URUNANA rw'Abarezi

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Online and distance learning:
Educational response to the COVID-19 crisis

VVOB education for development Rwanda

REB Rwanda Education Board

CONTENT

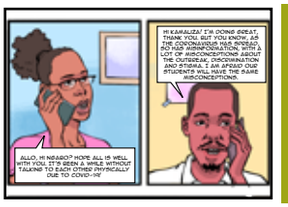
Responding to the COVID-19 crisis in basic education through ICT.....P.4

Teachers' role during the COVID-19 pandemic.....P. 16

Becoming a new teacher to his children.....P.8

#WhyITeach: ''I feel uplifted when my students uplift their knowledge'' P.14

''I have other things to do but my children remain my first priority'' - Ndagijimana.....P.10



COMIC: Integrating COVID-19 into STEM lessons P.20

Leading a school during the COVID-19 crisis

Interview with a school leader P.12

Tips for online/distance learning and teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown.....P.26

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Address:

REB: P.O. Box 3817 Kigali, Rwanda
@REBRwanda
@RwandaEducationBoardOfficial
reb.rw

rwanda.vvob.org | **E:** info.rwanda@vvob.org
KG 565 st, House No 6, Kacyiru, P.O. Box 3776, Kigali-Rwanda
T +250 785 702 442 @VVOBrwanda VVOBrwanda VVOB Rwanda

THE EDITORIAL TEAM

FOR REB:
Dr Christine Niyizamwiyitira
Diane Sengati Uwasenga
Innocent Hagenimana

FOR VVOB:
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Etienne Ntawigira
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Lead Editor:
Etienne Ntawigira

Design & Layout:
Etienne Ntawigira

Photographs:
Etienne Ntawigira

Printing:
Kigali Sun Ltd.

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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Since March 16, 2020 the Government closed all education institutions in immediate response to the first case of the pandemic in Rwanda – disrupting the education of about 2.5 million primary and about 600,000 secondary school learners. In an attempt to attenuate the impact of the school closures on pupils' education, the Government, through Rwanda Education Board, acted swiftly and doubled the capacity of its existing e-learning platform and launched a radio learning programme and YouTube channel. Our 10th edition focuses on the use of ICT in teaching and learning as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This edition investigated how parents, teachers and school leaders have ensured that their students continue learning through online and distance learning during the global health crisis. It also explores how teachers and school leaders use ICT to teach, upgrade their knowledge, manage and lead schools.

As an enabling tool and a cost-effective solution to improve and increase access to education, ICT shall remain a tool for teaching, learning and teacher training. To achieve this, it requires not only school leaders that help, lead, support, and encourage the regular use of ICT in schools and classrooms, but also a trained teacher capable to transform teaching methodology from teacher-centred method to learner-centred method.

Therefore, we call for teachers' self-efforts and support to improve ICT literacy. Teachers should be more committed and participate fully in ICT related trainings organised by different development partners in the education sector. We also urge all school leaders to promote school-based continuous professional development through communities of practice (CoPs), where teachers can support each other to improve teaching and learning.

School leaders, teachers as well as the school administrative staff should ensure optimum utilization and due care of ICT facilities given to the schools (computers, internet modems). Students should also be trained on how to use those facilities and learn how to take care of them and other properties.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of different partners to help our schools recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as VVOB-*education for development*. We highly appreciate their continuous efforts and support in adapting/shifting their education services to be delivered fully digitally. In partnership with the Mastercard Foundation through Leaders in Teaching initiative, at the secondary school level, and the University of Rwanda – College of Education and Rwanda Education Board, VVOB offers relevant certificate and diploma courses to primary and secondary school leaders, sector education inspectors, mentor teachers and science teachers to improve educational services.

Photo: Imvaho Nshya

In response to the devastating impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on education, VVOB aims to equip sector and district education officers, school leaders, and teachers in secondary education with the competencies and skills to prevent and/or manage future health crises that disrupt education.

We hope that you enjoy reading this magazine that offers teachers and school leaders the opportunity, among other opportunities, to learn from each other. We believe that you will contribute to this platform by sharing your experiences and good practices to enhance quality of education in Rwanda, especially in this difficult times when the world faces an unprecedented health crisis.

Dr. Ndayambaje Irénée
Director General
Rwanda Education Board

Responding to the COVID-19 crisis in basic education

By Diane Sengati Uwasenga
Director of Digital Content and Instructional Technology Development - ICT in Education Department-REB, and
Dr Christine Niyizamwiyitira
Head of ICT in Education Department-REB

Technology has been more than ever very important in the education sector. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, electronic copies of the competency-based curriculum (CBC) documents and subject syllabi were available and accessible online. Digital contents for all primary and secondary schools were available on the e-learning platform of Rwanda Education Board (REB). ICT Essentials for Teachers course was also available to teachers. However, only few learners and teachers were using the contents. Following the school closure as an immediate response to the first case of the pandemic, technology-led solutions were identified to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure learning continuity and capacity development amongst teachers, and prepare school reopening.

What had been done before COVID-19 outbreak

Following the adoption of ICT in Education Policy in 2016 and even before, progress has been made since then. Tremendous efforts were put in integration and utilization of ICT in education at primary and secondary levels. Different activities, initiatives and projects were introduced in schools ensuring and preserving quality education.

In primary schools, the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) program was introduced in schools and currently, 1,700 primary schools with electricity, representing 67% of primary schools, have received the XO laptops and Content Access Points (CAPs) to facilitate the access to digital learning materials aligned to the curriculum where there is no internet connectivity. Teachers were trained on the use of the laptops and on how to access content on the CAPs.

In secondary schools, a "Smart classroom" initiative was introduced including three (3) components:

- devices (50 computers and a projector per classroom),
- internet connectivity,
- and access to digital content.

REB developed an e-learning platform having digital content for all pre-primary, primary and secondary school subjects. A number of students registered and continued to learn online through the platform.

Currently, 760 secondary schools, representing 54% of secondary schools, have smart classrooms. To have smart classrooms a school is required to have one or two rooms available and access to electricity. However, these components are not enough if appropriate utilisation of the computers is not ensured. That is why, teacher capacity development was not left out. Various initiatives were implemented including training on integration of ICT in teaching and learning through the Capacity Development for ICT in Education (CADIE) project, training on Microsoft Certification for Educators (MCE), training on Microsoft Office 365, ICT Essentials for Teachers, among others.

Educational response to the COVID-19 pandemic

REB developed an e-learning platform having digital content for all pre-primary, primary and secondary school subjects. A number of students registered to the e-learning platform and continued to learn online through that platform. With the schools' closure and the lockdown, accessing smart classrooms was not possible or not easy and therefore all children and teachers would have limited access to the digital learning materials. REB called on development partners and relevant stakeholders in the education sector to mitigate the effect of the COVID-19 crisis in the education sector to minimise the impact of the school closure on the education system. Various partners supported home learning initiative through the development and distribution of learning materials, and through sharing expertise and other appropriate resources.

Children who have access to

internet connectivity and devices at home, such as laptops, tablets or smart phones, continue to learn from home using the platform. However, instructional videos and instructional audio materials were developed and broadcasted on television and radio respectively to support children who do not have access to the mentioned devices and internet connectivity, mainly in rural areas.

Based on the statistics, 98% of the population use radio as the most popular and accessible source of information. The same materials/ contents are uploaded on REB YouTube Channel to allow students to access the missed broadcasted classes.

E-assessment

Each lesson requires an evaluation to monitor the progress and the performance. To evaluate students remotely, question items are created and accessible on the e-learning platform. Model questions were created by the Examination and Standard Department uploaded and shared them on the platform. A user guide was provided online for teachers on how to add questions on the e-learning platform.

Considering the mobile phone penetration that reaches 71% of Rwandan Households (EICV5, 2018), MINEDUC availed automatic quiz to help students in primary and secondary schools to practice their lessons and do a self-evaluation for using a Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) based quiz through dialing *134#" at zero cost whether using Airtel or MTN SIM card.

A course on e-assessment is available on the learning platform to allow teachers to evaluate students of their respective classes.

