

COVID-19

A GGA RESPONSE

MAY 2020



CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND YOUTH FORMATION

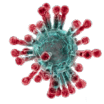


Recommendations on child and youth advocacy,
ECD centres and the implementation of the proposed
Department of Basic Education Response Document

Good Governance Africa is a registered pan-African, non-profit organisation. Through cutting-edge research and trend analysis, regular publications and advocacy work, we aim to improve governance across our five key areas:

LOCAL GOVERNANCE | NATURAL RESOURCES | NATIONAL SECURITY | CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND YOUTH FORMATION
ETHICAL VALUES AND SPIRITUALITY





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1. INTRODUCTION

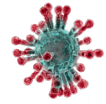
On 19 March, 2020 classrooms and learning environments across South Africa closed their doors in an attempt to keep the Coronavirus disease at bay. At midnight of 26 March, the entire country was placed under lockdown in an effort to flatten the curve of infections. Initially, it was planned that schools would resume on 18 April, which would have resulted in an extended holiday and two weeks to catch up - but the virus has proved more taxing than initially thought. The lockdown has been extended and now in mid-May, a month later, there is still uncertainty. The pandemic is challenging the education sector with a simple, yet pressing question: “what now?”

At the outset, the pandemic has revealed just how far-off many countries in the region are from realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations to address global challenges. The pandemic has had both a direct and indirect impact on child and youth access to quality education, and it serves to challenge their health, current development efforts to address high youth unemployment rates, and their social protection (UN Sustainable Goals/2030). The following serves as a tool for policy development to assist in a response. The South African Basic Education Minister, Angie Motshekga, and Blade Nzimande, the Minister of Higher Education, have been grappling with how to phase back learner attendance and “save the academic year”.

It is clear that doing nothing about this pandemic is not an option for government and the private sector alike. To quote Hubert Mweli, Director-General of the Department of Basic Education, during a briefing on the way forward for schools on 29 April, 2020, “We die from the virus or we die from poverty and hunger.” Mweli’s statement clearly indicates that South Africa and the wellbeing of its citizens is not being taken lightly. International experience has taught us a great deal. South Africa is in the more fortunate position of being able to learn from other countries, yet the national context is not that simple; South Africa - with nine provinces, 11 official languages, 12,408,755 learners with a wide variety of backgrounds and learning abilities, 24, 998 schools (excluding informal ECD centres and private home-schooling clusters) and 407,000 educators spread across rural, peri-urban and urban areas, and the biggest wealth gap globally between



A deserted Vusisiwe Secondary School, in Zweletemba, outside Worcester, during lockdown. PHOTO: RODGER BOSCH/AFP)



rich and poor - faces its challenges. Every country is unique and needs a contextually relevant and flexible strategy for a COVID-19 response in our schools (National Development Plan 2030).

A phased approach to learners returning to schools seems like the most viable option. This document explains the points the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has addressed in their COVID-19 development plan draft, released on 29 April, 2020, with added input and suggestions from GGA to consider for education development and youth formation.

2. INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES

Issues that already existed prior to the pandemic call for immediate attention. Common challenges that emerged from our teacher survey in Mbizana in the Eastern Cape (March, 2020) include the following: Overcrowding, a lack of resources (connectivity, water and sanitation), discipline, nutrition and safety are all areas of concern as prioritised by the DBE. If one has to find a silver lining, the COVID-19 crisis has forced governments to address these continent-wide cries for help, before an effective schooling system can be re-implemented. A total of 3,475 schools in South Africa require an adequate water supply in the form of boreholes, water tanks and plumbing (COVID-19 Basic Education Sector Plan).

Before learners can return to schools, all classrooms, staff rooms and hostels need to be sanitised. The sanitation process needs to take place daily before the start of each school day. Children will not move between classes and no clustering of desks will be allowed. A lack of furniture and space is a concern. Will there be sufficient desks made available to under-resourced schools? A sustainable solution is required. Local entrepreneurs should be enabled to produce furniture for local schools in their communities, thus improving the livelihoods of families in marginalised communities.

