

WEBINAR BRIEF

**JOINT COVID-19 RESPONSE FOR KENYA, HELD ONLINE FROM
10AM-11:25AM ON 2nd JUNE 2020**

Kenya: Featuring Stakeholders from the Health Sector (MOH, WHO & UNICEF)



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INTRODUCTION

Dr Teresa Mwoma, Chairperson of the network, started the meeting by welcoming all participants to the Webinar. Participants were asked to make brief introductions via the zoom chat section. Those who participated were 58 people, as indicated in annex.

In her opening remarks, Dr Teresa observed that COVID-19 had suddenly come with many challenges that had resulted in: schools closing down; children, being social in nature, restricted from playing with others; parents/caregivers losing jobs and unable to adequately support their families. The crisis was made worse by floods that had displaced many in different parts of the country, affecting livelihoods for many families and thus increasing poverty levels. Domestic violence (Gender-based violence) too had been reported as rampant. In some parts of the country, tribal clashes had also been reported. All these were having a direct negative impact on children: and would likely affect their growth, development as well as security.

Dr Teresa also introduced the webinar speakers, drawn from World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF Kenya Country Office and Ministry of Health (MOH) in Kenya. After the presentations, a Q&A plenary session ensued, and the speakers were given an opportunity to respond to concerns that were raised by the stakeholders.

WEBINAR SPEAKERS - HEALTH SECTOR IN KENYA

a. Paediatric Support & Covid-19: *Dr Laura B. A., Ministry of Health (MOH)*

Dr Laura began her session with a rhetorical question: Who are the major players helping children to survive and thrive, as Kenya faces the Covid-19 crisis? She lauded all ECD stakeholders who were thinking through the health and well-being situation of children in different stages of development. She noted that these stakeholders had an opportunity to tailor paediatric health services for the nation, at different levels: National, community and the household. She added that the necessary structures were being tightened to enable all to receive the necessary service delivery. The need to restructure service delivery arose after the emergence of Covid-19.

She added that there was critical attention for children too, as they can get sick from Covid-19. The caregivers or adults in their charge, needed to be sensitised on the following:

- i. **Structure:** Children need structure. Parents and caregivers need to explain why the previous structure is not working. A new structure needs to be set-up, guided by the needs of the children. Dr Laura noted that Education was not necessarily structured training: children could learn through radio lessons, as online classes were not possible for larger populations in Kenya. She noted that although young ones were mostly staying at home, teaching life-skills was a form of education for the children.
- ii. **Teaching children to become adaptable:** Adaptability is about how children could become resilient despite the stressors surrounding them. It is also about flexibility in the health system, but also with the parent, as well as with the child. Dr Laura noted that for every negative situation, finding the positives and focusing on them was critical. The current Covid-19 crisis could allow parents to re-learn their children, and strengthen the family - for children to thrive.
- iii. **Parents' survival tip:** Parents need to take care of themselves. Juggling working, childcare and running the home is not easy in this season. Parents need to reach out for

the support they need. Dr Laura noted that it was time to spread the gospel of the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF), have it entrenched in all the 47 counties, especially throughout this crisis period, to enable parents nurture skilfully (sing, play and support learning in the home).

- iv. **Safety in children:** Dr Laura noted that Violence Against Children (VAC) was occurring. Teachers are usually critical confidants when children face violence in the home. Dr Laura noted that further, teachers were skilled in easily picking out a troubled child. However, in the current crisis today, how could players in the space bridge the related gaps? Dr Laura proposed the following answer to this question, as follows:
- *Children in institutions:* Who are their caregivers? What materials have they received to adequately care for these children during the crisis period?
 - What are our collective strengths and weaknesses? How can we tailor holistic packages for all categories of children?
 - How can we document the experiences and skills that we are gaining during this season, to better prepare for similar/future pandemics?
 - *Health prevention and promotion:* How do we bring this to the fore, to become the cornerstone for health and well-being of our generations?

b. Supporting parents/caregivers in the context of Covid-19: Dr Martin Chabi, World Health Organisation (WHO)

Dr Chabi noted that during the Covid-19 crisis, children needed opportunities to keep learning in the home. Therefore, parents needed to be empowered, so that children could develop optimally despite the challenges of the season. However, he added that children exist in unique larger ecological environments, which further influenced their developmental potentials. Therefore, he explained that empowering parents and caregivers was critical and timely for the crisis period, and beyond.