Teacher capacity development

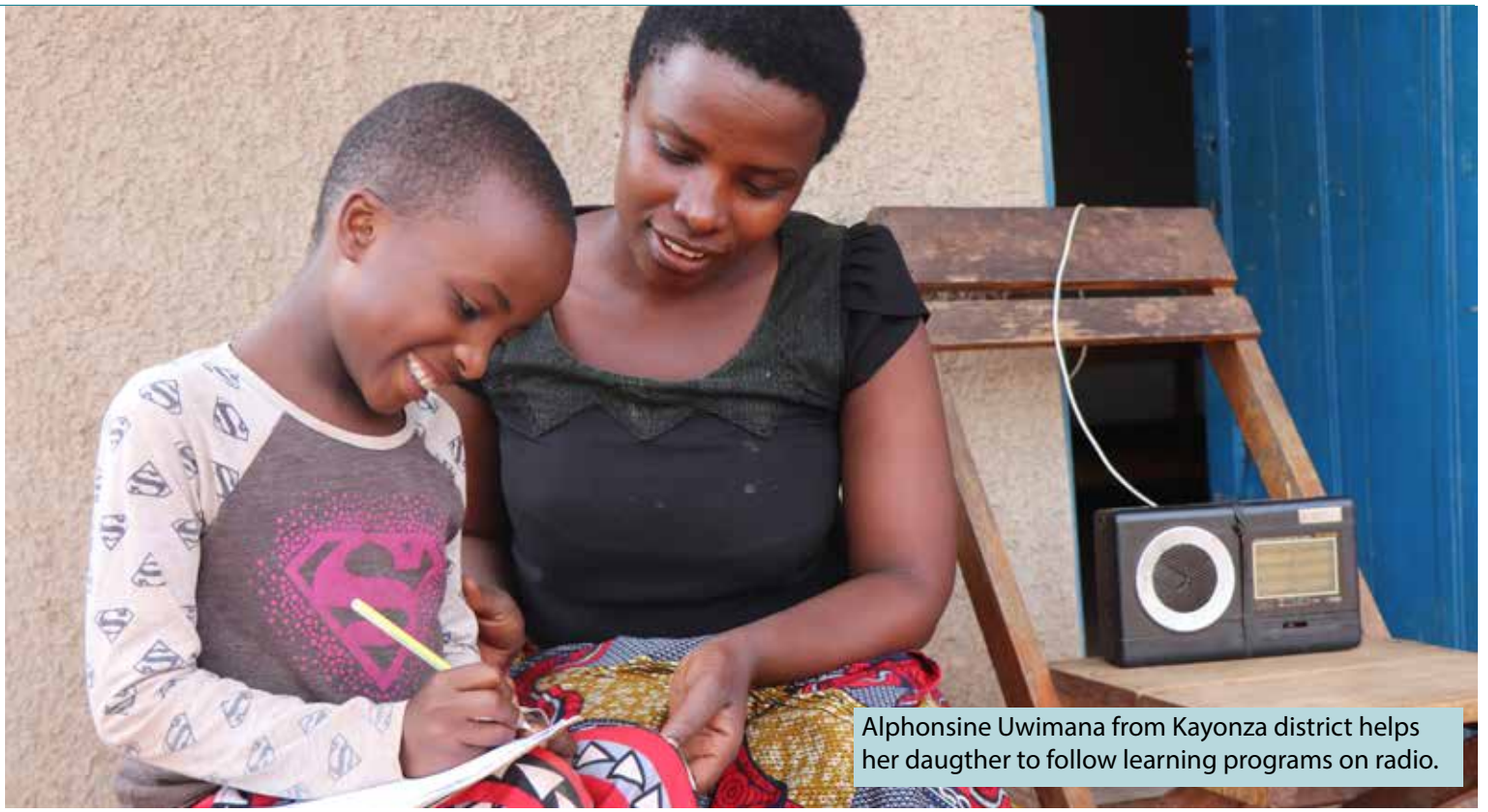
For a successful transitioning to a knowledge-based economy, there is a need for investing more to fix existing gaps in education system with focus on quality aspects especially:

- Improvement in lesson delivery with focus on development of soft skills;
- Competent teaching force;
- Proper integration of technology in the teaching and learning process, alignment of assessment approaches to competence based teaching using technology.

Hence, there was a need to increase teachers' capacity to integrate ICT in teaching and learning. To observe measures of protection against COVID-19, trainings are also done remotely.

Online programs for teachers are as follow:

Microsoft Office 365 (O365): Teachers were introduced to O365 and they created teachers' and students' accounts. Teachers are creating remote classes and enrol students. Currently, more than 4,000 teachers are able to use O365 tools such as TEAMS and OneNote. Their training being done online is



Alphonsine Uwimana from Kayonza district helps her daugther to follow learning programs on radio.

facilitated by Microsoft.

CADIE Project: A total of 129 master trainers were trained on CADIE program and 75 selected master trainers among them are training other teachers online. The target is to train 8,000 teachers to be trained by the end of 2020. The training is organised in different sessions and trainees are grouped into different cohorts or classes (50 participants per online class). It is expected that at the end of the course, teachers will be certified by Microsoft and will be awarded an MCE certificate after successfully passing the test.

Digital Literacy: Primary teachers will be trained on the use of ICT in teaching and learning. However, since most of them do not use computers, they will be required to be trained and get certified on basic ICT skills. This training will be facilitated by REB in collaboration with Microsoft. It is expected that 4,607 primary school teachers will be certified through a blended (face-to-face and online) training.

Continuous professional development

Various training programmes/ courses were developed and uploaded on the e-learning platform to allow beneficiaries to get trained on their own pace. Those are:

- Online continuous professional development (CPD) programme, a training course for school leaders developed by VVOB including CPD videos;
- ICT Essentials for Teachers course aligned to UNESCO ICT Competence Framework for Teachers (UNESCO ICT-CFT);
- Training on Assessment, English, Geographic Information System (GIS) for lower secondary school teachers, ICDL-the Digital Skills Standard, Scratch programming, CAPs, etc.

These programmes helped teachers and school leaders to catch up with some courses they never took due to heavy workload. They acquire adequate skills to ensure quality teaching responding to COVID-19 pandemic when schools are closed.

Lesson learned

• Technology has been identified at the heart of learning continuity. However, adequate learning materials and devices should be developed, distributed, used adequately and made accessible.

• Appropriate skills, at the standard level, are required to ensure that teachers deliver lessons remotely, create and manage virtual classes smoothly.

• Availing learning materials and courses on a regular basis is very important to ensure remote learning and self-learning and self-paced learning including self-evaluation.

Conclusion

Technology is found to be a paramount means to build a resilient education system: this is one of the lessons learned during the current global health crisis. Schools were forced to close, but learning continuity is only possible with the use of technology. It is important to work towards a resilient education system through: expanding access to technology devices at all households and schools; increasing connectivity and improving access to digital content with consideration of online; and face-to-face and blended approach for distance learning.

VVOB response to the COVID-19: Training teachers and school leaders online

> "We don't know when the crisis will end. I encourage all my students who can to enrol in online learning. I always tell them to ask me as their trainer or talk to their colleagues if they face challenges".

Since 2017, VVOB has been running a five-year programme, Leading, Teaching and Learning Together (LTLT), to improve learning outcomes in basic education through improved school leadership and teaching in 17 districts in Rwanda—targeting more than 1,000 primary and secondary schools. Through the LTLT programme VVOB has been facilitating a CPD diploma course in Effective School Leadership for school leaders to equip them with the competences to fulfil their roles as school leaders. At the same time a CPD certificate course in Educational Mentorship and Coaching is offered to school-based mentors (SBMs), sector education inspectors (SEIs) and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subject leaders.

Given the current global crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted, among others, the Rwanda education sector, with the closure of all schools throughout the country, VVOB has prepared for full online and distance delivery of the CPD training programmes. These programmes were offered face-to-face and partly in blended modality before the COVID-19 outbreak. VVOB and its partners have redeveloped the courses for delivery online and made them accessible to all participants that are able to enrol. Participants who cannot participate in full online programmes will be trained through a blended training approach next year.

To enable the delivery of these training programmes online/at distance, VVOB provides monthly internet and communication allowance to the University of Rwanda - College of Education (UR-CE) trainers and course participants for facilitation and participation in online CPD activities.

Enock Twebaze is a School Based Mentor (SBM) at G.S Saint Philip Neri in Gisagara district. When the government announced lockdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Mr Twebaze was in the middle of session 1 of four sessions for Educational Mentorship and Coaching certificate course. "I thought the situation would be back to normal at least in one month but it has continued. I appreciate that VVOB thought about online learning as an alternative during the crisis. I borrowed a laptop from my school and I am able to follow the training online despite some internet connection issues in my area."

According to Lainilde Mukasibo, UR-CE Lecturer, and trainer in Effective School Leadership diploma course offered with VVOB support, people should not wait until the situation changes to resume education/training programmes: "We don't know when the crisis will end. I encourage all my students who can to enrol in online learning. I always tell them to ask me as their trainer or talk to their colleagues if they face challenges".

VVOB - education for development has been sustainably improving education systems worldwide in partnership with ministries of education for over 35 years. VVOB supports the initial teacher education and professional development of teachers and school leaders in ten partner countries in early childhood, primary, general secondary, and technical and vocational education.

In Rwanda, VVOB has been implementing projects and programmes since 2003. VVOB works with the Ministry of Education, the Rwanda Education Board and the University of Rwanda - College of Education to improve the quality of basic education through enhancing school leadership and setting up an induction system for new teachers.

Enock Twebaze follows CPD training from home

Becoming a new teach

Emmanuel Mikebanyi is proud to support his children. He elaborated a home-learning timetable for his three children since the COVID-19 crisis began in March 2020.

By Etienne Ntawigira
Communications Advisor, VVOB

Emmanuel Mikebanyi is a father of five, one girl and four boys. Two of his children study at university, the others are in secondary education. He is a Civil Registrar in Kigabiro Sector, Rwamagana District in Eastern Province. He is also the President of the School General Assembly Committee at Saint Aloys Rwamagana secondary school, located in Rwamagana district. For Mr Mikebanyi, when the Government announced the lockdown due to the COVID-19 outbreak, he did his best to support his children in secondary education to continue learning. "I was staying with them at home. This was an opportunity to learn together"

Making a plan first

Mr Mikebanyi sat with his children and identified what everyone needed and then planned how to help each one according to his/her needs. They realised that learning programmes on radio and TV were short (15-30 minutes) and it would require every child to wait for his/her lesson which would take long. "You would also find that some students already covered the content aired on radio or TV. So, we decided to use the contents from Rwanda Education Board's e-learning platform as we found it much helpful for the children. The good thing with REB e-learning platform is that you can access contents whenever you want while it's not the case for learning programmes on radio and TV. I think you can follow lessons on radio if it's the only option but I would recommend all parents to consider REB learning resources online if they can. I have been buying monthly internet airtime to help every child download learning materials online."

Mr Mikebanyi was not using his personal laptop very often, so he lent it to his children to access learning content online. The elders who study at university also have a laptop and share with their siblings since the COVID-19 pandemic started. "In order to use the laptops we elaborated a timetable of how to share the two laptops on rotation. We also made household work timetable so everyone has a task to accomplish during breaks. This helps them to organise themselves and also learn how to use their time effectively."

"Whenever they face a challenge they ask me or consult their brothers who study at university for help. I could help them regularly before I returned to work," Mikebanyi said.

Using airtime effectively

Mr Mikebanyi spends about 10,000RWF every month to buy internet airtime to allow his children continue learning during the COVID

ner to his children

-19 crisis. "I help them to download learning resources and save them on the laptops so they can access them anytime offline. They can also do research on internet when necessary but we switch the internet off when no one is using it to minimise the cost," he said.

Changing mindset

Mr Mikebanyi is concerned about parents who are not supporting their children during COVID-19 school closure, and encourages those to change their minds.

