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ECD VOICE



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DEAR READERS,

Welcome to the 11th and final edition of the Zimbabwe Early Childhood Development Voice (ZimECDVoice) newsletter for the year 2023. We are thrilled to reflect on what has been an incredibly impactful year for ZINECDA and our partner organizations. From the momentous finalization of the National Early Learning Policy to the successful awarding of the second phase of the Transnational Networks Advocacy Capacity Strengthened for Improved ECDE legislation, Policies and Measures in Southern Africa (TRANAC) project and School Readiness Initiative: we have witnessed significant achievements.

We want to express our heartfelt gratitude to ZINECDA's dedicated membership across all 10 provinces, our government(s) for giving us space to contribute to early childhood development improvement, and our esteemed donors, including the Roger Federer Foundation and the Global Partnership for Education for financial and technical support. Your unwavering support has been instrumental in our success, and we are deeply grateful for your continued commitment to improving early childhood development in Zimbabwe and the Southern African region.

As we approach the end of the year, this edition will celebrate the remarkable milestones we reached in 2023 by providing updates on recent events, such as ZINECDA's participation in a regional conference in Botswana, submissions for the 2024 Post Budget analysis, ongoing partner capacity development assessments, and a special feature on one of our member organizations that has thrived throughout the year.

Additionally, insights into the issues at the forefront of ZINECDA's advocacy efforts and engagements in 2024 will be highlighted. We are excited to continue our important work and address the pressing challenges facing early childhood development in our country.

Thank you for your unwavering support, and we hope you enjoy this edition of ZimECDVoice as we reflect on our achievements and look forward to the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead in the coming year.

ZINECDA wishes you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Warm regards,

Naison Bhunhu

Major Highlights

ZINECDA Secures Second Phase of the TRANAC Project: Strengthening Early Childhood Development Advocacy in Southern Africa

ZINECDA is delighted to announce its awarding of the second phase of the (TRANAC) project as the lead grantee. This project aims to enhance and establish vibrant national and transnational Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) networks/coalitions that effectively influence and hold governments and regional bodies in Southern Africa accountable and transparent. The overarching goal of the project is to address the lack of policy implementation, inequitable service provision for marginalized and disadvantaged groups, gender and disability disparities, and inadequate financing in ECDE.

The project, which will be implemented over three years, consists of a consortium of six funded partners and three additional participating ECDE coalitions. In addition to Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Malawi, the project extends to Mozambique, Eswatini, and Zambia, with Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa participating as well. Through policy advocacy, accountability, and transparency mechanisms, the project aims to ensure that national governments and regional bodies develop, adopt, and implement comprehensive, gender-sensitive, and inclusive legislative instruments, policies, and systems for ECDE. This will result in increased access to quality ECDE services in Southern Africa, fostering inclusivity and gender sensitivity. The project will be informed by disaggregated data from research studies, enabling evidence-based decision-making that prioritizes marginalized and disadvantaged communities.

To achieve the above-stated, the project will build the advocacy capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) that lack the necessary skills to effectively engage with governments and advocate for accessible and high-quality ECDE services and programs. ZINECDA is excited to embark on this transformative journey and work collaboratively with her partners and stakeholders to drive positive change in the ECDE landscape of the region.



Major Highlights

Post-Budget Analysis and Recommendations for the 2024 National Education Budget: Promoting Effective Investment in Education

ZINECDA in collaboration with partner organizations (FACET and ECOZI) conducted a Post Budget Analysis meeting with members of Parliament from the Portfolio Committee on Primary and Secondary Education, Budget and Finance as well as Caucus on Child Rights. The objective of this meeting was to advocate for favorable allocation and timely disbursement of funds for education. Officially opening the Post Budget Analysis meeting on the 11th of December 2023, the chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Primary and Secondary Education Honourable Ophias Murambiwa expressed concern over the underfunding of education and Early Childhood Development (ECD) financing, despite education receiving the highest national budget allocation of ZW\$8 trillion from the proposed national budget of ZW\$58 [NC1] trillion for the year 2024. Honourable Murambiwa highlighted the committee's concerns regarding the significant underfunding of ECD education in Zimbabwe. Out of the Ministry's budget, only ZWL\$1.231 billion (15.45%) was allocated to ECD education, while ZWL\$1.096 billion (89.12%) was designated for employment costs, leaving minimal resources for operational expenses. He urged the government to demonstrate its commitment to transforming early childhood care and education by aligning with the Tashkent Declaration and the Incheon Declaration. These declarations emphasize the allocation of 10% of the national education budget and 1% of the GDP to ECDE. [NC1]has it gone down to this as the blue book was in the 60s.

