

AN ASSESSMENT OF MAJOR EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN ZAMBIA FROM 1964 TO 2015: LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

by

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Abstract

This chapter provides an understanding and evaluation of major educational policies in Zambia from 1964, the date of political independence, to 2015. Policies are often formulated in response to a problem or set of problems. At independence, Zambia inherited a small and racially segregated educational system from the British. Therefore, there was an urgent need to expand education at all levels to eliminate racial segregation, combat inequities and create an educated workforce. There has been a wave of educational reforms in this sector over the years. While some are steps in the right direction, implementation remains a challenge. This chapter shows that most educational policies in the country are either insufficiently implemented or are not implemented at all. Action is urgently required on the part of the government and other stakeholders if these policies are to achieve their original intention.

Key words: Education Policy, Access, Equity, Dropout Rate, Re-entry Policy, Free Primary Education Policy

Introduction

From independence in 1964 to 2015 successive Zambian governments have sought to reform the education sector to expand provision, achieve equity and significantly improve the quality of education. While some of these policies are steps in the right direction, implementation remains a problem. Most educational policies in Zambia are either insufficiently implemented or are not implemented at all. Urgent action is thus required on the part of the government and other stakeholders in order to ensure that these policies achieve their original intention.

This chapter is organised as follows: the first section provides an assessment of the major policies in the education sector since political independence and the rationale for these reforms. Specific policies, such as the Re-entry Policy and the Free Primary Education Policy are examined and discussed in the second section. Finally, the implications for the education sector are highlighted and suggestions are made on how to overcome ineffective policy implementation.

Major Education Policy Documents

Education was not well-developed during the colonial period in Zambia and was characterised by segregated and inequitable provision for African and European children. This set the tone for educational policy after independence. In 1964, Zambia inherited

a racially segregated educational system, meagre educational facilities for Africans, and a liberal arts biased curriculum. The educational priorities of the new government, under the United National Independence Party (UNIP), were the elimination of racial segregation in schools; increased enrolment at secondary and higher education levels with a view to creating the pool of indigenous Zambians required to run institutions in the new political and social order; and the introduction of science-oriented curricula and professional subjects to train Zambians for technical and professional careers (Achola, 1991). These issues are addressed in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

The following Ministry of Education document included a comprehensive statement on the party's educational policy, the abolition of racially segregated schools, universal primary and secondary education for girls and boys and increased educational facilities and enrolment (Achola, 1991). The new government adopted a policy to ensure equality of educational opportunities of race. The Act abolished racially segregated schools and placed all schools firmly under the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 1977). Children were allowed to enrol in former White schools and former African schools. The government also focused its attention on the expansion of secondary schools and a university (Kelly, 1991) in order to conserve resources.

The first major national education policy document was the *Proposals and Recommendations* document of 1977. This document identified the deficiencies of the colonial education system that trained Africans and did not meet the needs of Zambians in the context of the new political and political system. Thus, the 1977 Educational Reforms aimed at creating a system that met the needs and aspirations of Zambians and was an instrument for the development of an independent nation (Ministry of Education, 1977). The Ministry noted that 'Education is a social institution which is essential for the development of the Zambian nation' (Ministry of Education, 1977).

document cited above

a racially segregated educational system, meagre educational facilities for Africans, and a liberal arts biased curriculum. The educational priorities of the new government, under the United National Independence Party (UNIP), were the elimination of racial segregation in schools; increased enrolment at secondary and higher education levels with a view to creating the pool of indigenous Zambians required to run institutions in the new political and social order; and the introduction of science-oriented curricula and professional subjects to train Zambians for technical and professional careers (Achola, 1990). These issues are addressed in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

Kelly (1999), notes that during the colonial era, European schools were lavishly equipped and well-staffed, while a few African children received poor quality education. Achola (1990: 2) confirms that 'In line with British Policy elsewhere, the education provided was meagre both in quality and quantity'. Most of the learning in schools for Africans was rote learning which did not encourage creativity. Kelly (1999) points out that the Zambian government faced the problem of how to integrate the two systems (white and black schools) without affecting standards and without replacing racial distinction with that based on class. He adds that girls accounted for 42 per cent of primary school enrolment and only 20 per cent of the pupils in secondary. Furthermore, there was an uneven geographical distribution with some large areas having few or no schools. Many cities and large towns also suffered a shortage of schools (ibid, 1999).

