

Mitigating the social impacts of the coronavirus: Continuity of learning and safety of children in West and Central Africa



UNICEF EDUCATION - COVID19 Response in WCARO region

Topline

✦ The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is **disrupting learning** for millions of children and youth. Over **29 million children and youth are directly affected by nationwide school closures in West and Central Africa**. School closures put gains made in access to education and learning at risk, especially in West and Central Africa where we have an estimated 40 Million of Out-Of-School Children aged 6-15 years old. Especially the poorest and most marginalized children and youth, especially in humanitarian and fragile state, also face **broader risks** linked to limited access to essential services like school feeding programmes, information on disease prevention, water and sanitation, and health services.

✦ There is an **urgent need to invest now** in education systems to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic including ensuring that children are able to continue learning and are protected.

Situation

The COVID-19 outbreak has been declared a pandemic and poses a very real threat to children's education in West and Central Africa. Out of the 24 Countries in WCA, 7 countries have announced nationwide school closures, for a defined number of weeks (ranging from one to at least 3 weeks), disrupting learning for millions of children and youth. . Over 29 million children are directly affected by school closures.

This situation can rapidly scale in the region with the similar wide scale closures the region faced during the Ebola virus disease outbreak in 2014 to 2016.

Despite de precedent crisis with school's closure Countries and Ministry of Education are still facing difficulties to put in place alternative and innovative solution at nationwide scale to allow the continuation of learning process for children. School closures are often linked with interrupted education and limited social interaction. For the most vulnerable children, it also limits their access to essential services like school feeding programmes, information on disease prevention, water and sanitation, and can represent high risk to be victim of abuse and violence.

UNICEF response strategies

UNICEF's approach to the COVID-19 Response is guided by the 'readiness' agenda of the Global Education Strategy, focusing on countries and children that are affected by the virus, including the most vulnerable and excluded children in the most remote hard to reach areas.:

- ✦ **Every 5-year-old** is ready for school (more 5-year old' on track to identify or name 10 letters of the alphabet and recognize numbers from 1 to 10)
- ✦ **Every 10-year-old** is able to succeed at school (more 10-year old are able to read a simple paragraph and do basic math)
- ✦ **Every 18-year-old** is ready to transition to work and life (more 18-year old have literacy/numeracy, digital, transferable and job specific skills).

UNICEF is the lead in assessing, mitigating and responding to the social impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak which includes education as a response priority. UNICEF, together with partners, is mitigating the **social impacts of the coronavirus by ensuring continuity of learning and well-being for children and youth, especially for the most vulnerable affected by the outbreak**. To respond to COVID19, UNICEF's overall approach is to: **support governments on contingency planning; ensure continuity in learning in adherence to safe school operations guidance; strengthen monitoring and evaluation and innovate to enable the continuity of learning**.

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UNICEF Country Offices will be responsible and accountable for country level COVID-19 education responses. They will coordinate and partner with local education group members (including donors, NGOs, government personnel and local civil society representatives) to ensure that every child is able to continue learning.

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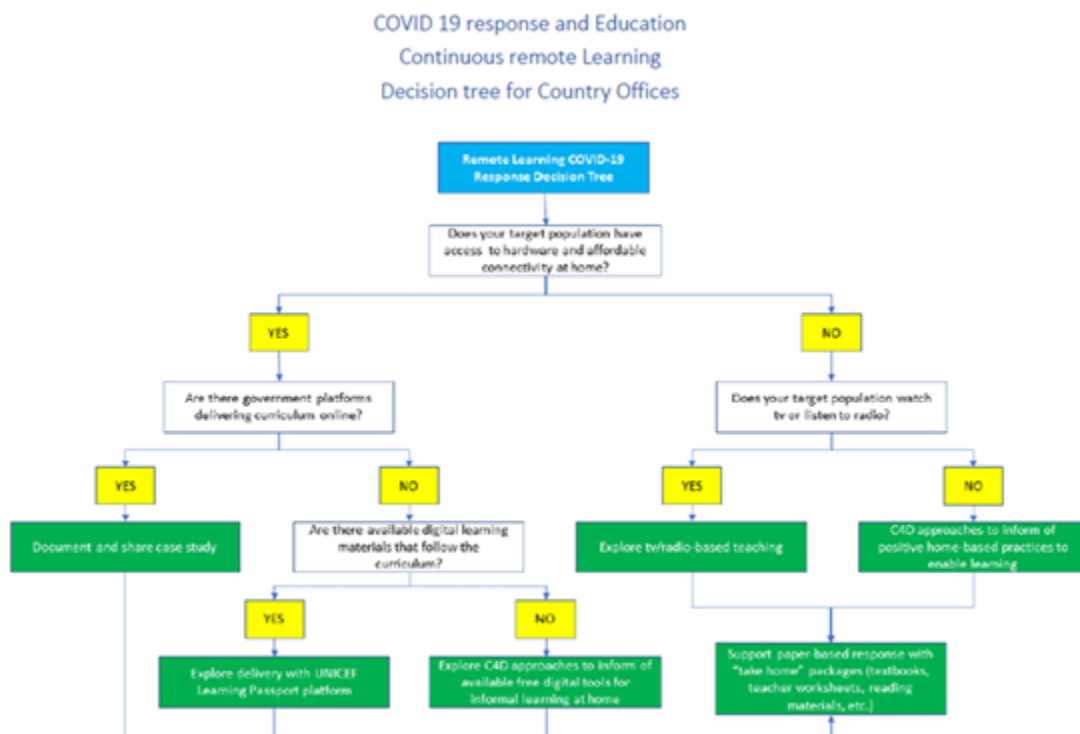
Key Intervention areas

