A Point of No Return? Gender and child's motivation to stay in school at the time of COVID-19 pandemic

Andreea R. Torre[1] and Prof. Adriano Niquice[2]

[1] Research coordinator (qualitative), consultant, UNICEF Mozambique, andtorre@unicef.org/andreeatorre@gmail.com
[2] Professor, Universidade Pedagógica de Maputo (UPE), adrianoniquice6@gmail.com

- ➢ Why do some children stay in school while others dropout?
- ➢ Have motivation and aspiration for education (among children and caregivers) was affected by the school closure? And do chances of school re-entry differ for boys and girls in the post-COVID19 context?
- ➢ How, if at all, have primary-school boys and girls seen their daily routines been affected?

Methods

The qualitative research as an integrated component of ALDE study was conducted in the aftermath of schools opening in 2021 after a year-long closure. The sampling of the qualitative study was distributed regionally to further unpack disparities and provide a more nuanced picture of school experiences within regions. Using a contrast sampling approach, the sampling frame and results from the 2018 and 2019 ALDE surveys helped identify deviant cases (schools with the highest and lowest dropout rates in each region) in the three regions where six schools were purposely selected. Interviews, focus group discussions and child-centred visual techniques were used with school staff, community leaders, parents/caregivers, and children. The instruments developed in consultation with all national partners were adapted to capture new Covid-19 reality.

Results

The qualitative findings have captured the incompatibility of schooling and livelihood possibilities in a context of limited employment opportunities which pushes families and children to privilege informal work and "alternative economic activities" over schooling. Such reality was exacerbated during the COVID19 prolonged school closure when domestic responsibilities were added into the children's daily routine. While already before the crisis the child's time was strictly shared between school and domestic obligations, with domestic obligations being given priority, such scenarios have become even more dominant. Girls were more likely to experience increases in care and domestic work. Unlike boys, leisure and play is absent from girl's narrative about their life.

Conclusions and Implications

The qualitative study sharpens policy focus on the gendered implications of the pandemic indicating the need for tailored interventions in the provision of education. What surfaces is that, with compounding strains such as the COVID19 crisis, in economic and climate-vulnerable areas, for girls, who are often taken out of school to reduce the drain on household resources, longer periods of school interruption can mean the end of their educational journey. While boys continue their education throughout the crisis period or return after, girls' path, instead, can be one of "no return". Such result call also for increased attention to puberty as a critical life stage for girls at risk of deep and prolonged poverty, the stage that shapes gender identity and impacts school trajectory.