

STATE OF THE YOUTH IN ZAMBIA: EDUCATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND POVERTY REDUCTION

Zambia has a young population, with 65% under age 25, and over half—52%—under the age of 18, and the country's Seventh National Development Plan (2017-2021), recognises that Zambian youth can, with effective support, play a significant role in realizing its Vision 2030—to transition from a low to middle income country by 2030.

Youth are formidable assets for national prosperity and potential development catalysts. Ensuring their health, investing in education, and building their skills for gainful employment and entrepreneurship are among a country's strategic obligations. To properly invest in youth, a government and its stakeholders must understand the obstacles its youth face, including social factors, and how they can enable their full civic and economic participation.

YOUTH POLICY IN ZAMBIA

Zambia has committed to youth empowerment by signing and ratifying international instruments including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Youth Charter, in addition to its national laws and and policies, which, if fully implemented, can spur youth development:

- The Constitution guarantees youth their human rights and provides for their participation in the economy and governance of the country
- The National Development Council Act coordinates, implements, and evaluates youth programs, while the National Youth Policy cultivates an enabling environment for youth's participation in development, through education, health, and creative industry, with sustained focus on the environment, gender, HIV, and volunteerism
- The Education Act and guarantees access to education for all and youth's development, to prepare them to participate in the economy and development, and current education policy guarantees free primary education as well as prohibiting child marriage.
- The Employment Act provides a right to employment, and the Employment of the Young Person's Act prohibits their hazardous work.
- The Adolescent Health Strategy ensures a health care system that is responsive and friendly to youth, enabling their access and use of health services including reproductive health (RH) services.
- Citizenship empowerment programs provide financial resources to youth for initiating businesses and other entrepreneurship activities.



Photo: John Healey, Population Council, Zambia

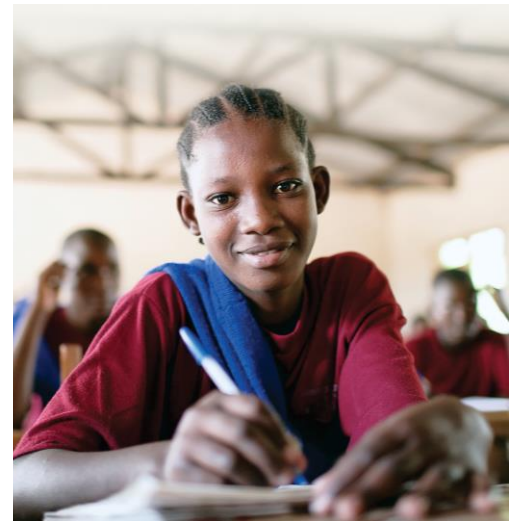


Photo credit: UNFPA

Although Zambia has a favourable youth policy environment, the country's policies and programs are poorly implemented and there is a lack of accountability. Although a parliamentary committee on youth and sport is charged with oversight of activities of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, it is mandated only to make recommendations for consideration by the executive branch of government; it has no legal authority to ensure the government adheres to its commitments. There is no superseding accountability mechanism holding the government accountable for fulfilling its commitments to youth investments.

As a result of poor policy implementation, youth in Zambia face many challenges which act as barriers to the effective enhancement of their well-being, in addition to their potential contributions to the country's overall development.

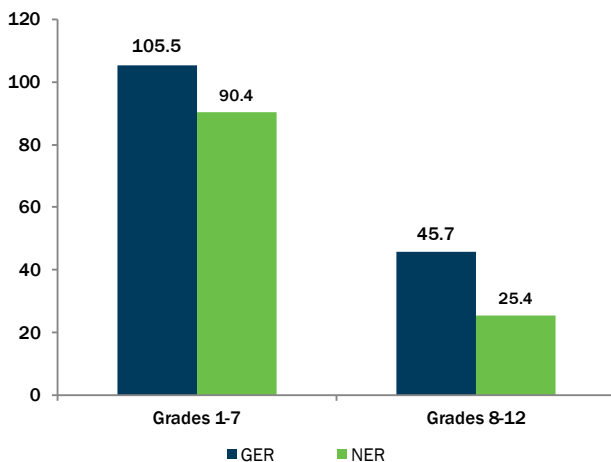
CHALLENGES FOR ZAMBIA'S YOUTH

POOR EDUCATION OUTCOMES

Youth are dropping out of the school system

Zambia is approaching universal primary education: in 2016 gross enrolment rate (GER) was 105% and net enrolment rate (NER) was 90.4% (Figure 1).

