen to return to work as soon they were able. For children, this has meant spending more time at home without parental supervision and/or parental engagement in their learning.

Neglect may have worsened over this period, as local opinion leaders confirmed the presence of unaccompanied children on the streets and children with poor hygiene in many localities across the country. In May 2020, The New Times also reported on the increasing number of street children due to rising unemployment and school closures.⁹³ In the past, children living on the streets have been subject to forced institutionalisation in so-called ‘transit centres’⁹⁴ – many of which closed at the onset of the pandemic precipitating the sudden release of children without prior planning as to their ongoing care and protection needs.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Imbuto Foundation and UNICEF (2014), Early Childhood Development and Family Services: Baseline Evaluation in 20 Sites in Rwanda, available at: https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/ECD_and_F_Baseline_Evaluation_Rwanda.pdf ⁹¹ UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (May 2020), Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women through the lens of Civil Society and Women’s Rights Organizations, available at: https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20untf/publications/2020/external%20brief/impact%20of%20covid-19_v08_single%20page-compressed.pdf?la=en&vs=2705 ⁹² ACPHA (4 May 2020), Technical Note - COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home, available at: <https://www.alliancecpa.org/en/child-protection-online-library/covid-19-protecting-children-violence-abuse-and-neglect-home> ⁹³ Ange Iliza (17 May 2020), Over 740 children taken off streets, City of Kigali says, The New Times, available at: <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/over-740-children-taken-streets-city-kigali-says> ⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch (27 January 2020), “As Long as We Live on the Streets They Will Beat Us” Rwanda’s Abusive Detention of Children, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/01/27/long-we-live-streets-they-will-beat-us/rwandas-abusive-detention-children> ⁹⁵ Ange Iliza (17 May 2020), Over 740 children taken off streets, City of Kigali says, The New Times, available at: <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/over-740-children-taken-streets-city-kigali-says>

Not all children may return to school

While the Government of Rwanda makes plans for a safe return to schools, there are already indications that not every child will want or be able to go back. Gender disparities may be more evident amongst older children, particularly adolescent girls who may have become pregnant in the interim period. For primary-age children, however, there may be less of a gender differential. Nonetheless, certain primary-age children may not return to school for diverse reasons:

- **68% of parents have expressed fears that their children having too much free time may have left them unmotivated to learn.**
- **Only 34% of parents felt that when schools reopen their child would have the same or better level of learning than when school closed.**
- **41% of parents felt that it would be difficult for their children to return to their studies.** Already, 38% of families reported that they had a child who had repeated their class in 2019.

It was generally felt by local opinion leaders that the vast majority of parents would be motivated to send their children back to school after such a long period of having them at home. Indeed, 53% of parents felt concerned in the past 7 days about their child falling behind in their education. 89% of parents stated that it was either ‘extremely likely’ or ‘likely’ that their children would return to school – leaving, however, an important number of children behind. Approximately 6% of households surveyed indicated that the reason why their primary-age child did not follow lessons during school closures is because they did not intend to return to school at all.

“ There was a boy who tore his uniform saying he will not come back ”

– Local opinion leader

According to local opinion leaders, there was some concern that economics may factor into parental decision-making. In particular, parents from poorer backgrounds may be less inclined to send their children back to school, especially if their children have started to financially contribute to the household. Less than 10% of those surveyed had a fixed monthly salary, with the vast majority relying on agriculture, small trade or seasonal employment as a means of livelihood (all sectors that have been heavily impacted by the pandemic). 12% were unemployed. Indeed, 62% of targeted families fell in either Ubudehe category 1 or 2 – reflecting their lower socio-economic status as per the Government of Rwanda’s scale.

Without outside intervention or sensitisation, financially strapped parents could potentially delay or refuse their children’s return to education – especially given the wider context

of increasing economic hardship across the country as a result of the pandemic. One mitigating factor may be if the Government is able to continue to offer school-feeding programmes, particularly since **49% of parents reported that they had been concerned if their children had enough to eat in the past 7 days.**

Children themselves may have lost morale during school closures, affecting their motivation to continue their education. This may have been further exacerbated as children realised that schools would not open in September 2020 as previously promised, disappointing those that were looking forward to a reprieve from staying at home. Some may feel they have outgrown school. Children who live far away from their schools may be also be at higher risk of being left behind once schools reopen, as are children who may have become involved in alcohol or substance abuse. Others may delay their return because they are eager to continue earning money or because they lack adequate scholastic materials or tuition fees. Where children had limited clothing options, school uniforms may have been worn despite school closures. As a result, uniforms may have become damaged and families may lack the means to re-purchase them. Some children will also need a bigger size by the time schools reopen.

Strategic recommendations to mitigate against rising inequities

In light of both ongoing school closures for Pre-Primary to Primary 3 children and the cyclical nature of the COVID-19 pandemic itself, recommendations have been formulated to inform not only current plans to return to school but also how to strengthen distance learning should additional school closures be imposed in future. This is important to ensuring that the education sector is able to ‘build back better’ to design a more resilient and inclusive system in future.

