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UNDERSTANDING THE SYSTEM

**STEP-UP ZAMBIA'S APPROACH TO IMPROVING LEARNER
PERFORMANCE BY EXPERIENCING, SCRUTINIZING, AND
EVALUATING THE REALITIES ON THE GROUND**

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Cover photo: Nsakaluba Primary School in Luapula Province houses 1,585 pupils Grades 1 through 9. After speaking with senior leaders at the school, the STEP-Up team soon discovered that teacher allocation makes a difference: Grade 1 teachers with only one class to teach had helped more students “break through” to reading than teachers with two classes. (Photo: Sarah Grausz/STEP-Up Zambia)

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States government.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USAID Strengthening Educational Performance Up (STEP-Up) Zambia project began in December 2011. The project team's first challenge was to understand why the primary education system in Zambia, which once performed well, has in recent years struggled to deliver quality education and produce students who succeed in higher education.

The team visited all 10 provinces, half of current education districts, and more than 150 schools in urban, rural, and remote rural locations. Accompanying the team on every visit were central, provincial, and district officials from the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training, and Early Education (MESVTEE) — either a provincial education officer (PEO) or other senior staff member from the provincial education office, a district education board officer (DEB), or (in special cases) a central ministry officer such as the director of Standards and Curriculum, who oversees teacher monitoring and supervision.

The field visits were not conducted to assess the school infrastructure or availability of learning materials — they were exercises to ask head teachers and education staff how they deliver education and ascertain the results of their work. The major question was, “Are children learning in your school?”

Education officials observed the realities on the ground for the first time, sparking "a-ha" moments that are inspiring officials to improve education through new initiatives. These initiatives address the need for a “whole system reform” process. MESVTEE will focus on one simple question: “How can we improve the quality of education delivered so that students perform better?”

STEP-Up's Findings

1) Student performance

Poor reading skills. STEP-Up found that less than 50 percent of pupils in Grades 1-4 can read and write. Schools tend to focus on examination results rather than assessing how and what children are learning.

Insufficient teaching hours in a year. A primary school pupil only spends 22.75 days in school per year. By Grade 5, a pupil has spent barely eight months in class since entering school (182 days in a school year totals 545 hours, or three hours of class per day, which equals 22.75 days of teaching).

Insufficient teacher-pupil contact hours. In rural areas, teachers spend an average of 10 to 15 days out of school pursuing personal matters (e.g., collecting paychecks from town, visiting family, or attending funerals).

2) Management issues

Inconsistent leadership. STEP-Up found that schools that have strong head teachers tend to perform better than schools that do not.

Insufficient data production and management. School leaders generally do not make the connection between the learner achievement data they generate and decisions coming from the higher levels, so they do not provide the most accurate information. In addition, the centralized data management system does not provide provinces and districts with timely information on how data analysis can inform school administration.

Decentralization process underway. STEP-UP found that, while decentralization of the country's educational bureaucracy has begun, there is still much to be done. Provinces and districts need to feel empowered to make relevant and timely decisions that have the greatest impact. Accountability and responsibility for results will then lie with the local jurisdictions.

3) School and social environment

Lack of education materials. The ministry has allegedly distributed education materials to primary schools, but in many schools these materials are not there. The situation is the same with ICT equipment (to be provided according to donor's programs) and books (available from vendors). School libraries are scarce, and those that do exist have very small collections. There is a need for concerted efforts from civil society partners, donor community, and PTAs to provide schools with the right amount of learning and reading materials to stimulate reading and learning.

PTAs' contribution to improved school environment. The project found that PTAs, under instruction from head teachers, are more focused on building classrooms and buying transportation than procuring educational materials, books, and other commodities that could help improve teaching.

Private sector participation. In general, the Zambian private sector is willing and eager to join the education sector in helping to raise the quality of education in a structured manner.

Absenteeism and gender equity. The "Education for All" policy increased accessibility to education; however, due to social and cultural issues, boys and girls are weeded out of the system at early stages due to early marriages and pregnancies, child labor, and other factors. Raising awareness among civil society of the vital importance of education is crucial to securing children — and the country — with a better future.

Health issues. Despite existing HIV and AIDS work place policies, there is no evidence of such activities at the local levels. The stigma remains, causing education managers and school leaders to avoid addressing these issues. Many schools simply refuse to implement such programs.

This report will provide evidence that supports findings as well as a preliminary analysis of some initiatives undertaken by the MESVTEE to address problems and the root causes of issues that affecting poor performance. STEP-Up and its ministry counterparts are carrying out more in-depth studies to confirm findings and to secure an appropriate strategy to undertake the reforms necessary to improve education in Zambia.

SECTION I: BACKGROUND

MESVTEE’s 2002 “Education for All” policy provided access to education for thousands of children, many coming from lower socioeconomic levels. The inclusive, equitable policy greatly benefited vulnerable children, especially girls, but it also challenged the education sector by flooding schools with more pupils than the system could handle.

As the formal education sector struggled to educate Zambia’s youth, civil society stepped in to fill gaps. Communities began to provide their own resources to build schools and hire makeshift teachers to such a point that today the “community school” phenomenon is responsible for the construction and staffing of some 3,000 of the 9,000 primary schools in Zambia. However, the ministry offers little to support community schools: Most teachers at community schools have little or no formal education training and receive limited support from the system to improve their skills. As a result, despite these grassroots responses and structures in place, education quality and learning outcomes in Zambia’s schools have suffered.

In the formal (government) education system, the overwhelming increase in enrollment, lack of well-trained teachers to take up the challenge, and lack of resources to manage the education process have manifested in poor student performance and reading skills. These challenges have generated an atmosphere of stagnation in an education system that, while striving to provide effective education, has not been able to introduce innovative approaches that would create needed change in the system.

MESVTEE is keenly aware of these challenges and is committed to providing quality education by using all available resources. STEP-Up began operating in December 2011 in this context. STEP-Up’s goal is to stimulate systemic reforms to address the primary shortcoming in education delivery: improving reading achievement and, in this way, improving quality education and learner performance.

A Global Struggle to Improve Education

According to recent assessments by the Zambian government and the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality, learner performance in reading and mathematics has not improved in the last decade; in several provinces, performance has dropped noticeably. But Zambia is not alone. A November 2010 report from McKinsey & Company, *How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, notes that nearly every country in the world “has undertaken some form of school system reform during the past two decades, but very few have succeeded in improving their systems from poor to fair to good to great to excellent.”

SECTION II: INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of STEP-Up is to help the MESVTEE undertake education management reform to improve learner performance. STEP-Up was created to focus on the effective use of existing MESVTEE capacity and the promotion of systems integration to further enhance educational performance in the following five STEP-Up Zambia task areas:

1. Integrate and strengthen systems for improved decision-making
2. Promote equity as a central theme in policy development and education management reform
3. Institutionalize MESVTEE's management of HIV/AIDS workplace programs
4. Strengthen decentralization for improved learner performance
5. Engage Zambian institutions of higher education in MESVTEE policy research and analysis

In addition, STEP-Up's methodological approach to institutional strengthening needed to begin with an *understanding of the system as it currently is*, the reason being that the process of changing knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) related to education management and decision-making cannot be taught — it must be experienced through collaborative learning opportunities with the education system stakeholders.

STEP-Up designs these learning opportunities to offer practical models of results-driven management norms that build mutual trust, are informed by locally available evidence and embodied in clearly defined tools for management and oversight, and facilitate professional feedback through coaching and mentoring. The goal is to identify topics of discussion regarding student underperformance, poor reading skills, and inadequate use of local data, and then to collaborate and generate well-defined and decentralized efforts to achieve system-wide reform.

In seeking to achieve improvement in reading performance, it is not only necessary to develop the appropriate technical interventions (e.g., reading methodologies and materials), but also to assess and prepare the conditions in the system that will make the application of these new approaches feasible.

Due to the length of time between program conception to contract award (almost 18 months) the team determined that it was necessary to verify the initial assumptions, as there had been changes in government and ministry leadership. This report focuses on the themes that emerged, highlighting the main issues detected during the verification visits to support the systemic approaches that are needed to improve performance and, ultimately, the quality of education. The annexes offer a detailed analysis of the project team's findings, case studies from the field visits, and a list of education leaders who have provided essential information for this project's work.

SECTION III: FIELD VISITS

In the first five months of the STEP-Up Zambia project, the team conducted ground-truthing (i.e., verification) visits to all of Zambia’s 10 provinces to gain a better understanding of the realities at the school, district, and provincial levels. STEP-Up invited ministry staff from central, provincial, and district levels to take part in the visits. Each visit proved to be a reality check for ministry staff. Following this common and binding experience, the team worked with ministry counterparts to organize provincial strategic planning sessions. At these sessions, participants constructed a joint vision and designed strategies and plans to improve student performance and reading achievement — as a means to improve the quality of education — in each province. (Strategic planning sessions are currently taking place at the district level.)

STEP-Up had several objectives in conducting the ground-truthing exercises. From a data collection standpoint, the objective was to gain first-hand information about what was happening in the system at headquarters, provincial education offices, district offices, and schools. The findings would inform STEP-Up Zambia’s overall approach on how best to plan the project.

Between March and May 2012, members of the project team visited some 100 schools in Zambia’s 10 provinces. The team visited three sample districts in each province — the district housing the provincial capital and two other districts recommended by the provincial education officers. In each, the team visited a minimum of three schools — two basic schools and one high school — to understand whether (and how) issues of learner performance translated from primary to secondary education settings. The team met with the head teacher and other senior staff members at each school (see Annex C for a list of individuals with whom STEP-Up met).

A. Step-Up’s Methodology for the Field Visits

To help the project team understand and experience what was happening in the field, and to orient them to the “appreciative inquiry” method, each member of the project technical team participated in the conversations and interviews with provincial and district-level MESVTEE officials, head teachers, and classroom teachers. The team also collected and analyzed documentation and examination results, where such materials were available. STEP-Up’s staff worked in two groups, visiting different provinces and schools and collecting a large amount of information.

Discussion as Data Collection

The MESVTEE’s traditional data-collection method is to use a standardized instrument containing questions that the researcher develops in advance; however, this method can be both prescriptive and restrictive. STEP-Up uses a participatory rural appraisal model, a method that encourages discussion. Respondents appreciated the depth of probing that accompanied the team’s questions.

Eastern Province: Talking Walls and Observations of Head Teachers

STEP-Up's first field trip was a fact-finding visit to Eastern Province, one of the four provinces where STEP-Up's predecessor project had worked. The purpose of this trip was to find out what was left a year after that project, the Education Quality Improvement Program 2 (EQUIP2), ceased its activities in the province. Visiting Eastern Province was a rewarding experience. The team, accompanied by the USAID contracting officer's representative (COR), was hosted and briefed by a dynamic and articulate team from the Provincial Education Office team, led by a dynamic PEO and provincial standards education officer (PESO).

The PEO and PESO and their team described EQUIP2's initial identification of 12 main issues that, at the time, were hindering the delivery of education in schools. This list of issues was the basis for a provincial three-year strategic plan.

To complete the overall strategic planning activity for Eastern Province, districts and schools carried out a similar analysis — starting from the province's 12 elements — to develop their own strategic plans. With this knowledge, the STEP-Up team went to visit schools.

School visits. STEP-Up visited schools in four of the eight districts in Eastern Province, with some visits arranged by the district office and others carried out spontaneously as occasions presented themselves. One element drew the team's attention immediately: In each school, the head teacher's office featured "talking walls." Without exception, each school had well-organized files containing information about school management (e.g. teachers' attendance, registers signed before and after teaching assignments, student attendance, evidence of lesson plans developed and used, homework policy statements, and evidence of compliance), demonstrating a systematic organizational structure.

"Talking Walls"

Many schools featured "talking walls," covered with posters displaying information about a school's progress. Talking walls in the schools STEP-Up visited told the team about performance indicators, exam results, numbers of male and female teachers and students, and more.

In spite of this evidence of checks and balances, however, STEP-Up observed that performance varied from school to school. When probed to explain the low level of learner performance, school leaders brought up a host of issues — dropouts due to early marriages, pregnancies, seasonal labor (e.g., helping parents in the fields or fishing) — and other causes, reflecting the distance in understanding of the importance of education between communities and parents and their schools. For example, parents could not see the value of education, which lacked clear, tangible outcomes, but they could see the daily results of their children's work in the fields.

