

# ***POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF BASIC EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA***

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## **SUMMARY**

Basic education for all encompasses a wide range of things. It is about the education of children, out-of-school youths, adult illiterates and the informed or literate community. It is also about equity or justice and fairness in the distribution of educational facilities and resources. It is about universal access (or quantity) as well about quality of learning achievement. It is about renewing political will and commitment to the development of education as a human right. It is about democratization of power and control over education. It is about elevating basic education high on the national development agenda and in national budgets. It is about promoting the value of learning that leads to a learning society.

In the midst of the rhetoric about what basic education for all is, it is important for states to identify the focal point of EFA which will make sense to the largest number. It is an inward assessment of the state of the art in education in order to identify that problem which will, when addressed, make a difference in the lives of individuals, communities and the society.

The most pressing problem in Zambia at this stage is illiteracy which is of great magnitude not only among adults but even among children 10-14 year olds most of whom are out of school youths. The level of illiteracy among children is currently estimated at slightly over 2 million, the greatest majority being girls, children from poor families and those in remote rural areas. Women constitute the largest number of adult illiterates (60%).

The causes of illiteracy in the young generation are many but the major ones are: non-availability of school places because of the high population growth rate currently standing at 3.2%; early dropout rate at Grade 4 especially among girls in rural areas; deterioration in the morale, commitment and professionalism of teachers as a result of declining conditions of service; deterioration in the teaching-learning environment because of dilapidation in facilities, overcrowded classes, and non-availability of education materials, and lack of funding for improvement and expansion of basic educational facilities at formal and non-formal levels.

Basic Education for All in Zambia will therefore make the greatest impact if it is able to turn off the tap of illiteracy by meeting the basic learning needs of school-aged children, out-of-school youths, in addition to meeting the learning needs of adults. The task is colossal because it involves quantitative access as well as promoting learning achievements that are observable and measurable. The term literacy is used in its broadest sense to include the objectives of basic education which centre on promotion of basic skills of reading, communication, writing, reasoning, numeracy, and acquisition of basic knowledge about science, health, the environment, culture, family life and citizenship.

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Turning off the tap of illiteracy as the object of EFA will involve attending to a number of critical policy issues, in particular:

- i) reasserting the political commitment to basic education as a human right;
- ii) rekindling political will and commitment to education;
- iii) narrowing the gap between formal and non-formal education;
- iv) creating partnerships for basic education development;
- v) restructuring the national budget to give basic education a greater push;
- vi) establishing a network of cooperation among government ministries particularly those dealing with Education, Finance, Health, Social Development, and Agriculture, recognizing that basic education is their joint responsibility;
- vii) meeting the basic learning needs and promoting the learning achievement of marginalised groups like girls, women and the poor, and
- viii) making learning achievement the ultimate objective of basic education and not necessarily access to available facilities.

Turning off the tap of illiteracy among the young in society as a cutting edge for basic education for all activities is an investment in the quality of education. Some of the strategies to improve the quality of basic education are:

- 1) Targeting financial resources to the production and distribution of learning materials for both formal and non-formal sectors. Basic education for all will only be a reality when every school going child is able to have a textbook in each subject area.
- 2) Establishment of a National Trust Fund For Basic Education. The fund should exclusively be for promoting learning achievement.
- 3) Formulation of debt relief policies for basic education among donors in order to increase resources for basic education.
- 4) Creation and propagation of a national education ethic rooted in learning achievement. The mass media have a special role to play in arousing awareness among individuals and communities that basic education for all is about acquisition of learning achievements that are observable and measurable.
- 5) Establishment of a national benchmark for achievement to guide assessment of learners' progress. In-service training courses for teachers to enable them assess learner achievements have to be developed widely.
- 6) Curriculum renewal to enhance quality of content, quality of delivery and quality of assessment. The curriculum renewal exercise should give emphasis to learning achievement by defining measurable learning competencies at each grade level and in pre-school institutions.
- 7) Delimiting the scope of basic education to include the first six grades of primary education or its equivalent in the non-formal sector. Wherever possible efforts must be made to encourage the development of pre-schools.