In line with the UNIP's 1962 manifesto, after independence, the 1966 Education Act focused on widening access to schooling (Ministry of Education, 1966). The manifesto included a comprehensive statement on the party's educational objectives. These included the abolition of racially segregated schools, universal primary education for both girls and boys and increased educational facilities and enrolment (Achola, 1990). In 1964 the new government adopted a policy to ensure equality of educational opportunity regardless of race. The Act abolished racially segregated schools and brought control of private schools firmly under the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 1966). African children were allowed to enrol in former White schools and free education continued in former African schools. The government also focused its attention on the development of secondary schools and a university (Kelly, 1991) in order to provide skilled human resources.

The first major national education policy document was the *Educational Reform, Proposals and Recommendations document* of 1977. This sought to address the deficiencies of the colonial education system that trained Africans to serve as labourers and did not meet the needs of Zambians in the context of the new social, economic and political system. Thus, the 1977 Educational Reforms aimed to create an education system that met the needs and aspirations of Zambians and functioned as a powerful instrument for the development of an independent nation (Ministry of Education, 1977). The Ministry noted that 'Education is a social institution which will continue to reflect the characteristics of the Zambian society' (Ministry of Education, 1977: 6). The document stated that:

- (i) The Ministry of Education should more aggressively improve the quality of education and services;
- (ii) The Ministry should eliminate regional and other inequalities in educational provision;
- (iii) The Ministry should provide an opportunity for every child of school-going age to enter Grade 1;
- (iv) It should clear the bottlenecks at Grade 4-5 levels so that every Grade 4 pupil, proceeds to Grade 5 and continues to Grade 7;
- (v) The Ministry of Education should progressively increase the number of Grade 8-9 places so that, in due course, every child who completes Grade 7 would be able to enter Grade 8 and complete Grade 9; and
- (vi) The Ministry should encourage self-help projects in communities and ensure that educational projects are executed to completion (Ministry of Education, 1977: 97-98).

The government was aware that the achievement of nine years of universal basic education would take time and require significant resources. The Ministry of Education (1977) noted that, enrolling every child between the ages of seven (entry to Grade 1) and sixteen (end of Grade 9) would require additional school places, teachers and annual recurrent funds. During the first few years after the 1977 Reform Document was published, the only steps taken to implement this policy were ongoing efforts to expand secondary school provision so that an increasing number of Grade 7 students would be able to proceed to Grades 8 and 9 (Ministry of Education, 1992). Expanding primary education was not a major priority immediately after independence; as noted earlier, the government instead focused its attention on the development of secondary schools and a university (Kelly, 1991). This was due to the need to provide skilled human resources for the Zambian economy. The number of secondary schools rose from twenty-nine in 1962 to sixty-seven in 1966, 111 in 1967 and 120 in 1968 (Mwanakatwe, 2013). Mwanakatwe (2013: 282-283) adds that 'From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, the number of secondary schools rose from 121 to 194. However, beginning from the mid-1980s, there was a sharp increase in the number of schools from 194 to a staggering 600 secondary schools in 1991'. This was mainly due to loans from the World Bank (Mwanakatwe, 2013).

The second national educational policy document *Focus on Learning*, concentrated on the development of primary education. It stated that 'The basic national policy in the education sector is to provide every eligible child with good quality education in Grades 1-7. From this, it follows that providing good quality primary education for all school-aged children within the shortest possible time-span is the foremost educational priority... [this] is based on equity, social, economic and educational grounds' (Ministry of Education, 1992: 15). The policy aimed to improve access, equity and efficiency and provide quality education through the rehabilitation of existing schools, building new schools, training education managers and procuring and supplying education materials to schools. The policy emphasised the need to mobilise national and international resources to revitalise and develop primary education.