"Some parents have smart phones and/or computers but are not helping their children to learn during COVID-19 crisis. Yet, they had been paying school fees and when schools reopen they will send their children. If you can afford school fees for your child why can't also buy internet bundles to facilitate his/her education during the crisis?" Mikebanyi wondered.

Students' views

Joseph Musengo (middle) is a university student. He helps his sister Umwari and brother Mugisha to access lessons on REB's e-learning platform.

Learning will not stop

Esther Umwari is one of Mr Mikebanyi's children who studies History, Economics and Geography (HEG) in senior 6 at Saint Aloys Rwamagana secondary school. COVID-19 crisis taught her that studying from home is also possible. "I read content and when I have questions I look for answers online, on Google—I don't necessarily need a teacher face-to-face to learn. I realised that there are a lot of resources on internet, what you need is internet connection and time," she said.

Ms Umwari encourages her counterparts never to stop learning. "Schools will reopen and learning will not stop. Try your best to continue learning at your own pace, at least learn something every day. As a National Examination candidate next year, I must prepare for my exams. I want to succeed but I also want to gain more knowledge. REB's online learning platform is very well organised and the contents on this platform are exactly the lessons we learn at school. We should also know that we follow competency-based curriculum which stipulates that us, students, need to participate actively in the learning/teaching process. We're encouraged to discover more instead of waiting for teachers to do everything for us."

Mugisha is Umwari's brother. He studies Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics (PCM) senior 4. He also believes that revising lessons can help students master subjects even more. "The schools closed when we were about to complete the first term. Revising what we had already seen allows to us to further our understanding of science subjects. Doing research online based on what you already know can also help you to discover more," Mugisha said.

My name is Onesphore Aduhire, 26, a student in senior 3 at TTC Gacuba II, in Rubavu district. I study Teaching Science and Mathematics. I have tried my best to continue learning since COVID-19 outbreak. Our school created a WhatsApp group for teachers and students. It is through this forum that teachers post assignments for us. For me specifically, I also take time to revise the notes our teachers gave us before the COVID-19 outbreak and do self-study. When I face a challenge I call a teacher or chat on WhatsApp. I also try to follow REB learning programmes on radio, using my smart phone. Some time I go to a neighbour who has a TV and be able to follow lessons as we don't have a one at home.

What would you recommend other students to do?

I advise other students not to take this time for granted. It is an opportunity to continue learning as we wait for schools to open. You can follow learning programmes on radio and/or TV, read books if you have some and revise notes. Talking to teachers through phone calls and WhatsApp after self-study has been helpful to me. Other students can also do the same.

"I have other things to do but my children remain my first priority" - Ndagijimana

By Etienne Ntawigira
Communications Advisor, VVOB

Jean de Dieu Ndagijimana has been a primary school teacher for the last 12 years. He is a father of three, two girls and one son, two of them study in primary education (P3, P6) while the youngest attends pre-primary. He currently teaches at G.S Kayonza in Kayonza District. When the government announced closure of all schools due the COVID-19 outbreak, Mr Ndagijimana thought it was going to take a few days for things to be back to normal. However, he never lost courage to continue his job as a teacher when the Ministry of Education announced that schools will reopen in September 2020. He he has been helping his own children while encouraging his neighbours' children to follow REB learning programmes on radio.

Home schooling

Mr Ndagijimana had never thought that home schooling would ever be an option in his life. "Being a teacher for over 12 years now, I couldn't imagine that teaching my students or my children from home would be an option. But this health crisis has made it a reality," he said.

Here is how Mr Ndagijimana has been supporting his children to continue learning:

- Facilitating them to follow lessons on radio
- Helping them to revise lessons of previous years
- Borrowed books from school to help his children
- Uses internet to search for teaching resources
- Download assignments from the school WhatsApp groups
- Uses WhatsApp to send his children's tests' answers to the subject teachers—by photographing handwritten answers and share them as photos
- Prepares tests for his children

"Home schooling can be as good as a formal class! In the morning we start classes at 8:30, and break at 11:00. We study for one and half hours in the afternoon. During break I play with my children for about 20 minutes to make home schooling enjoyable!"

"Educating your children is the best thing you can do in life. I dedicated my time to help my children during this crisis…I have other things to do but my children remain my first priority," Mr Ndagijimana said.

Are girls and boys treated equally?

Mr Ndagijimana believes that the mindset about gender equality among parents has changed. "When we visited different families in my village we found both boys and girls following lessons on radio".

He also gives an example of his own family. "At home we treat all our children equally regardless of their gender, not only in education related issues but in all aspects. My wife understands and values gender equality very well as she was once a victim of gender inequality when she was young. When she completed primary education her father was not willing to pay for her secondary education studies, rather he sent her brothers. Later on, when some family members complained about such injustice her father accepted to send her to secondary school after two years. However, she didn't complete secondary education as her father still believed that boys matter than girls. So with such background, my wife understands clearly how privileging children based on their gender can negatively impact their future."

Supporting neighbours

When the Government closed all education institutions, MINEDUC and Rwanda Education Board (REB) increased the capacity of its existing e-learning platform and launched a radio and TV learning programme and YouTube channel in to attenuate the impact of the school closures on pupils' education. To ensure the lessons are accessible to everyone, REB in collaboration with different partners mobilised teachers to follow up students in their communities by sensitising parents to support their children.

"I was part of a group of two teachers that would move from house to house in our village to make parents and children aware of REB's learning programmes. We would give them a schedule for radio and TV learning programmes. Radio and TV seemed more convenient to them as many parents/students don't have smart phones or computers to access REB e-learning platform."

Dealing with challenges

Some households didn't have a radio set so Mr Ndagijimana encouraged those to play radio on their telephones.

During family visits he also noticed that most of the parents had gone for farming activities as the majority are farmers in his area. "Where possible we recommend children to get support from their older siblings who are either in secondary education or university".

Mr Ndagijimana also noticed that, even among parents who have a smart phones, only few of them download exercises from school WhatsApp groups due to lack of internet bundle. "We encourage those parents to focus on radio programmes and help their children revise lessons of previous years".

Feedback from children

When Mr Ndagijimana asked some children in his village about learning programmes on radio and TV, they were all interested but highlighted some challenges:

- The programme is interesting but the time is limited (between 15 and 30minutes)
- Some students in P5 and P6 are not able to follow well in English
- There are no options to ask questions live, and questions to *134# code were limited

Tips for home schooling

According to Mr Ndagijimana, the following tips can help a parent to support his/her child well:

- Do not overload your child, consider breaks between sessions
- Avoid teaching your children in a distracting environment (switch off TV if they're following lessons on radio, avoid banging doors…)
- Play with your children during break to make home schooling enjoyable

Advising other teachers

For Mr Ndagijimana, teachers should:

- Think about/explore options to continue teaching and learning remotely during this crisis
- Keep updating their knowledge (read books, find resources on internet)
- Pay attention to COVID-19 prevention measures:

■ Continue playing your role as a teacher, teach your community how to prevent COVID-19

■ Be prepared to integrate COVID-19 prevention in your subject (s)/lessons when schools reopen

Festus Ndekezi is a neighbour to Mr Ndagijimana. He has been helping his children to follow learning programme on radio. He appreciates Mr Ndajimana for mobilising students/parents to continue learning.

Leading a school during the COVID-19 crisis

Interview with a school leader

The management of many institutions including education institutions has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, holding face-to-face meetings and assemblies at school can be challenging hence the last option, but with ICT something can be done. Gerard Bahizi, the Principal of TTC Gacuba II explains how he continued to manage his school even during the crisis, thanks to ICT.

By Julius Sebuhalala
Education Advisor, VVOB

Teacher Training College (TTC) GACUBA II is a secondary school comprising 356 students and 11 classrooms. It is a government aided school located in the centre of Gisenyi city, Rubavu district. As a TTC it has only upper level students in combinations relating to education:

- Languages and Education (LE)
- Sciences and Mathematics Education (SME)
- Social Studies and Education (SSE)
- Early Childhood and Lower Primary Education (ECLPE)

Gerard Bahizi has been the Principal for TTC Gacuba II for 20 years. For our 10th edition of Urunana rw'Abarezi, he shares his experience about managing and leading a school during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What did you do to make sure your students continue learning during COVID-19 crisis?

We created a School WhatsApp group connecting teachers with parents and some students who provided their WhatsApp numbers. About 130 students/parents are members of our WhatsApp group. Through this group teachers interact with students by sending exercises and assignments. Subject by subject, teachers send assignments to their students and share corrections within two weeks. Students are encouraged to ask questions about the exercises.

How did you support your teachers to support students?

As we already have a WhatsApp group for school staff, I explained to teachers the importance of having a WhatsApp group that brings together parents/students and teachers. After agreeing on this we added all 16 tutors as members of the group. Later, we asked every teacher to share exercises to his/her students on regular intervals and on rotational basis. However, there was resistance at the beginning among some teachers about buying internet bundles. So I had to keep explaining to them the need to keep and ensure learning continuity among students and teachers themselves.

"If the government has continued paying our monthly salaries why can't we use just a little money to buy internet for the sake of our students and our own benefits?" This is how I challenged them. They finally changed their minds, and now every teacher spends between 3,000 and 6,000RWF for internet bundles every month which is about 2 to 4 per cent of a monthly salary.

For teachers who don't have laptops we lent them the school laptops so they could prepare assignments for students.

How did you support the parents?

We keep regular communication with parents through WhatsApp group. We ask them to follow up on their children, by checking if they do the assignments sent by teachers. So far, we've been receiving positive feedback

from parents that "the school should continue the good initiative".

What have you done to support continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers during the COVID-19 crisis?

As we wait for school reopening, my teachers and I have been updating our knowledge and skills especially about ICT, as this could serve as one of the educational responses to COVID-19. Our school ICT Manager was trained by REB as a Trainer (ToT) on Microsoft TEAMS. The ICT Manager facilitated face-to-face and online workshops for us on how to use the application. This is a communication and collaboration platform where we can conduct video meetings, save files, collaborate on content, among other functions.