- 8) Attraction, retention and professional development of qualified teachers. Improving the welfare of teachers by allowing for diversified approaches in ways teachers are looked after among participating agencies.
- 9) Establishment of Basic Education Management Boards in communities to foster community participation and policing over basic education activities and institutions.
- 10) Monitoring and evaluation of the system by giving support to the inspectorate, planning unit and local consultancy and research capacities. This calls for utilisation of data to make informed policy decisions and plans.
- 11) Better co-ordination of basic education activities through creation of one professional Ministry of Education.
- 12) Mobilisation of broad public support for expansion in basic education while Government and donor resources are targeted to quality improvement ventures.

Effective promotion of quality basic education will however require giving special attention to the development of professionalism in the Ministry of Education. Education is a sector that needs professional leadership if it is to develop qualitatively. The task of bringing about a system of quality basic education will call for institutional reorganization of the Ministry of Education through the appointment of individuals with academic and professional backgrounds in education to run it. The reorganization will, in addition, require enhancing the capacity of the Ministry of Education in its professional responsibilities in particular developing the capacity for:-

- i) direct policy, planning and research in education,
- ii) monitoring and evaluating the quality of education through activating the motivation, mobility and commitment of the inspectorate,
- iii) teacher education and training, and
- iv) curriculum development and implementation.

The professional leadership in the Ministry of Education could be further improved by creating meaningful partnership with the university especially in research and consultancy. Because education is both the largest industry and the foundation for development through its role in developing human resources, the long term objective should be directed towards, establishing a National Institute for Educational Research. This is the think-tank necessary to provide data that are vital to the development of the quality of education in the country.

# **INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR DEVELOPING NONFORMAL EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA**

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## **SUMMARY**

One of the greatest challenges facing Zambia in the 1990s is to provide basic education to the rapidly growing school-aged population and the out-of-school youths and adults. This requires an expansion of both formal and nonformal education. In particular nonformal education in Zambia derives its importance from the limited capacity of the formal school system to solve the country's socio-economic problems, the educational implications of development policies and the urgent need to expand basic education for all citizens as a birthright.

In addition, a significant input of education is necessary in the country's efforts to solve some of its socio-economic problems such as the high population growth rate which constrains any efforts to improve the quality of life and the standard of living of the people; the problem of malnutrition which is caused by, among other factors, ignorance of the basic principles of proper nutrition and unawareness by the public of the food value of various foodstuffs leading to unbalanced diet; the high illiteracy rate of over 1 million adults; and epidemics such as cholera and AIDS.

However, despite the remarkable achievements in this area since Independence, the positive impact of nonformal education has been constrained by a number of factors. Notable among these are the inefficient coordination system which sometimes leads to duplication of efforts and wastage of resources, underfunding and the rigidity or uniformity of some of the nonformal curricula which limits their responsiveness to varying local educational needs.

Other limitations of nonformal education are the dominance of traditional face-to-face delivery methods and residential courses which are not only costly but also limit the geographical and numerical coverage of the programmes; and the lack of relevant training among many of the various categories of nonformal education practitioners.

The need to provide education for all as a birthright and as a means of solving some of Zambia's developmental problems on the one hand and the present incapacity of nonformal education programmes to cater adequately for the learning needs of the out-of-school adults on the other necessitates a radical departure from current methods and practices.

Firstly, in order to attract learners, sustain their motivation and generate interest to continue learning, it is proposed in this paper that the design and development of nonformal education programmes be based on the actual needs and problems of the target population. Secondly, there is a need for coordination between or among various nonformal education agencies (estimated at over 30). In this regard national, provisional, provincial and district committees should be established to serve as forums for sharing problems, experiences, information and ideas that may assist them in developing or improving their programmes. It should, however, be emphasized that the development of nonformal education should not be constrained by placing it under the bureaucratic control of one single Ministry or organization.

Thirdly, there is a need to narrow the gap between formal and nonformal education. One way of achieving this is to develop programmes such as literacy and "second chance" programmes intended to specifically cater for those who drop-out at Grades 4, 7 and 9. It is worth of note in this context that many nonformal education programmes especially youth skills-training courses are increasingly serving the needs of those with some secondary education, neglecting those who leave school at Grades 4 and 7.

