



Strengthening Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Pre- and In-service Teachers in Africa: Progress Report

November 2023

In partnership with



Training for Teacher Educators and School Leaders in Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda

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Abstract

Mental health and well-being have received increasing recognition following COVID-19, yet persistent challenges continue to exist within the education sector and such support is often not sufficiently given to teachers.

UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA) has been partnering with the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office for Southern Africa since 2020 to build resilience and strengthen mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for teachers and teacher educators in selected sub-Saharan African countries. The project is anchored within the framework of UNESCO's regional programme "Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future (O3)", which envisions a sub-Saharan Africa where all adolescents and young people attain positive health, education, and gender equality outcomes. This synthesis report summarises the progress made since the outset of the initiative.

Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 had a profound and detrimental impact on the education system globally. School closures affected over 1.6 billion children and youth worldwide, leading to psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, frustration, and stress. Girls and young women were particularly affected, facing additional responsibilities and higher rates of psycho-emotional threat. Protracted and recurring conflicts and violence in the region further impacted mental health, especially among youth. Undoubtedly, the pandemic deepened existing learning and health crises in sub-Saharan Africa, with preventable health issues and gender-based violence becoming critical risk factors that exacerbate mental health conditions.

Mental health and well-being have received increasing recognition following COVID-19; however, persistent challenges continue to exist within the education sector. Sub-Saharan African countries remain facing challenges in addressing those needs due to poor mental health literacy, stigma, and weak community-level capacity. Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence concerning the interconnectedness of education, health, and well-being. The role of education in promoting and protecting the mental health and psychosocial well-being of learners is immense. The physical environment of schools can promote the health, the well-being of learners and teachers, and create a conducive learning atmosphere. While the teachers' psychological and mental health is of utmost importance as it indirectly affects the learners they teach. Yet, the most common themes around health and education in national policies remain limited to school nutrition, sexuality education, and physical education (UNESCO, UNICEF & WFP. (2022)¹. According to WHO (2021)², school-based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is available in only 72 out of 142 countries (51%), of which 70% are in high-income countries. It is evident that a learning environment that is safe, supportive, inclusive, and free from violence and bullying positively impacts not only learners' mental health and overall well-being but also their learning outcomes.

Most importantly, **teachers play a vital role in providing support**. However, **teachers themselves are also in need of MHPSS** today. Provided the negative impact that COVID-19 has imposed on the education system, UNESCO IICBA assessed the psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on in-service teachers, as well as capacity gaps, innovations, and various strategies that governments are employing to address these challenges. The study revealed that **depression had the most felt psychological impact affecting a considerable 31.0% of teachers and 33.0% of teacher educators**, followed by anxiety which affected 24.6% of teachers and 25.5% of teacher educators. The study further indicated that 20.8% of teachers and 19.9% of teacher educators were experiencing stress.

Based on the findings, **UNESCO IICBA has developed a contextualized sub-regional strategy** to guide countries on specific interventions that will address mental health issues in the education sector, **as well as a regional training guide** as a tool to enhance the competencies of school leaders and teacher educators in psychosocial support (PSS) for teachers. The guide was piloted and improved through regional and country-level training in **Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda**, in collaboration with the UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa, the National Commissions for UNESCO, and the Ministries of Education. This report reflects on the trajectory of the three-year initiative and summarises its key achievements and ways forward.



Figure 1: Project countries

¹ UNESCO, UNICEF & WFP. (2022). *Ready to learn and thrive: school health and nutrition around the world; highlights*. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381965>

² WHO. (2021). *Mental Health Atlas 2020*. Geneva.

