ZAMBIA NATIONAL EDUCATION COALITION
(ZANEC)

AN ANALYSIS OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ZAMBIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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March, 2012
Executive Summary

It is a well known fact that an ‘Education Policy’ sets the vision and strategy for educational development, mobilizing support and cooperation for implementing the vision and strategy from a wide range of constituencies. In Zambia, several education Policies have been developed over time to provide a vision and strategies in the education provision. Major among these policies include the Education Policy Reforms of 1977, Focus on Learning of 1992 and the Educating Our Future of 1996. In this paper, we examine the performance of the education sector against the major national and international policy and legal frameworks namely the National Education Policy of 1996 and related subsector policies; the Education Act of 2011; The Patriotic Front’s Manifesto; the Education For All and Millennium Development framework. Specifically, the paper focuses on achievements, failed promises, policy gaps and recommendations for improving the status quo.

The situation in the Early Childhood, Care, Development and Education is characterised by the following:

- Absence of a policy framework
- Low access of only about 17.2% of grade one entrants having ECCDE experience.
- Service provision relegated to the Private Sector, NGOs and the Churches.
- Lack of a curriculum
- Lack of monitoring standards
- Low funding estimated at 0.2%

The situation at basic school level is characterised by the following:

- Exponential growth in enrolments (2.9m in 2005 to 3.6m in 2010).
- Unsystematic and low pace of upgrading Middle Basic into Upper Basic schools
- High pupil teacher ratios of (36.4 in 2006 to 55.2 in 2009, dropping to 49.8 in 2010)
- Low achievement levels 2008 (numeracy 39.4 % and literacy 34.6) at middle basic school level and Upper basic 34.8 in English and 22.3 in mathematics for 2009.
- High drop out rates especially among girls.
- Inadequate management capacity at school and district levels

While at secondary level the situation is characterized by:

- Improved completion rates from 17.6 in 2005 to 31.7 percent in 2010
- Marginal improvements in gender parity indexes from 0.79 to 0.86 percent
- High demand as evidenced by provision of private tuition
- No coherent high school curriculum
- Weak linkages with other educational institutions such as skills training, colleges and universities
- Shortages of appropriately qualified teachers
• Low achievement levels for the school certificate

Clearly, there is need for policy change since most issues that the 1996 education policy set to solve have evolved and required current strategies. The Civil Society fraternity have since voiced their concerns on the need to change the education policy. Their concerns revolve around issues of improving education services available to children and youth in terms of access, quality, equity and participation as enshrined in the government policy documents in its quest to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015. Ultimately, the issues under review should be seen as a contribution to the realisation of Zambia’s 2030 vision of becoming a prosperous middle income country.
INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the performance of our education system in line with existing aspirations contained in both our national and international policy and legal frameworks. The first part highlights the situational analysis of current education system. Thereafter the paper interrogates the successes and gaps in our education system. The second part is a set of recommendations from the Civil Society, which are directed by the Education For All (EFA) goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. In light of a limited resource envelope, the third and last section focuses on prioritisation of stated programmes both in the long and short term.

2.0 PERFORMANCE OF EDUCATION SUBSECTORS

This chapter highlights the achievements achieved and challenges encountered during the implementation phase of the 1996 education policy. The findings are structured according to the thematic areas of the EFA goals. Critical among the thematic areas include the Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE), Universal Primary Education (UPE), Life Skills, Adult Education and Gender. Further, input from stakeholders’ observed as gaps in the Educating our Future policy document are also presented.