3. LEARNER PREPARATION

Learners need to be prepared to re-enter the schooling environment; honest and clear explanations need to be given, and for this, the assistance of parents and caretakers is required. It is necessary to emotionally prepare children for social distancing and that their old classroom routine will have changed. *Oaky and the Virus* is a children's book written by Athol Williams, a senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town, which is available to download for free. It is a valuable learning tool for parents and educators that promotes and explains social distancing in an interactive manner with quizzes for comprehension. More resources in all official languages need to be easily accessible to all children.

4. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT

The psycho-social implications of wearing a mask need to be carefully considered. In 1975, Edward Tronick and colleagues first presented the "Still Face Experiment" to colleagues at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development. He described a phenomenon in which an infant, after three minutes of "interaction" with a non-responsive, expressionless mother, "rapidly sobers and grows wary. He makes repeated attempts to get the interaction into its usual reciprocal pattern. When these attempts fail, the infant withdraws [and] orients his face and body away from his mother with a withdrawn, hopeless facial expression."

It remains one of the most replicated findings in developmental psychology. The question is: how will altered communication with teachers and friends affect human connection? A large chunk of non-verbal communication is lost in translation when you are unable to see the whole face of the person speaking.

It is now more important than ever to guide young learners to identify and articulate their feelings and needs. Educators need to consciously articulate and verbally encourage learners more often to make up for that invisible face behind the mask.

All citizens are experiencing challenges and disruptions to daily life, and perhaps children are now more vulnerable to abuse, violence, exploitation and other neglect as their home environments and communities destabilise, while parents/primary caregivers experience greater stress. Mental health and counselling services for children, as well as parents, need to be more visible and should be prioritised in communities.

Government has proposed that the public and private sector and civil society should support and promote efforts towards increasing parent and primary caregiver knowledge and skills on mental health and the management of stress, anxiety and how to deal with grief. As suggested by the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN), parents and caregivers should serve as critical points of reference for children and youth. They should play an active role in protecting children from stress and promoting their overall development, health and wellbeing. In a 1 May, 2020 statement, the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshega, noted that psycho-social support services would be made available to schools; her department has public-sector psychologists and social workers with prior training available.

Prior policy documents suggest the need for social services and support for learners in schools, but not many social workers are employed to work in schools. Reyneke (2018), states that, approximately 148 social workers were employed at special schools and some in provincial offices.

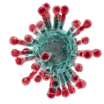
In 2016, there were 23,719 schools in South Africa, which means that even if these social workers were all part of district-based support teams, which they were not, each of them would be responsible for 160 schools.

The situation has not improved since; one social worker in Soweto reported that she was working in eight schools. She explained that although they are appointed to schools, they are based at the Department of Social Development's (DSD) provincial offices and only visited schools if they are called in to attend an "urgent" case.

Even in the event of an urgent case, social workers would only go to the schools if they had state transport available. The DSD therefore needs to be held accountable, with an effective strategy plan on equal distribution of human resources and efficacy.

Lockdowns and shelter-in-place measures come with a heightened risk of children witnessing or suffering violence and abuse. Children in conflict settings, as well as those living in unsanitary and crowded conditions such as informal settlements, are also at considerable risk. Children's reliance on online platforms for distance learning has also increased their risk of exposure to inappropriate content and online predators (UN, 2020a).

There is a real prospect that this pandemic and its effects will permanently alter the lives of this generation's children. Those of them facing acute deprivation in nutrition, protection or stimulation, or periods of prolonged exposure to toxic stress during the critical window of early



childhood development, are likely to develop lifelong challenges because of the impairment of their neurological development.

Children who drop out of school will not only face a higher risk of child marriage, child labour, and teenage pregnancies, but will see their potential lifetime earnings fall precipitously. Children who experience family breakdowns during this period of heightened stress also risk losing the sense of support and security on which a child's wellbeing depends (United Nations, 2020b)

5. AGENCY



A student from the Soweto Rugby School Academy photographed before lockdown. All sports events and recreational activities have been cancelled for social distancing purposes. PHOTO: GUILLEM SARTORIO/AFP

The need to know that you can get what you want, that you can create, that you are not powerless in the world, the “need for agency”, is fundamental. Many people are feeling anxious, uncertain and helpless in the face of this coronavirus outbreak. If we as adults, who have years of experience in regulating our emotions, feel frustrated then one can only imagine how children are feeling. The need for agency in young learners and youth needs to be considered during this time.