“ We shall begin from zero when schools reopen ”
– Local opinion leader

While this Inequity Impact Assessment was not designed to draw firm conclusions, its findings do support policymakers and practitioners to make better informed decisions about the impact of school closures on children’s immediate wellbeing and future prospects. Because of its purposive nature, this study allows for the formulation of recommendations based on the specific consideration of children from the most vulnerable and marginalised households. It provides information to enable contextually relevant decision-making with children at the centre, weighing up the risks to ensure decisions to open or suspend schooling are in the best interests of children while minimising the risk of harm.

“ I am scared that if things continue, we may have a generation of children who have not studied ”
– Local opinion leader

Protecting the right to education for all is particularly critical given the inequities that the pandemic has both created and exacerbated between children in Rwanda. In preparation for school opening, targeted interventions will be required to ensure the most vulnerable return to their education as quickly as possible. These could potentially encompass the following measures:

- Targeted accompaniment of parents to build their motivation and capacity to support the learning of children, including those with disabilities, at home;
- Dedicated parental engagement efforts amongst the most marginalised households to ensure parents are aware of specific incentives such as school-feeding programmes in order to send their children to school as soon as they resume;⁹⁶
- Back-to-school campaigns specifically designed for a young audience, focusing on the importance of education to attract children who may have become accustomed to working for money, have lost interest in their studies and/or need additional motivation to return;

⁹⁶ See BLF (2020 – forthcoming), Guidance on getting children vulnerable to dropout back to school.

“ There was a child I talked to the other day who wished COVID-19 could continue because they have worked and been able to buy a cow ”

– Local opinion leader

- All national and local sensitisation efforts as well as official communications about school reopening feature key messages related to the inclusion of children with disabilities, children from lower socio-economic backgrounds and children of all genders;
- Parallel support is provided by Inshuti z’Umuryango (IZUs) and other community volunteers to conduct door-to-door identification, sensitisation and mobilisation of the most vulnerable households;
- Daily nutritious meals as part of a school-feeding programming to re-enrol and retain students, especially those who may have experienced hunger and malnutrition during the extended crisis;⁹⁷
- Practical assistance including the provision of school uniforms and scholastic materials for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
- Provide menstrual hygiene kits to facilitate the return of pubescent girls who are at higher risk of abandoning their studies;
- Provision of child-friendly and accessible sexual and reproductive health information to ensure all children are equipped with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions and protect themselves;
- Reporting and referral of all expectant or lactating girls for integrated multisectoral health, psychological and legal support as survivors of sexual violence; and,
- Targeted interventions to ensure that expectant or lactating girls are still able to attend school and sit examinations as per national policy, combined with localised efforts to reduce stigmatisation.

“ The Government had said they will give food to all children at school. If this programme continues, children will come without effort ”

– Local opinion leader

The cyclical nature of the virus will likely mean that public health measures will need to be periodically escalated from time-to-time depending on the level of community spread in any given site. If deemed necessary to curb the spread of the virus, schools in some areas could be temporarily closed again. Another possibility is that pupils and teachers will have reduced contact time due to the need to maintain social distance and therefore limit classroom hours. This means that lessons learned from the current school closure might be applicable again at some point in the future. When it comes to ensuring that learning continues at home for primary-aged children, several measures have been put forth by research respondents. Depending on prevailing circumstances, these could include:

⁹⁷ At the time of writing, the Ministry of Education had just announced plans to roll out school-feeding programmes for all students in Rwanda. See, Emmanuel Ntiringanya (20 November 2020), All schoolchildren to get meals as government reviews policy, available at: <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/all-schoolchildren-get-meals-government-reviews-policy>

Parental engagement and support:

- Sensitisation campaigns led by local authorities to ensure that parents understand how and why to support their children’s learning at home, give equal importance to the education of girls and boys as well as the role of both mothers and fathers in learning, and understand the multiple risk factors facing their children during school closures;
- Promoting key messages related to the need for stress and anger management – in addition to non- violent communication and conflict resolution, as well as, positive discipline methods to equip parents to better handle heightened stress factors;
- Raise awareness amongst parents of the existence of any remote learning opportunities and shared learning resources, including libraries, in the local area;
- Providing of radios to families with poor socio-economic status; and,
- Ensuring that both children and parents understand the heightened risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and/or risk-taking behaviour that could result in unwanted and/ or early pregnancies.

Community mobilisation:

- Encourage schools to lend out textbooks, storybooks and other learning supports within the local area;
- Allowing same-grade children to meet in small groups or ‘learning pods’ with teachers or tutors at village level, wherever possible;
- Equip key stakeholders, such as headteachers, teachers and SGAC members, with the necessary resources so that can engage with parents through telephone calls, transport money and other means; and,
- Maximise the potential for IZUs and other community volunteers to support sensitisation and/or learning.

