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USAID/ZAMBIA EDUCATION

Zambia has steadily increased its primary school enrollment—with a net enrollment rate of 81.8%. While significant gains have been made in increasing access to education, regional disparities persist. The education system continues to be challenged by inadequate resources, poor-quality of education service delivery, and low secondary progression rates. The COVID pandemic resulted in seven months of learning loss, further exacerbating these challenges. A well-educated population is essential to stimulate economic growth, provide effective public services, and reduce poverty.

In collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Zambia, USAID activities aim to increase learners’ performance in the early grades by targeting foundational literacy skills. USAID activities provide improved relevant teaching and learning materials and strengthen the capacity of teachers and school administrators to better deliver education services. USAID also provides targeted support to students and schools most marginalized.

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Strengthening Children’s Ability to Read

USAID has a strong history of collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to improve performance of community and public schools and expand equitable learning opportunities for both boys and girls. USAID partners with the MOE to improve the quality of reading instruction. USAID has supported the MOE to develop relevant teaching and learning materials, strengthen their classroom and national assessment capabilities, and increased parental and community engagement in childrens’ education to improve childhood literacy rates. USAID has supported the MOE to develop, print, and distribute primary school teachers’ guides and literacy textbooks in English and seven local languages, including teaching and learning materials for children with special needs.

USAID’s Let’s Read activity supports 1.4 million children in pre-primary through Grade 3, reaching over half of Zambia’s public primary and community schools. USAID’s Transforming Teacher Education activity supports ten colleges of education and two universities to better prepare primary school teachers to implement improved learner-centered teaching practices.

USAID’s Edufinance activity supports the MOE to develop and implement a comprehensive policy and regulatory environment to reduce barriers to entry in the education market for non-state primary education providers. The activity builds the administrative capacity of the MOE to effectively regulate the non-state education sector. The activity also works with financial intermediaries to develop loan products to support operations of non-state schools and to supplement school fees in peri-urban and urban areas.

Expanding Learning Opportunities for All Children

Primary school enrollment in Zambia has grown at an unprecedented rate over the last two decades, flooding schools with first-generation learners and resulting in classrooms with deeply heterogeneous learning levels. The net enrolment rate has increased from 66 percent in 2000 to 82 percent in 2020. Compounding this challenge, the MOE often pressures teachers to complete dense curricula and prepare students for high-stake exams, leading teachers to teach to the top of the class. USAID partners with the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) to support the MOE’s Catch-Up accelerated education program at target schools in two provinces. This program trains teachers to implement the Teaching at the Right Level approach, which involves assessing and teaching literacy and numeracy according to proficiency level as opposed to grade level. Students then follow a learner-centered program that targets their current learning levels and helps them recover foundational skills in order to “catch up” to grade level.

Measuring Academic Achievement

USAID’s Education Data activity conducted a 2018 baseline Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) and a 2021 follow-on midline assessment to measure the extent to which children in Grade 2 are learning to read at grade level. The findings from the EGRA are used to apply lessons learned and identify trends to better inform decision making. The program will also build the capacity of the Examination Council of Zambia and MOE to track and collect data to improve learning outcomes.