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# STRENGTHENING EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE - UP (STEP-UP ZAMBIA)

**YEAR 3 WORK PLAN**  
**FY 2014: 1 OCTOBER 2013 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2014**

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## Acronyms

AATAZ	Anti-AIDS Teacher’s Association of Zambia
CPD	continuous professional development
DA	decentralization advisor
DCS	development communication specialist
DEBS	district education board secretary
DESOs	district education standards officers
EBS	Education Broadcasting Service
EMIS	education management information system
ES	education specialist
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
HEI	higher education institution
IEC	information, education, and communication
IMA	information management advisor
JAR	joint annual review
LEMIS	local education management information system
LSTTA	local short-term technical assistance
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MESVTEE	Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training, and Early Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
NAS	national assessment survey
OVC	orphans and vulnerable children
PA	provincial advisor
PEO	provincial education officer
PESOs	provincial education standards officers

PMEP	performance monitoring and evaluation plan
PRA	policy and research advisor
PTA	parent teacher association
RFP	request for proposals
RTS	Read to Succeed Project
SAF	special activities fund
SIR	sub-intermediate result
SM	special activities fund manager
SPLASH	Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Sanitation and Hygiene Project
STEP-Up	Strengthening Educational Performance-Up Zambia Project
STTA	short-term technical assistance
TTL	Time to Learn Project
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VCT	voluntary counseling and testing

## Introduction

USAID’s Strengthening Educational Performance-Up (STEP-Up) Zambia project is assisting the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training, and Early Education (MESVTEE) to improve oversight functions and accountability at all levels of the MESVTEE in order to ensure the delivery of effective educational services, particularly in reading, at the primary school level. Learner performance is the ultimate measure of success, and achieving this goal requires systemic reform with greater attention to enhancing management for results.

STEP-Up is a key project within USAID/Zambia’s education portfolio, which consists of several activities with the overall goal to improve educational achievement in reading by 2017 for one million Zambian students. This goal contributes directly to “Goal One” of the USAID Global Education Strategy, which aims to improve reading skills for 100 million children in primary grades by 2015. Improving reading in Zambia will assist the MESVTEE to enhance education quality with a strong focus on evidence-based interventions. STEP-Up’s focus on systems strengthening and management acts as an umbrella project with the MESTVEE, facilitating the achievement of objectives from classroom-focused interventions implemented through the SPLASH, Read to Succeed, and Time to Learn projects.

STEP-Up’s overall theory of change and approach is grounded in evidence from around the world from school systems that have demonstrated significant performance improvement as measured by learning outcomes. Project activities are anchored on a premise that success in achieving sustained reading improvements is contingent on Ministry officials taking leadership in the design and implementation of education interventions. Moreover, both Ministry staff and development practitioners are compelled to ensure that successful education interventions are implemented at scale to provide equal access to high quality education in the long-term.

The STEP-Up Year 3 work plan covers the period of October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2014, which aligns with USAID’s fiscal year. The narrative should be read in conjunction with the Gantt chart in Annex A, which provides the timeline and sequence for implementation of tasks, subtasks, individual activities, and milestones, as well as required resources, staff, and stakeholder roles/responsibilities. The following narrative discusses how the project will achieve results and accomplish synergies across the task areas by providing more detail to the activities specified in the Gantt chart. The narrative also presents how the project strategy will drive management decisions and project implementation.

## A. Project Overview and Results Framework

STEP-Up works across all ten provinces in Zambia in tandem with all operational units of the MESVTEE educational system, including central, provincial, and district levels, to increase the MESVTEE’s capacity to implement institutional reforms that will ultimately improve learner performance, namely reading outcomes. STEP-Up also assists the MESVTEE to leverage its existing resources to achieve sustainable improvements in education management, oversight, and

accountability. The heart of STEP-Up's approach is to assist the MESVTEE, through collaborative partnerships, to undertake a structured journey to identify and apply practical interventions that drive systemic reform through a problem solving approach.

STEP-Up's Year 3 work plan is based on the revised scope of work submitted to USAID/Zambia on August 28, 2013. The revised scope of work streamlines descriptions of key principles, task area activities, and deliverables and refers to the annual project monitoring and evaluation plan (PMEP) for annual project targets. STEP-Up held a three-day workshop with field and home-office staff in early October 2013 and has been working over the last month to develop a draft work plan and accompanying budget that builds on the successes and lessons learned from the past two years and moves the project markedly forward in this critical middle year of implementation toward achievement of our near- and long-term goals and expected results. The work plan was drafted with input from key MESVTEE directorates and our partner USAID/Zambia education projects.

As a result of the adjustments to the SOW and the subsequent Year 3 work planning process, the results framework has been slightly revised (see Exhibit 1). The results framework outlines the results needed to support achievement of USAID/Zambia's development objective: *human capital improved*, and the intermediate result of *improved educational achievement in reading by 2017*. Activities under STEP-Up's five task areas work toward the following four of USAID/Zambia's sub-intermediate results:

Sub-intermediate Result 1 (SIR 1): MESVTEE systems strengthened

Sub-intermediate Result 3 (SIR 3): Equitable access to education increased

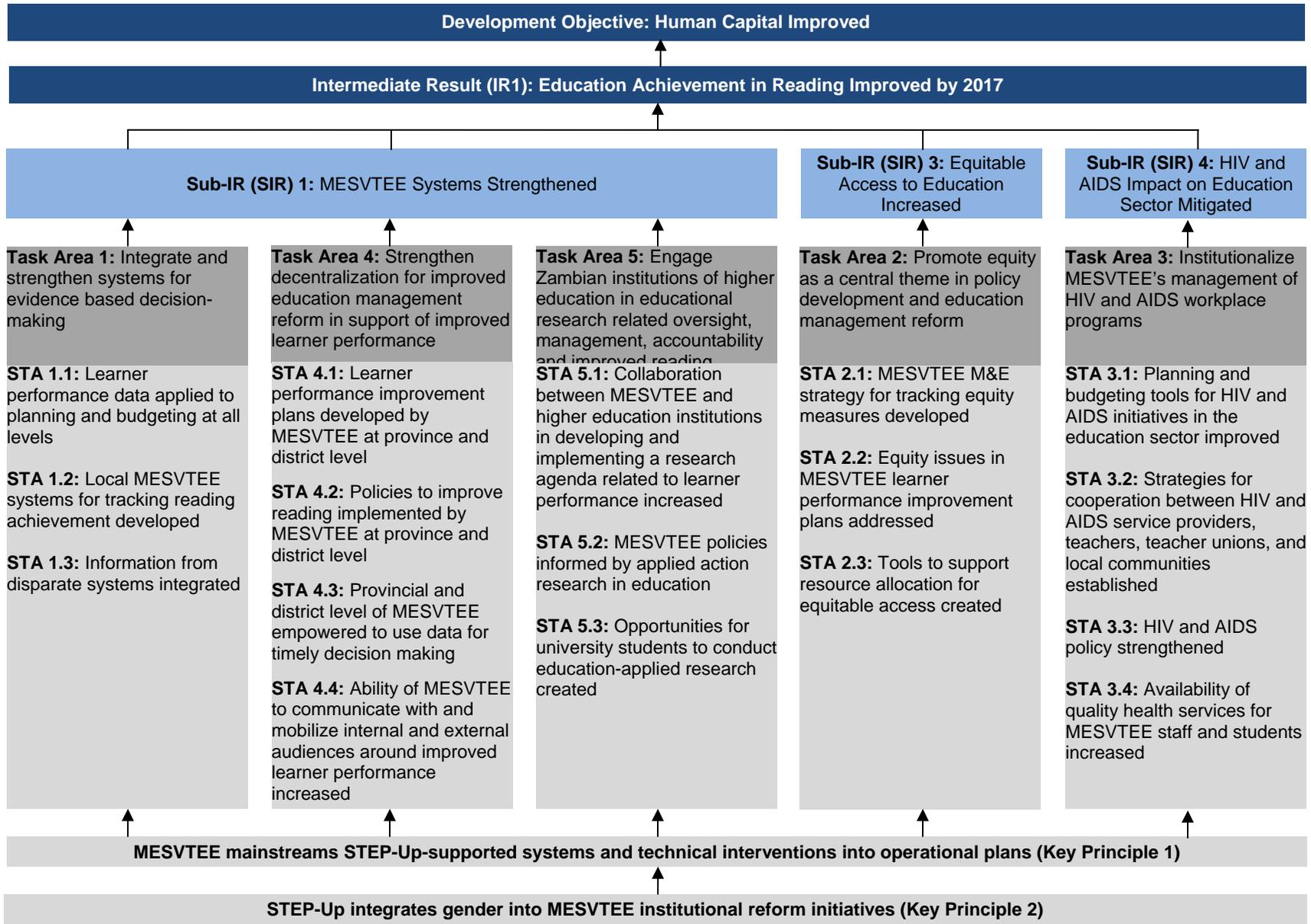
Sub-intermediate Result 4 (SIR 4): HIV/AIDS impact on the education sector mitigated

