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RESILIENCE IN RETURN TO LEARNING DURING COVID-19

NIGERIA CASE STUDY

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This report is dedicated to the tireless teachers, learners, and parents around the world who continue to endure this global emergency.

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ACRONYMS

AENN	Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria
BAY	Borno, Adamawa, Yobe
EDC	Early Childhood Development
EIEWG	Education in Emergencies Working Group
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FME	Federal Ministry of Education
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDP	Internally displaced person
KII	Key informant interview
LGA	Local government areas
LGEA	Local Government Education Authorities
LHP	Learn at Home Programme
NCDC	Nigeria Centre for Disease Control
NCPG	National Coronavirus Preparedness Group
NEI Plus	Northern Education Initiative Plus
NMEC	National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education
PTA	Parent-teacher association
PTF	Presidential Task Force
RtL	Return to learning
SAME	State Agency for Mass Education
SBMC	School-based management committee
SENSE	Strengthening Education in Northeast Nigeria
SMoE	State Ministry of Education
SUBEB	State Universal Basic Education Board
TRI	Transactional Radio Instruction
UBEC	Universal Basic Education Commission
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAEC	West African Examination Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

This case study examines the return to learning (RtL) processes and strategies of the education system in Nigeria from March 2020 to April 2021. The report sits within a [compendium of five case studies](#) and an overarching synthesis report (Heaner et al. 2021) that examine the RtL process during the COVID-19 pandemic in Colombia, Georgia, Lebanon, Nigeria, and Zambia.

The overarching purpose of this research was to (a) document descriptions of the processes of keeping learners engaged during school closures and reopening across a range of diverse national contexts and alongside multiple ongoing shocks and stressors; (b) capture the perspectives and learning of education stakeholders and institutions in order to understand how systems absorbed and adapted to the dynamic context of COVID-19; and (c) examine the ways in which education was positioned as a key sector in support of national resilience and recovery efforts. The research was informed by USAID’s Return to Learning framework (Boisvert and Weisenhorn 2020), which largely structured the thematic lines of inquiry for the case studies, as well as USAID’s Resilience White Paper, which framed the overall methods and analysis (Shah 2019).

METHODS

The research team was comprised of four international “core” team members and five local research consultants, one in each case study location.¹ This case study consisted of four waves of qualitative, primary data collection in Nigeria, conducted by one GK core team researcher with support from two local research consultants over a six-month period. The researchers conducted 30 key informant interviews targeting education stakeholders that included ministries of education at national and state (local) levels, donors, international and local NGOs, private-sector businesses, and civil society organizations. Over the course of the research, the team conducted ongoing review of documents and literature that described the RtL processes, decision-making, policies, and strategies.

Across the five case study locations, all consultants, the core team, and USAID came together to review findings and process after each wave. The purpose of these workshops was to unpack findings, compare across contexts, iterate lines of inquiry and priorities for the subsequent wave, and share methodological challenges and learning. After each wave, context-specific research teams developed priorities, plans, and targeted interviews for the next wave. After four waves, the team transcribed and analyzed data for each location. The findings from each case study are offered as descriptive, stand-alone pieces and are analyzed alongside each other in a synthesis report.

CONTEXT AND COVID-19

Since 2009, portions of northern Nigeria have faced a complex emergency of ongoing violence, climate risks, and natural hazards. The situation has been most dire in Borno State, where 80 percent of the region’s displaced people resided in 2020; four of five were women or children. Since the start of the

¹ In the Nigeria case study, an additional local consultant was identified after Wave 2 because of her connections to state-level government actors in the north, where it had proved difficult to secure interviews up to that point.

conflict in 2009, more than 36,000 people have been killed in those states, almost half of them civilians (OCHA 2020). In northwest Nigeria, insecurity is increasing in the form of attacks on and kidnapping of civilians by criminal groups, many linked to terrorist organizations. Many emulate Boko Haram attacks on education (for example, the December 2020 abduction of more than 300 schoolboys from a school in Kankara). In addition, much of northern Nigeria is prone to natural hazards. For example, flash flooding from heavy downpour between October 5 and 11, 2020 hit several communities in Bade and Jakuso local government areas (LGAs) of Yobe State with some 5,000 people, mostly farming households, directly affected. It has been difficult for the state to respond to serious climate risks; ongoing fragility and conflict have exacerbated these stressors, which have extended to the Niger Delta and Middle Belt (USAID 2018).

The decentralized education system in Nigeria operates nationally through the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) and parastatal Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and at the state level through the States Ministries of Education (SMoEs) and parastatal State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) and State Agency for Mass Education (SAME).² Across the states are 774 LGAs with education operations through the Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). Primary and junior secondary education is free and compulsory, yet only 61 percent of 6- to 11-year-old children regularly attend primary school, with even fewer in the north (53 percent). The National Population Commission estimates approximately 11.1 million children are out of school (2021). Girls are particularly marginalized, with 47.7 percent of girls in the northeast and 47.3 percent in the northwest attending regularly. In the northeast, 2.8 million children reside in conflict-affected states and, with 802 schools closed, 497 classrooms classified as “destroyed,” and 1,392 classrooms classified as “damaged but repairable,” (Solomon 2015 and UNICEF 2021);³ In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges for Nigeria’s already fragile education system (Obiakor and Adeniran 2020).

Schools were closed because of COVID-19 on March 19, 2020 and, after much debate, the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, in consultation with the Federal Ministry of Education, decided schools could reopen on January 18, 2021. States were left to decide actual open dates. Distance education options were planned and rolled out across Nigeria by July 2020. According to UNESCO, almost 40 million learners were affected by the nationwide school closures, of which more than 91 percent were primary and secondary school-level (Amorighoye 2020). Many of these learners were in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Non-formal learning—a critical education option for the 400,000 IDPs in northern Nigeria—was also affected by the stoppage of learning activities. In addition to missed learning opportunities during the pandemic lockdown period, there was a loss of access to vital school-provided services, such as federally-funded school feeding programs. It was estimated that longer school closures would deepen educational inequality (Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa 2020).

² SUBEB is the agency in each state that is responsible for the first nine years of schooling or basic education (Primary 1 to Junior Secondary School three.) SAME is responsible for adult and vocational learning.

³ In the northeast, 29 percent of all children receive Qur’anic (also known as *Tsangaya* or *Almajiri*) education, as do 35 percent of children in the northwest; this education typically does not include basic skills such as literacy and numeracy and the government considers children attending such schools to be officially out-of-school. In these locations, children mainly learn to recite the Qur’an. Many children (*Almajiri*) leave home to live under the *Ma’alam*, or spiritual leader.

FINDINGS

This case study describes the alignment of national and state-level COVID-19 responses (including the role of USAID and other stakeholders at the state level) with the USAID RtL Framework's five priorities, as well as challenges and opportunities for resilience during the responses. This report focuses on the RtL process in the unique context of northern Nigeria; in particular, in three states in northeastern (Borno, Adamawa) and northwestern (Sokoto) Nigeria, focusing on basic (general) education. This research found that it is exceptionally difficult to access information about RtL plans, processes, and outcomes. For the duration of the research, the education stakeholders working in northern Nigeria have been in a complex emergency, as have stakeholders in the northeast for more than a decade. In such a context, the RtL Framework's priorities were secondary to the need to absorb continuing shocks. Interviews asking informants at the state level to articulate plans and processes around those RtL priorities, therefore, did not elicit the type of detailed information implied in the RtL framework. Rather, the priority was placed on keeping learners engaged, preventing dropout, and getting them physically back into a classroom. There were also efforts to retain teachers by continuing their stipends to support distance learning initiatives and mobilize them quickly upon the return to in-person learning.

Accordingly, while national guidelines directed the RtL process in Nigeria, this case study reveals a common challenge in the three northern states: while the RtL plans were said to be suitable and comprehensive for each of the contexts—having been developed in close collaboration with states, donors, and NGOs, and incorporating equity and inclusion—in all locations, states faced common challenges in following through to ensure implementation was going as planned. This may be unsurprising, given the multitude of challenges beyond COVID-19 in these regions.

Still, pockets of promise around the states' responses emerged both in spite of and because of the broader contextual challenges this region has faced: (a) government, international NGOs, and civil society collaboration to develop innovative solutions for distance (radio) education; (b) government ownership of interactive radio instruction to reach marginalized learners; (c) government leveraging existing relationship with school-based management committees to deliver distance education resources; (d) state ambitions and first steps toward institutionalizing radio instruction for use in future emergencies; (e) state agencies prioritizing keeping learners and communities engaged (versus emphasis on learning) where dropout risk was high.

Importantly, the state-level pockets of promise identified were all reflective of absorptive capacities. This study found that expecting transformative or even adaptive capacities may not be prudent in the midst of such a complex emergency. For many education stakeholders in this context, these actions, though not meeting all the objectives in the RtL plans, were nonetheless critical steps in what was recognized to be an ongoing process.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report sits within a compendium of five case studies that examine the return to learning (RtL) process during COVID-19 in Colombia, Georgia, Lebanon, Nigeria, and Zambia.⁴ Learning regarding RtL processes and resilience in education systems more broadly is explored further in the synthesis report (Heaner et al., 2021). The purpose of the overall research was to (a) document descriptions of the processes of keeping learners engaged during closures and reopening schools across a range of diverse national contexts and alongside multiple ongoing shocks and stressors; (b) capture the perspectives and learning of education stakeholders and institutions to understand how systems absorbed and adapted to the dynamic context of COVID-19; and (c) examine the ways in which education was positioned as a key sector in support of national resilience and recovery efforts. The research was informed by USAID’s Return to Learning framework (Boisvert and Weisenhorn 2020), which largely structured the thematic lines of inquiry for the case studies, and USAID’s Resilience White Paper (Shah 2019), which framed the overall methods and analysis; it was ultimately guided by seven research questions ([Appendix B](#)).

Each of the case studies examines, describes, and analyzes specific localized processes, decision-making, and intricacies of continuing education and reopening schools; these are guided and organized by USAID’s RtL framework. With equity and inclusion at its core, this framework recognizes that crises affect learners in different ways, and offers guidance on plans and processes during crisis response that are critical in order to ensure that education authorities: (1) support all learners to return to (or maintain a connection with) learning; (2) mitigate learner drop-out because of the crisis; and (3) facilitate return to learning both for learners who have dropped out during the crisis and learners who were outside the system prior to the crisis. When facilitating this return to learning—in-person, distance, or both—the RtL framework encourages education planners, partners, and leaders to “leverage this opportunity to address historic educational disparities faced by the most marginalized” (USAID 2020). In this way, not only will learning loss be mitigated, but systemic resilience built through crisis response.

USAID defines resilience in education as the “ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth” (USAID 2012). USAID’s Resilience Framework may be understood in relation to pathways of resilience capacities (defined in the box below), and to pathways of resilience and vulnerability during COVID-19 (Shah 2019). This research set out to understand this framework in context to better understand how it may be more effectively applied.

