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16TH ISSUE

ECD VOICE

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Dear Reader!

Welcome to the 16th issue of The ECD Voice! In this edition, we bring you the latest updates and insights from ZINECDA and our partners as we continue advocating for quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) & education in Zimbabwe.

This newsletter highlights significant policy engagements, including the Zimbabwe National Education Trust Fund Bill, collaborative efforts, and innovative tools like the Smart Tablet Early Learning Assessment (STELA) tool for ,measuring school readiness. We also feature the impactful work of our member , Loving Hand, which is making a remarkable impact in underserved communities through their integrated health and education initiatives.

As we celebrate progress, we also recognize the importance of play and learning. With children enjoying their holiday break, we encourage them to embrace playful learning while heeding their guardians' guidance.

Join us as we explore these developments and more, and discover how we can collectively work toward a brighter future for every child in Zimbabwe.

Happy reading!

Director: Marceline Kahlari

ZINECDA Hosts a Breakfast Meeting with PPC Chair on the draft Education Trust Fund Bill

ZINECDA, in collaboration with partner organizations, on July 4, 2025 held a breakfast meeting with the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee (PPC) Chair for Primary and Secondary Education, Honourable Supa Mandiwanzira. The meeting served as a crucial platform to present the draft Zimbabwe National Education Trust Fund Bill, which aims to enhance educational funding and support systems in Zimbabwe.

During the session, the committee received a comprehensive briefing on the Bill's journey from conception to the current draft form, including its key objectives and potential impact on education sector. The discussion emphasised the importance of mobilising multi-stakeholder support to facilitate the Bill's smooth passage through parliamentary processes.

The meeting yielded significant outcomes, including the establishment of clear parliamentary procedures for advancing the Bill and the development of an implementation framework involving relevant government ministries, parliamentary committees, and civil society organisations. An action plan was formulated to guide the next steps, which will include a validation meeting with key stakeholders and the incorporation of international best practices in education financing.

Honourable Mandiwanzira expressed appreciation for the Education Task Force's efforts and acknowledged the valuable contributions of all stakeholders involved in shaping this important legislation. The Chairperson also provided constructive feedback to strengthen specific aspects ofthe Bill.

As the process moves forward, the Task Force remains committed to working collaboratively with all partners to ensure the successful enactment of this transformative legislation, which will play a pivotal role in advancing Zimbabwe's education system.

Breakfast Meeting

School Readiness Initiative Partners (SRI) Present the STELA Tool to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Primary and Secondary Education

As part of ZINECDA's ongoing efforts to enhance quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Zimbabwe, the network recently engaged with the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Primary and Secondary Education to discuss the Smart Tablet Early Learning Assessment (STELA) Tool.

Funded by the Roger Federer Foundation under the SRI project, which ZINECDA implements in partnership with Child Protection Society, Municipal Development Partnership (MDP) and Education Development Trust (EDT), the STELA Tool represents an innovative digital solution for assessing school readiness among ECD learners. By collecting comprehensive data on children's cognitive, language, and socio-emotional development, the tool enables educators, planners, and policymakers to make informed decisions tailored to the diverse needs of young learners.

The session focused on enhancing parliamentarians' understanding of how the STELA Tool can support evidence-based policy decisions, strengthening oversight, and catalyze improvements in early learning outcomes. With its adoption by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education , the tool ensures that ECD investments are guided by in ECD accurate data, enabling every child to begin their educational journey with a strong foundation.

Following the presentation, parliamentarians expressed enthusiasm for the tool and highlighted the importance of firsthand exposure to its implementation. They specifically requested visits to schools where STELA is being piloted, recognising that such field observations would offer valuable insights into its effectiveness and practical application. This proposed visit represents a crucial opportunity to secure broader support for the tool's national rollout and its integration into government systems.

PPC Sensitisation meeting

ZINECDA and the Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare Convene Technical Working Group (TWG) Meeting

ZINECDA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare, recently held a Technical Working Group (TWG) meeting to orient stakeholders on the National Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy Framework, approved by Cabinet in March 2025. In order to align with the national framework, the Technical Working Group (TWG) has been restructured as the National Early Childhood Development (ECD) Steering Committee. The committee will be chaired by the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, with coordination support from the Office of the President and Cabinet. This restricting marks a significant achievement for ZINECDA's advocacy efforts, ensuring the institutionalisation of the Technical Working Group (TWG) within the national ECD policy and program implementation framework.

The meeting prioritised the development of an implementation matrix for the framework for the upcoming year. Participants formulated an action plan that includes capacity-building activities for committee members on key ECD issues. Additional initiatives identified include a national mapping exercise of ECD service providers, research studies, and a detailed budget analysis covering all ECD pillars (education, health, child protection, welfare, and nutrition) specified in the framework.