Other issues affecting school performance in this resource-poor environment included poverty, lack of teacher motivation, and distance between homes and schools in an environment where animals represented a real risk. (In one location, a child was killed by an elephant the week before STEP-Up visited.)

One factor for forecasting school performance became increasingly evident: the quality of the head teacher's leadership. Where the team found a motivated, dynamic head teacher demonstrating good leadership and moral authority, the school was more effective. These head teachers implemented creative solutions to the challenges their schools faced, including monetary incentives to the best-performing teachers, awards to good students, visits to parents and community traditional leaders to get their help in bringing children to school. However, education outcomes such as reading levels did not come up unless the project team specifically asked for them. Performance was associated with students' capacity to pass exams, not with their academic achievement.

District offices. When the team met with district office staff, another set of issues became evident about how the education system was functioning at the district level. It seems obvious that a district should know the schools it manages, and this was the case in the districts STEP-Up visited. Unfortunately, that knowledge was not supported by data or other information about what was happening in the schools. Districts receive reports, but the data in many of those reports cannot be trusted, because the people who develop the reports have no real understanding of the potential use of this data to improve their situations. They have never seen the connection between the data they report and decisions based on the data reported. In Zambia's education system, decisions are still made at levels so remote to the school reality that in most cases they do not reflect the real needs of the schools (see one example in the box above).

The Need: Link Data to Decisions

Decisions made from a distance are less likely to result in appropriate solutions to challenges at the school level. Such a gap probably explains the case of a rural school that had received a truckload of school benches it did not need, and which are now stored in a classroom. The STEP-Up approach is demonstrating how field-level information is vital for Zambian decision-makers and their constituents.

District offices feed data to the provincial office (which then feeds data to the central ministry in Lusaka), but analysis and decisions based on that data can take up to a year to return to the district. As the real and immediate users of data, decisions need to be able to make decisions based on more than their perceptions. Among the DEBS the project team interviewed, the pressing demand was to find a way to move data more effectively.

A number of limitations keep districts from making regular visits to the schools they oversee. Lack of resources for gas, per diem, and other transportation costs — in some districts, the lack of a means of transportation — makes the monitoring task quite difficult. No regular school monitoring takes place. When districts can carry out monitoring exercises, their approach focuses on the use of formal tools that do not reveal the more qualitative — therefore, comprehensive — view of what is going on in a school. Such tools keep the focus on measuring examination scores; they do not reflect the dynamics among teachers, students, parents, and administrators that would provide better indicators about whether a school is achieving educational outcomes. The gap is in the in-depth evaluation of the quality of learning that is taking place.

At STEP-Up's debriefing meeting at the PEO's office, the PEO and her team brought up a different set of issues related to higher-level problems of authority and empowerment.

Specifically, the Provincial Education Office lacked the authority to develop and implement policies to address the needs specific to the province, lacked empowerment to exercise tighter control over the distribution of teachers in schools, and lacked an effective provincial information system — and other elements — that the PEO considered essential to ensure more effective capacity to address and respond to the issues in Eastern Province.

In Eastern Province, STEP-Up found that there was acknowledgement of EQUIP2’s positive contributions, which instilled an emphasis on compliance as a means of improving performance in education delivery (e.g., attendance and appropriate teaching). However, people knew that there was much more to be done to foster a transformation that would lead to enhanced quality and appropriateness of education delivered to students, beyond simply preparing them to pass exams. The core of systemic change had yet to be implemented.

A National Focus on Performance

After STEP-Up’s initial meeting with the Lusaka PEO, the minister of education called an *indaba* (stakeholder meeting) with education officials, six members of parliament who were interested in education, and representatives from the private sector and other groups. The minister announced his goal: to focus education delivery on performance. He explained that the education system’s objective should be improved student performance, so that Zambia’s youth are better prepared to respond to the country’s development challenges.

B. Lusaka Province: The First Ground-Truthing Exercise

When STEP-Up approached the Lusaka PEO, the Provincial Education Office was getting ready to enter a paradigm change. EQUIP2’s focus areas did not include Lusaka Province, so this meeting was the first time the PEO’s office had been approached to begin thinking about how to systematically improve learner performance in schools. The reception was enthusiastic and generated a comprehensive and intense calendar of field visits to four of the six districts in Lusaka Province. Through these visits, the STEP-Up team observed schools in Lusaka city’s complex urban environment, in rural environments, including what the team came to call “elephant rural” environments, far from the province’s urban areas, where pupils faced the dangers of coming into contact with wild animals on their way to and from school.

Schools in the city of Lusaka face tremendous pressure to enroll the many school-age youth in the areas they serve. STEP-Up learned of schools with 3,000 students — but space for considerably fewer — with as many as 105 students in some classrooms. In this urban environment, which should offer greater potential to provide learning materials to students, schools struggle with resources as they would in remote areas. In addition, these city schools lack support from parents and communities, many of whom assume that the shared responsibility of educating their children belongs solely with the MESVTEE. The STEP-Up team learned of parent-teacher associations (PTAs) that had not met for 10 years and others whose members believed that the Free Education for All Act meant that the government had the entire responsibility for educating Zambia’s children. The pressure to provide access to education is so high that, in many cases, the project team visited neighborhoods where a government school was surrounded by several community schools that were compensating for the lack of physical capacity at the government facilities.

In the so-called “elephant rural” schools, STEP-Up observed a host of social, cultural, and economic challenges. In these remote locations, distance and isolation create a tenuous relationship between communities and their schools. At one end of the spectrum, day-to-day chores have a higher value than education; parents are quick to take their children out of school to work in the fields, for example. At first glance it is easy to understand how teachers become discouraged working in poorly equipped schools, as was the case in several areas. As one extreme example, one community school in Luangwa District was about to be closed because teachers were intoxicated at work.

However, in many places, the team found that teachers were responding to distance and lack of communication with ministry officials, and making the best of their work with creativity and enthusiasm. They had pooled their own resources, adopted a proactive attitude with the community — “pulling” children from their homes to get them to school and talking with traditional leaders to make them aware of the benefits of educating their children. (These are just a few examples; the case studies in Annex B offer several more.) The STEP-Up team encountered these behaviors with a regularity that made it obvious that remoteness was not necessarily a handicap. On the contrary, the distance freed teachers from the “constraints” of the official education system, enabling them to be more resourceful, creative, and proactive.

This is not unique to Lusaka; STEP-Up’s field visits and observations confirmed that dedicated educators in every *Zambian* province are finding ways to succeed.

Visits to schools in rural or semi-urban districts confirmed the “leadership factor” that the Eastern Province PEO and her staff had pointed out. However, no systematic mechanism was found for encouraging or preparing administrators to develop and implement leadership skills. Nevertheless, leaders exist: Schools with strong leaders tended to perform better than other schools. The project team even found one good-performing school with strong leadership from the head teacher two blocks from a school where the head teacher rarely set foot in a classroom. This head teacher understood his role as simply school administration. The paradox of this situation is that these two head teachers knew each other but apparently did not discuss their approaches to running their schools.

During STEP-Up’s visit, the district education board secretaries in Lusaka showed good knowledge of the schools in their districts, despite the fact they were not able to visit them regularly. In the last year, even staff from the Provincial Education Office could only visit schools in the city of Lusaka, due to lack of funds for gas). The DEBS whose districts included strong individual leaders put forward creative ideas, such as clustering schools in Kafue, establishing incentive mechanisms for highest-performing teachers or mentorship relationships between teachers of the same subject. However, it was rare to find any systematic communication mechanisms that had been established to bring schools in a district together to discuss and analyze common problems, exchange ideas, or develop a sense of community. This lack of communication for development accounts for the isolation in which schools operate, which many articulated to the STEP-Up team.

STEP-Up’s debrief with the PEO in Lusaka was positive. Because provincial office staff had accompanied the project team on all of its visits, they had seen firsthand the issues described above. With this perspective, the PEO and her staff committed to moving as quickly as possible to develop a strategic vision and a plan that would address and improve learner performance in the province. As a first step, the PEO decided to visit Eastern Province to learn more about what had made progress possible there. This trip — the first of its kind — took place a few weeks after the project team’s visit.

C. Southern Province: An Eye-Opening Experience

For the visit to the Southern Province, the STEP-Up team was accompanied by USAID’s COR and the central ministry’s director of standards and curricula and her staff, providing an extraordinary opportunity to share STEP-Up’s methodology with ministry officials and — together — gain more experience and knowledge about the realities of Zambia’s education system. (Section V details the result of this collaboration.)

At the initial meeting with Southern Province’s Provincial Education Office, the group discussed the issue that was at the top of the province’s agenda — and which became a focal point for the team’s observations during its site visits: Why had the province, which had been doing so well, suddenly found its performance dropping?

As they had in Eastern and Lusaka provinces, school visits in Southern Province included urban, rural, and distant rural schools in four districts. The team’s findings confirmed some elements that were common across provinces. As part of the national system, schools operate in similar manners, with similar behaviors, and produce opportunities for similar responses to the challenges they face. However, the team made several additional findings:

Distance is a significant issue. In a district such as Kazungula, the most distant school is some 400 kilometers from the district head, presenting a huge challenge for monitoring visits. (The district office has only one car.) In such a situation, communication becomes a critical factor. Unfortunately, the district has yet to establish an alternative to in-person visits, so schools operate largely on their own.

In isolated areas, community schools become more relevant. In one district, Gwembe, community schools outnumber government schools, providing clear evidence of how civil society can respond when the government lacks capacity to meet the pressing demands of education for all. The government is also responding, however; the DEBS office made a substantial effort to place government teachers in community schools.

Equitable access to education includes more than just gender issues. Treatment of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) and children transferring from community schools to government schools is often far from being equitable. In one school, OVCs in one school were made to use a different uniform than other students. The team also heard the education community describe children transferring from community schools as “chaff,” attributing their presence as a factor in decreased school performance.

Witnessing on-the-ground realities creates “a-ha” moments. For the team members from the central ministry, seeing the difficulty of conducting monitoring visits to schools was eye-opening. Distance, lack of transportation, ineffective methodological approaches to guide supervision, and lack of staff capacity were just some of the challenges hindering the monitoring process. The combination of all these factors meant monitoring is an infrequent activity that focuses on external factors (such as a teacher’s appearance and voice projection) rather than problems with teaching, learning, and reading outcomes.

The team’s overall impression was that, in a general sense, schools in Southern Province had been left generally to themselves, without concrete guidance from the ministry to find creative solutions to providing institutional support and oversight.

During the final meeting with the PEO in Livingstone, the group began to answer the question of why performance had dropped: When the system stopped operating efficiently because of new challenges, no alternative solutions were put in place to address them. Moreover, the prescriptive nature of institutional oversight had created dependence on resources from the central level, stifling creativity and resourcefulness at the local level. Issues that underscored this dysfunction included the lack of fluid communication between different actors in the education system and a lack of knowledge of what was happening in each school. Systemic change to adapt to the new conditions had not yet occurred.

D. Confirming Findings and Clarifying Opportunities in the Other Provinces

Visiting the rest of the provinces enabled the team to systematize and confirm their findings, to begin the process of defining the main issues driving the overall concept of student performance and possible approaches to addressing those challenges, to contribute to Zambia’s 2030 goal becoming a middle-income country. This section summarizes findings in two other EQUIP2 provinces. Annex A provides detail about the team’s findings, as do STEP-Up’s quarterly reports and fiscal year-end results report.

Western Province formulated provincial and district-level strategic plans under EQUIP2, but STEP-Up’s field visits revealed that implementation of the plans either did not occur or did not foster change in the system. Information sharing was not a normal occurrence; dialogue with DEBS office personnel did not appear to exist in the districts in Western Province. One school STEP-Up team visited highlighted this gap. The head teacher had systematically collected and organized information about the pupils in his school and sent the

information to the DEBS, but he did not think the information could help him as well in understanding the issues affecting his pupils’ performance.

Local Commitment to Learning

Field visits in Northern Province revealed inadequate conditions for effective monitoring and supervision. In Mbala District, the vehicle used for monitoring had been nonfunctional for a couple of years, making almost impossible for district staff to visit remote rural districts. (STEP-Up and the DESOs visited a rural school 35 kilometers away that had not been visited in two years.) However, there was grassroots commitment to improving education outcomes. The team met a tribal leader who had toured the district on his bike and promoted the creation of 30 community schools in one year.

