

Policy Brief: Zambia

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Keeping Girls in School: Situation Analysis for Zambia

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This policy brief analyzes current trends in the education of adolescent girls in Zambia, describing trends in the education sector and in education coverage for adolescent girls and suggesting opportunities for further policy development in this area.

Why Keep Girls in School?

International evidence indicates that keeping girls in school positively affects their life trajectory and benefits the well-being of the next generation. When girls are exposed to quality education, they build numeracy, literacy, cognitive, and social skills, leaving them better prepared to participate in the labor market and gain an income. Girls' attendance in school during adolescence is also correlated with delayed sexual initiation, later marriage and childbearing, lower rates of HIV and AIDS, lower risk of domestic violence, and fewer hours of domestic work (World Bank 2014). As adolescent girls transition from childhood to motherhood, educated women are more likely to invest in the education and health of their children. Educated mothers are more likely to value schooling, to be aware of the returns to schooling, and ultimately to ensure that their children receive an education. Their children have higher immunization rates and better nutrition, increasing enrollment and improving school performance for the next generation (World Bank 2014).

The quickly growing adolescent population in Zambia will require close attention and higher investments to ensure that girls stay in school and receive a quality

education. Zambia has one of the fastest-growing populations in the world, with a projected 10 million adolescents by 2050. Educating this growing adolescent population will require well-planned investment in the education sector to reach those who are most vulnerable to dropping out of school.¹

Education Sector Trends

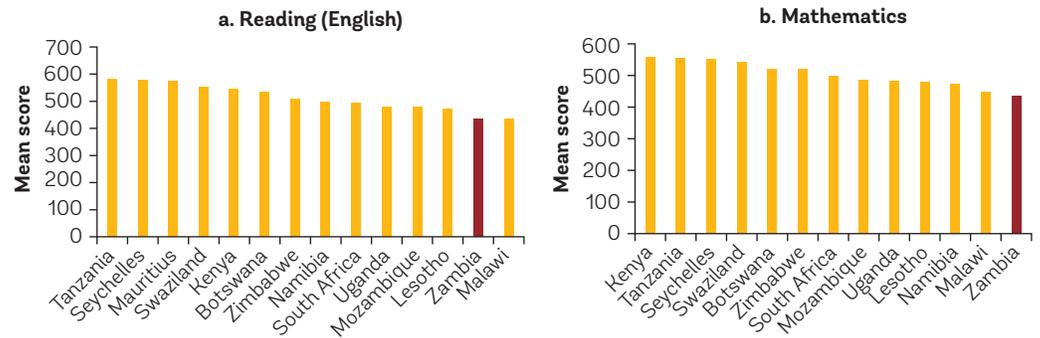
School-related costs can be unbearable for poor families. More than a third of rural Zambians are poor.² As a result, even small school fees and other indirect costs can deter families from accessing education, particularly in rural areas. For this reason, fees have been waived for attending primary school since 2002.

For students attending school, challenges exist in obtaining a quality education. Zambian pupils are among the lowest performers in the region, according to the 2007 Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), which tests students in grade 6 in 14 Southern and Eastern African countries (figure 1). In 2007 Zambia performed last in

¹ The adolescent population in Zambia is projected to multiply by 2.35 to 3.01 times between 2015 and 2050, with the median prediction at 2.68 (assuming relevant policies are enacted). To maintain current pupil-to-teacher and pupil-to-classroom ratios by 2050, significant investments would need to be made in school construction, teacher development and recruitment, and classroom resources.