Early Childhood Care, Development and Education

The age range that defines the critical period of early childhood is 0 to 6 years. This is a critical period for child survival, growth and development. It is a period when the brain develops rapidly; when walking, talking, self-esteem, vision of the world and moral foundation are developed. Government acknowledges in the Sixth National Development Plan (SNDP) that ECCDE is one of the most effective strategies in poverty reduction as it enhances the chances of breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty.
However, the overall delivery of ECCDE services has remained largely underdeveloped and uncoordinated. Currently, only 17.2% of grade one entrants have ECCDE experience in Zambia. Even with this paltry percentage of the provision of early childhood education, the quality of the service is still low and the learning environment, curriculum and the instruction materials often inappropriate and inadequate. The low access to ECCDE services is explained by a host of factors including the lack of government involvement in service delivery, Lack of an ECCDE policy, inadequate infrastructure for ECCDE; inadequate ECCDE financing; inappropriate and uncoordinated curriculum; inadequate monitoring and evaluation; and limited awareness on the importance of early learning, (MoESVT, 2011).

In addition, most early learning centers are predominantly offering pre-schooling and not holistic early learning programmes. This high level of deprivation, which is higher in rural areas, is mainly as a result of the fact that government, which is the main duty bearer, has left the responsibility of providing early learning ECCDE services to non-state actors such as the private sector, NGOs and the churches. As a result, access to ECCDE services in Zambia is usually too costly for the poor to afford. Thus, the growth of the ECCDE sub-sector, in ZANEC’s view, is dependent on the willingness by Government to annex ECCDE centres to existing basic schools.

2.2 Basic Education

Significant progress has been registered by government in this subsector between 2002 and 2009 mainly due to the declaration of free education from grades 1 to 7 and the infrastructure development efforts. This has resulted in increased enrolment from 2.9 million children in 2004 to 3.6 million children in 2009 (MoFNP, SNDP 2010). Similarly, the Net Enrolment ratio (NER) increased from 93% in 2005 to 97% in 2009, completion rates at grade 9 improved from 43% in 2005 to 52% in 2009, while the Gender Party Index (GPI) increased from 0.95 in 2005 to 0.99 in 2009 (Ibid).

However, the exponential increase in enrolment alone albeit important, have proved inadequate to guarantee the learners the necessary learning achievements. According to the Zambia National Assessment Survey Report of 2006 on Learning Achievements at Middle Basic Level, performance in Zambian schools is below the desirable minimum levels of 40%. Current achievement levels are on average at 37%, while the desired level is 70%. According to the 2008 National Assessment Survey Report, the national mean performance was 35.3 percent in English, 39.4 percent in Mathematics, 40.2 percent in life Skills and 39.4 percent in Zambian Languages. The findings revealed that there was stagnation in pupil performance as compared to the 2006 survey where the mean performances in English, Mathematics and Zambian Languages were 34.5 percent, 38.45 percent, and 37.79 percent, respectively. This poor performance is also depicted in the SACMEQ III results published in 2011. Thus, there is urgent need to improve learning achievements and efficiency indicators in this subsector.

2.3 Secondary Education

Before the reconfiguration of the education system, the high school sub-sector covered Grade 10 – 12. Achievements made by government in this sub-sector included the increase in enrolment from 162,019 pupils in 2005 to 257,100 pupils in 2009. In addition, completion rates at grade 12
also improved from 17% in 2005 to 19% in 2009. Other indicators that showed improvement in the same period include the pupil - teacher ratio which improved from 22:1 to 20:1, the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) which increased from 21% to 26% and the Gender Parity Index which rose from 0.81 to 0.87 from 2005 to 2009 (MoFNP, SNDP 2010) respectively.

However, the major concern for ZANEC in this subsector has been the low progression of learners from Grade 9 to 10. In 2010, only about 50% of children who wrote their grade 9 managed to progress to grade 10. This means that about half of children drop out of school at grade 9 level. The system where the number of learners who progressed from Grade 9 to Grade 10 was based on the number of school places available limited access to education beyond the basic education level. In view of the reconfiguration of the education system, the focus will now be on the progression from primary school to secondary school. Thus, increasing the number of classroom space at secondary school level would certainly accord more learners access to secondary school education.

