

How has COVID affected Mozambique?

Talking are: Dr Sarita Henriksen from the Pedagogical University of Maputo, Roger González Margalef from ISET One World University, and Eeva Lehtonen from the School of Professional Teacher Education of JAMK University of Applied Sciences

Intro: (happy music playing) Welcome to this podcast series on Solving the Global Learning Crisis. We'll discover how Ethiopia, Nepal and Mozambique are reshaping their higher education programs in response to the changing demands of the 21st century.

Eeva: Today we discuss how our Mozambican partner, university staff members and students have coped with the pandemic. Upon recording this episode on 31st of August, Finnish higher education institutions, including JAMK are slowly returning to normal teaching practices. In Mozambique, there have been many restrictions in place quite until recently. As for education, face-to-face lessons were finally re-allowed allowed last Friday at all levels of education. Sarita and Roger, what exactly changed last Friday regarding education and your institutions?

Roger: Yeah, thank you for the opportunity. I can briefly say that that our institution where I work, ISET One World, at the moment we are in full swing of activities because we are located in a rural area, far from Maputo, the city. So the law of Mozambique that was applying up to last Friday to all educational centers in major towns didn't affect us directly in our face-to-face interactions. So when the institutions at the major towns reopened again yesterday, Monday, we just continue with our normal activities because we are not within the area of that law. However, this doesn't mean that we are doing all activities as we could do normally before the pandemic.

Roger continues: I also feel that the this question of opening and closing the school because the coronavirus pandemic has different peaks, along last year and also this year – ups and downs – it can affect very much the mental and social conception for the students at all levels of going to school, re-opening and staying home again. That is quite a mental challenge. The biggest challenge also for my institution during 2020, especially when half of the of the year all schools and many other public places were closed nationwide was that we had to transfer all teaching and learning activities from face-to-face into distance or online form.

Roger continues: So we started reopening late in 2020. In 2021, new outbreaks of the disease have stopped the organisation of mass gatherings and bigger activities. So at the moment, face-to-face lessons are happening [at ISET One World]. Students who are in our 4th year – [which is the] last year of the degree – have gone to their teaching practice in other provinces: in the South of the country also in the center and north of Mozambique. They went in July and they will stay there until November. They are doing research for their final paper which will be defended orally in March 2022. Regarding the distance Learning Department where I work, we continued with new classes four times a year: in March, May, September and November. We also spreading [to] out all provinces of Mozambique and also in Angola where we have many distance learning students. And we are growing our numbers of students amid the pandemic.

Roger continues: We also have expansion plans in the distance Learning Department. One of these plans is the approval of a Master's degree in Pedagogy and Didactics, which has been done partially face-to-face before the pandemic – half face-to-face and half online. But now we are just waiting

approval from INET, the National Institute for Distance Education in Mozambique, so that we will be able to launch it as a completely online master's degree probably by the end of this year 2021. That is basically the situation at the moment. Thank you.

Eeva: Thank you Roger. It is true that Mozambique is a big country and there are regional differences also regarding covid and COVID restrictions. And how about Sarita, your university is located in the capital of Maputo. What exactly changed last Friday regarding your institution?

Sarita: Good morning Eeva, good morning Roger and good morning to all of those listening to us. With the presidential speech that was held the last Friday, the decision was taken that all education, primary, secondary and tertiary should resume, and for my institution in particular, it means that we can now re-open fully, and the night shift students can also go back to university classes because the curfew has now been extended from 21 o'clock or 20 o'clock to 22 o'clock. So it means that they can resume their classes in the night shift as well.

Sarita continues: It also means that our students can go back to the teaching practice. That had been completely cancelled because they did not have the possibility in 2020 and 2021 to go the schools and do their teaching practice, it also means that for those students who are doing the research, they can now go the primary and secondary schools and do their field work, and conduct their data. The decision the presidential decision also means that we can now organize seminars with up to 50 people at a time. This is great news, especially considering that because COVID caught us all by surprise, and even though distance learning was one of the teaching modalities [already before], of the teachers were not really confident at first with using the virtual platforms in order to conduct their teaching, and specially not in a long run like it happened now.