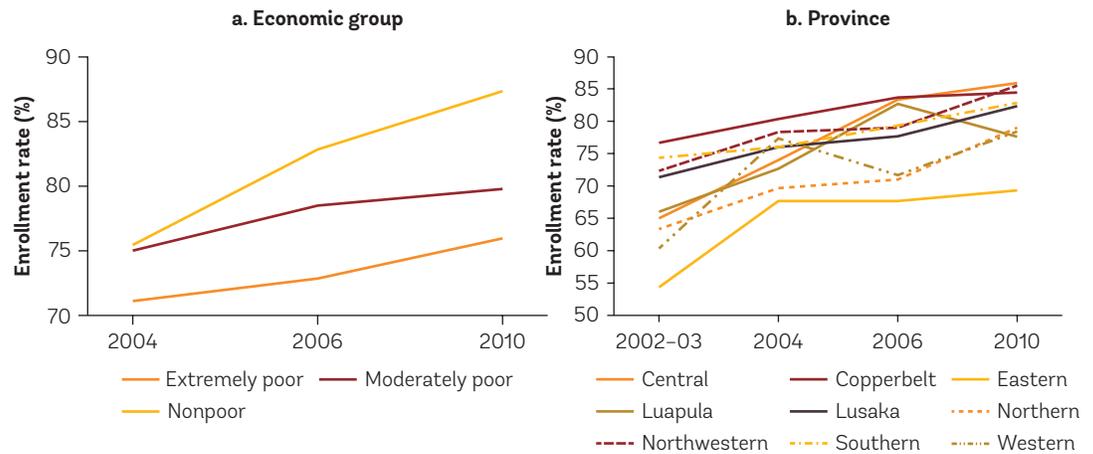
² According to De la Fuente, Murr, and Rascon Ramirez (2015), about 78 percent of the rural population is poor compared to 28 percent of the urban population.

Figure 1. SAQMEQ III Scores in Reading and Mathematics in Select African Countries, 2007



Source: SACMEQ III.

Figure 2. Enrollment Rates for Girls (11–18 Years of Age) in Zambia, by Economic Group and Province, 2002–10



Source: Living Conditions Measurement Survey.

mathematics and only better than one country, Malawi, in reading. Looking specifically at gender, there are no major differences in the performance of girls and boys, although girls remain slightly behind boys in reading.

Overall school enrollment has been rising for both boys and girls, exceeding regional averages. According to the Living Conditions Monitoring Survey, the enrollment rate for adolescents 11–18 years of age grew from 77 percent in 2002/03 to 86 percent in 2010 for boys and from 68 to 81 percent, respectively, for girls.³ In 2013 the gross enrollment rate (GER) for primary school-age girls was 108 percent in Zambia compared with 97 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. While the GER drops significantly in lower-secondary school, Zambia’s GER of

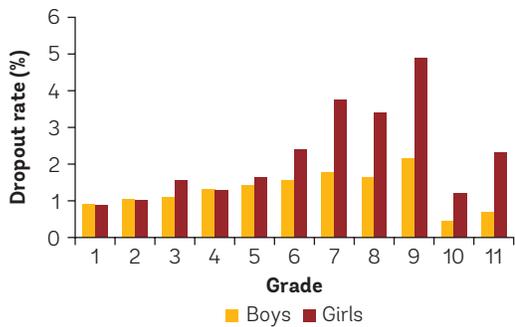
³ The enrollment rate is the percentage of students 11–18 years old at the time of the survey, which does not take into account any age-grade mismatches. Figures in this paragraph are from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s 2013 Questionnaire on National Education System.

61 percent for adolescent girls is still above the regional average of 46 percent.

The disparities in school enrollment between boys and girls widen throughout adolescence. While gender parity has been attained at the primary level, the gender parity index drops to .80 in grades 10–12. Boys and girls enroll in relatively equal numbers up to grade 5, but the ratio starts to slip in grade 6, yielding a composition of 54 percent boys and 46 percent girls by grade 12.

Looking specifically at adolescent girls, there are noticeable differences in enrollment across provinces and social status. Although overall enrollment has improved across provinces since 2006, the Eastern province has consistently had the lowest enrollment of girls. In 2010, for instance, enrollment of girls in the Eastern province averaged 69 percent, compared with more than 80 percent in the other provinces (figure 2). Regarding schooling trends among different social economic groups, there is a positive relationship between higher social status and school enrollment. On average,

Figure 3. Dropout Rates in Zambia, by Gender and Grade Level, 2013–14



Source: 2014 Education Management Information System.