Drawing from the discussions held during the meeting, ZINECDA and its partner organizations formulated the following recommendations for the Members of Parliament and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for ECD education.



Major Highlights

Post-Budget Analysis and Recommendations for the 2024 National Education Budget: Promoting Effective Investment in Education

1. **Prioritize Expenditure:** The proposed budget should consider increasing the share of capital expenditure without compromising salaries. This will guarantee continued and adequate availability of capital equipment and infrastructure which form the bedrock of strong infant education facilities.
2. **Accelerate Infrastructure Development for ECD:** Recognize the slow pace of infrastructure development, particularly for ECD, and implement an accelerated and comprehensive strategy. Focus on constructing age-appropriate classrooms and facilities to meet the growing demand resulting from increased enrolment.
3. **Enhance Literacy and Numeracy Programs:** Allocate additional financial resources to literacy and numeracy programs to bridge the gap between current rates and targeted percentages. This investment will effectively develop foundational skills among early learners.
4. **Timely and Adequate Disbursement of BEAM Funds:** Ensure that the Treasury disburses BEAM (Basic Education Assistance Module) funds promptly and adequately to beneficiary schools during the first quarter of the year. This will account for inflation and enable schools to plan and execute projects effectively.
5. **Increase Funding for Learner Welfare Services (LWS):** Raise the allocation for learner welfare services (LWS) from the current 2% of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's (MoPSE) budget. Boost LWS initiatives such as feeding programs, particularly in poverty-stricken areas, which not only address students' nutritional needs but also act as incentives for attendance, thereby improving school attendance rates and providing dietary benefits.
6. **Targeted Funding for Marginalised Areas:** Establish a marginalized fund to provide Grant in Aid for vulnerable schools in remote and overcrowded urban areas. This measure aims to ensure equal access to quality and inclusive education for marginalised populations.



Major Highlights

Post-Budget Analysis and Recommendations for the 2024 National Education Budget: Promoting Effective Investment in Education