STEP-Up's five task areas are:

1. Integrate and strengthen systems for evidence based decision-making (aligns with SIR 1)
2. Promote equity as a central theme in policy development and education management reform (aligns with SIR 3)
3. Institutionalize MESVTEE's management of HIV and AIDS workplace programs (aligns with SIR 4)
4. Strengthen decentralization for improved education management reform in support of learner performance measurement (aligns with SIR 1)
5. Engage Zambian institutions of higher education in educational research related to oversight, management, accountability and improved reading (aligns with SIR 1)

Each task area represents a different aspect of systems strengthening and there are many linkages and interrelationships among them. The project employs several cross-cutting activities including monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Key performance indicators and targets for each of the SIRs and task areas are provided in the accompanying Gantt chart, in Annex A, and are detailed in the STEP-Up Zambia performance monitoring and evaluation plan (PMEP).

**Exhibit 1. STEP-Up's Results Framework**

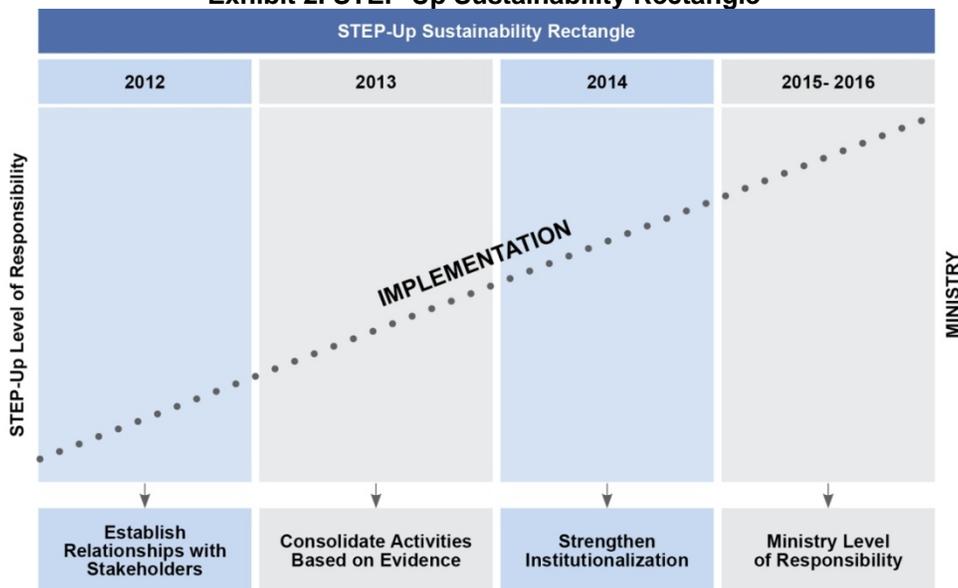


## **B. Year 3: “Making Things Stick”**

*Project Trajectory.* To date, STEP-Up has facilitated a significant change in the mindsets and practices of individual education officers and overcome some management norms that have undermined performance in Zambia’s education system. In Year 1, we traveled with leaders to visit schools and asked a simple question, “How many of your children are reading?” Exposure to what was really happening in schools gave leaders direct experience that “opened their eyes” and ignited a desire to do something about what they saw. After a critical mass of Zambia’s central, provincial, and district officers had their own “aha moments” through these experiential visits, STEP-Up gave them a tool—the learner performance improvement plan (LPIP)—which helped them convert their excitement into an action plan. Throughout much of Year 2, STEP-Up provincial advisors guided all 10 provinces and over 34 districts through the strategic planning process, a process which put learner performance at its core. Although STEP-Up advisors provided support, provincial and district education officers were empowered to lead the effort; they set their own reading targets and identified the practical steps needed to progress towards their goals. Through this process, MESVTEE officers at all levels were able to pinpoint things they could and should do to affect change, including identifying policy changes that needed to be made and determining how they could reallocate existing resources to better focus on learners.

STEP-Up must now take advantage of the excitement and momentum that was generated over the last two years as we move forward with helping the MESVTEE tackle some of the more difficult challenges that come with reforming an entire system. Building on the “getting started” stage in Year 1 and the “taking off” stage in Year 2, the focus of Year 3 is “making things stick”. To achieve this, STEP-Up’s Year 3 activities seek to put the Ministry firmly in the driver’s seat, so that they truly own the reform efforts underway and can translate shifting mindsets into institutional changes that affect the way the Ministry operates on a day to day basis. To this end, each STEP-Up task lead conceived this year’s activities with their exit strategy in mind, so that the project can gradually step away and leave improved systems in place that will be utilized and sustained in the long-term. (See Exhibits 2 and 3)

**Exhibit 2. STEP-Up Sustainability Rectangle**



*What's ahead in Year 3.* Highlights of activities for Year 3 include improving access to data locally through development of a LEMIS; supporting the MESVTEE to develop an M&E system to better track equity measures; strengthening the Ministry's capacity to implement its revised HIV and AIDS policy for the education sector; systematizing the disparate local tools used to capture reading metrics as a quality indicator; launching the *Let's Read, Zambia* mobilization campaign; and facilitating partnerships between the MESVTEE and higher education institutions to use applied research to inform ongoing policy dialogue on education. These are just a sampling of activities for the year ahead; details about all of our Year 3 activities and milestones for each task area can be found in Section C and the accompanying Gantt chart.

Overall, STEP-Up's aim in the coming year is to help the Ministry visualize change as "a system thing" not "a single thing", looking not just at individual actions but how each reform initiative fits into the bigger picture. It will be essential for STEP-Up to continue to work side by side and in full support of the Ministry's objectives in order for our activities to be embraced at all levels. In addition to empowering the local levels, we must continue to build the capacity of local education officers using day to day, one on one mentoring, targeted technical assistance, and training and provide them with easy to use tools and processes to do their jobs better.

In order to make things stick, the project will utilize the following strategies during Year 3 implementation:

*Ensure all actions are focused on the learner.* In line with MESVTEE priorities, learners are at the core of all STEP-Up programming. STEP-Up's approach to learner-centered education management reforms proposed a continual cycle analyzing learner performance based on data versus expected results that in turn generate policy discussions and interventions to improve performance. This approach is seen in the learner performance improvement plans, which shift the focus of MESVTEE units away from school infrastructure and other inputs to learning achievement and other outcomes. When interventions are built around learners, resources can be directly linked to beneficiaries and tracked closely.

