

FORECASTING SOCIAL PROTECTION TOWARDS THE SDGS, COVID-19 AND E LEARNING: CLOSING THE COVID-19 INDUCED EDUCATION GAP THROUGH SOCIAL PROTECTION IN ZAMBIA

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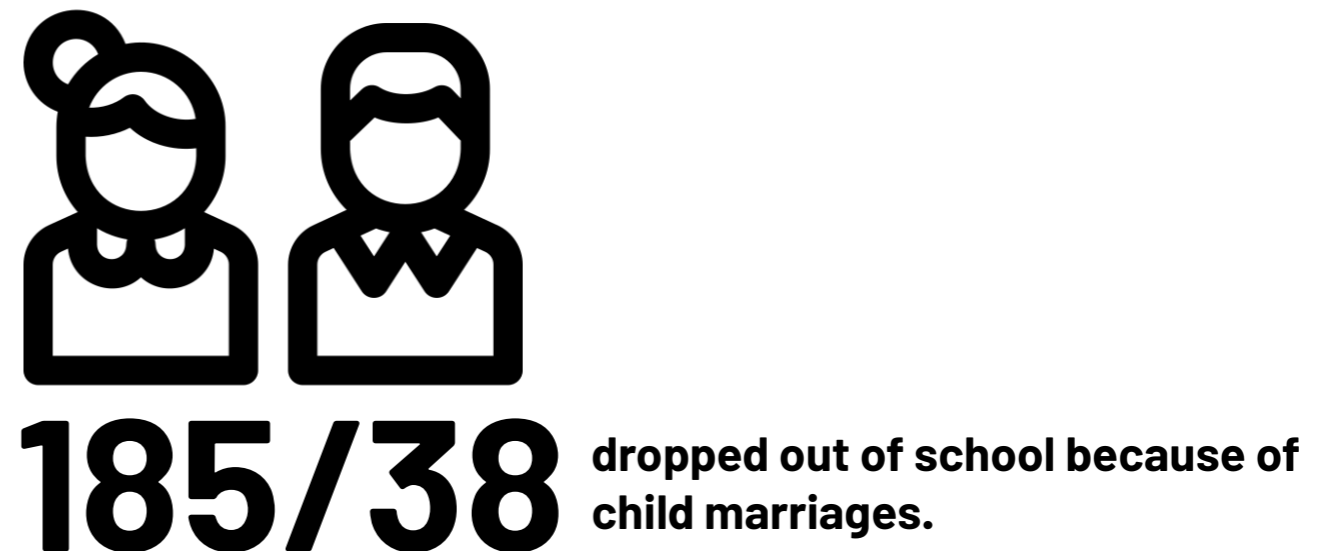
Introduction

- In Zambia, the pandemic saw the closure of schools and higher learning institutions both in 2020 and 2021, forcing **over 4.4 million children and adolescents** to stay home.
- Government through the Ministry of Education and its partners developed and has since been implementing the Education Contingency Plan (EPC) to respond and mitigate the impact of the pandemic on learners for continued learning
- Government implored various methods to keep children learning through **printed learning packages, radio, television and online learning** using computers, phones and the Internet.
- The reality on the ground is that most learners from distant rural areas, migrant children, children with disabilities and those from **vulnerable households** could easily access these modes of learning.

IMPACT OF CLOSURE OF SCHOOL ON SDG2 AND SDG4

- A. Decline in school attendance:** The closure of schools has led to reduce school attendance; Zambia in 2020 recorded a non-return national ratio of 9% for the exam classes that opened in June 2020.

A study was conducted by Zambia National Education Coalition on the continuity of learners on 400 schools in Zambia, the findings show that **565 girls dropped out of school due to pregnancy**, while **185 girls and 38 boys dropped out of school because of child marriages**. Furthermore, 1,017 boys dropped out of school due to **economic hardships against 1,232 girls who dropped out of school for the same reason**.

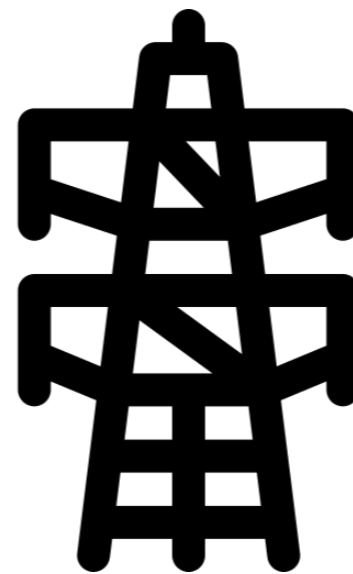


- B. Reduced access to quality education:** According to the survey conducted by Ministry of General Education only **5% of learners indicated availability of Internet in their homes and only 29% indicated having access to power.**



5%

of learners indicated availability
of internet in their home



29%

access to power

- C. Increased inequality in access to education:** The impact of inequality in inclusive education is even worse for children living with different forms of disabilities. A Zambian study conducted in December 2020 by Catholic Medical Mission Board reveals that school attendance for children with different forms of **disabilities has been greatly affected as most children cannot access online education** due to their conditions and no specific interventions have been put in place to ensure continued learning for this segment of the child population.



