



Enabling Excellence: Girls Succeeding in Zambian Community Schools

Gombe* Community School is situated near the banks of one of Zambia's largest lakes and over 70 kilometers from the nearest paved road. The school can only be reached by crossing over a dozen, mostly dilapidated, bridges and it is nearly inaccessible during the rainy season. Once a visitor makes it to the school, they will likely run into a soccer practice, with the members of the girls' team proudly showing off their uniforms. Grade 7 girls at Gombe Community School not only excel at soccer, they are also academic achievers performing above the national average in their final exams.

The visitor's first impression at Nsembe Community School, located in a semi-urban shantytown, will be slightly different, but no less surprising. They will witness grade 7 learners returning to school for their free remedial afternoon sessions after lunch break. The community is proud of its school that "competes well" with other schools in the area. Girls at Nsembe Community School, like their counterparts at Gombe Community School, perform better than the national average in grade 7 exams.

Both schools are exceptional cases. Nationwide, girls are less likely than boys to complete primary school because of poorer performance (as indicated by lower marks) and higher dropout rates than boys in all grades (Nkosha et al. 2013). Across all types of Zambian schools,¹ more boys than girls complete the last year of primary school and take grade 7 national exams (Examinations Council of Zambia [ECZ] 2014).

**The names of schools have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants in the study.*

¹ There are four school types in Zambia: government schools, private schools, grant-aided schools, and community schools.

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Of learners who take the exams, more girls fail and they receive lower grades than boys (ECZ 2014). In all subjects except English, on average, boys score better than girls (ECZ 2014). Research shows that the key reasons for these discrepancies in girls' education, retention, completion, and performance in Zambian primary schools include poverty, pregnancy, early marriage, sexual violence, and poor or lack of water and sanitation (Nkoshla et al. 2013; Zambia National Education Coalition 2012; Mwansa 2011; Jasper et al. 2012; UNESCO 2015).

In Zambia, the grade 7 national exam is a high-stakes examination that determines a learner's transition from primary to secondary school. Therefore, these trends mean that even those girls who complete primary school are less likely to progress to secondary school.

One explicitly stated goal of the Zambian Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) is increasing girls' primary school progression, completion, and enrollment in secondary school (MESVTEE 2011, MESVTEE 2005, MESVTEE 1996).

This case study examines two exemplary Zambian community schools where girls consistently achieve results above the national average in grade 7 national exams in order to build an evidence base for what works in improving girls' performance in those exams. Reviewing the dynamics present in each of these case schools allowed the research team to identify a number of factors that have been crucial to enabling these schools to support girls' academic performance. Identification of these factors may help the Zambian government and its partners more effectively support other community schools and replicate

their results. Because community schools where girls perform above average also feature strong performance by boys, the best practices identified by this case study have the potential to benefit all learners.

ZAMBIA'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL SYSTEM

In Zambia, government-funded schools are not the only schools providing primary education. Given the lack of accessible government schools in remote areas and high school fees that were charged until 2002 (MESVTEE 2002), community schools have existed since the 1980s and now represent an estimated 30 percent of all primary schools and about 20 percent of primary school enrollment in Zambia (MESVTEE 2013).

Community schools often suffer from a lack of resources such as classrooms or teaching materials. For the most part, teachers are untrained "volunteers" from neighboring communities who live off in-kind contributions or small allowances from the community. Teachers are recruited by a parent community school committee (PCSC), a group of parents that manages the school and organizes community support, such as labor and materials, for infrastructure improvements. Typically, community schools charge a small contribution per learner per term, although this practice varies widely.

Community schools are eligible for different types of MESVTEE support that include grants; teaching, learning, and building materials; teacher training; and deployed government teachers. In order to qualify for government teachers, the community school must provide teacher housing. Support is usually provided through the local District Education Board

Secretary (DEBS) office, but the main school in each zone (zonal center) is also often a key part of the delivery of this support.

CASE STUDY DESIGN: RESEARCH QUESTION AND CASE SELECTION

While the government is eager to improve the overall achievement in early grade levels, research on exceptional results for girls in the community school context is almost nonexistent. This case study attempts to contribute to providing actionable information for Zambia's quest to improve learning outcomes at the primary school level. Understanding the factors that affect learner performance in community schools in Zambia is particularly important in light of the government's stated aims of (1) increasing support for and oversight of community schools (MESVTEE 2007), and (2) increasing progression and completion rates in primary education, especially for girls (MESVTEE 2011, MESVTEE 2005, MESVTEE 1996).