During the proceedings, Ms. Yvone Tagwireyi, a representative from the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), facilitated a discussion on the roadmap for adopting the SADC Child Rights Protocol. This Protocol seeks to strengthen child protection and welfare mechanism across the region.

TWG Meeting

ZINECDA attends the National Coordination meeting

ZINECDA participated in the Education Coalition of Zimbabwe (ECOZI) second quarter National Coordination Meeting. In its roles as the Board Secretary for ECOZI and a member of both the Finance and Foundational Learning Committee, the organisation contributed to identifying key education advocacy issues.

This quarter's agenda featured several critical items, These included deliberations on the new Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) Act, with a representative from the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare outlining its registration requirements. A productive discussion was also held on gender and social inclusion in education audits, a collaborative effort between ECOZI and UNICEF and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MOPSE). Furthermore, ZINECDA presented on recent education related events, including the commemoration of International Education Day and Global Action Week for Education (GAWE). Other updates covered the validation process for the Zimbabwe Early Learning Development Standards and the joint monitoring visits conducted with MOPSE.

ZINECDA, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and Partner Organizations Commemorate Global Action Week for Education

ZINECDA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and partner organizations, recently commemorated the Global Action Week for Education (GAWE). This international advocacy platform urges governments to fulfil their commitments to providing quality education from Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) through all grade levels.

The event took place at Rutsate Primary School in Manicaland, where Melody Mukundwi, an Executive Committee Member of ECOZI, noted that Zimbabwe has observed GAWE since 2012. This annual event provides a vital platform for civil society, government, and communities to engage in dialogue, reflect on progress, and address persistent barriers to education.

Ms. Mukundwi emphasized that the commemorations not only raise awareness but also influence policy shifts, expand school infrastructure, promote inclusive education frameworks, and foster accountability.

“Zimbabwe faces numerous emergencies that disrupt learning, including Cyclones Idai and Freddy, recurrent droughts, economic instability, and health crises like COVID-19,” she stated. “These challenges have intensified vulnerabilities in our education system, particularly for girls, learners with disabilities, and those in rural areas. Education in emergencies is not just about continuity; it’s about providing safe environments and psychosocial support. Schools often serve as protective spaces where children can access life-saving information, meals, healthcare, and emotional stability.”

GAWE CONT...

She outlined key considerations for improving education in emergencies:

- Training and supporting teachers to deliver education during and after crises.
- Developing flexible learning models for remote or displaced learners.
- Ensuring curricula are responsive to local hazards and emergency preparedness.
- Financing and safeguarding educational infrastructure

Ms. Mukundwi reiterated that protecting education in emergencies is essential for ensuring every child can learn, grow, and thrive, regardless of circumstances. ECOZI and its member organizations are actively advocating for:

- Emergency-responsive policies prioritizing education during crises.
- Disaster-resilient school infrastructure projects in high-risk areas.
- Learning materials and psychosocial support for crisis-affected learners.
- Inclusive education initiatives focusing on children with disabilities, girls, and other vulnerable groups.
- Strengthening School Development Committees (SDCs) for disaster preparedness and response.
- Piloting remote and low-tech learning alternatives, such as radio lessons and printed home packages during school closures.
- Monitoring education budgets to ensure effective allocation of emergency funds.

Deputy Minister's Remarks

The Guest of Honour, Deputy Minister for Primary and Secondary Education, Honourable Angeline Gata, addressed attendees. She stated that GAWE 2025 is more than a ceremonial gathering; it is a strategic assembly confronting a crisis that threatens the foundation of our nation's future—the right to quality education amidst escalating emergencies.

She noted, "Climate change is no longer a theoretical debate. In Manicaland, Masvingo, Matabeleland, and beyond, floods have damaged classrooms, droughts have depleted lunch supplies, and preventable tragedies have claimed young lives."

Deputy Minister Gata reported that over 120 schools were damaged by floods during the 2024/25 rainy season, displacing thousands of pupils. She also highlighted the impact of droughts, which have forced students to walk over 10 km daily in search of water, exacerbating dropout rates, particularly among girls. Tragically, three children in Buhera District lost their lives this year while crossing flooded rivers to attend school.

GAWE CONT...