So far, all teachers have created classes on TEAMS. The next step will be to inform students about this software and explain how it works.

How do you use ICT to continue managing/leading your school?

I have been using ICT to continue leading my school through calling my staff members; sending short text messages; using WhatsApp group; and recently started organizing videos meetings/calls through Microsoft Teams. Thanks to REB for having trained me on using Microsoft Teams.

What challenges have you faced regarding using ICT to continue leading your school?

I think Microsoft Teams could be an alternative to continue teaching/learning online whenever necessary, but we still face ICT related challenges. A big number of students/parents do not have laptops or smart phones, and most of them cannot access assignments that teachers have been sending through WhatsApp groups since the COVID-19 closures.

In addition, we try our best to help students, but there are some who do not participate to our activities even when they have internet enabled devices. I think this is mainly due to some parents' mindsets who just consider this as 'long holidays' for their children. I know some parents cannot afford to pay monthly internet as some might have lost their jobs due to COVID-19; but others prioritize other things than supporting their children's learning. When school reopen we will make sure other students catch up.

We also faced some challenges related to the use of Microsoft TEAMS, as it was new to us but we're getting familiar to this application with the support of our ICT Manager.

What lessons have you learned about this crisis with regards to your roles and responsibilities as a school leader?

Technology has affected and influenced the way we live, the way we communicate, learn, and think than ever before. With the ever-changing world due to technology, I learned that a leader must be familiar with up-to-date ICT tools. For instance, as a school leader, ICT enables you to keep in touch with your staff, education leaders and relevant stakeholders at different levels. In other words, as physical meetings and face-to-face learning/teaching become more difficult due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ICT remains a viable alternative to keep things moving forward.

What are your plans to continue/improve using ICT after the crisis?

I plan to continue seeking how I can improve my ICT skills by using ICT regularly in my daily work. I will also keep encouraging all my staff members, parents and students, to consider ICT as a reliable alternative not only for learning/teaching but for other sectors as far as we still face the COVID-19 pandemic.

Would you give tips for successful use of ICT?

To be able to help our students to continue learning through ICT you need to:

- Keep communicating with school staff through online meetings whenever possible
- Communicate with parents/students via WhatsApp group

What are your recommendations to REB and/or MINEDUC?

I would ask REB/MINEDUC to:

• Help every teacher to get his/her own laptop so that s/he can use it whenever needed, if possible

• Encourage, and if possible facilitate parents especially those who have children in secondary schools to purchase laptops/smart phones or tablets to ensure learning continues even during crises like this one

• Provide computers for students to all schools, if possible

• To provide internet connectivity in schools and in the entire country in general to make learning and teaching easier and accessible to everyone.

I understand that the Government is exploring all possible options to ensure the education sector and other sectors in general move forward.

#WhyITeach

I feel uplifted when my students uplift their knowledge and skills

By Etienne Ntawigira
Communications Advisor, VVOB

Honorée Dukuzumuremyi has been a science teacher for 22 years. She currently teaches chemistry in lower secondary at Ecole des Sciences de Musanze, in Musanze district. She shares five reasons why she teaches.

1. My mother as my role model

My mother was a teacher, but also a role model. She was so committed to teaching. I think she was exceptional. I remember seeing many students coming to our home during weekends and holidays, looking for my mother to teach them. They would gather around a black board which my mother had bought and she would teach them free of charge. In addition, my mother would visit parents whose children had dropped out of school and encouraged them to send their children back to school. She would further investigate the causes of drop out and supported the parents accordingly. She provided scholastic materials, and helped some poor parents to pay school fees for their children. This was so inspirational to me as a child.

2. Good teachers

Some teachers are 'just teachers' but others are 'good teachers' and exceptional teachers! When I was in secondary education you would rarely find a female science teacher. Girls in science schools were also very few. But I will never forget one of my chemistry teachers who made me love science, and here I am, a female science teacher! He would perform many experiments and explain everything repeatedly to make sure we understand his lessons. We were also encouraged to ask questions so we would always enjoy interacting with our teacher. I believe he was one of few teachers who was applying student centred approach at that time.

> "My love of teaching grew considerably when I started teaching. When I see how students are interested in my lessons and curious to know more, I feel very excited".

Some teachers make students feel that science is complicated.

If you start telling your students that science subjects are difficult to comprehend, that "it was also hard for me when I was studying", they will end up fearing it. My teacher was not this kind, but some others were. He would give simple, concrete and relevant examples to connect science to our everyday life. I also do the same for my students today. For example, when I want to teach evaporation and condensation, I ask my students to wake up early morning and observe water droplets on grass in a garden, and ask them to go back around midday to see whether the droplets are still there or not. This is a simple example to demonstrate how water evaporates due to heat and changes from vapour into liquid (droplets) after losing heat.

3. Giving back

The commitment of the 'exceptional teachers' I met made me feel that I owe something to them—giving back what they taught me to the younger generation. I became a teacher so that I can step in their shoes. Luckily, I became a teacher at the same school where I studied, eight years later after I started my teaching career. I felt like going back home, to the school where I grew up, the school that made me who I am today! The images of my 'good teachers' are still engraved on my memory. I will stay at this (former) school of mine until I reach retirement age.

4. My students, my motivation

My love of teaching grew considerably when I started teaching. I feel uplifted when my students uplift their knowledge and skills. When I see how students like my lessons, so interested and curious to know more, I feel very excited. I enjoy spending most of my time with my students as it makes feel younger—at times you feel that you're their age! I am always happy because of teaching. I think no one can understand this if s/he never taught students at one time! When you teach you also learn, so teaching is another way of continuous learning for us teachers—It naturally helps you to grow professionally.

5. Recognition motivates

I am considered as an excellent teacher at my school. I am a science lab supervisor. I am a girls' mentor in different matters including encouraging them to love science. I also attended different training workshops and courses and was recognized as an excellent science trainee/trainer by different development partners in the education sector such as the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS).

Currently, I am one of the teachers working with Rwanda Education Board (REB) and University of Rwanda College of Education (UR-CE) on SMART notebook with a focus on mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology in O'Level. SMART Notebook is software meant to supplement use with the SMART Board. The software helps users create interactive presentations, and offers a variety of ways to enhance presenting interactive lessons.

Being recognized at different levels especially at my own school is a great motivation ever. I feel valued. It pushes me to excel even more and beyond expectation in my career.

COVID-19 crisis gap

Since the Government closed all schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I feel disconnected from my students. I try to communicate to some of my students/parents through WhatsApp and emails but I can only reach a few, about 20%. Some of them don't use WhatsApp or don't have access to internet. I always ask parents (at least the ones I can talk to through WhatsApp) to support their children to continue learning during the COVID-19 crisis. We prepare assignments and upload them on the school website so students who have means can access them.

I receive feedback from few parents about those assignments, but I am always worried about my students who are not able to access any of the activities we share. I just wonder if they won't lose studying interest if schools remain closed for longer period than expected.

Hopefully, I have been following continuous professional development (CPD) training in Educational Mentorship and Coaching for STEM subject leaders, offered by UR-CE and VVOB, online. I gained some strategies which will help me to motivate my students when schools reopen. I learnt 5E instructional model (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate). I will apply this model to engage my students, motivate them while guiding them towards skill development. I realized that I was using some of the 5Es without knowing it!

Teachers' role during the COVID-19 crisis

By Etienne Ntawigira
Communications Advisor, VVOB

Charlotte Musabyimana has been a teacher for five years now. She teaches English language to 200 students in primary 6 at G.S Kayonza in Kayonza district. She could walk for an hour from her home to the school before the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of each school year her school records parents' contact information and indicate those who use WhatsApp. Since the Government closed all schools due to the pandemic, she has been in contact with about 90 parents/students through WhatsApp to ensure they continue learning.

Ms Musabyimana prepares exercises on a paper, photograph them and send them to her students through their parents. "Students handwrite answers and send them to my personal WhatsApp. After marking each copy I share answers to the group so they can compare and correct what they have done."

> "We know that a number of students are not able to do the assignments we have been sending. We will make sure those who are following can support their colleagues through group works when schools reopen."

A challenging task

Following up about 100 students remotely has been a challenging task for Ms Musabyimana. "Sometimes I receive low quality photos/answers and struggle to read them. Some students' handwriting is difficult to read," she said. Additionally, all parents who have smart phones are not always connected to internet, which means that students do not receive/send exercises regularly.

Why only few parents use WhatsApp?

Ms Musabyimana thinks that some parents don't use WhatsApp due to the following reasons:

• Affording to buy internet airtime is a challenge to some

• Other parents are busy looking for other needs for their families. "I am a retailer at Kayonza market so I cannot find time to help my children to learn from home. I first focus on satisfying their basic needs," a parent told Ms Musabyimana when she asked her about her children's learning during the COVID-19 crisis.

• Parents' mindset. "For example, some parents complain about batteries for their radio sets. When we ask parents to support their children to continue learning during the corona-virus crisis some of them were expecting some money to buy a radio or batteries!"

ICT challenges

Ms Musabyimana doesn't have electricity at home. "There is electricity in the neighbourhood and we're also expecting to get it soon. Meanwhile I charge my phone battery at my neighbours but my work gets interrupted when my battery is down."

At the beginning of the crisis Ms Musabyimana could use her own money to buy airtime for internet. "I loaded 2,000RWF for one month, but the school bought me airtime for the following month. We plan to continue supporting primary 6 students until school reopen."

Focus on primary 6

G.S Kayonza has put more efforts in supporting students in P6. "These are candidates of the National Primary Leaving Exams, so we want them to succeed. We also found not easy to support/follow up other students in other classes…. we planned what we thought we could manage, and it's also not easy!" said Betholde Niyirora, the head teacher at G.S Kayonza.

What will happen to other students?

"We know that a number of students are not able to do the tasks we have been sending. We will make sure those who are following can support their colleagues through group works when schools reopen."