From 1964 to 1991, the government of the Republic of Zambia followed a socialist approach in its provision of public services. Social democratic principles were applied to embrace free or subsidised basic services such as health and education (Ministry of Education, 1996). However, from 1991 onwards, there have been major shifts in the approach to the provision of education, that is from following socialist principles to following principles which are capitalist in nature. This covers the period from the 1992 educational policy document, *Focus on Learning* to the current national educational policy, *Educating Our Future* that is discussed in more detail below. The government shifted to a policy of cost-sharing with parents in primary, secondary and tertiary education. The Ministry of Education announced that it would build alliances with communities, private education providers, voluntary organisations and beneficiaries (Ministry of Education, 1992; 1996). Cost-sharing encompasses household contributions in the form of formal fees such as school levies and examination fees, indirect charges for school uniforms, books and stationery and informal payments (Watkins, 2000). It also includes capital spending, with contributions of cash, labour and materials for school construction and maintenance (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The third and current education policy is the *Educating Our Future* document of 1996. This policy focuses on quality, efficiency, equity, revitalised partnerships, decentralisation and democratisation and it aims at ensuring that by 2015 every child should have had access to nine years of basic education (Ministry of Education, 1996). In order to ensure quality of education, one of the aspects the Ministry of Education looked at was literacy and numeracy in schools. Ministry of Education (1996: 34) states that ‘A fundamental aim of the curriculum for lower and middle basic classes is to enable pupils to read and write clearly, correctly and confidently, in a Zambian language and in English and to acquire basic numeracy and problem-solving skills’. However, this policy faces challenges at the implementation stage because learning achievements are still low in schools. For example, the learning achievements in Grade 5 at the Primary School level are low as reported by the Examinations Council of Zambia in its 2014 National Assessment Survey Report when they stated that, ‘... the proportion of learners below the minimum level of performance was 57.0 per cent in English, 49.0 per cent in Mathematics, 49.6 per cent in Zambian languages (Examinations Council of Zambia, 2014: xi)’. Some pupils still leave Primary School at Grade 7 level without knowing how to read and write properly.

In addition, the Ministry of Education recognises the importance of teaching practical and technical subjects in schools. The policy document *Educating Our Future* stipulates that, practical and technical subjects are of importance because these provide some compensation for the traditional knowledge and practical skills that pupils would have acquired in their home environment if they were not attending school; they constitute a form of knowing, experiencing and dealing with the physical world that every educated person should possess and hence have intrinsic educational value; they possess a potential relationship to the world of work and hence may help to prepare pupils for post-school employment or vocational training; and they equip pupils with skills that are conducive to the constructive use of leisure (Ministry of Education, 1996). In view of this, in 2013 the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early

Education (MESVTEE) developed a curriculum to enable learners in secondary schools to choose a career path. There are two career pathways at the secondary school level. These career pathways are at academic and vocational levels (MESVTEE, 2013). In addition to traditional subjects, the revised curriculum provides for vocational subjects such as physical education, computer studies and art and design, and entrepreneurship subjects such as commerce and principles of accounts (MESVTEE, 2013). Preliminary observations indicated that there were challenges inhibiting the effective implementation of this curriculum as some schools had inadequate physical facilities and teaching and learning resources to cope with the exponential growth in the number of learners.

Furthermore, in order to ensure access to nine years of basic education to every school aged child by the year 2015, the Ministry of Education embarked on infrastructural expansion and removed barriers that may act as an obstacle to the entry and completion of education. The vision is outlined in the *Educating Our Future* document as follows:

Every individual in Zambia has a right to education. Hence it is a matter of fairness or justice that access to, and participation and benefit in, the education system be available to all. The development of education will, therefore, seek to promote equality of access, participation and benefit for all in accordance with individual needs and abilities. Measures to promote equality will include allocating resources to those in greatest need, providing appropriate support systems, and changing the tangible and intangible qualities of the system itself to cater for the diverse educational needs and interests of the population (Ministry of Education, 1996: 3).