According to the DBE, each learner and teacher in the quantile 1- 4 schools will receive two face masks to be worn at all times. No hugging or gathering of more than five children on the playground will be allowed. These are responsible decisions, but implementation needs to be considered.

How can educators, parents and primary caretakers turn this into a learning opportunity? It is important to include the children and youth in the decision-making process, granting them the chance to embrace ideas and come up with their own creative solutions for their school communities. Proposed activities may include the following:

- Ask learners to decorate their masks;
- Ask learners to create awareness posters about social distancing or hygiene;
- Let them create a dialogue for COVID-19; this creates a safe space for learners to debrief and

conceptualise what they understand about this pandemic;

- Include learners in disinfecting their own tables, chairs and learning environment;
- In addition to the elbow greet, let learners design innovative ways of communicating from a distance;
- Include learners in processes like mapping the classroom seat planning.

6. YOUTH

The Youth of South Africa represents 35,1% of the country's population, the largest cohort after children (28,8%) (STATSSA, 2019).

6.1 Youth: A powerful resource



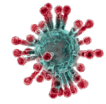
Youth advocating for climate change in Cape Town. PHOTO: RODGER BOSCH/AFP)

As the COVID-19 pandemic has left communities around the world reeling, young people have mobilised their networks and placed themselves firmly in the forefront of the COVID-19 response.

The WHO hosted a webinar on 5 May, with 808 participants from around the world, to find out more about how young people are contributing to the COVID-19 response and how they see their future in a post-pandemic world.

The panellists included representatives from the Global Health Workforce Network Youth Hub (GHWF Youth Hub); the International Federation of Medical Students' Association (IFMSA), representing 1.3 million students; and the Global Shapers, representing over 9,000 youths (WHO, 2020). The representative from GHWF Youth Hub highlighted the fact that all over the world young people have stepped up to respond to COVID-19.

The *Sunday Times* (3 May, 2020), showcased a photo of youth in a peaceful protest to advocate for employment opportunities in the Eastern Cape; while in the Western Cape, the Department of Sports and Cultural Affairs managed to recruit just under 600 unemployed youth in 2020 to volunteer as tutors and afterschool practitioners at primary schools in their communities.



This serves as proof that the youth (classified as people between the ages of 15 and 34) of South Africa can also be inspired to become agents of change. Using social platforms, they are a valuable resource in mitigating risks and community outreach in this crisis. Even in a small village, such as Nkantolo in the Eastern Cape, youth have set up WhatsApp groups to share information. Socio-economic responses need to promote community agency and resourcefulness, an effort which, to date, has been missing in the conversations initiated by the state.

The South African government needs to capitalise on their youth and create opportunities for youth forums to join and learn from international networks and share their insights. We cannot afford to underestimate the power of young people's ability to contribute to policymaking and advocacy.

The DSD can also turn to the youth for assistance in addressing the shortage of psycho-social support in schools as described earlier in this document, drawing on a vast resource of student health professionals (medical, psychology, social work, physiotherapy, OT etc.), who could assist with psycho-social support and be rewarded with credits for an elective towards their qualification in return.

6.2 Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health

In the context of COVID-19, with the disruption of schools, routine health services and community-level centres, new ways of providing information and support to adolescence and youth for sexual and reproductive health and rights need to be established.

There is not enough evidence to substantiate the suggestion that people living with HIV on treatment and undetectable are not at greater risk of COVID-19. For this reason, although it is important that attention and efforts should be directed towards responding to COVID-19, with the current high rates of HIV infections in Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, countries should not sideline their HIV prevention and management strategies or those for other sexually transmitted diseases, especially among youth, as well as TB and other medical conditions.

7. PHASED-IN APPROACH, CONCERNS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A gradual phasing in of learners returning to schools is now expected to start in South Africa on 1 June, 2020. Transport providers, educators and learners will be screened daily under guidance from the Department of Health. The DBE plans to begin with Grades 7 and 12. These grades are the levels that need to enter a new phase in 2021; Grade 7 needs to transfer to the high school FET phase and Grade 12s are finishing formal schooling and may enter the HET phase.