The gap between formal and nonformal education should be narrowed by ensuring that the formal school system provides professional support to the nonformal sector in terms of facilities, personnel, research and (where desirable and appropriate) in the design and development of the curriculum. Perhaps more importantly, the curriculum of the teacher training colleges and similar institutions should include elements of nonformal education to reflect the desired role of teachers and related personnel because part-time instructors in these programmes are drawn from the teaching and related professions.

Fourthly, nonformal education programmes should be integrated into development projects. Thus there should be more schemes such as youth skills-training-cum-production centres initiated and run by the Department of Youth Development. In these centres, production units are part and parcel of training. The Integrated Rural Development Programmes provide an example of how training can be integrated into development projects. Nonformal education should also be integrated as much as possible into local community activities. Members of local communities should participate as resource people, craftsmen etc. A good example is the Manyinga Rural Crafts Training Centre in the North-Western province where youths are attached to village carpenters as apprentices for a period of time before they are eligible for selection for training.

Fifthly, this paper proposes the use of new delivery methods which are aimed at cutting across literacy and geographical barriers, can motivate learners and reach the mass of the people more cost-effectively than current methods. More specifically the use of mass media especially radio and printed materials should be given greater attention. A new approach in the development of educational radio programmes for rural development in particular should be adopted.

Programming should therefore involve production teams comprising media specialists/broadcasters, educators and content specialists. Other new but under-utilized delivery methods are popular theatre and mobile training courses which have proved effective in terms of larger geographical and numerical coverage and cost. Of great significance also is to professionalize nonformal education by providing training to various categories of nonformal education personnel including planners, administrators, fieldworkers and part-time instructors. Institutions should be identified to provide training in such areas as

- a) the role of education in community development;
- b) problems of development and the role of nonformal education staff as motivators of development;
- c) objectives of nonformal education;
- d) non-traditional pedagogical techniques; and
- e) instruction in everyday science, health and hygiene; food and nutrition, environment and agriculture.

Nonformal education is not necessarily cheap and a number of government, quasi-government and voluntary organizations have made enormous financial sacrifices in this area. However, they are not the only beneficiaries as the private sector benefits from high productivity accruing from the increased performance of their nonformally trained workers. Also industrial productivity increases if as a result of nonformal education programmes workers are healthy and fewer of them die from preventable diseases. The private sector should therefore also contribute towards the financing of nonformal education.

In summary the following recommendations are made towards the strengthening of nonformal education in Zambia.

- a) Nonformal education should be evaluated in order to identify gaps in its provision.
  - b) A comprehensive directory or inventory of nonformal education programmes should be produced in order to be more certain and exact about their coverage.
  - c) There is need to base the design and development of nonformal education programmes on the assessed needs and problems of the target population. This entails a needs assessment survey.
  - d) National, provincial and district coordination committees should be established to serve as fora for the exchange of information and ideas between various providers of nonformal education.
- The Department of Continuing Education should provide professional support to nonformal education (especially in terms of research and dissemination of information to non-formal education agencies) and should change its name to the Department of Non-formal Education to suit its added responsibilities.
- f) Formal and non-formal education should be closely related by, among other measures, including elements of the theory and practice of non-formal education in the curriculum of teacher training and similar colleges/institutions. Also, some programmes should be specifically designed to cater for the limitations of the formal school system e.g. literacy and "second-chance" programmes.
  - g) Where appropriate nonformal education programmes should be integrated into existing development and local community projects.
  - h) Nonformal education should employ new and cost-effective delivery methods, particularly mass media methods which can reach the mass of the rural population.
  - i) The Zambia National Broadcasting Cooperation should establish a special channel for educational broadcasting which should charge lower rates (to be compensated by higher advertising and other rates).
- Greater attention must be paid to the provision of basic nonformal education aimed at alleviating the country's socio-economic problems in such areas as agriculture, population control, health and hygiene and cooperative education.
- k) The private sector should be involved in financing nonformal education.