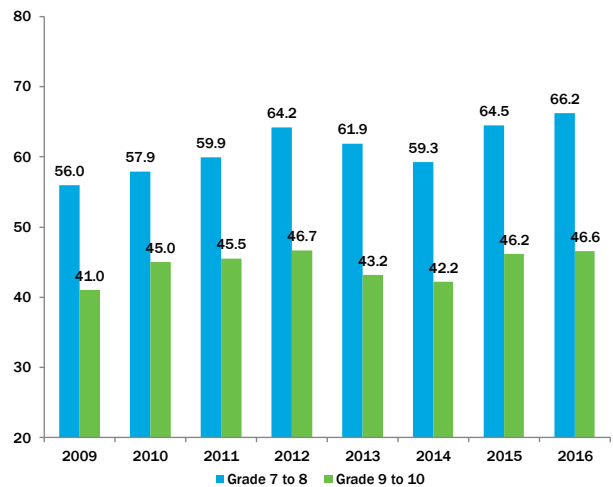
Figure 1: Primary and secondary gross enrolment ratio (GER) and net enrolment ratio (NER), 2016



Source: Ministry of General Education, 2016

Transitioning from primary to lower secondary (grades 8 to 9), and to upper secondary (grades 10 to 12), (Figure 2) and tertiary (college or university) is low. Transition rates from lower secondary to upper secondary school consistently remained below 50%, from 2009 to 2016, which means that less than half of those who completed lower secondary school transitioned to upper secondary education—most (more than half) dropped out.

Figure 2: Transition rates from grades 7 and 8 and grades 9 and 10

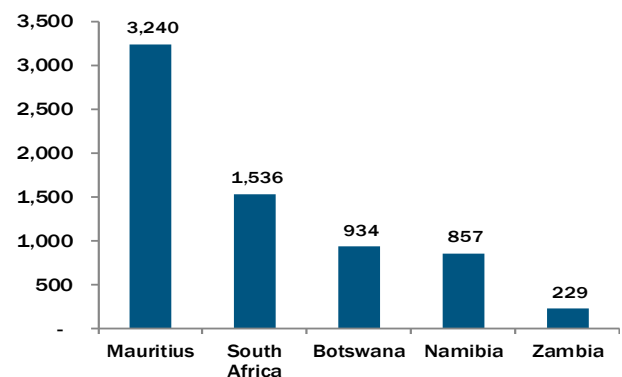


Source: Ministry of General Education, 2016

Most youth finish school with only primary or lower secondary educations, which is insufficient for real job market competitiveness.

Among those who do complete secondary education, only 28% go on to acquire a university degree (UNESCO: 2016). Zambia has one of the lowest numbers of university students in the region: 229 per 100,000 population, compared with 1,536 per 100,000 in South Africa and 934 in Botswana (Figure 3).

Figure 3: University students per 100,000 population, selected African countries

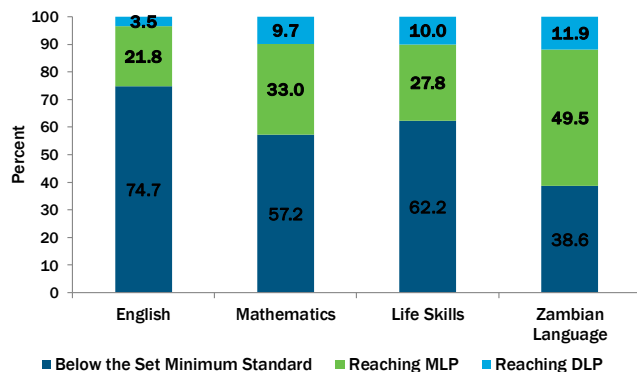


Source: UNESCO 2016

Reasons for poor transition rates include poor literacy and numeracy skills among primary school students, limited spaces for higher level education, and the high cost of secondary and tertiary education. Progression into secondary and tertiary education largely depends on whether students are able to read and count while in primary school.

By grade 5 it is anticipated that students should be able to read and write. To assess literacy and numeracy skills, GRZ conducts a grade 5 national assessment survey to measure the quality of education by assessing learning outcomes among grade 5 students. To measure learning achievements, GRZ has set a minimum level performance (MLP) and a desirable level performance (DLP) in English, Mathematics, Life skills, and Zambian languages. When the survey is administered, at a minimum, students are expected to reach MLP to demonstrate basic mastery of literacy and numeracy, or ideally to reach the DLP, which demonstrates advanced mastery of knowledge and skills being tested. As Figure 4 shows, however, Zambia's 2014 national assessment of learning achievements for grade 5 found that only 21.8% of Zambia's students reached the MLP in English, and 33% in mathematics. The majority (74.7% in English and 57.2% in mathematics) were below the set minimum standard. The poor learning outcomes in primary school contribute to poor transition rates from primary to lower secondary school level.