7.1 The return of Grade R learners to learning centres

One group that has attracted plenty of attention during the past years, and identified as a necessary step in education, is the Grade R level. The Grade R year focuses on school readiness; the child needs time to become socially, academically, physically and emotionally ready for formal schooling. The DBE has acknowledged the urgency of allowing Grade R learners to return to school under strict conditions. This needs to be followed up on. At the moment, the National Development Plan still states that Grade Rs will only return much later, in August.

Younger children are far less likely to catch or transmit the COVID-19 virus and therefore bringing them back to school first is the safest approach – for them, for their teachers, and for the health of our economy

and society. As at 19 April, 2020, only 0.3% of the total positive tested cases in South Africa are between the ages of 0-9 years. No deaths of young children have been recorded to date in South Africa or in emerging countries around the world (Spaull, 2020).

The Independent Schools Association expressed their desire for Grade 1 pupils to return first as this is the year for acquiring the essential skills of reading and writing (Matshaba, 2020.) However, the foundation for reading and writing is cemented in Grade R. After the large investment in introducing Grade R into primary schools as an entry point to formal schooling, it would make sense to provide for the current cohort of learners to graduate to grade one to make space for the next cohort of eager minds. As President Cyril Ramaphosa noted in his State of the Nation address in 2019, “Grade R is essential in equipping children to succeed in education, in work and in life – and it is possibly the single most important factor in overcoming poverty, unemployment and inequality.”

Five-to-six-year-olds are in a sensitive phase for the acquisition of language. This means that there is a certain window period in a child’s life during which he/she’s entire being searches, and is ready to acquire and practise, a skill until it is mastered, in this case language (Montessori, 1998). We cannot fail five-to-six-year-olds, denying them the opportunity to acquire the foundational skills they need to be on par with peers from 2019.

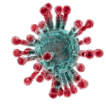
According to Engelbrecht et al (1982:140), a child’s entire education is rooted in her language education, which largely shapes her into the person she will be. We must not underestimate the ability of young children to take responsibility, as by this age they already have developed a conscious will. To behave in a socially accepted manner is a developmental milestone for a six-year-old (Grobler, 2016). However, the adults in the learning environment need to lead by example.

Moreover, there is no mention as to when the Early Childhood Development centres will be able to reopen. In the Nelson Mandela Foundation’s March 2020 survey, ECD practitioners expressed their concern for young learners at home with no room for movement and stimulation to assist in reaching developmental milestones. Childcare facilities should be allowed to open as essential-service providers to parents returning back to work as permitted.

We need to consider what will happen to child-headed households or families where the older sibling minds the younger ones while the parent is working for an essential service provider? Resources to assist these learners with online learning access or tutoring sessions need to be made available. Special cognisance must be taken of children and youth who fall on the wrong side of the digital divide, with no access to technological or online resources.

In such circumstances, while not optimal, other traditional means such as radio should be used to share content and enable home-based learning to continue. For example, speakers of different languages should have access to different frequencies determined by the state, with broadcast slots for different grades and subjects for learners to follow.

Once the hard lockdown eases, the phased-in approach affords the opportunity for peer learning and young leaders to emerge; a two-week time frame is proposed between each cohort returning to school. It is a rare and valuable life opportunity for these older Grade 7 and 12 learners to take



charge and lead by example, assisting educators in promoting hygiene and social distancing during school hours and on public transport to and from school.

7.2 Inequality

For schools to reopen on 1 June the following should be in place:

- A desk for every learner, with sufficient space to prevent transmission;
- Space for small classes – no more than two learners should share a desk and no more than 40 in a class was suggested in the DBE COVID response meeting. However, for effective social distancing, the number of learners per class should be a maximum of 20, with a safe space of at least two metres apart, and learners should not be sharing a desk.
- Enough educators, bearing in mind teachers over 60 years of age may not yet return to school;
- Sufficient water and sanitation;
- Personal protective wear for each child and staff member;
- Screening in place. Educators need training on how to accurately use the thermometers provided by the government as well as how to record the data;
- Transportation systems that allow social distancing;
- Sanitisers and disinfectants for daily use.