Key Activities

1. Assessment of Psychosocial Impact of COVID-19 and Psychosocial Needs

To understand the psychosocial impact that COVID-19 brought on teachers, teacher educators, and learners in selected sub-Saharan African countries, as well as their support needs, UNESCO IICBA conducted a study. The analysis specifically aimed to:

- Assess the psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on in-service teachers, teacher educators, and learners.
- Identify and rank the causes of the negative impact of COVID-19 on in-service teachers, teacher educators, and learners by their severity.
- Identify innovative strategies governments are employing to address these challenges.
- Identify challenges school leaders, teachers, and teacher educators may face while providing health and psychosocial support (PSS) to teachers and learners.
- Assess the PSS needs of in-service teachers, teacher educators, and learners.
- Provide recommendations for resilience development, infection control, and provision of PSS to teachers, teacher educators, and learners during and after the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Develop high-level advocacy and policy briefs for Member States, Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) and other partners based on the key findings of the study.

The study adopted a sequential explanatory design, collecting and analysing quantitative data first and then using qualitative data guided by the quantitative findings. **A total of 2,545 respondents from 14 sub-Saharan African countries participated** in quantitative data collection, consisting of **1,072 teachers, 141 teacher educators, 1,182 school leaders, and 150 inspectors/government officials**. Additionally, 15 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in four countries, namely Cote d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Lesotho, and Rwanda, involving teacher educators (two FGDs), teachers (two FGDs), school leaders (two FGDs), inspectors/government officials (three FGDs), learners (three FGDs), parents (two FGDs), and experts (one FGD).

The study identified the psychological and social impacts of COVID-19 on teachers and educators, with **depression and anxiety being the most prevalent psychological impacts** among teachers and teacher educators.

More males than females were affected by these psychological impacts. Additionally, these impacts were faced by more teachers and teacher educators working in rural areas than by those working in urban areas, and they were mostly experienced by secondary school teachers and teacher educators rather than primary school teachers and teacher educators.

Figure 2: Psychological Impact

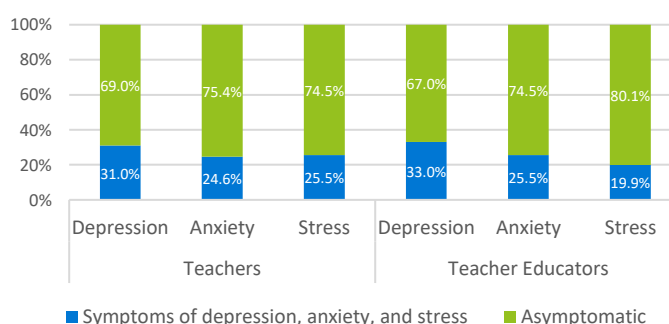
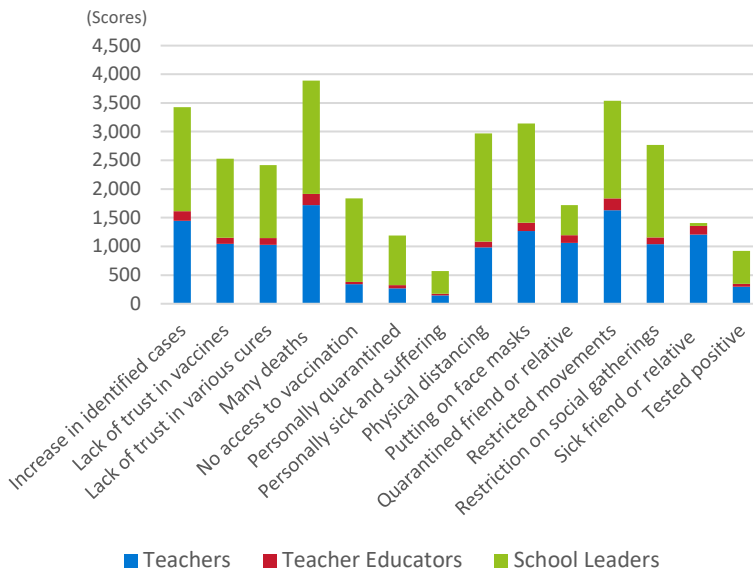