Adaptive distance learning strategies:

- Consider offering radio lessons at different times of the day to accommodate the often gender- specific domestic roles and responsibilities girls and boys may have during school closures, as well as, different times parents may be available to help support their children and ensure access to any available radio devices;
- Ensuring radio lessons are broadcast on different stations to capture a wider audience;
- Diversifying communication channels to share lesson timetables through local authorities, teachers, social media and other outlets;
- Adopting pedagogical approaches so that online lessons are as engaging as possible to primary-age children, similar to other successful radio programmes from Itetero or Ni Nyampiga;
- Given low language proficiency levels amongst some primary pupils and parents, identify strategies to support English language acquisition in a purely audio learning context;
- Increasing the lesson time from twenty to forty minutes to allow for sufficient time to cover the subject at a pace adapted to young learners;
- Incentivising participation with live question and answer sessions and competitions through toll-free numbers and text messages;

⁹⁸ For additional guidance, see: World Bank Group and Inclusive Education Initiative (2020), *Pivoting to Inclusion: Leveraging Lessons from COVID-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities*, available at: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/147471595907235497/IEI-Issues-Paper-Disability-Inclusive-Education-FINAL-ACCESSIBLE.pdf>; and, Global Partnership for Education (11 May 2020), *An inclusive response to COVID-19: Education for children with disabilities*, available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/inclusive-response-covid-19-education- children-disabilities>

- Raising greater awareness of REB's *134# quiz service including sensitisation on its existence and how to use it following a radio lesson;
- Introducing assessment of distance learning wherever possible to both motivate learners and monitor learning; and,
- Systemising and enhance the capacity of teachers to monitor remote learning.

Ensuring the inclusion of children with disabilities:

- Children with disabilities, learning difficulties or other special needs are identified and provided with additional support through individualised adaptations, accommodations and assistance – in addition to accompaniment for their parents;⁹⁸
- Consider offering televised lessons with simultaneous sign language interpretation for pupils with hearing impairment or online lessons with audio interpretation options for pupils with visual impairment;
- Allowing specialised centres for children with disabilities to remain open, wherever possible; and,
- Providing paper-based learning materials to use as a complement to radio lessons, including possibly collaborating with local publishing houses to create and disseminate written learning materials, including some in braille.

⁹⁸ For additional guidance, see: World Bank Group and Inclusive Education Initiative (2020), *Pivoting to Inclusion: Leveraging Lessons from COVID-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities*, available at: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/147471595907235497/IEI-Issues-Paper-Disability-Inclusive-Education-FINAL-ACCESSIBLE.pdf>; and, Global Partnership for Education (11 May 2020), *An inclusive response to COVID-19: Education for children with disabilities*, available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/inclusive-response-covid-19-education-children-disabilities>

Annex I – Targeted districts, sectors and schools

PROVINCE/DISTRICT	SECTOR	SCHOOL
Kigali		
Gasabo	Kimihurura	GS RUGANDO
Gasabo	Nduba	EP SHANGO
Gasabo	Rusororo	EP GASAGARA
Kicukiro	Gahanga	GS KAREMBURE
Kicukiro	Kigarama	GS KIMISANGE
Kicukiro	Masaka	GS MASAKA
North		
Gakenke	Rusasa	EP RUSASA
Gakenke	Busengo	GS RUHANGA
Gakenke	Cyabingo	EP MUHAZA
Rulindo	Masoro	EP SHENGAMPULI
Rulindo	Burega	GS BUREGA
Rulindo	Shyorongi	GS SHYORONGI
South		
Gisagara	Mamba	EPMWENDO
Gisagara	Mugombwa	EP LINDA
Gisagara	Nyanza	EP RUSONGATI
Nyamagabe	Cyanika	GS CYNAIKA
Nyamagabe	Gatare	GS GATARE
Nyamagabe	Mushubi	EP NYAGISUMO
Nyanza	Busasamana	GS NYANZA B
Nyanza	Busoro	EP BUSORO
Nyanza	Cyabakamyi	GS RUBONA
East		
Kayonza	Mwili	GS NYAMUGARI
Kayonza	Kabare	EP ADELAIDE
Kayonza	Gahini	EP KIYENZI
Nyagatare	Rukomo	GS RURENGE
Nyagatare	Katabegemu	GS NYAKIGANDO
Nyagatare	Mimuli	GS CYABAYAGA
West		
Ngororero	Hindiro	EP MBONABYOMBI
Ngororero	Kabaya	CS MWENDO
Ngororero	Sovu	GS MUGEGA
Nyamasheke	Kirimbi	EP NYABINAGA
Nyamasheke	Rangiro	EP MURAMBI
Nyamasheke	Kanjongo	GS ST. PAUL TYAZO
Rutsiro	Musasa	EP GIHINGA I
Rutsiro	Nyabirasi	EP MUBUGA
Rutsiro	Murunda	GS Murunda

Annex II – Data collection instruments

2.1 Question guide for pupils

Before the interview begins:

- Introduce yourself briefly and clearly, mentioning your name and institution and your role in the research.
- Explain the purpose of the proposed research.
- Explain why they were selected as a participant. Reassure them that personal details will not be revealed to anyone and will be used only for the purpose of the research. Any findings will be anonymously presented. Explain that their participation is voluntary – they can decide not to participate, or stop/change their mind at any time, even after the interview has begun.
- Explain the requirements for gaining their parents informed consent (consent forms to be provided) and the children’s verbal assent.