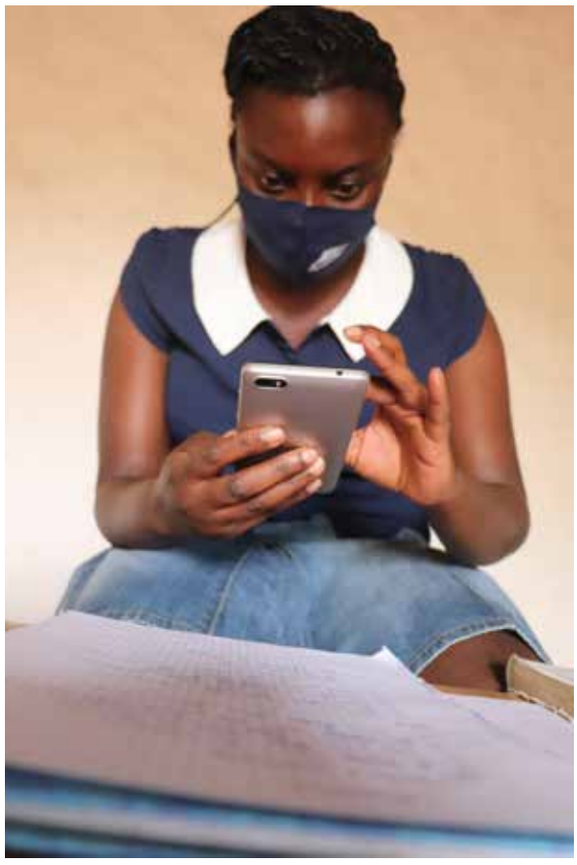
Continuous learning

Ms Musabyimana does research on internet to upgrade her knowledge. "I use approximately 30 minutes every week."

Drawing lessons from the COVID-19 crisis

Ms Musabyimana learnt that doing everything as soon as you can is important. "You never know what tomorrow holds! Saving for tomorrow is also another lesson…."

Given the current situation, Ms Musabyimana sees a need to work with local leaders and school leaders to mobilise and sensitise parents to adopt the use of ICT as part of their life. We should also remind parents about their roles in educating their children. A parent may have not gone to school nor knows how to use ICT devices. But it is important to raise his/her awareness about the importance of education so that they can make sure their children go to school, revise lessons, follow learning programmes on different channels during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Recommendation to parents

"Parents should support their children to revise lessons. This will help us teachers, to move forward when schools reopen. It's good to start school when their brain is still fresh….so they need something to keep them busy during this health crisis. Otherwise, some students may even loose interest to go back to school if they spend over six months without being reminded about their lessons.

Taking time for your child is crucial. We know that parents are first and foremost concerned about basic needs for their children during this time of a crisis, but they should also know that an uneducated child will hardly succeed in life, and will be a burden to the family, the society and to the nation."

"A physical classroom is no longer the only reliable method of teaching and learning"- Teacher Kayibanda

By Innocent Hagenimana
Public Relations/Communications Officer, REB

After the closure of schools on 16 March 2020, in immediate response to the COVID-19, some teachers, school leaders and parents had to think out of the box to keep supporting their students continue learning during the crisis.

Dieudonne Kayibanda is a teacher at Ecole Secondaire Marie Adelaide in Kamonyi district. When COVID-19 outbreak started Mr Kayibanda and his colleagues thought the crisis would last just a few days. Later, the Government declared that schools will remain closed until September 2020. "So we started preparing exercises to students as a way of keeping their minds fresh. We use WhatsApp groups, and upload the content on the school-website, so the students receive them through the support of their parents," Mr Kayibanda said.

COVID-19 has taught Mr Kayibanda a lesson: "a physical classroom is no longer the only reliable method of teaching and learning, whether we like it or not, we need to move with technology".

For Mr Kayibanda, there is need for a shift from a physical classroom to digital learning in the near future. This is why he thinks that teachers should be trained to cope with the ever-changing situation due to the COVID-19.

Coping with online learning was a little bit challenging at Ecole Secondaire Marie Adelaide since many teachers are not on the same level of using ICT and some do not have ICT devices such as smartphones or computers. However, Mr Kayibanda has not faced difficulties like some of his colleagues. " I attended a lot of trainings on ICT, that's why supporting my students was not a big problem. I think more trainings in using ICT in education are needed at our school. We need to be equipped with enough skills and knowledge on how we can teach our students live through ICT. I will be glad to teach my students without necessarily meeting them physically," he said.

Gender equality during the COVID-19 crisis

According to Jean Nepomuscene Samvura who has a student at Ecole Secondaire Marie Adelaide, there is no inequality in supporting his children. "I also have a girl who studies at another school, I treat and support her the same as I do for the boy, they are all my children," he said.

Mr Samvura advises other parents to support their children to continue learning during the COVID-19 crisis, and encourages students not to stop learning. "Parents should make sure their children are doing the right things in this period. And students should not think that learning stops when the radio lessons stop or when a school does not send anything, but they should also continue to do some practices on their own if possible,' he said.

Managing and leading a school remotely

Experience of Ecole Secondaire Marie Adelaide

By Innocent Hagenimana
Public Relations/Communications Officer, REB

The management of many institutions including education institutions has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, holding face-to-face meetings and assemblies at school is a challening option, but with ICT something can be done. Candide Mutegarugori, the Head Teacher for Ecole Secondaire Marie Adelaide Gihara, located in Kamonyi district, believes that relying on ICT is the alternative to continue managing and leading her school as the world faces this unprecedented health crisis. " I organise regular meetings with teachers, thanks to our school ICT team members for assisting us to use Zoom application to meet regularly online," she said.

Leading teaching

"Loving what you do is great, but you also need knowledge and skills in what you do. Good teachers will always find a way to get more skills in what they are teaching and make things more interesting to their students. It requires a little more work, a little more imagination, and even acting ability/ skills," she said.

Ms Mutegarugori believes that regular and continuous learning is necessary for both the teachers and the school leaders to ensure educational excellence. "Even the best head teacher may lag behind if s/he does not continue to upgrade his/her knowledge and leadership skills to strive for excellence."

Ms Mutegarugori encourages other school leaders to use this time (as schools still remain closed) to acquire more knowledge and skills through ICT, for the best of their schools.

" ICT enabled me to upgrade my knowledge by doing research. It also allowed me to keep in touch with parents and other stakeholders of the school," she said.

Not everyone has ICT device

Ms Mutegarugori acknowledges the challenges that some teachers and students/ parents face in teaching and learning online. "Yes, we meet virtually, we do share knowledge among ourselves , we do research, we do collaborate with parents and stakeholders but not everyone can afford to buy ICT devices or internet bundles. We encourage teachers to use their own money to buy internet bundles but we know that it is not easy for everyone," she said.

"We're glad that we are still connected to each other. We are also grateful to VVOB for their invaluable support through professional training in Effective School Leadership we had in the past. We do request for more trainings to other staff members at our school," she said.

Working with parents

Parents can continue to support children's learning by involving them in simple activities at home. Discussing the budget to purchase fruits at the market, for example, can build a child's numeracy skills. While telling a child a story and asking them questions, or creating time for family discussions and debates, can build comprehension, critical thinking and language skills.

> "Even the best head teacher may lag behind if s/he does not continue to upgrade knowledge and leadership skills to strive for excellence."

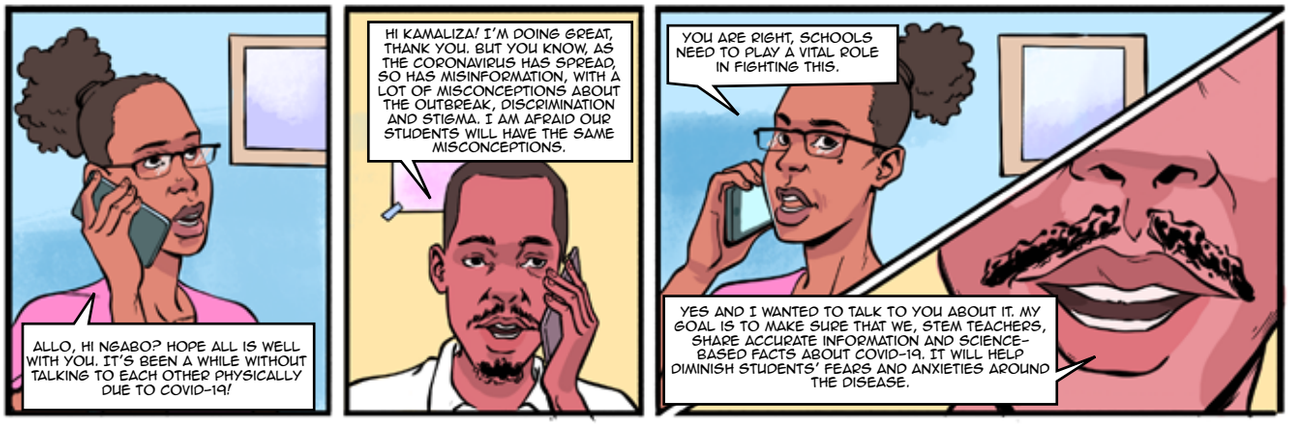
Schools also need to work with parents to make sure they facilitate their children to continue learning.