While reviewing the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic across this and associated case studies, it is important to keep in mind that as the threat of COVID-19 became increasingly clear across the globe throughout 2020, so did the realization that the shock of COVID-19 was not abating as quickly as initially hoped. Meanwhile, many emergency responses to the pandemic that were initially intended to be short-term in nature required much more long-term thinking and planning. This included learning how, in contingency planning and in future crisis response, potential could be in-built for stressor mitigation and response.

⁴ Throughout this report, “return to learning” or “RtL” is referred to when describing the broad effort to get learners back into some capacity of in-person, distance, or hybrid modality of education services, and the “RtL process” refers to the various steps in getting there, which may not necessarily include, at that moment, in-person learning.

Absorptive resilience capacities – The ability of learners, schools, communities, or institutions to minimize exposure and sensitivity to shocks and stressors through preventative measures and appropriate coping strategies to avoid long-term negative impacts.

Adaptive resilience capacities – The ability of learners, schools, communities, or institutions to make informed choices and changes in response to longer-term social, economic, and environmental change.

Transformative resilience capacities – The ability of communities and institutions to establish an enabling environment for systemic change through their governance mechanisms, policies and regulations, cultural and gender norms, community networks, and formal and informal social protection mechanisms.

METHODS OF INQUIRY

The research team was made up of four international consultants (three researchers and one technical advisor) who served as the core team, and one local consultant per case study country.⁵ One core team researcher served as the main point of contact for the local consultant for each case study. In general, the local consultant was responsible for conducting interviews (in person or online/by phone, as appropriate) and supplying notes or recordings to the core team member, who would review and provide feedback as necessary. In some cases, the core team member participated in interviews or conducted interviews on her own. The local consultant also collaborated with the core team member on refining lines of inquiry, selecting participants, supporting data analysis, and writing the report. The study comprised three phases: (1) inception, (2) document collection and review; and (3) four “waves” of primary data collection through key informant interviews. After each wave, lines of inquiry were refined as needed.

As part of the inception phase, five countries were selected in a manner that considered Mission-level capacity to support and benefit from the study and various features and characteristics of the contexts. USAID (either the Missions themselves, or colleagues working in the region) suggested an initial set of 14 countries. From those 14, the team aimed to select five that would allow for comparison across contexts in order to identify common themes, but also with enough breadth to show diversity in contextual approaches to RtL. A scoring rubric was prepared to assist in this selection. The rubric was designed to allow for each case study context to be coded on two administrative criteria (USAID Mission concurrence and existing vetted GK Consulting contacts), and five situational criteria to generate a “contextual profile” for each, thereby balancing the uniqueness of a case study with its complementarity within the set. These situational criteria were:

1. Resilience: experience with a health crisis, or a crisis in which schools closed at scale for a protracted period of time
2. Return to learning status: schools have reopened/are currently open/funding allocated or provided

⁵ In the Nigeria case study, an additional local consultant was brought on to support outreach to the state-level government agencies.

3. Context vulnerability: nature of existing shocks and stressors on society, and specifically on learners
4. Diversity of income levels
5. Geographical diversity (aim to include one each from Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa)⁶

The five countries selected using the criteria were: Colombia, Georgia, Lebanon, Nigeria, and Zambia. Colombia was selected because of its upper-middle income status, as well as experience dealing with natural hazards and an ongoing refugee situation. Georgia served as a good contrast to Colombia given that it, too, had an upper middle-income status but had fewer ongoing shocks. Nigeria was selected because of its lower-middle income status and previous experience battling a public health crisis (Ebola in 2015) along with recurring instances of violence in the north. Lebanon and Nigeria complemented each other in terms of their similarly multi-risk contexts and lower-middle income status, but were distinct from one another in terms of geography and geopolitics.

Also during the inception phase, the research questions initially articulated by USAID were elaborated upon and situated within a conceptual framework of resilience, and local consultants were hired to lead the case studies in each of the selected contexts.

For the second phase, the research team conducted a comprehensive desk review and gathered (a) frameworks published by international agencies on education sector responses to COVID-19; (b) reports on education during the pandemic school closures; (c) situation analyses of access to education during school closure in each of the countries; and (d) government plans drafted and decreed in response to COVID-19 (specifically in the education sector) for each of the countries. At that point, additional thematic areas of focus were considered for certain contexts. In Nigeria, it was determined that given the decentralization of RtL approaches and the profoundly different contextual factors facing the northern parts of the country, deep dives into the northern states would be pursued. Specifically, the research would look at the BAY states in the northeast (Borno, Adamawa, Yobe) and Sokoto in the northwest, given the unique multi-risk context in those locations, and because of the team's existing contacts in those locations (which could also be facilitated by USAID's active projects in those locations).

The third phase focused on interviews with key informants in the education sector—national and local government agencies, donor agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations, and the private sector—over a series of four waves of research. After each wave, the local and international research teams convened to discuss emerging findings and recalibrate the research questions and sample set for subsequent waves. In total, 30 people were interviewed for the Nigeria case study (Exhibit 1).

⁶ A separate set of case studies had already been planned through the USAID Asia Bureau, so Asian countries were not considered in the set.

Exhibit I. Respondents in Nigeria interviewed during research

INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED IN NIGERIA	# OF RESPONDENTS ⁷
National government	1
State government	7
- Borno	1
- Adamawa	4
- Sokoto	5
Donors	5
United Nations agencies	0
Private sector	3
International and local NGOs, civil society	12
TOTAL	30

Common limitations across five case studies

Several limitations must be considered in contextualizing the findings of this study.

Subjectivity and potential for bias from the research team

As with respondents, researchers are subject to their own biases, which can emerge in the data, particularly with the open-ended qualitative approach employed for this study. The local researchers had significant influence and autonomy over shaping the questions which were asked in each interview, and in analyzing and interpreting responses. This helped ensure that the questions were relevant and appropriate to the context at the time in terms of COVID-19 and other developments in the education sector in each setting. Constant reexamination of personal beliefs, judgements and practices within the research team and a process of triangulating information (where possible) served to mitigate some of the inherent biases that individual researchers brought to their work. Local consultants regularly engaged with the core team and those working on the other country case studies to share findings and analysis. Local consultants were also asked to directly reflect on their own biases emerging from the research.

Focus on first fourteen months of ongoing crisis

This study was conducted during the six months from November 2020 to April 2021 and was designed to reflect both on the initial eight months of crisis response and on the ongoing response, decision-making processes, and actions that took place during the course of the six months of data collection. It was beyond the scope of this study to capture longer-term outcomes of the RtL process. As such, some of the research questions can only be partially addressed, and in some cases, have introduced more questions to ask in subsequent research. For example, the research found that the majority of coping

⁷ One of the Adamawa interviews was a group interview with two people at the same time; one of the Sokoto SUBEB interviews was a group interview with three people at the same time; and one of the donor interviews was a group interview with three people at the same time.

strategies deployed across the contexts were absorptive in nature, rather than adaptive or transformative, given the COVID-19 emergency was still ongoing. Thus, the research focus is balanced toward absorptive capacities deployed and the characteristics that have allowed some contexts to more readily build on these to then deploy adaptive strategies, and less on transformative capacities. The potential for both adaptive and transformative capacities to be further leveraged in the future has been explored in the pockets of promise and serves as an important focal point for future research.

Context-specific limitations in Nigeria

This report must be situated within two significant limitations in the implementation of the research. The first limitation was in securing interviews with state-level education stakeholders at the States Ministries of Education (SMoEs) and parastatal State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) and State Agency for Mass Education (SAME). Efforts were made to reach individuals within these agencies in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe from the first week of Wave I data collection (December 2020). Initially, phone numbers were secured from the USAID Mission, and repeated attempts were made to try to set up an interview and, if that failed, to obtain an email address to which a formal letter could be sent. Contacts were often unavailable or requested to be called back another time. The team expanded its scope to other states in the north, including Sokoto, Niger, and Bauchi. Ultimately, these attempts led to one interview (Sokoto SUBEB) as of February 2021. At the same time, government-level documentation revealing policy or perspective on the RtL situation in these states was unavailable, aside from sporadic news and updates on Facebook and Twitter. International NGOs and other stakeholders working in these states were able to speak to some degree about the situation in these states and from there, possible government perspectives, but this was limited.

Because it was essential to have state-level information, an additional consultant was hired who had recently used a process for setting up interviews with education officials in these states: a local researcher who she already knew, residing in or around each state capital, would hand deliver the formal letter of invitation to the government office(s) and follow up in person multiple times in a week, requesting a response. If the informant agreed, the researcher would set up a time for the GK Consulting team to call for the interview. By this point, it had been determined that priority would be placed on securing interviews with SUBEB and SAME officials in Sokoto, Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. After weeks of follow-up, five informants had been interviewed by the end of April: three in Adamawa (two in SUBEB, two in SAME), and one each from SUBEB in Borno and Sokoto. Given the limited number of interviews, the information and perspectives on state RtL was, for the most part, unable to be well-triangulated. It is suspected that in some cases, informants may have been embellishing slightly on the success of activities or on motivations around the delivery of some activities (e.g., stressing the importance of marginalization in their planning, or remarking on the vast reach of a teacher training program); in other cases, informants did not have the information required on hand. In many cases, the types of information being sought (around the RtL priorities mapped in USAID's RtL framework) did not exist because such priorities were not on the radar of state education actors who were working in the face of a complex emergency, constantly dealing with new shocks and stressors in addition to COVID-19. This was, itself, a finding of this research.

While the report is, therefore, limited in its ability to provide a comprehensive account of the RtL plans and processes in each of these states, it nonetheless highlights some areas that provides important insights to the synthesis report, particularly in terms of the areas where states leveraged existing

resilience in their COVID-19 RtL response and some of the pockets of promises identified that may be further leveraged to enhance resilience going forward.

2. CONTEXT

NORTHERN NIGERIA'S COMPLEX EMERGENCY CONTEXT

Since 2009, portions of northern Nigeria have faced a complex emergency of ongoing violence, climate risks, and natural hazards. In the northeast BAY states (Borno, Adamawa, Yobe), the violence showed no signs of abating at the time of writing in 2021 due to a proliferation of attacks from non-state armed groups and government counter-operations affecting civilians. In 2019, more than 180,000 people were forced to flee their homes because of attacks from non-state armed groups, many of which were linked to terrorist organizations (most notably, Boko Haram and the splinter faction, Islamic State West Africa Province); access to livelihoods was made difficult for many more (OCHA 2020). The situation has been most dire in Borno State, where 80 percent of displaced people resided in 2020; four of five were women or children. Since the start of the conflict in 2009, more than 36,000 people have been killed in those states, almost half of them civilians (OCHA 2020). In northwest Nigeria, insecurity is increasing in the form of attacks on and kidnapping of civilians by criminal groups, many linked to terrorist organizations. Many emulate Boko Haram attacks on education (for example, the December 2020 abduction of more than 300 schoolboys from school in Kankara).