Date

Location

Gender

Age

Any disabilities (if disclosed)

Interviewer name

1. We are still feeling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our lives. Can you tell us a little bit about how the pandemic has affected you and your friends and family?
2. As you know, we are here to talk specifically about the impact of school closures on children in your community. Can you tell me about how children have been affected by the school closures?
3. Which children do you think have been most affected and why? (Probe: girls, boys, children with disabilities, children with parents with disabilities, children with parents with low level of literacy/numeracy, children from a low socio-economic background etc.)
4. While schools have been closed, what have girls your age been spending most of their time doing? What about boys your age? (Probe: learning, playing, domestic chores, working for money etc.)
5. Have your parents/caregivers changed the way they discipline you since schools closed? Are you being disciplined more or less often?
 - a. Is there any difference between discipline for girls or boys your age?

- b. If there are any changes in the way they discipline you and/or the frequency, why do you think this has changed?

6. At home, do you receive support and encouragement from your parents/caregivers to continue your learning during these school closures?
 - a. What kind of support do you receive?
 - b. Who supports you most – mother, father, older siblings, someone else?
 - c. If no one was supporting you, why not?

7. Did you have any access to learning opportunities at home during school closure? (Probe: radio lessons, other remote learning platforms, tutors, textbooks, storybooks and other learning materials)

8. If you followed the radio lessons, what did you enjoy most about them?
 - a. Did you learn something new?
 - b. What do you think can be done to make them even better?

9. Were both boys and girls your age able to follow radio lessons equally? If not, what were the reasons behind this difference? (Probe: attitudes and behaviors of parents/caregivers towards importance of education for girls or boys; difference in domestic tasks between genders etc.)
 - a. Were there any children who were excluded, for example, children with disabilities? (If yes, which kinds of disabilities made it more likely that children were excluded)?
 - b. Were other children excluded for different reasons? (Probe: lack of access to radio/electricity, lack of motivation, lack of parental engagement, too many other domestic chores, playing, engaged in economic or sexual exploitation etc.)

10. In your community, what can be done to help all children continue their learning while schools are closed?

11. If schools reopen, will you go back to school like before? If not, why not?
 - a. Do you think there will be any difference between girls and boys?
 - b. What about for children with disabilities?

To conclude:

- Reminder of how the data will be used (purpose of research and confidentiality of information)
- We have come to the end of our discussion, thank you so much for your time and information. It's now your time to ask me questions, if any.

2.2 Household survey questionnaire for parents

Before the survey begins:

- Introduce yourself briefly and clearly, mentioning your name and institution and your role in the research.
- Explain the purpose of the proposed research.
- Explain why the interviewee was selected as a participant. Reassure him/her that personal details will not be revealed to anyone and will be used only for the purpose of the research. Any findings will be anonymously presented. Explain that their participation is voluntary – they can decide not to participate, or stop/change their mind at any time, even after the survey has begun.
- Explain the requirements for gaining the interviewee’s informed consent (note: consent forms to be provided).

Do you confirm your consent to participate in the assessment? (Yes/No)

Name of data collector

Date of interview

Location

Name of respondent

Telephone number of respondent, if available

#	Item	Response	Instructions
Demographic characteristics			
1	Province		
2	District		
3	Sector		
4	School attended by your child(ren)		
6	Sex of respondent	Male	
		Female	
7	Age of respondent		Write in figure
	Disability, if any		Write in response
8	Marital status between parents	Married	
		Separated	
		Divorced	
		Widowed	
		Other (please specify)	
9	Number of parents/caregivers in the household	Two-parent household	
		Single parent household (mother only)	
		Single parent household (father only)	
		Child-headed household	
		Elderly primary caregiver (grandmother/ grandfather etc.)	
10	Other family characteristics	Family with stepchildren	
		Family with adopted children	
11	How many people (adults and children) live in your household?		Total number of people living in the family including children, parents, and other people
12	How many children do you have in P1-P3 grades?		Write in figure