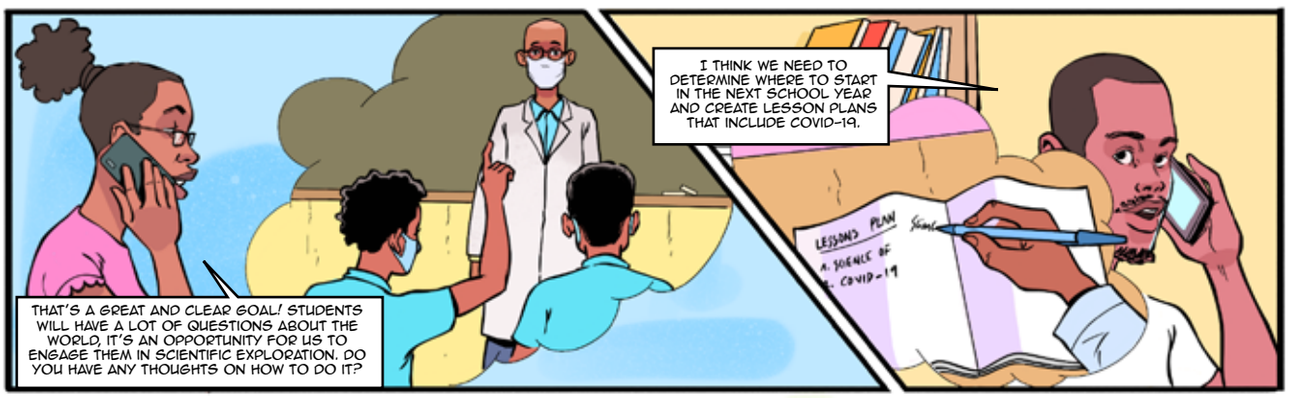
Jean Nepomuscene Samvura has a student at Ecole Secondaire Marie Adelaide. He feels supported by the school. "I am happy that the school has been sending exercises, learning materials, and REB's radio/TV learning programme timetable on WhatsApp and the school website. My responsibility is to make sure that my child is following guidance and do assignments sent by teachers," he said.

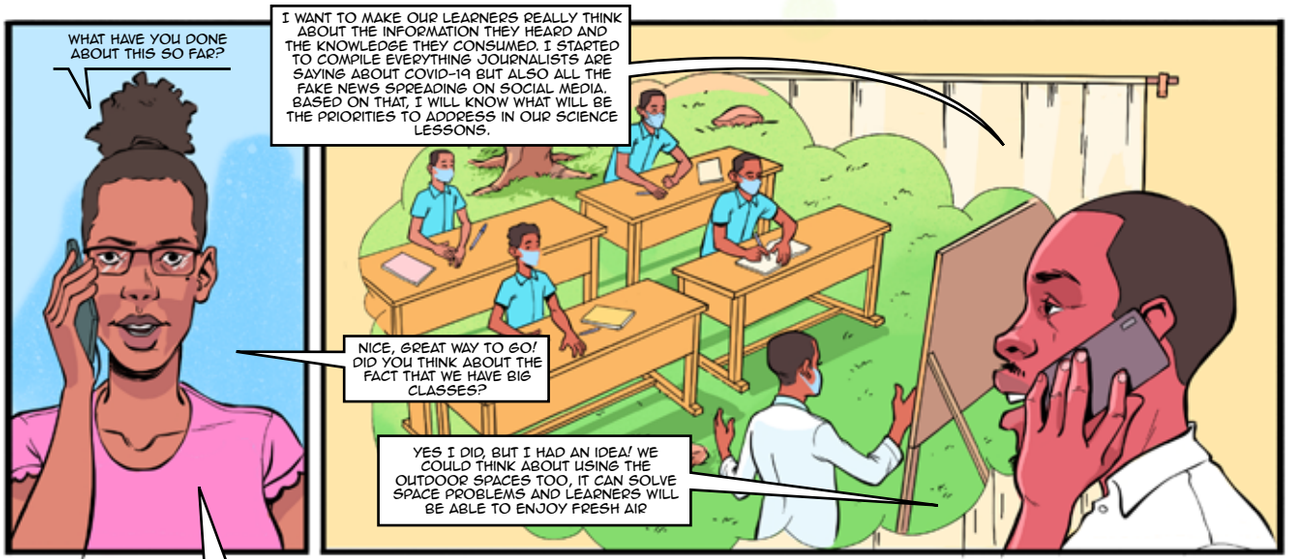
Although parents are supporting their children they face some hindrances such as lack of electricity in rural areas, affording internet bundles, lack of ICT devices, and lack of skills among parents to support their children in revising courses. "I am supporting my children as much as I can, I am also happy that REB is supporting our children by making lessons and learning materials accessible on online and on radio/TV. But I wonder how children in rural areas where there is no electricity or internet connectivity are coping with the situation," Samvura wondered.

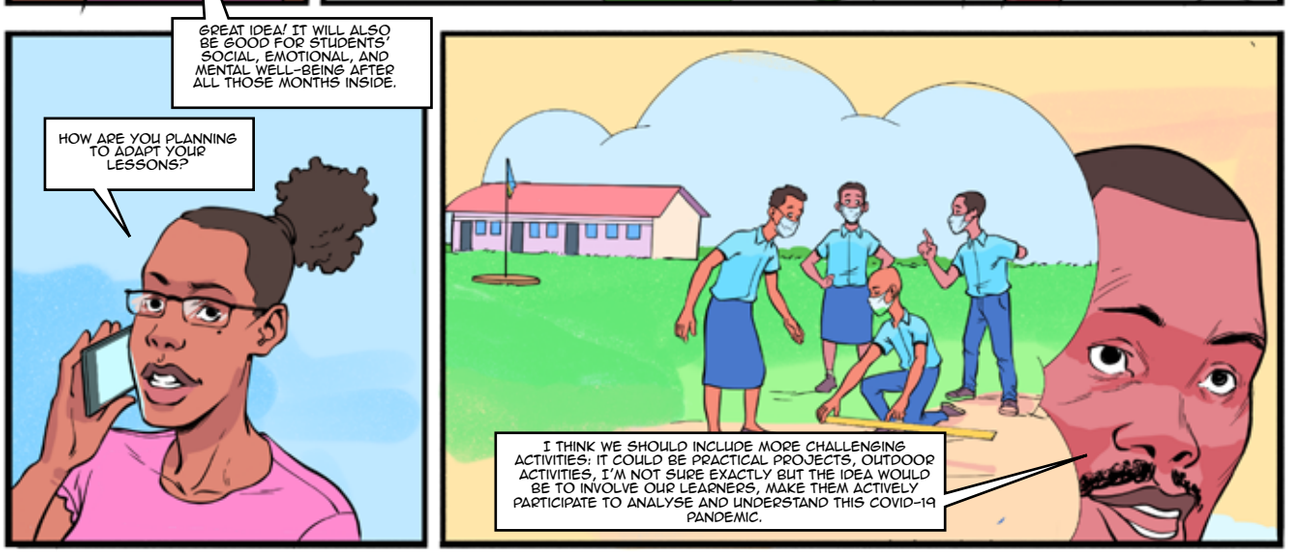
INTEGRATING COVID-19 INTO STEM LESSONS

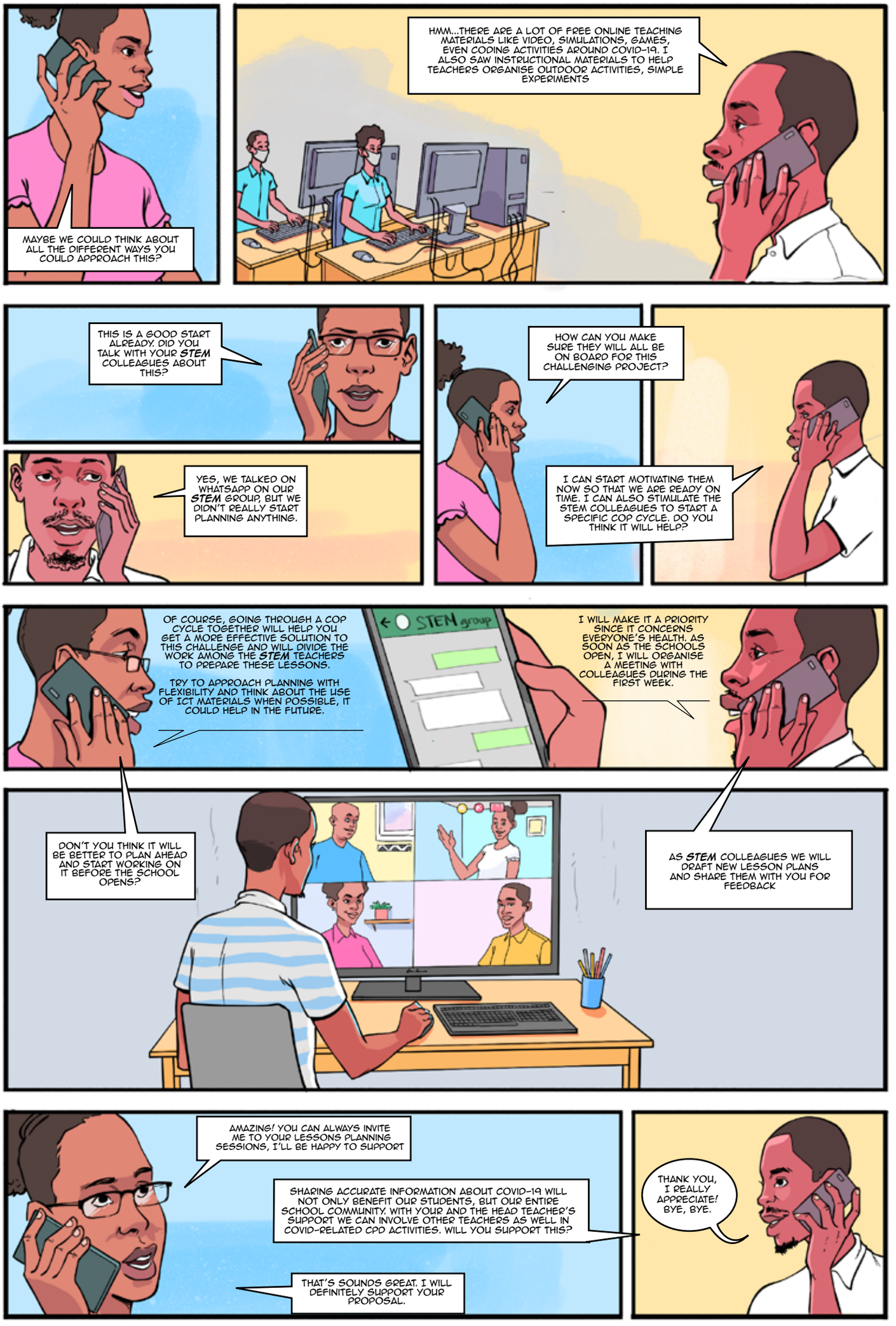
SOON, SCHOOLS WILL OPEN AFTER MORE THAN FIVE MONTHS OF CLOSURE DUE TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK. IN A TELEPHONE DISCUSSION KAMALIZA (DEPUTY HEAD TEACHER-DHT) HELPS NGABO (SCHOOL SUBJECT LEADER FOR ***STEM***-SSL) EXPLORE HOW HE WILL INTEGRATE COVID-19 INTO THE STEM LESSONS AND HOW HE IS MAKING SURE THAT ALL STEM TEACHERS DO SOMETHING SIMILAR.










