



## PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Policy Monitoring and Research Centre is pleased to join the rest of the world in commemorating World Literacy Day, which falls on the 8th of September, 2022. Literacy, defined as the ability to read and write, plays a cardinal role in education and it is impossible to separate the two. Moreover, in a world that is increasingly going digital, digital literacy is of cardinal importance regardless of one's gender, ability, social, economic, cultural, or political status.

This year, the world recognizes International Literacy Day under the theme, **"Transforming Literacy learning spaces, exploring opportunities and possibilities."** This year's theme is appropriate as the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought to the fore the importance of digital learning platforms in learning spaces while recognizing the potential these spaces have for an even broader, more extensive reach. The unequal access to such platforms increases the inequality divide between vulnerable and privileged Zambian citizens. It is thus of primary importance that the digital gap between these two demographics is narrowed down to facilitate access to all citizens for digital learning.

In Zambia, according to the Demographic Health Survey (2018), 66% of women and 82% of men aged 15 - 49 are literate. This implies that 18% of men and 44% of women aged 15 - 49 are classified as illiterate. **This survey also revealed a gap in the literacy rate between urban and rural areas, with the literacy gap between urban and rural populations higher in women than in men. 91% of urban men and 81% of urban women are literate, compared to 54% of rural women and 74% of rural men. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the inequality gap regarding access to digital learning platforms, especially in the country's rural areas.** It is important that as Zambia continues to emerge from this pandemic, investment into the ICT sector is given the utmost priority to ensure that all citizens, regardless of status, have access to such platforms, which will foster development and facilitate for the country to attain **Sustainable Development Goals centred around quality education; gender equality; and good health and well-being, which are in line with the recently launched Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) - improving the lives of citizens and allowing them to live decent lives.**

In light of this, PMRC would like to commend the Government for the recent equitable recruitment and deployment of **30,496 teachers, as this is a significant step towards improving the quality of education (and the literacy rate) in Zambia by reducing pupil-teacher ratios in all districts of the country.** Further, the three-fold increase in learning materials and grants, particularly to primary schools and the plans to construct an additional **120 secondary schools** under the Zambia Education Enhancement project, is a further step in the right direction. The budget allocation to the education sector of 18 billion Kwacha (10.4% of the 2022 budget), from almost 14 billion Kwacha in 2021, is also to be commended. However, there remains room for improvement in budgetary allocation to this sector, and the Government is urged further to increase this sector's funding in the 2023 budget to facilitate the smooth implementation of programmes such as the Alternative Modes of Education Programme (AMEP).

Lastly, PMRC would like to take this opportunity to wish all learners a happy and fruitful 2022 International Literacy Day.

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