13	How many girls and which grades?		Write in figure
14	How many boys and which grades?		Write in figure
15	Have any of your children repeated a class last year?	Yes	
		No	
16	Do any of your children have a disability?	Yes	
		No	
17	If yes, which type of disability does he/she have?	As per Washington Group	Tick all which apply
18	Do any of your children have a chronic disease?	Yes	
		No	
Socio-economic status			
19	Highest level of education of the father?	Primary level	
		Secondary level	
		University level	
		Not applicable if father unavailable/unknown	
20	Highest level of education of the mother?	Primary level	
		Secondary level	
		University level	
		Not applicable if mother unavailable/unknown	
21	What is your Ubudehe category?	Category 1	
		Category 2	
		Category 3	
		Category 4	
		Category 5	
22	What is your main daily activity or source of income?	Self-employed in farming	
		Small trade	
		Seasonal employment (Ibiraka)	
		Public servant	
		Other employment with a fixed monthly wage	
		Unemployed	
		Other (please specify)	
23	Which form of power do you use at your home?	On grid energy (Electricity)	
		Off grid energy (Solar)	
		Paraffin lamp	
		Candles	
		Other source of energy (please specify)	
		None of the above	
24	How long does it take you to reach the source of water you use at home?	We have a water source at home	
		Less than 10 minutes	
		Between 10 to 30 minutes	
		Between 30 minutes to 1 hour	
		More than 1 hour	
Access to technologies			
25	Do you have a stand-alone radio in your household?	Yes	
		No	
26	Do you have a telephone?	Yes	
		No	
27	If yes, is your telephone a smart phone?	Yes	
		No	

28	Who else has a telephone at home?	Father	
		Mother	
		Other (please specify)	
29	Do you listen to the radio on your phone?	Yes	
		No	
30	Do you use WhatsApp?	Yes	
		No	
31	Do you have a television at your home?	Yes	
		No	
32	Do you have a computer or tablet at your home?	Yes	
		No	
33	Do you have access to the internet?	Yes	
		No	
Learning resources at home			
34	What learning resources are available at your home for your P1- P3 children?	English textbooks	Tick all which apply
		Mathematics textbooks	
		Kinyarwanda textbooks	
		Textbooks for other subjects	
		Storybooks	
		Mathematics manipulatives (numbers, counters etc.)	
		Other (please specify)	
		We do not have any learning materials	
35	What ICT equipment do you have at your home which could support learning?	Telephone	Tick all which apply
		Tablet	
		Radio	
		Computer	
		Television	
36	Of the ICT equipment you mentioned earlier, which ones do you use for learning activities at home?	Telephone	Tick all which apply
		Tablet	
		Radio	
		Computer	
		Television	
37	If you do not use your ICT equipment for learning activities at home, why not?	I do not know how to use them	Tick all which apply
		I lack time to use them in learning	
		I do not do learning at home	
		The equipment is not working	
		I do not have power in my home to charge or turn them on	
		I do not have money to buy cash power for electricity	
		I do not have money for internet access/data	
		I do not have access to this equipment even though they are at home	
		Other (please specify)	

Parental engagement in remote learning			
38	In the past 7 days, what have you been most concerned about in relation to your P2/P3 child(ren)?	Children having enough to eat	Tick all which apply
		Children falling behind in their education	
		Children not being able to take their exams	
		Children getting sick	
		Children loitering, not being occupied	
		Children being safe	
		Children getting into trouble because they are not in school	
		Children being disobedient	
		Children getting involved in sexual relations, exploitation and/or getting pregnant	
		Other (please specify)	
		I have not been concerned	
39	Before the school closure due to COVID-19, did you support your children in their learning?	Yes	
		No	
40	When schools were open, how often in a week did you work with your P2- P3 children on their schoolwork (for example reading, completing homework)?	Every day	
		Three times a week	
		Twice a week	
		Once week	
		Never	
41	Do you support your child to continue their learning at home during this period of school closure?	Yes	
		No	
42	If yes, what are the main actions you take to support your children's learning while schools are closed?	Talk to children about school	Tick all which apply
		Read to children	
		Pay for tutoring	
		Tell children to review their books	
		Help with homework	
		Call child's teacher/headteacher for advice	
		Play-based learning activities	
		Providing textbooks (purchase or borrow books)	
		Encourage children to do distance learning (radio, television, internet, phone, etc)	
		Support them in following up radio lessons	
Other (please specify)			
43	If yes, how often do you support your children to learn at home since schools closed?	Every day	
		Three times a week	
		Twice a week	
		Once week	
		Never	
44	If no, what factors prevent you from supporting your child in learning at home?	I do not have time	Do not read the responses and tick all which apply
		I have too many other things to do	
		I have too many children	
		I am busy with work	
		I do not know how to support them in learning	
		I do not know how to read or write myself	
		I have a disability/illness which prevents me	
		My children are not interested in learning	
		Learning at home is not a priority	
		Learning happens at school	
		Teachers are responsible for learning	
Other (please specify)			

