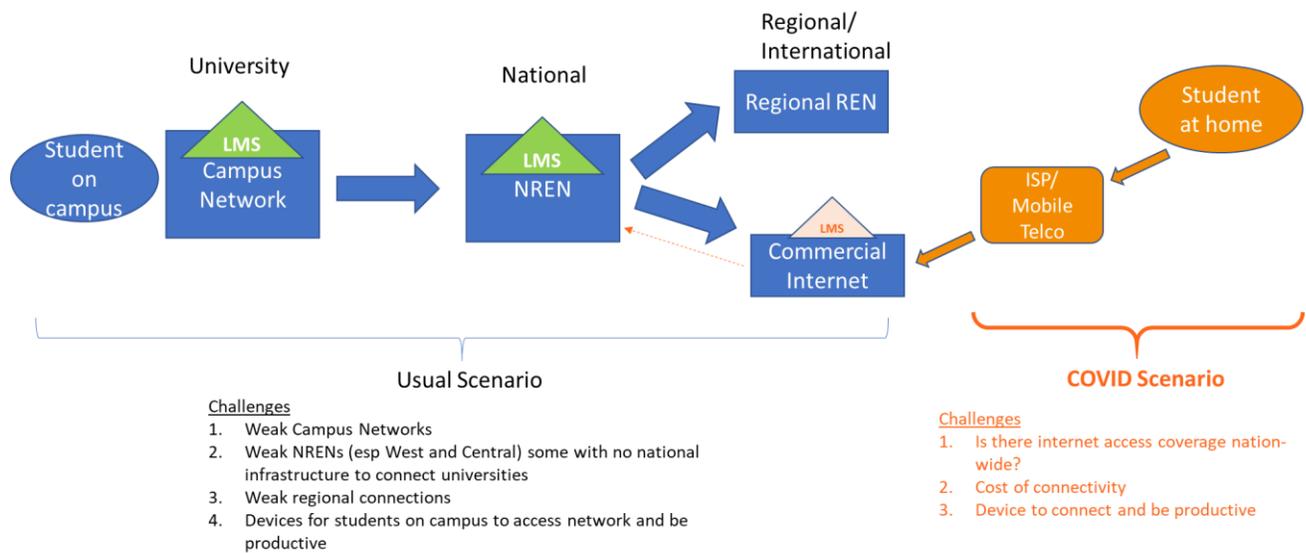


ACE COVID-19 Response Task Force
Connectivity sub-Group

Problem Statement

As universities (and ACE Centers) closed due to COVID-19, they turned to remote learning or distance education as a potential solution. However, as they attempt to leverage edtech for remote learning, several challenges have arisen with connectivity- access and costs for students being a key one. Another access related issue is whether students have a suitable device such as a laptop or smart phone to keep learning.

To address the connectivity challenge would require looking at several components of the network.



In many countries, the NREN has been at the forefront of connecting universities and NRENs have played a leading role in ensuring students stay connected to research and learning systems from home. Unfortunately, African NRENs especially those in West and Central Africa are relatively weak.

Here is a proposed response for COVID but also for the longer term.

Develop a simple action plan for the immediate/short term interventions with timelines (0 – 6 months) and support the implementation of the action plan

- Advocacy with local and regional Telecommunications Companies for zero-rating education sites or providing free data bundles to students
 - AAU, WACREN and UbuntuNet to coordinate and lead advocacy with regional Telecommunications Companies (AAU can coordinate the advocacy in partnership with the WACREN and UbuntuNet)
- Ensure that all ACE beneficiary students are equipped with a laptop and have internet access

- AAU to quickly check with center heads how many students are registered in their centers and how many students have devices/access
- Might require to revise some IPs and update milestones under some DLIs (4.3, 5.3, 7.5) to provide student devices to all ACE beneficiaries
- Nigeria ACE Impact Centers have some funding toward NREN subscriptions
 - Determine how this can be used to strengthen the NREN in the short term
 - Determine if other ACE Impact Centers could also allocate some funding towards this
- Work with Nigeria ACEs to move forward the timelines for engaging the Nigeria Research and Education Network (NGREN)
- Work with non-Nigeria ACEs to revise their Implementation Plans to accommodate strategies for including connectivity improvement strategies

Develop an action plan for medium/long term support (7mths – 5yrs)

- Strengthen NRENs and Campus Networks in each country
 - ACEs implement action plans to improve connectivity through their NRENs
 - Identify WB projects that could support
- Connect with Afri-Connect partners to discuss alignment on the regional connectivity initiatives

Identify and liaise with the various potential partners that can support now and, in the future,

- Regional Telecommunications Companies (MTN, Orange, Airtel, Vodafone)
- WACREN and UbuntuNet Alliance
- Geant- Africonnect
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Identify resources that are free and for those that come at a cost, determine cost and the terms that apply

- Zero rated or Free data bundles for students
- Emails for each student free from Microsoft/Google
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