Actually, in the early 1990s, the Ministry of Education prioritised basic education in order to improve access and quality of education from Grades 1 to 9. In line with the Education for All commitment made at Jomtien in Thailand in 1990 and the observed decline in the national education standards, the Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Program (BESSIP) was launched in 1999 and ran until 2002 (Musonda, 2003: 22). BESSIP was Zambia's first comprehensive programme to implement the 1996 policy on basic education (Musonda, 2003). It was funded by the Ministry of Education through its regular budget and supported by external multilateral and bilateral aid agencies through grants and loans. BESSIP involved four funding modalities. Modality 1 was a pool or common 'basket' into which all Zambian government and cooperating partner (donors) finances were lodged and disbursed in accordance with an Annual Work Plan. Modality 2 involved World Bank loans and Modality 3 was BESSIP's limited components while the Ministry of Education controlled the funds. These were only available for restricted and specified components and were not in a common bank account or pool. Finally, Modality 4 covered separate projects managed by individual donors, for instance, donors only made funds available for specific BESSIP components or activities (Herbert et al., 2002; Musonda, 2003).

BESSIP's main objectives were twofold: (i) to increase enrolment in Grades 1 to 7 and reverse the decline in enrolment ratios by providing access to all eligible children; and (ii) to improve the learning achievements especially in literacy and mathematics (de Kemp et al., 2008: 36). It sought to improve access to basic education through:

- (a) Constructing new schools in order to reduce the walking distances to a maximum of five kilometres;
- (b) Reducing school costs for parents by providing grants to schools;
- (c) Enrolling children who had dropped out or had never attended school; and
- (d) Offering more bursaries to vulnerable children (girls, orphans, the poor and children in rural areas) (de Kemp et al., 2008: 37).

The Ministry of Education (2007) reported that BESSIP's main outputs included:

- (i) Construction and renovation of new classrooms;
- (ii) A marked increase in the number of teachers attending in-service training; and
- (iii) Increased procurement of textbooks and other materials.

When BESSIP started, it catered only for Grades 1 to 7 (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2002). However, basic education in Zambia was planned to cater for pupils from Grades 1 to 9. It was only in the early 2000s that BESSIP activities were extended to Grades 8 and 9. This meant that, despite the achievements recorded in basic education, some children of school-going age were still not in school. Access challenges persisted largely due to poverty, as the direct and indirect costs of attending school were usually too high for the poor families. As Hunt notes (2008: 7):

Household income is found to be an important factor in determining access to education as schooling potentially incurs a range of costs, both upfront and hidden. Upfront costs include school fees, while the more hidden costs include uniforms, travel, equipment and the opportunity costs of sending a child to school.

Even when education is public and tuition is free, parents still incur costs such as transport, uniforms, stationery and textbooks, miscellaneous school charges and boarding fees. Many parents in sub-Saharan Africa including Zambia, cannot afford to send their children to school (Offorma, 2009; Lewin, 2009; Mwanza, 2010).

For a number of reasons, out-of-pocket expenses may be greater for girls than boys. For example, parents' reluctance to send their daughters to school without proper clothing raises the cost of attendance. Concerns about their daughters' physical and moral safety also make parents unwilling to allow them to travel long distances to school each day, particularly in rural areas. High levels of absenteeism and poor retention among girls are common in Zambia's rural schools.

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 below, show the dropout rate at basic education level by gender and province in Zambia for Grades 1 to 7 and Grades 1 to 9 respectively.

Table 6.1: Dropout rate for Grades 1 to 7 by Gender and Province in Zambia in 2008

Province	Male	Female	Total
Central	1.70%	2.37%	2.67%
Copperbelt	1.13%	1.49%	1.49%
Eastern	1.85%	2.68%	2.95%
Luapula	2.18%	2.98%	3.37%
Lusaka	1.27%	1.64%	1.79%
North western	1.97%	3.17%	3.81%
Northern	2.40%	3.18%	3.62%
Southern	1.14%	1.83%	2.26%
Western	1.94%	2.96%	3.46%
National	1.68%	2.36%	2.65%

Source: Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 48

Table 6.2: Dropout rate for Grades 1 to 9 by Gender and Province in Zambia in 2008

Province	Male	Female	Total
Central	2.19%	1.95%	5.14%
Copperbelt	1.28%	0.77%	1.50%
Eastern	2.42%	2.59%	6.06%
Luapula	2.80%	2.87%	7.26%
Lusaka	1.54%	1.35%	2.90%
North western	2.91%	2.76%	9.56%
Northern	3.07%	4.47%	8.61%
Southern	1.72%	1.67%	5.61%
Western	2.69%	2.20%	8.12%
National	1.73%	2.65%	2.18%