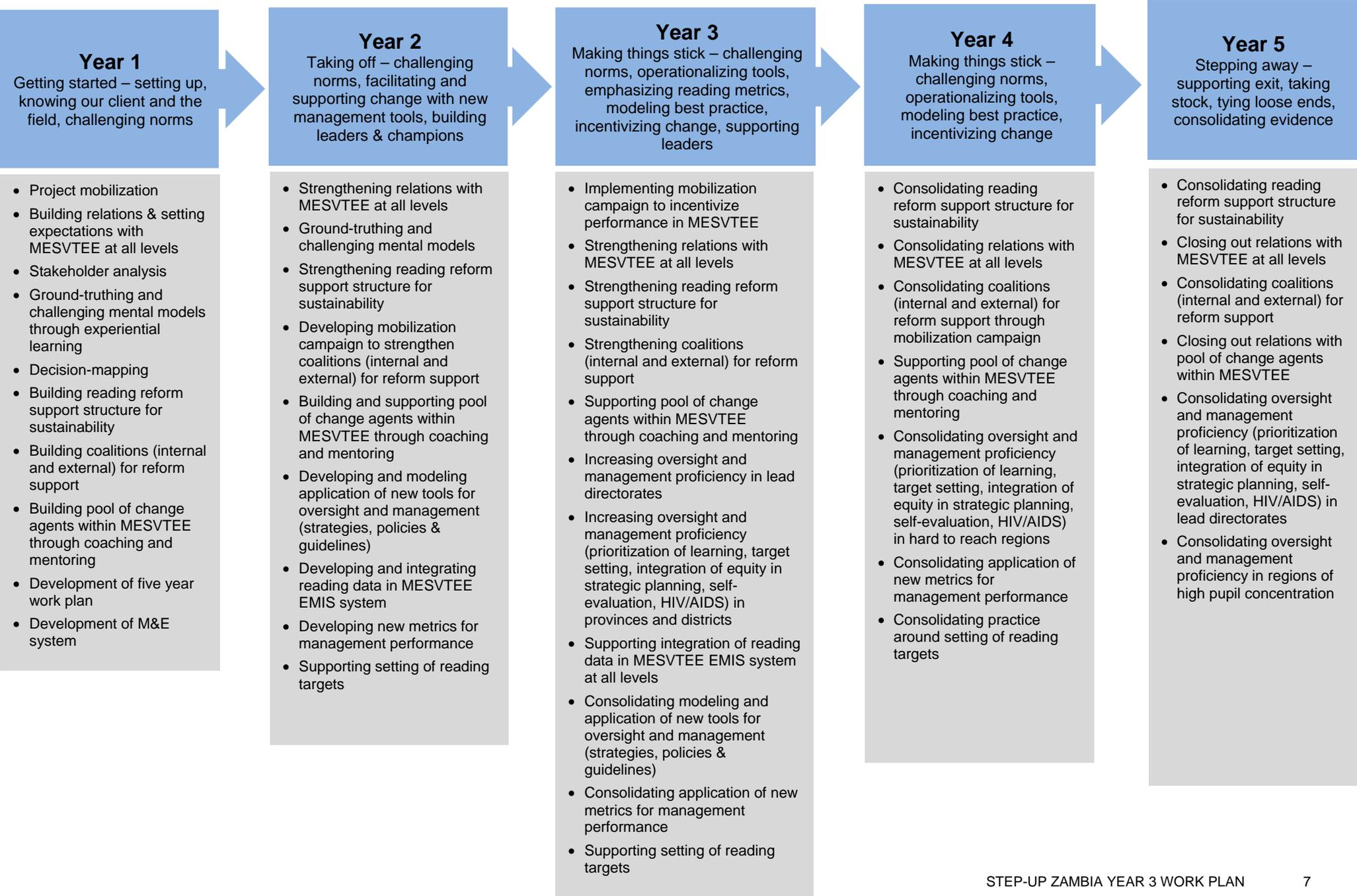
*Increase integration across tasks, across MESVTEE Directorates, and across USAID-funded projects.* STEP-Up’s programming offers cohesive support to the Ministry at all levels through the integration and strengthening of systems for improved decision-making. In Year 3, STEP-Up seeks to leverage the success achieved to date with the MESVTEE’s Directorate of Standards and Curriculum and identify champions of change in other Directorates so that real systemic reform can happen. STEP-Up’s provincial advisors play a key role in helping our provincial and district counterparts to understand how all of STEP-Up’s activities and those of the other USAID-funded education projects intersect and are designed to help them achieve a singular goal of improving learner performance. Collectively, intersecting activities, integrated IT applications, and comprehensive information will sustainably support central, provincial, and district MESVTEE units to self-evaluate and fine-tune their metrics and approaches for improving management and learner performance.

*Utilize resources more strategically and efficiently.* One of STEP-Up’s goals is to help the MESVTEE allocate its own resources and leverage private-sector investments more effectively to achieve real improvement in learner performance outcomes. As the project reaches the midway point, it must also be ever more strategic in the use of project funds to maximize results. With the support of USAID, STEP-Up scaled up its presence in all 10 provinces in Year 1, beyond what was originally envisioned. While this scaled up approach has resulted in nationwide reform efforts, the associated costs leave fewer funds for STEP-Up to utilize in its out years. Therefore, during work planning, STEP-Up staff were challenged to identify the essential activities that we need to undertake to achieve our expected results and seek opportunities to leverage external resources during planning and implementation. STEP-Up has a renewed commitment to finding opportunities to share costs with other USAID/Zambia education projects, when themes overlap or are complementary, as with aspects of the upcoming *Let’s Read, Zambia* communications campaign. At local levels, STEP-Up will do a better job coordinating programming around the calendar of events being held by the Ministry and other implementing partners, capitalizing on times where administrators will already be brought together. For example, we will try to piggyback our training events onto existing events, holding them either the day before or after Ministry gatherings, so that we can minimize the travel burden on government counterparts and STEP-Up staff and reduce associated per diem expenses. Further, with STEP-Up technical leaders now embedded in the MESVTEE to a greater extent, STEP-Up is examining additional ways to downsize recurring operational costs including office rent and communication costs.

*Implement with an exit strategy in mind.* We will seek to find all project activities a “home” within the Ministry’s management structures to increase the likelihood of sustainability beyond the life of the project. For example, the mobilization campaign for early grade reading will support the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum but do will do so through a collaborative approach with the Ministry’s public relations office to conduct future campaigns.

Exhibit 3 on the next page gives the overall trajectory and priorities of Year 3 in the context of the five-year STEP-Up contract term. Derived from USAID’s extensive body of experience in systems reform over the years, the graphic depicts the gradual buildup of MESTVEE ownership of changes supported through STEP-Up toward an overall improvement in system performance.

### Exhibit 3. STEP-Up Trajectory: Systems Strengthening – Supporting Reading Improvement



## C. Detailed Year 3 Activities by Task Area

In the following section, we provide a detailed explanation of the activities STEP-Up plans to undertake in Year 3. The activities are organized by task and sub-task area as outlined in the results framework and accompanying Gantt chart (see Annex A).

### Task 1: Integrate and strengthen systems for evidence based decision-making

*Overview.* A key objective for STEP-Up under Task 1 is to assist the MESVTEE to meet the informational needs of the different decision making tiers, namely central, provincial, and district education managers as well as school leaders, teachers, and parents. This is part of a broader goal to help the MESVTEE assume ownership over the process by empowering lower levels and strengthening their capacity to process, analyze, and take action upon available data for their respective jurisdictions to enable real system-wide reform. The ability to generate, access, and analyze accurate, reliable, and relevant data is central to enhancing the ability of education stakeholders at all levels to alter existing and create new education policies and plans, better manage resource allocation, and seek greater equity in education for all Zambian children, all with a primary focus on improving learner performance through reading.

To do this, STEP-Up is working with the MESVTEE to enhance its existing education management information system (EMIS) so that it provides more accurate, timely, and reliable data, ensuring sound data entry and analysis is happening to a greater extent at the lower levels. Developing a local EMIS, or “LEMIS”, is not merely about establishing a data and information software system; the process involves nurturing a new management culture within the MESVTEE. Improving the process of data collection, integration, analysis, and dissemination will be key, but a foundational shift in the MESVTEE’s culture of data sharing, information use, and organizational management will be vital for the effectiveness and sustainability of the LEMIS.

*Key achievements in Years 1 and 2.* In Years 1 and 2, STEP-Up provided international technical assistance to the MESVTEE to address technical issues related to processing the annual census utilizing the EMIS software, including addressing school count and reporting. Thanks to this support, the Ministry was able to prepare a narrated 2012 statistical bulletin, linked to graphics and tables of key education indicators, for dissemination to the wider education sector audience. With STEP-Up’s support, the MESVTEE also updated the EMIS software so they could capture and process school data from the newly created Muchinga Province.

STEP-Up also carried out a ground-truthing and data mapping exercise to understand the flow of information at the MESVTEE, from the primary source (the school) through the intermediate levels, up to the central ministry. The exercise revealed that standard school data is collected officially through the annual school census which is a process managed at the central level. To supplement this annual census data, it was revealed that provinces and districts had developed a number of ad hoc data collection instruments (mostly Excel worksheets) that they used to collect additional data they wanted to track for their own purposes, including information on learner performance, teacher transfers, etc. Finally, this

exercise helped STEP-Up identify key Ministry units such as the Directorates of Standards and Curriculum, Teacher Education and Specialized Services, and Human Resources and Information that collect operational and learner performance data and will need to be consulted as the LEMIS is developed.

In the final quarter of FY 2013, STEP-Up worked with the central MESVTEE to develop guidelines to help provincial education officers (PEOs) each select 4 districts from each province to become the 40 pilot districts for initial LEMIS implementation. Different units within those districts identified synergies on how to work together and collaborate in the process of data management.

