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**NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM PRIOR TO AND DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC**

According to a 2019 [Executive Summary on Poverty and Inequality](http://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary) by the National Bureau of Statistics, 40.1% of the population in Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country and the largest producer of oil in Africa, is classified as poor. That is, on average, four out of 10 Nigerians has per capita expenditure below $400.

A [UNICEF report](https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education) states that 10.5 million of the country’s children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Only 61% of 6 to 11-year-olds regularly attend primary school. Some states in the north east and north west of the country have more than half of the girls not enrolled in schools as marginalization ensures that girls are deprived of basic education.

A struggle was going on prior to COVID-19 to ensure young children stay in school and have access to proper education, as [Nigeria contributes approximately 20%](https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/nigeria) of the total global out-of-school population.

The COVID-19 pandemic is revolutionizing digital and online education globally but kids in rural and underserved communities in Lagos State, Nigeria, are being left behind as they are not equipped to adapt or transition to the new methods of learning.

On 19 March 2020, the Federal Ministry of Education approved school closures as a response to the pandemic. States in the federation contextualized this, with the Lagos State Ministry of Education releasing a schedule of radio and TV lessons for students in public schools.

However, for families that earn below $1 per day and faced harsh economic realities due to the four-week lockdown in the state, the purchase of radios or TV might be a trade-off that they cannot afford. A suggestion to this problem was [the provision of portable solar radios](https://nairametrics.com/2020/04/18/covid-19-is-exacerbating-the-problem-of-educational-inequity-in-nigeria/) to help bridge the digital divide.

The pandemic has unmasked substantial inequities in the education sector. Private and non-governmental sectors are tirelessly working to salvage this situation. Projects such as [**Digiterate**](https://toplink.weforum.org/initiatives/explore/a0s0X00000OMUNeQAP) and [**Teach for Nigeria**](https://teachfornigeria.org/#https://teachfornigeria.org/) hope to ensure proper tools for education are available to all in Lagos.

However, one major issue that may stem from this inequality is that these kids who currently cannot keep up with their peers because of inaccessibility to digital tools may never catch up and will continue to feel the effect of this gap long after the pandemic is over.

This may result in a severely diminishing pool of young adults who have not garnered the necessary skills to stay ahead in the future. With Nigeria already behind in preparing its young people for the workplace of the future, the effects of the pandemic further exacerbate this issue.

There are measures that must be taken to help bridge the divide when the urgent needs of the pandemic subside. They center largely around Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and government aid.

PPPs can do much to improve the quality of, and increase access to, education for poor children in underserved communities. More schools in such areas, especially Lagos, would go some way to start shifting the teacher/student ratio [which has hit alarming lows](https://mepb.lagosstate.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2017/01/Basic-Stat-Hotline-Y2010.pdf) of 1:83 at points during the past decade.

The result of new schools opening would be a reduced burden on teachers, currently ill-equipped to handle the [ever-burgeoning class sizes](https://www.tribuneonlineng.com/in-lagos-public-schools-grow-teachers-students-groan/#https://www.tribuneonlineng.com/in-lagos-public-schools-grow-teachers-students-groan/).

Voucher schools may also aid in rapidly improving the education system in Lagos as suggested by a [World Bank Report](http://wbgfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/EPS/SABER_EPS_Nigeria_in_Depth.pdf) addressing the need for more information on the private education sector there, given that private schools are the lead education provider in the state. Voucher schools are schools chosen by students and to which the government provides funding; they may be government or non-government providers or both, depending on the system.

Government aid is needed in terms of investing in educational tools of the future alongside a total revamp of the educational sector. Reforms in the national curriculum post-pandemic would be an effective way to bridge the gap in inequality. Priorities should include the introduction of courses such as coding and robotics which can usher students into the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and prepare them for jobs of the future.

In countries such as Nigeria, education should be viewed as a high government priority. Help in increasing awareness of the pressing need for the country’s children to be educated, especially those from low-income families, will benefit the country’s economy in years to come.

Aid provided in this direction can be viewed as an investment in human capital; the more educated a country is, the more productive.

Of all sustainable missions surely the most pressing is to improve lives, and there’s no better way to do so than proper and sound education for all.

Source: We Forum