Figure 3: Factors contributing to the negative impact of COVID-19

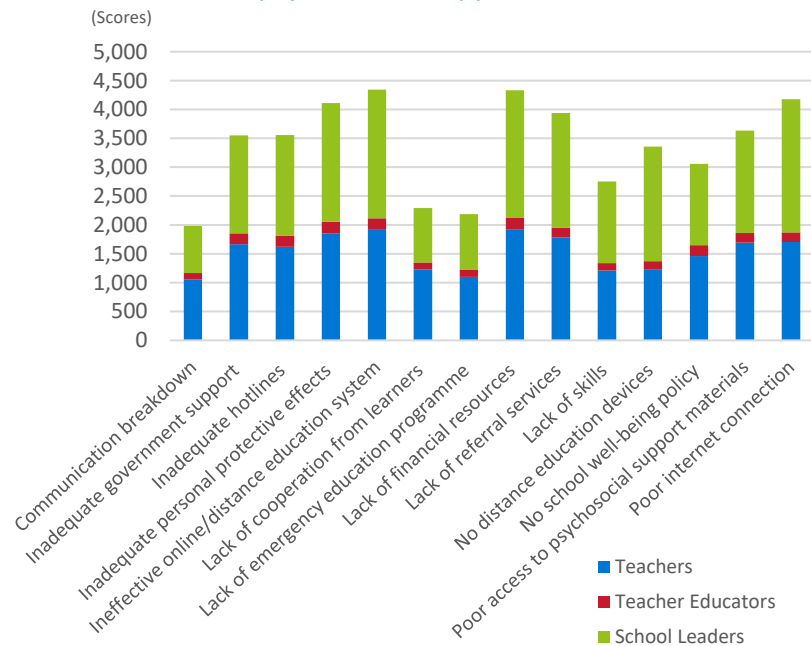


In terms of factors contributing to the negative impact of COVID-19, "many deaths", "restricted movements", and "increase in identified cases" were the biggest contributors among the surveyed teachers, teacher educators, and school leaders. Qualitative data identified several positive impacts as well, including improved resilience, communication skills, ICT skills, and the introduction of blended learning. Regarding the challenges in providing

psychosocial support, the ineffectiveness of the online/distance education system, lack of financial resources, and inadequate protection were the most repeated responses. Meanwhile, **innovative strategies** employed by governments to address these challenges included **communication tools, joint task forces, and hybrid learning modalities**. Recommendations made by the participants included "Well-equipped counseling units", "Academic counseling sessions, workshops, and specialized therapies", "Adjustment of the curriculum and academic calendar", "Diverse learning platforms", and "Provision of personal protective tools and vaccination".

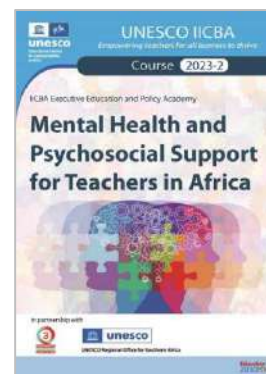
Based on the findings, the study provided policy recommendations related to **building resilience, revising curricula, increasing education budgets, developing inclusive recovery policies, and fostering community involvement in education**. The study concluded by emphasizing the **importance of capacity and resilience development to prepare for future pandemics and crises**.

Figure 4: Challenges faced in provision of psychosocial support



2. Development of A Regional Training Guide

Based on the assessment of the psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on teachers and teacher educators, as well as their psychosocial needs, UNESCO IICBA developed a training guide to strengthen MHPSS for teachers in Africa, in collaboration with numerous partners and individual experts. The guide was first drafted by Aha Psychological Services with technical and editorial support from members of the working group. Then, it was piloted in the project countries to further refine the contents.