STEP-Up is working in a cross-sector environment with other USAID-funded education projects—Time to Learn, Read to Succeed, and SPLASH—as well as the World Food Programme, UNICEF, and CAMFED, on a data harmonization initiative. This initiative aims to harmonize data collection standards and processes and provides an opportunity for sharing education information. The group developed a terms of reference and concept paper required for the formation of proposed data management committees within the MESVTEE at the central level, in all 10 provinces, and in the 40 proposed LEMIS pilot districts. The concept of LEMIS and technical requirements have been developed and shared with the ministry and in 40 districts. Although the committees formed in each of the 40 pilot districts are still awaiting endorsement by the permanent secretary, they developed an analysis of how they collect and use data. This bottom up approach informs the design of the LEMIS so that it produces data that is needed and in demand by education managers at the provincial and district levels.

*Key goals for Year 3.* In Year 3, STEP-Up will focus on developing the LEMIS system that will enable the Ministry to not only manage its basic data requirements but also monitor learner performance information, such as district-level assessments and reading levels. STEP-Up, in partnership with the MESVTEE, will also utilize district resource centers as vehicles for data dissemination at the local level.

#### **Task 1: Year 3 Key Milestones**

- Data management committees work to establish common data standards and use at the district level
- Data map of information needs and learner performance completed
- Design, development, and initial deployment of a LEMIS tool complete

The key activities under Task 1 are as follows:

#### **Sub-Task Area 1.1: Learner performance data applied to planning and budgeting at all levels**

*Raise awareness of the importance of applying learner performance data for planning and budgeting at central, provincial, and district levels.* To continue to foster an enabling environment that demands and utilizes data for decision making, STEP-Up's information management advisor, in collaboration with the decentralization advisor and development communications specialist, will work with the Ministry to create a brief awareness package explaining the purpose, process, and benefits of the LEMIS for improved decision making at the local level. The package will outline the process involved in data collection, including how to validate, publish, and report on the data. This awareness package, which STEP-Up's provincial advisors will use to guide their conversations with the selected 4 pilot districts

from each province, will ensure consistency in messaging about the LEMIS to all 40 pilot districts. Consistent and clear messaging will be important to reduce confusion as STEP-Up supports the MESVTEE to transition from collecting survey data annually through the school census to an ongoing, day-to-day process of inputting operational data directly into the LEMIS. Spearheaded by the Directorate of Planning and Information, STEP-Up will collaborate with other education partners working on the data harmonization framework for student and school statistics in order to produce common education reports at the local level via LEMIS.

*Support the MESVTEE to form data management committees at the central, provincial, and district levels to harmonize the learner performance data management process across ministry departments and units.* STEP-Up's information management advisor, in collaboration with the Ministry's systems development chief, will provide technical assistance through the Directorate of Planning and Information to obtain the Ministry's support for utilizing data management committees as primary bodies for improved data mapping, harmonization, and integration at the local level across directorates, projects, and donors. STEP-Up will seek the permanent secretary's endorsement to allow districts to form their own local data management committees. Once achieved, STEP-Up will train officials in the 10 provinces and select pilot districts on the role and responsibilities of the data management committees. The goal is to allow administrators, teachers, and the education community to understand and utilize data to promote an informed dialogue about education policies at the local level. For example, at the district level, the data management committees can establish harmonized data to be able to analyze potential linkages between test results from reading and student-teacher ratios at the school level.

*Review the planning and budgeting process and initiate alignment of operational plans with resource allocation at the central, provincial, and district levels.* STEP-Up's Task 1 and 4 leads will collaborate to support Ministry planners at the central and provincial levels and in selected districts to analyze how school data and learning outcomes can inform and support the yearly planning and budgeting process. The objective is to promote local capacity to improve the budgeting and planning process based on education data and learning results. This process will strengthen the existing bottom-up approach to decision making of financial resources and tracking student performance based on actual data. For example, the project will work with priority districts and provinces involved in the strategic planning process to actively participate and contribute to the Ministry's annual work planning and budgeting at the central level. The activity will be conducted in two stages. STEP-Up will hold a series of one-day workshops at the central Ministry with selected officials from the Directorates of Standards and Curriculum and Planning and Information on how to drill-down and use district-level data in their learner performance improvement plans for their annual budgeting process. The information management advisor will also support STEP-Up's provincial advisors to replicate the exercise in the provinces and priority districts. STEP-Up will utilize the experiential learning model, to the extent possible, to get real buy-in from the Ministry in this process.

### **Sub-Task Area 1.2: Local MESVTEE systems for tracking reading achievement developed**

The MESVTEE has successfully maintained its yearly education survey data through annual school questionnaires based on the Ministry's EMIS system called Ed\*Assist. To supplement the data collected through the annual questionnaire, provinces and districts have developed

simple tools for tracking both assessment and reading levels on a monthly basis in tandem with the official EMIS data. For example, Luapula Province has a learner performance tracking system, and Mazabuka District manages a teacher performance tracking tool on literacy. However, the challenge is that national data and local data are not linked, since the annual statistical bulletin is usually not available on a timely basis and not harmonized at the source of the data, typically the school level. To address this need, STEP-Up will support the Ministry to transition from collecting annual survey data to collecting real-time operational data about learners, teachers, administrators, and schools through the LEMIS. The goal for the LEMIS is to provide up-to-date, relevant data that serves both the local districts and provinces to systematize, capture, process, and report on data that is timely, accurate, and most importantly, relevant to their work at the local level while meeting the needs of the annual school census.

*Complete data mapping of learner assessment and reading tracking processes currently undertaken by the selected 40 districts that can feed into the comprehensive learner performance achievement tracking through LEMIS.* STEP-Up's information management advisor will collaborate with the project's Task 4 lead and provincials advisors to complete the collection of reading and assessment instruments and processes currently being used at the provincial and district level, especially in the targeted 40 districts. These instruments will be analyzed with support from short-term local and/or international experts in order to identify gaps in the current tools compared to other similar models in other countries, in order to inform the needs assessment that will help develop the specific terms of reference and information requirements for the Ministry's LEMIS. Task 1 will coordinate with STEP-Up's decentralization advisor and the development communication specialist to ensure clear messages reach relevant Ministry officials and feedback is collected and taken into consideration during the needs assessment process. STEP-Up will utilize the results of the review as the starting point to inform the data input and output requirements of the LEMIS that will be included in the procurement documents for the LEMIS software development. This collaborative process will allow district officers feel they are a part of the development process of the LEMIS. In turn, this action will increase acceptance, buy-in, and sense of ownership by the MESVTEE, fostering sustainability for the system's use.

*Conduct capacity assessment of the established MESVTEE structure, IT infrastructure, and skills levels of MESVTEE personnel involved in the data process in order to assess readiness for the implementation of a comprehensive education and learner performance tracking system (LEMIS).* Building on the experiences of previous and current efforts in EMIS, we will carry out a needs and capacity assessment to better understand the data and information needs of stakeholders at various levels, human capacity levels, and infrastructure constraints. STEP-Up's information management advisor with support from short-term local ICT and EMIS experts will work alongside the project's provincial advisors to assess the skills of the each pilot district's human resources, including their ability to collect, validate, and analyze school data. The team will also assess each district's IT infrastructure (existing computers, electricity, connectivity, etc.) and other logistical constraints that might impact LEMIS development.

Through STEP-Up-led workshops previously held with the 40 pilot districts, the project has been able to gather various assessment methodologies and collection tools on reading achievements that are currently being used by the different districts. A thorough review of these tools will serve as a starting point around which the assessment team will develop a comprehensive framework for the data input and data reporting requirements of the LEMIS.

Additionally, as part of this assessment, STEP-Up will work with the MESVTEE to determine the ideal process by which data and analyses should be shared vertically and horizontally among the Ministry structures and will identify the existing and required procedures, IT infrastructure, and human capacity to implement this aspect of the LEMIS. The human aspect of the system will be critical to its success, so it will be important for STEP-Up and the MESVTEE to fully understand the existing capacity of MESVTEE staff and determine the appropriate skill sets and personnel functions required to better manage, analyze, and utilize learner achievement data.

*Conduct procurement for development of local education management information system (LEMIS) application.* STEP-Up will utilize the results of the needs assessment and review of existing applications and data collection tools to develop system requirements for the development of a new LEMIS application or further development of an existing application (like the one under development at the end of STEP-Up’s predecessor project, EQUIP2). The resulting application will incorporate local data collection processes identified by the data management committees set up to improve the quality of existing data, in addition to including new learner performance data into the overall data collection cycle. In line with STEP-Up’s standard procurement process, if a new application is necessary, the project will release a call for expressions of interest from potential bidders, prepare a request for proposals (RFP), evaluate submitted bids, and make an award.