Thus, this case study seeks to answer the following question:

What factors help support girls to do better than the national average in grade 7 national exams in some community schools?

A review of MESVTEE grade 7 national exam data for the past 4 years shows that in schools where girls perform above the national average in grade 7 national exams, boys also tend to do well. Nationally, girls perform worse than boys. However, the inverse is not true: there are many schools where boys perform better than

the national average, but girls are still left behind.²

The case schools presented here were selected because their female learners performed better than the national average in grade 7 national exams in 2013 and 2014.³ Featuring an urban and a rural school, the case schools represent the variety of settings in which Zambian community schools operate. The schools are similar in their age, size, PCSC activity, and level of teacher education, and both have a government head teacher and at least one other government teacher. Neither of the schools is regularly supported by organizations other than MESVTEE and the USAID Time to Learn project.

During a week-long visit at each school in 2015, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with community leaders, head teachers, teachers, PCSC members, parents, female grade 7 learners, and MESVTEE officials.

The following examines the factors that support girls' high performance at grade 7 national exams in the cases of Nsembe and Gombe Community Schools.

² The percentage of learners with top grades (division 1) was 19 percent on the national level in 2013 and 2014, with boys slightly outperforming girls in both years. Boys and girls alike at Nsembe and Gombe Community Schools exceeded these levels in both years, with girls in Gombe featuring above 40 percent of learners in the top division in 1 year (ECZ 2011-2014).

³ Performance above the national average is measured as the percentage of girls getting marks that place them in division 1, which is the top division. Schools with a higher than average percentage of girls in division 1 also had a lower than average percentage of girls in division 4, the lowest ranking division (ECZ 2011-2014). Both community schools are exam centers because data only exists for exam centers.

NSEMBE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Nsembe Community School is located in a semi-urban area in a shantytown just off a main road, and only a few kilometers from the local DEBS office. Founded around the turn of the millennium by a local church in order to cater to its poorest members' children, the school was fully dependent on the church. When the church suddenly had to pull out for financial reasons, the school was faced with the threat of shutdown. The PCSC successfully solicited help from the DEBS office, which began to provide basic necessities regularly to the school like text and exercise books, as well as small grants for infrastructure improvements. The office also started regular school monitoring visits and invited the school's volunteer teachers to government trainings. In 2014, the DEBS deployed three government teachers to the school, including a new head teacher. Together with the five volunteer teachers, the school had eight teachers and approximately 400 learners at the time of data collection. Grade 7 is taught by the only male teacher at the school who is a volunteer teacher. All volunteer teachers possess a grade 12 certificate and two have diplomas: one in early childhood education and the other in counseling.

Nsembe's Successes

Nsembe Community School provides a good environment for girls' education overall. Enrollment of boys and girls at the school is almost even (about 55 percent boys and 45 percent girls). Pass rates in grade 7 national exams are above the national average for both boys and girls. Girls are even outperforming boys with around 75 percent to 65 percent, compared to 60 percent overall nationally (ECZ 2011-2014). Nsembe Community School has

developed such a reputation for supporting girls to pass grade 7 national exams that girls frequently transfer to the school after failing grade 7 national exams at other schools, including government schools. This has resulted in the 2015 grade 7 class having more female than male learners (about 60 percent female and 40 percent male) despite the opposite ratio in nearly all other grades.

Parents, learners, and school staff indicated that the school provides a good learning environment. Teachers assign daily homework and conduct homework checks to regularly assess learners' progress before exams. Teachers and the head teacher reported that teachers develop lesson plans, which the head teacher reviews, and that all staff work 8 hours a day, spending the time out of class to prepare lessons. Parents commented on observing a high quality of teaching. For example, parents whose daughters transferred to Nsembe Community School after failing at other schools reported that their girls advanced their reading skills in a very short time and that they could see that the teachers put more effort into their work than at other schools.

School staff reported a great deal of mentoring at the school. Upon her arrival, the head teacher began to meet with each grade once a month together with the classroom teacher to check on each learner's personal well-being and encourage them to study hard to succeed academically. School staff and the PCSC said that if the head teacher or teachers become aware of any personal problems, they meet with learners individually. The teachers reported specifically focusing on motivating the learners whose families do not place much value on education to come to school. They also said that they felt encouraged to do their

work through the mentoring they received from the head teacher.