Figure 2: Proportion of students in grade 5 at minimum and desired levels of performance



Source: Ministry of General Education, 2015

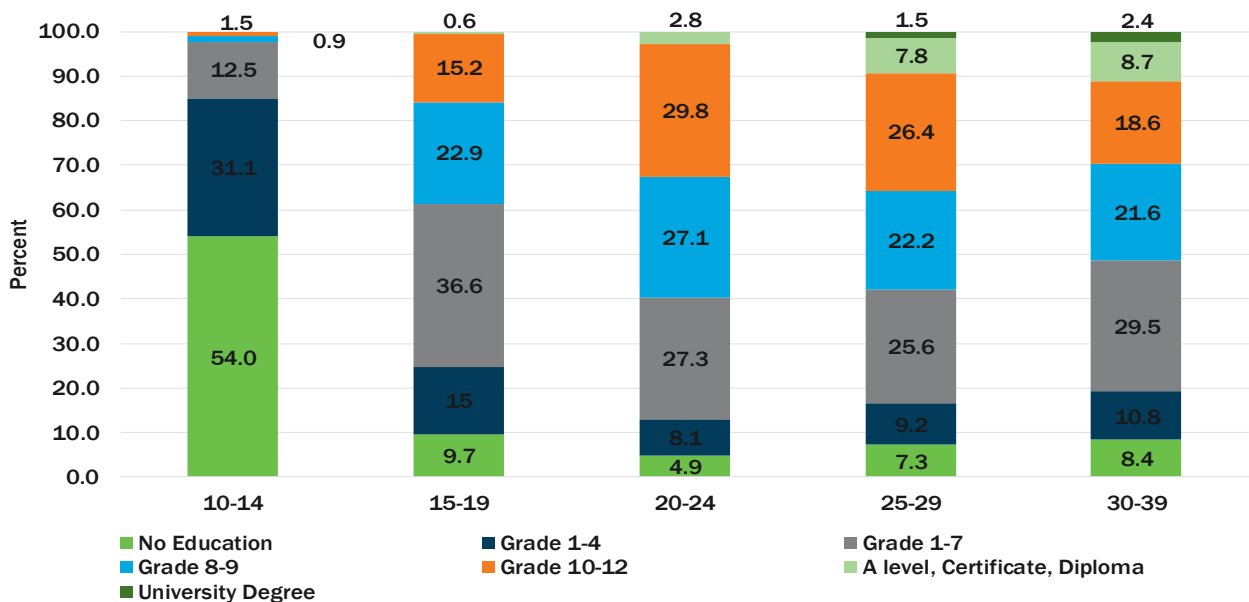
The Living Conditions Monitoring survey (LCMS) in 2015 highlighted the seriousness of uneducated youth. Although in 2016 the Ministry of General Education reported that Zambia is approaching universal primary education, LCMS found that over half (54%) of 10 to 14 year olds had no education. Asked why they have never attended school, over a third (38.7%) said they were never even enrolled, while 19.9% cited lack of financial support as the reason for not attending school (Table 1).

Table 1: Reasons for never having attended school (%)

Reasons for never having attended school	Age Groups			
	10 to 14	15 to 19	20 to 24	25 to 29
	%	%	%	%
Under age	12.1	3.7	3.6	0.8
Never enrolled	38.7	29.9	34.2	24.3
No financial support	19.9	31.0	35.6	43.3
School not important	8.9	17.7	10.1	14.3
School too far	4.2	5.6	5.2	8.2
Couldn't find a place	3.8	2.4	1.6	1.3
Unsafe to travel to school	1.4	0.9	1.2	3.0
Illness/Injury	7.5	3.6	4.7	3.3
Other	0.7	3.2	0.2	0.7
Expense	1.9	0.9	3.1	0.3
Disability	0.9	1.1	0.5	0.5
% Total	100	100	100	100

The majority of those who had an education (31.2%) had only reached lower primary level educations (grades 1 to 4). Although fewer 20 to 24 year olds had no formal education, over one quarter stopped while in upper primary school (grades 5 to 7). Findings also show few youth reaching tertiary education, with only about 1.5% of those 25 to 29 with a university degree, and 7.8% with a certificate or diploma. Among 30 to 39 year olds, only 2.4% had a university degree, and 8.7% had a certificate or diploma (Figure 5).