*Oversee roll-out of LEMIS application by end of 2014 to the selected 40 districts and ensure that it links to other education systems that are tracking performance.* The subcontracted firm selected to develop the LEMIS application will propose a solution according to the technical connectivity requirements and required inputs and outputs delineated in the RFP. If at all possible, an existing software solution will be considered as long as it can be customized to meet the requirements of the LEMIS application. The subcontractor will collaborate with STEP-Up’s information management specialist, the Ministry’s systems development chief, and representatives from the Examination Council of Zambia to ensure the LEMIS and other existing systems utilize consistent school coding and that the LEMIS is linked to the examination database and is able to pull assessment results from non-examination grades. As part of the LEMIS roll-out process, the subcontractor will conduct end-user training, targeting staff from various levels of the MESVTEE, including system administrators, expert data users, and general Ministry public users. The subcontractor will hold a series of workshops, meetings, and formal training to demonstrate and brief Ministry officials, key policy makers, and other stakeholders on how to retrieve and analyze data from the system. We envision this demonstration to take a few hours, and it will be carried out multiple times for staff at different levels of MESVTEE and for external stakeholders. Additionally, STEP-Up will train members of the data management committees to serve as trainers (through a training of trainers approach), will provide then be able to provide training for all system users at the central, provincial, and district levels on how to operate the LEMIS system.

**LEMIS Application Roll-Out:  
What is the Process?**

The roll-out process comprises a set of steps from proof of concept, design, piloting, limited release, and final “go live” of the system. The goal of this approach is to ensure the application addresses the actual information needs at the local level with best practices in data collection, validation, and reporting. The application will be tested and rolled-out in up to four districts at a time.

*Cultivate resource centers to serve as information hubs to improve learner performance data usage, access, and dissemination at the local level.* STEP-Up Task 1 and 4 teams will collaborate to review the different intended audiences and recipients of the data outputs from the LEMIS and will work the network of existing resource centers to determine how best to package and disseminate the resulting data and analysis to education stakeholders at the lower levels, including the surrounding community. This exercise will guide the type of capacity building and infrastructure support (hardware, software, and training) STEP-Up will need to support the resource centers to ensure they are better able to function as useful and utilized hubs of information.

*Support the MESVTEE to explore the use of mobile technology to improve the efficiency of learner performance data collection.* Data collection can be challenging in remote areas of Zambia that are inaccessible due to poor infrastructure and flooding. However, there is an opportunity to take advantage of high mobile phone penetration in these areas and across the country, to capture and transmit data into the LEMIS. Therefore, STEP-Up will engage short-term technical assistance to review different mobile data collection technologies already being implemented by other partners like Read to Succeed, Time to Learn, World Food Programme, and CAMFED to assess the possibility of feeding the relevant data sets captured by those technologies into the LEMIS. Following the review, STEP-Up will develop a proof of concept and accompanying budget projection for the MESVTEE to use mobile data collection technology.

### **Sub-Task Area 1.3: Information from disparate systems integrated**

*Assess and provide recommendations for integrating disparate MESVTEE systems.* The MESVTEE has three key information systems that provide critical data for day to day administration, including the student loan (bursary) system, the financial system, and the human resources management information system. These systems contain interrelated information which should be linked and access in an integrated platform. Currently, these systems are not linked and do not talk to each other, making analysis of critical information difficult and inaccurate. For this reason, STEP-Up will utilize short-term technical assistance to support the MESVTEE to determine the technical and cost requirements to integrate the three disparate system based on a common standard platform centered on learner information to better inform policy reforms and resource allocation. To do this, STEP-Up's information management advisor will develop a scope of work for the short-term experts, detailing technical requirements for the three systems. Following their assignment, the short-term consultant will produce a report with recommendations for a business intelligence system that will be used to inform the MESVTEE and seek external funding for its implementation. The analysis will tap into the best practices in data mining and retrieval.

***Critical assumptions and potential challenges.*** Achievement of the strategy for this task and the activities proposed will depend on the following assumptions and mitigation of the following potential challenges:

- Access to district level information to identify best data collection tools
- Institutional support to share data across projects and funders
- Availability of the funds for implementation from STEP-Up
- Willingness by MESVTEE to support decentralization of data collection activities

**Coordination points (key stakeholders).** The key stakeholders in implementation of activities under this task are:

- MESVTEE’s Directorate of Planning and Information for EMIS
- MESVTEE’s Chief Accountant and Directorate of Planning for budgeting and planning data
- MESVTEE’s Directorate of Human Resources and Administration
- Zambia Information Communication and Technology Authority
- Central Statistics Office for population census data
- Examinations Council of Zambia for examination results
- Ministry of Home Affairs for national citizen registration
- Other USAID education projects – Time to Learn and Read to Succeed
- UNICEF
- United Nations World Food Programme

## Task 2: Promote equity as a central theme in policy development and education management reform

*Task overview.* In an environment built around the notion of providing educational support for all, special consideration will be given by STEP-Up’s activities to those categories of learners who, for one reason or another, tend to “fall through the cracks” of the system: orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), girls, young pregnant students driven out of school, people in the education community affected by health problems such as HIV and AIDS, physically or mentally-impaired students, as well as other people with special needs. Findings in the field show that their needs are not being met. The education community is not devoting sufficient resources, time, or attention to these problems.

STEP-Up Zambia is working with the education community as a whole; developing equity measures and tracking tools, supporting the prioritization of equity issues within MESVTEE strategic and operational plans; and strengthening resource allocation management tools.

*Key achievements in Years 1 and 2.* Ground-truthing exercises conducted in Year 1 allowed STEP-Up and our MESVTEE counterparts to see first-hand examples of inequity in the schools. Seeing versus reading about the realities on the ground ignited in many MESVTEE officials a desire to take action and do their part to help change things in the system. To leverage that desire to help into action, STEP-Up conducted a gender and equity assessment that provided recommendations and an action plan on tangible steps the project and the MESVTEE should take to better address equity issues. Namely, the assessment recognized a need for more data collection and disaggregation of data about disadvantaged subgroups, to better understand and analyze the real equity gaps that exist. The assessment also stressed the importance of utilizing the strategic planning process to foster ownership by the MESVTEE in creating targets and action plans for addressing equity issues at the district, provincial, and central levels. Some provinces and districts have already begun to revise their learner

performance improvement plans to prioritize equity issues, but there is a lot of work to do in Year 3 to ensure all provinces and districts follow suit.

*Key goals for Year 3.* In this pivotal middle year of the project’s implementation, STEP-Up will work to leverage the relationships that have been built with counterparts and the independent reform initiatives happening in various provinces and districts into system-wide reform that institutionalizes STEP-Up’s work into the day-to-day way in which the MESVTEE thinks and works. To do this, STEP-Up will focus this year on supporting the central MESVTEE to enhance its M&E strategy for tracking equity measures; guiding provincial and district officials in the process of revising their learner performance improvement plans to address equity gaps; ensuring the LEMIS allows for better tracking of equity measures, including resource allocation; and building the capacity of MESVTEE at all levels, particularly lower levels, to analyze data and formulate better policies that work to narrow equity gaps for disadvantaged students. As we implement each activity, we will continue to push the MESVTEE to take the lead and coach them in the process.

#### **Task 2: Year 3 Key Milestones**

- M&E strategy for MESVTEE focused on tracking equity measures developed
- Strategic plans at central, provincial, and district levels revised to address equity issues
- Equity study focused on early grade reading conducted

The key activities under Task 2 are as follows:

#### **Sub-Task Area 2.1: MESVTEE M&E strategy for tracking equity measures developed**

*Review 2010–2013 data by district to identify equity gaps.* To better understand existing equity gaps, STEP-Up will review available data from 2010-2013 on enrollment rates, progression rates, dropout rates, and pass rates on national exams by learner subgroups (urban/rural; OVC/non-OVC; children with special education needs; children without special education needs; older students 2+ years off grade age) with gender disaggregation. This task will be done in collaboration with Task Areas 1 and 5, with support from short-term local experts who will work with provincial advisors, task managers, and the project’s M&E specialist.

*Collaborate with MESVTEE to develop equity measures.* Currently the ministry only disaggregates data by sex and age, and learner performance has been equated solely with progression rates from grade to grade and pass rates on national exams at grades 7, 9, and 12. These measurements do not get at the heart of whether or not students are receiving a quality education and *learning*, and they do not adequately track how students from disadvantaged groups are doing or how effective existing policies related to disadvantaged groups actually are. Therefore, in collaboration with Task 1, STEP-Up will work with the MESVTEE to develop equity measures and include those measures as part of the required data inputs for the LEMIS.