The Deputy Minister affirmed the Ministry's commitment to systemic, sustainable, and collaborative action, guided by the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). She announced several key interventions:

- **Policy Integration & Legal Frameworks:** Accelerating the finalization of the National Education in Emergencies Policy, aligning it with the Zimbabwe National Climate Policy and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The mandatory inclusion of climate resilience in school infrastructure codes is targeted for 2026.
- **Infrastructure & Technology:** Prioritizing the construction of flood-resistant schools in high-risk areas by 2026, funded through the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and partnerships with UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education. The E-Learning Zimbabwe platform will be scaled up to ensure 100% curriculum coverage during disruptions, utilizing solar-powered devices for off-grid communities.
- **Capacity Building & Community Mobilization:** Continuing to train teachers in disaster preparedness, psychosocial support, and climate-smart pedagogy, with training set to be completed by the fourth quarter of 2026 in collaboration with UNESCO and tertiary institutions. A National School Safety Volunteers Programme will be launched to empower communities to protect schools through early-warning systems and rapid-response teams.
- **Resource Mobilization & Accountability:** Establishing a dedicated Education in Emergencies Fund to leverage domestic resource mobilization and international support. The Ministry will publish biannual progress reports to Parliament to ensure transparency and accountability for every dollar spent.

In conclusion, the Deputy Minister called on development partners to align their support with the Ministry's national priorities.The GAWE commemorations were attended by diverse group of dignitaries and stakeholders, including, the Minister of State for Manicaland Provincial Affairs and Devolution, Hon. M. Mugadza; Traditional Chiefs, Chief Mutasa; Chief Directors, Provincial Education Directors, and Directors from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education; senior government officials; ECOZI members; NASID and teachers' unions; Child Parliamentarians; school children; and parents.

GAWE Commemorations

ZINECDA; the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education & Development partners conduct Joint Monitoring Visit in Bulawayo Province

In a recent comprehensive assessment of eleven schools across Reigate and Imbizo districts, the Zimbabwe Network of Early Childhood Development Actors (ZINECDA) and its partners identified systemic challenges requiring urgent action and innovative models of excellence. The monitoring exercise, a collaboration with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and several development partners, revealed both critical gaps and promising practices.

Infrastructure and Learning Conditions in Crisis

The visiting team documented significant infrastructure deficiencies impacting the education system. Multiple schools reported broken windows, inadequate accessibility ramps, and critical shortages of learning spaces. The classroom shortage has become so severe that many students are forced to learn outdoors or participate in 'hot-seating' arrangements where multiple classes share limited spaces. This problem extends to boarding facilities, one school designed for 500 boarders currently accommodates only five, as parents refuse to pay fees for substandard conditions. Secondary school maintenance emerged as particularly problematic, with many facilities in advanced states of disrepair.

Literacy Gaps and Student Welfare Concerns

Despite the implementation of the THRASS (Teaching, Handwriting, Reading, and Spelling Skills) program and remedial classes, literacy levels remain alarmingly low. Many students in both primary and secondary schools including those in examination classes, struggle with basic reading skills. This stands in stark contrast to the strong performance at A-Level, where pass rates range between 80 to 95% suggesting potential solutions might be found in upper-level teaching methodologies.

The team identified several critical student welfare issues, including a troubling case where five girls dropped out of a single school due to pregnancy, underscoring the need for early warning systems and support programs. Schools located near mining operations reported heightened risks of child abuse, with the surrounding environment creating safety concerns that extend beyond the classroom. Early Childhood Development facilities face particular challenges, with many lacking required double doors and other basic safety features.

Systemic Challenges in Resources and Management

Staffing imbalances persist across the education system, with some schools reporting extreme gender disparities such as only three male teachers among seventy female educators. While financial record-keeping practices were generally satisfactory, the prolonged non-disbursement of BEAM funds - stretching back five years in some cases - has severely constrained schools' ability to address their most pressing needs.

JMV CONT...

Positive Developments

Amid these challenges, the monitoring team also identified several promising practices worth celebrating. Numerous schools have developed innovative gardening projects that simultaneously support feeding programs and provide practical learning opportunities. Primary schools demonstrated particularly strong organizational practices, and effective supervision systems were evident through well-maintained logbooks and consistently marked exercise books across multiple institutions.

Recommended Actions

The findings present both a warning and an opportunity for Zimbabwe's education sector. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated action on multiple fronts from infrastructure rehabilitation and literacy interventions to targeted programs that protect vulnerable students and the immediate release of overdue BEAM funding. The resilience demonstrated by some schools suggests that with adequate support and resources, systemic improvement is achievable. This monitoring exercise provides both a roadmap for urgent interventions and evidence that quality education remains within reach for all Zimbabwean students.

Joint Monitoring Visits in Bulawayo

Africa Education Hub Capacitation Exercise

ZINECDA, as the administrator of the Africa Education Hub, recently upgraded the platform to enhance user-friendliness and support collaboration among education stakeholders. Following this upgrade, ZINECDA conducted virtual training sessions aimed to orient grantees on how to effectively navigate the revamped hub. A total of 19 Education Out Loud (EOL) grantees from Southern and Eastern Africa attended, representing a diverse group of partners engaged in collaborative efforts.

