

RADIO EPISODE 13: SCHOOLS REOPENING FOLLOW-UP PROGRAMME

RADIO:

Start with playing the 'COVID-19 – Together we can beat it' song.

Welcome to the 13th of our 'COVID-19 – Together we can beat it' radio programmes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for our country, our communities and every one of us. Keep listening to find out how to protect yourself, your family and friends.

Call us to ask questions and share your experience. Phone us on XXX, SMS us on XXX or send a WhatsApp message on XXX to be part of this conversation.

And guess what! From this week we also have PRIZES for lucky winners! At the end of this programme, we'll ask a question about today's topic. The first listener who SMSes or WhatsApps the right answer, will get a branded cap and water bottle. So keep listening!

Over 12 weeks, we've discussed the COVID-19 disease and how to protect ourselves against it. We've also looked at the many other challenges which the COVID-19 pandemic has brought. Last week we spoke about the difficulties people with disabilities face during COVID-19. We were overwhelmed by the reactions from listeners, which made it clear that people with disability need our support now.

Two weeks ago, we discussed SCHOOLS REOPENING. There was huge interest in the topic and we couldn't take all your calls or answer your messages. Listeners raised many different issues, and so we have decided to talk about SCHOOLS REOPENING again today.

We are delighted that our expert panellists agreed to join us again, to be part of the discussion and answer questions. Thank you very much!

<Introduce panellists>

So, let's talk about it!

This has been a year of unprecedented difficulties for every single one of us, and in particular, for learners, teachers and school authorities who have the additional challenge of resuming schooling safely.

Two weeks ago, we spoke about many of the difficulties which children experienced during school closures. We also discussed the new challenges that the reopening of schools has brought. You had many questions, and our panellists helped to answer them.

Let's remind ourselves what's happening in our country, in terms of reopening schools:

<Radio hosts, you decide whether you want to share some of this information again>

In ZAMBIA

In Zambia, Grades 7, 9 and 12 went back to school first, on 1 June 2020. All other grades went back on 21 September 2020. Where space in classrooms is a challenge, learners go to school on alternate days.

In LESOTHO

- Public schools reopened on 7 September 2020, in phases for external classes only: Form C, Grade 11, LGCSE, AS and IB are open in all schools.
- Dates for opening of other classes had not been announced as of Friday 23 October 2020.
- The current academic year will go through until next March 2021, where children will be taking their exams. However, the Ministry has announced that this won't affect the 2021 academic year.

In MALAWI

- Form 4 learners went back to school on 7 September and the rest (Form 1 – 3 and primary school learners) went back on 12 October 2020.
- Records show that a high number of female learners fell pregnant during the lockdown and dropped out of school.
- The schools' focus is now more on Curriculum catch-up programmes and exams.

Let's remind ourselves of some of the burning questions and concerns that came from listeners across the country, and from neighbouring countries:

- **The massive loss of learning time** and how this is going to affect children, especially during exams.
- Many learners are suffering from **anxiety** and are finding it hard to settle back in school. They need help. *I'm very happy to tell you that we will discuss this topic next week. So make sure you tune in!*
- Some learners have to be **forced to go back to school**, because they have gotten used to being at home.
- Some **parents are not sending their children back to school**, because they assist them to sell family merchandise, harvest food, farm or do household chores. These are often the most vulnerable families, and they need help so that their children can return to schools.
- Because of a loss of income, many **families are battling to pay school funds**. These families need help from Government.
- Many learners had **challenges during the lockdown**, for example, most of them could not access online education, and many girls fell pregnant. This is affecting their futures

BUT ABOVE ALL, we're here this week to listen to you, and answer YOUR questions if we can. Start dialling now – we're ready to take your calls.

<AT END OF PROGRAMME:>

The moment that you've waited for - Our prize-winning question:

On what date did the first learners in our country <give name> go back to school after the lockdown?

SMS or WhatsApp your answer to us NOW. Also give us your name, age and where you live. We'll call out the lucky winner's name next week, and tell you how we'll get your prize to you.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO THE PANEL:

<TO THE HOST: The host and panellists should focus on answering questions from listeners, not questions in this script. But the following could be guiding questions if there is a gap in the conversation.>

Questions for education specialist:

- 1 Listeners have serious concerns about financial challenges that could force vulnerable families to keep their children out of school. This could be because they need the children's to help out at home, or because they cannot afford school fees. Do you know of this problem? And can you offer any solutions?
- 2 To what extent are schools aware of the emotional difficulties that some learners experience when they go back to school? And are they equipped to assist?

Questions for youth facilitator:

- 1 Do you know of any learners who have not been able to go back to school, because of any of the challenges mentioned above?
- 2 From your experience, how big is the challenge of unintended pregnancies during school closures? And do you have any suggestions for helping pregnant girls to cope and go back to school?

SMS TOPIC 14:

Do you or any of your friends have problems going back to school? Do your parents need you to work at home? Are they battling to pay school fees? Or are you pregnant and not sure what to do about it? Then take control and get help. Contact your FLN youth facilitator or guidance teacher. Tune in to XXXXXXXX THIS XXXXday from XXXXXXXX, to hear more. To opt out send 'stop' to XXXXX (308 characters no spaces).