Reopening of Education Institutions by the Government

Recently, many a day has seen a nose dive in the number of COVID-19 positive cases in the country. It’s been a steady decline, albeit not regular it’s clear that the worst is past us. The President, in his last State of The Nation address - alluded we had started to see the beginning of the pandemic curve flattening in Kenya. Suffice to say it’s quite safe for schools to reopen vis-à-vis the indicators aforementioned.

Schools should reopen, albeit in phases. Tertiary institutions; colleges and universities should resume on location learning by virtue of maturity. Most if not all students and staff are cognizant enough of the virus, how it spreads, its implications and whatnot. A good chunk are informed on how to shield themselves and others from the lurking potential risks and would be able to hold their peers accountable in a case of caution to the wind.

That can’t be said for Primary Schools though. It is not lost on me that they are kids, in their frivolousness; they may not be able to comprehend fully the novelty of the state we are in. It’ll be perilous for all of them to be in school at the same time, hence the need for phasing in. My opinion is that KCPE candidates resume physical classes as a feasibility test of sorts for the Government and the Ministry of Health. That way they can ascertain whether the protocols set would work and what to tweak. High Schools should do the same too; KCSE candidates should resume while the other students wait out to at least January.

Preparedness of educational institutions to resume learning

In as much as many fancy the proposed idea of reopening schools we need to acknowledge that the Education sector remains underfunded and poorly managed. I stay next to a primary school, now, more than a month into the idea of reopening schools I’m yet to see more infrastructure being installed therein for the health of the students. What are we waiting for? The school has been on a stasis. It remains as it was, maybe even worse.

Pictures have surfaced of schools (primary and secondary) lacking basic amenities and resources like enough teachers, classrooms, desks, books, et al. learners are forced to throng in classes and share the scanty material at their disposal, a cry of desperation. Some schools, mostly in Northern Kenya don’t even have running water, an essential utility to curb the spread of the virus. How will measures like social distancing be enforced when there are bottlenecks of this magnitude to be taken care of?

Public universities are not free of the inadequacy menace either. Oft-times, undermanned universities are compelled to have tutors hold common unit classes of spaces fraught with leaners. Some are so packed and hold up to over 500 students.

Save for the donated dispensers and hand washes/sanitizers, we can agree that the schools and the government have not done enough to protect learners. The necessary requirements should’ve been placed prior to the idea of resuming learning even being discussed. We could turn a blind eye and assume all is good but exposing leaners to such like conditions would be a ticking time bomb.

Impact of College Closure Vis-à-vis COVID 19 Impact on Student life

College closure has vastly been a foe to student life, conversely, it has been a friend to some and impacted their lives positively, no matter how miniscule.

Colleges have been a source of income for many students seeking some independence, trying to break out of their guardian’s nest. For those who simply don’t have the luxury of being supported financially by parents, relatives or well-wishers. For many running businesses like; tuck shops, kiosks, canteens etc their source of livelihood has been suddenly stripped from them. They have been forced to pack and leave. I know a student in my school who remarkably doubled up as a provider for his family back at home. His business was thriving and he could get by fine, even better than those fortunate enough to have a fiscal support system. I wonder how he copes now, bereft of his main market and the murkiness of the future ahead. It’s all down to holding on and sitting tight hopeful that the storm abates.

For those from inhabitable areas, colleges have been an escape – at times - even better than home. Colleges, are where they could be in their zen and have some peace of mind. Of this ilk have had nothing to fall back to but the homes that aren’t as conducive for them. They have been forced to put up with the detrimental conditions until the pandemic alleviates or until some respite comes their way. For planners and sticklers of schedules, closure of colleges has meant that all won’t be able to finish their semesters in time. The semester calendar has had to extend and may still do because of uncertainity.

To some, closure of colleges connoted more time in hand. For some – like me – we’ve discovered things that appeal to us, like writing and have had more time to put our soul into it. Some have embarked on businesses they usually won’t have due to insufficient time. To some this period has been a time for reflection, a time to intrapersonal confer to figure out what we actually want to do in the moment or in the future. This has also meant that we have been able to spend more time with our families which is wontedly diminished to short semester breaks.

College closure has been detrimental to student life but if we look beyond the negativity. Beyond our education stasis. There is a blessing in disguise.