Training Objectives:

The primary objectives of the training were to:

- Familiarize participants with the new features of the Africa Education Hub.
- Demonstrate how to share content effectively on the platform.
- Provide guidance on navigating the upgraded interface.

AEH CONT..

Content Covered:

The agenda included hands-on sessions featuring:

- An overview of the platform's new functionality.
- Step-by-step demonstrations on using its content sharing and collaboration tools.
- Interactive Q&A sessions to address participants' specific queries .

Outcomes:

Participants successfully registered on the platform, indicating a positive initial engagement. Feedback revealed that:

- Attendees found the training highly informative.
- Many expressed eagerness to explore the platform further .

Way Forward:

To ensure sustained engagement and support, ZINECDA plans to:

- Provide ongoing resources and tutorials
- Schedule follow-up sessions to address emerging challenges.
- Encourage collaboration among partners through regular check-ins and the sharing of best practices.

ZINECDA Membership Profiling: Loving Hand

Overview:

ZINECDA is pleased to profile "Loving Hand," a dedicated member organization that plays a vital role in advancing Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiatives. This profiling highlights their contributions, programs, and impact within the community.

Loving Hand is a registered community-based organisation operating in Bulawayo Province, reaching communities in high-density suburbs, peri-urban areas, and newly resettled communities. The organisation was established with a vision to build healthy, empowered, and resilient communities through integrated health, education, and social support initiatives. Loving Hand's core programming focuses on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) among youth, HIV prevention, the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV, and combating stigma and discrimination associated with HIV and AIDS. Recognising that lasting change begins in early childhood, the organisation has expanded its scope to include a strong focus on Early Childhood Development (ECD).

Through its ECD work, Loving Hand ensures that vulnerable young children living in underserved communities have access to safe, stimulating, and nurturing environments that promote holistic development. The organisation partners with parents, caregivers, ECD centres, and community leaders to strengthen early learning, improve child nutrition, promote child protection, and provide psychosocial support for families affected by HIV. Loving Hand also trains ECD practitioners and community volunteers to deliver child-friendly HIV prevention information and to support children born to HIV-positive mothers, ensuring they receive continuous care and monitoring for healthy development.

MEMBERSHIP

By linking its ECD interventions with wider SRHR and HIV programming, the organisation works to break cycles of poverty, poor health, and marginalisation from the earliest stages of life. The organisation actively advocates for greater investment in ECD at local and district levels and collaborates with stakeholders to strengthen policies and community systems that protect and empower young children. In the last six months, it has recorded notable successes. The organisation supported HIV-positive mothers through PMTCT support groups, ensuring that more than 95% of babies born to these mothers tested HIV-negative at six weeks. Additionally, the organisation successfully trained and deployed youth SRHR champions, who reached peers with accurate SRHR information, HIV prevention messaging, and stigma reduction activities within high-density communities.

Looking ahead, the organisation aims to further strengthen its impact. The organisation plans to establish a new community ECD hub in underserved peri-urban and resettlement areas to provide safe spaces for early learning, parenting sessions, and nutrition monitoring for children under five. Through this integrated and community-driven approach, Loving Hand remains committed to building a future where every child is given the loving care, good health, and learning opportunities they need to survive and thrive.
Learn more:

https://map.eannaso.org/listing/loving-hand-2/

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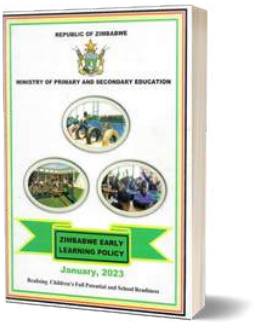
Reading Corner: The Zimbabwe National Early Learning Policy



The Zimbabwe Early Learning Policy (ZELP) is a national framework designed to ensure all children in Zimbabwe have access to quality, inclusive, and affordable early childhood education. Launched in 2024, the policy aims to establish a strong foundation for future learning by promoting foundational literacy and numeracy and addressing challenges in the implementation of Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs.

This policy also serves as a guiding framework that sets out essential guidelines and principles to ensure the provision of quality ECD for all children in Zimbabwe. One of the key objectives of the policy is to guarantee that every child in the country has access to affordable, equitable, and inclusive ECD programs. This commitment reflects the understanding that early childhood education is a fundamental right and lays the foundation for lifelong learning. By ensuring accessibility and inclusivity, the policy strives to eliminate barriers and provide equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances.

Happy Reading!

Reading Corner: The Zimbabwe National Early Learning Policy cont..

The policy also emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to early childhood education. It recognizes that children's development encompasses various aspects, including physical, cognitive, emotional, and social domains. By addressing all these dimensions, the policy aims to foster well-rounded development and prepare children for future learning and success.

Happy Reading!

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