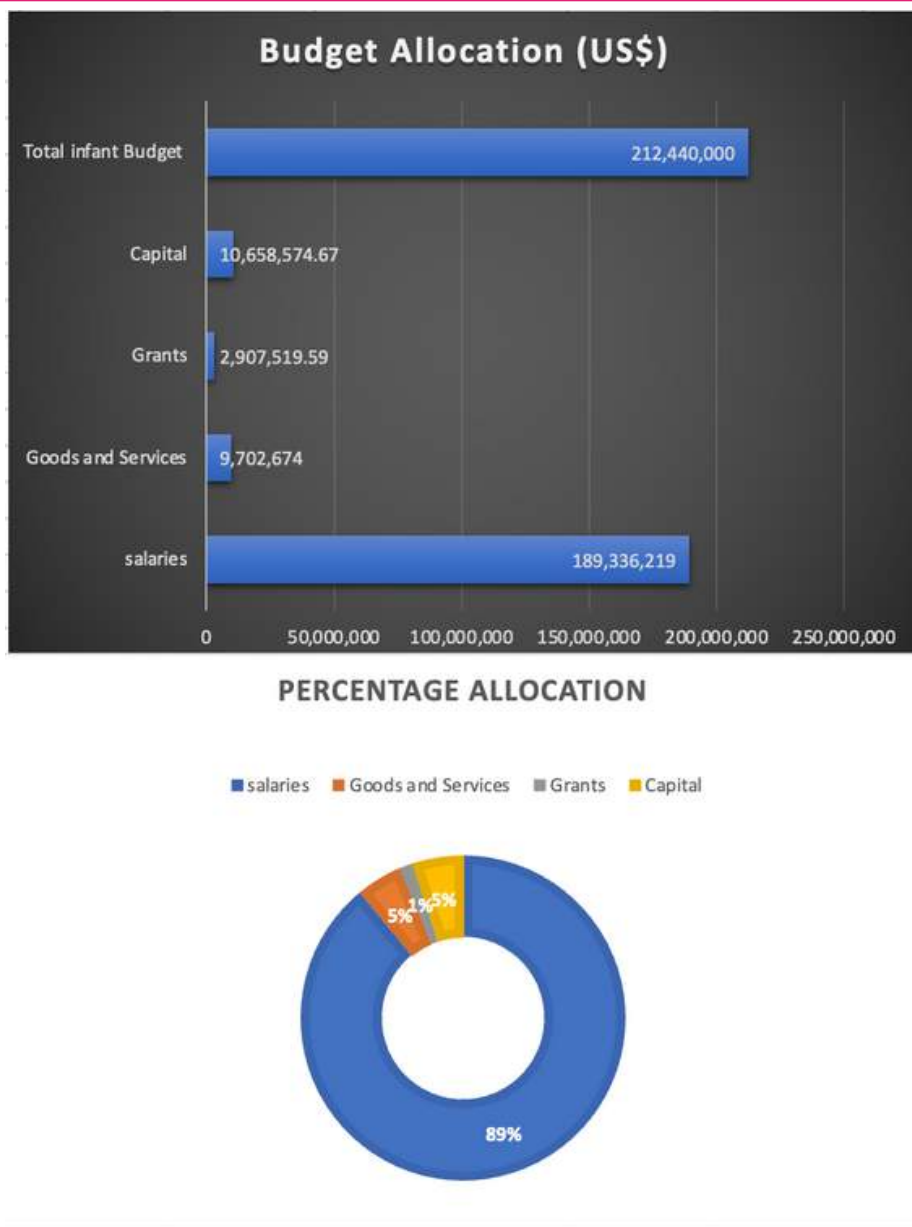
7. Increase Budgetary Allocation: Prioritize an increased budgetary allocation for education. This should address infrastructure gaps, provide sufficient resources for teaching and learning materials, and enhance the overall quality of education.
8. Establish an Education Financing Framework: The government should institute a robust legal framework for domestic education financing, aligning it with the national development plans and international commitments, with a primary focus on generating domestic resources.
9. Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation: Enhance the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to effectively track budget utilization, facilitate evidence-based decision-making, and monitor educational performance and outcomes.
10. Meet Global Funding Targets: Meet Global Funding Targets: Ensure compliance with international funding targets for education, such as those outlined in the Dakar Framework for Action, which recommends allocating 20% of national budgets to education, and the Tashkent Declaration, which suggests allocating 10% of the national education budget towards ECD.





Major Highlights

2024 INFANT PROPOSED BUDGET ALLOCATION






Major Highlights

Outcomes of the End-of-Project Evaluation: Assessing Success and Impact

ZINECDA, as the alliance lead, initiated an End of Project Evaluation for the TRANAC project, which was implemented in collaboration with the Network of Early Childhood Development of Lesotho (NECDOL in Lesotho) and the Early Childhood Development Coalition of Malawi (ECDCM in Malawi). The primary objective of this multi-country Endline Evaluation study was to assess the TRANAC project's goals and outcomes by documenting the achievements of project advocacy in the participating countries and evaluating its impact in the SADC region. Notably, the project achieved significant impact by advocating for the introduction of ECD-related policies in Zimbabwe and Malawi. Moreover, the implementing partners effectively engaged with their respective governments, resulting in an increase in ECD financing from just over one percent to above two percent. The evaluation also highlighted the efficacy of the TRANAC project's transnational advocacy model, which empowered coalition partners beyond the project's lifecycle and fostered sustainable knowledge generation and sharing among stakeholders. This approach proved instrumental in driving positive change and ensuring long-term impact in the field of early childhood development. The findings of the end-of-project evaluation validate the effectiveness of the TRANAC project in achieving its objectives and making significant strides in improving ECD policies and financing in the region. These outcomes serve as a testament to the dedication and collaborative efforts of all involved stakeholders.

School Readiness Initiative second phase outcomes and prospects for the future

ZINECDA successfully concluded the second phase of the School Readiness Initiative, generously supported by the Rodger Federer Foundation; as the organisation embarks on the next phase of the project, it remains resolute in its commitment to advocating for improved access to ECD. Through its lobbying efforts, the organisation will work closely with government officials, community leaders, and other key stakeholders to eliminate barriers and develop inclusive policies that promote equitable access to ECD services. Additionally, ZINECDA will prioritize influencing the development of a comprehensive ECD curriculum. A well-designed curriculum is crucial in providing a holistic and developmentally appropriate learning experience for young children that encompasses various domains, including cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. Emphasizing play-based learning, individualized instruction, and fostering creativity and critical thinking skills will be at the core of our efforts.