Eeva: OK, thank you so the way that I hear it, it seems that your institutions COVID policies are almost back to normal – or could you describe your institutions policies a bit?

Sarita: When the pandemic happened, the pedagogical university, like all other institutions in Mozambique, introduced the COVID protocol, meaning that before you enter any of our buildings, you had to measure your temperature to check that you didn't have any fever and you had to sanitize your hands. Those things are still going to remain. And we had identified a COVID focal point; a staff member who was responsible for contacting all the faculties and sectors and find out whether any staff members had fallen sick, and then to make sure that if someone was feeling sick, if it was COVID or not, if they had tested positive or not , and to make sure that they stayed home for the during the period of their recovery. So even though we are back to face-to-face teaching, the COVID protocols are going to remain because the virus is not gone yet. We are still going to measure students' and teachers' temperature when they come into the campus. We are still going to make sure that no one comes to classes while they're not feeling well because it could be anything.

Eeva: Thank you for the clarification. Roger, would you like to comment on this regarding your institution, do you have a COVID protocol?

Roger: It is actually more or less the same that Sarita was saying. When the pandemic had its major outbreak, we had to create new protocols both from what the government was saying, Ministry of Health, but also what we could produce for our own reality: where we are and how we distribute ourselves in the classrooms and different spaces we have at our premises. For staff and students, it was a big challenge to get adapted with all COVID protocols. And regarding teaching and learning it, it

depended very much on E-learning capacities of each school and also for us, and each student and each family.

Roger continues: And then we had the second challenging moment that it was as our school. Our institution has a boarding place. Students sleep there, eat there. When in August/ September 2020, students came back from home to the school, that was an even more major challenge to make all the COVID protocols according to what the government needed. Because we have many inspections from health authorities. And also we really had to make them wash their hands, make a line with a 2 meter separation for getting the food and sleeping in rooms: maximum three people, four people, when it was intended for six people, for example. Also, the lessons were done in major big classrooms or outside in corridors when there when it was not raining. This kind of possibilities had to be taken care off, and it was a big challenge.

Roger continues: I can also comment something at the level of children. Even if in our school we are working at higher learning with adult people, as we know as we can see of primary schools in the surrounding area, the problems are even bigger because for children of primary schools, they have lost one full year of studies. And later on, when lessons were programmed to be also on Saturdays, many families could not send their children in school on Saturdays. They have other obligations at home. And as the pandemic had different outbreaks, ups and downs, we have to stop once again and until now, in especially in urban areas. So at the social or mental level, besides the study programs, many children have been kind of involved in an atmosphere of laziness, forgetting when they have to go to school and when they have to go back, or do their homework. Simply they have lost the normal calendar, or the normal rhythm of activities.

Sarita: One addition, I would like to mention one initiative that was taken by my colleagues from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics where we have a biology and chemistry department. In 2020, they took the initiative of producing a local university-made alcohol gel. And it worked as a sanitizer, and it was a very successful experience. It not only showed that we are able to do things in a proactive way, but it also shows that we have the capacity to respond to an emerging crisis when it happens and this was an added value. And supporting what Roger has just said, yes, there was a problem, especially with the primary school children. Because they kind of lost the pace of studying because overall, primary school teachers are not really prepared to teach, to give online classes and they do not have the means. Most of them do not own a computer and most of the primary schools do not have, a let's say a library with a computer; a Resource Center, and they do not even have, in some cases, access to the internet, do not have even electrical power. I'm talking about schools for example in the rural area.