45	Who most often supports your primary-age children to learn at home?	Mother	
		Father	
		Older siblings	
		Grandparents	
		Other (please specify)	
46	Since the start of school closures, were your children able to follow radio lessons?	Yes	
		No	
47	How often did they follow radio lessons?	Every day	
		Three times a week	
		Twice a week	
		Once week	
		Never	
48	Which subject did they learn?	English	Do not read the responses and tick all which apply
		Mathematics	
		Kinyarwanda	
49	If they did not follow radio lessons, why not?	We do not have a radio	Do not read the responses and tick all which apply
		We do not have electricity at home	
		We were not aware of radio lessons programme	
		There was no one to support children	
		We did not know what time the lessons were aired	
		Following radio lessons is not a priority at home	
		Children were not interested	
		Children had a disability which prevented them from following lessons	
50	When was the last time your children listened to the radio lessons?	In this week	
		Last week	
		In last two weeks	
		In last month	
		Never	
		I do not remember	
51	Has your children's participation in the radio lessons changed, in terms of frequency?	Yes, there has been a positive change, they are frequently following	
		Yes, there is a negative change, the listenership decreased	
		No, the listenership remained the same	
		They have never followed the radio lessons	
52	If there has been a positive change, what do you think are the main reasons?	We were sensitized about radio lessons	Do not read the responses and tick all which apply
		We think it necessary that children follow radio lessons because schools are closed	
		We are being reminded to follow radio lessons	
		Our children ask for radio lessons	
		Other reasons (please specify)	
53	Were you able to provide textbooks, storybooks or other learning materials for your children to learn at home during this school closure?	Yes	
		No	
54	If yes, where did you get these learning materials?	I bought them	
		I borrowed them from school	
		I borrowed them from neighbors or friends	
		I borrowed them from the reading clubs in my community	
		I made them at home	
		Other (please specify)	

55	What are the main reasons children in your household are not spending more time on education during this time while schools are closed?	Lack of access to television	Tick all which apply
		Lack of access to radio	
		Lack of access to internet	
		Lack of access to educational programs	
		Lack of access to textbooks, storybooks or other learning materials	
		Lack of motivation	
		Lack of support from teachers and schools	
		Children are not interested	
		Children are working to earn money	
		Children are taking care of their siblings	
		Children are doing housework	
		Lack of supervision from adults in the household	
		There is not a good/quiet place to study	
		Children need to spend their time doing other things	
Children do not plan to return to school			
Other (please specify)			
56	If you do support learning at home, has there been a change in the way you support your children to learn?	No, there has been no change	
		Yes, now I have been actively supporting my child	
		Yes, before I used to support them, and now my support is reduced	
		Other (please specify)	
57	Do you know what time radio lessons for primary children are aired?	Yes	
		No	
		Not sure	
58	If yes, when are these lessons aired?	Correct answer provided for English lessons	Tick all which apply
		Correct answer provided for Mathematics lessons	
		Correct answer provided for Kinyarwanda lessons	
		The respondent mixed the days of radio lessons	
Community support and opportunities for learning			
59	How did you find out about the remote learning opportunities once schools closed?	Head teacher	Tick all which apply
		Radio announcements	
		Local Authorities	
		Religious leaders	
		Neighbors and friends	
		Media	
		Social Media	
		REB	
		SGAC member	
		Children	
		By chance	
Other (please specify)			

60	What kind of support from others do you receive to ensure that your children benefit from remote learning?	I receive related messages on WhatsApp	Tick all which apply
		I am reminded by my children's teachers	
		I am reminded by my children's Head teacher	
		I am reminded by SGAC members at my children's school	
		I am reminded by neighbors and friends	
		I receive reminders from local leaders	
		I am reminded by BLF staff	
		I am reminded by Soma Umenye Staff	
61	Have you or any other adult in the household been contacted by anyone from your children's school since it closed? If yes, by who?	Head teacher	
		Teacher	
		SCAC member	
		SEO	
		DEO	
		REB	
		BLF staff	
		Soma Umenye Staff	
62	Have you spoken to your children's teacher since schools closed to discuss their continued learning?	Yes	
		No	
63	Is there anywhere in your community that your child could borrow or get learning materials during this period of school closure?	Yes, I can borrow them from school	Tick all which apply
		Yes, I can borrow them community library	
		Yes, I can borrow them from my neighbors and friends	
		Other (please specify)	
		No	
64	Do you know other platforms that support remote learning during school closures?	No, I do not know them	Do not read the responses and tick all which apply
		Yes (*134# quiz service)	
		Yes (REB e-learning portal)	
		Yes (REB YouTube channel)	
		Yes (Television lessons)	
		Other (please specify)	
65	If yes, which ones do you use to support your children to learn at home?	*134# quiz service	Do not read the responses and tick all which apply
		REB e-learning portal	
		REB YouTube channel	
		Television lessons	
		Other (please specify)	
66	What do you think are the general challenges affecting your children's education?	Lack of learning materials	Do not read the responses and tick all which apply
		Lack of textbooks	
		Long distance to school	
		They are hungry as we lack enough food at home	
		They lack time for studies as they are mostly involved in household chores	
		They work for money	
		We cannot afford other materials required by schools	
		They have a disability that affects their ability to attend school or learn	
		They have chronic disease which negatively impact their attendance at school	
		Other reasons (please specify)	