Figure 1: Distribution of youth by highest level of education, and by age



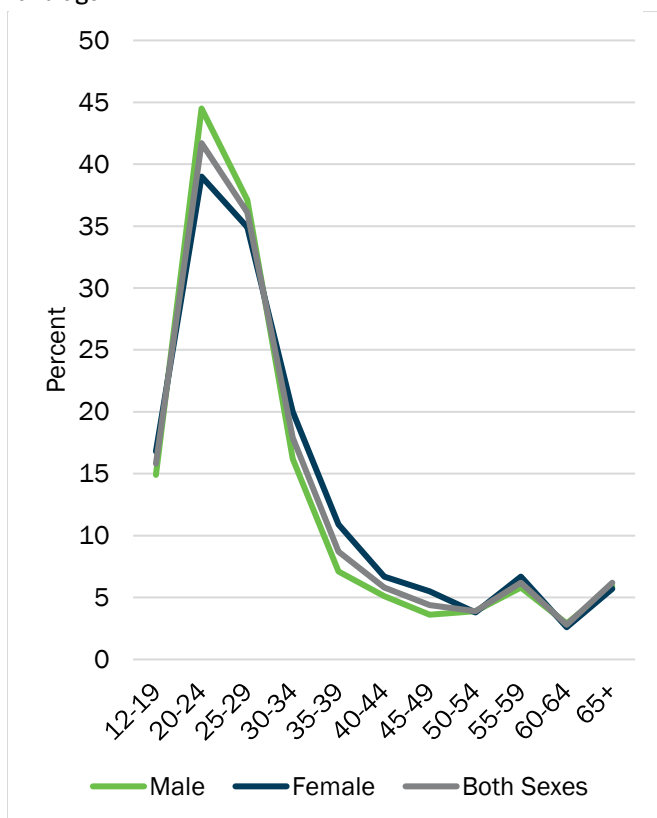
Clearly, educational opportunities for secondary and tertiary education remain limited for youth in Zambia. This has negative impact on their future choices, as the job market continues to evolve and demand higher and higher education.

HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY

Gainful employment has the potential to lift youth from poverty and provides an opportunity for direct contribution to national economic growth. Although Zambia's economy has grown in the last few decades, from four to seven percent annually (Ministry of Finance 2016), it has not created enough jobs to fully employ its youth sector. Youth are faced with an unemployment challenge. According to the labour force survey of 2014, the total number of Zambia's labour force was 6.3 million, the majority of whom, 60.2%—or 3.8 million—are youth, yet most youth are unemployed and economically inactive.

Unemployment was highest among the age groups 12 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 29—at 41.7%, 36.1%, and 17.9%, respectively (CSO 2016). This is generally understandable for the 12 to 19 age group, as some portion may still be in school—but some are out of school, looking for employment, and not finding it. The lowest unemployment rates in Zambia are among older people, among those ages 55 to 59, at 6.2%, and 65 and older, at 2.8% (Figure 6).

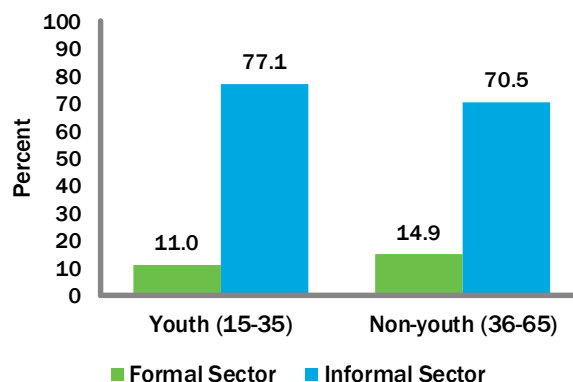
Figure 6: Unemployment rates, ages 12 and older, by sex and age



Source: CSO, LCMS, 2015

More than three quarters (80.3%) of Zambians are employed in the informal sector, mainly subsistence agriculture and self-employment, compared to 19.7% in the formal sector. Of those in the informal sector, youth constitute the majority, at 77.1%. Only 11% of youth is formally employed (Bhorat et al. 2015). Non-youth are more likely to be formally employed than youth (Figure 7). Informal sector employment is associated with low salaries and limited career options, which hinders youths' further self-development.

