

School Assessment: Key Findings from the Education Partner Joint Assessment

Zimbabwe, February 2009

The Zimbabwean education system was dealt severe blows in 2008. By December of 2008, hyper-inflation resulted in extreme devaluation of teachers' salaries; where once it was adequate to support a family, the salary was able to purchase only a few loaves of bread. This resulted in an increasing number of teachers absconding from their positions. When combined with the lack of teaching and learning materials, fuel and food shortages and a protracted election period when schools were used as voting stations and, in some cases, used for organized violence, the ability of teachers and children to regularly attend schools decreased dramatically. Student attendance was estimated to have decreased from 80% at the beginning of the year to a mere 20%. Education partners were eager to establish a clear overview of the status of schools and the ability of all children, specifically the increasing numbers of vulnerable children, to access quality education given the continued concerns over persisting hyper-inflation, unresolved grievances over teacher salaries and incentives, and the dollarization of school-related expenses for families.

A joint assessment of schools was conducted during the second week, 2-5 February, of the 2009 academic year. **Eighty-six (86) percent of schools reportedly open were not fully functional; 54% of the opened schools were conducting no classes at all. Ninety-two (92) schools visited were completely closed: of the total 94 schools reportedly "open"¹, only 14% of schools reported teaching at full capacity. Remote schools in at least two of the districts did not know that schools had officially been open; one expressed reluctance to speak with the assessment team because they believed they were breaking the law² by opening their doors to children.** The assessment was conducted at a point in the term when the student and teaching populations should have become stable following their return from the prolonged break. Teams from three UN agencies, five international NGOs and 13 national organizations conducted visits, using a standard comprehensive assessment tool, to 186 schools in all ten provinces.

Schools Status by Responsible Authority

Responsible authority	School Status by Category				Total (N)
	Not Fully Functional		Fully Functional		
	n	%	n	%	
District Council	31	100.0	0	0.0	31
Government	24	92.3	2	7.7	26
Church/Mission	7	87.5	1	12.5	8
City Council	7	63.6	4	36.4	11
Town Board	4	100.0	0	0.0	4
Other, Private	2	66.7	1	33.3	3
Other, community school	3	60.0	2	40.0	5
Not specified	3	50.0	3	50.0	6
Total	81	86.2	13	13.8	94

The majority of teachers have not returned; very few are returning to remote communities. Although at least one teacher was available in 111 of the 186 schools, assessment teams reported that some of those teachers complained of being stranded and were waiting to collect enough money to pay

¹ Schools were deemed open by assessment teams if the headmaster, teachers, or students were in attendance on the day of the visit regardless of whether classes were being conducted.

² The MOESC had delayed the official opening of schools from 13th January to 27th January. The MOESC stated that schools would be breaking official regulations should they open earlier; legal action and forced compliance were options to enforce official regulations.

for transportation to their home community. Teaching staff included qualified or trained teachers, non-trained teachers and volunteers. Information on the teaching establishment was unavailable in 74 of the schools. The reasons, as perceived by the respondent, for the non-attendance of both teachers and the continued closure of the schools were primarily due to lack of adequate compensation³. The teachers' strike was cited by 10% of the schools and the remaining reasons mentioned were that students were not returning, lack of food, transport issues, motivation and the lack of water. The main reason cited for schools not opening was the lack of teachers (43%). The teachers were purportedly not in attendance because of low salaries (27%). **The main reasons for teacher non-attendance were low salaries, lack of money to pay transport, and their departure from the community in search of alternative employment or a return home.**

Perceived lack of motivation and funds to pay for transport were the main reasons cited for the non-attendance of headmasters on the day of the school visit. Additional reasons included headmasters struggling for food on low salaries, being on leave or ill and headmasters visiting District Education Offices (DEO) for official business. Of those schools visited, 12 had no one on-site who claimed responsibility as headmaster, school personnel or School Development Committee (SDC) member. Forty-five percent of the respondents were headmasters; the remaining interviews were conducted with the senior most staff or community representative available, on one occasion the clerk was interviewed.