Northern Province had a strategic plan at provincial and district levels, but the plan had not reached the school level. Underlining this gap was a statement by the new PEO that although the province had performed well in the last year, education officials did not know why, and they would not trust the result unless subsequent years showed similarly high performance. Discussions about this issue focused on the lack of relevant and reliable data to inform the Provincial Education Office about progress in schools, challenges for improving teaching, and other aspects that would provide the context for understanding these results.

In every province the team visited, the most encouraging element was the enthusiasm among many teachers to give of themselves to improve learning, despite the challenges. One teacher at Kasama Girls High School volunteered his time to teach students entering the school to read, when about one-third of girls entering high school were illiterate.

E. Summary of Stakeholder Views

One of STEP-Up's objectives for the ground-truthing exercise was to gather the views of stakeholders about learner performance in relation to management and standards for delivering education, with a particular focus on progress of reading skills in early grades.

MESVTEE's senior education standards officers reported that one challenge for the ministry is that districts were focused on monitoring infrastructure more than on what is happening in the classroom. There is a need to change the mentality of the administrators at all levels (PEOs, DEBSs, and head teachers). The same high-ranking officer, who supervises PEOs, stated that PEOs are not interested in performance.

Respondents brought up issues related to monitoring, supervision, teacher capacity, and central ministry oversight of provinces and districts:

The ministry has suggested doing away with formal inspection in favor of interactions with pupils, class monitors, prefects, heads of department (HODs), and heads of schools. In the past, MESVTEE staff monitoring schools sat with the HODs to hear what pupils had to say, and the provinces were responsible for follow-up. Should such a strategy be implemented, it could have positive implications for the progress of decentralization.

Respondents reported that EQUIP2's provincial advisors had interacted more with PEOs than PESOs, stating, "The PEOs used to come to the office from the field with goats, chickens and other gifts, but not the standards officers." Respondents stated that provincial advisors had been placed under the Directorate of Planning and Administration rather than the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum.

Automatic promotion from Grade 7 to Grade 8, which began in 2008, has been blamed for the poor performance on the 2010 Grade 9 examinations. However, a close examination of results from some schools did not confirm this view; results from prior years were even worse.

Senior education standards officers reported that schools focus on sports to the detriment of teaching and learning. Some boys miss school for inter-provincial sports, and respondents suggested zoning schools to mitigate this problem. Respondents stated that the first term is “the only term teachers want to teach. Even then they are already thinking of sports in the second term, so they can leave early.” The third term is the worst in terms of lost time due to examination preparations. The result of this focus on sports is that instead of eight terms of instruction in Grades 10 through 12, pupils are taught for only four terms.

Respondents also noted teacher placement and qualifications. In some schools, there is one teacher for nine classes — and that teacher has a diploma rather than the required teaching degree. There are also more teachers in urban areas. The respondents described a scenario in which a teacher is posted to rural areas but return to urban areas, in some cases without the knowledge of the central ministry. They cited Lusaka specifically: Chongwe District allocates plots to teachers, who settle in the area without reporting to work. The teachers are paid, but they are not teaching. The chief education standards officer was surprised to hear that.

Senior education standards officers suggested that there should be interventions to decongest town schools, such as placements according to the number of classes (1.5 teachers per class), with the other teachers moving to other areas.

When asked whether there were any gaps in professional development, respondents stated that teachers should be trained by the senior education standards officers, not by the Education Management and Teaching Team. They suggested that MESVTEE develop a program to train heads of schools to reinforce administration, so that teachers do not leave their classes unattended. They also reported that some teachers travel to Zimbabwe for professional development courses and return only two weeks before schools close. They reported that the ministry has yet to investigate the issue fully. (The government has said that all teachers should be diploma holders by 2015.)

Respondents stated that some schools do not set targets; schools under EQUIP2 developed strategic plans with targets. At the central ministry, setting targets is a component of the work plan, and they have set targets for the number of schools to reach. However, they noted that the work plans are not funded. The typical target is to visit each province once per term, but respondents stated that there were no visits to provinces or schools. They stated that there was a need to revisit the process of setting targets, because even when they set these targets, they do not have funds to meet them, especially for transport; however, they have not stopped setting targets. They stated that the central ministry may not be prioritizing effectively; instead of buying a vehicle, the money is used for “other things.”

STEP-Up noted that the respondents did not mention setting targets for learner performance; instead, they suggested targets such as “number of schools reached” and “number of teachers monitored.” It became clear during the discussion that they did not see themselves as part of the solution. Although they are in a position to drive the change

process, they referred to how the MESVTEE generally should assist. There is no doubt, on the other hand, that the senior education standards officers and the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum are anxious for change, even if they do not yet feel empowered to be part of that change.

SECTION IV: EMERGING THEMES

This section will report on the themes that emerged from this common experience, highlighting the main issues detected during the ground-truthing visits to support the systemic approaches that are needed to improve performance and, ultimately, the quality of education. The annexes offer a detailed analysis of the project team’s findings, case studies from the field visits, and a list of education leaders who have provided essential information for this project’s work.

In analyzing the information from the ground-truthing exercise, STEP-Up has identified the following overarching themes:

- Learners’ performance (attitudes toward learner performance)
- Decentralization
- Use of information and communication
- Social aspects (i.e., HIV, gender, equity, OVCs, absenteeism, pregnancy)
- Central ministry and the policy environment

A. Detailed Summary of Themes

A1. Theme 1: Learner Performance

Sub-theme 1.1: The system equates learner achievement with learner performance and, therefore, uses examination results as the primary measure of learner performance.

The STEP-Up team found a universal inability — or lack of effort — to define learner performance effectively. As a result, the education system has been concentrating its interventions on higher grades (Grades 5-9) at the expense of learning in lower grades. The system is highly achievement-oriented, such that pupils study only to pass examinations. When school leaders spoke of analyzing results, they referred to Grades 7, 9, and 12. Though the 2008 national assessment report acknowledges that reading difficulties at higher levels begin earlier, many schools do not intervene to help pupils improve performance. They gauge results through formative and summative evaluations.

This paradigm has the consequence that teachers are not being trained in the New Break-Through to Literacy (NBTL) methodology — the government’s primary methodology for teaching early reading skills to Grade 1 pupils. School leaders reported that automatic promotion from Grade 7 to Grade 8 resulted in lower achievement at Grade 7 and 9. There is a lack of assessment of pupils’ progress, especially at earlier grades, and very little assessment data available at school, district, and sometimes provincial levels. Data that does exist is gathered and kept at the national level. Provinces, districts, and schools are left in the dark with regard to assessing children’s progress.

Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of thorough analysis means there a lack of understanding about the quality of student learning (“quality passing”), even among students who pass examinations. Schools reported to STEP-Up that they had set targets, and that those targets were not being met. At one school, which had set a 75 percent pass-rate target for

Grade 7, STEP-Up’s team was told that the reason the school had missed its target was the government’s policy of enrolling more children. At some schools, targets were set only because other schools were setting a target, and were therefore unrealistic. However, most schools were not taking steps to reach their targets. Using examination results, pupil performance of the pupils in some schools was said to be good or average, indicating a lack of understanding about quality of student learning. At a higher level, some provinces indicate they are performing very well in relation to other gravely performing province. The statement of achievement overlooks their potential for quality student learning.

As can be seen above, it is clear that all the targets are for achieving an examination pass rate. There were no efforts by the system, from the PEOs’ offices to the schools, to set targets that would improve the numeracy or the literacy of the pupils. There were also no targets to indicate how many children would be able to read or do numeracy by the end of a specified period.

There were some schools that improved results (e.g., Grade 12: 39 percent in 2009, 45 percent in 2000, and 55 percent in 2011). One school had a Grade 9 performance level at 94 percent in 2011, up from 24 percent in 2005. This means little, however, because we were not told the *quality* of these results. How many pupils got distinctions, how many merits, how many credits, and how many passes?

The schools allege that generally private and grant-aided schools are doing better than regular schools. The measure they use is that of examination results. Research indeed showed that this is the case. Government schools use this argument (i.e., having less material resources than private and grant-aided schools) to excuse their poor performance. Yet some government schools outperform grant-aided schools.

Sub-theme 1.3: Learner performance is generally poor; poor literacy in grades 1 and 9 is attributed to a lack of a “reading culture.” However the system defines learner performance, STEP-Up heard at all levels — from PEOs’ offices to the school level — that except in a few schools, learner performance is poor. A large number of pupils in schools have not broken through in reading. In some cases, performance in reading goes down as children progress to Grade 3. One head teacher stated, “Children are very, very bad at reading,” adding that only 13 percent of the children in Grade 2 had “broken through.”

On average, STEP-Up found that that pupils are allowed to progress to the next grade without demonstrating reading skills, leading (ostensibly) to poor performance in literacy on the middle basic level assessment and national examinations at Grade 7. Contradicting this finding, schools report good results in reading for Grades 7 and 9. How can children who can hardly read or write pass examinations that require them to comprehend written questions before answering them? In addition, pupils who are said to do well in secondary school are failing to do well at universities. One staff member gave an example of first-year students underperforming at Mulungushi University, as at UNZA.

The following are some of the team’s observations around low performance in literacy:

- In the districts and schools STEP-Up visited, learner performance was very low, especially in literacy and mathematics in Grades 1 through 5. The team came across many cases of Grade 9 pupils who could hardly read. In one extreme case, a Grade 9 pupil could not even spell his name. The team also learned that because pupils in Grades 8, 9, and 12 have such low reading proficiency that teachers have to use methodologies designed for the primary level to allow student to understand what they are trying to teach.
- At Meheba High School, reportedly a high-performing school, STEP-Up learned of a Grade 8 pupil who could not even write the date. When asked how he made it to Grade 8, the pupil he said he had been told where to shade in his answers on the Grade 7 examination, but that he had not understood what he was doing. A Grade 9 pupil in the same school who also said she did not know what she was doing said, “I didn’t passed. When I passed away, I resurrected the other way.”
- In Livingstone District, which is divided into east and west, social stratification classified the eastern schools as lower performers. Even at the Provincial Education Office, the team heard the term “riff-raff” used to describe pupils who do not perform well or who come from lower-income homes.
- There is a notion that children from high-density areas like shanty compounds or community schools lower the performance of a new school when they transfer. One assumption is that the majority of their parents cannot supervise the homework or that the parents of children from shanty compounds are not interested in their children’s education.

School leaders’ explanation of factors affecting performance are as follows:

- Triple sessions per day reduce learning time. Students are in class for only three hours instead of the minimum of five hours.
- Schools have relaxed their homework policies and continuous assessments, saying that standards officers do not visit.
- In Kazungula, parents said they could not check their children’s work because they themselves are illiterate.
- Pupils cover long distances to go to school, and DEBS staff members cover long distances to monitor schools, especially in rural districts. STEP-Up was told that one school is 500 kilometers from the Serenje DEBS office. Another school is 300 kilometers from the Kazungula DEBS office.
- There are high teacher attrition rates and pupil absenteeism.
- Some Grade 9 teachers who are not trained to teach at that level.

- New Breakthrough to Literacy (NBTL), Step Into English (SITE), and Read on Course (ROC) materials are not as effective as they were during project implementation due to lack of training of teachers and materials.

The STEP-Up team witnessed a lot of “blame game” activity. PEOs’ offices blame the central ministry, districts blame PEOs, and schools blame the DEBS office. Those who blamed others generally failed to make viable suggestions for how to improve reading skills. However, the team has seen examples of excellence and innovation. Case Study 1 in Annex A describes the success one teacher is having helping her students to read.

Sub-theme 1.4: Weak supervision and monitoring by the provincial office. The team noted that one of the possible hindrances to learner performance was that PEO offices, districts, schools, and teachers did not have sufficient supervision. STEP-Up asked MESVTEE’s senior education standards officers whether their role should include school-level monitoring. In theory, the role of the central ministry is to supervise overall education, monitor provincial offices, assist in collaborating with education stakeholders, provide general policy guidelines to the ministry, and generally ensure that the education system runs as efficiently and smoothly as possible.

In its field visits, STEP-Up found that although officials at all levels want to see what is happening in the classroom, the focus of monitoring is teacher and school management (inspections and audits), with little guidance for how teachers could be supported to improve learner performance. Monitoring activities are viewed as an “official” task, and there is little understanding of how a community leader, other ministry official, head teachers, or senior teacher could play a role. As a result, schools do not monitor themselves, and some have attributed low performance to the infrequency of visits from standards officers.