3. Pilot Training

The draft guide was piloted through face-to-face training in Eswatini and Ethiopia and online training in Kenya and Malawi. Each training was coordinated in cooperation with the Ministries of Education and UNESCO offices to capacitate Ministry of Education officials, teacher educators, school leaders, and teachers on MHPSS for teachers.

Country	Dates	Trainees
Eswatini (in-person)	29/11/2022 - 1/12/2022	31 people (9 males; 22 females) from the Ministry of Education, teacher training colleges, and primary and secondary schools
Ethiopia (in-person)	8/12/2022 - 12/12/2022	28 people (24 males; 4 females) from the Ministry of Education, teacher training colleges, and secondary schools
Kenya (online)	13/12/2022 - 17/12/2022	24 people (10 males; 14 females) from the Ministry of Education, the Teacher Union, teacher training colleges, and secondary schools
Malawi (online)	19/12/2022 - 23/12/2022	16 people (8 males; 8 females) from teacher training colleges and primary and secondary schools

The pilot training provided several **lessons**:

- Participants applauded the training as highly relevant and timely;
- The focus on “teachers” well-being was well appreciated by participants;
- Heterogenous profiles of participants from different institutions and levels enabled active participation and experience sharing;
- Virtual training faced challenges due to limited/unstable internet connection, yet online training enables access to teachers without contributing to absenteeism;
- Psychosocial support techniques/skills need additional/ample time for practice;
- Recommendations made for a refresher training or course; and
- More detailed and country-specific action plans with clear objectives are needed.



Face-to-face training in Eswatini



Online training in Kenya

4. Regional Master Training

In response to the needs raised during the pilot training, regional training was held from 8 to 11 May 2023 in Johannesburg, South Africa. The regional training aimed **to enhance the capacity of master trainers** with advanced facilitation skills needed to effectively use the training guide to further cascade and institutionalize MHPSS services for teachers. **A total of 44 people** (six master trainers per country, plus UNESCO staff) **from Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, and Uganda** joined the workshop to support the scaling up of the revised guide. Each country team developed national action plans as a way forward.



5. Country-level Training

Following the regional training, three country-level training workshops were organized in Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda. The sessions were designed and led by the national master trainers who participated in the regional training and were supported by the UNESCO team and the Aha Psychological Services team through a series of consultation meetings.

Country	Dates	Trainees
Kenya (in-person)	19/6/2023 - 23/6/2023	26 people (13 males; 13 females) from the Ministry of Education, the Teacher Service Commission, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, Kenya Institute of Special Education, the Teacher Union, and universities.
Malawi (in-person)	26/6/2023 - 30/6/2023	28 people (12 males; 16 females) from the Ministry of Education Directorate of Teacher Education and Development, MoE Regional Divisions, teacher training colleges, and primary and secondary schools

Uganda (in-person)	26/6/2023 - 30/6/2023	26 people (11 males; 15 females) from the Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Health, teacher training colleges, and the Teacher Union.
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Each training took place for five days. The structure of the training followed that of the regional training, which corresponds to the training guide, cases and discussion examples were contextualized.

Day 1	Setting the Pace <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Context analysis on mental health and psychosocial well-being issues for teachers Recap on the gains from the pilot workshop on the MHPSS guide Introduction to psychosocial support models and principles
Day 2	Training Session Preparation and Demonstration #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content sequencing and effective facilitation methods Group psychological first aid and practice Advanced psychosocial support and counseling skills #1
Day 3	Training Session Preparation and Demonstration #2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced psychosocial support and counseling skills #2 Mapping of social capital and community resources for psychosocial support Facilitation skills in the delivery of MHPSS in educational institutions
Day 4	Contextualisation and Integration of MPHSS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating networks and referral system on MHPSS Identification of entry points for scaling up the use of the guide at the national level Action planning and workshop evaluation
Day 5	Teach Back Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstration of acquired training skills Presentation on the plan for cascading and implementation of MHPSS

Lessons learned from the country-level training of trainers include:

- The package of training may require more time because of its intensity;
- A checklist would help in practicing counselling;
- Facilitators need to incorporate localized example cases from their own context, including relevant visual aids and factual figures;
- Gender-based violence (GBV) has different levels of intensity and some trainees raised challenges in imagining real cases of GBV (especially in emergencies), understanding what constitutes GBV, and internalizing the intention of each activity;
- An already-prepared relatable scenario would help facilitate role-play activities; and
- There is a need for understanding the legal policies that govern counselling.