*Help review and refine data collection tools to include required equity data fields.* STEP-Up will then work together with Ministry counterparts to review existing data collection tools to identify how they need to be revised to capture all required equity-related data needed for entry into the LEMIS.

## **Sub-Task Area 2.2: Equity issues in MESVTEE learner performance improvement plans addressed**

*Review provincial and district learner performance improvement plans with counterparts to ensure equity issues are prioritized.* STEP-Up will perform an assessment of existing MESVTEE learner performance improvement plans to determine how they address issues of inequity in primary education for disadvantaged groups including rural, poor, girls, OVCs, and children with special educational needs. The assessment will involve a determination of the relevant equity issues in specific areas of education. Secondary qualitative and quantitative data will be used to understand how the improvement plans have addressed the needs and are able to track progress over time in the interest to support all girls and boys (especially OVCs and children from other disadvantaged groups) to realize their right to a quality education. STEP-Up will develop an equity gap analysis report of the improvement plans as well as a subsequent follow-up action plan for each province and district.

*Share the findings of learner performance improvement plan reviews with provincial and district counterparts.* STEP-Up will disseminate the findings of the gender and equity analysis with provincial and district level counterparts. Using a participatory approach, the meeting will aim to develop specific strategies to ensure equity issues are adequately considered within the MESVTEE. STEP-Up will encourage the Ministry's central level officials to garner participation of representatives from the lower levels, as they are the ones directly linked to the difficulties schools and learners face with regards to equity and resource allocation. The lower structures of the MESVTEE will need to take an active role in helping schools develop plans on how to tackle equity issues. STEP-Up will underscore how important it will be for the lower structures in the Ministry to take the lead on coming up with solutions, proposing possible policy changes, and developing simple documents to help schools address equity activities and use the increasingly available data for decision making.

*Support provinces to adjust learner performance improvement plans to include equity issues.* After identifying the specific equity-focused interventions each province and district will undertake, STEP-Up will advise the PEOs as they revise their respective learner performance improvement plans as needed. STEP-Up will also support the PEOs as they guide the districts to include equity activities in the district and school level learner performance improvement plans. It is important that the PEOs take on more of a leadership role in the process, to build their capacity and ownership of the activity. Through collaboration with the Task 4 team, a measurement of the extent to which equity issues are addressed and implemented will be added to the learner performance improvement plan rubric, providing STEP-Up and the central Ministry with a tool to track progress and hold provinces and districts accountable.

*Facilitate sharing of best practices between provinces and districts.* Provincial advisors will share examples of successful approaches being developed or implemented at the school, district, or provincial level surface to address equity issues. STEP-Up will capture these examples and best practices and will make them accessible to MESVTEE staff, including teachers, through the network of existing resource centers.

## **Sub-Task Area 2.3: Tools to support resource allocation for equitable access created**

*Ensure LEMIS tracks resource allocation for disadvantaged subgroups.* STEP-Up will work with the MESVTEE and the Task 1 team to ensure that the LEMIS is also capable of

interfacing with other Government offices to track data about resource allocation for disadvantaged groups.

STEP-Up will also provide technical support to key managers at the provincial and district levels on performing rapid equity assessments/analysis for disadvantaged subgroups, addressing equity issues in the learner performance improvement planning process, and allocating resources more effectively to address equity issues. Technical support will include follow-up mentoring of managers to ensure that ministry officials develop plans and budgets that include an equity and gender component. STEP-Up will also incorporate data on disadvantaged subgroups in LEMIS to evaluate equity at the local level.

***Critical assumptions and potential challenges.*** Achievement of the strategy for this task and the activities proposed will depend on the following assumptions and mitigation of the following potential challenges:

- STEP-Up will have support from the MESVTEE to carry out activities as outlined in the work plan, and each partner will contribute the necessary technical support required during the period of implementation.
- Provincial advisors, together with task managers, will ensure all activities planned have been implemented successfully.

***Coordination points (key stakeholders).*** The key stakeholders in implementation of activities under this task are:

- MESVTEE
- Disability NGOs
- Leaders of Special Education Schools
- Ministry of Gender and Child Development
- Parents Teacher Associations (PTAs), local traditional leaders, and the private sector

### Task 3: Institutionalize MESVTEE's management of HIV and AIDS workplace programs

***Task overview.*** Under Task 3, STEP-Up works with the MESVTEE to address the negative impact of HIV and ill health on quality education. HIV and AIDS related illnesses killed approximately 31,000 Zambians in 2011 (UNAIDS, 2012), and many teachers and pupils are absent from school because they are managing their illness or that of a family member. Based on analysis of the mortality trends as documented in the Ministry's statistical bulletin from 2009 through 2012, suspected HIV-related deaths were decreasing from 2009 (0.57 percent) to 2011 (0.47 percent) but began rising again slightly in 2012 (0.48 percent). Verifiable mortality as a result of HIV and AIDS is challenging, as the immediate cause of death may be attributed to an associated illnesses, and stigma limits reporting on HIV or AIDS as the underlying illness. STEP-Up is assisting the MESVTEE to develop and implement a national policy for HIV and AIDS in the education sector to mitigate the impact of HIV and support teachers and pupils to live productively. STEP-Up is also working with the MESVTEE to develop community support structures to promote good health and self-care.

STEP-Up focuses on leveraging existing systems, staff, and partnerships to ensure the continuity of programming while building the capacity of MESVTEE staff at all levels to support the education sector’s response to HIV and AIDS in schools. HIV and AIDS education sector programming is multi-dimensional; it includes interventions with teachers, staff, learners, and the community. A demand-driven, dynamic approach ensures that policies in place are implemented, especially at district and school levels.

*Key achievements in Years 1 and 2.* Over the last two years, STEP-Up has increased the uptake of voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) services in the education sector for individuals that have tested positive for HIV and AIDS. To date, the project has reached over 84,000 teachers, learners, and community members with HIV awareness-raising and mobilization activities in five provinces – Copperbelt, Lusaka, Central, Eastern, and Northern. To strengthen community health and address health gaps that impede quality education, nearly 24,000 teachers, students, and community members have been counseled and tested for HIV and AIDS. Finally, STEP-Up has trained over 1,000 para-social and community health workers in four provinces – Lusaka, Central, Northern, and Eastern.

STEP-Up’s “ground-truthing” visits to provinces, districts, and schools revealed evidence that the MESVTEE has failed to allocate sufficient financial and human resources to operationalize HIV and AIDS related interventions. Instead, activities are determined by individual donors rather than through coordinated efforts informed by a cohesive annual plan. In addition, resources are focused on initiatives at the national level, and the needs of the provinces and districts are not adequately addressed.

*Key goals for Year 3.* During this critical third project year, STEP-Up will support the MESVTEE to implement an effective national policy for HIV and AIDS in the education sector; create awareness initiatives that prevent HIV and AIDS; promote access to quality information through teaching and sensitization training; and encourage the importance of wellness and good health for teachers and learners.

During the first two years of STEP-Up, the project collaborated with and demonstrated to the MESVTEE at all levels how the Ministry can holistically support teachers with an accurate and comprehensive HIV and AIDS education sector-focused policy and by creating an enabling environment for teachers and education stakeholders to demand and utilize HIV and AIDS services and other critical health services to enhance teacher health to keep them in the classroom. During Year 3, STEP-Up will work with all levels of the MESVTEE (central, provincial, district, and zonal levels); across directorates (Human Resources and Administration, Standards and Curriculum, and the Curriculum Development Center); and across ministries, with the Ministry of Health, to increase the sense of ownership the MESVTEE has in promoting and supporting positive teacher health and increasing knowledge and messaging related to HIV and AIDS. This year, STEP-Up will work with provincial and district education officials through the provincial advisors to ensure the inclusion of HIV and AIDS policies and activities in learner performance improvement plans, with the goal of empowering provincial and district officials to develop locally-driven activities that support teachers’ positive health. STEP-Up will also work

**Task 3: Year 3 Key Milestones**

- MESVTEE HIV and AIDS policy finalized
- 13,000 individuals receive VCT
- Improved HIV messaging modules produced and piloted
- 500 education stakeholders trained as community health and para-social workers

with district and zonal education officials to design and lead Health Market Fairs and to develop community driven support groups in order to both reduce stigma and empower the education sector to become a leader in HIV reduction programming and positive health. Earlier Health Market Fairs were almost solely led by STEP-Up. In Year 3, the project will begin to transition leadership of the Health Market Fairs design and implementation to MESVTEE officials. Additionally, as there are more schools than clinics, STEP-Up will work with the Curriculum Development Center and other USAID projects in education to develop and disseminate current scientific messaging related to HIV and other healthy behaviors based on teacher and students needs and requests from formative research completed in Year 2.

