As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge communities across the globe, the prospects for the world’s most vulnerable children are somber. We know that one third of schoolchildren globally have not been reached by any remote learning during COVID-19 (UNICEF) and even three-month school closures can cause students to fall one year behind (NWEA). New research predicts that COVID-19 school closures will cost students up to $15 trillion in lost future earnings (IZA Institute of Labor Economics). Other new studies predict that at least seven million children are now at risk of dropping out of school completely (World Bank, Save the Children). And this is on top of the fifty-nine million children of primary-school age who were already out of school worldwide prior to the pandemic.

While this year exacerbates inequality across the globe, the Luminos Fund team is more dedicated than ever to our mission helping girls and boys learn to read and do arithmetic in our joyful classrooms, and continue their studies in their local village schools. Our key focus during this crisis is to keep our students safe and connected to learning. Our team never stopped pushing and, this fall, our classrooms are beginning to reopen. Read more about our efforts and plans in Ethiopia, Liberia, and Lebanon on the next pages.
In Ethiopia, the Luminos Fund is operating micro-classes, supporting distance learning, and partnering with government.

On March 16th, Ethiopia mandated the closure of all schools, impacting more than 26 million learners. Luminos continues to explore all available options for resuming learning safely for our children and understands the need to be agile while adhering to the guidelines laid out by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MOE). This year, the MOE’s growing need for proven alternative learning solutions—like Second Chance—is creating an even greater opportunity for the government’s adoption of our model beyond what is underway. There is significant appetite from education stakeholders in Ethiopia for technical expertise from Luminos and its partners on condensing curriculum, teacher training, and improving learning outcomes.

Our 2019-20 cohort of students

When schools closed, Luminos pivoted to supporting students with home-based learning through the distribution of learning resources and the creation of a digital learning portal for Luminos and its partners to share resources across regions. SMS-based contact helped ensure direct communication with families during the pandemic, and from May to July, we ran outdoor micro-classes of 4-6 students. Facilitators received guidance on micro-classes and ongoing virtual training and support from Program Supervisors and Luminos partners. Luminos also supported the MOE’s COVID-19 education response with staff as active participants in the Education Cluster and through one-on-one advising with key MOE officials. We continue to explore MOE partnership opportunities to reach even more children through our Second Chance model. All schools in Ethiopia plan to open by the end of November, and all Ethiopian students—including our 2019-20 cohort—will be promoted to the next grade for the start of the 2020-21 academic year.

Our 2020-21 cohort of students

In the 2020-21 school year, Luminos expects to reach 1,300 children directly through Second Chance education, and thousands more through government adoption. As noted, all schools in Ethiopia plan to open by the end of November. Our staff continues to work extensively with government partners across national, regional, and local levels to finalize plans for the 2020-21 government adoption program, which aims to equip the government to implement Second Chance in conventional government primary schools across Ethiopia.

Note: COVID-19 data as of Oct. 29 from the WHO
In Liberia, the Luminos Fund is operating micro-classes (up to seven students and a teacher, physically distanced), supporting distance learning, and partnering with government.

Schools across Liberia closed in March. Luminos continues to explore all available options for resuming learning safely for our children. We understand the need to be flexible to respond to students’ and families’ needs while adhering to guidelines laid out by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The Luminos Fund launched in Liberia in the aftermath of Ebola, when approximately one in four Liberian children did not return to school, and we are keen to apply lessons from that time to the current crisis. Strategies like micro-classes keep children engaged in learning and help ensure they enroll when schools resume. As challenging as it has been to get these classes off the ground and ensure learning is happening, we are encouraged that we have positively engaged our children and kept up their enthusiasm for school.

Our 2019-20 cohort of students

Our primary focus has been the safety and health of our children and communities. Our US team actively participates in weekly MOE, Education in Emergencies Zoom meetings. Given only 12% of the Liberian population has access to electricity, we adopted a low-tech approach to ensure our 2019-20 students remain connected to the learning process by distributing worksheets, English readers, writing materials, and workbooks. Currently, Luminos is running outdoor micro-classes of 6-7 children, covering key foundational literacy and numeracy concepts. We anticipate students will transition to government school for the start of the 2020-21 school year in December. Since March 2020, Luminos has also supported its communities with WASH stations and food supplies. Even procuring basic items such as bags of rice proved challenging as most of the stores had run out of supplies. Our team worked incredibly hard on the ground to source the required permissions to cross county borders during lockdown and complete the necessary distributions.

Our 2020-21 cohort of students

We are planning for the 2020-21 cohort and forecast that we will be able to resume classes, with certain restrictions, in January 2021. Luminos will reach 2,400-2,800 children across Bomi, Montserrado, and Grand Cape Mount counties. We are updating our curriculum for the new school year to include psycho-social support for children, both in school and at home, in response to COVID-19. We anticipate continuing to support students with an element of home-based learning in the 2020-21 academic year.

Note: COVID-19 data as of Oct. 29 from the WHO
Lebanon

In Lebanon, the Luminos Fund provides educational programs for Syrian refugees.

This year has been uniquely challenging in Lebanon, between political and economic strife, COVID-19, and the massive explosion that shook Beirut in August. Lebanon is dependent on imports and the destruction of the port has led to widespread shortages of medicines, baby formula, and other essentials. Luminos continues to explore all available options to help our students learn safely. We are working to be flexible and agile to respond to students’ and families’ needs while, at the same time, adhering to guidelines laid out by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE).

Our 2019-20 cohort of students

Luminos pivoted to providing e-learning options to children within a few weeks of school closures. Curriculum-aligned educational videos, including lesson explanations, stories, rhymes, and songs, were shared 3-4 times per week. These videos covered the core subjects Science, Math, English, and Arabic. Teachers shared videos with learners through WhatsApp groups and followed up directly with learners through phone calls and WhatsApp messages.

While dealing with the macro-challenges in Lebanon, the team on the ground has been trying to find the best possible means to remain connected with children and their families. Our partners have responded nimbly to the Beirut blast by supporting children with school supplies, volunteering to clear the rubble, and providing emergency relief materials to effected communities. We’re incredibly grateful for their hard work.

Our 2020-21 cohort of students

We are planning for the 2020-21 cohort on the assumption that we will be able to resume classes, with certain restrictions, starting in November. We have invested in more established e-learning platforms to better structure the remote learning process for 2020-21. MEHE published an academic calendar that states that schools will reopen by first week of November for all grades in regions where there is no lockdown. Currently, student registration for the 2020-21 school year is ongoing for both Lebanese and Syrian children in public schools. In the 2020-21 school year, Luminos expects to reach 1,300 children across Mt. Lebanon, Beqaa Valley, and Beirut. We anticipate all students being promoted to further education.

Note: COVID-19 data as of Oct. 29 from the WHO