

OP-ED: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF 30,496 TEACHER RECRUITMENT: TOWARDS THE ACTUALISATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL (SDG) 4

The advancement of the education sector is a critical pillar for achieving human and social development as well as ensuring sustainable investment in human resource to drive the country's development agenda. Zambia's education sector has for many years faced challenges that include; **inadequate financial and human resources, poor quality of education and low progression rates, among others.** These challenges tend to be higher in rural areas due to developmental inequalities, where access to quality education has continued to be affected by distance, poor infrastructure and lack of teachers.

Early this year, the **Government made significant progress on enhancing investment in the education sector through the implementation of the education for all policy which saw the removal of user fees to guarantee access to education.** Similarly, the increased allocation towards the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) would be channelled towards the fulfilment of this policy as a vehicle for infrastructure development and access to bursary financing for boarding fees and skills development at tertiary level. The policy direction to remove user fees across all Government primary and secondary schools resulted in increased demand for education services across the country. These measures meant increased pressure on existing infrastructure and human resource in the education sector.

To effectively deliver the education for all agenda, Government through the 2022 national budget announced the **recruitment of 30,000 teachers set at a cost of K1.7 billion.** This was aimed at improving service delivery and reducing the teacher-learner ratio, particularly, in rural areas where challenges with teacher allocation were prominent. The average teacher-learner ratio currently stands at 1:58 for primary schools and 1:38 for secondary schools, against the required standard ratio of 1:45 and 1:35 at primary and secondary school levels, respectively. **Therefore, the recruitment of 30,496 teachers will translate into a significant reduction in the teacher-learner ratio which is likely to have a positive impact on progression rates and quality of service delivery which is a crucial aspect for attaining Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education.**

The step to allocate 2,056 teachers towards early childhood education will enhance the cognitive foundation of children in literacy and numeracy skills while 25,736 teachers in primary education will help address the quality of basic education, while the 2,694 teachers recruited under secondary education will improve the knowledge of learners gained at primary level. This recruitment is an achievement towards the actualisation of the right to education as espoused by the Convention on the Rights of the Child which Zambia has continued to make strides towards the commitment to fulfil its obligations as recommended by the United Nations Committee. Additionally, investment in human development through sectors such as education is crucial for the attainment of economic transformation that Government envisages will propel economic growth, sustainability and job creation.

PMRC notes that there has been increased allocation of teachers in rural areas and commends the Government for this positive investment towards rural development. This recruitment is also a step towards reducing developmental inequalities through the provision of equitable quality education services aimed at bridging the gap between urban and rural learners.

Aside from positively impacting service delivery in the education sector, the recruitment will have positive socio-economic benefits at household and community levels since these teachers will be able to effectively contribute to the growth of the economy through taxes and access to other essential services. In the same vein, the demand for local goods and services will be increased, particularly, in rural areas. This presents an opportunity for private sector investment in rural areas to meet the demand for various social amenities such as accommodation, financial services, water and sanitation, among others. Increased disposable income will lead to investments in communities and could positively grow the rural economy. Increased disposable income will also have trickle-down effects for sustained livelihoods such as investment in entrepreneurship ventures leading to job creation, increased household income and support towards the extended family, as well as improved nutrition and health outcomes.

An analysis of the school structures and the payroll indicates that with the recruitment of the 30,496 teachers, **the education sector at Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary levels will still have a deficit of about 84,570 teachers.** Going forward, the Government endeavours to recruit teachers over the next 5 years, this and the recruitment of the 30,496 teachers will add to the already existing wage bill of 104,448 teachers countrywide.

In order to sustain this timely and progressive move, PMRC would like to urge Government to increase the budgetary allocation towards the education sector in line with the **Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All, which states that 20% of the total national budget be allocated towards the education sector.** Given the country's tight fiscal space, some of the quick wins of enhancing the country's resources to actualize this measure will include the following;

1. The **IMF US\$1.4 Billion bailout package** will help the country to restructure its extensive debts. The IMF package will open the door for talks for the restructuring of Zambia's foreign debts with its creditors. The expected fiscal adjustment envisages an important shift in spending towards productive sectors such as manufacturing. This will help stimulate economic growth and job creation which are necessary to support social sector spending. The IMF package will also open up opportunities for Zambia to borrow at concessionary rates (borrow cheaply), enhancing the country's resources which can then be channelled towards its investment within social sectors including education.
2. The Zambia Revenue Authority is investing in technology to **modernize its tax administration and seal all tax loopholes.** An efficient and "modernized" tax administration system presents one way of improving taxpayer compliance, which in turn increases tax capacity.
3. Broadening the tax base through the provision of incentives to support the formalisation of the informal sector to stimulate growth and job creation.

Such incentives could include; the formation of capital markets to improve access to finance as well as easing the cost and tedious processes attached to formalisation, among others.

4. Economic diversification of key sectors such as mining, agriculture, tourism, energy and manufacturing creates a sustainable cycle of economic activities thereby increasing prospects of employment and growth. Economic diversification is also a positive objective in sustaining economic growth as it will enable the country to be less vulnerable to adverse terms of shocks by stabilizing export revenue.
5. Exploring opportunities for increased tax revenues, job creation and investment following the enactment of the **Cannabis Act and Industrial Hemp Act.** The world is beginning to recognize marijuana for its enormous health and economic benefits. There is a booming industry in the United States, Canada, Holland and across Europe. Statistics show that the world marijuana market is expected to reach US\$146.4 billion by the end of 2025.



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