Training in Kenya



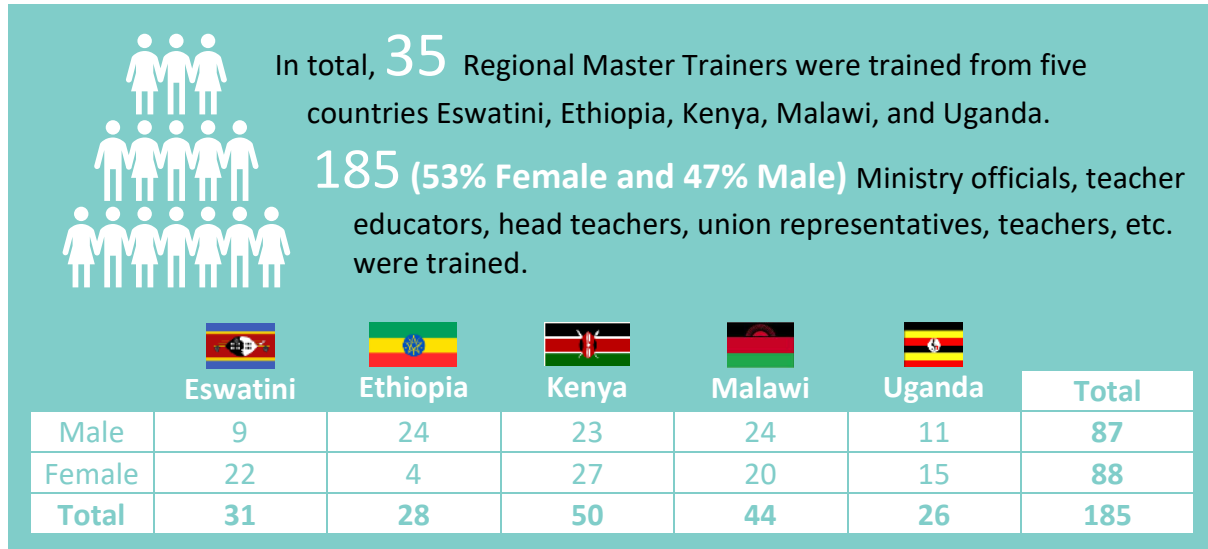
Training in Malawi



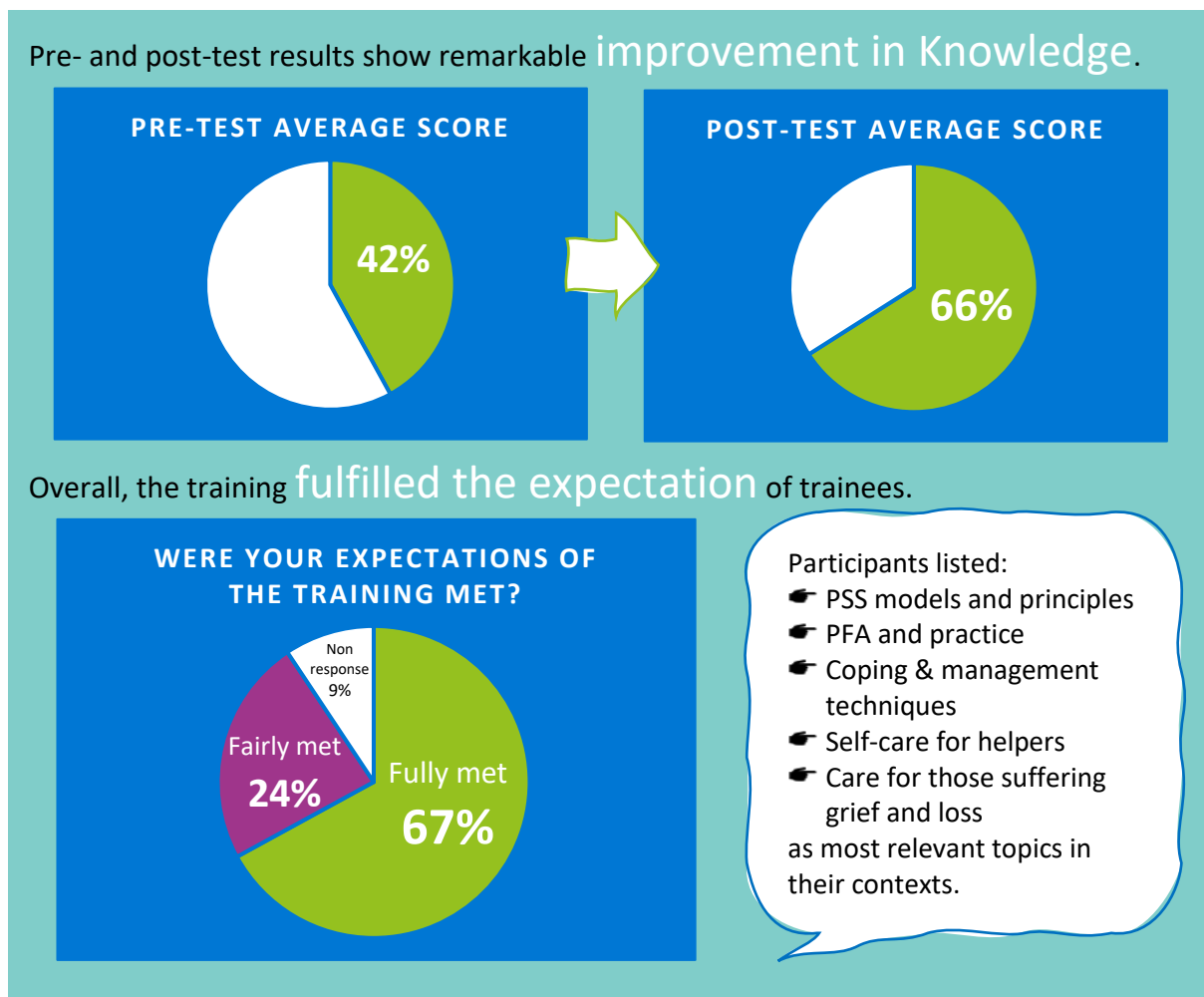
Training in Uganda

Key Achievements

1. Trained Trainers



2. Outcomes of the Training



Ways Forward

1. Theory of Change


Goal: Improved mental health and psychosocial well-being of teachers and teachers’ educators contributing to the achievement of education goals			
Theory of Change: If countries deliver a unified package of interventions that aim to strengthen resilience, prevent mental health & psychosocial disorders, and effectively manage affected teachers and teacher educators, they will be better able to deliver quality teaching hence contributing to improved learning outcomes and quality of education across Africa			
Expected Results: By 2030, all AU member States will have scaled up the provision of MHPSS for teachers and teacher educators across all levels of the education system to improve the prevention, management, and rehabilitation of teachers and teacher educators with MHPSS needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased % of schools with functioning community-based MHPSS committee • Improved knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to all MHPSS thematic priorities among teachers and teacher educators • % of schools that provide the comprehensive package of MHPSS interventions including prevention, management, and effective linkage to specialized services using a multisectoral approach • Number of countries that integrated MHPSS courses in pre-service teaching curriculum • Number of countries with policies and costed strategies in place that prioritize MHPSS for teachers and teacher educators 			
Intermediate Results			
Result 1: Improved enabling environment for MHPSS across the policy, legislation, and financing systems, the MHPSS workforce, multisectoral supports, referral pathways, and MHPSS research and data	Result 2: Capacity strengthened across all levels of the education system	Result 3: Operational guidance, foundations, and systems in place to support MHPSS delivery across member states	Result 4: Monitoring/reporting, evidence building, and learning to advance MHPSS