Students' non-attendance was largely, directly or indirectly, due to economic constraints. The lack of teachers was perceived as the most significant reason followed closely by the lack of money for school fees and lack of stationary/materials. Fear of cholera was mentioned by a relatively small number of schools given the focus on the disease by the humanitarian community. School fees⁴ remain a volatile issue in communities; with no guidance or standards from the MOESC, schools are establishing rates in both local and foreign currency. Supplies that were once purchased in local dollars are now predominantly available only in foreign currency requiring school staff to solicit US dollars; **families and caretakers of the more vulnerable children are unable to send their children to school given their economic status.** Rates required by the schools visited during the assessment ranged from US\$ 2 to US\$ 500⁵. The highest rate was required by a private school; the lowest for a community school. Of the total number of schools, thirty-seven schools (21% of the total schools visited) reportedly had not determined school fees. Many of the school staff expected to meet parents and SDC members in the coming one or two weeks to agree on school levies. In at least one of the schools, a set amount was determined for general school levies (5 USD) and with an additional amount (30 USD) to go towards teacher incentives.

It is of great concern that the 2009 academic year began with unresolved staffing issues and the burden placed on the parents and caretakers of children. The impact on the ability of children to regularly attend school is clear, with the impact felt most severely in the more vulnerable communities where parents are unable to mobilize funds and the most remote communities where distance and lack of facilities prevents the return of teachers.

The education partners are recommending the following, based on key findings of the assessment:

- The abolition of school fees or increased national funding serving as a larger safety net will ensure that all Zimbabwean children, especially those most vulnerable, will have continued access to education. We strongly believe that no child should be prevented from obtaining an

³ Detailed graphs attached at end of report for both children and teacher non-attendance

⁴ Money paid to schools is commonly referred to as school fees although the official term is school levy. School levies are meant to cover basic operational costs, including cleaning supplies, stationary, and the upkeep and security of school grounds. Levies have been diverted to support teachers' incentives within the last months due to continued hyper-inflation and an inability of the government and teachers' unions to reach an agreement and allocate sufficient funds for salaries.

⁵ Detailed graph attached at the end of the report.

education due to an inability to pay school fees, school levies or additional school-related expenses.

- The provision of teachers' salaries and incentives, reflecting the changing economic context and increased cost of living, remains an unresolved issue and has resulted in severely decreased number of teachers in classrooms. To ensure learning activities are supported by qualified and motivated staff, we respectfully request that this issue be considered a priority.

We respectfully request the Minister to immediately engage in open dialogue with the education partners and donors as the MOESC responds to the current crisis.

Additional Information on Non-Attendance and School Fees/Levies

Main reasons for children not to attend to school:

1	Not enough teachers	75
2	No money for school fees	55
3	No materials/stationary	35
4	Fear of cholera	13
5	Children needed to raise income/ food for the family	7
6	Sick parents	5
7	Poor quality of education	5
8	Missed too much school in the past and unable to perform	4
9	Need to help parents at home	3
10	Lack of adequate toilets/ sanitation facilities	2
11	Poor school infrastructure	2
12	No parents	1

Main reasons for teacher non-attendance:

1	Low salaries	121
2	Lack of money to pay transport to school	106
3	Moved out of the community/country	39
4	Children not coming to school	31
5	Teaching equipment/materials not available	27
6	Teachers not contacted yet	22
7	Not adequate staff housing facilities on school grounds	12
8	Insecurity/violence	5

School Fee/Levy breakdown by Responsible Authority and Amounts

School responsible authority	Average amount paid for this term (US\$)	Range	Frequency	No. of no responses	No. of schools in discussions
District Council	15.6	US\$ 5.00- 50.00	16	50	22
Government	27.1	US\$ 5.00- 60.00	20	9	8
Church/Mission	24.8	US\$ 15.00- 35.00	4	7	4
City Council	21.4	US\$ 10.00- 40.00	7	5	1
Town Board	26.3	US\$ 10.00- 45.00	4	0	0
Other, Private	500	US\$ 500.00	1	0	0
Other, community school	16.8	US\$ 2.00- 35.00	4	2	2

Participating Organizations

CADEC, Catholic Relief Services, Children's Protection Society, Community Technology Development Trust, Diocese of Gowkwe OVC Project, DOMCCP, EFZ , FABAZIM, FOST, IPA, IOM, Mercy Corps, New Hope Foundation, NZEVE, ORAP, Plan International, SC-UK, Single Parents' Movement, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP