



United Nations  
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International Institute  
for Capacity Building  
in Africa

# Psychosocial Support to Teachers during COVID-19 Crisis

Meeting Report

3 June, 2020, 14:00-15:30 (GMT+3)

Microsoft Teams

Recording of the Webinar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Oa7qib3kRw&t=1s>

## Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted education in an unprecedented way. In order to contain the spread of the virus, many governments around the world have temporarily closed schools. As of 15 April 2020, according to a UNESCO report, globally 191 countries, 1.57 billion learners, and 91.4% of the world's student population are affected by school closures. In addition, according to Teacher Task Force, 63 million primary and secondary school teachers are affected. Governments have had to act rapidly to meet the challenge to continue providing quality education in this new environment, where face-to-face pedagogy is no longer possible and where teachers lack skills related to ICT, distance education and education in emergencies.

Teaching and learning are greatly challenged during this unprecedented situation. Teachers have been impacted by the crisis professionally and personally. As countries plan to reopen schools, the role of teachers, their knowledge of their learners' needs, and teaching expertise are critical to developing effective strategies. An area that needs particular attention is the fact that COVID-19 pandemic may result in psychological distress for teachers. The distress can stem from both the related health risks and the increased workload of teaching in new and challenging ways with inadequate training. This can lead to burnout, resulting in high rates of absenteeism, and can even lead some teachers to leave their jobs. Education responses to COVID-19 need to ensure teachers and education support staff receive ongoing psychosocial support.

In this context, UNESCO IICBA organized a webinar on 'Psychosocial Support to Teachers during COVID-19'. The objectives of the meeting were to deliberate on the psychosocial condition of teachers and the challenges they face in the COVID-19 crisis; to exchange experiences of various countries in addressing issues related to teachers and teaching while designing education responses to COVID-19. The English session was held on 6 June 2020 and welcomed over 50 participants which included Ministry of Education officials responsible for teacher development and management, specialist of psychosocial support, primary and secondary school teachers, teacher educators, education researchers, representatives of partner organizations, and UNESCO colleagues.

The webinar was moderated by Mr Saliou Sall, Senior Programme Coordinator, IICBA. It was officially opened with remarks by Ms. Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta, Director of UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa.

## Sharing of Experiences and Practices: Uganda, Cameroon, and Kenya

### Uganda

**Dr. Jane Egau Okou, Commissioner, Teacher Instructor Education and Training, Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda**

In her presentation, Dr. Okou demonstrated teachers' concerns during COVID-19, their needs in psychosocial support, and strategies of the support planned in Uganda.

Teachers' worries arise from three main concerns:

- Continuity of work: syllabus coverage, learning loss, work load after school reopening, contracts and salaries.
- Safety during COVID-19: both in schools and at home.
- New skills and competencies of teaching: ICT skills, technologies and other new methods.

Based on these three aspects, Dr. Okou highlighted that the government should fully acknowledge the needs of all

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teachers, clarify the future of COVID-19, and assure psychosocial support for teachers. To this end, strategies of support have been set up in Uganda, which focus on:

- increasing teachers' involvement in planning of workload and school reopening;
- ensuring safe and supportive environment for work;
- providing trainings on ICT and new teaching methods;
- promoting peer-support/group work among teachers with different levels of competencies using means like WhatsApp, social interaction opportunities and other activities.

Link to full presentation:

<http://www.iicba.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/1-UNESCO%20Webinar%20on%20Psycho-Socio%20Support%20%28Uganda%29.pdf>

## Q&A

### Q: What are types of the contract that affect teachers salaries?

A: Government teachers have been paid in most cases. The problems are in private schools. In some cases, the school directors could not pay the private teachers because children have not paid school fees. In Uganda, negotiations are undergoing to make sure all teachers are being paid. The salaries can be distributed after reopening school.

**Comment:** If there is no training on ICT skills, devices and facilities will be no use.

A: Uganda is intensifying the programming of ICT training for teachers. The delivery of devices has also been planned.

## Cameroon

### Prof. Therese Mungah Shalo Tchombe, Emeritus Professor & Honorary Dean, University of Buea Faculty of Education & UNESCO Chair for Special Needs Education, Cameroon

Prof. Tchombe firstly gave an overview of the education response during COVID-19 and psychosocial conditions of teachers in Cameroon. Then she demonstrated practices that have been adopted such as needs assessments, principles of psychosocial support developed by the government, identification of role of government in promoting relevant support.

It was noted that Cameroon is experiencing not only the COVID-19 but also separatists' armed conflicts, which increased the challenges to the education system and urgent needs of psychosocial support to teachers. In this context, teachers' concerns mainly come from health and safety risks, increasing workload, and new technologies due to the reopening of onsite classes for public examination and continuous distance education for regular students.

Following that, she shared the findings of a needs assessment conducted in March 2020 by UNESCO with 23 selected schools of the North West and South West Anglophone regions, illustrating the key issues of the lack of awareness of psychosocial support by school leaders and teachers in Cameroon. Given this situation, Prof. Tchombe took a deeper look at the concepts of psychosocial support and provided 6 key characteristics of support (holistic, enabling, rights-based, friendly, positive and comprehensive). Furthermore, she emphasized the powerful roles of government in creating an enabling, supportive and hopeful environment for better psychosocial support to teachers.

At the end, four recommendations for further actions were given:

- Provide legislation for ensuring teachers receive appropriate psychosocial support to enhance professional engagement
- Put in place structures to develop teachers' computer literacy skills for managing online teaching
- Create mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of psychosocial support and welfare services to teachers and schools administrators
- Establish modalities for teacher incentives

Link to the presentation:

<http://www.iicba.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/2-PRACTICES%20AND%20EXPERIENCES%20ON%20PSYCHOSOCIAL%20SUPPORT%20TO%20TEACHERS%203rd%20%28Cameroon%29.pdf>

## Kenya

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**Ms. Mary Wanjiru Kangethe, Director of Education Programs, Kenya National Commission for UNESCO**

At the beginning, Ms. Kangethe outlined the challenges of education in Kenya before COVID-19 and key reforms in education. She then introduced the new issues raised by the pandemic such as new modes of teaching and working, concerns of safety and health, job security and coordination with parents and guardians.

Thereafter, she demonstrated several principles for effective provision of psychosocial support for teachers in Kenya:

- Framed within the broader view of **'whole school approach'** to support not only teachers, but also learners and other stakeholders, thereby supporting the whole system
- Founded on addressing **risk factors** and **increasing protective** factors for the wellbeing of learners
- Leveraging on **existing resources** (e.g. peer mentorship)
- Developing of **perceived needs**, which means building a safe environment for teachers to safely and openly talk about their needs
- Clarity on **coordination points**
- Building **partnerships**

Furthermore, she proposed recommendations for a long-term and comprehensive structure of psychosocial support to teachers which mainly focus on three aspects:

- Promote experience sharing and peer support.
- Acknowledge achievement, provide appreciation and create optimism.
- Improve the social system in general (e.g. economic and financial security of society).

Besides, she insisted that it is important to integrate psychosocial support to teachers in capacity building and institutional response planning. In addition, specialized support should not be neglected.

Link to full presentation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Oa7qib3kRw&t=2715s>

## **General Q&A**

**Chat Moderator:Dr. Binyam Sisay, IICBA**

**Q: How do governments collect information from teachers?**

**A:** Each country has its own system in which the central administration relates to the regional administration going down to the divisional and sub-divisional level. Situation analyses are undertaken for teachers by education administrators to identify challenges and to advise the government to improve support. However, the challenge exists in the gap between government's requirement on the results of teaching, and the real problems faced by school systems and teachers. Therefore, it is crucial to have strong coordination and communication among stakeholders to identify the weaknesses of the system and improve them. Certifications are simply not enough. A more comprehensive mechanism of intervention is much needed.