Sarita continues: We would say that 2020 and part of 2021 can be considered as lost years in academic terms. We are still going to measure at the end of 2021 to see whether we managed to achieve anything academically; what are the levels of success and failure. But I don't have that many hopes. Because the difficulties of navigating with the online platforms, the digital platforms occurred not only at the level of primary and secondary school teachers, but even within the university context. A few of my colleagues are quite comfortable with MS Teams and other platforms, but the majority have neither the skills nor the means to deliver. And let's say our student populations come from the very vulnerable groups and they have lots of needs. Very few of them use computers or own computers and the libraries were completely closed. But I should highlight our teachers' ability to kind of reinvent: WhatsApp for example it's a common means of communication. Some of the teachers resorted to WhatsApp. I don't know exactly how it worked, but this was a very important tool in delivering content to the students. One

more implication of Friday's presidential speech is that we can now go back to giving face-to-face exams. One of the struggles of my colleagues was: How are we going to give online virtual tests? How can we make sure that it's the students themselves responding? But now everyone can deliver the exams with a peace of mind that students are not using other people to help them writing the exams. Thank you.

Eeva: I think your comments showed so well the huge workload, challenges, but also some solutions that COVID-19 brought along. Not only regarding teaching and learning, but all the other measures that the schools had to invent and start applying. So in this situation, how are your staff and students coping with the situation?

Roger: I can start trying to resume what is happening at our school. Each one of the of the staff members and students have a different reality as we understand because at some point they have never had an access to e-learning platforms or doing the studies on the distance, and to add more some more difficulty to the point is that when we had to send our students to their homes to continue studying online, because of a government law, we really didn't have the time to instruct them how to use e-learning platforms that we actually have in our school.

Roger continues: But we didn't have time to give the full instructions face-to-face so that they could continue studying from home, the whole instructions had to be delivered by the teachers in the distance in Zoom or WhatsApp discussions like we are having right now [in this interview]. But the conversation we are having right now is between three people and the class conversations or the class instructions were made by more than 20, 25 or 30 people. So that was a big challenge for the teachers to interact with each of them and it created a different gap between people who could follow the lessons and who could deliver the work, and people who could not deliver, could not follow anything of their supposed activities to be done. But now as we are back in the school, things are starting to get back to normal. And for those of the staff members who have families surrounding, we had to give some forced holidays. So they went for 30 days, which then turned into 60 days, two months in total, and then they came back with COVID prevention distance and measures. So we could continue. Nowadays we are not so strong in preventing people in and out of the school. People can come in and out so we can have meetings with health authorities or from external teachers who come once a week, but still it's a challenge to make it in proper safety measures.

Roger continues: We are not adding new days, for example Saturdays, because our teaching and learning activities are done 24 hours, seven days a week. The online platforms are always available and the teachers are always available to solve questions, to have a time with the students as we are living in a boarding place. But still it was something that was happening also before the pandemic we have to cope with that situation and be ready full-time for the student. At some point there was a small conflict with some of the guardians and the parents of the students who didn't want to keep paying the same amount of the school fees. Because if the students were eating and sleeping at home, doing the studies from the distance, why should they keep paying the full amount for a boarding school? But finally, we had an agreement that the teaching and learning process is done online just because of the special situation of COVID pandemic, but the full availability of teachers is the same as the as the if the activities were happening face-to-face. So we reached the agreement. That's the situation. Now we are we are coping with new things.

Sarita: I would like to comment on the how students and staff are coping with the situation. In fact, the management of the university in 2020, and I'm talking about the pedagogical department, the rectorate, the Scientific Directorate and the in coordination with the distance education and Distance Learning

Center, organized training and capacity building sessions on the various platforms for the staff, especially on the Moodle, which is a platform that's widely used with the distance learning... also the MS teams, and it was a good initiative because it helped some of those teachers who didn't have any clue about how to navigate the digital to develop the basic skills and to perfect such skills in order to teach.