Ideally, head teachers are responsible for monitoring teachers. Although everyone “wants to monitor,” STEP-Up found little evidence of the purpose or benefits of monitoring for learner performance. Many head teachers are not effectively supervising their teachers’ performance in generating learning. One PEO’s office reported that there were only three standards officers to monitor 7,000 teachers. The PEO was aware of the situation but had not found a solution; he was focused was on the lack of funding from the central ministry and the lack of adequate transport.

Sub-theme 1.5: Overcrowded classrooms or schools that lack teaching and learning materials are not conducive to education. STEP-Up encountered extreme overcrowding in classrooms. One school, with more than 3,000 pupils, averages about 100 pupils per class. In some areas, classes are overenrolled due to the influx of people migrating into the province, as in Northwestern Province, because of the mining industry. Where classrooms are overcrowded, teacher-pupil contact is minimal, and (as in one school in Lusaka) some parents transfer their children to other schools.

Case Study 2 (Annex A) highlights the effect of the physical environment can have on learning, but it is just one example. In the only rural school we visited in Kabwe, all but

two of the 14 teachers travel 12 kilometers to school on bicycles they bought themselves. They arrive late, but are never absent.

Sub-theme 1.6: Schools with more effective management and leadership are better at improving learner performance. This finding should be treated as tentative, until more research can be carried out to substantiate it. Two examples from STEP-Up’s field visits provide anecdotal evidence:

- Kasisya is a private basic school in Solwezi, managed by the Sisters of St. John the Baptist. It conducts pupil performance assessments from entry through Grade 7. The school has a feedback system it uses to inform parents about their children’s performance, to ensure buy-in for initiatives to sustain good performance. Assessments occur weekly, monthly, and each term, and the school has a policy to target learners in need of additional support.
- Meheba High School outside Solwezi was built for Angolan refugees. Conditions at the school are not the best — some teachers sleep in classrooms. The DEBS official who accompanied STEP-Up team members said he was not aware of this, although the head teacher said that he had provided several reports to the DEBS office about it. Using the Grade 12 examination as a measure of performance, Meheba’s pass rate was 32 percent in 2008 (up from 24 percent in 2007 and 16 percent in 2006). The school leaders used three strategies that enabled them to improve pass rates.

— First, they charged themselves with identifying and filling gaps in their performance as teachers. They began by empowering heads of departments to making decisions for their departments and committed to implementing the government-issued professional guidelines. The immediate results were a significant increase in pass rates: Grade 12 rates rose from 42 percent in 2009 to 70 percent in 2011; Grade 9 rates rose from 72 percent to 88 percent in the same period. The school’s target for 2012 for both grades is 95 percent.

— Second, the school set departmental-level strategies for improving learner performance, such as group teaching, stronger homework policies confirmed through testing, more effective continuous professional development meetings, encouraging girls’ participation in class, and guidance counseling to help attract pupils to science and mathematics. The box to the right lists additional actions.

<p style="text-align: center;">More Actions to Improve Learner Performance at Meheba High School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouraging learners to read widely.• Promotional tests to for grades 10-12.• Identifying pupils with learning difficulties for extra time with teachers.• Encouraging pupils to research the problems affecting and report their findings to the teachers.• In-class observation by the head teacher, with a schedule for follow-up.• Allowing fellow teachers to teach when the class teacher does not feel competent in a topic.
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— Third, the school uses an incentive system and other motivational factors, with buy-in from the teachers and the community. Teachers receive monetary rewards from the government for high performance over three years, the highest-scoring

pupils in Grade 9 are exempt from school fees, and the head teacher and deputy strictly monitor and review teacher performance, including teacher and pupil attendance registers. In addition, the school holds PTA meetings twice each term, with specific discussions of learner performance. This is a departure from what STEP-Up found in other schools.

Sub-theme 1.7: Teacher deployment is not linked to trends in learner performance. In every province STEP-Up visited, respondents acknowledged the importance of teaching quality for improving learner performance. However, there is a notion that Zambia has a shortage of teachers; this assumption is likely based on the fact that teacher distribution is uneven across urban and rural schools. STEP-Up learned that many teachers assigned to rural schools return to towns for a variety of reasons, leaving rural schools understaffed. This scenario creates a shortage of teachers, and leaves some areas with under-qualified or inappropriately qualified teachers.

Some MESVTEE representatives disputed this notion, however. Provincial staff in Lusaka reported that some schools with unqualified teachers were performing better than the schools with qualified teachers. Some claim that some community schools, which do not typically have trained teachers, produce better results than government schools with trained teachers. Both of these assumptions require additional research.

Finally, the team concluded that teachers and leaders in schools mainly care that they are delivering education, with little concern about the outcomes. The importance of reading, in particular, does not resonate. There is a general sense of disempowerment due to the perceived lack of material resources, leadership, communication, and clear guidance about what is expected from their work and how to achieve these goals.

Challenges in School-Based Management

At Mwinilunga High School, pupils seem to have free will to decide when to become boarders or day students, making it difficult for the school to manage placements. The local PTA and the school board did not have a plan to help school leaders overcome challenges with staffing, sanitation. The PTA and the education board should have a plan for sustainability through income-generating activities.

At Kelondu Basic School in Ikelenge, the PTA and the school leaders seem to be miles apart. The head teacher has insulated himself and does not engage the community in school initiatives that should promote and sustain learner performance. In addition, school managers and teachers tended to personalize the school's "good" results, excluding the community from that praise.

A2. Theme 2: Decentralization

Sub-theme 2.1: There is evidence that all the levels in the education sector are practicing decentralization to a degree. The ministry's concept of decentralization, which includes community participation, has been understood and well-received, with some efforts to make local decisions to improve school and learner performance. Although the decentralization policy is well-articulated at provincial and district levels, however, implementation is questionable. On the whole, schools are trying to apply government policies, working with PTAs and community members to find solutions. However, the strength of the school boards and the PTA is often dependent on the strength of the head teachers. Some schools had good initiatives that they did not share

with the district, because the reporting format was rigid and monitoring tools did not have space to capture them.

Sub-theme 2.2: The system is still top-down and does not encourage innovative ideas from lower levels. In general, the greatest challenge is a lack of adequate school monitoring by the PEO and DEBS offices; many schools are left to run themselves. Meanwhile, schools feel restricted in their ability to innovate, fearing (from experience) that authorities at higher levels will see changes as noncompliance with policy. STEP-Up found examples of schools that have improved learner performance by “ignoring” the central government policy and implementing innovative approaches to teaching and learning. In 2010 in one school, where a teacher is using her own approach to the New Break-Through to Literacy, 98 percent of Grade 1 children were able to “break through” (see Case Study 1).

Sub-theme 2.3: The decentralization policy has proven both to improve and hinder learner performance. In some instances, decentralization has not given leaders the authority to implement local solutions to local problems. This was evident in one school with very low literacy levels, where the school management had decided to use the first and second terms of Grade 2 to concentrate on teaching reading and writing without introducing other subjects. The district office did not grant permission, on the premise that the plan would not keep pace with the required curriculum. This decision has had an effect on the pupils’ reading and writing abilities as they reach higher grades.

The “grip” of the central government has affected schools as well as programs at DEBS offices. Standards officers noted that it was difficult for them to follow their work plans due to ad-hoc meetings with the PEOs’ offices. STEP-Up’s own discussions with PEOs or PESOs were sometimes interrupted by phone calls and requests for their immediate attendance at an unplanned event.

Local implementation of the Primary Reading Program has been challenging, after a promising start in Northern Province, where it was viewed as a donor-driven initiative. Another core issue is the availability of the accompanying learning and teaching materials, which are not easy to source locally. The program, which is designed to use the “language of play” to teach early reading skills in local language, has been criticized in Muchinga Province, because it seems to concentrate on a local language that is not the first language in the children of that province. The issue of the language of instruction has also been contentious in schools. The idea behind using a local language may have benefits in developing concepts, but the schools STEP-Up visited felt that the term “language of play” had either not been clearly defined by the government or been misinterpreted by teachers. Whatever the case, it is an issue for further investigation by the government.

Sub-theme 2.4: Most existing policies are prescriptive, leaving little room for local initiatives to enhance their efficacy. During the field visits, STEP-Up learned that that responsible staff were not oriented to the policies. Although personnel at provincial levels had participated in drafting some of the policies, interpretation and implementation at

district and school levels varied greatly. To ensure uniform implementation, policy makers will need to have substantive interactions at the local level.

Prescriptive policies have led districts and schools to depend on the central government to provide everything a school requires — from teachers to materials and infrastructure to the curriculum. DEBS offices and schools are rarely consulted on these issues. One DEBS in Chipata District, in dire need of textbooks for all subjects, received a truckload of what the ministry referred to as “learning and teaching materials.” The truck contained rulers, pencils, pencil erasers, exercise books, and other small items. The DEBS had not been consulted about what he really needed for the schools in his district.

Sub-theme 2.5: Stakeholder/community participation would be more effective with structures for information sharing and more effective leadership. The STEP-Up team found that the system is largely isolated at the school level, with weak collaboration among schools. In addition, information collection is weak, as is provincial and national oversight of and support for grassroots efforts. The result is that evidence and issues from these decentralized structures do not reach provincial and national level negotiation platforms, and are not reflected in education policies.

Accountability and feedback mechanisms are also weak, rendering decentralization for improved performance ineffective; isolated interventions do not seem to be aggregated effectively to enable a national understanding of lessons and needed actions to improve learner performance. From this perspective, it appears the national level is isolated from the extent and magnitude of poor learner performance. The apparent reliance on the national assessment survey and examination results does not give a true picture of the situation. In short, evidence that is being generated by Zambia’s decentralized education structures needs to be used more effectively.

Community and parent participation (through structures such as PTAs) was quite good in some of the schools the STEP-Up team visited. It was nonexistent in other schools. At one school in Lusaka, there has been no PTA meeting for 10 years. This may be an exceptional case, but other schools complained that when PTA meetings are called, parents do not come. Where participation does exist, it needs to be strengthened and expanded (beyond annual general meetings of PTAs or and at the time exam results are released, for example). Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure frequent participation, so that community members and parents participate in local monitoring.

STEP-Up’s team also noted weak national-provincial links. The system is focused more on issuing directives than on providing technical support. District-to-school accountability is visible, but has room for improvement, especially at the school level. There appears to be a general lack of accountability for learner performance, whereas such accountability should be clear at every level of the education system.

A3. Theme 3: Use of Information and Communication

Sub-theme 3.1: Lack of real information. Information was a challenge in most of the places STEP-Up visited. DEBS offices and schools did not have ready information on a

number of issues. Some vital statistics (pupil absenteeism, enrollment, pregnancies, number of teachers trained and number of OVCs) were missing or incomplete. Even exam results could not be obtained from some schools. On the other hand, information was readily available in some schools, such as Mujala Demonstration School in Livingstone, which stood out prominently in this area. In addition, performance information was inaccurate and inconsistent, or inflated for submission to the central ministry — to the detriment of the pupils.

In most of the visits, when the head teacher was asked questions about learner's performance, he or she would generally not know. It turns out that this information is in the hands of the senior teacher who communicates it to the corresponding district resource center (DRC) and then to the provincial office without copying the district office. In this way, the head teacher responds to administrative questions and administrative and technical aspects run through separate channels.

Without targets set for performance in Grades 7, 9, and 12, schools cannot determine whether they are making progress. This issue is compounded by inconsistent recordkeeping, lack of data verification, and obsolete data. In some cases, STEP-Up found a lack of understanding about how or why data was important; schools only reported to the DEBS office because they were required to do so.

Sub-theme 3.2: Little contact between school management (head teachers) and the classroom. Many head teachers perceive themselves as simply administrators and see no point in visiting their classrooms. Head teachers who showed interest in student performance and teaching quality were, not surprisingly, stronger leaders.

STEP-Up's team observed that meaningful interaction between teachers and DEBS offices was limited. This is the reason why ministry staff members, accompanying the project team to the field, were surprised at some of the things the teachers were sharing during the field visits. In general ministry personnel at central, provincial, and even district levels do go out on field visits, very often, or even at all. Therefore they lack the "reality check" experience that would make their work much more connected with the constituency they are trying to serve. There are many reasons for that; lack of funds for gas, lack of time, etc. However, the most frequent reason perceived by the team was that there is no real notion of "service to a constituency, based on their real detected needs."