disabilities

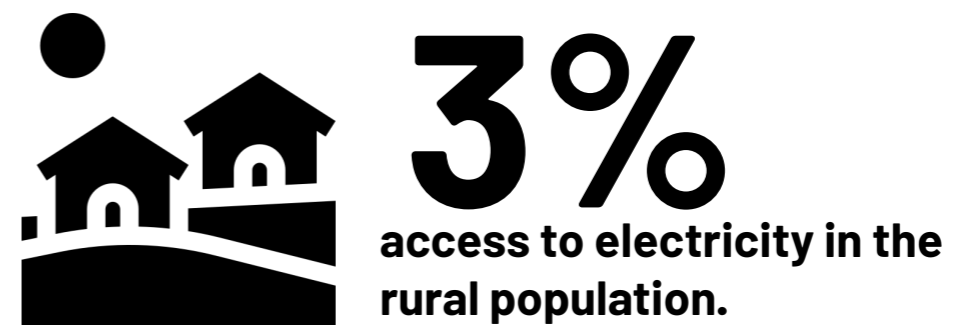
**children cannot access online
education due to their conditions**

D. Reducing strides made towards SDG2 : The closure of schools both in 2020 and 2021 did not only disrupt the learning process but also left close to **1 million learners who benefit from the school feeding program at risk of hunger, thereby reducing the gains the country has made towards achieving SDG 2 on reduced hunger and child related malnutrition.** While the main aim of the program was to improve school attendance and enrollments as an attractive mechanism from vulnerable households, the program has proved to be effective in improving nutritional status of children as well as the cognitive and academic performance.

CLOSE TO **1 million**
learners who benefit from the school
feeding program at risk of hunger,

Current Gaps Causing Educational Inequality in Zambia

- I. **Access to digital infrastructure is unequal across the socio-economic, urban and rural divide**
 - While radio, television and online learning were very useful during the closure of schools, **in Zambia these platforms are remained inaccessible to the majority of learners especially those from vulnerable households and rural areas.**
 - In terms of disparities in access to electricity, USAID 2019 Zambia Energy Sector Overview revealed that the **Zambia's national access to electricity averaged at 31% with 67% of the urban and 3% of the rural population having access to power.**



- disparities of access to power were also the same across schools as a number of them that did not have access to electricity; **about 4,854 primary and 191 secondary schools have access to electricity.**
- In 2018, only **3,025 schools sourced power from the main grid** while the proportion of those, which **sourced power from generators, were 331, from solar.**



3,025

schools sourced power from the main grid.




331


schools sourced power generators and solar.

- In terms of phone ownership, out of the **73.6 percent of the people who owned mobile phones, 29.6 percent had smart phones**, thus implying that most of the people possess basic phones, which are non-internet supported.

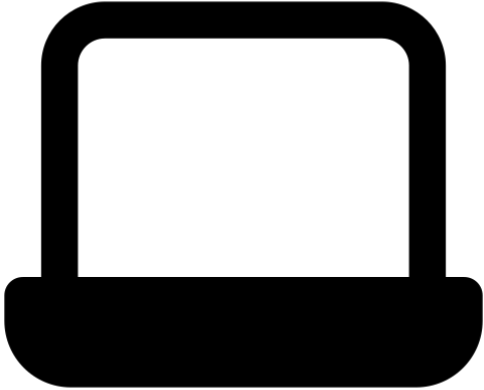
73.6%
of the people who owned mobile



29.6%
had smart phones



- Further, **access and use of computers stands** at 14.7 percent in urban areas and 2.7 percent in rural areas.



URBAN AREAs
14.7%
access and use of
computers.

vs

RURAL AREAs
2.7%
access and use of
computers.

II. Dominance of Internet access and knowledge on the use of computers and the Internet by urban population

- On **Access and Usage of ICTs by Households and individuals** indicated a big gap in Internet access between urban and rural areas, with **31.2 percent in urban areas and 6.6 percent in rural areas.**
- The cost of Internet services has prohibited a lot of children from vulnerable households from adopting online learning because for most poor households the economic cost of buying data is perceived as secondary to other needs such as food and shelter.
- 11.8 percent of individuals in urban areas know how to use computers compared to 2.8 percent in rural areas.

Possible Solutions

1. Investment in free tax Internet packages for students and teachers to reduce digital learning inequalities. COVID-19 has shown that affordability and accessibility to Internet services is more necessary now than ever before.
2. Equal distribution and investments in ICTs including supporting infrastructure meant to support access to e learning. Data shows that while there is an increase in the number of computers in Government schools, the distribution of computers by province shows the usual disparity with urban schools such as those in Lusaka and Copperbelt having more computer facilities than areas off the line of rail.
3. Government can emulate countries like Kenya to provide free solar chargeable Internet gadgets to learners in rural areas; with support from cooperating partners who have the capacity to mobilize resources Zambia will be able to equip all learners with equipment required for online learning.

Possible Solutions

4. Government is urged to engage the private sector through public- private partnerships to equip schools with computers and solar panels to enable expanded access to e-learning services. The current environment is conducive for this approach.
5. As Government continues to re-align the education sector programmes to national development plans, it is prudent to consider all measures using the available resources to enable learners in the remotest parts of the country stay abreast with education access like their colleagues in urban and rich-households.
6. With the newly created Ministry of Technology and Science there is need to support innovators that are more interested in developing ICTs that use cheaper technologies in providing cheaper online platforms in Zambia.

**THANK
YOU**

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