

Elise Dykstra
Mason City High School
Mason City, IA, USA
Zambia, Education

Zambia: Education for Development

Zambia has been struggling to feed its quickly growing population since the 1960s when it was first founded. With the 14th largest growth rate in the world at 2.83 percent and a total fertility rate (TFR) of 5.62, the population of Zambia is expected to quadruple by the year 3000 (World Population Review). Meanwhile, food is already scarce. Zambia, on average, has the fifth-smallest calorie consumption of all countries at 2,013 calories per day per capita (*Evolution of energy and nutrient supply*). This epidemic of food insecurity and hunger will only continue to grow as the population of Zambia skyrockets, and will not resolve itself without intentional action to improve the status of the country and produce more food. In addition to putting extreme stress on food availability in Zambia, the exponentially growing population will also place additional pressure on the already substandard education system. The literacy rate and graduation levels are not only low, but also extremely disproportionate from urban to rural students, as well as from males to females. For a variety of reasons, such as language barriers, poor education environments, puberty, and early marriage, young women from rural areas of Zambia are extremely disadvantaged if they wish to pursue higher education or even just a job outside the home. Zambia's education system is working against their country rather than for it, therefore a variety of systems should be implemented to improve the education of women and other at risk groups to raise the overall literacy rate in the country.

Zambia is landlocked and neighbors seven other African countries. It is mostly made up of a high plateau averaging about 4000 feet above sea level. The climate consists of three distinct seasons including warm-wet, cool-dry, and hot-dry seasons, with the rainy season averaging 34 inches of precipitation. Such a large amount of rainfall in a short time can cause serious flooding and the lack of rain during the dry seasons often results in extreme drought. Despite those serious climate issues, the geography provides some opportunities for those living there. For instance, the Copperbelt is a 90-mile region which encompasses many of the world's largest copper deposits and provides jobs for many in extraction, refining and trading of copper. However, air pollution is widespread in this region and acid rain is common due to pollutive extraction techniques (CountryReports).

The vast majority of the workforce is employed in agriculture. The predominant method of agriculture is shifting cultivation, also known as slash and burn agriculture. This consists of a farmer cutting down all pre-existing vegetation and burning it to fertilize the soil, then using the land to grow crops until the land's nutrients are exhausted. Once this occurs, the land is left fallow to allow it to regain its nutrients. This is the main reason that only one-sixth of arable land is under cultivation. Many families survive off of subsistence or near-subsistence farming. Corn or maize is the staple food and is commonly grown by families alongside millet, cassava and peanuts (Williams). Over 50 percent of average calories consumed by Zambians come from corn and its byproducts. Due to lack of dietary diversity, inadequate consumption of many vitamins and minerals is common among Zambians. For example, 58 percent of children and 31 percent of women have an iron deficiency, and 35 percent of all children are stunted due to lack of nutrients (NCBI). Inflation is also a serious issue for many families. In 2013, the Zambian kwacha was worth about \$0.20 US dollars (USD). Over the past decade, the kwacha's worth has fallen to an all-time low of \$0.04 USD, resulting in widespread poverty (*Zambia: Economy*).

Most Zambian families are quite large and consist of many extended family members, particularly in rural areas. Mothers usually have five to six children, though it is not likely all of the children will live long enough to reach adulthood. It is also common to take in orphaned children. For rural families, living near

extended family on a family plot of land is expected, as is supporting extended family in times of hardship. From a young age, girls are taught to do household chores, while boys are taught to farm, fish, hunt and tend livestock. In the home, women take care of the house and cook for the family, and men are in charge of providing food. If a man helps with household chores, neighbors and family assume he does not have control over his wife (*Zambia: Family*).

The health situation in Zambia is dismal. Diseases like malaria, pneumonia and tuberculosis are rampant and measles and diarrhea cause many premature deaths among children. Over 20 percent of children have lost one or more parents to disease alone. Human Immunodeficiency Viruses (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) affects 13 percent of all people of reproducing age, or more than 11 million people across the country. This causes thousands of deaths yearly and is a central reason for Zambia's unusually low life expectancy of 52.7 years. Although healthcare is free in rural areas, this only includes a birth attendant and a community health worker, who are often under trained and do not have the resources to deal with serious illnesses or health problems. In order to see a doctor, a person must go to a district hospital, which can require days of travel on Zambia's poor road infrastructure (*Zambia: Health*). Only 65 percent of the population has access to clean water, and polluted water and open garbage pits cause epidemics. Lack of trained medical professionals and access to advanced healthcare in rural areas are both main causes of the health crisis that Zambia is now embroiled in.