It was in this context that the first COVID-19 case was identified in Nigeria on February 28, 2020. Identified cases surged first in June/July of that year, peaking at 790 confirmed cases in a day, and then rose dramatically in January/February of 2021, peaking at close to 1,500 cases a day. As of April 28, 2021, there were a total of 165,000 confirmed cases and 2,063 deaths. As of May 2021, around 2 million first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine had been administered (Onuah, Shirbon, and George 2020). With its under-resourced health delivery system, there was evidence of some learning from the 2014 threat of an Ebola epidemic. For example, relatively rapid, protective measures were enacted, along with a comparatively stronger Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) that, since 2014, had enhanced diagnostic and surveillance capacity (Dan-Nwafor et al. 2020). Despite this, the public health response capacity remained relatively weak and Nigeria was, based on WHO measures of pandemic preparedness, not prepared to respond in 2020 (Brookings 2020).⁸

The impacts of the drastic lockdowns that were the initial response to the pandemic were felt throughout the country, including an increase of crime and domestic violence and the inability of many people to engage in their usual income-generating activities (UNDP 2020 and Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics 2020). By January 2021, humanitarian partners had reached 5 million people (up from 3.6 million in September) with multisectoral assistance across BAY states, while funding for the Humanitarian Response Plan 2020 was at a historic low. As of December 2020, only 51 percent of the total \$1.08 billion funding required to provide life-saving assistance had been received (OCHA 2021). The total number of people classified as “in need” went from 7.9 million in January 2021 to 10.6 million in February 2021. It was estimated that 8.7 million people needed urgent humanitarian assistance. Up to 5.1 million people were at risk of critical food insecurity during the 2021 lean season (June–August), a

⁸ According to the WHO's joint external evaluation of core capacities to respond to a pandemic, Nigeria was rated as having limited capacity to prevent and respond to pandemics and a more developed capacity to detect.

risk similar to that faced in 2016/2017 when some of the worst affected locations had famine-like conditions (OCHA 2021).

Based on research from past pandemics (including HIV/AIDS and Ebola), Mercy Corps predicted increased violence in the north due to the intersection of COVID-19 and the previously existing contextual risks. By October 2020, conflict drivers identified in northeastern Nigeria included suspicions that “COVID-19 restrictions are a ruse to prevent people from practicing their religion, or a way for the government to get money.” Movement restrictions forced herders to remain in place, increasing competition with farmers over natural resources and intensifying conflict, with some justification for attacks using the narrative that “people are here to spread COVID-19” (Mercy Corps 2020).

NIGERIAN EDUCATION CONTEXT

The education system in Nigeria operates nationally through the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) and parastatal Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), and at the state level through the State Ministries of Education (SMoEs), and parastatal State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) and State Agency for Mass Education (SAME).⁹ Across the states are 774 local government areas (LGAs) with education operations through the Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). The National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) operates as a parastatal entity under the FME through six zonal offices (northeast, northwest, north central, southwest, south, southeast). It supervises and supports the activities of the State Agencies for Adult and Non-Formal Education across all states.

Funding for SUBEB comes from UBEC. Each state funds its SAME; however, they also receive non-financial funding (handbooks, training materials, physical assets for vocational studies, etc.) from the NMEC. The SMoE, SAME, and SUBEB all have separate offices. SAME reports to the SMoE and the NMEC.

Primary and junior secondary (basic) education is free and compulsory, yet figures from 2020 reported only 61 percent of 6 to 11-year-olds regularly attending primary school, with even fewer in the north attending regularly (53 percent). Girls were particularly marginalized, with 47.7 percent of girls in the northeast and 47.3 percent of girls in the northwest attending regularly. In the northeast and northwest, 29 percent and 35 percent of all Muslim children, respectively, received Qur’anic education. This type of education, also known as *Tsangaya* or *Almajiri* education, typically does not include basic skills such as literacy and numeracy and the government considers children attending such schools to be officially out-of-school (UNICEF 2021); as such, these individuals were counted in the percentages of out-of-school children reported above (Solomon 2015).¹⁰ In the northeast, based on figures prior to COVID-19 closures, 2.8 million children resided in conflict-affected states, with 802 schools closed, 497 classrooms classified as “destroyed” and 1,392 classrooms classified as “damaged but reparable.” This equated to 13.2 million children out of school. Critically, in northern Nigeria, insecurity is an extreme barrier to education access. Between December 2020 and March 2021, there were at least five reported cases of abductions in northern Nigeria. This and the threat of further attacks has led to the closure of 600 schools in the

⁹ SUBEB is the agency in each state that is responsible for the first nine years of schooling or basic education (Primary I to Junior Secondary School three). SAME is responsible for Adult and Vocational learning.

¹⁰ In these locations, children mainly learn to recite Qur’an. Many children (*Almajiri*) leave home to live under the *Ma’alam*, or spiritual leader.

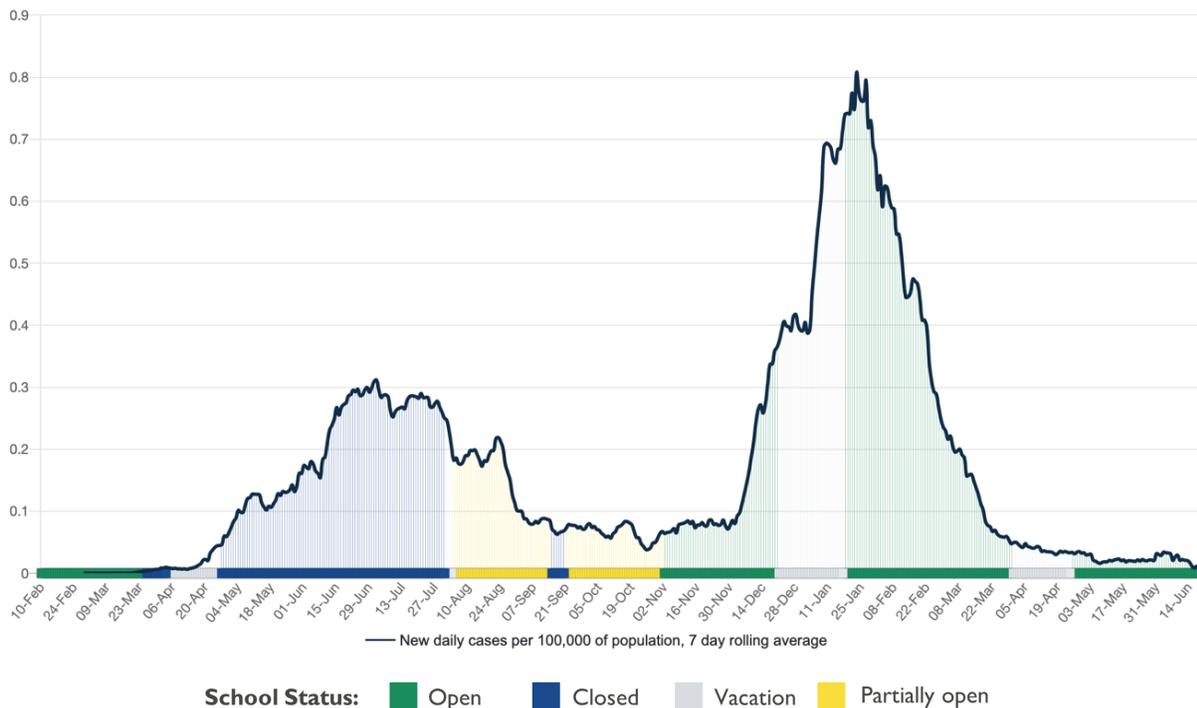
region. No one has been arrested or prosecuted for these abductions, and parents and guardians report fearing sending their children back to school (Amnesty International 2021).

In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges for Nigeria’s already fragile education system (Obiakor and Adeniran 2020).

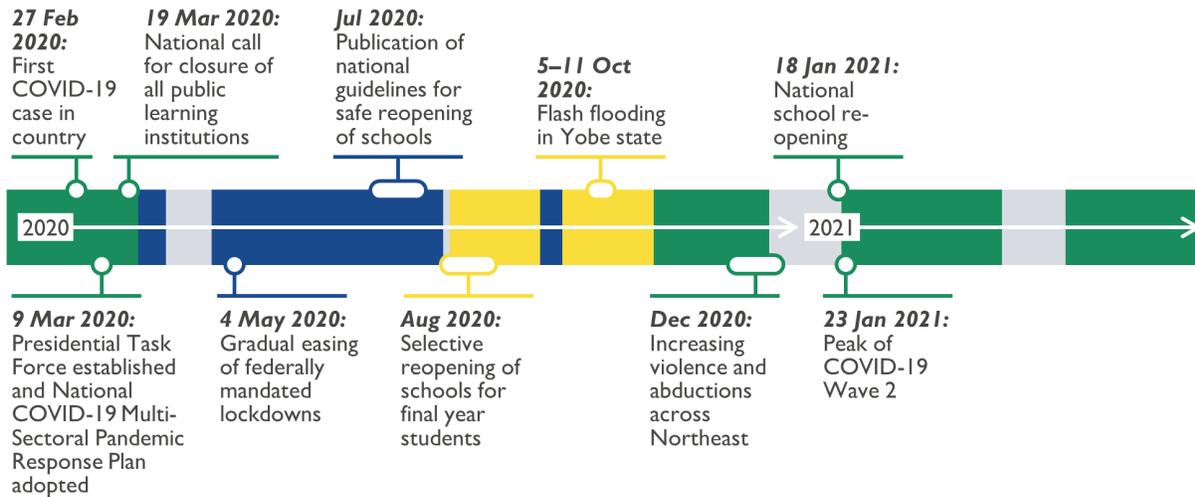
TIMELINE OF KEY COVID-19 EVENTS AND OTHER CONTEXTUAL STRESSORS IN NIGERIA

Schools were closed on March 19, 2020 and, after much debate and under the advice of the Federal Ministry of Education, the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and the Federal Government of Nigeria announced schools could reopen on January 18, 2021. However, States were left to decide actual open dates. In the interim, distance education options were planned and rolled out across Nigeria by July 2020.

Exhibit 2. School status and COVID-19 cases from February 2020 to April 2021, Nigeria (Insights for Education, 2021)



TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS



According to UNESCO, almost 40 million learners were affected by the nationwide school closures in Nigeria, of which over 91 percent were primary and secondary school learners (Amorighoye 2020). Many of these learners were in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps (UNESCO, 2020). Non-formal education—a critical education option for the 400,000 IDPs in Northern Nigeria—was also affected by the stoppage of learning activities. In addition to missed learning opportunities during the lockdown period, learners lost access to vital school-provided services such as federally funded school feeding programs, which not only support health and nutrition but also encourage enrollment in schools. These programs boosted learning in addition to serving as social protection and social safety nets. It was expected that a longer-term impact of school closures would be deepened educational inequality (CSEA 2020).