Sub-theme 3.3: Ineffective use of data for decision-making. Data collection and management vary greatly from one school to the other, without clear standards for collection, storage, and transmission of data, and weak understanding of the link between data, communication, and decision-making. On the other hand schools with good records management also had participatory school management approaches, good governance, and shared responsibilities. Their results were very good, compared to schools that did not practice such a system. In Zambia's education system, information flows one way — up — and there is no feedback to the lower levels. At lower levels, information collection is seen as a response to a directive from a higher office, not as an activity that has implications for those collecting the data.

Sub-theme 3.4: Poor information flows from the national level to the school level. On the whole, STEP-Up found that stakeholders didn't grasp the difference between information sharing and true communication (for example, on the number of pregnancies or human/animal encounters). With one exception (Ikelenge), all of the sites STEP-Up visited lacked clear, consistent reporting lines (from the schools to the DEBS and the PEO). Many sections in the education offices are not aware of what other sections are doing. At the school level, many head teachers do not know where to get vital statistical data. Communication, even within a DEBS office, is poor; nowhere could the team confirm that regular staff meetings were held.

Sub-theme 3.5: Inadequate data management, storage, and analysis. The data management platform seems to have collapsed over the years in all provinces, at all levels of the education sector. The Education Management Information System (EMIS) is centrally managed, the feedback from Lusaka is often delayed and the data that is reflected in the final statistical bulletin quite frequently is different from the data the schools had submitted. The notion of creating an "enhanced EMIS" at the central level is also somehow a science-fiction idea; the ministry does not have the hardware or the software to implement this tool. The demand emerging from the field was that a district and provincial levels of the MESVTEE provides faster and more accurate data collection and analysis systems than the central level. A LEMIS (local EMIS), would be more relevant to the planning and budgeting cycle at the lower levels.

The STEP-Up team discovered that data analysis based on quality and disaggregated by sex or disability was not done in many schools — a major oversight considering the issues confronting inclusive education and equity. Head teachers were able to talk about the re-entry policy (post-birth), but STEP-Up's general finding was that the performance of girls re-entering school suffered. Further probing revealed that schools were not monitoring the performance of these pupils. Most schools had no reliable databank for this category of pupils.

Sub-theme 3.6: There is little or no use of communication technology (ICTs), even where there is the means to do so (e.g., radio stations). Several community and private radio stations exist in the districts STEP-Up's team visited, but except for a few cases, there was no deliberate effort to use these as tools for communication. Policies and strategies relating to computer use are not localized. Some policies exist at central level, but they are not communicated to the lower levels. A number of schools, especially high schools, have good computer labs: Serenje High School, for example, has 40 working computers but are not used efficiently. At Ikelenge High School, databases in computers were used to store information, but no teaching was going on, using this hardware.

However, despite government encouragement of computer use in schools, school leaders reported that there are no guidelines. In addition, there is no deliberate effort to build skills in the management and use of technology equipment. There is also no infrastructure for reporting data (e.g., communications infrastructure for the use of mobile phones, the Internet, radio, or computers for data processing).

Sub-theme 3.7: There is no communication from the ministry to the civil society to raise support for education in the country. The ministry only has one public relations person who covers ministerial public appearances. Without ministry communication to civil society on the status of the education and learner achievement, the public believes that there are no major problems with the Zambian education system. The result is that Zambians generally do not feel motivated to press for better quality education, and parents pull their children out of school for reasons such as field work and family care.

A4. Theme 4: Social Aspects

Sub-theme 4.1: Weak community involvement. In general terms, community involvement in education is weak. PTA and board meetings do not emphasize academic work. Some schools do work with the communities through the PTAs, and communities generally are encouraged to participate in school activities. However, in all the schools STEP-Up visited there were no teacher outreach activities to the community, despite school leaders conceding that it would be of benefit.

Turnover of school leadership is another concern. One school in Lusaka reported that parents stopped attending PTA meetings when one head teacher, with whom they had been working for a long time, was transferred. This demonstrates the lack of institutional memory necessary to maintain continuity, and not losing ground.

Sub-theme 4.2: Rampant absenteeism. Absenteeism results from many factors, including early pregnancies, animal/human conflicts (e.g., children attacked by wild animals on their way to and from school), long distances to get to schools, high poverty, child labor, and lack of interest by parents in education. Children are often involved in livelihood survival strategies (e.g., collecting caterpillars, cropping, and fishing) in urban and rural areas. Case Study 3 provides one example of this challenge. Another important factor that contributes to absenteeism lies in the teachers' community. Findings showed that, in rural areas, teachers spend from 7 to 15 days out of school, going to the city to collect and cash their paycheck. For that reason it could be said that ***the system pays teachers full time but they work part time.***

Sub-theme 4.3: The HIV/AIDS in the Workplace policy exists but is rarely implemented. STEP-Up's field visits revealed that there are no clear guidelines for the management of HIV/AIDS issues in schools and education management institutions. The national HIV/AIDS policy clarifies how the ministry should deal with HIV in the workplace. However, at the school level, this is not the case; there is a blatant refusal to address the issue due to stigma. In schools, administrators had no written guidelines for dealing with HIV and AIDS issues, using empathy instead. An interesting finding was that, when head teachers were asked if they had an HIV/AIDS coordinator in the school, they all responded by saying yes, but none was able to give us a name.

Provincial education office staff indicated that the ministry's HIV/AIDS policy was being applied, but they did not adapt it to suit province-specific conditions or develop provincial-level guidelines. Some provinces had routine talks and discussions about HIV and AIDS during staff meetings. Guidelines will help ensure consistent and equitable

application of the policy. There were few workplace HIV/AIDS policies in PEO's and DEBS offices. HIV- and AIDS-related activities were left in the hands of the anti-AIDS clubs, but without guidelines. Even the NGOs that work in schools are making their interventions in an unstructured way.

Sub-theme 4.4: Though the re-entry policy for girls who become pregnant is being implemented, it is not well-understood, especially at the school level. The ministry formulated the re-entry policy to give this vulnerable population an opportunity to continue schooling. Unfortunately, in all provinces STEP-Up visited, very few education staff members have seen the guidelines. This lack of communication has led to widespread misinterpretation. One PEO office staff member who accompanied the team to Northwestern Province had never read the policy, and did not know that boys responsible for impregnating girls were to be suspended for the same period that the girl was at home. Varying interpretation of the re-entry policy defines how girls are re-admitted to the system. Even where a number of girls were reported pregnant (in 2011 alone, 48 pregnancies were reported at one high school in Kasempa), many schools did not do any meaningful follow-up with the girls. Girls who do return to school are often stigmatized and ostracized.

In some schools, it was discovered that when girls learn on their own, they tend to perform better than when they are with boys. However, it was the other way round for other schools. Case Study 4 (Annex A) offers a promising story of how a committed educator can make a difference in a pupil's life. In Mwinilunga, a "girl-friendly" school had interesting results because its mixed classes were performing better than the single-sex classes. STEP-Up did not have enough time to triangulate data from other schools or districts to understand the issues underlying such disparities; the issue requires further research.

Sub-theme 4.5: OVC and other vulnerable populations are not followed up and receive no particular attention. Some schools do not record data on OVCs or girls. In general, records pertaining to OVC support and re-entry are kept only to account for funds, particularly because they are largely donor-funded. Research about performance of these beneficiaries was not possible, as it is not documented by schools that only care about reporting numbers, nothing else. A snapshot review of performance revealed that most OVCs do not perform well. STEP-Up team members were told, however, that in some places there was not much difference in performance between OVCs and other pupils. This claim still needs to be verified.

Although the numbers are well-disaggregated by sex, disaggregation is done for the wrong reasons. Issues related to equity (e.g., OVC support, re-entry of pregnant girls into schools, school health, and nutrition interventions) are treated as minor events and documented depending on the management style or mandate of school authorities. The available data are compiled when there is an official need for planning or an expectation of funding from a donor.

All the schools visited reported large numbers of OVCs, an indication of what the government needs to do. There was a large concentration of OVCs in community schools than in regular schools, although this requires follow up due to conflicting information. Community schools themselves are an indication of the magnitude of the education problem. At Livingston High, the team learned that OVCs are given a uniform that is different of the one for “normal” students. The head teacher explanation was by this they could be easily recognized and given the attention they need. However, he did not explain what “special attention” means.

Sub-theme 4.6: *Despite existing policies, gender is not a consideration in the system.* In theory, gender parity policies apply to recruitment of personnel, women’s access to higher level positions, and the percentage of girls ‘enrollment. STEP-Up compiled information about attendance by high-level government officials (PEO, DEBS, head teachers) at strategy planning and other sessions; the result was 75 percent male and 25 percent female were present at these sessions.

Also, although the Education for All policy is supposed to guarantee equal access, girls are vulnerable due to factors like sexual abuse, early pregnancies, early marriages, and other issues. Many drop out and never return to school.

Sub-theme 4.7: *Private-public partnerships (PPPs).* There is not, in the education community, a clear sense of what a PPP is and how to forge them. The team attended a PPP session called by the PEO in Solwezi, Northwestern Province. The session was well-attended by local private sector enterprises, including a representative of the Lumwana mine, the largest mine in the area. The provincial office presented a well-structured program describing their needs as identified in the provincial strategic plan. However, they then presented a menu of activities with a price tag for each and asked the audience to make pledges of support. The mine representative responded kindly by saying that this was not the best way to interact. Instead, he said, the correct way would be to initiate a dialogue for how best to build and implement PPP support.

Partnership Potential
In Northwestern Province, schools are collaborating with the Lumwana mine, which sponsors pupils in Grades 10 and 12 and holds workshops for parents. Deliberate PPPs of this kind would contribute to learner performance. Nevertheless, the education sector has not yet been proactive in engaging with the mines to develop interventions that would respond to real educational needs. Instead, the mines seem to take the lead in planning interventions (probably in line with their own corporate social responsibility plans).

The STEP-Up team found out that the central ministry is considering a similar approach as the Solwezi one: stating the needs and passing the hat. The first step is to educate the ministry on how to engage the private sector to build the way for more support for the education system. After meeting with various private sector companies, the team observed that among them there is a real awareness and commitment to support education, which is perceived as the key to ensuring Zambia's future development.

Community members cited reasons for not collaborating, including the misconception that there is a policy in the education system that prevents parents from contributing to

school development other than by helping to build classrooms or fund transportation of students. Thus, there is a need to educate parents and the community on how to best support schools.

A5. Theme 5: The Central Ministry and the Policy Environment

Since some members of the STEP-Up team are embedded in the central ministry's offices, they witnessed the dynamics at this level. Directors and high-level officials are regularly busy with meetings and other appearances, making it extremely difficult to interact with them on a regular basis. Mainly, they were out of touch with the situation in the field. One problem is the lack of support, including budgeted funds for gas, daily sustenance allowance (DSA), and vehicles, to be in touch with the field. There is also a lack of creative solutions to enable the headquarters staff to be in close communication with their constituencies and even with their offices out in the field. They are in charge of administering a system of which they know little but expect a lot. As a result, they produce policies and programs believing they will be implemented, but the disconnect can be significant because they operate on data and assumptions that do not necessarily correspond to realities in the field, lack close monitoring capacities, and do not provide clear guidance on how to implement policies.

Lack of guidance, management and oversight mechanisms, and knowledge about the existence of such policies often creates a disorderly environment. For example, the team discovered in Eastern Province the teaching and learning using locally available materials (TALULAR) policy promoted by the ministry, but unbeknownst to many teachers.

A6. Conclusions

The themes we present summarize issues the team identified in the ground-truthing exercise. Conclusions include the following:

- Issues identified can be organized into themes that were present in most if not all provinces; these are not isolated issues. An approach to identifying, understanding, and seeking to solve these problems requires a systemic approach.
- On the other hand, the team concludes that the system is not a homogeneous and consistent entity. Designing approaches must take into account a diversity of situations, people, capacities, cultures, and mitigating factors.
- Therefore, in the long run, successful implementation must involve contextualization. This means designing and implementing individual solutions that will address an issue common to the system, taking into account the particularities of the social and cultural environment where it will be implemented.
- Stabilizing human resources capitalizes on capacity and institutional memory, which is vital to empowering individuals in school leadership positions.

- For these reasons, STEP-Up considered that the best environment for establishing a “mediating layer” for the systemic approach required for this process was the provincial/district level. At the provincial level, issues can be better analyzed and resolved and working relationships can be established with the central level (i.e., headquarters), provided that headquarters is willing to make decentralization an effective management tool.