Perception towards children's learning			
67	When schools reopen, do you intend to send your children back to school?	Yes	
		No	
		No answer	
	If not, why not?		Please write the responses provided by respondent
68	Do you think that when schools will reopen your child will have the same or better level of learning than when schools closed?	Yes	
		No	
		I do not know	
69	Do you think you children learned anything new from listening to radio lessons?	Yes	
		No	
		I am not sure	
		I do not know	
70	Do you think it is possible for P2-P3 aged children to learn if they are not in a classroom with a teacher?	Yes	
		No	
		I am not sure	
		I do not know	
71	Do you think radio programs can help P2-P3 child/ren learn, in general?	Yes	
		No	
		I am not sure	
		I do not know	
72	What do you feel could be done to ensure that all children have access to remote learning opportunities?		Please write the responses provided by respondent
Equity aspects			
73	Are P2/P3 children in your household currently spending time on learning at home since schools were closed?	Yes, all of them	
		Yes, most of them	
		Yes, some of them	
		No, none of them	
74	Are either girls or boys spending less time on learning during this period of school closure?	Boys	
		Girls	
		Both spend equal time learning	
75	If there is a difference between girls and boys, why do you think this is?		Please write the responses provided by respondent
76	If you have a have child with a disability, is he/she learning at home?	Yes	
		No	
		I do not have a child with disability	
77	Do you think is he/she spending the same time learning as his/her siblings or other children in the same class?	Yes	Ask if they answered 'yes' to question above
		No	
78	If not, why not?		Please write the responses provided by respondent
Child protection aspects			
79	Are any of your P2/P3 children involved in work to earn money during this period of school closure?	Yes	
		No	
		No response	
80	If yes, what kind of work are they involved in?		Please write the responses provided by respondent
81	If yes, is it your son and/or daughter who is working for money?	Son	
		Daughter	
		No response	

82	Which activities do your children spend most of their time doing during this period of school closure?	Playing	Tick all which apply
		Learning	
		Doing house chores	
		Fetching water	
		Collecting firewood	
		Working for money	
83	Do you think, there has been any change in your children's behavior during this period of school closure?	Yes	
		No	
		No response	
84	If yes, how has their behavior changed?		Please write the responses provided by respondent
85	Are you concerned about your children having too much free time during school closure?	Yes	
		No	
86	What kind of concerns do you have about them having too much free time?	They will get lazy	Do not read responses and tick all that apply
		They may get involved in sexual activities and/or get pregnant	
		They may get involved in drugs	
		They may get involved in criminal activity	
		They will be unmotivated to learn	
		It will be hard for them to go back to school	
		Others (please specify)	
87	When your child misbehaves, how do you discipline him/her?		Please write the responses provided by respondent
88	During the period of school closure, has your child requires discipline more or less often?	More often	
		Less often	
89	Have you changed the way you discipline your children since schools closed?	Yes	Please write the responses provided by respondent
		No	
		I don't know	
		I am not sure	
90	If yes, what has changed and why?		Please write the responses provided by respondent

To conclude the survey:

- Reminder of how the data will be used (purpose of research and confidentiality of information)
- We have come to the end of our discussion, thank you so much for your time and information. It's now your time to ask me questions, if any.

2.3 Focus group discussion guide with local opinion leaders

Before the focus group discussion begins:

- Introduce yourself briefly and clearly, mentioning your name and institution and your role in the research.
- Explain the purpose of the proposed research.
- Explain why they were selected as a participant. Reassure them that personal details will not be revealed to anyone and will be used only for the purpose of the research. Any findings will be anonymously presented. Explain that their participation is voluntary

- they can decide not to participate, or stop/change their mind at any time, even after the focus group discussion has begun.
- Explain the requirements for gaining participants’ informed consent (note: consent forms to be provided).

Date
Location
Number of participants
Gender of participants
Age range of participants
Any disabilities (if disclosed)
Name of FGD facilitator

1. Which primary-aged children were most impacted by school closures in your community (Probe: girls, boys, children with disabilities, children with parents with disabilities, children with parents with low level of literacy/numeracy, children from a low socio-economic background etc.)
2. In your opinion, what has been the impact of school closures on these children – both now and in the future? (Probe: loss of learning, lack of motivation to return to school, too much free time, involvement in economic exploitation, sexual or criminal activity, harsh discipline from parents etc.)
3. During this period of school closure, what have primary-aged girls in your community been spending their time on? What about boys? (Probe: learning, playing, domestic chores, working for money etc.)
4. Do parents have the time and resources necessary to support their primary-aged children’s learning during this period of school closures? Is this different for mothers/ female caregivers compared with fathers/male caregivers? Please help us understand.
5. To what extent have radio lessons been helpful in terms of continuing children’s learning at home during school closures?
 - a. Were parents/caregivers in your community aware of the radio lessons?
 - b. Were primary-aged children able to learn effectively from radio lessons? Was there any difference for girls or boys, or children with different kinds of disabilities?
 - c. Did the radio lessons help parents/caregivers to support their children?
6. What were the main challenges to accessing or benefiting from radio lessons during this period (Probe: lack of knowledge of their existence, lack of ICT access/ infrastructure, lack of parental engagement, lack of interest from children etc.)
 - a. Were any children excluded, for example because of their gender or disability?