Exhibit 3. Timeline of school status, key COVID-19 events, and other contextual stressors focusing on northern Nigeria

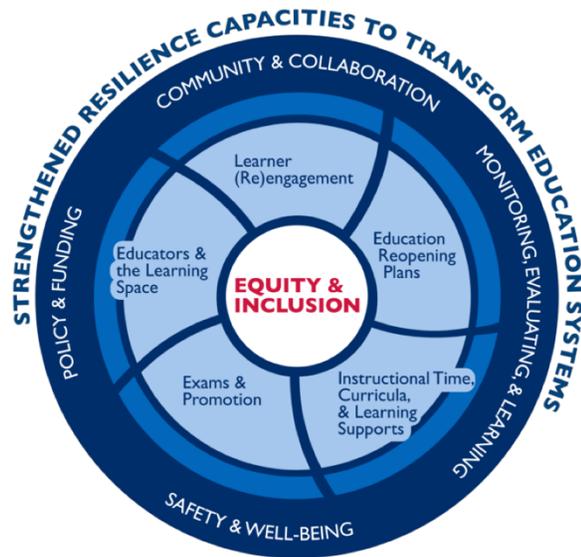
DATE	EVENT(S)
January 26, 2020	NCDC establishes a multisectoral National Coronavirus Preparedness Group (NCPG) upon reports of the disease’s emergence in Wuhan. Daily meetings assessed epidemiology and risk of spread, and initiated measures to strengthen preparedness.
February 27, 2020	First case of COVID-19 is identified in Nigeria, determined to be imported from Italy to Lagos on February 24 with subsequent travel to Ogun State the same day. 216 contacts in Lagos and Ogun States identified for 14-day follow-up.
March 9, 2020	Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 established by President of Nigeria; National COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Pandemic Response Plan adopted by PTF and served as blueprint for government response.
March 19, 2020	Closure of all learning institutions (Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria)
May 4, 2020	Gradual easing of federally mandated lockdowns
July 2020	Roll-out of Learn at Home Program

DATE	EVENT(S)
July 13, 2020	Publication of guidelines for safe reopening of schools (Federal Ministry of Education)
August 4, 2020	104 unity colleges and other secondary schools in all states across nation told to open for examinations (West African Senior and Junior School Leaving Certificate)
October 5–11, 2020	Flash flooding in Yobe state
October 12, 2020	Federal unity colleges reopen (104 institutions)
October 19, 2020	Announcement that Phase 3 of lockdown would be extended four weeks
December 2020	Increasing violence and abductions across northeast, e.g., 300 school boys abducted from dormitory in Katsina state in December; health facility in Yobe State looted by NSAG operatives, burning only ambulance serving 30,000 people; community schools set on fire in Borno and Adamawa on Christmas Eve (OCHA February 2021).
January 12, 2021	Review of planned reopening date with possibility of delaying reopening
January 18, 2021	Schools reopen despite some Members of Parliament (including house committee on basic education and other groups) protesting that protocols were not adequately followed, which they saw to be particularly problematic given increase in cases. Members of Parliament suggest 3-month postponement.
February 17, 2021	Government Science College in Kagara, a boarding school, attacked by unidentified gunmen in Niger State, student killed and 42 people kidnapped, including 27 students.
February 19, 2021	COVID-19 cases in Nigeria reach 150,000
April 13, 2021	Federal government inaugurates technical working group for the alternate school program to enable access to quality education for out-of-school children

3. NIGERIA'S PLANS AND PROCESSES IN THE RETURN TO LEARNING

It was in this multi-risk, multi-hazard context—with the combined stressors of COVID-19 and associated closures, continued attacks on schools, ongoing conflict and insecurity, and a series of natural disasters—that this study examined Nigeria's return to learning process up to April 2021. **This report focuses specifically on the role of state-level government agencies in the return to learning process in the unique context of northern Nigeria, in particular, in three states in northeastern (Borno, Adamawa) and northwestern Nigeria (Sokoto), focusing on basic (general) education.** This broad geographical area was chosen because of the opportunity to learn more about the relationship between existing contextual stressors and the return to learning process during COVID-19; these particular states were chosen because of the ability to access government informants in those locations.

Exhibit 4. USAID Return to Learning Framework



RETURN TO LEARNING FRAMEWORK PRIORITIES

This section tracks the Nigerian education system's responses to COVID-19 against USAID's Return to Learning framework (Exhibit 4). The RtL policy brief proposes that a sufficiently resilient education system would be able to address each of the priority areas within the RtL framework—outlined below—while keeping these cross-cutting considerations at the core: promoting equity and inclusion; ensuring the safety and well-being of learners, educators, and school personnel; actively communicating, consulting, and collaborating with educators, communities, and other stakeholders; planning to monitor, evaluate, and learn; revisiting policy and funding to benefit all learners; and planning for resilience (USAID 2020). This section outlines where and how the Nigerian education system is—or is not—aligned to date with the five priorities (section headings) and sub-priorities (in bold below section headings) identified in the RtL framework (see [Appendix C](#) for detailed explanation of priorities and sub-priorities in the framework).

Contextualizing the data presented on RtL plans

The decentralization of the Nigerian education sector is an important component to consider when examining the RtL priorities. Although there is national guidance and policy, states are ultimately autonomous in making and applying decisions. The sections below, therefore, present the national policy and the situation in one or more of the case study states (Borno, Adamawa, Sokoto) to highlight both the variety and commonality of approaches. The information presented in this section, however, is almost exclusively based on individuals working at state-level government parastatal institutions (SUBEB and/or SAME), and in some cases, just one person represented the government for the entire state. In

addition, in some of those interviews, details were not always able to be recalled or were said to be unknown. Documentation of plans and processes described were either not made available or (it is suspected) did not exist at all. The information obtained was triangulated whenever possible through additional interviews with international NGO staff working in those areas, though this was not always possible, as respondents did not always know those details. Therefore, data in this section are limited and have not been verified in many cases.

As will be elaborated on in subsequent sections, **this difficulty in finding information about the RtL plans, processes, and outcomes was a finding in itself:** the education stakeholders working in the northern Nigeria context have been, for the duration of the research, and in the northeast, for over a decade, immersed in a complex emergency. In such a context, the RtL priorities as articulated in the RtL framework are secondary to the need to absorb continuing shocks; this being the case, interviews asking state-level informants to articulate plans and processes around those RtL priorities did not elicit the type of detailed information implied in the RtL framework.

RtL Priority I

RtL Priority I: (Re)engage all learners, especially the most marginalized. This priority emphasizes that not all learners are affected by crises in the same way or to the same degree, and that education planners “need to understand how learners, especially the most marginalized, have been affected, and strategize to re-engage them in education.”

Distance education: In an effort to achieve continuity of education during closures to prevent learning loss and keep learners engaged, the Nigeria Education Sector COVID-19 Response Strategy included guidance for distance education solutions (Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education 2020b). Accordingly, FME with UBEC established a Task Team responsible for developing a webpage that would “provide information, guidance, and resources to the 36 States and FCT for the continuing education and individualized learning of children at home.” The Task Team also developed the Learn at Home (LHP) Programme.

In partnership with educational technology companies, the LHP launched virtual learning platforms and online resources (via links on their website). For example, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) e-Learning portal¹¹ provided resources to support students to better prepare for examinations; the Mobile Classroom App¹² opened its lessons and resources to all students at no cost during the school closure period; and a partnership with School Gate¹³ allowed all primary school students to access its courses for free during this period. Other e-learning resources cited on FME websites were Khan Academy, Sesewa, National Open University, UNESCO School Meets Learner Approach, Teacher Development Programme, British Council, Unity Schools, various state government owned e-resources, Oracle Academy, IBM University Relations, and Development Learning Partners Educational Resources. Data on use of these resources were not available at the time of writing, though it was generally understood that while the resources were free, they were not accessible to many

¹¹ Available at <https://waeconline.org.ng/e-learning/index.htm> . Last accessed June 22, 2021.

¹² Available at <https://www.mobileclassroom.com.ng> . Last accessed June 22, 2021.

¹³ Available at <https://schoolgate.ng> . Last accessed June 22, 2021.

learners without electricity, devices, and Internet access (see [RtL Priority 2](#) and Section 4 sub-section [Reaching marginalized learners with distance education](#)).

Attention to marginalized learners: The planned institutional arrangement and coordination of the FME’s Nigeria Education Sector COVID-19 Response Strategy was to “Identify and/or design strategies, platforms and actions for continued teaching, lessons delivery, assessments and learning for all during the period without putting the health and safety of teachers, learners and education administrators at risk” and in the FME Guidelines for Schools and Learning Facilities Reopening After COVID-19 Pandemic Closures, which cover five action areas with specific actions and responsibilities for various stakeholders (Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education 2020b). The guidelines also stipulated measures for reaching the most marginalized (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5. Five action areas identified in the FME Guidelines for School and Learning Facility Reopening

Five Action Areas in FME Guidelines for School and Learning Facility Reopening	
1	Campaigns, advocacy, and sensitization in rural and remote areas and child/ girl-friendly messaging (using animations, infographics, and cartoons in local languages) on the pandemic
2	Public health and safety measures to be adopted to promote necessary behavioral changes
3	Equipping and resourcing schools for improved teaching and learning methods for special needs learners
4	Developing appropriate mental health and psycho-social support services that address stigmatization and discrimination to assist learners, teachers, administrators, and other education personnel and their families to cope with the effects of COVID-19 and continued uncertainties of the pandemic
5	Adequate provisions for school feeding where applicable to encourage learners to return and sustain attendance

Focusing on the northern areas, in agreement with the Nigeria FME, the Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiEWG) based in Maiduguri, Borno State and comprised of more than 50 partner organizations, determined that all children who were attending school before the COVID-19 crisis should be considered in their response. This included Early Child Development (ECD), primary and secondary education, and Islamic Qur’anic Education. Their approach was inclusive of alternative learning opportunities. All learning programs were, as documented, directed to strive for equity and inclusivity (EiEWG 2020). Interviews with staff of SUBEBs revealed that there was some consideration for particularly marginalized children in their RtL approach, however, this differed in each state. Radio was a popular means of receiving information in the North. As a result, the EiEWG recognized that educational programs aired on the radio were particularly helpful in reaching marginalized children who would be unable to access other digital resources. However, the EiEWG also noted limitations for deaf children and encouraged educational television programs to be aired and incorporate sign language.