Major Highlights

School Readiness Initiative second phase outcomes and prospects for the future

ZINECDA is delighted to share some of the notable achievements attained during the implementation of the second phase.

- Notable improvement in ECD budget allocation by the government, which increased from less than 1% in 2021 to 2% in 2022. This enhanced budgetary allocation will enable the government to invest more resources in early childhood education, thereby providing better learning environments, comprehensive teacher training, and essential materials for young children.
- Adoption of the Smart Tablet Early Learning Assessment tool. By harnessing the power of smart tablets, accurate data can be gathered on children's cognitive, physical, language, and socio-emotional development more efficiently and comprehensively. This empowers us to tailor interventions and support based on their specific needs, ensuring a targeted and effective approach to early childhood development.
- The development of a model bill for domestic resource mobilization. In recognition of the vital role sustainable financing plays in ECD programs, we collaborated with policymakers, experts, and stakeholders to create a comprehensive model bill. This bill serves as a robust framework for mobilizing domestic resources to support ECD initiatives, guaranteeing a steady and reliable funding stream for early childhood development.



ZINECDA Participates in Botswana's Regional Early Childhood Conference

ZINECDA actively participated in the impactful Regional Child Rights Conference held in Botswana from November 25th to December 1st, 2023. The conference, organized by the Child Rights Network for Southern Africa (CRNSA) in collaboration with the Government of Botswana through the Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development, aimed to address challenges and shortcomings in the implementation of child rights instruments. Bringing together key stakeholders from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, its primary objective was to establish a common platform for coordinated regional responses to child rights issues, under the theme: "Taking stock of the reality of children within the SADC Region." During the conference, participants had the opportunity to assess the current state of children within the region, identify gaps in the implementation of regional, global, and continental child rights instruments, and develop strategies to bridge these gaps. The ultimate goal was to revive and strengthen regional child rights coordination mechanisms while formulating a comprehensive regional child rights advocacy agenda with clear milestones and timelines.

Key Takeaways from the Conference:

- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Recognizing the importance of a unified and responsive strategy, all participants emphasized the need for involving all relevant stakeholders in addressing child rights issues effectively.
- **Harmonization of Laws and Policies:** Participants acknowledged the necessity of harmonizing laws and policies guiding child rights across the region. This harmonization ensures consistent protection and promotion of children's rights, including migration laws.
- **Advocacy:** The significance of engaging in advocacy efforts to raise awareness and mobilize support for child rights issues across the region was highlighted by all participants.
- **Addressing Knowledge Gap:** A shared understanding emphasized the importance of addressing the knowledge gap on child rights issues. Stakeholders should receive education and training to enhance their understanding of child rights instruments and their effective implementation.
- **Comprehensive Strategies:** The conference stressed the importance of implementing comprehensive strategies that combine prevention and promotion efforts to effectively safeguard and promote children's rights.



INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

ZINECDA Participates in Botswana's Regional Early Childhood Conference



Conference Recommendations and Communique:

Building upon the discussions and deliberations, the conference generated valuable recommendations, which were consolidated into a comprehensive communique to be shared with the SADC Secretariat. The recommendations aimed to guide future actions in advancing child rights within the region, fostering collaboration, harmonizing laws and policies, advocating for children's rights, addressing knowledge gaps, and implementing comprehensive strategies.

Conclusion

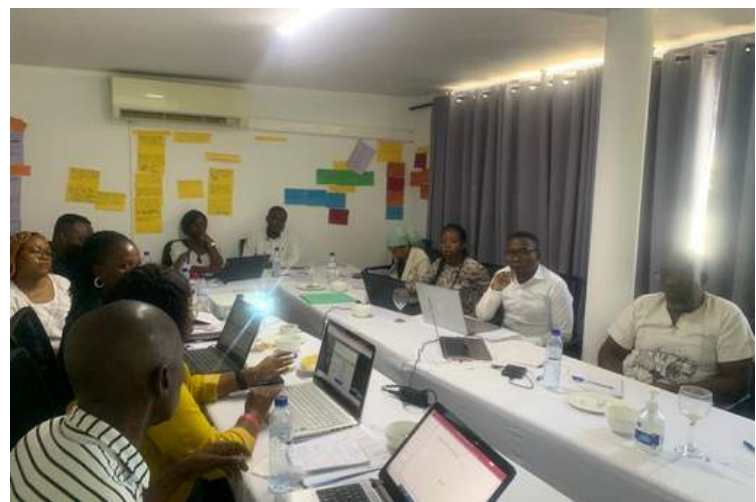
ZINECDA's active participation in the Regional Child Rights Conference demonstrated its commitment to championing child rights within the SADC region. By engaging with stakeholders, contributing to discussions, and formulating recommendations, ZINECDA played a vital role in shaping the regional child rights agenda, ultimately working towards a brighter future for children in Southern Africa.



INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Capacity Assessment Visits: Enhancing Early Childhood Development Advocacy in Zambia, Mozambique, and Eswatini

Following the recent awarding of the second phase of the TRANAC project, ZINECDA, as the alliance lead grantee, conducted comprehensive due diligence assessments in Eswatini, Mozambique, and Zambia from November 20th to December 12th, 2023. These Capacity assessment visits aimed to identify gaps and challenges in the coalitions' capacity to effectively advocate for transparent and accountable governments, improved financing, and inclusive policies on Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE). Based on the assessment findings, a tailored capacity-building plan will be developed, focusing on areas where improvements are needed. The visits also served to introduce the coalitions to the key elements and clusters of the TRANAC project, ensuring their alignment with the overall goals and activities. During the capacity assessment visits, the cluster partners in these countries underwent evaluations in various areas, including institutional governance, leadership, monitoring and evaluation, programming capacity, and financial management capacity. The outcomes of these assessments will inform the development of capacity building and learning plans to address the identified gaps through targeted training, establishment of systems, and procedures.





MEMBERSHIP

ZINECDA MEMBER PROFILE:

Little Ducks: Nurturing Young Minds for a Bright Future

Little Ducks, is an esteemed ECD Center situated in Mutare Urban and has been shaping the foundation of young children's lives since its establishment in 2018. With a current enrollment of 58 children, the center prides itself on its commitment to holistic development, high-quality education, inclusivity, and strong partnerships with parents. In this abstract, we delve into the remarkable journey of Little Ducks, highlighting its notable achievements and the challenges it courageously faced.

•Holistic Development: A Cornerstone of Success

Little Ducks places paramount importance on fostering the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth of each child. By creating a nurturing environment, the center ensures that children thrive in various aspects of their development. Through tailored experiences, children at Little Ducks enhance their motor skills, language acquisition, creativity, and social interactions. The center boasts of a team of four highly qualified teachers, led by a dedicated principal.

Embracing Diversity: An Inclusive Haven

Recognizing the significance of inclusion, the center implements inclusive practices, adapting teaching strategies, providing additional resources, and fostering positive peer interactions. This ensures that every child has equal opportunities to learn and grow.

•Embracing Technology: Preparing for the Digital Age

Little Ducks has successfully integrated technology into its teaching practices. Leveraging educational applications, interactive learning platforms, and digital resources, the center enhances the learning experience and prepares children for the digitally-driven world.

•Collaborative Parental Engagement: A Shared Journey

Little Ducks acknowledges the vital role of parents and actively engages them in their children's developmental milestones. Regular parent-teacher meetings, workshops, and open communication channels facilitate collaboration and information exchange. The center equips parents with resources and guidance, empowering them to support their child's learning journey at home.

•Overcoming Challenges: Forging Ahead

Despite the ever-evolving educational landscape, financial sustainability, and the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, Little Ducks perseveres in its mission. Adapting to change, the center prioritizes continuous professional development for teachers to stay abreast of emerging trends and methodologies. Seeking partnerships, grants, and sponsorships, Little Ducks maintains its commitment to affordability and accessibility for all families.



ZINECDA READING CORNER

Reading Corner:

As the festive season approaches, ZINECDA has carefully chosen a captivating short story titled "I am not a baby" by Carole Bloch for guardians and parents to read. Through this story, ZINECDA aims to help parents understand and appreciate the remarkable speed at which babies and young children achieve their developmental milestones. Often, parents may not fully realize or accept that their little ones are rapidly growing into capable individuals. This heartwarming tale serves as a reminder of the incredible journey of growth and development that children embark upon, encouraging parents to cherish and support their children's progress.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!!



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