The key activities under Task 3 are as follows:

### **Sub-Task Area 3.1: Planning and budgeting tools for HIV and AIDS initiatives in the education sector improved**

*Assist MESVTEE with the implementation of HIV and AIDS strategic plan.* In collaboration with UNESCO, UNICEF, and the teachers' union, STEP-Up will support the Directorate of Human Resources and Administration to make the requested updates and revisions to the latest education sector HIV and AIDS policy document and strategic plan. Following approvals by both the Ministry and subsequently the Cabinet of the policy document, a national education sector HIV and AIDS strategic plan and management guidelines will be finalized and disseminated, thus providing districts with a framework from which to develop locally-driven HIV and AIDS programs. In collaboration with Task 4, STEP-Up will provide support to the Directorate of Human Resources and Administration, PEOs, and DEBS and assist with the dissemination of the new policy by incorporating the guidelines in learner performance improvement plans.

### **Sub-Task Area 3.2: Strategies for cooperation between HIV and AIDS service providers, teachers, teacher unions, and local communities established**

*Strengthen teacher health education and support networks at zonal level.* In order to create a peer network and promote health education for teachers, STEP-Up will continue supporting the development of teacher para-social support groups with motivational speakers. In Year 2, STEP-Up helped create networks of para-social worker groups in five provinces, providing a platform for the para-social workers to share information and inter act with community members. In Year 3, we will expand to new provinces as well as work to create direct HIV positive teacher support groups based on the networks created through the para-social worker groups. These initiatives help reduce stigma and discrimination and promote empowerment and resilience in infected and affected communities. STEP-Up will continue to collaborate with the MESVTEE, the teachers' union, and USAID partners to create maximum impact and reduce the duplication of activities.

### **Sub-Task Area 3.3: HIV and AIDS policy strengthened**

*Assist MESVTEE with roll-out of updated national policy for HIV and AIDS in the education sector.* In order to consolidate and update the MESVTEE's policy and program related to HIV and AIDS, STEP-Up has supported the Ministry and its stakeholders (UNESCO, UNICEF, and the teachers' union) to revise the existing HIV and AIDS policy and related strategic plan, as described under sub-task 3.1. After the policy has been officially approved

and the accompanying strategic plan has been finalized, STEP-Up will advise the MESVTEE's HIV and AIDS Coordinator on the process of rolling-out the updated policy to PEOs, DEBS, zones, and schools to ensure all levels understand the policy and the steps they need to take to implement it. In parallel, STEP-Up provincial advisors will work with the PEOs and DEBS to disseminate information about and implement the HIV and AIDS policy and related national strategic plan initiatives on a local level. To leverage resources and unify planning, STEP-Up will facilitate the collaboration of provincial and district staff with counterparts at the Ministry of Health (MOH) and HIV and AIDS committees. The HIV and AIDS committees are convened in all ministries to strengthen peer activities and exist at all levels (central, provincial, district, and zonal levels) to ensure coordination.

*Improve HIV and AIDS prevention messaging and policies for teachers and schools.* In Year 2, STEP-Up conducted formative research through focus groups and targeted interviews with HIV and AIDS and education stakeholders to understand why, despite high levels of reported knowledge about HIV, transmission is not dramatically declining and the disease is still having a considerable effect on the education sector as evidenced by the multi-year review of teacher morbidity documented in the MESVTEE's statistical bulletin. STEP-Up wanted to understand what messages were and were not penetrating the target audiences within the education community, and through formative research undertaken by short-term expatriate technical experts from subcontractor AIR in July 2013, STEP-Up learned that the curriculum and messages related to HIV have become stagnant, are watered down, and do not provide the scientific and technical information that teachers and students want on the individual level and for dissemination/education in the classroom and across their communities. For this purpose, six focus group discussions of teachers were held: two in Lusaka district, two in Chongwe district, one in Kabwe district, and one in Chibombo district. The teachers were selected from those present in the school to be part of the focus group meeting. During the focus groups, participants were given current technical and scientific information on topics like why concurrent partners are dangerous and why male circumcision is so effective. The participants indicated that they appreciated having scientific, evidence-based information and claimed it would be useful in their classrooms and daily lives. Therefore, in Year 3, STEP-Up will work with the MESVTEE's Curriculum Development Center and select teachers and students to develop health messaging modules for schools. These modules will address the sociological and scientific issues that have previously not been addressed in HIV prevention curriculum. This strategy will provide teachers and resource centers with updated information, messages, and guidance on the risk factors associated with contracting HIV, based on current evidence related to concurrent sexual partners and male circumcision, among other topics. It is critical to empower teachers and students through compelling information to make more informed decisions about risky behavior. To ensure maximum impact and cross-program support, Read to Succeed and Time to Learn will be invited to collaborate on this activity as well.

Additionally, STEP-Up will pilot the modules at health fairs to obtain real-time feedback from teachers in multiple locations with different HIV and AIDS knowledge and backgrounds. In addition to the diversity and utility of information gained by piloting at the health fairs, the health fairs will also allow for MESVTEE officials at the provincial, district, and zonal levels to gain first-hand exposure to these supplemental modules. STEP-Up expects this will increase local demand and help expand the availability of materials. STEP-Up will support the MESVTEE with the Curriculum Development Center, the Directorate of Human Resources and Administration, and the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum to roll out these modules. This activity falls under the combined responsibility of each unit

through the improved HIV and AIDS policy and materials, including HIV and AIDS programming in the learner performance improvement plans and the availability of current scientifically available HIV prevention and education.

#### **Sub-Task Area 3.4: Availability of quality health services for MESVTEE staff and students increased**

*Organize health market fairs.* Health fairs provide a centralized and manageable entry point for bringing education stakeholders together and provide encouragement and support for overall positive health and increase access to VCT services for members of the education community. During Year 2, through the organization of health fairs, STEP-Up provided nearly 24,000 people with voluntary counseling and testing for HIV; reached over 84,000 people with awareness raising and prevention messages; and provided approximately 21,000 people with access to other health services to reduce teacher absenteeism from the classroom. Building on this success, STEP-Up will continue to work with the MESVTEE to roll out health fairs across Zambia.

As we are entering the middle year of project implementation, it will be important to gradually hand over leadership of the health fair organization to the MESVTEE so that they have the capacity and experience to continue organizing such events after STEP-Up ends. Therefore, in Year 3, STEP-Up will work with the PEOs, DEBs, and other education stakeholders to transition the design and management of the health fairs to the MESVTEE. Health fair activities are included in the revised MESVTEE HIV and AIDS policy and strategic plan and will thus need to be included in the provincial and district learner performance improvement plans, as part of the process of institutionalizing the responsibility within the MESVTEE. During Year 3, health fairs will be implemented by STEP-Up and the MESVTEE in the five provinces of Lusaka, Copperbelt, Northern, Eastern, and Central. STEP-Up will work with MESVTEE staff to design, implement, and roll out health fairs in these targeted provinces and will include MESVTEE staff from the provinces targeted in Year 2, so that they may share lessons learned and coach their counterparts on health fair design based on Year 2 successes.

Additionally, there will be a renewed focus on targeting teachers, spouses, and education stakeholders at the health fairs. During Year 2, each health fair was conceptualized by the DEBS hosting the health fair, and as such, the population targeted varied. While teachers and students need access to current information and services, stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS makes voluntary counseling and testing a challenge in a mixed environment. In exit interviews and through feedback provided to health fair vendors, teachers expressed apprehension about being seen by their students going for HIV testing. To ensure teachers' access counseling and testing services, it is important for STEP-Up and the MESVTEE to develop a health fair and health services provision strategy that enables confidence, comfort, and confidentiality for all participants. Therefore, to avoid associated stigmas with VCT, STEP-Up will advise that teacher events be held on separate days from student events.