It is not viable for all schools, which have been struggling with a lack of infrastructure and resources for decades, to comply in such a compressed timeframe without the assistance of private enterprises and NGOs. Are we putting rural learners at risk by sending them back too early?

New risks to children have been identified from a condition related to COVID-19, which resembles the symptoms associated with Kawasaki disease (see *New York Times*, 5 May, 2020). Thus, there is a need for reliable monitoring and evaluation measures to be in place. The principal should appoint a staff member as the COVID-19 coordination manager. This person will need to receive training on how to effectively implement the regulations required by the government and report to the district office. Professor Abdul Karim, chair of the COVID-19 ministerial advisory committee, noted that those infected with the disease may not necessarily have a fever; many carriers and those infected are asymptomatic.

The effectiveness of testing temperatures as a precaution measure at schools will need to be closely monitored. Another point to consider is the monitoring of the effective cleaning of the two masks each child will receive and to ensure the safety of those who will interact with the child outside of school hours. Many children reside with older relatives and their grandparents, especially their grandmothers, who by definition fall into in a higher risk group. Inevitably, some schools will be able to adhere to the above requirements more easily than others. With regards to equity, is it fair for these schools to be allowed to reopen while others remain shut and at the mercy of inadequate service delivery and logistics?

The education gap could turn into a chasm, further reducing learners' future opportunities in life. While the phased approach may start and the senior learners gradually return, lower grades are encouraged to learn from home. This highlights another gap pointing to digital inequality: Households who have access to data and online learning facilities versus those who don't.

The UN Sustainable Development Group comments in its report on the impact of COVID-19 on children (15 April, 2020) that, globally, approximately 826 million students kept out of the classroom by the COVID-19 pandemic do not have access to a household computer and 43% (706 million) have no internet at home.

Realistically, there is virtually no curricular learning taking place during lockdown for the poorest 80% of learners in South Africa (Spaull, 2020).



A learner doing schoolwork at her home in Qunu, Eastern Cape. PHOTO: JENNIFER BRUCE/AFP

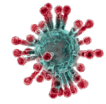
Youth who do have access to technology and the internet should invest in learning and developing new skills and seize the free online courses currently offered by many institutions. Data-free upskilling resources are also an important consideration. Data-free upskilling content will contribute towards helping youth and parents learn and expand their skills to increase their livelihoods. In South Africa, the MTN Foundation has begun its move towards providing data-free channels for children, youth, and communities. Through the foundation, MTN offers its users data-free access to more than 350 websites, which include e-learning and work-seeking sites.

Since Monday, 20 April, fortunate children whose parents can access the necessary technology have been glued to the screen of a virtual classroom. There are parents who download extra apps and programmes for their children to “not fall behind”. Technology can be extremely useful in education as long as it is incorporated into a programme that encourages holistic child development: teachers are often tired and pushed beyond their comfort zone by demanding parents who expect educators to be instant experts on multimedia and online platforms.

On the other side of the spectrum, the inequality of access to resources for learning through information technology is vast, but there are ways to address this - for example, introduce and train parents on apps that use little or no data such as Wordworks and Khan Academy. These apps can be installed on phones, to which a larger portion of the population have access. The next step is to create awareness of these interventions through home visits under strict health and safety guidelines. As health workers venture out to test for COVID-19 infections, word-of-mouth communication should be capitalised upon. Bulk SMSs with information can also be sent to the beneficiaries.

8. LEARNING VERSUS COVERING CONTENT

Dr Maria Montessori, a pioneer in education, had a saying: “the poor little rich child”. She was referring to children who get everything done for them, who don’t get the opportunity to learn



through discovery, by doing chores, taking responsibility and exercising the freedom of choice to direct their own learning that speaks to their inner developmental needs. Learning is not, and can never be, something that happens over a distance; it is intensely personal, right inside your very being, while teaching might be at a distance. Learning happens inside your own brain, creating something new out of filtering through one's own experiences and links to prior learning. Adults can only create the environment and content for learning; children learn in the comfort of their own being (Coldwell, 2020).

Returning to the formal curriculum, the DBE is focusing on curriculum recovery, trimming content to the basics with a COVID-19 awareness that stretches across all learning areas. Extra classes will be provided in addition to the already pressing timetable. The remaining school holidays will be shortened. There is a concern that the focus is on saving the school year.