77 percent of adolescent girls from extremely poor households are enrolled in school, compared with 80 percent from moderately poor and 88 percent from nonpoor households.⁴

School dropout rates are the most significant gender difference in education. Starting in grade 6, significantly more girls leave school than boys. For instance, in 2013–14 girls dropped out of school more than double the rate of boys in grade 7 and three times the rate of boys in grade 11 (figure 3). These dropout rates vary considerably by region, with Northwestern, Luapula, and Northern provinces having the highest dropout rates for girls in grades 1–9.

Pregnancy, economic hardship, and marriage are the main reported reasons that girls drop out of school. Most students who dropped out of school between 2002 and 2010 reported that the reason was lack of financial support; however, disaggregated by gender, girls said that the primary reason was pregnancy (2002–10 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey).⁵ According to 2014 Demographic and Health Survey data, nearly 30 percent of girls 15–19 years of age have already given birth or are pregnant, of which more than half have no education and more than a third have only a primary education. Pregnancy disproportionately affects the rural population, as 79 percent of the girls who leave

school due to pregnancy are in rural areas.⁶ Southern and Eastern provinces have the highest number of girls leaving school due to pregnancies (2014 Education Management Information System [EMIS] data).

Lower secondary is a period of increased risk for girls, with just over half of all school dropouts from pregnancy occurring in grades 8–9 (2014 EMIS). Between 2009 and 2013, pregnancy was the main reason for girls to leave lower-secondary school, consistently accounting for 46–48 percent of dropouts among girls in grades 8–9 (2014 EMIS). While lower secondary has the highest number of girls dropping out due to pregnancy, the percentage of girls dropping out due to pregnancy increases with grade level: 26 percent in grades 5–7, 48 percent in grades 8–9, and 58 percent in grades 10–12. The percentage of girls in each grade level leaving due to marriage and economic hardship falls as schooling levels rise (figure 4).⁷

Early marriage disproportionately affects adolescent girls. More than 75 percent of girls ages 15–19 are married compared with less than 12 percent of boys in the same age group (figure 5). The 2014 Demographic and Health Survey report found similar results, with 41.8 percent of women, but only 4.2 percent of men (ages 20–49) reporting that they were married by the time they were 18 years old.⁸

Issues for Policy Development

Reducing gender disparities in educational attainment for adolescents in Zambia requires addressing both the supply of and demand for education; increasing the demand for education for adolescent girls requires providing services to meet their specific needs. The reentry policy for education in Zambia allowed a third of female dropouts from primary school and half from secondary school to return to school in 2013–14. However, further services, such as childcare support, lower schooling fees, and mentorship, may be needed to ensure that these girls are able to

⁶ Overall, 58 percent of the population in Zambia lives in rural areas.

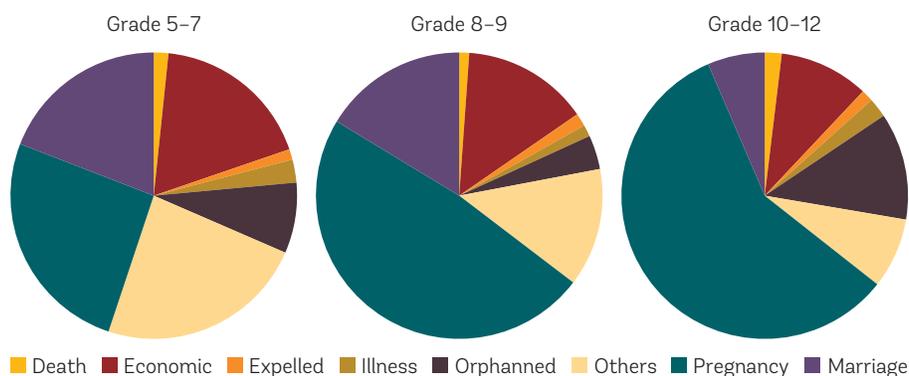
⁷ Due to marriage: grades 5–7 (19 percent), grades 8–9 (16 percent), and grades 10–12 (6 percent). Due to economic hardship: grades 5–7 (18 percent), grades 8–9 (14 percent), and grades 10–12 (10 percent).