SECTION V: FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

A. The Kabwe Meeting

Cecilia Sakala, MESVTEE’s Director of Standards and Curriculum, has been committed to improving education outcomes for years. After accompanying the STEP-Up team on the ground-truthing trip to Southern Province, she decided to develop a more strategic approach to monitoring and supervision in the ministry. Ms. Sakala requested STEP-Up’s support to organize a meeting that would bring all DEBS, DESOs, and PESOs together to develop a strategic framework for their work. For three years, Mrs. Sakala had requested similar support from the ministry, but funding limitations and other priorities meant that her requests were not approved.

The First Link

Kabwe was a success, not only in terms of bringing all these people together, but also in being the first step toward instilling a new culture of information sharing across the wider education community, starting with those present at the retreat. One product of this meeting was a proposal for a virtual network to link all participants. STEP-Up is working to satisfy this demand.

With the project’s support, Mrs. Sakala convened the meeting in Kabwe, the capital of Zambia’s Central Province, from May 14-18, 2012. This “retreat” marked the first time decision-makers at these levels had come together to collaboratively analyze issues in education delivery and jointly formulate strategies to address those issues.

The discussion centered on reading, a fundamental part of the learning process. Representatives from provinces and districts across the country discussed the poor reading performance of Zambia’s youth, acknowledging the problem of “automatic promotion” (allowing pupils to move from one grade to the next without good reading skills). After analyzing each district’s ability to produce readers, the group created a national target: In 2013 and 2014, Zambia will work toward creating 1 million readers.

After returning to Lusaka, Mrs. Sakala proposed a thorough impact evaluation of the Primary Reading Programme, which has been Zambia’s standard tool for reading instruction for many years. Her idea was to uncover how the program has contributed to reading performance in schools, while responding to the question of why reading achievement has been so low.

B. Eastern Province

As Eastern Province has been seeing consistent progress in the implementation of the Equip 2 program, STEP-Up gave special attention to the accomplishments of that province. In June 2012, the PEO for Eastern Province called for a meeting with the province’s DEBSs, DESOs, PESOs, some head teachers, and other administrators. This meeting, facilitated with STEP-Up support, was intended to analyze the status of learner performance and define the key issues that would be addressed during the upcoming revision of the strategic plan.

The meeting format was innovative, leaving aside the protocol that typically surrounds this type of event. The result was an open and highly participatory discussion in which every participant shared information about their districts — problems as well as creative solutions — and their visions for improved learner performance and education quality.

Many participants expressed the need to establish more effective communications networks to link schools, DEBs offices, and the provincial office, not only to move data but also to share experiences and enable support between and among schools, teachers, and other actors. Such a network would help information about promising practices for improving student performance flow to every school in the province. By the end of the week, the group had begun to develop a palpable sense of community; they were acting as one to define a common goal.

Considering the province's level of development, the issues discussed at this meeting were somewhat different than those in other provinces. Participants praised the effectiveness of the accountability model, and discussed how the province's organization around more efficient education delivery could cover education outcomes as well as outputs. They discussed issues such as contact time (i.e., the time a teacher spends with each of his or her students in classrooms), measuring improvement in reading, how to develop teaching materials using locally available resources, and how to involve PTAs in education-driven activities (e.g., instead of focusing only on building infrastructure).

The discussion led to a conversation about resource planning, teacher distribution, and continuous professional development, as well as possibilities for in-service training. This first approach to a provincially driven resource allocation exercise encouraged participants to reach a higher level of thinking about how to achieve higher performance levels and better education quality in their schools by obtaining and moving reliable data among schools, the DEBS, and the Provincial Education Office; using DRCs more efficiently; distributing teachers according to their levels of professional training; and finding ways to mobilize community resources.

As the meeting closed, participants praised the format of the meeting and the PEO responded that this was the collegial working environment she wanted to instill in the province — a real and effective education community working together to achieve the common goal of increasing education outcomes in Eastern Province. She promised to use a similar format for the strategic planning review session the following month, a meeting that indeed took place and is reported here below.

SECTION VI. EXPERIENCES WITH STRATEGIC PLANNING

The concept of promoting the development of strategic plans, beginning with the provinces, took shape during STEP-Up’s ground-truthing exercise. As the central, provincial, and district ministry officials who accompanied the team experienced “a-ha” moments — moments of discovery — they began to link on-the-ground realities to issues of education performance and realize that they had been “shooting in the dark.” Three of these discoveries emerged as the core issues related to the collection and use of data about school and learner performance. First, the formal monitoring tools used by ministry standards offices did not provide information about how teaching contributed to learner performance. Second, school-level datasets sent to the district offices were incomplete and inaccurate, and head teachers were not using the data to understand low achievement. Finally, overall communication flow across all levels was institutional (memos and reports); communication lacked the content and intensity that would make it a real development tool (communicating new ideas and best practices and fostering dialogue).

STEP-Up’s ground-truthing exercises had one of two immediate outcomes related to strategic planning. Provinces that had received support under EQUIP2 already had provincial and district strategic plans. Eastern Province had extended the exercise to the school level, with impressive results; its level of organization and compliance had had a positive impact on the overall functioning of the system. This impact, however, was not sufficient to dramatically improve learner performance.

In provinces that had not engaged in a strategic planning exercise, the process was more complex. Representatives from these provinces had difficulty acknowledging that there was a problem; although they knew their performance was low, they seemed not to understand the cause. After each ground-truthing trip, the STEP-Up team encouraged the government officials who had accompanied the team analyze what they had witnessed. Before interacting with their schools in a new way — discussing rather than monitoring — following STEP-Up’s model, the focus of analysis had been on guaranteeing access, addressing overcrowding and school infrastructure, and rates of students passing exams. These aspects, though important, did not have a direct impact on education quality or learner performance. The field trips had revealed some of the real issues, leading STEP-Up’s partners to acknowledge that there was a problem. It was at this point that they decided to build strategic plans for their development.

In both cases, the challenge was to develop a vision that would directly address issues of quality, poor reading, and learner performance and identify the path that would lead each province achieving its vision. To do this, some provinces would review their existing strategic plans, adding performance-oriented elements. Others would begin by creating visions for educational performance, and then developing strategic plans to address the education performance and quality issues they had discovered.

As provinces began organizing themselves in preparation for the strategic planning sessions, which would later translate into similar processes at district levels, STEP-Up began deploying its provincial advisors. The primary role of these advisors would be to

support the strategic planning process, to ensure that strategic planning would reach the school level, and that the strategic plans would be implemented.

The table below summarizes the strategic planning process in the first six provinces (Lusaka, Eastern, Copperbelt, Central, Northwestern, and Western), highlighting USAID and STEP-Up’s methodology for strategic planning — that systemic change cannot be taught and must be experienced. The process in the Northern, Southern, Luapula, and Muchinga provinces confirmed the soundness of this methodology.

Strategic Planning in Six Provinces

Province	Key Characteristics of the Strategic Planning Sessions
<p>Lusaka <i>The first strategic planning session</i></p>	<p>The session was organized and conducted by the PEO, PESO, and their staff. The rich discussions led to the drafting of an initial strategic plan that addressed many of the issues detected in STEP-Up’s ground-truthing process, such as supervision and monitoring, data and information management, local policy development and implementation, teacher preparedness, teaching/learning materials, learner performance and assessment in reading, student attendance, community involvement, infrastructure development, financing, and teacher motivation.</p> <p>With such a long list of issues, a deeper analysis was needed to construct a holistic vision for the province. For example, one aspect the province did not fully address was the concept of “improved performance.” To maintain momentum, the province has created a committee (including the DEBS and provincial stakeholders) to fine-tune the strategic plan. To become a “living document” and an instrument for change, the plan and the province’s vision will need to be shared and implemented at the district level.</p>
<p>Eastern</p>	<p>Some 100 people were invited to the strategic planning session, a wide array of stakeholders that included teacher’s union representatives, DRC coordinators, and representatives from local media outlets. The purpose of this exercise was not only to review the provincial strategic plan, but also to make sure that all key stakeholders would contribute.</p> <p>Through presentations and debates it became clear that ground-truthing and follow-up activities were paying off. The meeting featured strong encouragement for using the policy of teaching and learning using locally available resources (TALULAR) for reading improvement. Given the relevance of DRCs as supports and sources of local materials for teachers and the community — and providing access to on-the-job training materials and Web-based resources — participants recommended the creation of a strategic plan for the DRCs.</p> <p>The meeting generated strong consensus that education should include a relationship with the surrounding community on many different issues: keeping children in school, reaching out to the private sector for support, developing dialogue with the media to build public awareness about the importance of (and progress in) education. Participants placed a high priority on the need to build a local information system that would move data quickly and effectively in the province, to create local policies to address province-specific issues, to have a higher control on rural/urban teacher distribution, and to enhance communication and exchange of ideas within the education community, to circulate best practices, and to focus more (through monitoring) on education outcomes, such as overall improvement in reading in all schools.</p> <p>At the closing ceremony, the PEO’s words summarized the overarching concept for the exercise: “this province has an education community, not just an institution called MESVTEE, and the duty of this education community is to become a coherent body that will carry out the mission that has been assigned to us all: to improve education, in order to reach higher levels of reading and by so doing provide the nation with the kind of population that will require to reach the 2030 development goal of becoming a</p>

Province	Key Characteristics of the Strategic Planning Sessions
	mid-level income country.”
Copperbelt	<p>Strategic planning included a broad spectrum of local ministry officials as the drivers of the sessions. STEP-Up’s role was advisory. Although participants were enthusiastic, it soon became apparent that the conceptual tools were not the right ones. After rich but complicated analysis, there were so many complicated issues at play that STEP-Up shifted to a more active role, guiding and supporting the process to help participants focus their process. By instilling a “make it simple, but make it work” concept, the project team helped focus on the main issues that had emerged from the ground-truthing experiences: the need to improve education outcomes by enhancing reading performance, and the need to concentrate more on education outcomes than on formal, traditional monitoring.</p> <p>With this new approach, participants quickly developed a vision and plan, as well as the activities they saw as required to reach the province’s goals. The PEO wholeheartedly supported the approach and became a driver for strategic planning. The lessons here are that it is extremely important to include lessons from the field in the thinking about the future and that leadership is crucial for success.</p>
Central	<p>As in Copperbelt, the strategic planning process underscored the importance of on-the-ground information to inform the process. The difference was that this province lacked leadership and guidance from the PEO, who was not present for the entire session, resulting in an inability to develop a concrete plan. Participants resolved to continue the process by appointing a committee, but it was ultimately necessary to repeat the planning process, this time with presence and leadership of the PEO. This time, the province was able to develop a vision, a plan, and targets that will form the basis for a more secure path toward improved learner and reading performance.</p>
Northwestern	<p>Strategic planning in Northwestern Province, one of Zambia’s largest and lowest-performing provinces in the country, brought together a larger community of stakeholders, including entrepreneurs from the private sector (among them the president of the Book Sellers and Publishers Association of Zambia. From the beginning, the PEO created an environment conducive to creative review of the existing strategic plan, which had been developed with EQUIP2 support.</p> <p>Participants’ enthusiasm translated to a focus on both learner performance and practical outcomes. They decided to share with other schools any methodology that resulted in improved reading skills, to motivate those schools. To compensate for the gaps in continuous and effective monitoring throughout the province, participants created a self-assessment tool, now being tested, that will bring information related to education outcomes to DEBS offices. Finally, the session saw the beginning of negotiations with entrepreneurs to bring a stronger support for education in the province. Participants also planned meetings with mining companies to better articulate their support to the sector, and with the Book Sellers and Publishers Association, with the goal of providing books to schools.</p> <p>The immediate result of the enthusiasm generated in that meeting was a successful meeting with the private sector in Solwezi, including the largest mining company, one month later.</p>
Western	<p>In this province, ground-truthing took place simultaneously with the strategic planning session. The POE’s office had determined that field visits were unnecessary, noting that they understood the problems and that their priority was to complete the review of a strategic plan created with EQUIP2 support. At the same time, the STEP-Up team undertook a ground-truthing exercise.</p> <p>When the team returned, they debriefed the strategic planning participants to a lukewarm reception. The following day, the entire assembly (in six groups) was taken to school visits around Kasama, where the planning session was being held and where rural schools were near enough to visit. When the group returned that afternoon, their assumptions had changed completely. They all recognized the importance of the ground-truthing exercise. This experience transformed the outcome of the meeting, enabling the province to develop concrete activities linked to concrete problems affecting the reading and learning performance of people in the province.</p>

Lessons and Conclusions from Strategic Planning

To understand whether the strategic planning sessions had accomplished their goals and instilled a focus on change in the provinces, STEP-Up analyzed the resulting strategic plans. The analysis revealed that the education community does not yet fully grasp the concept of “improved learner performance.” This lack of understanding resulted in a lack of clarity in targets and commitments (provinces set targets such as “70 percent learner performance by 2015,” “70 percent of children breaking through [to reading],” or “learners scoring a minimum of 70 percent on national exams.” The plans were missing some key aspects:

- Focus on outcome indicators (for example, what is expected after monitoring, training or other activities?)
- The need to include more output indicators (such as “monitoring visits conducted each month” and “meetings held with a specific purpose, each month”)
- The need to have clear means of verification.
- The need to connect different activities (for example, “50 percent of Grade 1 pupils breaking through [to reading] as a result of X training sessions conducted”).
- There was little or no mention of the reading targets each province agreed to during the Kabwe meeting. It seems to have been forgotten.