This is understandable, but what about instilling a love for lifelong learning in these very same young minds that we are trying to get to "catch up"? Now is the perfect time to explore a three-year curriculum approach, where the learner gets the opportunity to plan and take responsibility to complete learning outcomes, working in small, mixed-age groups on a variety of projects, which spark the imagination, engage the intellect, and develop their reasoning abilities (such as is observed with the Montessorian approach).

The introduction of small groups is advantageous for learning and monitoring individual progress, a luxury that many South African schools never could enjoy. Montessori inspired many visionaries, including Mahatma Gandhi, who lived in South Africa for many years (and who, equally, inspired Montessori).

The Montessori method has proved successful globally and has been adopted as the official ECD curriculum in Tibet. For 12- to 18-year-olds, the environment should reflect all aspects of adult life and provide opportunities to not only pursue academic interests, but also to participate in real adult practical work in a social setting as close to a real society as possible.

Through experiences of everyday life and its responsibilities, adolescents will practise what it takes to become a contributing member of a wider society. Thus, life and dealing with COVID-19 challenges and interventions become the adolescent's opportunity for growth and learning (Association Montessori Internationale, 2020).

9. NUTRITION

As the Coronavirus spreads, we mustn't forget about the hungry children. In developing countries, school meals are often the only regular and nutritious meal a child receives. As schools around the world close, 320 million children are currently missing out on daily school meals (Mert, 2020). Healthy nutrition is essential for learning to happen.

Malnutrition makes children vulnerable and at risk of stunting, a serious physical development challenge which, until recently, great strides were being made to address (Grow Great Initiative, 2018).

A school does not exist in isolation, it is embedded in a community, and community members need livelihoods and food to sustain and care for the children attending school. Various food schemes, such as LunchBox, are supporting schools in collaboration with the DSD. When receiving meals at school learners and educators are to adhere to strict hygiene rules and social distancing while waiting in queues.



A woman holds her child as she queues at the Kwa Mai Mai market in the Johannesburg CBD during food distribution.
PHOTO MARCO LONGAR /AFP

10. SECURITY

Many schools have been burgled and vandalised during the COVID-19 lockdown period. In Kwa-Zulu Natal alone, 225 schools have been victimised since the start of lockdown. It is unfortunate that schools have been targeted, and those that have need priority access to the mobile classrooms made available by the DBE.

The Safe Schools database in the Western Cape was designed to inform the police of hotspots where crime is threatening schools as a motivation to increase police presence in the area. With the police service and defence force also deployed in increasing numbers (See GGA's policy response document), schools will need assistance with security going forward.

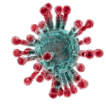
11. EDUCATORS

Educators will be in high demand since teachers over 60 years of age may not return to school. This experienced workforce should not be lost, but instead give support from home with marking, online sessions, where possible, and designing learning tools.

With the possibility of teachers falling ill, substitute teachers will be required. Parents are valuable assets, and when given a chance will gladly contribute towards their child's education.

There are many interventions, such as the Ready Steady Read Write programme, which use parents to volunteer and assist in the classroom with reading and writing.

Each school can build a reserve base of willing parents who can help with not only facilitation but also food distribution and the disinfection of surfaces.



Parents can receive a certificate of merit for serving their school community and, in partnership with retailers, receive food vouchers or data. Volunteers do not need to be limited to parents; they can even include unemployed youth in communities, especially those with a grade 12 qualification.

Children are vectors of the virus. The majority of children don't show severe symptoms, but they are still contagious and do run a risk of contracting COVID-19 themselves, albeit reduced compared to other age groups.

According to Prof. Karim, educators stand a higher risk of being hospitalised. Teacher unions are concerned about the safety of educators; hence the conditions for reopening schools are non-negotiable to protect the workforce, as well as the children and those with whom they interact.

12. PLIGHT OF ECD CENTRES

Early Childhood Development centres, playgroups and day mothers have had no indication as to when they may resume their services. ECD operators are mostly NPOs and micro-social enterprises - most of whom are black women. They provide a service that is needs-based in poor communities with limited cash flows, which places them way below the minimum wage.