Figure 7: Employed persons, by age group and sector



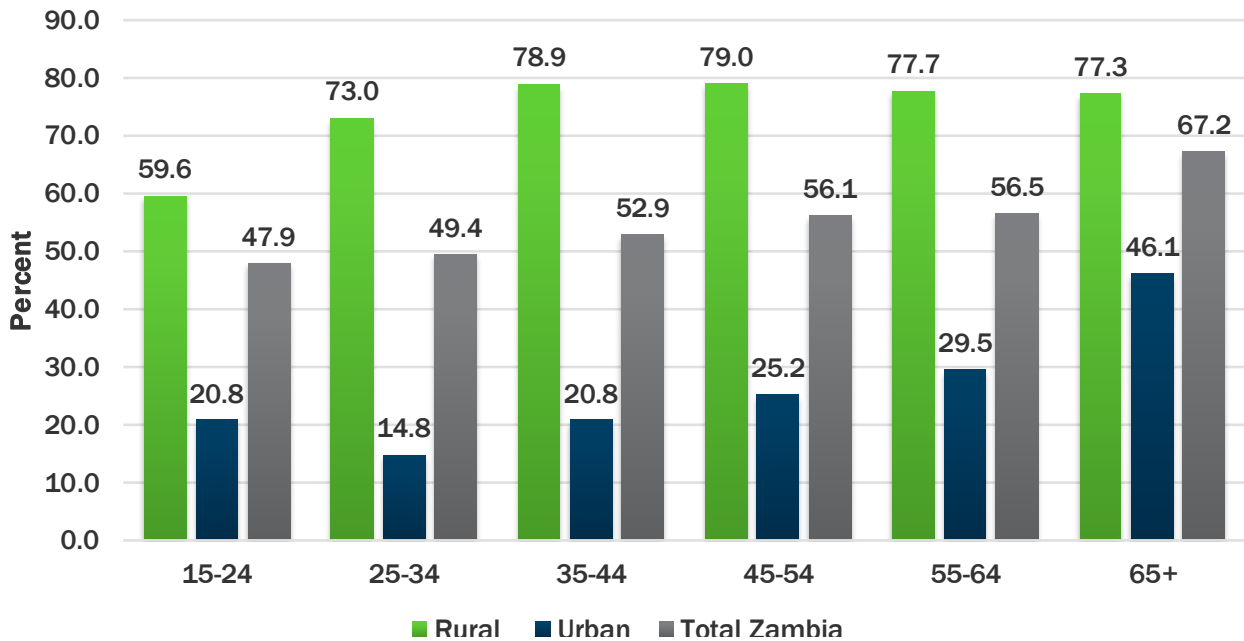
Source: Bhorat et al., 2015

A combination of poor education and unemployment has contributed to high youth poverty levels. LCMS reports that poverty among youth is high. Almost half of households headed by youth ages 15 to 24, or ages 25 to 34, are poor (Figure 8). Most rural youth are poor: among 15 to 24 year olds, 59.6% are poor, compared to 20.8% of their urban counterparts. Similarly, among older rural youth, ages 25 to 34, almost three quarters (73.0%) live in poverty, compared to 14.8% among those in urban areas.

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Figure 8: Poverty according to age of household head and residence



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although Zambia’s government has enacted laws and policies supporting youth’s participation in Zambia’s development, its country’s youth face significant challenges that hinder attainment of their full potential. Few youth achieve secondary and tertiary education, resulting in limited opportunities for employment.

Zambia’s economy has not created sufficient jobs for full youth employment, and youth who are employed are primarily working in the informal sector, characterised by low wages and lack of career progression.

Lack of gainful employment means youth have limited income; as a result, many households headed by youth live in poverty.

Youth comprise the majority of Zambia’s population, and the country’s government should work towards fulfilling the potential demographic dividend its youth population presents. To do so, the government and its partners should invest in:

- **Enhanced education quality and skills development:**

The Government should institute educational reforms that focus on improving the quality of the country’s primary, secondary and tertiary education, to ensure high quality learning outcomes among students at all levels of the education system.

- **Increased access to education opportunities:**

Although ensuring universal access to secondary and tertiary education is expensive, it is necessary for enabling higher education by as many youth as possible. The education system must be reformed, with progressive creation of greater university and college opportunities for youth, with curriculum reform, ensuring it focuses on meeting labour market demands so youth are effectively prepared for good paying jobs. Curricula should be reformed for progressive focus on various areas of competency, particularly global market skills such as science and technology, innovation, entrepreneurship, and strategic leadership.

- **Generating quality jobs for youth:**

The government and its partners should create more jobs through various economic diversification programmes. Creating high quality jobs for youth is not only desirable but will be a catalyst for poverty reduction strategies among youth and the realisation of the country’s vision of becoming a middle and prosperous income country by 2030.

- **Enhanced governance and accountability:**

The government and stakeholders must fortify governance and accountability systems to ensure commitments to youth programmes are fulfilled and effectively supported through budgetary allocations. Zambia should explore a youth accountability framework to monitor the implementation of youth policies.

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