Over one billion children are out of school due to covid-19, what next?

Two weeks ago, RELI Kenya hosted a special webinar on integrating online and radio learning in response to the covid-19 pandemic. Education in different parts of Kenya have experienced many varied forms of disruption over the years - from cattle rustling, border conflicts, electoral violence, flash floods and terrorist attacks. Each disruption brings with it uncertainty. However, with covid-19, there has been an unprecedented closure of all institutions of learning, from kindergarten all the way to tertiary institutions – and that the closure is indefinite makes matters worse.

> *"There are more than 1 BILLION children at home worldwide, 11 MILLION of whom are in Kenya." Ubongo Kids*

Parents, caregivers, teachers and the community at large are asking what prolonged school closures and social distancing measures will mean for children's learning going forward? It's bad but there are opportunities too. The covid-19 pandemic has accelerated opportunities for children to learn remotely through technologies such as mobile phone, Social media and radio.

RELI created space for conversations about Learner Centred Teaching in the time of covid-19 and featured three organisations that are helping children to learn from home. What was most impressive was how the three organisations are leveraging:

1. Human Centered Design (HCD) interventions, centering especially learners, parents and caregivers
2. Forming partnerships for collective action from the national level all the way to households

The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), **"**provides curricula and curriculum support materials through research and engagement to nurture every learner's potential for sustainable development." At the Zoom-hosted webinar the KICD team led by Dr. Mucheru and Jacqueline Onyango shared about the learning resources that are available on radio. KICD broadcasts school radio programmes on weekdays on KBC English Service, Iftiin FM and Radio Taifa. Also exciting is that they are reaching children in far off places such as Wajir and Turkana. The lessons are available on Transworld radio in Wajir, Mandera and Garissa Counties.

Carol Keenan and her team for War Child Canada shared about Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) that is promoting the use of radio education in Eastern Congo, with support from the Ministry of Education who host a live Q&A session several times a week and a hotline. The Ministry of Social Affairs is involved in helping with scaling up of the project. What makes IRI special is that it combines both radio programmes and the active learning of children as opposed to one-way and passive radio delivery.
They also leverage community buy-in of the government officials, teachers, students, children and the community at large. War Child has immense experience of working in

conflict areas and they described more about what works for them in terms of increasing access to education in areas where insecurity and travel restrictions are prevalent.

Ubongo Kids, an “animated educational TV series produced in Tanzania helps **kids** find fun in learning.” Nisha Ligon and her team shared about how they utilize radio, TV and mobile phones to help kids learn. What makes their strategy so successful is the use of entertainment as a tool for learning and the wide reach of mass media.

> *There are 500 Million kids in Africa, 44% of the children aged 3-4 in Africa experience low cognitive or social-emotional development and fewer than 14% of the children in Sub-Saharan Africa are achieving proficiency in Mathematics*.

There’s a great need for quality education and widespread access to it. No child should be left behind as education becomes increasingly dependent on technology. Technology is a critical component for children’s education. After what was shared by the three organizations, it is evident that there are many resources available for free, and it’s a matter of directing parents, caregivers and teachers to the right tools for their contexts, and supporting them as the key coaches in their children’s learning.

Although a major concern is that the school closures will magnify the digital divide between children who have access to online education and those who do not, this is a time that calls for collaborative efforts and vigilance to ensure that even the most vulnerable children without access to mobile phones or the internet are reached, and are adequately engaged to continue with their ABC until school resumes.