States across northern Nigeria adopted radio instruction and, in an effort to reach the most marginalized learners without radios and/or family members to support their learning at home, community-level learning centers were established. There, learners could gather during the radio program and receive additional support from trained teachers or facilitators. Activities were planned to

be fun and participatory, and in some cases, meals were provided by the government to encourage more learners to attend. Teachers were reached through WhatsApp in some cases. High-level officials from SUBEBs across the three case study states noted the effectiveness of these learning centers in reaching marginalized learners. However, they were equally aware that there still existed a great number of learners not accessing any resources because of pressures from family and others to sell, engage in farming, get married or have children.¹⁴ The use of radio is further elaborated on in Section 4, subsection [Reaching marginalized learners with distance education](#).

RtL Priority 2

RtL Priority 2: Education reopening plans. This priority encourages decision makers to develop comprehensive plans for reopening institutions, ensuring the physical safety for students, teachers, and school administrators whether meeting in-person or remotely. The actions encourage regular monitoring to be able to adapt to the context, and to “transition between remote and in-person learning depending on the local risk factors.” To ensure equity and inclusion are built into actions taken, this priority encourages participation of a range of stakeholders in decision-making processes around reopening and contingency planning, and clear, consistent communication with all stakeholders across all processes.

National guidance; state autonomy: According to the FME COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for Reopening, federal and state ministries of education should decide when to reopen after consultations with the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19, Federal Ministry of Health, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), and other critical stakeholders, including non-state education providers, teachers’ unions, parent-teacher associations, and school-based management committees (SBMCs).¹⁵ The FME provided state and LGA-specific guidelines related to health through the school readiness template for states and local government areas (Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education 2020c). Guidance provided on coordination included establishing multi-sectoral school health teams for state and LGA-level coordination; developing prevention, response, and reintegration plans; ensuring that resources and tools were available for implementation of the plan; and engagement with policymakers/authorities for policy advice, resources, and reporting.

At the national level, an initial phased return to school/learning process (to occur between September 3 and September 21, 2020) was dependent on schools adhering to adequate health and safety guidelines. This was to be monitored to track and report progress on safe reopening and operations (coordinated by the FME, SMoE, and UBEC). Guidance was issued from FME to reopen all schools on January 18, 2021 among protests from some members of the House Committee for Basic Education, who pointed out the relatively sharp increase in COVID-19 cases since the end of 2020. The FME recommendations for monitoring included structured and systematic joint evaluations of schools; a state-instituted

¹⁴ In Dikwa and Monguno in Borno State, even radio wasn’t possible because of insecurity. In response, USAID created home learning kits that learning facilitators helped learners obtain and use.

¹⁵ Set up in 2005 by the National Council of Education, School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) are to be established at all primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria. These committees are expected to encourage accountability and decision-making within communities by creating a bridge between government, communities, parents, and children. Members are drawn largely from civil society, faith-based groups, and parent-teacher organizations.

feedback mechanism for reported incidences; the establishment of monitoring procedure for absenteeism from school for both learners and staff; and monitoring of consumable COVID-19 safety and prevention items (Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education 2020a). The LGAs' Rapid Response Teams, along with school health teams, were expected to monitor the implementation of remedial classes in schools; the implementation of shifted classes and alternative timetable for schools; and hygiene behaviors and safety measures in schools. These data were to be captured using the NCDC reporting platform Surveillance, Outbreak, Response Management System (Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education 2020c).

Based on federal guidance, states wrote and used independent plans to monitor, encourage, and enforce compliance with all safe school reopening protocols, procedures, and measures. Discussions with Directors from the SUBEBs in Northern Nigeria reveal that the SMoEs adhered to directives from the FME to hold consultations with stakeholders. In addition, reports show that schools in the north adhered to guidance from the FME on safety operations such as: the procurement and distribution of COVID-19 compliance supplies to all public state schools; promotion of compliance with COVID-19 safety protocols within schools by school health teams; continuous campaigns on safety measures and responsibilities; availability of WASH facilities such as bucket and soap or hand sanitizer; and compliance with NCDC case detection and tracing protocols (Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education 2020c).

FME guidance called for consultations to be held and communication exchanged with parents, teachers, learners, and communities to understand and address common concerns in making RtL plans. The guidance said that decisions on safe reopening should be contingent on meeting the requirements set out in these guidelines and on a case-by-case basis for each school and learning facility. To this end, a multi-sectoral approach comprising education, health, environment, and Emergency Operation Centres (EOCs) should use the Joint Assessment for Safe Reopening of Schools and Learning Facilities to determine when each school should reopen.

Interviews with SUBEB staff from states in the north revealed that this was applicable in a general sense. The state governments set up the larger COVID-19 response taskforce, within which was a smaller team for the Education Sector led by the SMoE and which comprised agencies like SUBEB and SAME. However, it does not appear that this was done on a case-by-case basis. Most reports show that unilateral decisions were made for all government-owned schools in the state, whereas private schools had flexibility around reopening.

Adamawa: A staff member from the Adamawa SUBEB reported that there was collaboration between the SMoE and other agencies/ministries around the reopening of schools. The SMoE and SUBEB were supported by UNICEF to develop a COVID-19 response plan (for the period during school closures) and a plan for school reopening. The COVID-19 response was anchored in the office of the Secretary to the Governor who passed information through the SMoE—the Commissioner of Education and the Permanent Secretary on Education in the state. Decisions around the approach to be used was made by the SMoE working collaboratively with SUBEB and other agencies like SAME. These were further relayed by SUBEB to education secretaries spread across the different LGAs. Each LGA has a Local Education Authority headed by an Education Secretary. The schools (headmasters) were to report to the Education Secretaries. The interviewees with high-level officials from education agencies in Adamawa State said that while the plans were comprehensive, they weren't implemented exactly as designed because of funding challenges (see more on this in [Section 3](#)).

Sokoto: In Sokoto State, the state government responded to COVID-19 by setting up a committee chaired by the Honourable Commissioner of the Ministry of Health with members drawn from various departments and agencies such as education, water resources, and women affairs. The sub-committee for education was headed by the SMOE (chaired by the Commissioner of Education) with membership from other parastatals like SUBEB and SAME. They were tasked with discussing the effects of COVID-19 and providing a work plan for managing schools during the pandemic and the return of children to school.

There were meetings at the state and local government and community levels to prepare, with discussions on whether or not all students would resume at the same time or if only certain categories of children would resume. The state started with the resumption of lower grades and gradually, the upper grades joined them as the number of cases of COVID-19 decreased.

In returning to learning, the state initially raised awareness with the public so that parents knew the plans in place to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and provide support in reducing its spread. Parents and children were made aware of their responsibilities. When schools reopened, the committee conducted supervision to check the level of implementation in the state.

RtL Priority 3

RtL Priority 3: Instructional time, curricula, learning support. This priority is recommended to sequentially follow the previous priority and focuses on ensuring that modifications to educational programs are made with attention to, and prioritization of, core learning objectives. Consideration of various catch-up options—and the financial and human resources needed for these—is recommended, as is the importance of ensuring that learning objectives also take the psycho-social, social-emotional learning, and protection needs of learners into consideration.

National guidance: The FME recommended that states provide adequate classrooms and learning spaces in line with NCDC guidelines, issue policy circulars on digitalization of teaching and learning to continue multimedia learning opportunities, and organize remedial/catch-up/accelerated learning classes to ensure coverage of the curriculum. LGAs were expected to support schools to organize remedial classes and shifted classes/alternative timetables and distribute instructional materials. They were also expected to organize LGEA cluster meetings with SBMCs, head teachers, mothers' associations, and community leaders on mobilization of parents on school return, especially for vulnerable children.

Interviews in Borno, Adamawa, and Sokoto states revealed that there were changes to school operations when they reopened, with schools extending their sessions or the number of days children attended school. Decisions were made to continue with an abridged school term in Adamawa and Borno, and to move all children to the next academic year in Sokoto.¹⁶

¹⁶ Interviews 19, 24, 28

Adamawa: In Adamawa State, SUBEB respondents explained that the plan was for schools to take on additional lesson hours to try to make up for lost learning and to train teachers to deliver instruction with these modifications.¹⁷ It was also identified that learners would need additional classrooms to allow for physical distancing, primarily in urban areas to which populations had been moving during the insurgency, given its relatively safer status. Respondents explained that state government was responding to this additional stressor on teachers and schools by intensifying the construction of more schools and the rehabilitation of school classrooms with the help of UBEC. More than 400 classroom blocks were said to have been built since the start of the pandemic with UNICEF and the KfW Development Bank's support (New Telegraph 2020).¹⁸ Additional funding for was provided by the state government, other international donors, and from the LGAs. In addition to infrastructure investments, this funding also supported procurement of instructional materials for children, of which there was said to now be an adequate amount.

Sokoto: In Sokoto State, the first term of the 2020/2021 school year was extended to 15 weeks in order to cover material from the previous school year and ensure that students could perform well in state and federal examinations. Physical distancing within classrooms was managed by reducing the number of children in each class, with morning and evening classes to address the need for more space. Junior secondary schools were open in the morning and senior secondary schools were open in the afternoon.

RtL Priority 4

RtL Priority 4: Exams and promotion. This priority encourages education planners and decision makers to be strategic and methodical when considering if, how, and when to promote which learners, and to consider carefully how to communicate changes to examination processes and procedures, and justifications for these.

In a national perception survey commissioned by the EiEWG in collaboration with NCDC and with FME's approval, it was reported that a large majority of parents/guardians in public and private schools opined that learners were not able to learn adequately from home. These respondents stated that when schools were reopened, government and school owners should put adequate measures in place to help learners recover lost learning time. Further, they supported the government's decision to reopen for milestone exams.

Sokoto: The SMoE decided to cancel the third term of the 2020 school year, but increased the number of weeks students had to attend school in the next school year to make up for the time lost.

Adamawa: The SMoE did not allow automatic promotions; rather, the number of weeks in a term was reduced from 13 to 10. No specifics were given on how the curriculum was condensed. The number of vacation days for the 2020/2021 school year was also reduced.

¹⁷ Interviews 24 and 25

¹⁸ This figure was not able to be verified, though reports from September 2020 indicate 165 classrooms across 80 schools in two LGAs had begun the rehabilitation process.

RtL Priority 5

RtL Priority 5: Educators and the learning space. This priority reminds education planners and decision makers of the essential role of educators and other personnel, and their needs, preparation, and mobilization in planning to “welcome learners back safely”. Workforce (including recruitment, deployment, certification) and capacity development (including both the professional and psycho-social needs of personnel) requirements are highlighted, as is the need to ensure that learning environments are safe. This priority also reminds education planners to ensure that adequate policy and finance are available to support the above.

In its School Readiness Template, the FME provided guidance to states and LGAs around the reopening of schools. States were expected to conduct capacity strengthening programs for teachers to support COVID-19 school reopening readiness and continuous quality teaching and learning. LGAs were supposed to support the training of school health teams to provide psycho-social and emotional support for learners.