Child Safety during online Usage

While at home during the Covid-19 outbreak, online communities have become central to maintaining children's learning, support and play. Nonetheless, this was also increasing their exposure to cyberbullying, risky online behaviour and sexual exploitation. He shared the following related signs to look out for, and support that was needed:

- If child is withdrawn or irritable, take note and address the situation;
- Support them on proper use of webcams and protect them from cyberbullying or visiting unsafe sites;
- Spend time with them online, in healthy ways - gauge how children were using the online etiquette. Use these online bonding sessions as teaching and memorable moments;
- *Encourage healthy online habits:* Monitor what children are doing online, more so watching or sharing. Educate them on undue marketing that's not good for their health, for example the marketing of sugary drinks and foods. This was because they can be susceptible to unhealthy eating habits, changing their feeding habits which may hamper their health and development;
- *Online usage as a form of play:* Parents can support constructive use, to help children to create positive online messages to friends. These can be uploaded on social media platforms such as instagram or YouTube, but under parental guidance.

Dr Chabi urged stakeholders to collectively do all they could to keep children safe, whether they were parents, from the community, delivering supportive services, playing an advisory role or policy-making. He urged participants to become part of the discussions on reopening of schools and childcares - a global discussion that was currently underway. Further, Dr Chabi reiterated that while supporting the ongoing efforts, all players must place a child-protection lens on related deliberations. He added that stakeholders ought to encourage those on the frontlines of fighting Covid-19 and support them. He also urged them to share, engage and keep safe during the outbreak.

c. Parenting & Covid-19: Agnes Ngonyo, UNICEF

Agnes shared that the current outbreak had come so unexpectedly. Parents, who suddenly became the centre of childcare, need to be supported. Despite the survival basic needs that parents are required to provide, and mental health difficulties they are likely to be facing, all parents need practical tips on what they can do support their children to develop holistically. In this regard, Agnes shared the following survival tips for parents:

- **Set aside individualised time with each child:** Parents can start with about five minutes a day, to check on how each child is doing; or learning together with them such as through radio and television programs;
- **Keep it positive:** Children too are facing difficulties during the outbreak - they are unable to play freely and have no opportunities to interact with others. Parents can play with them, and we can support them as they play different games - such as with water or pretend to cooking;
- **Daily routines:** Children feel safer when they have a regular routine. They then are more likely to behave better. Children more so need fresh air and exercise, to release the excess energy that is characteristic of their growth and development;
- **Managing misbehaviour:** Disciplining should be done skilfully, and should be age-appropriate;
- **Keep calm and manage stress:** Despite the prevailing circumstances, fear and distress about the future is normal regardless of our backgrounds. Thus, it is important to take a break, exercise outside and at home. When doing so outside the home, apply safety measures, especially when traffic (of people and cars) is reduced. This will positively impact on children;
- **Talking about Covid-19:** Relieve children from some of the myths, and misunderstandings surrounding the pandemic. Share the right information regarding the response strategies. Reassure them.

Agnes ended her session by adding that resources for supporting parents were endless and can be found within the WHO and UNICEF presentations (*find links below and in the attached WHO/Unicef slides*).

- <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/how-talk-your-child-about-coronavirus-covid-19>
- <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/coronavirus-covid-19-guide-parents>
- https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/links/covid-19-mncah-resources-care-for-young-children/en/

PLENARY: QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

- *How can children in prisons, who are vulnerable, be supported?* Dr Laura noted that MOH was about to draft the NCF policy before the Covid-19 crisis came about; and were to engage with

stakeholders. MOH will be reaching out to counties to engage them on the same, so that the writing process could be conducted holistically, through team effort.

- *Young children and wearing protective masks:* Literature shows that children aged less than two (2) years should not wear face masks, as it was not safe and could cause suffocation. Dr Chabi advised that covering the child with a leso or kanga was advisable. However, he noted that when all adults wore masks, they were already protecting young infants around them. He also added that 2-5 year olds, had no capacity to wear a mask for long periods. Therefore, caregivers and parents of this age bracket were advised to limit visits to large gatherings, during the crisis period.
- *Children with special needs. How can they be supported?* Dr Chabi noted that it was not advisable for children with disabilities and developmental delays to use face masks as they would suffer discomfort and/or suffocation.