Teachers said that their main motivation for their personal efforts is the desire to sacrifice for their learners so that they get to know “the other world” (e.g., formal employment) they can access with education. Both learners and parents said that they greatly appreciated the teachers’ efforts and many stated that the teachers were the key reason why girls were performing so well at this school. Grade 7 girls reported that the teachers care about them and that they can learn more from them than from their parents. They voiced ambitious dreams for their future, like working as a nurse, journalist, accountant, or teacher, reporting that it motivates them to know other girls who successfully managed to complete grade 7 at the school. Most adult participants strongly believed that the presence of female role models also plays an important role in encouraging the girls. Some girls have explained that they want to be a head teacher “just like madam.”

“The head [teacher] is our pillar. We have a very good team; everyone cooperates.” (Teacher)

The school has taken specific measures to improve the performance of grade 7 learners and encourage stronger identification of learners and the community with the school. In 2014, the head teacher introduced free remedial afternoon lessons for grade 7 learners from term 1 on, for which they return to school three afternoons a week after a lunch break. Most grade 7 learners attended these lessons regularly, with similar attendance of boys and girls, and would not be able to do so if they were not free. In 2014, the head teacher rewarded the top three learners of each class

with donated presents like a pair of shoes, a bag, or a notebook, in a public end-of-year ceremony after which teachers and parents recalled an increase in learner motivation and effort. The school community would like to give presents each term, but cannot afford this financially. The head teacher also introduced a simple, low-cost uniform because many learners previously came to school with torn clothing, drawing the mockery of learners from other schools. Learners, teachers, and parents reported that this particular measure made them proud because it showed the larger community that their school was like any other “real,” or government, school and that this helps them carry out their daily routine.

“We do here what other people are doing in other schools.” (Grade 7 girl)

“Now they [learners] look like they go to a proper school.” (Parent)

School staff, the PCSC, and parents reported close collaboration that results in a feeling of mutual support. The head teacher and PCSC collaborate in sensitizing the community on relevant issues such as the importance of education and the benefits of the afternoon lessons through parent meetings. They also meet with parents individually to address their concerns. Many parents expressed appreciation for this approach in interviews and reported supporting their daughters’ education actively through methods such as ensuring that their daughters do homework or encouraging them to read in their free time (teachers confirmed these practices by parents). Some parents relieve girls of household duties so they have more time to study. As one mother explained: “When the girl comes back from school, I have already done more house chores so she can sit

and read. I don't engage her in so many house chores as that could disturb her." Grade 7 girls reported finding this particular form of support highly motivating. If there were problems with an individual learner, like frequent absences, teachers personally met with the parents to discuss solutions. If problems persisted, the head teacher and PCSC also got involved. School staff and the PCSC reported that absenteeism had dramatically reduced within a year upon the new head teachers' arrival due to this approach.

***"Madam can help; she's there for us."
(PCSC chair)***

***"I am a proud person. They [PCSC]
always come and help." (Head teacher)***

Nsembe Community School reported a high level of support from the MESVTEE. The school community perceived the DEBS office as actively engaged by providing needed teaching and learning materials and grants, deploying several government teachers, and monitoring the school frequently. The school also reported often receiving basic materials like chalk or exercise books from the zonal center. School staff have found these materials helpful for maintaining a high teaching standard. The head teacher previously worked as a teacher at the zonal center and reported being able to use her previous contacts to maintain close relations between Nsembe Community School and the zonal center. It is in this way that she has also learned about new government policies and received invitations for "her" teachers to join government trainings, which teachers said they found greatly motivating. The head teacher reported that her frequent interaction with the government and support she received made her feel recognized for her work, which helps

her stay motivated to accomplish the tasks at hand. It appeared that the school staff's high motivation is pivotal for the care the individual learners at the school are receiving.

***"It does not work without the government. Even you NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] cannot just make up for that [lack of government involvement]."
(PCSC vice chair)***

"I am not left alone." (Head teacher)

Nsembe's Challenges

While Nsembe Community School reported to be satisfied with many aspects of its work, participants exhibited a broad consensus in describing the school's challenges. The school has outgrown its infrastructure because the number of classroom blocks has remained unchanged since its inception, yet enrollment has drastically increased.

The community struggled to support the volunteer teachers whose allowances are financed through learner contributions made each term. Parents often fail to make the contributions due to lack of resources and learners are temporarily excluded from class in these cases in order to improve parents' discipline with payments. Several volunteer teachers have considered leaving the school because they struggle to maintain their livelihoods. Both teachers and community members are eager for teachers to improve their professional qualifications, but teachers are unable to pay for the teaching college. While the school gets invited to free government trainings, teachers sometimes fail to attend these because they cannot afford the \$5 lunch contribution and are asked to leave

the room during lunch hour if they bring their own food, which is embarrassing for them.