Nearly all schools are taught entirely in English, which many rural students do not regularly speak at home and do not understand enough to learn well at school. On top of that, school is not affordable for many. Though teachers' salaries are paid by the government, parents must pay for books and uniforms for their children. This is a considerable problem for many families, especially those with several children. (*Zambia: Education*) Orphans can rarely afford school. Current enrollment in primary school is 81.8 percent, but only four percent of grade two learners meet national grade-level standards for reading proficiency. Teachers tend to have little to no training and are not required to have higher education. School buildings are usually rundown and have few resources (*Room to Read*).

For women, completing school is both difficult and rare. Girls are twice as likely as boys to drop out of school by grade seven. Forty-six percent of women are married before age 18, and the adolescent fertility rate is 135 per 1000 15 to 19-year olds. In rural areas, 27 percent of all women have no education whatsoever (*Tag Archive... Education in Zambia*). When families can only pay for one child's education, it is the custom to have the oldest male child go to school. A common attitude in Sub-Saharan Africa is that education will not improve a woman's social or economic standing due to social and gender norms (Saavedra et al). Most people marry in their late teens, and women are usually a few years younger than their spouses, meaning men can stay in school longer before having to look after a family and a home. Additionally, even if a woman was able to continue school after marriage, it is a social expectation to bear a child within a year of marriage (*Zambia: Family*).

The impact of this is that the literacy rate is 82 percent for men but only 66 percent for women. Aside from the literacy rate, discrepancies are seen across multiple demographics. In government, only 13.5 percent of 156 seats in the legislative branch are held by women, and women occupy only seven percent of the Cabinet positions (*CountryReports - Zambia Government*). In the home, women spend the day managing the house and cooking, while men tend livestock or farm. In addition, 73 percent of women contribute to unpaid family labor, while only 27 percent of men do. Zambian women are expected to respect and obey men, which can affect their ability to advance in the workplace, and only 54 percent of women are a part of the labor force. This can also affect their ability to stand up for themselves against sexism and gender-based violence. Men make up 62 percent of formal employment while women fill the remaining 38 percent (*Delegation of the EU*). In general, women with education are more likely to stand up for their rights and have a desire to advance professionally, which would help negate these discrepancies.

It can be hard for many Americans to imagine the number of girls out of school. Here is a statistical breakdown of the age group of children born just four years ago. In 2020, there were approximately 310,000 baby girls born (World Population Review). Of these children, 5.33 percent or 16,182 girls, the population of an entire mid-size American town, will die before the age of five, leaving 293,818 children to grow up and attend school. Most likely many of those children will die of disease or other causes before adulthood, but for the purposes of this paper let us assume they all live to age 24. The secondary education completion rate is 22 percent for women aged 20-24, meaning that about 58,763.6 women born in 2020 will complete secondary education by the year 2040. About 235,054.4 women, about half the population of the state Wyoming, will not.

One thing that many charities are doing to help curb the education shortage in Zambia is raise funds to pay tuition for a student in need. While this is helpful for a limited number of students, it is not sustainable. Foreign aid cannot cover the education of every student in all of Zambia now or in the future (*Tag Archive... Education in Zambia*). In order to improve the sustainability of foreign aid, it should be put towards assets that help more than one student. For instance, instead of buying books for thirty students that a child can use just once, a charity could purchase a full set of books for a school, impacting students for several years and exponentially increasing the number of students helped by aid. Instead of buying a uniform for a single student that needs to be replaced yearly, buy one that students with financial needs can check out and return at the end of the school year. And above all, foreign aid should be spent on improvements to the entire education system: repairs and refurbishment to schools, teachers' training and resources, and language resources for students who may be challenged in English.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, a common attitude of many parents is that educating young women will not increase their social and economic status due to gender bias and sexism. For this reason, one must first educate the families of the children in question before they can be educated. World Bank is doing a project in Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe to educate students and their families on how education can help them improve their futures and status, as well as the negative effects of dropping out (Saavedra, Jaime and Brix). Having a similar program implemented in rural areas of Zambia would be extremely beneficial. One way to implement family education programs such as these would be having a school employee or social worker visit houses of school-aged children, particularly girls, and discuss their education and future with their parents and the child, along with any financial assistance they would be able to receive. Another way this could be implemented is by flyers or mail to homes of young families, stating the benefits of education or providing examples of women from poverty who made a way for themselves through education.

