Remote professional development during Covid 19: The Case of SAGE in Zimbabwe

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

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Remote professional development during Covid 19: The Case of SAGE Zimbabwe
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Context:
The SAGE Zimbabwe project is funded by UK Aid from the UK government. It is formed by a consortium, led by Plan International UK and including faith-based, academic (Open University) and private sector actors. Its focus is on providing high-quality, accelerated (ATL), non-formal education in accessible, girlfriendly community-based Learning Hubs.

Challenges:
Covid 19 Restrictions not only threatened to disrupt the provision of learning opportunities to learners but also the essential ongoing professional development programme aimed at supporting Hub volunteers.

The challenge for the ATL programme partners lay in mobilising training for Community educators to support the refocussing of practice.

The challenge for Hub Based Community Educators lay in engaging learners through new methods such as telephone based, and socially distanced, small groups within the community.

A rapid, pragmatic response to Covid restrictions:
In order to support the refocussing of Hub Volunteer practice in order to support learners at a distance. The mode of training and support for Hub Volunteers also needed to change.

Within the context of Covid Restrictions and poor IT infrastructure, WhatsApp emerged as the digital platform of choice due to its widespread popularity and use within Zimbabwe.

WhatsApp was to become the primary means for delivering training to Hub volunteers in order to overcome Covid Restrictions.

Bespoke training materials:
Due to the cost of data and inherent restrictions in using small screen devices to share information, bespoke training materials, referred to as ‘One Siders’ were designed to support the training.
Comprehensive briefing notes and session guides supported facilitations of sessions.
Co-facilitation and the use of ‘side chats allowed for in session support.

Build Community Educator capacity to engage learners in new ways

Adopt ‘WhatsApp’ as training engagement platform

Develop bespoke training materials

Support in Country Facilitators

Reflections:
The use of contextual examples of practice, in the form of a running case study, were well received and provided concrete founding of principles in practice.

Cofacilitation of WhatsApp based training sessions allowed for the development of new facilitation skills.

WhatsApp allowed for live engagement across distances and post session engagement.

Acknowledgements:
This poster draws upon work reported by Charlotte Chishava (Plan Zimbabwe) and Stephen Harrison (Open University) at the 2021 UKFIET, ‘Building Back Better?’ conference. It also draws upon analysis undertaken by Stephen Harrison, Clare Tope and Clare Woodward (Open University).