

**EDUCATION FOR ALL: INCREASING ACCESS
TO EDUCATION FOR GIRLS IN ZAMBIA**

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Introduction

Education is a basic human right that should be made available to all people regardless of race, class, religion and gender. The World Education For All Conference which was held in Jomtien in 1990 member countries and funding agencies made commitment to Education For All through a framework of Action and set targets for reaching the set targets. Zambia participated actively at this World Forum. This paper discusses how Zambia has attempted to offer education for all to its citizens especially girls who have always lagged behind the development. It discusses how the Programme of the Advancement of Girls Education (PAGE) has been implemented as a way of increasing access and equity to girls. It also provides other strategies for increasing access to education for girls in the country through the involvement of community schools and through the introduction of interactive radio programmes for out-of school children. The paper further argues that all these efforts may not be enough to bring girls in the forefront of the education arena. There is need for more government involvement in ensuring that all children, especially girls have access to education in Zambia.

Following Zambia's participation at the World Conference on Education For All in 1990, a National Conference on Education For All was held in March 1991 to prepare strategies and set goals for Education For All the next ten years. The National Conference set targets on the six major themes of Education For All.

All the 155 governments and representatives from 150 organizations agreed to take the necessary steps to universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy before the end of the decade as well as to:

- expand early childhood education
- improve learning achievement
- reduce the male-female literacy gap
- expand basic education opportunities for youth available communication channels to promote knowledge, skills and values for better living

Zambia is a signatory to the World Declaration on Education For All.

As a follow-up to the World Conference on Education For All by the year 2000, the Ministries of Education, Community Development and other cooperating partners and NGOs co-ordinated a national conference on Education For All in March 1991. The National Conference identified the following themes:

- Early Childhood Care, Education and Development;
- Universal Primary Education;
- Adult Literacy.

The National Conference on Education For All resulted in the formulation of policy document *“Focus on Learning”* in 1992 and *Educating our Future* in 1996 which stressed the importance of giving special focus on: decentralization of the educational system, establishment of strong

partnerships with stakeholders such as NGOs, Community Base Organizations and Cooperating partners, rehabilitation of schools.

As the years went by it became increasingly apparent that the targets set out in 1991 were not met. There was an increase in the number of school age children who were not in school and the majority of this group of children were girls. This prompted the Ministry of Education with the assistance of UNICEF to conduct research studies to identify the major problems facing girls and why girls dropped out of school.

a. The Programme For Advancement of Girls' Education (PAGE)

The Girl Child Education Programme 1994 focused on policy development, capacity building, gender sensitization, material development and research. Under this programme several research studies were conducted that led to the implementation of the Programme For the Advancement of Girls Education (PAGE). The Programme is a Ministry of Education initiative supported by UNICEF, CIDA and NORAD and is a concrete expression of Zambia's commitment to the advancement of girls and women in education and in all sectors of society. The programme seeks to deliver quality primary education to all children, especially girls, and to reduce gender disparities in primary education enrolment, retention, completion and achievement. PAGE's overall objectives are:

- to empower girls and women to fully participate in and benefit from the economic and social development of the nation.

- to ensure the survival of girls into adulthood with particular emphasis on their protection from HIV/AIDS

To pursue the above, PAGE's immediate objectives are:

- to promote and create public awareness of the importance of girls' education and empowerment at national level, within the framework of the Education For All Programme and Convention on the rights of the child.
- to support the Ministry of Education to monitor and analyze data on girls' education.
- to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of classroom practices in providing learners, especially girls, with basic competencies and
- to implement specific interventions that directly impact on access, retention and achievement of girls in selected schools.

Research studies that were conducted between 1994 –1996 revealed several problems that girls face in schools. The studies also made recommendations on how the situation can be improved. Results of the research studies indicated that there were many problems that impinge on the education of girls.

- In primary school, the enrolment, retention and completion rates of girls were lower than that of boys.
- Within the school, the girl is often made to feel inferior to the boy. School textbooks and pictures show girls as listening, being frightened, being submissive, being easily fooled, needing help and rescue. Boys on the other hand are shown as strong leaders, rescuing people, unafraid,

inventive, solving problems, taking the initiative. Boys are given important tasks such as class leaders, girls are given subordinate positions. Teachers give attention to boys while girls passively look on.

- Girls are made to believe that they are less intelligent than boys, especially in mathematics and science. At home they receive the same message that this is a man's world. This results in their having low levels of self-esteem which eventually leads to low performance.
- Girls work long hours around the home and little time for homework.
- Girls are the ones relied upon to help in looking after the sick, preparing meals for those who are in hospital, or caring for the other children. This leads to absenteeism and results in low performance and they feel discouraged.
- Many parents prefer to spend the little money they have on the education of boys rather than of girls.