2. Follow-up Activities at the Regional Level

Finalize and Validate the AUC Strategy on MHPSS for Teachers in Africa	
Activity 1.1	Finalize the drafting of the regional strategy document with the AUC Teachers Cluster
Activity 1.2	Hold an online technical validation workshop that will gather various stakeholders for final review and validation in collaboration with the AUC Teachers Cluster
Activity 1.3	Hold another online meeting to present the draft version by 30th November with the AUC Teachers Cluster
Activity 1.4	The draft regional strategy document to be approved by STC in 2023
Activity 1.5	Hold a face-to-face high-level side event with Ministers of Education for the regional dissemination of the AUC regional strategy for MHPSS for teachers in collaboration with AUC/ESTI at the AU Summit side events in February 2024 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Activity 1.6	Designing, translating, and printing 500 copies of the regional strategy on the promotion of MHPSS for teachers and teachers' educators
Finalize the French Version of the MHPSS Training Guide for Teachers	
Activity 2.1	Finalize and translate the MHPSS training guide for teachers in French version with adult counseling protocols and procedures
Activity 2.2	Organize a face-to-face pilot training for the French version of the guide in at least 2 Francophone countries in collaboration with the UNESCO Multisectoral Regional Office for West Africa using the French version of the guide
Activity 2.3	Print the MHPSS guide both in English and French
Develop an Evidence-based MHPSS Counselling Guide for Children and Young People in Schools	
Activity 3.1	Assess the status of MHPSS for young people in schools in five countries, pre-service education curriculum content on MHPSS, and competency gaps of in-service teachers at the regional level about promoting and protecting learners' mental health and psychosocial well-being, in five countries (Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda)
Activity 3.2	Develop pre-service teacher education guidelines on mainstreaming MHPSS in teacher training institutions (Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda)
Activity 3.3	Conduct an online validation workshop to validate the above findings
Activity 3.4	Development of a regional child-friendly MHPSS handbook with counseling protocols (e.g., cue cards as reminders of "the counseling procedures") to assist in the provision of MHPSS for learners in five countries (Ethiopia, Eswatini, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda).
Activity 3.5	Provide technical assistance to countries to implement the developed materials
Activity 3.6	Production of a regional child-friendly MHPSS handbook with counseling protocols
Follow-up through Refreshers Training, M&E, and Documentation of Promising Practices in Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda	
Activity 4.1	Establish a regional virtual community of practice (CoP) among the Master trainers and stakeholders to maintain peer learning opportunities platforms (intra and inter-countries)
Activity 4.2	Organize other national levels Trainer of Trainer's workshops on MHPSS in at least 3 new countries (So far there is a request from South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe)
Activity 4.3	Documentation and dissemination of good practices through O3 events, AUC events, and other stakeholder events