MAYBE WE COULD THINK ABOUT ALL THE DIFFERENT WAYS YOU COULD APPROACH THIS?
HMM...THERE ARE A LOT OF FREE ONLINE TEACHING MATERIALS LIKE VIDEO, SIMULATIONS, GAMES, EVEN CODING ACTIVITIES AROUND COVID-19. I ALSO SAW INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS TO HELP TEACHERS ORGANISE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES, SIMPLE EXPERIMENTS
THIS IS A GOOD START ALREADY. DID YOU TALK WITH YOUR STEM COLLEAGUES ABOUT THIS?
YES, WE TALKED ON WHATSAPP ON OUR STEM GROUP, BUT WE DIDN'T REALLY START PLANNING ANYTHING.
HOW CAN YOU MAKE SURE THEY WILL ALL BE ON BOARD FOR THIS CHALLENGING PROJECT?
I CAN START MOTIVATING THEM NOW SO THAT WE ARE READY ON TIME. I CAN ALSO STIMULATE THE STEM COLLEAGUES TO START A SPECIFIC COP CYCLE. DO YOU THINK IT WILL HELP?
OF COURSE, GOING THROUGH A COP CYCLE TOGETHER WILL HELP YOU GET A MORE EFFECTIVE SOLUTION TO THIS CHALLENGE AND WILL DIVIDE THE WORK AMONG THE STEM TEACHERS TO PREPARE THESE LESSONS.
TRY TO APPROACH PLANNING WITH FLEXIBILITY AND THINK ABOUT THE USE OF ICT MATERIALS WHEN POSSIBLE, IT COULD HELP IN THE FUTURE.
STEN group
I WILL MAKE IT A PRIORITY SINCE IT CONCERNS EVERYONE'S HEALTH. AS SOON AS THE SCHOOLS OPEN, I WILL ORGANISE A MEETING WITH COLLEAGUES DURING THE FIRST WEEK.
DON'T YOU THINK IT WILL BE BETTER TO PLAN AHEAD AND START WORKING ON IT BEFORE THE SCHOOL OPENS?
AS STEM COLLEAGUES WE WILL DRAFT NEW LESSON PLANS AND SHARE THEM WITH YOU FOR FEEDBACK
AMAZING! YOU CAN ALWAYS INVITE ME TO YOUR LESSONS PLANNING SESSIONS, I'LL BE HAPPY TO SUPPORT
SHARING ACCURATE INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 WILL NOT ONLY BENEFIT OUR STUDENTS, BUT OUR ENTIRE SCHOOL COMMUNITY. WITH YOUR AND THE HEAD TEACHER'S SUPPORT WE CAN INVOLVE OTHER TEACHERS AS WELL IN COVID-RELATED CPD ACTIVITIES. WILL YOU SUPPORT THIS?
THAT'S SOUNDS GREAT. I WILL DEFINITELY SUPPORT YOUR PROPOSAL.
THANK YOU, I REALLY APPRECIATE! BYE, BYE.

Preparing for school reopen

TTC GACUBA II

My name is Gerard Bahizi, the Principal for Teacher Training College (TTC) GACUBA II, a government aided boarding school located in Rubavu district, Western Province. Our school has more than 350 students, 55 per cent being girls.

After closing all schools in March due to COVID-19 the government announced that they would open in September this year, but no one is sure yet whether schools will reopen or not. The Prime Minister of Rwanda Dr Edouard Ngirente said while updating the Parliament on COVID-19 fight last month, that **Rwanda will be cautious ahead of reopening schools in September**. As we wait for the exact date as well as instructions and guidelines for reopening to be communicated, we are doing our best as a school to prepare for school reopening in the future.

Addressing key issues

Our school management committee is working on a school improvement plan (SIP). Some of the key issues so far discussed include health and safety of students and teachers, emotional and psychological support of teachers and students, and budgeting for major activities to reopen our school. For instance, we talked about a number of students we should not exceed in a classroom to prevent the spread of COVID-19. On average we had 32 students in a classroom. Two students would sit at one desk but we shall reduce to only one per desk, which implies the need for more classrooms, desks and teachers. The Ministry of Education promised to build six additional classrooms and complete them as soon as possible. If schools open before these classrooms are finished, we may consider other options such as using a refectory as a classroom.

Regarding hygiene and sanitation to prevent the spread of COVID-19, REB recommends at least one hand washing sink per two classes. Ideally, we would need at least five hand washing sinks with four to five taps each but we will manage to install only one at the entrance, and use locally made portable tip taps for hand washing in other locations at the school.

We also thought about testing all students for COVID-19 when schools reopen. We believe the Ministry of Health will guide us on these issues.

Affording school fees

Another challenge we expect to face is about school fees. Some parents already lost their jobs due to COVID-19. So we doubt that all parents will be able to afford to send their children back when schools open, and this is beyond our control.

Ensuring emotional well-being

We hope that REB in collaboration with relevant health institutions will train our three existing counsellors on how to deal with emotional well-being related issues as far as COVID-19 is concerned. In addition, one of our staff members who is also a counsellor is currently working with one of the COVID-19 isolation sites as a volunteer. We will ask him to advise other staff members on COVID-19 prevention and control tips.

Communicating with teachers and parents

To ensure constant and consistent dialogue and communication with teachers and parents, we plan to use a school management software. We've already identified one called *Urubuto* and have foreseen a budget to subscribe to it. This application will allow us to communicate with teachers and parents instantly, to manage students and staff permissions and monitor students' discipline and attendance, among others.

Continuous learning

As we wait for school reopening, our school ICT Manager who was trained by REB as a Trainer (ToT) on Microsoft TEAMS software also trained us on how to use this application. So far, all teachers have created classes on TEAMS. The next step is to inform students about this software and explain how it works. This could be an alternative to continue teaching/learning online whenever necessary, although a big number of students do not have laptops or smart phones. Most of students cannot access assignments that teachers have been sending through WhatsApp groups since the COVID-19 closures. For teachers, following online workshops has been going on well. All of them are still getting paid so they can buy internet air time and attend online training sessions. We believe teachers have not faced any big challenges during the COVID-19 closures.

ing after COVID-19 closures

Advising other school leaders

People think that the pandemic will end soon. I think no one knows when this pandemic will end. It may be soon but it may also take longer than expected, who knows! We need to think about measures and strategies for safety of students and teachers when schools reopen. At the same time, we also need to prepare alternative solutions if schools remain closed. Training teachers on using ICT to continue teaching and learning can help. As school leaders we need to keep in touch with school staff and parents/students through different online channels. ICT remains a reliable alterative not only for learning/teaching but for other sectors especially during a health crisis like the one we are facing today.

G.S Saint Aloys Rwamagana

Egide Mukeshimana is the Deputy Head Teacher for G.S Saint Aloys Rwamagana secondary school, in Rwamagana district. This is boarding school with more than 1,000 students, girls representing over 50 per cent.

What has been the biggest challenge(s) as you prepare for reopening your school after COVID-19 closures, and what kinds of actions (if any) have you been able to take to resolve this challenge?

One of the biggest worries for reopening our school is students behaviour. It is always hard to control students' behaviour. So many questions arise when we think about opening our school while COVID-19 pandemic is still there. Will students always wear face masks? Will they wash their hands consistently? How will we ensure they respect social distancing at school? They usually bath together, sleep in a same dormitory….we are still concerned about these issues among other challenges.

We have been discussing how we can help our students take charge of their own behaviour by encouraging self-awareness as well as self-control . The key solutions to address this is to make expectations as clear as possible. We have been elaborating general regulations for students, with focus on instructions and guidelines on how to prevent the spread of the virus, based on the Ministry of Health (MoH) overall guidelines on COVID-19 prevention. We will post a list of regulations on notice boards everywhere in the school so that students can read and apply them. Additionally, we will communicate the rules during morning assemblies. We also understand that when the Ministry of Education decides on the date to open schools, they will also release clear instructions on COVID-19 prevention, which we will consider and adapt to our guidelines. We would be very lucky if corona-virus vaccine is discovered before schools open.

Another challenge relates to classroom size. We usually had more than 40 students in a classroom before schools closed. Of course we will reduce the number of students in a classroom but a *'one meter plus'* seems to be difficult. It is still a critical issue and we know it is a general problem that almost all schools in our country have to face. So, we will also wait for MINEDUC and MoH views and recommendations. Meanwhile, I think we can possibly use our big meeting hall that can accommodate about 2,000 seated people. We also consider using our three science laboratories as an alternative, in case other options are not possible yet.

Concerning hygiene and sanitation, we are doing our best. We already had many hand washing sinks at our school, but we will install additional tit taps for hand-washing, to have one for each class or at least one per two classrooms.

What do you think has been the most difficult for teachers?

I know most of our teachers rely on bank loans. They are still getting their monthly salary but they lost the incentive which were paid by parents. They must be struggling to cope with the situation.

Recommendation to other teachers

We don't know exactly when schools will open. But we shouldn't wait until the Government announces the date for reopening and to start planning. Every school can use available resources, however little they may be, and plan for school reopening in advance. Parents remain our key stakeholders, we rely on them in everything and without them nothing can move. Always involve parents through the school parent committee in every step of your activity planning.