The overarching challenge lies in the need to initiate conversations with education leaders’ levels on questions such as the following:

- How does the strategic plan fit into the overall paradigm, and how will it align with day-to-day work?
- How will the plan be used as a management tool?
- How will the PEO’s office ensure that every level of the system is using the plan?
- What reports will be required from the districts?
- How will the strategic plan be aligned to reporting systems and structures (that is, quarterly and annual reviews and reports to headquarters)?

The two underlying questions that will require rapid responses are how to get education decision makers out of the “business as usual” model, and how provinces will feel empowered to implement their plans even if the order does not emanate from HQ.

The next phase of STEP-Up’s work will be to help ensure that the strategic plans are useful tools for fostering change at every level of Zambia’s decentralized education system.

SECTION VII: CONCLUSIONS

The immediate result of this process was increased enthusiasm among stakeholders for the strategic planning process, reflecting the willingness of provincial education officials to work toward a stronger education system. STEP-Up's analysis of the strategic plans has made it clear that although enthusiasm is an important first step, capacity to effect change is more difficult to obtain.

Main Conclusions from the Ground-Truthing Exercise

- Travel to the 10 provinces created awareness about the need for change, but there is also a need to create the right conditions for change.
- A prerequisite for effecting change is a shift in language among the key stakeholders; for example, use “learner performance” and “quality of education,” not (questionable) statistics of exam passing rates. The ministry's strategic plans still focus on the latter.
- Change will involve taking a hard look at “business as usual” (e.g., what new tools and methods the standards directorate will require for monitor reading performance levels in pupils).
- The reading target set by USAID, as the main goal of its Global Education Strategy (targeting to improve reading skills for 100 million children worldwide by 2015), has created a new shift that will require the education system to address the effectiveness and quality of education, measured in terms of outcomes, not just outputs. (For example, how well can each student graduating from basic school read, and how much has he or she learned?)
- One of the main issues is the tremendous lack of communication across the education community's institutions, particularly among schools. This factor is a significant barrier to education development. The PEO for Eastern Province pioneered the notion that the province should become an “education community,” but there is still much work to be done to make that vision a reality. Schools feel isolated, and they need to be guided and empowered to begin networking as a community of practice.
- Those best-placed to support change are those who most feel the need for it. A process that builds a constituency, starting at the grassroots level and building demand for change, has proven effective. This has lead STEP-Up in its strategy for generating the conditions required to promote sustainable conditions for change in the education system to improve learners' performance.

The process that will lead to improved learner performance in reading and a higher quality of education will have to consider all of these aspects. When policy incorporates these elements and a critical mass in support for change is reached, the system will be on a path to producing well-educated youth able to respond to Zambia's development goals.

ANNEX A. CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: The Rural Rhino School

Ask Sylvia Mulenga about children not breaking through in reading, and she will tell you it is nonsense. Mrs. Mulenga, a teacher at Kamwi Middle Basic School in Kazungula, will say that helping Grade 1 pupils breakthrough in reading is “a piece of cake.”

“It is not difficult,” she says, “Most of the children in my class are able to read and write. I had this class [Grade 3] when they were in Grade 1. Though I did not teach them in Grade 2, they have not forgotten what they learnt in Grade 1.”

Her statistics on pupils able to read are strong. In Grade 1, 42 of 45 students (81 percent) have broken through. In Grade 2, 35 of 45 (84 percent) can read. Of her Grade 3 students, 78 percent can read.

Her strategy? Personal Commitment

“I carry out monthly assessments through reading,” she says, “The school has set extra lessons for reading after lunch. I am sorry to say this, but I do not use the NBTL methods prescribed by the government, since those depend on materials which are not there. I have developed my own reading cards from cardboards, and I use a one-to-one method of teaching. This is possible through personal commitment. I regard and treat the children as if they are my own. Now parents are happy that their children are reading. Before they used to say the school was condemned.”

Mrs. Mulenga learned how to reflect on her methods through a course she attended sponsored by Save the Children Norway. As deputy head teacher, she has influenced other teachers to follow her example.

Mrs. Mulenga boasts, “I am not a Citonga speaker. I had to learn Citonga. I speak Namwanga. But, as you can see, the children have broken through in Citonga. I feel very good and proud about the achievement.”



Mrs. Mulenga at her desk.



One of the children writing on the chalkboard.

This is not Zambia's only success story in reading. The former DEBS for Namwala, Munamukuni Shandele, argues that schools should not rely too much on the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) for reading materials.

"You must behave like a mad person," he says. "Pick anything that you think is useful and turn it into a reading material."

Mr. Shandele's arsenal of reading materials includes cans, toothpaste containers, carton boxes, old newspapers and even toilet paper. He emphasizes the need to teach phonics, a concept he encouraged when he was the senior education standards officer for languages at the PEO's office in Livingstone.



Mrs. Mulenga and some of her Grade 1 readers and writers pose with STEP-Up's performance monitoring advisor.

Case Study 2: The Effect of Environment* on Learning

In a remote, rural part of Zambia, Kazungula District's main challenge is distance. One school, Moomba, 300 kilometers from Kazungula town, is rarely visited by district standards officers. To reach the school, one has to pass through Western Province, cover a distance of 100 kilometers of dirt road to Mulobezi, and then re-enter Kazungula, covering another 13 kilometers to the school.

Some teachers travel 120 kilometers or more, at their own expense, to visit the DEBS office every week. "This has been very challenging," one teacher said, "We spend 120,000 kwacha (about \$25) per round trip. We are not assisted by the DEBS office financially or otherwise." This is typical in the district. Other teachers travel even greater distances and spend up to four days at the DEBS office before returning their posts. The distances and lack of transport makes school monitoring nearly impossible.

In addition, there is very little communication between schools and the DEBS office due to lack of a cellular network in many places. Some parts of in the district are so remote that teachers must travel 20 kilometers to reach some form of transport; others travel 10 kilometers to make a phone call. It is not uncommon for a determined teacher to climb a tree or an anthill in search of a network to call to the DEBS office. Teachers also travel for other reasons, or are busy with survival strategies in villages.

The result of all of this travel is that little learning is taking place due to teacher absenteeism. The Kazungula DEBS expressed this concern, noting one instance when his staff visited a school, only to find only a single teacher present.

* *Environment* refers to any situation that has contributed to poor learner performance.

Case Study 3: *Lininga*, Caterpillars, and Tobacco

In June and July in Kazungula, you will find the classrooms nearly empty at Nachilinda Basic School and other schools along the Zambezi River. The boys have all gone to collect *lininga* — the only fish known to come to the surface during the cold season. One boy tries to protest when the father tells him he has to go to the river: “If you do not go fishing and choose to go to school then you will eat books,” his father says. The reason is survival — they sell the fish in Livingstone or Kazungula to raise money for their families. Although the DEBS knows the school calendar can be changed to account for *lininga* season, he chooses to let the old custom take its course, at the expense of the pupils’ education.

In rural Serenje in October and November, it is examination time, but the pupils are absent. It is caterpillar season, and the children are in the bush hunting the *ifinkubala* (as they are called in the local language). Parents order their children to leave school, and the whole village camps at caterpillar gathering areas for the entire two-month period. The dried caterpillars have a good market in Kabwe, Ndola, and other Copperbelt towns, and as far as Lusaka.

Also in Serenje, at harvest-time, some parents send their children to commercial farms in Mkushi. They order the children to leave school so they can find employment. In 2011, one school closed because the children had gone to pick tobacco.

The effect of these “survival strategies” on school children continues in Zambia. Communities feel a real need to survive. MESVTEE can no longer ignore this fact; it is time to come up with their own strategies to address the situation.

Case Study 4: Joyce’s Story

It takes Joyce at least an hour to walk from her home village to Janeiro Basic School in Luangwa, since she is careful to avoid any encounters with elephants; but the time it takes does not bother her at all. She is 17, and this is her second attempt at Grade 7. Joyce is only too happy to have this privilege again as she attentively focuses her attention to her math teacher during a lesson.

Two years ago, after the death of her father, Joyce’s uncle sent her into a polygamous marriage to a much older man from a nearby village. “I knew that I would be forced out of school to get married so that I could help the family after our father died,” she says in ChiNyanja, “but I had no idea that the man I was to marry was at least 50 years old.”

Joyce’s marriage was short-lived, due to the intervention of her school head teacher, Mr. Nkhata, who had been following her progress in school and was quick to notice her absence and investigate her whereabouts.

“I was alarmed to learn that one of my best students, Joyce, had been married off to a wealthy old man after her father’s death, and I immediately found a way to get her back in school because she needed to be in school.”

Mr. Nkhata was able to mobilize support from the community and village headman demanding that Joyce return to school, and she eventually was freed from her alleged husband to return to school.

“I was very happy when my teachers helped me out of my desperate situation. Even though I am now living with my poor grandmother and two siblings, I am only too happy to be back in school,” she says with a smile.



Joyce stands among fellow pupils at Janeiro Basic School. (Photo: Precious Habeenzu/STEP-Up)

Joyce and her two siblings rely on her grandmother’s fishing efforts to survive on one meal per day.

ANNEX B. PEOPLE MET DURING GROUND-TRUTHING

The STEP-Up Zambia team met with 190 representatives from 7 provincial education offices, 22 district education boards, 16 high schools, 34 basic schools, and 2 community schools.

Quick Counts

Persons Met	Male	Female	Total
Totals	117	73	190
<i>Director</i>	0	1	1
<i>University dons</i>	1	0	1
CESO	1	0	1
PEOs	2	2	4
PESOs	4	0	4
DEBs	11	5	16
SESOs	9	11	20
SEO	0	1	1
DESOs	2	3	5
ESOs	7	3	10
EO TED	0	2	2
PRCC	0	1	1
Planning officers	5	3	8
Buildings officers	2	0	2
Statistical officers	1	0	1
DRCCs	3	1	4
Head teachers	24	17	41
Deputy head teachers	12	11	23
HODs	11	1	12
Senior teachers	5	4	9
Teacher	13	6	19
Accountants	2	0	2
Human resource officers	1	1	2
Others-community chairpersons	1	0	1