1. Share policy and technical guidance to Country offices: Support education chief and education staff technically through the revision of Country Plan, skype call to discuss their support to Government, and sharing information and knowledge.

2. Support governments on contingency and crisis response planning, strengthening systems for efficient delivery, and monitoring and evaluation: Support Governments with education sector risk assessments, contingency and response plans. Strengthen local capacities of Ministry of Education officials to coordinate and monitor response. Advocate and support governments to prepare schools, teachers and families for school closures and school re-opening.

- [Contingency planning and preparedness](#) from the [Education Toolkit](#) (on the COVID-19 Information Platform SharePoint)

3. UNICEF Country Offices support governments to think through decisions that the government may and the pathways to proceed to arrive at those decisions. Decisions should be guided by the principle of the Best Interest of the Child and consultations with partners (on child safety, child health, special needs, etc) A decision tree below can be used by country offices to help governments arrive at their decisions on what course of action to take:



4. Jointly with Government and Partners analyses the situation and agree on possible scenarios and options at country level to guarantee that children can continue to learn Noting that every country context is unique, the following are possible scenarios to consider:

- **Scenario 1:** Schools are closed for a short period of 2-3 weeks:
 - If possible, activate inclusive distance learning (by e-learning, radio, hard copies of take-home learning packages) using available learning resources where they exist

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- If not possible to activate distance learning, suggest to the Ministry of education to prepare a letter to all schools requesting to revise the calendar at the return of children in classes to catch-up with the time lost
- Support clear government communication to local education authorities, teachers, parents and other education service providers
- Put monitoring mechanism in place.
- **Scenario 2:** Schools are closed for 1-3 months:
 - If possible, activate the distance learning or the radio program
 - If not possible to activate the distance learning or radio program, consider supporting the Ministry in activating a 2 months acceleration learning as soon the crisis is ending
 - Consider a revised calendar of final examination to August/September before the reopening of classes keeping into consideration all implication on the next school year.
 - Support clear government communication to local education authorities, teachers, parents and other education service providers
 - Put monitoring mechanism in place.
- **Scenario 3:** Schools are closed for an extended period of more than three months:
 - **Initiate a structured approach to encourage digitization of curricula, development of radio- , TV or self-learning instructional materials based on the national curriculum**
 - **Engage with government and partners to re-orient available resources to support more long-term solutions**
 - **Engage with government and National Exams Councils to decide on adjustments and communication on exams schedules;**
 - **Support clear communication with teachers, parents on continuity of learning and on exam schedules**

For the schools that did not activate any distance learning there will be needed to consider the use of an accelerated program that will allow children to catch up with the time lost. In this case a Ministerial decision need to be taken concerning the students of final exams, the BAC. Prepare a plan for the reopening of schools with an improvement of hygiene and sanitation practices and a plan for the improvement of water, hygiene and sanitation infrastructure.

- Put monitoring mechanism in place.

5. Implement safe school operations and risk communication: Operationalize the safe school guidance produced by NY, help equip schools with minimum hygiene packages, circulate live-saving information material on handwashing and recommended behaviors, and sensitize teachers and care givers. Train teachers and caregivers in providing psychosocial and mental health support to students; work with schools to prevent stigma and discrimination.