7. How could radio lessons have been improved? (Probe: timing, content, mode of delivery, etc.)
8. What other support do parents and children need during school closures in order to ensure that learning continues for all primary-aged children despite COVID-19? (Probe: other remote learning opportunities, access to learning materials, encouragement from local authorities and local leaders, sensitization etc.)
 - a. What kind of support is necessary in order to ensure both girls and boys benefit equally from learning opportunities at home?
 - b. What about for children with different kinds of disabilities?
9. Have parents/caregivers changed the way they discipline their children since schools closed? If yes, what has changed and why? Is there any difference between how they discipline girls or boys?
10. If schools reopen, do you think that parents will send their children back to school like before? Will some children remain at home?
 - a. Will there be any difference between girls or boys?
 - b. What about for children with disabilities?
 - c. What about children coming from poor or remote areas?

To conclude the focus group discussion:

- Reminder of how the data will be used (purpose of research and confidentiality of information)
- We have come to the end of our discussion, thank you so much for your time and information. It's now your time to ask me questions, if any.

Endnotes

- ⁱ Ministry of Health, Republic of Rwanda, (14 March 2020), Statement on New Measures to Prevent COVID-19 Coronavirus Transmission, available at: <https://twitter.com/RwandaHealth/status/1238886882408312834/photo/1>
- ⁱⁱ Ministry of Education, Republic of Rwanda, (April 2020), Keeping the Doors Open for Learning: Response Plan of Ministry of Education to the COVID-19 Outbreak, available at: https://mineduc.gov.rw/fileadmin/Documents/Report/Education_Sector_COVID_Plan_Rwanda.pdf
- ⁱⁱⁱ For ease of reference, the term 'parent' is used throughout this report to encompass biological and/or adoptive mothers and fathers, as well as, other primary caregivers within the household setting. Consequently, 'mothers' may include other adult female caregivers in the home, while 'fathers' can mean other adult male caregivers within the home.
- ^{iv} Building Learning Foundations (July 2020), BLF Digest: Remote Learning, Issue #5, available at: <http://buildinglearningfoundations.rw/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/BLF-Digest-Issue-5.pdf>
- ^v Sharon Kantengwa (23 July 2020), Teaching in the face of a pandemic: An educator shares her experience, The New Times, available at: <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/lifestyle/teaching-face-pandemic-educator-shares-her-experience>
- ^{vi} While survey respondents were not asked about their awareness or use of REB's helpline as part of this study, other organisations have monitoring data specific to the helpline. Save the Children, for example, has bi-weekly monitoring reports related to the awareness campaign on children's reading and learning at home through the school closure period.
- ^{vii} World Vision (2020), COVID-19 Aftershocks: Access Denied – Teenage pregnancy threatens to block a million girls across Sub-Saharan Africa from returning to school, available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-access-denied>
- ^{viii} World Vision (2020), COVID-19 Aftershocks: Access Denied – Teenage pregnancy threatens to block a million girls across Sub-Saharan Africa from returning to school, available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-access-denied>
- ^{ix} Joining Forces (June 2019), A Second Revolution: Thirty years of child rights and the unfinished agenda, available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/15389/pdf/2019_06_14_jf_crn_a_second_revolution_global_report_final_eng_embargoed-compressed.pdf
- ^x NUDOR (July 2018), Rwanda Alternative Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to be submitted to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the National Union of Disability Organizations in Rwanda available at: <https://www.nudor.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Rwanda-alternative-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-CRPD-Final-Signed-by-NUDOR.pdf>; and, World Health Organisation (March 2020), Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak, available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Disability-2020-1>
- ^{xi} Yasmin Noone (8 March 2018), The mother is the last to eat in developing countries, available at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/food/health/article/2018/03/08/mother-last-eat-developing-countries>
- ^{xii} UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (May 2020), Impact of COVID-19 on violence against women through the lens of Civil Society and Women's Rights Organizations, available at: https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20untf/publications/2020/external%20brief/impact%20of%20covid-19_v08_single%20page-compressed.pdf?la=en&vs=2705
- ^{xiii} ACPHA (4 May 2020), Technical Note - COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home, available at: <https://www.alliancecpa.org/en/child-protection-online-library/covid-19-protecting-children-violence-abuse-and-neglect-home>