⁸ Although pregnancy and early marriages may be some of the main stated reasons for girls dropping out of school in Zambia, the lower levels of school enrollment by economic group and province suggest that the issue reflects an interaction among early pregnancies, marriage, and economic status.

⁴ Extreme poor is defined as households who cannot afford to meet the basic minimum food requirements even if all expenditure is on food. In 2010, the poverty line was set at K96,366 for extreme poverty and K146,009 for moderate poverty.

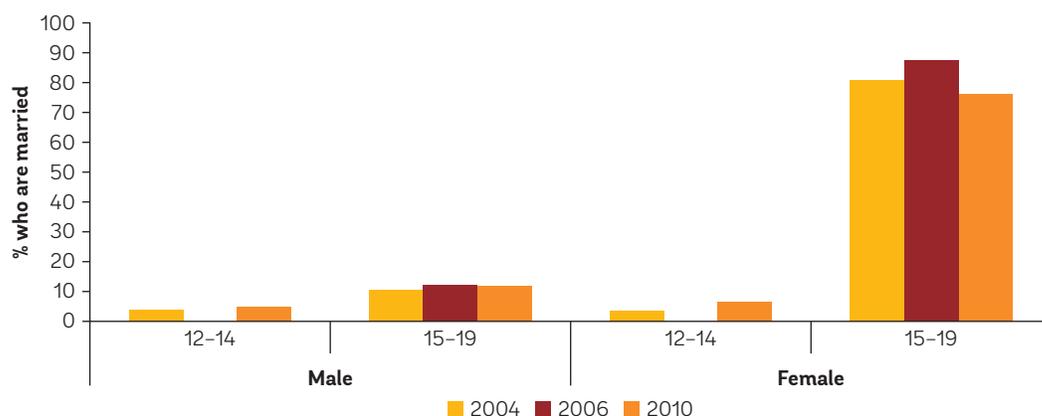
⁵ Every year, approximately 43,000 girls in Zambia drop out of school. Among them, approximately 11,000 girls drop out due to pregnancy. (EMIS 2009–13).

Figure 4. Reasons That Girls Drop Out of School in Zambia, by Grade, 2014



Source: 2014 Education Management Information System.

Figure 5. Percentage of Adolescents Who Are Married in Zambia, by Age Group and Gender, 2004-10



Source: 2013 EMS.

complete their education and that additional teenage mothers are able to return to school.

Several ongoing initiatives are helping to keep girls in school. For instance, the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) bursary scheme kept 28,562 girls in secondary school between 2001 and 2014 (CAMFED 2014). This is significant given that an estimated 44,000 lower-secondary school-age girls are out of school in Zambia (UNICEF 2014). CAMFED programs also support retention by providing cash transfers to vulnerable girls in primary school and improving the school environment through teacher mentors, child-centered pedagogy, and child protection help desks. The Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia and other partners also run similar bursary schemes.

Conclusion

While Zambia has made progress in increasing overall enrollment, more effort is needed to ensure that adolescent girls stay in school and complete their education. Starting in upper grades of primary school, adolescent girls are more likely to drop out of school than their male

counterparts, with pregnancy, early marriage, and financial constraints likely interacting are frequently cited as the main reasons. More information is needed on current government and nongovernment programs and policies to ensure that they are targeting girls at the right age and providing adequate support to keep girls in school and ensure that they complete a quality education.

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