- [Guidance on safe schools' operations](#) from the [Education Toolkit](#) (on the COVID-19 Information Platform SharePoint) Include the WCARO Radio Program

6. Ensure the continuity of learning by sharing and adapting learning resources available for remote learning: Develop/adapt and share free and open digital tools to support large-scale remote learning; including educational TV and radio programmes, online content, internet-based and learning. Develop, share, print and distribute learning materials.

[See Annex 1](#)

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- [Continuity of learning](#) from the [Education Toolkit](#) (on the COVID-19 Information Platform SharePoint) Include the [WCARO Radio Program](#) set of lessons in English, French and other language in the country folder.

7. Document and Share WCAR Country Solutions, education updates and experiences: Links will be provided in share point to facilitate sharing:

- **Senegal** : Thus far, resources have been uploaded on the MoE's website to support distance learning (in digital format) as part of a 'Home-base learning initiative' (Initiative 'Apprendre à la Maison') which can be accessed here fyi: <https://education.sn/fr/article/230>
- **CAR**: Country based adapted Radio Program Series 1 **French, and Sango language** included in the [WCARO Radio Program](#).
- **Burkina Faso**: Country based adapted Radio Program Series 1 **French, and Fulfulde, Moore, Tamachek, Koronfe, Sonrai language** (not yet uploaded to the SharePoint)
- Cote d'Ivoire: UNICEF has engaged with local donors and agreed with some of them to re-allocate 10% of available financial resources to support the COVID-19 Education Response.

8. Support to monitoring and evaluation of interventions: Develop and implement simple monitoring and evaluation systems of learning activities and education response plans (to feed into country, regional and global Situation Reports and post-action evaluations).

UNICEF's role, partnerships and coordination

The COVID-19 outbreak demands an integrated response to keep children safe and learning. At the Regional level, UNICEF education section support the countries office, under the leadership of the Health section, in preparing the response plan to enhance multi-sectoral response measures and to help minimize any emergent secondary side effects of the outbreak.

A Special EiE Working Group Meeting with key partners and donors will be held on 23rd March. At the country level, UNICEF is coordinating with local authorities, UN and other partners including WHO, IFRC, CDCs, NGO partners through the UN Country Teams, under the leadership of Country Resident Coordinators.

UNICEF WCARO education Response

UNICEF WCARO education is engaging in response activities and contingency planning for COVID-19 by:

- ✦ Participating actively in the WCARO Technical Task Force COVID-19 work
- ✦ Maintaining an updated summary of [Key intervention by Country](#)
- ✦ Continue to share all programmatic material, key messages and communication materials with country offices for the public to reduce exposure and prevent COVID-19 infection in schools. (posted on education SharePoint folder, donors and partners including GPE, UN Communication Group, civil society partners)
- ✦ Develop and contextualize regional guidance, based on global guidelines (including this note)
- ✦ Continuously identify and share relevant learning resources, platforms
- ✦ Guide countries on what to do through regular updates of a Q/A as situation evolves
- ✦ Work with HQ to use existing LTAs for radio-based learning (BBC Media Action and CRF-South Africa)
- ✦ Requesting Children Radio Foundation, in collaboration with country offices to share radio learning products developed at country level, and to begin the recording in French of all script of the second series already developed.

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- ✦ Evaluating the possibility to collaborate with Bayard Press (based in Ivory Coast and Mali) to produce child friendly adapted C4D materials that can convey key messages to children (3-10 years old)
- ✦ Developing a Dashboard to monitor the numbers of schools closed and children attending school
- ✦ Support countries to develop short one-page proposals and engage with donors to support country action plans.
- ✦ Maintain contact with NY education section on:
 - Distance Learning tools, with a focus on Radio Program, and open source platform
 - Learning Passport Initiative: Encourage governments with digitized national curricula to share these. Available nationally digitized curricula are being uploaded in the Learning Passport portal ([link will be shared](#)).

Fundraising

- ✦ **French Natcom** Regional Taskforce Proposal (\$150,000) pledged. Rene (Health) coordinating.
- ✦ **French NATCOM possible COVID Response under discussion: Need short concept notes, short human-interest stories visibility materials for a possible campaign.**
- ✦ **GPE** opportunity at Global Level (\$8 million for GPE countries)
- ✦ **World Bank: Pledged \$12 billion, will go to governments. Ensure that UNICEF work plans signed with governments include COVID response. Leverage government and WB resources to finance UNICEF/AWP interventions.**
- ✦ **ECW – Possibility for Re-programming of existing FER and MYRP funds**, for the countries that already have the funds. ECW's priority is first and foremost, to ensure that we support existing country partners under the FER and MYRP windows to quickly re-programme and re-orientate their efforts in line with specific coordinated, country-level measures and priorities, which are aligned with the national response strategy to combat the COVID-19 impact on the education sector. ECW grantees across both funding windows can submit re-programming requests based on the attached template and the ECW Secretariat will expeditiously review the requests when received. Please send any re-programming requests to info@un-ecw.org. ECW is committed to ensuring you have the resources necessary to respond immediately at country level to minimize the impact on education as a result of COVID-19 for children and adolescents who are already affected by crises so they can continue their education. Here the document for the [re-programming](#).
- ✦ Engagements are regional level with donors (ongoing): **Need short one-page notes** from countries.