Many caregivers struggle to provide enough food for their children who may eat only one meal a day resulting in lack of concentration and illness at school. The school community observed that a donor-sponsored feeding program (which ended in 2011) had been a major encouragement for learners to come to school every day, particularly for girls.

GOMBE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

In 1994, traditional leaders (“headmen”) of 11 remote villages far from the next government school united to provide the children in their villages with a primary school they could reach by foot. Starting with one teacher in a thatched, temporary classroom, the community approached the local DEBS office for help. The school quickly received a government teacher, and has had a government head teacher since. Several permanent classroom blocks were built between 2006 and 2010 with the help of an international nongovernmental organization and the government; enrollment subsequently increased. At the time of data collection, the school had seven male teachers (four government and three volunteer teachers all with a grade 12 certificates) and approximately 300 learners. The school has always only had male teachers. Since the school’s founding, the local DEBS office has provided material support such as textbooks, chalk, and exercise books, which was replaced in 2010 with regular small grants to buy such materials.

Gombe’s Successes

At Gombe Community School, girls have generally done particularly well. Overall, school enrollment was equal between female and

male learners, yet the grade 7 class had more female than male learners. The school community reported that early marriage used to be common in their communities, but it drastically reduced over the past 5 years after awareness raising through the school, and that dropout rates among girls subsequently decreased. Pass rates for grade 7 national exams have improved from just above 50 percent in 2009 to between 80 and 90 percent in 2013 and 2014 for both boys and girls compared to an overall national average of 60 percent (ECZ 2011-2014). The majority of girls started secondary school education at the zonal center and several girls have completed secondary education.

Gombe Community School’s staff, parents, and headmen saw themselves as a close-knit group united by their wish to improve their children’s future through education and described in-depth collaborations in different areas. The chief of the area - the traditional leader presiding over dozens of headmen – was reported to be very invested in girls’ education, holding an annual meeting with all headmen to emphasize its importance. Subsequently, headmen held meetings with their communities where they requested that parents send every girl to school. Building on that, the school management since 2012 reached out to several headmen whose villages did not send children to school, and jointly organized meetings with parents. At the time of data collection, all surrounding villages were sending their children to Gombe Community School.

The PCSC and teachers reported monitoring learner absenteeism together and, in cases of frequent or prolonged learner absence, teachers personally met with parents to encourage better attendance. If this did not

improve the situation, they contacted a village headman who met with the parents. Parents and the PCSC were not only involved in school affairs when there were problems, but also in everyday life. The school allows parents to visit lessons any time, and some have. This way, parents and school staff perceived themselves as having a lot of informal interaction, which they said allows them to “move together.”

Parents reported supporting their children’s education in different ways, such as learning about their grades when attending end-of-term ceremonies. Some parents were able to provide their children with breakfast as an additional meal of the day or check their exercise books. Some allowed their daughters to do all their household chores in the morning before school, so that they could study in the afternoons.

Overall, all groups involved with the school voiced being content with the close collaboration and took pride in the visible results in their villages. For example, children can now read letters to community members who had to walk 2 hours to the zonal center for this service before the school was founded. The keen interest of all groups in activities concerning the school was evidenced by a high turnout for group discussions. For example, 9 of 11 headmen came to meet with the research team.

“We really feel happy working together; we are really united as PCSCs, teachers, and headmen. When we call for meetings, they all come, we work together very well and there is cooperation. When there is a problem, we sit and find the solutions so that learners that come here have a brighter future.” (PCSC member)

School management and teachers reported a close working relationship. The head and deputy teacher frequently monitored classroom instruction, and parents and learners commended a high teaching quality. Since the school received more government teachers in 2008, grade 7 pass rates have improved. Additionally, teachers reported that, due to the workload reduction, they had more time to attend to learners with difficulties and to mentor learners on the value of education. Grade 7 girls reported wanting to be “like the ones who have learned” and wanting to pursue further education, for example, as a teacher. In the afternoons, teachers offered different clubs, with soccer being the most popular among girls and one of the things they said they loved the most about their school. To the joy of the whole community, the school soccer team successfully competes with other schools.