Most of the ECD workforce in poor and vulnerable populations are unregistered with the relevant bodies. According to a survey conducted in April 2020 by a collaboration of NGOs (Ilifa Labantwana, BRIDGE, National ECD Alliance (NECDA), the Nelson Mandela Foundation, Smartstart and the South African Congress for Early Childhood Development (SACECD):

- 99% of practitioners reported that caregivers have stopped paying fees owing to the lock-down;
- 68% were worried that they would be unable to reopen;
- 83% of practitioners have been unable to pay full salaries to their staff over the lockdown period;
- 96% of respondents reported that their income was insufficient cover their operating costs.

ECD practitioners run the risk of closure and people employed in the ECD sector could stand to lose their jobs in the absence of relief.

Given the critical importance of Early Childhood Development to subsequent development across the lifespan, GGA proposes that the ECD sector should not be excluded from sector-specific interventions. GGA supports the two proposed interventions suggested in this survey to ensure the ECD sector survives the COVID-19 crisis:¹

- Support for ECD operators who have lost income due to reduced fee payment;
- Support for the ECD workforce to offset their loss of income.

13. PARTNERSHIPS

As identified in GOAL 17 of the United Nation's SDGs, "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development", partnerships are needed now more than ever to form a collaborative tool in combating the devastating global effects of the COVID-19 outbreak.

1 For the full report see: <https://ilifalabantwana.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Final-report-The-plight-of-the-ECD-workforce.pdf>

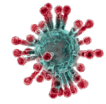
Children, youth, caregivers, communities, civil society members, the private and social sector are all needed to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a vast network of NGOs and NPOs across Africa that focus explicitly on finding innovative and sustainable solutions to promote child development and youth formation. We need to combine resources and efforts to effect the following:

- produce credible information that can assist national and local governments to produce policy that most appropriately targets interventions in the best interests of the child and youth;
- promote coordination on the advocacy front to avoid duplication and to source, distribute and install personal protection packages (including masks, sanitisers, gloves, soap and thermometers), water tanks and data/wi-fi connectivity and food parcels to the communities within which we work;
- emergency relief: many beneficiaries will need assistance in applying for grants and will need access to relevant information concerning them;
- facilitation and training: where possible, facilitators can be made available for Train the Trainer COVID-19 intervention sessions to assist the departments of health and education in training stakeholders in the COVID-19 national development plan.

NGOs and NPOs need to become the voice of their communities, working in partnership with different levels of government, the private sector and civil society as a whole to facilitate dialogue and action around the concerns and ideas of their beneficiaries to the relevant governmental departments.



A group of Grade R learners from Northglen Primary School hold posters of former president Nelson Mandela as they sing “Happy Birthday Nelson Mandela, We love you” in Durban on July 18, 2018. PHOTO: RAJESH JANTILAL/AFP



14. CONCLUSION

Citizens depend on the government to formulate and implement effective strategies to protect all children and youth from the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and to enable communities to safely educate their children during and after the crisis.

Certain contradictory statements have been made by top structures in the DBE, ranging from the date on which schools will reopen to which schools should receive masks (See 'Not on the same schoolbook page', *Sunday Times*, 3 May, 2020). While acknowledging this, GGA also recognises the immensity of the challenge and commends the DBE for providing the public with access to their discussions about the reopening of schools and for consulting with various stakeholders.

They are acting swiftly to make information and learning content available on their website. The DBE and DSD are tasked with massive responsibilities to ensure the safety of the nation's young people and they are taking a pro-active stand.

While many regulations have been set in place to address the COVID-19 pandemic, and these have been discussed within this document, which aims to assist with policy development and direction by providing insights, feedback and suggestions, Good Governance Africa supports the notion of safety first.

The safety of Africa's children and youth, primary caregivers and educators needs to remain a priority, regardless of pressures to salvage an academic year. This involves a trade-off between saving lives and recognising the importance of human livelihoods, especially of those in the educational and child- and youth- related sectors.

While nutrition, health and safety are vital, and prioritised by Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, much more is required to reach self-actualisation, as will be evident in the checks and balances of the coming months. Solidarity is key; if we want to make an impact, we cannot do it alone. In the age-old spirit of *ubuntu*; it takes a village to raise a child.

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