Several interventions were introduced emanating from research studies. The following interventions were developed:

1. **Research Studies** were conducted in order to provide information and insight needed to identify and formulate policies and actions in support of girls' education.
2. **Advocacy and Sensitization** is aimed at advocating for policies which promote an enabling environment for the education of children, especially girls. It also focuses on strategies and activities to sensitize

the community i.e. parents, teachers, administrators, and pupils to change negative attitudes towards girls' education.

3. **Familypac** emphasizes partnerships and collaboration between parents, teachers and pupils in order to create positive classroom learning experiences. Through familypac, parents are encouraged to increase their support for girls education by practical support in dealing with homework and other school activities which enhance girls' performance and self-esteem.
4. **Single Sex Classes** creates a separate but conducive learning environment for girls and aims at increasing self-confidence, self-esteem among girls by reducing the threat of harassment from boys. This is done with a view to increasing their performance especially mathematics and science.
5. **Affirmative action** to increase number of women in the management of education is being implemented as a positive action to achieve equality in the education of girls and boys in schools, in the management of schools and in positions of decision making in the Ministry of Education.
6. **Participatory Planning and Management** is implemented to improve provincial, district, and school planning for education and girls education in particular. This is done through Strategic Planning Workshops.
7. **Girls Friendly Module/Gender Sensitive Pedagogy** implemented to strengthen the girl friendly school concept which includes such areas

as the social climate of the classroom, what is known as the girl-friendly classroom and social assertiveness or standing up for oneself.

8. **School Clubs** which seek girls an opportunity to compete on equal terms with boys and to build their leadership qualities.
9. **Community Action** which seeks to mobilize communities in support of girls' education. The support of traditional leaders is critical in this area. So is the recognition by parents and communities that their role in the education of their children should not be confined to making bricks and providing labour for their school buildings, but should extend into all that goes on in the school.
10. **Gender Across the Curriculum for Primary Teachers Colleges:** This is essentially a series of teaching gender-oriented modules for the pre-service training of primary school teachers, to enable them to be aware of how pervasive is in all that they do and to help them to be more gender-sensitive in every aspect of their professional work.
11. **Education Kit** PAGE schools were provided with learning materials including Anti-Aids literature to help children and teachers address the HIV/AIDS issue.
12. **School grants** are provided to schools to assist them in making local decisions regarding priorities and needs in improving girls education.

The Organization and Implementation of PAGE

PAGE operates at national, provincial, district, school and community levels. At the national level, it provides overall guidance for the implementation of the programme, promotes policy development for the improvement of primary

education with special reference to girls, conducts studies, and maintains an advocacy and sensitization campaign. Its work at national level is guided by Steering Committee which meets quarterly and a Management Committee which meets monthly.

At Provincial and District levels PAGE works to increase the capacities to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate measures aimed at increasing the enrolment, participation and achievement of girls; to support the development and implementation of PAGE school Plans; and to monitor school and district progress towards provincial goals and objectives.

Implementation of PAGE

PAGE strategies take place at national provincial/district and school levels. At national level, PAGE

- builds leadership, commitment and carries out public advocacy for PAGE,
- promotes policy development for the improvement of primary education, with special reference to girls,
- supports research to enable documentation, dissemination and discussion through symposia, media presentations and other means,
- promotes the development of gender sensitive, relevant and appropriate learning materials and
- advocates for increases in the number of female teachers – female school heads and education managers.

At provincial and district levels PAGE interventions focus on

- orienting staff and increasing their capacities to support the development and implementation of PAGE.
- Supporting strategies aimed at increasing the number of female teachers, female school heads and education managers.
- strengthening provincial and district capacities to include PAGE philosophies and objectives within Annual Work Plans, to monitor gender issues and targets; and to monitor, document and report on the experiences and lessons learned from PAGE.
- mobilizing support of government, political, religious, traditional and other leaders in support of PAGE.

School level interventions include

- orienting school heads and staff to PAGE and creating supportive learning environments.
- advocating for school management and staff to be more supportive of girls' education.
- training teachers to upgrade their pedagogical skills with particular emphasis on mathematics, science and motivation of girls.
- providing relevant and appropriate learning materials.
- defining and strengthening life skills pertinent to the needs of girls e.g. their aims and aspirations versus cultural and community pressures.
- mobilizing community and parental support through community activities and introduction of Familypac.
- provision of educational materials

The Future of PAGE

PAGE as innovation in the school system was piloted in two provinces between 1996 – 98. Later, it was introduced to all provinces in 1998. While this was happening, the Ministry of Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme (BESSIP). Although the aims of BESSIP and those of PAGE are similar debate is currently on going whether PAGE should be integrated into the new programme or that it should firstly take root in schools in various provinces where it has recently been introduced. It does appear that PAGE will become an integral part of BESSIP. This will not interfere in the implementation of PAGE interventions. The major achievement of PAGE includes the advocacy and sensitization of communities from national level to school level.

b. Community Schools

Another innovation which is being implemented to increase access to education is the emergence of community schools in Zambia. Although there has been an expansion of educational provision over the years in Zambia, not every school-age child is in school. In response to the growing number of children not in school, community schools were established in various communities in the country to provide learning opportunities for school-age children and over-age children who were not in school.