VVOB and the Mastercard Foundation partner to help schools recover from the COVID-19 pandemic

VVOB and the Mastercard Foundation partner to help schools recover from the COVID-19 pandemic in Rwanda

"We encourage teachers to continue teaching and learning during the COVID-19 crisis, but we know it is not easy for everyone"—Head Teacher Mutegarugori

As COVID-19 advances, its effects become ever-more pronounced. The public health crisis is aggravated by the social and economic aftermath: job losses, school closures, increased poverty. Since March 16, 2020 all education institutions in Rwanda have been closed in immediate response to the first case of the virus – disrupting the education of about 2.5 million primary and about 600,000 secondary school learners. In response to the devastating impacts on education, VVOB-education for development partnered with the Mastercard Foundation through the Mastercard Foundation's COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Program.

When schools closed in March , Rwanda Education Board (REB) acted swiftly and doubled the capacity of its existing e-learning platform and launched a radio learning program and YouTube channel in an attempt to reduce the impact of the school closures on pupils' education.

While the online learning modalities have attracted many users, most learners, teachers, and school leaders remain left out as they lack access to the required infrastructure. Moreover, the majority of teachers and school leaders have not been equipped to deliver distance education, and more particularly online learning.

As schools plan to reopen in September 2020, additional challenges arise:

- Will learners find their way back to school?
- Will learners be able to catch up on lost time learning?
- Will schools have the appropriate protocols in place to safeguard learners, teachers, and school leaders' physical and socio-emotional well-being?

Candide Mutegarugori is the Head Teacher at Marie Adelaide Gihara secondary school in Kamonyi district. She believes that technology is a viable alternative to continue managing and leading her school as the world faces this unprecedented health crisis. However, Ms. Mutegarugori is concerned about students' ICT skills and affordability of ICT devices and services among her teachers. "We encourage teachers to buy internet airtime to continue teaching and learning during the COVID-19 crisis, but we know it is not easy for everyone. Some teachers do not have ICT devices such as smartphones or computers," she said.

Building Resilience

To address these challenges, VVOB aims to equip sector and district education officers, school leaders, and teachers in secondary education with the competencies and skills to prevent and/or manage future health crises that disrupt education.

As part of the ongoing Leaders in Teaching initiative of the Mastercard Foundation, VVOB was already providing continuing professional development (CPD) services to district directors of education, sector education inspectors, headteachers, deputy headteachers, school-based mentors, and STEM school subject leaders through blended learning. With further support from the Mastercard Foundation, these services have been adapted and are now being delivered digitally. They include thematic support on, among others, school hygiene and distance learning.

To ensure effective online learning, VVOB will deepen the capacity of its education partners to provide and monitor online CPD services to teachers and school leaders, equipping them with the competencies to provide high-quality education both off- and online.

Access to hardware and internet being a precondition to participation, VVOB will also equip key education actors with laptops or tablets, as well as modems and/or data-allowances.

The project is built around four pillars, including:

1. Provision of laptops and internet connectivity to all key actors in all 30 districts, establishing an enabling online CPD environment.

2. Development of a digital data-ecosystem for planning, monitoring, and evaluation in order to solidify a quick response system to emerging needs.

3. Integration of thematic support on building resilient schools in current CPD materials.

4. Capacity building of district and sector officials in 16 non-LIT districts on effective school leadership, , mentoring, and coaching respectively and ensuring teachers and school leaders have the required ICT skills to participate in online learning.

"Through this initiative, VVOB, in partnership with the Rwandan Government and the Mastercard Foundation, continues to lay strong foundations for relevant and cost-effective continuous professional development services for key actors in the education system in Rwanda. These key actors will be supported to take up a leadership role in the system to address the current challenges and to become more resilient for future challenges," said Jef Peeraer, the Country Programme Manager at VVOB Rwanda.

"I thought the situation would be back to normal in one month, but it has continued. I appreciate that VVOB thought about online learning as an alternative during this crisis. I borrowed a laptop from my school and I am now able to follow the training online despite some internet connection issues in my area," said Enock Twebaze, a school-based mentor at G.S Saint Philip Neri in Gisagara district.

"I thought the situation would be back to normal in one month, but it has continued. I appreciate that VVOB thought about online learning as an alternative during this crisis."

Mr Twebaze was in the middle of session one of four sessions for the Educational Mentorship and Coaching certificate course offered by VVOB with support from the Mastercard Foundation. The 18-month project (June 2020 to December 2021) is part of a larger response program of the Foundation, which aims to support institutions and communities in African countries to withstand and respond to the short-term impacts of this pandemic, while strengthening their resilience in the long-run.

"During this crisis, we need to step up our support in the education sector to mitigate against the loss of learning, particularly among the most vulnerable groups. We also need to see this as an opportunity—a chance to invest in the future, which will undoubtedly be marked by greater digitization, convenience, technological advancements, and, if we take the right actions and make the right investments, inclusion for all. Enabling educators to deliver e-learning is part of planting the seeds to create a fairer and more equitable world," said Rica Rwigamba, Country Head, Rwanda at the Mastercard Foundation.

VOB's Support to Quality Education Services

VVOB – education for development has been sustainably improving education systems worldwide in partnership with ministries of education for over 35 years. VVOB supports the initial teacher education and professional development of teachers and school leaders in 10developing countries in early childhood, primary, general secondary, and technical and vocational education.

At the same time, a certificate course in Educational Mentorship and Coaching is offered to school-based mentors (SBMs), sector education inspectors (SEIs), and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subject teachers in primary and secondary education.

Results to Date:

• More than 500 school leaders have completed a CPD diploma course in Effective School Leadership.

• About 500 school-based mentors, SEOs, and teacher training centre tutors attended a CPD certificate course in Educational Mentorship and Coaching.

• Over 500 STEM teachers benefited from a CPD certificate course in Educational Mentorship and Coaching.

By 2021, a total of approximately 1,300 primary and secondary schools will have benefited from the CPD training programs, while 2,000 school leaders are expected to have benefited from the diploma course in Effective School Leadership. About 3,000 teachers, including science teachers will have completed a certificate program in Educational Mentorship and Coaching.

Tips for online/distance learning and teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown

For teachers

- Explore options of continuing teaching/ learning remotely during the crisis
- Prepare tasks with few and simple instructions for your students
- Collaborate with/consult other teachers from other schools
- Keep updating your knowledge (read books, find resources on internet)

Pay attention to COVID-19 prevention measures:

- Play your role as a teacher, teach and influence your community to prevent the COVID-19
- Be prepared to integrate COVID-19 prevention in your subjects/lessons when schools reopen. Discuss this with your colleagues and school leaders.

For parents

- Do not overload your child
- Consider breaks between sessions
- Play with your child during breaks to make home schooling enjoyable
- Teach your child in a distraction-free environment (switch off TV if they're following lessons on radio, avoid banging doors…)
- Borrow books from school/libraries to help your children
- Download learning content from school Whatsapp groups or e-learning platforms for your child so s/he can access them offline to minimise internet cost
- Elaborate a study timetable for you child
- Ask older siblings to support the younger ones if possible
- Encourage your child to ask questions to his/ her teacher if they have any

For school leaders

- Keep in touch with your staff members through online meetings (eg. Microsoft TEAMS), phone calls, WhatsApp
- Record parents' ICT information (whatsApp numbers, those who use laptops...)
- Consult other school leaders
- Identify ICT challenges and ask your ICT officer to help in addressing them
- Support/motivate your teachers to support students (lend them school laptops, provide internet airtime)
- Discuss with your teachers how to integrate COVID-19 prevention in subjects/lessons when schools reopen

Back-to-school after the COVID-19 closures

KEY ISSUES SCHOOL LEADERS NEED TO CONSIDER WHEN SCHOOLS REOPEN

1 Teaching and learning

- **How can we ensure the online/distance learning and be prepared to support the continuation of learning when schools reopen?**

Have you considered:

- Regular actions and strategies to monitor the online leaning of students are in place during the lockdown?
- Working with teachers, parents, and local leaders to ensure that students don't drop out during the online learning?

2 Safety and healthy environment

- **How can school leaders ensure the security, safety and hygiene of their schools and school materials during COVID-19 crisis?**

Have you considered:

- Put in place strategies of ensuring the security of school materials (guards to ensure security during the lockdown)?
- Share strategies to keep the school clean during the lockdown (clean school premises and materials; availability of water...) ?

3 Dealing with psychological and socio-emotional well-being related challenges

- **As school leaders, how are we prepared to ensure the well-being of students and teachers when school open?**

Have you considered:

- In the absence of specialists in communities, focal points need to be identified and put in place.
- Schools should ensure that staff and students receive, as and when needed, mental health and socio-emotional well-being support.

4 Social dialogue & communication for school reopening

- **How can we be best prepared to communicate the reopening of schools to students, parents and the wider community?**

Have you considered:

- Before schools reopen every school should have an annual school improvement plan, with clear goals and strategies to implement it.
- School leaders have a clear plan to be fully involved in the back-to-school campaign to ensure all students return to school?

5 Gender equity as a cross-cutting topic

- **How can we integrate gender and equity in all actions and decisions taken?**

Have you considered:

- Planning to monitor the return of students with consideration to sex-disaggregation of data to track any gaps in enrollment plus those with disabilities?
- Assessing and addressing issues such as gender-based violence (GBV) for both teachers and students as well as the increased risk of early marriages and teenage unplanned pregnancies among students as a result of COVID-19 lockdown?

6 Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

Have you considered:

- School leaders and their staff and other relevant stakeholders developing an M&E plan to determine the effectiveness of the return to school effort and ongoing crisis response?
- School leaders and their staff, reviewing, adapting, and updating available systems for monitoring and tracking children's return, re-enrollment and retention based on learner group and be age specific?

For more details, read a full "**toolkit for school leaders after COVID-19 closures**" on **rwanda.vvob.org/publications**

REB: P.O. Box 3817 Kigali, Rwanda
@REBRwanda
@RwandaEducationBoardOfficial
reb.rw

rwanda.vvob.org | **E:** info.rwanda@vvob.org
KG 565 st, House No 6, Kacyiru, P.O. Box 3776, Kigali-Rwanda
+250 785 702 442 @VVOBrwanda VVOBrwanda VVOB Rwanda

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