Full List

Station	Type	Name of Person	Title	Sex
Central Province				
Kabwe District				
DEBS	Office	Felistus Kanyembo	DEBS	Female
DEBS	Office	Simasiku Nawa	SHRMO	Male
DEBS	Office	Kenson Kapapa Munshya	Buildings Officer	Male
Kabwe	High school	Annie Lungu	Head teacher	Female
Kabwe	High school	Isaac Sitali	D/Head teacher	Male
Kabwe	High school	Maureen Kalomwe	HOD	Female
Kafulamase	Basic school	Lemmy Kunda	Head teacher	Male
Kafulamase	Basic school	Agness Mwendachabe	D/Head teacher	Female
Kasanda				
Malombe	Basic school	Caiphaz Miyutu	Head teacher	Male
Kasanda				
Malombe	Basic school	Aggrey Kabandula	Senior Teacher	Male
Kasanda				
Malombe	Basic school	Ethel Chanda	Teacher	Female
Kasanda				
Malombe	Basic school	Moddie Chibwe	Teacher	Female
Kasanda				
Malombe	Basic school	Lillian Lisulo Mbewe	Senior Teacher	Female
Kasanda				
Malombe	Basic school	Rose Mphande Mabuku	Senior Teacher	Female
Kasanda				
Malombe	Basic school	Anastasia Ndhlovu	Senior Teacher	Female
Kasanda				
Malombe	Basic school	Mercy Banda Chongo	Senior Teacher	Female
PEO	Office	Stanley Handema	PESO	Male
PEO	Office	Lisulo Musho	SESO	Male
PEO	Office	Beatrice Mumbi Mwansa	SESO	Female
PEO	Office	Evelyn Bbalo Munsanje	SESO	Female
PEO	Office	Sangwani Sichinga	Planning Officer	Female
PEO	Office	Betty Mzumara	SEO	Female
Serenje District				
DEBS	Office	Francis Mwango	Buildings Officer	Male
DEBS	Office	Victor Mushala	Statistical Officer	Male
DEBS	Office	Dominic Hakanene Nchimunya	DEBS	Male
Kabamba	Basic school	Bernard Sampa	D/Head teacher	Male
Kabamba	Basic school	Moses Kumwenda	Senior Teacher	Male
Serenje	High school	K.M. Zyangale	D/Head teacher	Male
Serenje	High school	K. Fwanyanga	HOD	Male
Serenje	High school	Stephen Phiri	HOD	Male
Serenje	High school	Iwell Chembe	HOD	Male
Serenje	High school	Donald Malama	HOD	Male
Serenje Boma	Basic school	Theresa Daka	Head teacher	Female
Serenje Boma	Basic school	Misheck Mukuka	Teacher	Male
Serenje Boma	Basic school	Oliver Chanda	Teacher	Male
Serenje Boma	Basic school	Anthony Mwitumwa	D/Head teacher	Male
Serenje Boma	Basic school	Emelia Chinsende	Teacher	Female
Serenje Boma	Basic school	Chanda Mulenga	Teacher	Male
Serenje Boma	Basic school	Aaron Sichula	Senior Teacher	Male

Station	Type	Name of Person	Title	Sex
Eastern Province				
Chadiza District				
Chadiza Boarding	High school	Rose Miyombo	Head teacher	Female
Chadiza Boarding	High school	Simeon .S. Lungu	D/Head teacher	Male
Chadiza Boarding	High school	Charles. P. Makunka	HOD	Male
DEBS	Office	Ruth N. Moyo	DEBS	Female
Mwala	Basic school	Mbewe	Head teacher	Male
Chama District				
Chama	Basic school	Mary. M. Kabandama	D/Head teacher	Female
Chama	Basic school	Jonathan Phiri	Head teacher	Male
DEBS	Office	Leonard Ngoma	DEBS	Male
DEBS	Office	Peter. M. Ndlovu	ESO	Male
DEBS	Office	Gibson Phiri	DRCC	Male
Chipata District				
Anoya Zulu	High school	Zimba	Head teacher	Male
Anoya Zulu	High school	Zulu. S. Isaku	HOD	Male
Anoya Zulu	High school	Mabanhla.S. Banda	HOD	Male
Anoya Zulu	High school	Tellas. T. Ngoma	HOD	Male
Anoya Zulu	High school	Rodia Tembo	D/Head teacher	Female
Chipikula	Basic school	John Jere	Head teacher	Male
DEBS	Office	Ernesto Malambo	Planning Officer	Male
DEBS	Office	Mainza Mutolo	ESO	Female
DEBS	Office	Kezias Lungu	DEBS	Male
Hillside	Basic school	P. Musanda	Head teacher	Female
PEO	Office	Pilila Jere	PEO	Female
PEO	Office	Kachigo Manda	SESO	Male
PEO	Office	Venus. G.N Thole	EO-TED	Female
PEO	Office	Luka Gondwe	SESO	Male
Katete District				
Chimbundire	Basic school	Mathew. S. Chimbangu	Teacher	Male
Chimbundire	Basic school	Belia. M. Ndhlovu	D/Head teacher	Female
Chimbundire	Basic school	Kateule N. Mwaba	Head teacher	Male
Petauke District				
DEBS	Office	Samuel U. Phiri	DEBS	Male
DEBS	Office	Martin Tembo	DRCC	Male
Mbwindi Day	High school	Maurine N'gandwe	Head teacher	Female
Mbwindi Day	High school	Emmanuel Phiri	D/Head teacher	Male
Lusaka Province				
Luangwa District				
DEBS	Office	Majalin	DESO	Female
Janeiro	Basic school	Stuart Nkhata	Head teacher	Male
Kakaro	Basic school	Silumeyi	Head teacher	Female
Luangwa	High school	Mercy Mubanga	D/Head teacher	Female
Lusaka District				
Chibelo	Basic school	Madyankuku	Head teacher	Male
Chitukuko	Basic school	Malitoli	Head teacher	Female
DEBS	Office	Joel Kamoko	DEBS	Male
DEBS	Office	Mweemba Chikuntila	ESO	Male
Kabulonga	Basic school	Emade Sakala	Head teacher	Female
National	Office	Happie Kalenga	SESO	Female
National	Office	Chilufya Mumba	SESO	Female
National	Office	Vengi Sinda	CESO	Male

Station	Type	Name of Person	Title	Sex
National	Office	Dominic Nyambe	PESO	Male
National	Office	Veronica Siluyele	SESO	Female
National	Office	Hildah Chishala	SESO	Female
National	Office	Mathews Chirwa	PESO	Male
National	Office	Cecilia Sakala	Director	Female
PEO	Office	Grade Banda	DESO	Female
PEO	Office	S. Sakala	SESO	Female
PEO	Office	P. Banda	SESO	Female
PEO	Office	Neroh Mwanapabu	PESO	Male
PEO	Office	Rose Siziya	SESO	Female
PEO	Office	Nyambe Sefulo	SESO	Male
PEO	Office	Judith. S. Musona	PRCC	Female
PEO	Office	Agness. T.M. Chanda	SESO	Female
UNZA	University	Oswell Chakulimba	Dean	Male
Muchinga Province				
Chinsali District				
Chinsali Girls	High school	Pardon Tesho	Head teacher	Male
Chinsali Girls	High school	Bizwell Katito	Teacher	Male
DEBS	Office	Davy Nsofwa Chanda	DEBS	Male
DEBS	Office	Gilbert Lungu	Accountant	Male
Mwaba	Basic school	Frank Chanda	Head teacher	Male
PEO	Office	Jobbix Kalumba	PEO	Male
Isoka District				
DEBS	Office	Margaret Shikabonga	DEBS	Female
DEBS	Office	Twiza Nalungwe	Planning Officer	Female
Muchinga	High school	Katele Kalale	Head teacher	Male
Nakonde District				
DEBS	Office	Clifford Sichilima	DEBS	Male
DEBS	Office	Welcome Malungo	Planning Officer	Male
Mwenzu Girls	High school	Hastings Kayira	D/Head teacher	Male
Mwenzu Girls	High school	Gibbs Alison	Head teacher	Female
Nakonde	High school	Eden Kasongo	D/Head teacher	Male
Nakonde	Basic school	Joyce Fufu	D/Head teacher	Female
Northern Province				
Kasama District				
Chiba	Basic school	Elijah Sinkala	Head teacher	Male
DEBS	Office	J.J. Simuntala	DESO	Male
DEBS	Office	Mulenga Nyemba	Planning Officer	Male
DEBS	Office	Edward Silavwe	ESO	Male
Mulenga Chipoya	Basic school	Charles Khumalo	Head teacher	Male
Musa	Basic school	Emelda Kaungu	Teacher	Female
Musa	Basic school	Noble Sichivula	Teacher	Male
	Community		Committee	
Paul Kalemba	school	Peter Chisoso	Chairperson	Male
	Community			
Paul Kalemba	school	Kellan Sinyangwe	Teacher	Male
PEO	Office	Ngosa Kotati	PEO	Male
PEO	Office	Marcel Bwalya	SESO	Male
PEO	Office	Victoria Kapila Mbewe	EO-TED	Female
Mbala District				
DEBS	Office	Yambayamba Mateo	DEBS	Male
DEBS	Office	Ethel Sikazwe	Planning Officer	Female

Station	Type	Name of Person	Title	Sex
DEBS	Office	Isabel Namfukwe Kabulembe	ESO	Female
DEBS	Office	Harrison K Kunda	ESO	Male
Kawimbe	Basic school	Jennipher Nankamba	D/Head teacher	Female
Kawimbe	Basic school	Ali Mbuwa	Teacher	Male
Kawimbe	Basic school	Wesley Simpokolwe	Senior Teacher	Male
Kawimbe	Basic school	Danny Kamitondo	Teacher	Male
Kawimbe	Basic school	Boswel Chibale	Teacher	Male
Mpulungu District				
DEBS	Office	Josephine Mabuku Sipalo	DEBS	Female
DEBS	Office	Catherine Mwamba	ESO	Female
Mpulungu	Basic school	Bernadete Mutale	Head teacher	Female
Mpulungu	Basic school	Catherine Ngulube	D/Head teacher	Female
Mpulungu	Basic school	Michael Gondwe	Head teacher	Male
Mpulungu	Basic school	Pascal Mwale	Teacher	Male
Mpulungu	Basic school	Evans Chanda	Teacher	Male
Northwestern Province				
Ikelenge District				
Ikelenge	High school	R. Chikumbi	Head teacher	Male
Ikelenge	High school	F. Mubambe	D/Head teacher	Male
Ikelenge	High school	J. Kayayi	HOD	Male
Ikelenge	High school	A. Makuya	HOD	Male
Kasempa District				
DEBS	Office	Kamana	DEBS	Male
Kalusha	Basic school	Phiri	Head teacher	Female
Kasempa Day	High school	Robby Kalukwa	Head teacher	Male
Nkenyauna	Basic school	Friday Chunga	Head teacher	Male
Mwinilunga District				
Kanyihampa	Basic school	S Maseka	Head teacher	Male
Solwezi District				
Tumvwanani	Basic school	Manjimila	D/Head teacher	Male
Southern Province				
Kazungula District				
DEBS	Office	Samson Sakala	DEBS	Male
DEBS	Office	Lillian Haangoma	DESO	Female
DEBS	Office	Audrey Chiwala	DRCC	Female
Kamwi	Basic school	Sylvia Mulenga	Head teacher	Female
Nachilinda	Basic school	Ndiyoyi Mfuzi	Head teacher	Male
Nachilinda	Basic school	Frederick Sinjele	D/Head teacher	Male
Riverside	Basic school	Xavier Mwiinga	Head teacher	Male
Livingstone District				
DEBS	Office	Mwala Imasiku	DEBS	Male
DEBS	Office	Collard Chilala	ESO	Male
DEBS	Office	Peter Muleya	Planning Officer	Male
DEBS	Office	Gladys Siyawayawa	SHRMO	Female
DEBS	Office	Mujala	Accountant	Male
Linda	High school	Michelo	Head teacher	Female
Linda	High school	Himwita	HOD	Male
Livingstone	High school	Mapondo Haabuuka	Head teacher	Male
Mujala Demo	Basic school	Munkombwe	Head teacher	Female
Mwandi	Community school	Joyce Kanimba	Head teacher	Female
Mwandi	Community	Matilda Sindela	D/Head teacher	Female

Station	Type	Name of Person	Title	Sex
	school			
	Community			
Mwandi	school	Mildred Moobola	Teacher	Female
Nansanzu	Basic school	Wallace Kamchela	Head teacher	Male
Nansanzu	Basic school	Ngenda	D/Head teacher	Female
Ngwenya	Basic school	Lusaka	Head teacher	Male
PEO	Office	Given Mweemba	PEO	Female
PEO	Office	Ayden Kambunga	SESO	Male
PEO	Office	Benson Zemba	SESO	Male
PEO	Office	Charles Mwanambala	SESO	Male
PEO	Office	Regina Siamusiye	SESO	Female
PEO	Office	Maurice Mulopo	SESO	Male
Monze District				
DEBS	Office	Peggy Chilema	DEBS	Female
DEBS	Office	Titus Bwanga	ESO	Male
DEBS	Office	Hakoola	ESO	Male
DEBS	Office	Salende	Planning Officer	Male
DEBS	Office	Mung'abata	DESO	Male
DEBS	Office	Ferdinand Hampungo	DRCC	Male
Manungu	Basic school	Mweemba Maambo	Head teacher	Female
Manungu	Basic school	Chikonga	D/Head teacher	Female
Manungu	Basic school	Mukwakwa	Senior Teacher	Male
Monze	High school	Smith H Habulembe	D/Head teacher	Male
St Vincent	Basic school	Lontia Siakalambwa	Head teacher	Female
St Vincent	Basic school	Keaner Kachemba	Teacher	Female
St Vincent	Basic school	Evans Hamakalu	Teacher	Male