In Malawi, an exciting new opportunity has been established for young women called Creating Healthy Approaches to Success (CHATS), a weekly after-school program for adolescent girls to help them build life skills and navigate the challenges of continuing their education. It focuses on subjects such as leadership, career development, gender-based violence awareness and prevention, self advocacy, sexual and reproductive health, and access to higher education. Sessions are partially led by the girls themselves, giving them more self-confidence and improved leadership skills. To supplement this, female guest speakers present on topics such as entrepreneurship or accessing higher education to give girls role models and exposure to a variety of career paths. Fallice Friday, a CHATS graduate, stated in the article *Advancing Girls' Education in Africa* that, "I love the CHATS because they changed my life. People who overcame difficult things come and speak to us and from them, I now think that the difficulties I face will not make me drop out of school. I do not think bad things about my life, but good things that I can do. In my village people pester me, telling me not to go to school. They tell me about girls [who] are educated and now do not have jobs but, I think with an education I will get a good job that will help me have a better life" (Together Women Rise).

Having something similar to CHATS for Zambian girls would be excellent because many of the issues covered in the CHATS curriculum are things that would be common issues for women in Zambia. The article *Advancing Girls' Education in Africa* also mentioned that empirical and anecdotal evidence in Sub Saharan Africa shows that young women who are pushed by family members or culture to marry before the age of 18 often do not comprehend that they have basic human rights and rights under the law. They are also less likely to pursue quality education and even basic healthcare. Making girls aware of their rights and power, and making them more confident and self-sufficient can help prevent gender-based violence and abuse, as well as improve women's health and quality of life (Together Women Rise). Additionally, most girls in Zambia, especially in rural areas, will have known a family member, maybe a parent, who is afflicted with or has died of HIV/AIDS. The AIDS epidemic is seriously affecting Zambia and will only continue to get worse if nothing is done to curb the spread of the disease. However, if many young women are aware of ways to prevent the spreading of the disease and are educated on sexual health, this could have a tremendous effect on the number of people with the disease in ten or twenty years.

Providing good education to all citizens would leave a huge positive impact on Zambia. Many issues Zambia is currently facing can be solved or improved with an influx of educated professionals. The healthcare system can be expanded so affordable care is available in even the smallest villages and specialized healthcare is more available to rural families through better infrastructure such as roads and transportation. More women educated means more women in government, meaning better rights for women in the future. This also could mean more trained, well-educated teachers, which helps the students of the future to be more successful in school, which restarts the cycle. Better education on legal rights means that more women can stand up against sexual and physical abuse in their communities (Rubenstein). A global trend shows that there is a strong correlation between average years in school for females, the adolescent birth rate, and the GDP per capita of a country. So by increasing just the average number of years in school for females, the number of babies born to teenage mothers decreases, and the economic productivity of the country will increase. There is also a well-proven trend that more years in school for women correlates with a decreasing TFR. Essentially, a woman with an education will be looking for a professional career, and will likely choose to launch her career before she starts having children, resulting in a lower TFR and therefore fewer mouths to feed among Zambia's currently soaring population.

Specifically targeting groups such as women and rural children is essential because they are more likely to come back and help others like them. A rural student who receives training to become a teacher may choose to go back to their home village and teach school in the local language and dialect, so that students will have an easier time learning, and therefore a brighter future. A woman with full knowledge of her rights and who is willing to stand up for herself and other women becomes a role model for women around her, showing them that they too can be economically successful. The most important part of any of the solutions offered, be that financial aid, information campaigns or girls' clubs, is that it must be carried out by someone from that area, who grew up there, was educated there, and is now living a successful life. Who is more likely to change the opinion of an obstinate family? A student who grew up in that village or nearby, speaks the language, came from a similar background economically, and now is leading a successful life, or a person from urban Zambia or a foreigner, who may struggle in that area's language or has no conception of what life is like for the family? It is easier to listen to those who came from similar circumstances and rose above them to succeed.

Due to the poor education system of Zambia, many young people are not receiving the necessary education to sustain themselves, so to combat this, the country should put education systems designed for at-risk students into place. If these programs help just one child, it will be a victory. Even if the child does not go into the workforce, they are a leader in their community. They can advocate for themselves and those around them. Every educated professional has a chance to considerably improve their country,

whether by inventing better farming techniques, providing healthcare to the farthest, most rural villages, improving the infrastructure and transportation systems, or advocate for any prominent issues in the government, be that education, women's rights, or other social injustices. Every generation has a chance to change their country and their world. Education is the gateway to life.

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