The school has taken specific measures to improve learner performance. Since 2008, grade 7 learners have had the opportunity to return to school after a lunch break three times a week for 1.5 hours of free remedial studies in terms 2 and 3. In addition, the term break between terms 2 and 3 is cut short by 2 weeks, in which the grade 7 learners have lessons for 4 hours each morning. As long as the school was receiving grants from the MESVTEE, at the end of each term the best learner in each class received a present like a school bag or notebook in a public ceremony. The school community recalled that this encouraged learners to study hard in order to receive a present.

Gombe’s Challenges

Due to its isolated location, Gombe Community School has hardly ever received visits from the DEBS office beyond the distribution and

collection of grade 7 national exams and, basically, has no contact with its zonal center. School staff and parents regretted that the DEBS has not deployed female teachers who could be positive role models for girls and show them what type of jobs they can access with education. Volunteer teachers have not had access to government training. The school's longstanding sponsored feeding program was discontinued in 2011. The school reported reduced enrollment thereafter, but the small school field does not yield enough harvest for the school to start its own feeding program.

While the school has weathered these challenges so far, the community perceived the school's situation as seriously deteriorating of late. According to the school community, after the DEBS office reduced the size and frequency of grants in 2014, it ended grants and other support, besides government teachers, in 2015 due to funding shortages. Parents had to buy materials, like exercise books and pencils, for their children in addition to paying the regular learner contribution of 5 Kwacha (70 cents) per term, which many found exceedingly difficult. Learners are sometimes temporarily excluded from class if their contributions are not paid.

The PCSC recruited two new volunteer teachers for 2015 after the removal of a government teacher by the DEBS office. However, given the additional financial burden placed on parents regarding learners' materials, they have been unable to pay these teachers the promised allowances and it is unclear if the teachers will remain at the school.

Some of the government teachers' houses were destroyed during the last rainy season and the community was unable to rebuild them due to a lack of resources. Moreover, some government teachers' houses already lack the

sanitary facilities required by MESVTEE policy, which might eventually cause them to leave the school.

Given these challenges and the most recent changes, the school community felt that the successes they struggled for so hard were under acute threat and that they would not be able to sustain educational quality in the future.

ANALYSIS

Comparing the experience of the two schools, several common factors emerged that contribute to an environment that has supported girls to perform above the national average in grade 7 national exams: free remedial lessons in grade 7, a sense of pride in the school by the extended school community, public recognition of good learner performance, support and mentoring of teachers by the head teacher, close collaboration of school staff with parents and community, an overall inclusive treatment of girls at the school, school staff and the PCSC actively working to remove obstacles to girls' education, and a close relationship with and material support of the MESVTEE.

Girls seem to have benefited from measures both schools introduced specifically to improve grade 7 national exam performance, such as free remedial lessons in grade 7. Learner motivation for attendance and studying also seemed to be strengthened by public recognition—for example through gift-giving ceremonies—and learners taking pride in their school and identifying with it, be it through a school uniform or a successful soccer team. This also improved the spirits of the school community at large.

Other factors at the school-level that helped create a positive learning environment for girls appear to be a high level of education of teaching staff and close support of teachers through the head teacher, for example, through classroom monitoring or feedback on lesson plans. Girls felt that teachers cared about them in an environment where staff reported caring about each other. While Nsembe Community School had many female teachers and Gombe has never had any, both school communities perceived the presence of female teachers as important and positive role models for girls who can be motivated by demonstrating that educated women can get a good job.

Efforts at the school-level seemed to be enhanced through a close collaboration of school staff with parents and the community at large. In communities where traditional leaders play a key role, like Gombe Community School, it is crucial to involve them as much as parents. Activities such as parent classroom monitoring and frequent meetings allow for interaction between school staff and parents, improving relationships through making the different groups feel supported by each other.

In general, the inclusive approach of both schools seemed crucial to the success of girls. Both schools actively worked with their communities to remove obstacles to girls' education. These efforts include discussing the benefits of education with parents and encouraging their action, like a reduction of household chores, to enable girls' participation in beneficial activities such as the free remedial lessons. It seemed like the open and frequent discussion of issues relevant to girls supported a change of attitudes towards girls' education in the communities.

The MESVTEE support through teaching and learning materials, government teachers, and teacher trainings seemed indispensable for bolstering school-level efforts given the schools' poor resource base. Herein lays the main difference between the two schools: while Nsembe Community School support through the DEBS office is fairly secure, Gombe Community School might be approaching a crossroads. In addition, at Nsembe Community School regular contact and communication with the MESVTEE helps make the school staff feel that they are part of a larger structure and that their work is appreciated by the government, which increases their motivation and, in turn, their effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This case study provides evidence that girls' success in grade 7 national exams does not come about by chance, but can be stimulated through targeted interventions that align well with general best practices in community school education. Based on the evidence presented in this study, the following practices by different key stakeholders have the potential to improve girls' performance in community schools.