Source: Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 49

According to the Ministry of Education (2008: 47), the dropout rate at primary school level (Grades 1-7) increased from 2.27 per cent in 2007 to 2.65 per cent in 2008. At junior secondary level (Grades 1-9), it fell slightly from 2.43 per cent to 2.18 per cent and it increased from 1.38 per cent to 2.04 per cent in high schools (Ministry of Education, 2008: 47). The tables show that the dropout rate for girls is higher than that for boys. It is important to note that, the 1966 Education Act has been revised by the government. The 2011 Education Act incorporates, among other provisions, compulsory primary school attendance for all children of school-going age and the legalisation of community

schools, and outlaws marrying or giving into marriage children of school-going age (The Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2011).

However, despite the focus on access and equity in the policy documents fifty years after independence in Zambia, the poor still constitute the largest group of uneducated persons with poor retention rates at school, high failure rates and unequal access to schooling (Mwanza, 2013). In seeking to resolve access issues, from the late 1990s onwards the government formulated the Re-entry Policy and the Free Primary Education Policy.

The Re-entry Policy

The Re-entry Policy is designed to provide opportunities to girls, who drop out of school due to pregnancy, to return to school after delivery. Teenage pregnancy rates were high before the introduction of this policy and many girls were unable to finish school. In September 1997, a conference on girls' education was held at Mulungushi International Conference Centre, Lusaka, at which the Minister of Education announced that schoolgirls who fell pregnant would no longer be expelled and that those that had previously been expelled would be allowed to return to school (Ministry of Education, 2004). The Re-entry Policy was launched on 13 October 1997 (Ministry of Education, 2010: 11).

The Re-entry Policy is supported by a set of guidelines that include:

1. How schools would be able to detect pregnancies;
2. The steps that need to be taken after a pregnancy has been detected;
3. The documents which should be given to the pregnant girl when she goes on leave and those that should be maintained by schools;
4. The length of time between delivery and re-entry; and
5. Steps that can be taken to improve the school environment and prevent pregnancies (Ministry of Education, FAWEZA and UNICEF, 2004).

The Re-entry Policy is important as educating a girl is associated with significant reductions in infant mortality and morbidity, lower fertility rates and improved family nutrition and health. In addition, education gives a girl a sense of empowerment and self-confidence and improved opportunities in both the wage and non-wage sectors. An educated girl is also the best guarantee that her children will attend school which would help put an end to the inter-generational transmission of poverty (UNICEF, 2012).

Since the introduction of the Re-entry Policy in 1997, some girls have returned to school after giving birth but many have not (Ministry of Education, 2010). As discussed below, this is often due to financial constraints. Statistics on pregnancies and readmissions at the national level show that since 2002 the proportion of girls going back to school at the basic education level has varied between 34 per cent and 43 per cent (Ministry of Education, 2010: 12). As illustrated in Table 6.3 below, the figure in 2002 was 36.1 per cent; this increased to 43 per cent in 2005 but dropped off in 2006-2008 before moving upward again to 40 per cent in 2009 (Ministry of Education, 2010: 12).

Table 6.3: Number of pregnancies and re-admissions in Basic Schools 2002 to 2009

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Pregnancies	3,663	4,405	6,528	9,111	12,370	11,391	12,370	13,634
Re-admissions	1,322	1,836	2,626	3,899	4,470	3,870	4,692	5,517

Source: Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 12

However, implementation of this policy leaves much to be desired. Mwanza's (2013) study showed that the guidelines are not being adhered to, adversely affecting successful implementation. For example, some schools do not have qualified and trained counsellors to provide proper guidance and counselling to girls and their parents/guardians. There is also a lack of financial support for girls who fall pregnant to return to school (Mwanza, 2013). Many girls' families disown them, or they say that there is no money for their education as their babies have to be cared for. Where girls do return to school after delivery, they normally have no one to look after their babies (Mwanza, 2010).