2.4 Tertiary Education and Skills Training

In order to increase enrolment at this level, government has in the recent past encouraged private sector participation at tertiary level which has seen the emergence of fourteen (14) private universities against one new public university, the Mulungushi University. This has led to an increase in enrolment at tertiary level from 12,774 students in 2005 to 19,086 students in 2009. Similarly, in terms of skills development, enrolment in TEVET institutions increased from 30,511 to 33,399 students between the period 2005 and 2009 respectively (MoFNP, SNDP 2010).

Despite this increase in enrolment at both tertiary and skills training levels, there still exist a number of out of school youths who cannot access education at this level due to either inadequate places or lack of access to bursaries. Thus, infrastructure development and introduction of loan schemes should be the focus of this sub-sector during the period leading to 2015. For instance, the bursary schemes though desirable are inadequate, unsustainable and cumbersome to access. A loan system would thus be much more sustainable as the money paid back by those who have graduated would be used as a revolving fund to support other learners.

In addition, the quality and type of skills that are provided in TEVET training institutions have also been an issue of concern for education CSOs and other stakeholders as some of these skills are neither aligned to the demands of the current job market nor tailored to stimulate self-employment. The result is that more and more people acquire these skills but cannot get any form of employment due to very few opportunities. They is urgent need therefore to review the skills training curricula to make it market driven.

2.5 Adult education

Adult education is the sub-sector for those adults who have not been able to attend any formal education or dropped out of school at an early stage. The low literacy levels are of concern to ZANEC at this level. Only 68% of the Zambian population is literate. It is also estimated that of the 32% illiterate population, about 60% are women (ANCEFA, 2010). The result of all this is that a considerable number of people in Zambia are not able to adequately participate in development programmes because they cannot read and/or write. Currently, this sub-sector is
receiving very low funding which has led to inadequate teaching and learning materials, insufficient infrastructure and low remuneration for instructors/facilitators.

### 2.6 Crosscutting Issues

Although the Ministry of Education has adopted a number of policies to guide the provision of education equitably, the system currently does not assure access by all categories of learners. For instance, there are still glaring gender disparities at the various levels of education. Although gender parity is in favour of girls from Grades 1 to 4, the index drops thereafter from Grade 5 in favour of boys. This is mainly due to the high drop-out rates for girls resulting from among other factors; early pregnancies (estimated at 13,649 in 2009), early marriages and lack of safe school environments for adolescent girls.

Similarly, despite the policy framework for community schools being in place, community schools which enable access to education by OVCs are not adequately supported. The same is the case with regard to access by CSEN. Thus, there is need for a strategy that specifically address cross-cutting issues of gender and OVCs, including CSEN.

### Conclusion

There is need to address the concerns relating to access in the ECCDE, tertiary and adult literacy subsectors; quality and efficiency concerns in the basic school subsector; and the progression rate to high school. In order to achieve this, the Patriotic Front government will need to fully implement its promises outlined its current manifesto which can go a long way in ensuring the Country’s attainment of its EFA goals by 2015. The following are the specific recommendations to the Patriotic Front government;

1. Increase the budgetary allocation to education from the current 18.6% to the SADC recommended 20% of the national budget.
2. There is need for the speedy review of the National Education Policy of 1996 to enable it respond to the current the education demands of the 21st century.
3. Government should also complete the process of reviewing the curriculum which supports a dual education system with a practical orientation towards survival skills and academic subjects.
4. Implement the free and compulsory education up to grade 12 as provided for in the PF manifesto.
5. Consider annexing of ECCDE centres to existing primary schools as a strategy for promoting access to ECCDE. This is in line with the PF’s aspirations of having an ECCDE centre in every ward contained in its manifesto.
6. Upgrade and support all registered community schools to ensure the provision of quality education;
7. Promote inclusive education at ECCDE, primary, secondary and tertiary levels targeting marginalised children such as Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN), Orphans and Vulnerable (OVC),
8. Improve access to Secondary Education through infrastructure development;
7. Improve gender equity and parity through the improvement of girls’ retention in education especially through the implementation of the re-entry policy.
8. Implement the National Qualification Framework to ensure it serves its purpose as a mechanism for regulating university education especially in enhancing quality assurance.

References


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