3. Follow-up Activities at the Country Level

 <p>Eswatini</p>	<p>Led by UNESCO Eswatini in collaboration with the Guidance and Counselling Department (Educational Testing Guidance and Psychological Service Department) at the Ministry of Education. The other partners include World Impact, an NGO that the Ministry works with to assist in the training of teachers, the Swaziland National Association of Teachers, the Eswatini Principals Association, and the Swaziland National Association of Head Teachers Association.</p> <p>Planned follow-up actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstreaming MHPSS to the Care Support for Teaching and Learning framework at the school level for both teachers and learners • Capacity building of teacher educators, in-service teachers, pre-service staff, guidance officers, school inspectors, Swaziland National Association of Teachers officers, Principal Association and Head Teachers Association Executive members and Teaching Service Commission staff, Special Education and Needs Inspectors, World Impact staff.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate MHPSS training in the pre-service teacher training curriculum to strengthen the existing PSS course • Strengthen Ministry of Education sector policy by ensuring MH&PSS is prioritized and mainstreamed as a policy directive
 <p>Ethiopia</p>	<p>Led by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with AHA Psychological Services and other partners.</p> <p>Planned follow-up actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextualisation of the Regional Manual into a national document • Development of a teacher education course module for pre-service teacher education and CPDs • Conducting national Training of Trainers for the cascading of the training on MHPSS in collaboration with the Ministry of Education • Organizing awareness-raising programs and partnerships with the media
 <p>Kenya</p>	<p>Led by the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Teacher Unions (KUPPET, KNUT, KUSNET), Teacher Association (KESSHA and KEPSHA), Kenya Private Schools Association (KPSA) and Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (KNATCOM).</p> <p>Planned follow-up actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support mainstreaming of MHPSS into policies and guidelines in the education sector in Kenya (Situational analysis on MHPSS issues for teachers and lecturers, development of national policy guidelines on MHPSS for teachers, and dissemination) • Equip lecturers and teachers with knowledge, skills, and attitudes in mental health and psychosocial support (contextualization of MHPSS manual for teacher educators, capacity building of teacher educators and lecturers on MHPSS, documentation of success stories, etc.) • Create and promote an enabling environment for lecturers and teachers to access MPHSS through sensitization meetings to all administrators in both primary and secondary schools, CDEs, SCDE, CDs-TSC, SCDs-TSC, BoMs, PAs, County Teacher Unions' leadership • Create linkages for specialized services and monitor implementation
 <p>Malawi</p>	<p>Led by the Ministry of Education (DBE/DEP) and the National Commission for UNESCO, supported by DSE, DHE, DODEL, DSHN, DTED, DIE, DQAS, TSC, MIE, MANEB, NCHE, TC, BOGs, ACADEMIA, CSOs, DPs, MDAs, NGOs, local leaders, Teacher Unions, PTA/SMC and Ministry of Health.</p> <p>Planned follow-up actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake consultation meetings on MHPSS and hold awareness meetings and Situational analysis on MHPSS issues at the country level to inform the development of the National teacher framework on MHPSS. • Support mainstreaming of MHPSS into policies and guidelines in the education sector in Malawi (Development of national policy guidelines on MHPSS for teachers and dissemination) • Enhance Teacher training (for pre-service) curricula and integrate them with MHPSS concepts. • Capacity building of TTC educators, and teachers (may include SHN coordinator, counselor, matron) to provide MHPSS; create referral networks • Engage parents and the community to Strengthen School support systems on MHPSS



Uganda

Led by the **Ministry of Education and Sports, Guidance and Counselling Department** in collaboration with **Uganda National Teachers' Union**.

Planned follow-up actions include:

- Develop evidence-based education strategies and guidelines to mainstream mental health and psychosocial support for teachers and learners (hold consultation meetings with key Education stakeholders for consensus building on MHPSS for teachers and Learners (UNITE Taskforce, UNATU, G&C, TETD)
- Undertake a situational analysis of the status of MHPSS among teachers and learners at the country level, and develop National guidelines on MHPSS for teachers and learners)
- Capacity building of school stakeholders (school managers, governance, educators, and teachers) in MHPSS (developed a nationally customized guide on MHPSS for teachers, roll out the guide in 5 regions)
- Coordinate and implement mental health and psychosocial support interventions in schools and other education institutions (develop, school-based guidelines and counseling protocols on MHPSS, Map MHPSS partners in the Education sector to facilitate effective referrals and Linkages)
- Conduct operations research, monitor, and track implementation of MHPSS in schools and other educational institutions



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