Free Primary Education Policy

In 2002, the government of Zambia introduced the Free Primary Education Policy for Grades 1 to 7. This aimed to cater for the poor, orphans and other vulnerable children who because of costs could not participate in the formal education system (Ministry of Education, 2002). All forms of fees were abolished, school uniforms were not to be compulsory, and enrolment of pupils was to be unconditional and not linked to contributing items such as reams of paper and hoes (Ministry of Education, 2002).

However, Mwanza's (2013) research shows that this policy has also suffered from implementation challenges. In theory, the government and schools are supposed to be responsible for all the costs of primary education including instructional materials, freeing parents from all costs. In practice, however, parents bear certain costs as schools have not been able to meet their obligations. Parents still pay fees such as Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and maintenance fees. Many cannot afford these other school costs (Mwanza, 2013).

Despite these challenges, Zambia has recorded significant improvement in enrolment at primary school level since the introduction of the Free Primary Education Policy. As the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) (2015: 5) reports:

Comparing data between 2000 and 2014, the overall indication is that Zambia's education sector has experienced noticeable improvements. Since 2002, when the government announced the Free Primary Education (FPE) Policy, the MESVTEE has registered over 1.2 million learners, growing Zambia's net enrolment from 71 per cent in 1999 to over 91 per cent in 2013.

The MESVTEE's analysis of the government's efforts to achieve Goal 2 of the Global Education Goals, i.e., "Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children

in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality” (UNESCO, 2015: xii) pointed out that:

Despite 15 years of concerted action, access remains a huge challenge for Zambia. The access challenge has two key dimensions. The first is about getting more pupils into limited school places while the second relates to ensuring that disadvantaged children access education (MESVTEE, 2015: 13).

Conclusion

This chapter examined and evaluated the major education policies in Zambia since the attainment of political independence in 1964 in addressing access and equity. It argued that ineffective implementation of some policies has contributed to access and equity challenges in this sector. It does not augur well that 50 years after Independence, some children of school-going age are still not in school or fail to complete a full cycle of basic education and secondary schooling. There is a need to ensure that every child of school-going age not only enrolls in school but remains, completes a full cycle of 12 years of schooling and hopefully eventually enrolls in higher education. For education policies to yield meaningful results they must be effectively and fully implemented.

Policy Implications

Failure to effectively implement some education policies has negatively affected the achievement of the goals of Education for All. Poverty prevents many parents from paying school fees, particularly from Grade 8 onwards, meaning that these children are not in school. Furthermore, girls fall pregnant and do not return to school after giving birth due to a lack of school fees, widening the gender gap in education. Inequality and access challenges thus persist in the education sector in Zambia. In this regard, it is recommended that the government and other stakeholders ensure that education policy is fully and properly implemented in order to achieve equity, access and quality education for all. This calls for more effective communication between policy makers and policy implementers such as head-teachers, teachers and education stakeholders. Policy makers need to redouble their efforts to ensure that education policy is communicated and promoted effectively and consistently as well as develop arenas where informed practice and focused interpretations of policy are formulated and then applied in local settings.

The head-teacher is the key in ensuring the success of policy implementation at school level and thus needs to be fully conversant with education policy. This will assist him/her in disseminating information about the origins of a policy and the problem(s) it is intended to alleviate. For example, in the implementation of the Free Education Policy for Grades 1 to 7, the head-teacher has an important role to play in communicating effectively with teachers, pupils and community members. In addition, he/she needs to motivate and encourage teachers and other staff to accept and implement policy. Furthermore, since inequalities persist in education, the government needs to allocate

additional funds to schools with high concentrations of poor and disadvantaged families. This will assist disadvantaged and vulnerable children to remain in school and complete their schooling.

Finally, with regard to the implementation of the Re-entry Policy, the Government, non-governmental organisations and all stakeholders need to ensure that funding is made available to young mothers who desire to return to school but cannot afford to do so. Through the MESVTEE (now Ministry of General Education), all stakeholders should ensure that there is an adequate supply of qualified counsellors in schools to provide guidance on reproductive rights, preventing unwanted pregnancies and making girls aware of their rights in terms of the policy. Finally, the government and all stakeholders need to strengthen advocacy to ensure that girls return to school after giving birth.