Sarita continues: And I would like to go back to something that Roger mentioned that has to do with the conflicts or the disputes related to paying fees. In his case were mostly like accommodation fees and tuition fees. We are a public State University, but still our students pay a symbolic fee. So what happened in 2020 is that both public universities and private universities were struggling with having students paying their tuition fees because they were saying: "OK, we don't go to school, we don't go to university and we are just having a few hours a day of distance learning. Why are we supposed to pay a full tuition fee?" And this was very controversial and at that time, universities were told to reduce their tuition fees. But then I think they are back to normal to charging 100%. But what I see, especially in the post graduate courses, in the master courses that we have, is that – I am the director of the master course in translation – I see that most of my MA students have not been able to meet their financial obligations since 2020 because they somehow lost their sources of income, and how can we force them to pay what they don't have? So what we decided at that level of the university management is that we are not going to impose any penalty. We are going to let time pass until we go back to some kind of normality until they start making money once again and then we are 100% sure that when those students want to defend, or to get their diplomas, they will have to get the sources somewhere in order to pay their debts. But it is a complicated situation.

Eeva: you already mentioned something about primary secondary school children, but if we talk a bit more about that: how are those children and maybe their families coping with the situation?

Sarita: It's not easy because there were there have been lots of reports of primary to school children staying home because classes had been interrupted, and instead of really staying home, we would see them running out in the streets, and in fact they were much more vulnerable, not going to school than if they had been to school because they would just roam around the markets, the streets, etc.

Sarita continues: And in one of the presidential speeches and also staff from the Ministry of Health have been kind of persuading the parents to keep an eye on their kids because on the part of the parents were more or less relaxed. And we also have to recognize that not all the kids live with their parents, biological parents, some live with their grandparents, some live...I don't know in what kinds of families and then these thing of watching for the kids was not there. It was a difficult year in in many respects, both for the children themselves, and also for the parents. And that's why the Minister of Health, as they said, had to make these campaigns to persuade the people that this is not holidays, you are out of school in order to prevent the spread of the virus. But being home doesn't mean that you're supposed just to play around as if you were on holidays. Roger, maybe you can add up to this?

Roger: The situation of the primary school children is quite sensitive and complicated because they are not adult people who can take care of their own education by themselves. If they are told to go home and keep on studying on e-learning platforms, how do they do that? That is a big challenge. They are not really ready to decide by themselves and we also have to consider that many of the parents, guardians or grandparents, whoever they are living with, they are also not capable of providing a computer, tablet, not even pen, paper to do some basic activities. So sometimes it's difficult to tell children to go home to avoid spreading the disease that other people are speaking about somewhere, and tell them to stay home doing what?

Roger continues: If they don't really get the point of staying home so they go to do some other small works, especially in town, but also in the rural areas, children go to the markets to help their grandparents to cut the wood to buy things in the market to do daily activities that they cannot do in the everyday life because they are in the school. So this avoiding being in school, it keep them away from *studies*. So Sarita was mentioning almost a full year or 1,5 years can be considered last for many children. And then more children will come for next generation next year. We can expect an extra number, a big number of children who have the right to study, but there are no physical premises and no teachers to take care of the education. That is more or less the situation, and let's see this solution of having lessons on Saturdays, which has been in place... I'm not even sure if still goes on, but many schools during the beginning of 2021 they had this policy of teaching on Saturdays. But there is also a challenge because of transport for students to go, for teachers also to go as they have duties at home on the weekends. So that's a bit how it's going. It's a big challenge and we are very far away from digitalising education all over Mozambique.

Eeva: Thank you so much for commenting on this. Difficult situation and the reality and the consequences of that kind of decisions. How about teachers then? Teachers around the world were required to convert to online teaching almost overnight as we just discussed. As teacher education institutions, have you been able to support the working teachers during the pandemic?