**Q: How are teachers receiving support in a concrete way?**

**A:**

- It is necessary to prepare comprehensive frameworks of psychosocial support beforehand, involving all stakeholders like practitioners, researchers and policy makers. COVID-19 in fact has provided opportunities for us to enhance the collaboration among stakeholders and foster the development of systematic psychosocial interventions.
- Globally, psychosocial support to teachers is lacking. This crisis made us realize that psychosocial support should be directed to teachers not only to children. It should be legislated for and taken into account during teacher preparation and teacher practice.

**Q: Could you please talk about educators having to deal with the discrepancies, in terms of discipline, studying and norms, which students will display once schools are resumed following confinement?**

**A:** In Cameroon, temporarily, only examination classes have returned to the schools. But indeed it is a great challenge when schools are fully reopened. In terms of recommended interventions, staff rooms and computer literacy should be put in place for teachers to support them preparing for the school reopening.

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**Q: Does the support include teachers from private schools? How do they receive psychosocial support?**

A: In Cameroon, the private schools have their own mechanisms to provide psychosocial support for teachers (e.g. short classes).

**Q: What kind of incentives (financial, professional, recognition) and what kind of support do we need to make available for teachers?**

A: Before the provision of support, teachers must be consulted to identify the needs and be able to participate in the decision making process.

**Q: Can speakers address the difference between psychosocial support and motivation and job satisfaction?**

A: There are some indicators implied by presenters. For example, job satisfaction can be offered by good salaries, respect from others and affirmation of teachers' work. Additionally, sometimes, material support could motivate them to improve lives and support families.

**Q: Teachers are absent in most school safety protocols of several countries. How could we involve them to avoid stigmatization of teachers or students in case of contamination, especially in front of the community?**

A: According to one speaker, during the situation analysis and capacity building sessions, teachers feared to talk about stigmatization because it might hamper their career and life by voicing their thoughts. It was suggested that attention be paid to creating a safe environment for teachers to make their voices heard safely and freely.

**Q: How are supports provided, and what support can be envisioned for teachers from marginalized groups or refugee areas, or learners with special needs?**

A: In Kenya, mechanisms are being planned by the government to take teachers from these areas into consideration. For example, capacity building can be given to principals of schools or headmasters to train them to reach out to teachers from disadvantaged areas or groups.

Few interventions on psychosocial support at the national level are provided to refugee groups or learners with special needs. But some selected tools can be used to develop a national level tool in order to bridge this gap, for example, networks of education in emergencies and post-conflict violence.

## **Closing Remarks**

**Dr Yumiko Yokozeki, Director of IICBA**

Dr. Yokozeki pointed out that the political character of the COVID19 pandemic has magnified a lot of issues such as social discrimination, racial issues, and economic disparity, which have also negatively affected teachers. Teachers need comprehensive and thoughtful psychosocial support. They also have to be well equipped with psychosocial knowledge and skills to support students after school reopening.

IICBA is compiling resources for teachers to be able to use during school closure and school reopening which are free and low-bandwidth friendly. IICBA is also working on a virtual campus where teachers can do courses with certificates and download resources. The content on psychosocial support can be a part of it.

## Agenda

Wednesday, 20 May, 2020		Moderator: Mr. Saliou Sall, Senior Programme Coordinator, IICBA
15 min	Welcoming remarks and introduction	<b>Ms. Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta</b> Director of UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa
36 min	Countries' perspectives - Uganda:  - Cameroon:  - Kenya:	<b>Dr. Jane Egau Okou</b> Commissioner, Teacher Instructor Education and Training, Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda  <b>Prof. Therese Mungah Shalo Tchombe</b> Emeritus Professor & Honorary Dean, University of Buea Faculty of Education & UNESCO Chair for Special Needs Education  <b>Ms. Mary Wanjiru Kangethe</b> Director of Education Programs, Kenya National Commission for UNESCO
34 min	Q&A and Discussion	<b>Dr. Binyam Sisay</b> , IICBA
5 min	Closing Remarks	<b>Dr. Yumiko Yokozeki</b> Director, IICBA

If you have any questions or comments regarding this Meeting Report, please do not hesitate to contact Ruixi Liu at [r.liu@unesco.org](mailto:r.liu@unesco.org)

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