The Concept of Community Schools

A community school is a school which is established and is run by a community which indicated the need for a school to cater for the less

privileged children of whom the majority are girls and orphans, who for social and economic reasons have never been to school or have dropped out from school at an early age.

There has been a strong move by many communities which have been under-served by the education system to provide for themselves through community schools. These are schools established, owned, financed and operated by communities for their own needs. Nearly all the schools are small and working according to their own curriculum and responding flexibly to the needs of the poor, by-passed (never-have-beens) and disadvantaged children.

In a study by Lungwangwa et.al (1999) on *“Factors affecting primary school attendance in Zambia”* the following reasons were made regarding enrolment and attendance:

- Enrolment rates in primary education were declining in the country.
- The Net Enrolment Rate stood at 69%, meaning that about one third of the primary school-age children were not attending school.
- Almost 20% of the children in rural areas live more than five kilometres away from school and in some cases, distances from school can be as much as sixteen kilometres or more.
- In general there were more over age primary school children in rural areas than in urban.

This study identified several reasons for children not attending school.

- poverty
- long distances
- negative parental attitude towards education
- low value attached to education
- pregnancies
- unaffordable user fees
- dilapidated school infrastructure.

Community schools serve as one of the paths to basic education. In 2000, there were 373 registered community schools in the country catering for more than 47,276 children. About 50% of these schools are found in shanty compounds of cities and another 50% were found in rural areas, having been set up by grass root organizations and villagers themselves. The schools are self-financing in that although they receive encouragement, material and professional support from the Ministry of Education, they themselves are responsible for paying their teachers. Some communities do generate resources but most depend on resources NGOs can raise on their behalf.

Community schools have been developed in some unplanned townships where the government did not have schools or had no immediate plans to construct schools. In some cases community schools were established due to inadequate Grade One places and so children who became over-age could not get admission into the regular schools. At times Community Schools were organized due to long distances to regular schools. In recent years, when user fees were introduced in regular schools, many parents were unable to pay the school fund.

The Community school is currently being used as a term for initiatives in basic education outside the formal system. It can also be defined as community participation. Some community schools are housed in a structure while others are in the open. The main characteristic of a community school is that the community feels the need to establish such a school, they work for teachers who may be enumerated but, more often than not are not enumerated. Some of the characteristics of community schools are their diversity in the way they began, the degree and type of community, ministry or agency involvement. In urban areas community schools can be seen as interventions by agencies whose constituencies are poor, children of HIV/AIDS affected families, orphans and girls. They are normally run by volunteer teachers, usually chosen by the agency itself. In rural areas, community schools are those began by a community, which has either found its own building or began to construct a multi-purpose building. The Ministry of Education provides teachers for such schools.

In 1997 Zambia community Schools Secretariat (ZCSS) was formed in order to strengthen and coordinate community schools. The mission of ZCSS is to “Empower communities to establish own and participate in the running of community schools for vulnerable children, by the provision of relevant quality education that will empower children and promote their rights”

The ZCSS main objective is “to strengthen the capacity of community schools in Zambia networking and coordinating”. The Ministry of Education is committed to support community schools by providing provincial focal

persons. Although community schools provide access to education to many school-age children who are not in schools some issues need to be raised. Since not all teachers are remunerated, there is a lot of absenteeism and poor standards of delivery. Standards of education were compromised in many schools and this created an impression that underprivileged children were being given inferior education. Although a SPARK Syllabus was available most schools did not understand the Skills, Participation, Access, and Relevant Knowledge (SPARK) syllabus.

Mwansa (1997) observed effective management of community schools was evident in schools where there were other developmental activities and community commitment was strong and where supervisors had deliberately made an effort to involve the community in the decision making process. Commitment was weakest in those communities where the community had little or no hand in the establishment of the school. He further observed that the main professional weaknesses of community schools were that staff were primarily untrained teachers, the teachers were not paid, desperate supply of learning materials and the poor quality of learning facilities.

Despite these concerns, the growth of community schools as an organized education enterprise in the late 1990s was a response to the learning needs of many school-age children who were not in school and whose number was increasing year by year. Community schools offer much promise in the provision of basic education to the many under privileged and neglected and poverty stricken parents.

c. Interactive Radio Programmes

In 2000, the Ministry of Education launched Interactive Radio Programme for out-of-school children as a pilot project around Lusaka. The launch was preceded by a Baseline survey to determine the needs of five communities in Lusaka. The findings of the survey indicated that there were many school age-children who were not in school and expressed the need for more access to primary schools in the district. Inactive radio classes have been running since 2001 and have been very popular with many children enrolling for these classes.

Concluding Remarks

Increasing access to education for girls in Zambia is a major challenge. Although access has been increased through the Programme for Advancement of Girls' Education and through community schools, there is still a large proportion of school-age children who are not in school. There is need therefore for the government to expand its primary education system in order to capture all the school-age children who are not in school.

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