Sarita: It's a difficult question, but we have to agree, at least Roger and I have to agree, that it has not been an easy situation for our teachers, not for the university or high education staff; not the least for the secondary school or the primary school teachers. First of all, as I said earlier, there was a widespread the lack of skills in the use of the virtual platforms as a permanent means or a permanent platform for the delivery of teaching. With a few exceptions, of course for those teachers who had been involved in distance learning for over a long period maybe this didn't come as a shock – they just had to continue doing what they had been doing for years, but for the fore most of the teachers it was a process of learning, a process of re-adaptation, and a quick one, to a completely different situation. And because they were not exactly comfortable with online teaching, there have been lots of concerns to the extent to which they were really meeting their teaching objectives. The extent to which students were really assimilating new content. Roger?

Roger: Well, the challenge is big also for teachers here. So I can say that at the very initial level, what we did at the beginning of the pandemic was to enhance the use of mobile data, phones, tablets, both for teachers and also for students. So they could be available to continue studying when sent home, even if they didn't have the full mastering of the of the e-learning platforms, they could have access to Skype, WhatsApp or Moodle platforms so we could keep on contacting or even talking on the phone. Just having a small contact to be directed or linked to the school.

Roger continues: For distance learning students, I can say it was an advantage because our students knew from the beginning before the pandemic how to use the online platforms. They were very used to solve these tasks and interact with the with the teachers and the school at any time. But one question is that both for the face-to-face students who are sent home, and also for the distance learning students, there was a need to adapt or readapt study materials and study tasks, including exams forms. I can say [there was] a different atmosphere when they didn't have to go around doing physical research, physical actions contacting other communities which was completely banned along the pandemic. That was an extra work for us at the school to produce or re-adapt new study tasks. I can say no new practicalities were required into the daily duties for our distance learning students regarding their studies. But this contact with the communities, either for the face-to-face residential students and the distance learning

students, it was and it is still today nowadays being re-adapted because our study materials were designed for group work, or activities where they could do research physically on the field but now they couldn't. They had to do individual activities or research interviews, inquires on the phone on a WhatsApp platform, or messages. We did it, following our curriculum and the general directives of our courses. But of course we lost something...

Roger continues: One more thing I have to say is that in our school in our face-to-face program we include an international travel where we [travel by] bus around different countries surrounding Mozambique, but that was completely impossible in 2020, also in 2021. We are sending our students to teaching practice. Now, they are out in teaching practice inside Mozambique. We have not even discussed about going out outside the country. Maybe next year. But that is the main challenge, so this kind of external or international experiences have to be also conducted online. Our students have been completely directed to cooperate with the ADPP in other countries and also public or private institutions in other countries in southern African countries, but also around the world. It is one benefit that we have taken from the pandemic that as we can contact people online. It is enough to have a contact of someone in Finland in China, in Brazil... so we can have a Skype or zoom meeting with the people that we could never reach a face-to-face or in our normal program of busing the continent as we do in southern Africa. That's our re-adapting, we are doing our best.

Sarita: let's hope for better days and that those better days will come soon and that the virus will go where it came from. We miss we miss the past somehow.

Roger: Yes, and I actually wanted to add on last sentence regarding this same point that we are missing some things that we used to do in the past. It could be very nice to go back to what we were doing... traveling and living in direct contact with communities, but let us hope and let's do all our maximum whatever in Finland, in Mozambique, or governments or whatever institutes... [But] we cannot consider that, just if the pandemic would end today or tomorrow, everything will be perfect because, many students, primary school secondary, they are still missing transport to school; they are still missing school materials to read and write. There is a long way to go, to improve, but the pandemic of course made it more impossible even for some people. But yeah, that's let's hope things will get better.

Eeva: That was a good point. Thank you again for this interview.

Sarita: Yeah, thank you very much. For this opportunity.

Roger: Thank you so much

This podcast series is produced in the higher education Institutions Institutional Cooperation Instrument HEI ICI programme, with the support of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

www.jamk.fi/globalteacherdu



Ministry for Foreign
Affairs of Finland