General comments

- *Most of the Kenyan population is unable to access online learning and Television programs. What is the government doing about it?* Parents need to spend time with their children - these are learning moments. Children should also be supported on day-to-day activities where life-skills can be shared. Learning is not only about online or formal instruction. Given the pandemic, parents and caregivers should therefore make best of what they have in the home. Dr Chabi added that KICD was also trying to reach the underserved through radio lessons; or through EDU TV for those with relevant access.
- Covid-19 print media for children of ECD age is needed during the season.
- NCF - One of the principles of NCF is: Leaving no one behind: ensuring that you tailor solutions towards all needs. Further, Dr Chabi explained that everyone needed care, but some (are vulnerable) more than others. All vulnerabilities are to be mapped out, so that the relevant policy is tailor-made for those with learning and other disabilities.
- Advocacy on Cash transfers: This is an issue that the network and members can push for collectively.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

- The Next Webinars shall endeavour to engage MOE, CoG and Social/Child protection experts in the space.
- ECDNeK was also planning to hold Webinars in partnership with Kays Foundation in the coming days. Dates for the next Webinar would be communicated.
- There being no other business, the meeting was completed at 11:25am.

ANNEXTURE

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Dr Teresa Mwoma - ECDNeK, Chairperson / Senior Lecturer, Dept of Early Childhood Studies, Kenyatta University
2. Dr Benson Okongo - Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University, Bondo
3. Dr Laura Ayiengo Angwenyi - Ministry of Health
4. Dr Ouko Onganga - Kenyatta University, ECDNeK Board Member
5. Dr Martin Chabi - WHO
6. Sally Moraa Ocharo - ECDNeK Secretariat
7. Anne W. Njine, Education Specialist, Opportunity International, Kenya.
8. Dr Sam Ngaruiya - MOE
9. Linda Kharemwa - Education Officer, UNICEF
10. Gladys Miriti - Grassroots Development Initiatives Foundation-Kenya (GRADIF-K), Tharaka Nithi & Embu Counties
11. Arif Neky - UN SDG platform
12. Caroline Linda - ECD Coordinator Lwala Community Alliance
13. George Nyangwe - KESHA
14. Joyce Wesonga - Uthabiti
15. Pendo - Homa Bay County
16. Agnes Ngonyo - UNICEF Kenya
17. Damaris Wambua - ECD Specialist, ChildFund Kenya
18. Arif Neky - UNSDGPP
19. Sr Esther Wachera - CRS AOSK
20. Beatrice Agola - QASO, Migori County
21. Mumbi Muguongo - Clean Start
22. Duncan Odhiambo - Sub-CDE, Rongo
23. Najma Rashid - Independent Consultant
24. Immaculate Salaon - Community Initiatives Agenda
25. Dr Samuel Ngaruiya - MOE
26. Pendo Mary - Rachuonyo East ECD Coordinator, Homa Bay County
27. Oscar Kadenge - PATH
28. Janet Mwitiki - Independent Consultant
29. Carol Opondo - ICS
30. Violet Akinyi - Opportunity International
31. Leonard Chumo - Missions of Hope International
32. Stella Mbugua - ECDNeK
33. Ruth Muendo - APHRC
34. John Samuel Otiono - Pamoja Child Foundation
35. Esther Ekitela - UNICEF
36. Sr Joyce Nyagucha - AOSK
37. AKF Madrassa
38. Eunice Ombech - AKU-IHD
39. Linzy Nyamboki - Build Africa Kenya
40. Mercy Moraa - AKU-IHD
41. Pauline Kariuki - Feed the children
42. Grace Otieno - HCBEF
43. Kennedy Nyamura
44. Sr Wilhemina Uhai - ACWECA
45. Lilian Oneya
46. Pauline Akinyi - UNICEF
47. Justus Wasike - MOE, Awendo Sub County
48. Everylne Akeyo
49. Lissa
50. Rebecca
51. Kephaz Emmanuel
52. Mruma Tunu
53. Rose
54. Maureen Ouma
55. Everlyn
56. Ta'lim
57. Other
58. other