Support from NGOs was also planned. The EiEWG set goals to (1) reduce morbidity and mortality due to COVID-19 among school learners, teachers, and other school stakeholders in Northeast Nigeria, (2) mitigate the negative impact of school closures on student learning and teacher well-being, and (3) ensure effective, inclusive, and safe return to quality learning for learners, teachers, and SBMCs.

Adamawa: SUBEB in Adamawa reported that three days of training were provided to teachers across 21 LGAs that supported the education agencies in the state. Teachers were also provided with COVID-19 prevention materials (thermometers, washing basins, detergents, and hand sanitizers) to distribute in various LGAs. SUBEB in Adamawa State also reported that in order to try to ease the burden on teachers where they were understaffed, plans were made to employ an additional 2,000 degree-holders and 2,000 National Certificate of Education holders.¹⁹

Borno: In Borno State, SUBEB reported that it provided training to teachers, beginning with those who were to be facilitators in the radio instruction learning centers that were established during closures. Training was also said to be provided to instructors in non-formal schools (Tsangaya Schools) to build capacity to provide literacy and numeracy lessons to learners by radio. SUBEB reports that teacher training included psycho-social support, disaster management, and conflict reduction and resolution modules.

“We have now introduced psycho-social support training in our schools. And then CDRR [conflict disaster risk reduction] is also there, where disaster and conflict resolution has been embedded in our own system and even now, a training for such things is going on in our own schools for the teachers. When the teachers have this knowledge, they will go on to scale down in their classes. So, our children have a kind of preparedness and response to emergency.” —KII SUBEB, Borno State²⁰

¹⁹ Interview 25

²⁰ Interview 19

Sokoto: In Sokoto State, SUBEB noted that more than 2,600 principals of junior secondary schools and headmasters of primary schools, most of those in the state, were trained on how best to manage children with COVID-19 and ensure the safety of children when schools resume (USAID/Nigeria 2019).²¹

4. OUTCOMES OF THE RETURN TO LEARNING PROCESS

This section identifies opportunities presented through the pandemic response that may be strengthened and embedded as common practice in the education system as a whole, particularly from an inclusion/equity standpoint. These may be leveraged to build more system-wide adaptive capacities, contributing to systemic resilience. This study calls these opportunities “pockets of promise.”

In the process of implementing the return to learning plans outlined above, states faced multiple challenges that cut across the RtL priorities. However, multiple pockets of promise also exist. Much information on outcomes is unknown, or reports are provided by one person without any other data to triangulate it. As such, while the state-level RtL plans were generally considered to be clear and feasible, the degree to which those plans have been implemented and are effective is largely unknown.

REACHING MARGINALIZED LEARNERS WITH DISTANCE EDUCATION

As explained in [RtL Priority I](#), FME offered substantial online resources for learners during school closures and as they eased back into in-person learning. However, as in other countries, the FME plan was not realistically inclusive because of the state of digital access and Internet penetration across the nation. This limited disadvantaged students, including the vast majority of public school students in the northern areas (World Bank 2020). According to the Digital 2020: Digital Global Overview report published in January 2020, about 60 percent of Nigerians are not connected to the Internet. The statistics for mobile phones, which could also be used as a learning medium, are more hopeful. According to the report, around 169.2 million people—83 percent of Nigerians—had access to mobile phone connections; however, of these, 50 percent—around 84.5 million people—resided in urban areas. For the population with access, the proportion was skewed toward students from high socio-economic households and urban households; an overwhelming majority of whom were private school students who already had a learning advantage over their public school peers. For children from poorer backgrounds with less access to Internet connectivity, computers, and other devices, and who resided in rural areas where local languages are dominant over English, ICT learning uptake was limited. The inequity in access to ICT-based learning has the adverse effect of further intensifying the existing disparities in learning outcomes along socio-economic lines, and the urban-rural divide.



It was recognized early in the pandemic that the majority of learners in northern states had severely limited access to ICT learning solutions offered at the national level. In response, state governments and international NGOs worked together to identify innovative solutions to facilitate distance education to

²¹ According to the Sokoto State Education Accounts Report for 2015/16 and 2016/17, in 2016/17 there were 2,014 pre-primary and primary schools, and 222 junior secondary schools in Sokoto.

marginalized learners. Some states and NGOs (either in collaboration, or independently) leveraged previous experience offering and/or supporting learning via radio. The school closures period thus saw multiple synergies between government and NGOs to further expand the scope of state-led and independent learning interventions using non-Internet-based resources. This improved access, beyond the scope of governmental provision, to varying degrees across Nigeria (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6: Illustrative NGO/government partnerships to deliver radio instruction in northern Nigeria during COVID-19

Ace Charity – Adamawa, Borno, Kano, FCT	Designed and piloted a learning intervention called “ACE Radio School” to engage public primary and junior secondary school pupils/students, most of whom were at home as a result of the directive to shut down schools. The program broadcasted to nine states and seven communities.
Addressing Education in Northeast Nigeria (AENN)	USAID-funded, implemented by FHI 360 and Save the Children, provided formal and nonformal education, rolled out radio lessons, toll-free hotline with home learning activities, and SMS messages for parents in Borno and Yobe. Teachers and community members provided coaching to families.
Home-based radio instruction in Borno	In Borno state, UNICEF in collaboration with the University of Maiduguri implemented a radio initiative targeting 5,000 out-of-school children, working with 100 graduate-level teachers who were trained to “teach at the right level.”
Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI Plus)	USAID-funded, implemented by Creative Associates and EDC, developed materials for remote learning based on classroom teaching and learning materials (Let’s Read/Mu Karanta) in Bauchi and Sokoto. Initially, the instruction was delivered through TV to increase access; radio was later used instead after it was determined that too few children had access to TV.
Transactional Radio Instruction (TRI)/Strengthening Education in Northeast Nigeria (SENSE) Activity	USAID-funded, implemented by the American University of Nigeria and with World Bank Better Service Delivery for All funds, aimed to reach 500,000 learners in Gombe and Adamawa with a 13-episode distance learning project, aired two days a week for 10 weeks in Hausa. The program built on a similar program aired during a particularly violent period of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2013.
UNICEF, German government (KfW Project)	SUBEB with UNICEF and KfW in Adamawa State delivered radio-based instruction to junior secondary and senior secondary-level students in literacy, numeracy, civil education, chemistry, biology; aimed to reach 19 local government areas of the state.

Adamawa: To support the radio instruction developed by USAID and other partners, the Adamawa SUBEB established community-based learning centers where learners could gather around a radio to listen to the programming as it aired and receive supplemental instruction from paid facilitators. In total, SAME reports that they supported 150 centers and certified more than 9,000 learners.²²

²² It is not clear what this informant referred to in saying “certified.” Interview 23.

To attract learners to the centers, facilitators offered participatory activities popular in the community such as singing songs or playing sports. When these learning centers were first established, learners stayed for one hour with about 30 minutes used for playing or sports. Over time, the learning time was extended to two or three hours. The government also introduced feeding programs to try to ensure attendance remained high, and to attract additional marginalized children to the centers. Radio sets were distributed to communities, as well as leaflets with instructions for parents on how to support their children's learning. SUBEB recognized that these learning centers were particularly critical for the continued learning of *Almajiri* children, who, at the onset of the pandemic, were mandated to return to their states of origin.

POCKETS OF PROMISE

Government ownership of interactive radio instruction to reach marginalized learners



A SUBEB official in Adamawa explained how partnerships between the government and NGOs in the face of the pandemic had helped state-level actors to see the role radio could play in education:

“A lot of work is done collaboratively with UNICEF and German donors (KFW Development Bank), PLAN International. For instance, the RANA project (funded by DFID through UNICEF and implemented by FHI) has become a household name.... Although it is the calamities faced that brought these collaborations, if there is synergy, engagement and improvement in the future it will be for the better. Now it is known that the radio can be used during school closures and the insurgencies and SUBEB will continue to maintain that effort. The state has tried to embed the gains from collaborations with INGOs by encouraging schools to keep using the learning and materials.” —KII SUBEB, Adamawa²³

Borno: The USAID-funded AENN radio program was delivered in Borno (and Yobe) by SUBEB in partnership with FHI 360. State officials of the SUBEB in Borno State reported that radio campaigns had been used pre-COVID-19 to respond to school closures resulting from the insurgency, including in Hausa and Kanuri, to reach more learners. These were leveraged during COVID-19 closures to try to ensure that learners would not lose interest in education before schools reopened. Informants agree that the radio learning model during COVID-19 was immediately popular, and some attributed this to the communities' exposure to such instruction in the past. Once lessons started through the radio, a lot of adults showed interest, sending their children to the centers established within communities.

“A radio learning model attracts a lot of attention from the parents and from everybody and people from this particular part of the country have an interest in listening to the transistor radios. For news, when BBC Hausa came on for news, you can see a greater number of people tune in, so when lessons started through the radio, a lot of adults, parents started showing interest and they themselves were also a part of it.” —KII SUBEB, Borno State.²⁴

Similar to the model in Adamawa, a trained teacher was deployed to a community-based center in areas where radio access was poor to teach during the airing of the program; by some reports, every day. Lessons were provided for all classes in primary school and the first three years of secondary school.

²³ Interview 25

²⁴ Interview 21

Information on the radio learning and centers was passed to communities by the SBMCs, which were already well-established liaisons with local government in communities prior to COVID-19. SBMCs were also tasked with delivering radios to those without one, usually in rural areas. SUBEB reported that the work with SBMCs thus far has been very effective in ensuring that radio recipients were not selling them but instead using them for learning.²⁵

The SUBEB informant suggested that this type of alternative learning was becoming increasingly institutionalized in Borno State's education system; even at the federal level, UBEC had taken interest in the approach and was adopting it into the school system/curriculum. Even during the holidays or other emergencies, the lessons have continued, and SUBEB has plans to establish a mini radio station within its premises that has the potential to tremendously impact society and pupils. Land was said to have been provided by the Borno State government for building the radio station.

"We are trying to make it part and parcel of our own school system – even at the holidays. That process is going on and coincidentally, some months ago, I invited UNICEF and gave them an interest, that we need to have a radio station at SUBEB, a mini radio station, so that we can make continuation of the learning at home because we have seen that it has a tremendous impact on the pupils and society." —KII SUBEB, Borno²⁶.