Funding Requirements

Funds are urgently required to manage the education impacts of the coronavirus on children and youth.

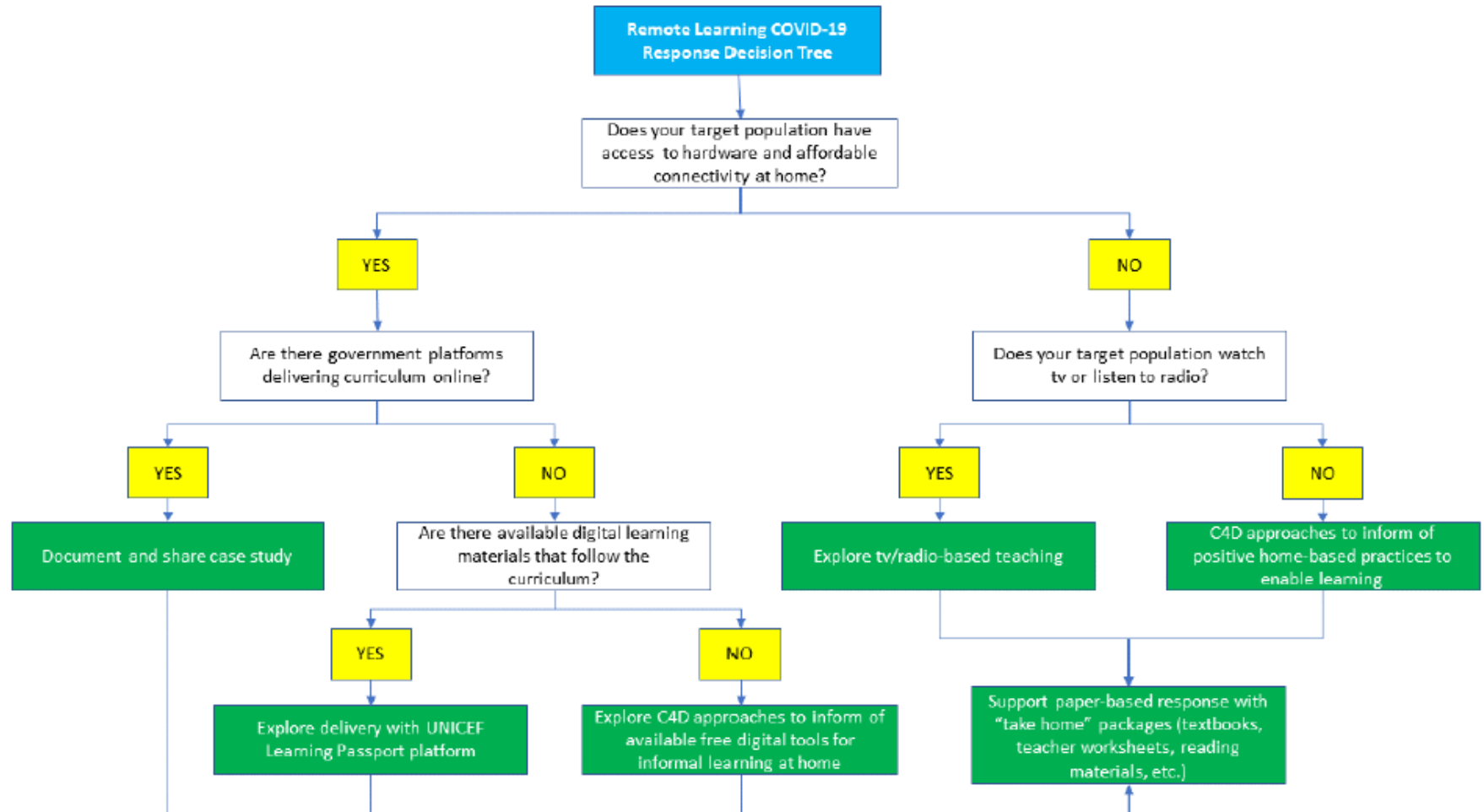
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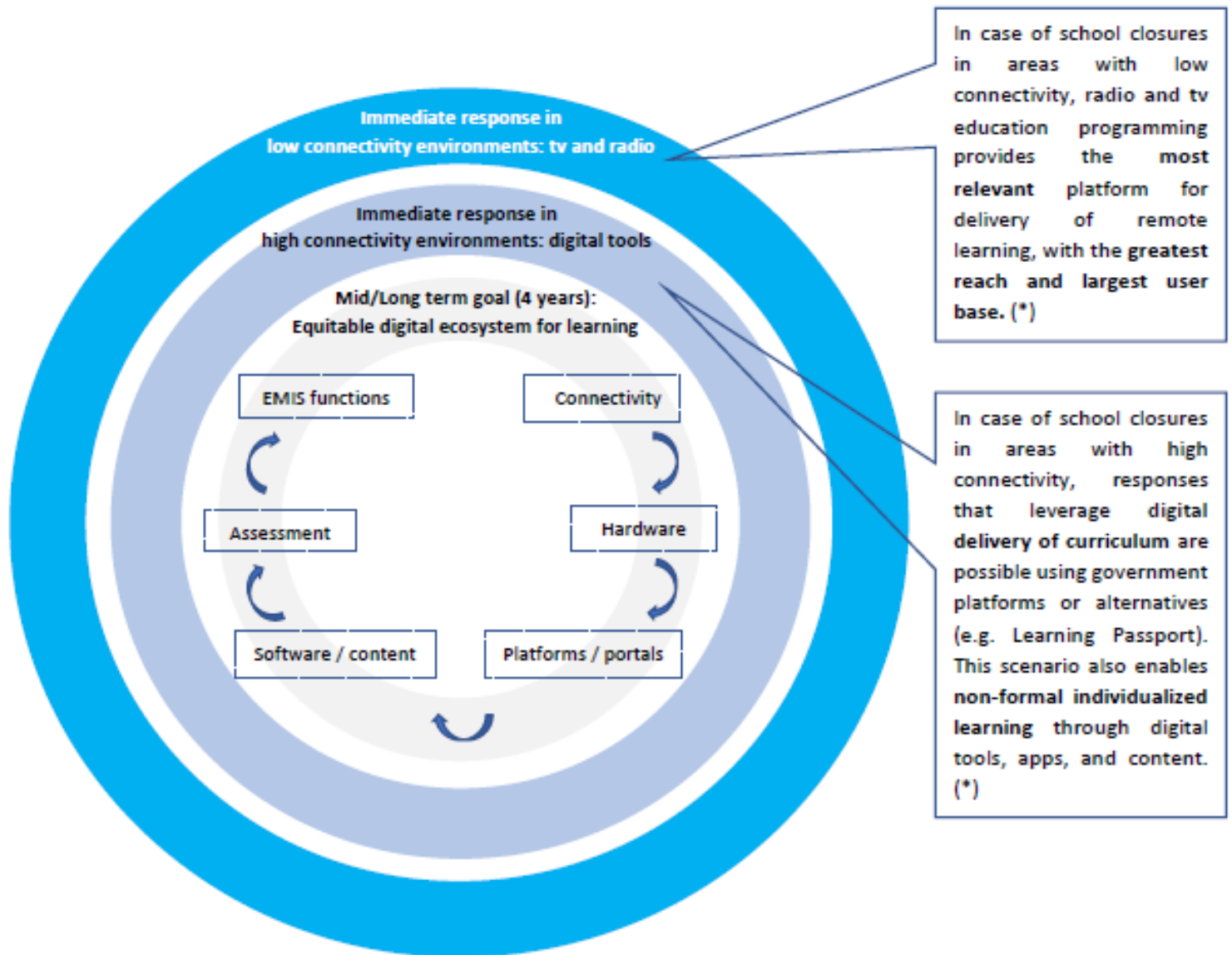
ANNEX 1

COVID 19 response and Education Continuous remote Learning Decision tree for Country Offices



Examples of free digital tools that provide reading materials, learning applications for foundational skills and languages, and platforms with diverse content can be found by clicking or entering this URL in your browser: <https://bit.ly/2vXnnUX>

COVID 19 response and remote learning:
applicable technologies in different contexts and timeframes



(*) In all scenarios and contexts, paper-based materials may be part of the education response with “take home” packages (textbooks, teacher worksheets, reading materials, etc.)