MESVTEE

The MESVTEE should frequently monitor community schools and provide all types of support they are eligible for regularly as per MESVTEE policy (MESVTEE 2007). This is to ensure that community schools are equipped with the necessary learning infrastructure, but it also serves to provide school staff with a sense of belonging to the official school system.

The MESVTEE should especially ensure adequate staffing levels at community schools – for example, through deployment of

government teachers – and ensure that community school teachers are able to participate in government trainings at no cost.

The MESVTEE should also consider strengthening the relationship between community schools and their zonal center systematically, for example, by deploying teachers from zonal centers to community schools, and by sensitizing community school volunteer teachers and PCSCs about the support they can receive from the zonal centers.

In order to improve the professional qualification of community school volunteer teachers, the MESVTEE should consider easing their access to teacher colleges through bursaries. The provision of small allowances for community school volunteer teachers by the MESVTEE could reduce the high fluctuation of teachers and also reduce absenteeism or dropout of learners from school if their parents are unable to pay their learner contributions.

Reintroduction of feeding programs at community schools could improve learner (boys and girls) attendance and performance.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Community schools should try to offer free remedial lessons at least to grade 7 learners throughout the last school year to improve learner performance in final exams. Further research is needed to determine the feasibility and efficacy of remedial lessons in earlier grades, but broader application of these remedial lessons holds promise given girls' underperformance throughout primary school grades. For the same purpose, attendance and homework should be enforced. In order to inspire good performance, community schools should seek appropriate ways to publicly recognize and incentivize good learner

performance. Schools should include girls in these activities as much as boys, and be conscious of possible obstacles to girls' participation in activities and work with the community to remove them.

Community schools should closely engage parents in school affairs. In order to increase their interest in their children's education, the parents could be encouraged to monitor lessons at the school. Outreach should also specifically focus on the value of girls' education to change community attitudes. Parents should be encouraged to relieve girls of some household duties to give them more time to study and avoid early marriage.

Community schools should try to find appropriate ways of instilling a sense of belonging to and pride in the school into their learners, parents, and teachers to improve the overall motivation and effort of all groups. Similarly, community schools should consider how they could provide girls with positive role models at the school.

Head teachers should mentor their teachers, for example, regarding lesson planning and through classroom observation to further their professional qualifications and give them a feeling of support.

Community schools should attempt to involve traditional leaders as closely as possible in the sensitization activities. If individual learners experience difficulties, parents should be met with individually.

CONCLUSION

There could be a widespread improvement in community school girls' performance in grade 7 national exams if education policy makers, program implementers, and community schools

widely implemented certain supportive measures. These measures include: 1) free remedial lessons, public recognition of good learner performance and mentoring of learners with equal inclusion of girls in such activities and active engagement to remove obstacles to their participation; 2) head teacher's support to and mentoring of teachers at Zambian community schools; and 3) assistance in cultivating close relationships between school staff, parents, and community, as well as community schools and the MESVTEE. Given the fact that boys also performed well at Zambian community schools where girls performed well, such reforms would benefit all Zambian community school learners. More research on the factors that hinder girls' good performance in schools where boys do better than the national average could complement the recommendations of this study.

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⁴ Ministry of Education changed its name to Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) in 2013.

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Time to Learn's *Case Study Series* provides insight into best practices in the education of orphans and other vulnerable children in Zambia, including an emphasis on Zambia's community schools. Designed for policymakers and program implementers, these case studies focus on key research priorities identified by stakeholders in Zambia's educational sector, including government officials, academics, and civil society.

Time to Learn is a 5-year activity funded by USAID and the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that assists the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) to provide an equitable standard of education service for vulnerable learners, improve reading skills, and implement practical strategies to strengthen school quality and promote community engagement in community schools. Time to Learn is implemented by Education Development Center, Inc. EnCompass LLC is the Time to Learn research and evaluation partner. The *Case Study Series* is embedded in a broader mixed-methods learning agenda, including five evaluations (one baseline, two impact, and two performance) and research capacity building. Case studies draw on knowledge from this broad learning agenda and existing research from the MESVTEE and the academic community.