Sokoto and Bauchi: In Sokoto and Bauchi states, *Mu Karanta!* (Let's Read!) radio instruction was implemented by the SUBEB in partnership with Creative Associates and EDC (funded by USAID), UNICEF, and later, the World Bank (through the Nigeria Partnership for Education Project). SUBEB was responsible for the provision of teachers to support the scripting, presentation, and recording of lessons on basic education, and for providing quality assurance to the process and monitoring the scripting. USAID provided technical support on the development of the radio and television program for early grades. A total of 48 lessons each by radio and TV were produced and broadcast between March and September 2020 targeting learners from non-formal learning centers and adolescent girls' learning centers in Sokoto state. It was estimated that the radio programs reached 40,320 households. Parents were also sent IVR messages on enrollment, the importance of girl-child education, retention, and hygiene. To maintain teacher morale, the initiative supported teachers and facilitators with digital pedagogical, curricular messages/instruction using Internet platforms. One NGO staff member working on this program in Bauchi remarked,

"The pandemic brought some innovation and creativity. Now the state government knows that lockdown or no lockdown, that this education should not stop and technology can make it possible... UBEC is now

POCKETS OF PROMISE

Leveraging existing relationships with school-based management committees to deliver distance education resources



POCKETS OF PROMISE

State efforts to institutionalize radio instruction for future emergencies



²⁵ Interview 21

²⁶ Interview 21

invested in this mechanism. They are paying for the radio program and have trained master trainers. They are recording more and more and more [lessons].” —KII NGO, Bauchi²⁷

MONITORING PROGRESS

While the state-level RtL plans were generally considered to be clear and feasible, the degree to which they have been implemented and are effective was largely unknown because of lack of state-level monitoring. For example, one SUBEB staff member in Sokoto remarked that on a recent monitoring visit, a representative learned that no monitoring visits had taken place to that school since the start of in-person learning (though such monitoring visits generally did not occur before the pandemic, either).²⁸ As such, data were generally not used to inform key decisions made in the RtL implementation process despite being written into the plans, perhaps impractically. There was no way of knowing the degree of implementation and compliance with the frameworks developed in the state capitals. SUBEB staff remarked that much of this challenge stemmed from a lack of finances to carry out the requisite visits; staff had been trained and knew their role but simply were not able to afford to carry out the work:

“There is a team in place that has the capacity to provide monitoring support. Officers have been provided with training by UNICEF, USAID, UBEC and there are supervisors from the pool of head teachers, however, the logistics required for supervision [financial and human resources to ensure monitoring support is carried out] is not available.” —KII SUBEB, Sokoto²⁹

“KEEPING INTEREST” VERSUS LEARNING

Across the states and according to government and international NGOs partnering with them, and evident in programming implementation, there was a need to prioritize preventing dropout at the expense, perhaps, of learning loss. To do this, activities during closures and when schools began to reopen were focused on learners and families to maintain attention and interest in education, such as playing games and sports, or singing, given the extreme risk they faced of dropping out.

As an NGO staff member explained, “we worked so hard to get them to come to school in the first place, this pause will certainly draw them away.” Much of the content of the radio programs, the participatory instruction and sports at the learning centers, and the additional community outreach by NGOs and the government, therefore, was designed specifically to “maintain a presence” for communities and learners.

For example, the USAID-funded AENN activity continued paying learning facilitators’ salaries in Borno and Yobe during the closures so they could work toward assuring parents of the value of attending NFLCs (and support IRI instruction) post-

POCKETS OF PROMISE

Local education actors’ prioritization on keeping learners and communities engaged where dropout risk was high



²⁷ Interview 17

²⁸ Interview 14

²⁹ Interview 14

pandemic.³⁰ Critically, local government education officials agreed with this emphasis on keeping learners interested:

“There has been continued campaigns for education in Borno state as the state had barely recovered from the insurgency which lasted for over a decade and subsequent apathy to education when COVID-19 struck, so there is a need to keep engaging and having campaigns for people to have interest in Western Education as no education is to be termed useless or forbidden.” —KII SUBEB, Borno State³¹

Not all learners took advantage of these resources, though:

“When school was not in session, these children were engaged in selling, hawking things in the market. The parent would say – you’re not in school and you are idle, ok, go to the market and sell these items. So the population of the [center] classes were not as large as they should have been even though the parents were told, through the radio and through the TV to please make sure that they send their children to these centers.” —KII SUBEB, Adamawa State³²

There were also challenges in bringing learners back to school when they reopened; informants most often attributed this to learners losing interest in education (not to concerns with COVID-19):

“To facilitate return to school, there was a need for extensive campaigns, including house to house campaigns in some cases. These were to get people back into class after the easing of the lockdown, but many did not return due to various reasons including marriage, relocation, better life opportunities.” —KII SAME, Adamawa State³³

It was generally acknowledged that there would be some degree of learning loss, though this is hard to quantify and, as mentioned above, lack of consistent assessments and monitoring further complicated the situation. One study focused on learners benefiting from the USAID-funded Northern Education Initiative Plus (NEI Plus) activity suggested that upon returning to school in January 2021, learning outcomes were maintained despite the months lost due to COVID-19 school closures (USAID 2021).

5. DISCUSSION: USAID’S RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK AND THE RETURN TO LEARNING PROCESS IN NIGERIA

USAID RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

USAID defines resilience in education as the “ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth” (USAID 2012). USAID’s Resilience Framework may be understood in relation to pathways of resilience and vulnerability during COVID-19, as indicated in

³⁰ Keeping the learning facilitators on payroll also ensured there would be a rapid restart of activities when schools were allowed to re-open. This was critical, given the shortage of learning facilitators even before the pandemic.

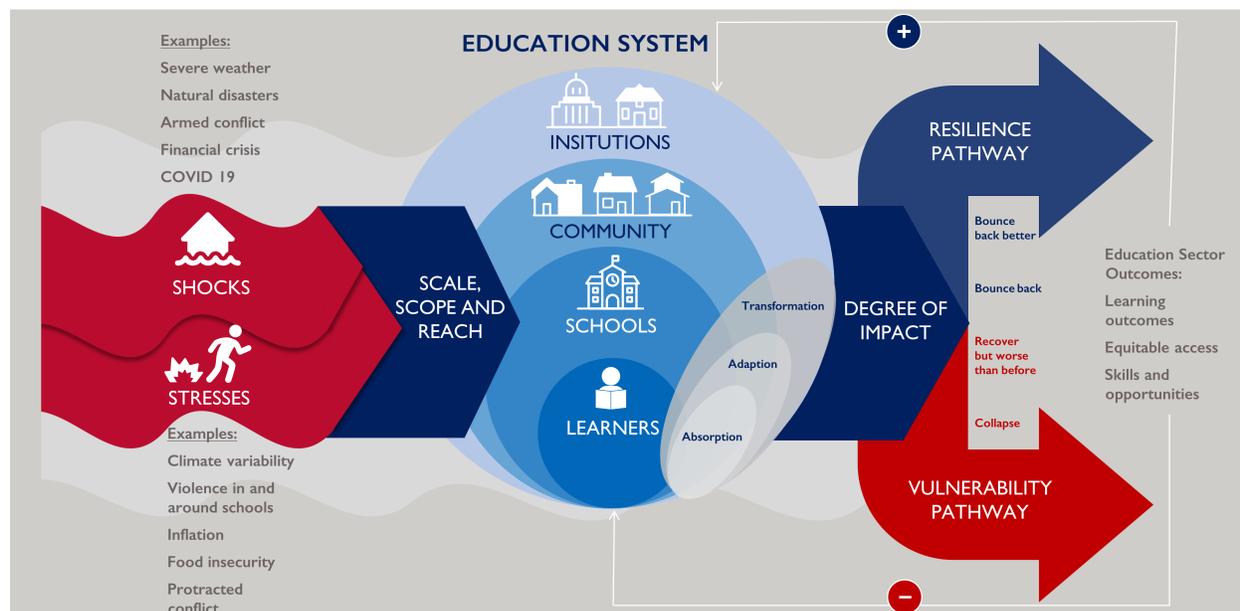
³¹ Interview 19

³² Interview 25

³³ Interview 23

Exhibit 7 (Shah 2019). This research set out to understand this framework in context to better understand how it may be more effectively applied.

Exhibit 7. Pathways of resilience and vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic



Reconceptualizing COVID-19 from a shock to a stressor over the course of the pandemic (early 2020 to the time of writing in mid-2021) affected countries' responses and this research. According to the USAID Resilience White Paper:

Shocks are typically short-term, acute deviations from long-term trends that have substantial negative effects on people's current state of wellbeing, level of assets, livelihoods, and safety or their ability to withstand future shocks. Stressors, on the other hand, tend to be chronic, long-term trends, pressures, or protracted crisis that undermine the stability of a system and increase vulnerability within it (Shah 2019).

The terminology itself is less important than the underlying change in perception and, thus, response to the COVID-19 crisis. Our research trajectory, in fact, serves as a microcosm of sorts in terms of adapting questions, methods, ideas, and assumptions as the duration and, thus, nature of the pandemic evolved. In each country context, COVID-19 interacted with other shocks and stressors in unique ways, with both similar and contrasting impacts on the education system. While scale, scope, and reach of the pandemic differed, so too did the ways in which each country's education system responded in attempts to mitigate impact. Ultimately, the relationships and interactions between COVID-19 impact and the underlying political, economic, and social norms, structures, and processes of response were illuminated in unique ways in each of the five case studies, with each case study demonstrating specific characteristics and qualities of resilience. The accompanying synthesis report (Heaner et al. 2021) offers in-depth analysis of resilience across these contexts.

RESILIENCE IN NIGERIA

There has been encouragement for international stakeholders to work with governments to address conflict drivers through incorporation of conflict sensitivity into COVID-19 responses, addressing the impact of COVID-19 on conflict dynamics, and “seizing windows of opportunity created by COVID-related disruptions to advance peace” (Mercy Corps 2020). This section provides a summary of the identified pre-COVID-19 capacities that were leveraged, and some of the key emerging resilience pockets of promise. These pockets of promise are largely absorptive and adaptive, which is reflective of the emergency situation that existed in the region prior to COVID-19.

Pre-COVID-19 capacities that were leveraged

Absorbing school closures, again: Informants in Borno and Adamawa were clear about the resilience already present from past shocks and stressors. COVID-19 was yet another challenge. As a SUBEB staff in Borno said, “even before COVID-19, the education sector had tried to be resilient.”³⁴ The northeastern states in particular had dealt with multiple instances of insecurity that caused learning interruptions, and had experience in ways to adjust to maintain some continuity of learning. In particular, in Adamawa and Borno, radio instruction had been used and was able to be leveraged to meet the needs of students—many of whom resided in northern states—who were unable to access the Learn at Home online resources provided by FME. By contrast, informants in Sokoto remarked that they were much less prepared for COVID-19 and the associated school closures, and that making adjustments to delivery of radio instruction was quite new. Support from international NGOs was critical in developing and rolling out the radio instruction, but state education officials were receptive to the idea and served as key decision makers in adapting the specifics of how the roll-out would occur.

Prioritizing keeping interest over learning outcomes: One of the biggest challenges identified by informants in their education work in the region was keeping children in school, even without emergencies forcing them physically out of the classroom. Much work has been done to convince learners and their families to prioritize education, and any disruption is viewed as a potential threat to the continuity of education. As such, states and international NGOs, most notably USAID-funded partners, recognized the importance of focusing their attention on both keeping learners’ and families’ interest in education so they would return when schools reopened again, and in keeping teachers engaged and on payroll, where possible, to support distance learning initiatives and allow a more seamless transition back to in-person instruction. In this regard, the mechanisms used in the radio instruction activities—prioritizing interest in education to prevent dropout versus focusing on achieving learning outcomes—did not lose sight of this and, though the outcome is unknown, may have prevented more learners from dropping out.

Key emerging resilience pockets of promise

State institutionalization of radio instruction programming: The necessity of supplementing or totally replacing instruction with radio instruction led to a great degree of collaboration between state education stakeholders and international NGOs. Prior to COVID-19, many international NGOs were

³⁴ Interview 19

working to provide a variety of options for learners who had been attending both formal and nonformal education.

Seeing the successes in keeping marginalized learners engaged in education, informants expressed a need at the state level to institutionalize the radio instruction for use in future closures, and explore how it may be used to supplement in-person learning. There is room to grow: it was reported that the school reopening was sudden and disturbed the implementation of the radio programming and its role, with stakeholders not knowing how it should be used or maintained while students were able to access classrooms.

Informants at the SUBEB and SAME level in Adamawa and Borno expressed the will to work toward this. Informants in the NGO sector provided some additional context, stressing that such initiatives would likely be successful if owned by them but in partnership with state government:

“On paper – the government does have some interest but there is not a strong direction in knowing what should be prioritized. So, development partners report to government, they do high level things that government breaks down to implement. So just having that prioritization and critical thinking through about what is most urgent, that’d be the way.” —INGO Informant³⁵

6. CONCLUSION

The Nigeria case study has been insightful not only in terms of data collected, but also in terms of the challenges encountered in conducting the research itself. The first challenge was in securing interviews with state-level education actors. For example, in Borno State the researchers were only able to secure one interview that would represent the entirety of the state’s government RtL response. The second challenge was in the limited degree of description and/or documentation provided by informants about state-level RtL plans, processes, and outcomes. This is a reflection of the complex emergency context in which RtL has been occurring and may indicate the limited time or capacity of actors to document and/or widely disseminate response plans or reports. The priority was keeping children engaged, preventing dropout, and getting children physically back into a classroom. That was one step of many, but a hugely challenging one in this context.

Accordingly, while the return to learning process in Nigeria was guided by national guidelines, this case study’s focus on the process in three northern states reveals a common challenge: while the RtL plans were said to be suitable and comprehensive for each of the contexts because they were developed in close collaboration with states, donors, and NGOs, and mindful of inclusion and equity, there was a common challenge in terms of states following through to ensure implementation was going as planned. This may be unsurprising, given the multitude of challenges inherent in the concurrent crises experienced in the region.

Still, pockets of promise emerged both in spite of and because of the broader contextual challenges this region has faced. The study showed how states were able to leverage their experience with instability-related school closures by using radio instruction and supplemental supports to keep learners engaged and interested in education during closures, alert them when and how schools would be reopened, and

³⁵ Interview 21

communicate that it would be safe and important for learners to return. These are all absorptive capacities, but expecting more may not be realistic in a complex emergency. For many education stakeholders in this context, these actions, though not meeting all the objectives in the RtL plans, were nonetheless critical steps in an ongoing process.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: REFERENCES

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APPENDIX B: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS
<p>1. Planned Process for RtL: What was the process by which countries planned for/are planning for the return to learning during COVID-19?</p>	<p>a. What policies and plans exist or were developed to support the return to learning?</p> <p>b. What were key triggers/decision points when planning the return to learning, and what factors contributed to the decisions made?</p> <p>c. Who was involved in decision-making, and how were decisions made about the return to learning across the education continuum (pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary, non-formal, technical training)? What were the explicit (and implicit) priorities?</p> <p>d. Were the decision-making processes harmonious, across different stakeholders?</p>
<p>2. Actual Process for RtL: What was/is the actual process by which countries returned/are returning to learning (from an implementation perspective) during COVID-19?</p>	<p>a. How did countries reach and retain marginalized populations; adapt the academic calendar; adapt instructional time, curricula and learning supports (including integrating distance learning); modify exams and learner promotion practices; and re-engage educators and prepare infrastructure?</p> <p>b. What were the key challenges and opportunities that emerged to ensuring a safe, equitable, and inclusive return to learning, especially regarding (but not limited to) safety and wellbeing; communication, consultation, and collaboration; monitoring, evaluating, and learning; and policy and funding?</p> <p>c. Which learners became (further) marginalized by the actual return to learning process?</p> <p>d. What strategies were common across contexts; which strategies had particular relevance to specific countries? What contextual, political, or other factors seem to explain the differences between planned and actual RtL processes?</p> <p>e. How were strategies changed or adapted in response to contextual factors (e.g., insecurity, rising COVID-19 tests, political transitions, natural hazards)?</p>
<p>3. Appreciating Shock/Stress Context for RtL: What are the ways in which COVID-19 intersects with ongoing shocks and stressors in context and do these additional shocks/stressors affect some populations more than others (i.e., are certain populations/ demographics/ locations more vulnerable due to additional shocks/stressors)?</p>	<p>a. How has this been identified and tracked through the return to learning period?</p> <p>b. How are response efforts recognizing and responding to the differential impacts of the pandemic on communities, educators/school personnel and learners, and targeting action accordingly?</p>
<p>4. Identifying Pockets of Promise in RtL: How are educational decision-makers seeking to identify not only problems/ issues with the COVID-19 response, but also where things went well and</p>	<p>a. This may include investigation of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Local level autonomy vs. The need for centralized decision-making support</i> – <i>Communication between teachers and parents;</i> – <i>Capacity of educators and policymakers to adapt quickly and nimbly; the functionality/local leadership of coordination mechanisms;</i>

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS
<p>seeking to build off of these “pockets of promise”?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Focus and attention on student well-being, pre-existing contingency plans and structure, etc.</i> - <i>Role of non-state actors and potentially the private sector or civil society in supporting educational continuity</i> - <i>Coherence between education actors and health, humanitarian, protection, social protection or other actors</i> - <i>The extent to which these ‘pockets of promise’ are absorptive/adaptive vs potentially transformative</i> <p>b. How can these “pockets of promise” be built upon/strengthened so as to embed as common practice in the education system as a whole? And particularly, from an inclusion/equity standpoint?</p>
<p>5. Outcomes of RtL Process: Retrospectively, according to key stakeholders, what positive and negative, intended and unintended consequences were observed as a result of decisions made when planning the return to learning?</p>	<p>a. What were the intended or unintended outcomes of the return to learning process on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>equitable and inclusive access to education?</i> - <i>learner’s well-being or ability to cope with adversity?</i> - <i>promoting or inhibiting learners’ resumption of learning?</i> - <i>building resilience of learners, schools, families, communities, and the education system?</i> <p>b. What do key stakeholders identify as the most important lessons learned from the return-to-learning process?</p>
<p>6. Utility of USAID Frameworks: To what extent are USAID’s RtL and Resilience and Education Frameworks useful for conceptualizing, planning, and carrying out the return to learning during and after an education disruption such as COVID-19?</p>	<p>a. How could the frameworks be amended, adapted or contextualized in light of what has been learned in the application of them to examining educational responses in a range of country contexts (for example, by specifying in greater detail adaptive, absorptive, transformative capacities, or thinking about exposure and sensitivity to risk)?</p> <p>b. How are the two frameworks related / how do they inform one another? What can we say to the hypothesis that enhanced resilience capacities within entities engaged in the RtL process will enhance the potential that the RtL is equitable, minimizes learning loss, etc.</p>
<p>7. Perception of Education as a National Priority: How is/has education being/been positioned as a key driver for national COVID-19 response and recovery efforts?</p>	<p>a. How is/has cross-sectoral approaches and perspective affecting/affected this positioning, especially in regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>education as a site for strengthening lines of communication between health officials and communities about the pandemic</i> - <i>use of education as a vehicle for workforce upskilling/ redeployment;</i> - <i>balancing public trust in schools’ health/safety measures, with student demand/need for protection and return to learning and the need for equitable provision of learning (social capital)</i> - <i>continuity of education as a part of a social protection strategy, portfolio, or package</i>

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coherence of the national COVID-19 public health strategy and the education return to learning strategy (i.e., the prioritization of the education workforce for vaccinations as they become available³⁶)

³⁶ See: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/immunization/sage/covid/sage-prioritization-roadmap-covid19-vaccines.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=bf227443_2

APPENDIX C: CHECKLIST: RETURN TO LEARNING DURING COVID-19 PRIORITIES³⁷

✓	(RE)ENGAGE ALL LEARNERS, ESPECIALLY THE MOST MARGINALIZED
	Conduct rapid assessments (either through existing data or primary data collection) to identify marginalized groups.
	Collaborate with communities to (re)engage all learners.
	Ensure education information and monitoring systems are functioning and capable of tracking (re)enrollment of all learners, especially marginalized populations, in real time.
	Promote alternative pathways back to education.
	Address policy barriers that exclude some learners from returning to education.
✓	DEVELOP EDUCATION REOPENING PLANS
	Involve learners, educators, parents, and communities in decision-making.
	Develop an education reopening plan, including safe operations guidance.
	Develop an outbreak response plan at the school-level.
	Communicate clearly and consistently.
	Monitor the situation regularly.
✓	ADAPT INSTRUCTIONAL TIME, CURRICULA, AND LEARNING SUPPORTS
	Understand the range of options for helping learners catch up.
	Revise the academic calendar and schedule.
	Adapt (or condense) the curriculum and teaching and learning materials.
	Identify learners' social-emotional, protection, and academic needs.
	Consider where distance learning should continue.
	Mobilize financial and human resources for planning for catch-up programming.
✓	MODIFY EXAMS AND LEARNER PROMOTION PRACTICES
	Identify how exams have been affected by the crisis.
	Identify which exams are a priority.
	Develop a learner promotion strategy.
	Communicate with learners, families, and educators.
	Ensure that monitoring systems to track access to exams and pass rates are in place.
	Mobilize resources needed to implement adapted exams.
✓	RE-ENGAGE EDUCATORS AND PREPARE THE LEARNING SPACE
	Revisit workforce needs.
	Address educator capacity development needs.
	Develop or revise policy to meet education workforce needs.
	Assess the need for repairs and creation of new learning spaces, additional furniture and materials, disinfection of learning spaces, and signage and floor markings.
	Mobilize financial resources to fill gaps.

³⁷ Boisvert K. and N. Weisenhorn, 2020