As the health fairs bring together a large number of teachers for a day at a centralized location, they also create an opportunity to access and address pressing issues for teachers and the education sector as a whole. Therefore, in Year 3, STEP-Up, the MESVTEE, and USAID partners (both health and education projects), will be invited to host targeted events at the health fairs. Events may include training, coaching, and information sharing workshops focused on learner performance data for decision making, the new curriculum, literacy

refresher courses for teachers, and resource distribution. Many USAID/PEPFAR-funded health projects like Zambia Prevention, Care and Treatment Partnership (ZPCT II<sup>1</sup>) already participate in the fairs in the provision of health services but will now have an opportunity to engage on other levels as desired. During these workshops, DEBS will have the opportunity to share their learner performance improvement plans with the teachers and relate them to specific issues affecting their districts. The timing and logistics of each health fair will be determined at the district level to ensure that school will not be interrupted and teachers will be available to attend.

*Train para-social and community health workers.* To improve learner performance, it is imperative that teachers and students are healthy and are in the classroom. Increasing teachers', students', and their family members' access to health resources helps reduce the number of days teachers and students are absent from the classroom and minimizes the individual household burden related to illness. Community health and para-social workers are responsible for identifying and referring eligible individuals, namely teachers, students, and family members living with HIV or other chronic illnesses, linking them to much needed health service providers. Para-social worker trainings promote increased district and school-level engagement and ownership in being part of the solution, and therefore it is vital that this activity be included in the provincial and district work planning process and prioritized for long-term MESVTEE funding. To date, STEP-Up has trained over 1,000 community health and para-social workers in four provinces in partnership with STEP-Up local subcontractors Afya Mazuri and Action for Positive Change. The MESVTEE identified many teachers to serve as para-social workers for their communities, thus ensuring the continuity and linkages between the beneficiaries (teachers) and the MESVTEE. This process will continue in Year 3. STEP-Up will again solicit applications for local partners/vendors, like Afya Mazuri and Action for Positive Change, in the six provinces of Copperbelt, Southern, Northwestern, Western, Luapula, and Muchinga. The direct collaboration with the MESVTEE in the identification of the community health and para-social workers and the use of local partner organizations is designed to establish a cohort of individuals and linkages with local service providers to strengthen the long-term availability of this service within the education sector.

*Provide eligible individuals with a minimum of one care service.* During Year 2, the STEP-Up-trained para-social workers provided a minimum of one care service to over 5,000 teachers and their direct family members. Through the process of providing services in Year 2, STEP-Up observed that individual needs and services available in each area varied greatly. This diversity and in some places, the limited availability of quality services, proved to be a challenge for para-social workers in the provision of care services. To reduce confusion and simplify the process, STEP-Up will work with para-social workers and the contracted local partners to develop criteria that will determine the eligibility of clients to receive health care services. To help establish this initiative, the STEP-Up provincial advisors will assist PEOs to disseminate registration materials to newly trained para-social workers.

*Critical assumptions and potential challenges.* Achievement of the strategy for this task and the activities proposed will depend on the following assumptions and mitigation of the following potential challenges:

- The revised national policy for HIV and AIDS in the education sector and accompanying strategic plan will be approved by the Cabinet.

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<sup>1</sup> ZPCT II provides test kits and training to the MOH and does not do direct testing.

- The MESVTEE will make the necessary resources available to PEOs, DEBS, and zones for the full dissemination of the revised policy and strategic plan.
- The MESVTEE's Curriculum Development Center will make teachers available in a timely manner for the design of the supplemental HIV messaging modules.
- PEOs, DEBS, and zones will actively engage in the design and rollout of the health fair activities as a learning and implementation process.
- Given the complex nature of HIV and stigma and the narrow population of HIV+ teachers, it may be challenging to gather support groups or motivational speakers.

*Coordination points (key stakeholders).* The key stakeholders in implementation of activities under this task are:

- MESVTEE HIV and AIDS Coordinator
- Ministry of Community Development
- Civil society organizations
- Ministry of Health
- National AIDS Council
- Teachers' union and teacher support groups
- Community-based, nongovernmental, and faith-based organizations
- Health Service Providers implementing USAID activities
- Other health sector and HIV and AIDS implementing partners

#### Task 4: Strengthen decentralization for improved education management reform in support of improved learner performance

*Task overview.* The MESVTEE has been implementing decentralization to improve service delivery in the education system. In practice however, there remain many challenges, the most significant relating to how the structures (center and sub-national levels) in the decentralized service delivery system exercise their responsibilities to achieve the desired impact on education. Task 4 is working through and with central and sub-national levels toward strengthening the internal functionalities of operational units at all levels of the education service delivery system, with the learner at the center of education management reform.

*Key achievements in Years 1 and 2.* To date, STEP-Up has built strong relationships with Ministry counterparts and has gained a deeper understanding of the issues on the ground that are barriers to and/or enhance learner performance, including what key system challenges exist in the service delivery structure that need to be addressed. Through working on a daily basis with the Ministry, STEP-Up has also gained tremendous insight into the organizational culture and overall environment in which the Ministry in its entirety exists and operates, which to some extent influences what can be done and at what pace.

From Year 1 “ground-truthing” exercises, STEP-Up sparked a conversation among counterparts on the importance of early grade reading and the need to consistently collect and reflect on such data at all levels of the education service delivery system. Building on the momentum gained in Year 1, STEP-Up’s Year 2 interventions and interactions achieved considerable success in challenging norms and bringing about attitude change around the thinking and practice that learner performance can or should only be measured by examination scores/results at grades 7, 9, and 12. This mindset shift is significant in the sense that there is greater focus at all levels on reading as a barometer of success. There are also signs that the Ministry is ready to take a step further in the journey of systems change. Four main milestones that signal the buy-in and readiness of MESVTEE to advance its strategic vision improve learner performance are:

- The development of learner performance improvement plans by all 10 provinces, 65 districts, and several hundred school management units;
- The concurrence of the Director of Standards and Curriculum on the importance of finalizing the learner performance improvement plans that will guide change in administrative and technical practice at the provincial and district levels;
- The identification of existing reporting tools, an assessment of their utility in capturing provincial, district, and school level progress data on reading levels, and the determination to revise and/or develop improved reporting tools; and
- The development and implementation of a strategic plan by the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum that has a focus on monitoring performance and outcomes as opposed to outputs only.

This powerful demonstration of the Ministry taking leadership and focusing on early grade reading is evidence of a desire by key Ministry staff to challenge certain norms and take ownership of the reforms for which STEP-Up is advocating.

*Key goals for Year 3.* In Year 3, STEP-Up’s focus is to ensure these gains do not fizzle out and momentum is sustained. STEP-Up needs to approach every activity with counterparts in a way that makes things stick, institutionalizing reforms so that they become part and parcel of the way the Ministry operates. The strategy for Year 3 therefore focuses on positioning the MESVTEE firmly in the driver’s seat of revitalizing and institutionalizing good management and accountability practices that support improved learner performance. The Ministry’s National Implementation Framework (NIF III) for the Sixth National Development Plan has a goal of ensuring basic skills in reading and numeracy by implementing strategies such as:

- Developing and implementing a new curriculum with improved materials and methodologies for teaching and assessing literacy and reading;
- Providing support to teachers to learn how to teach reading in early grades;

#### **Task 4: Year 3 Key Milestones**

- Learner performance improvement plans for all provinces and at least 40 districts finalized and in conformity with STEP-Up quality standards
- 40 districts supported to monitor and report on the trajectory of learner performance improvement plan implementation
- Directorate of Standards and Curriculum fully utilizing its operational plan for 2014 for national level oversight and internal management

- Expanding and strengthening supervision and engagement with communities and the private sector;
- Strengthening community involvement in monitoring learning; and
- Putting in place a system for tracking learner performance which will inform decision making.

The goals above are from the Ministry's own agenda. In Year 3, STEP-Up will support the Ministry to achieve these goals by applying the following strategies:

- Strengthening relationships with the Ministry at all levels and reaching out to more key departments and service delivery structures (e.g. resource centers) so that the pool of change agents within the Ministry expands;
- Supporting the Ministry to consolidate existing tools and apply new tools that enhance oversight and management and focus more on learner performance, measured by improved reading performance in early grades in addition to pass rates at grades 7, 9, and 12;
- Supporting all service delivery levels in making their learner performance improvement plans work (e.g. developing realistic targets, actionable goals, and target outcomes and helping to link resources and budgets to learner performance improvement plans), and collecting, documenting, and regularly communicating the evidence to different audiences and stakeholders; and
- Increasing management and oversight proficiency in lead directorates.

The key activities under Task 4 are as follows:

#### **Sub-Task Area 4.1: Learner performance improvement plans developed by MESVTEE at province and district level**

*Assist provinces and districts to revise their learner performance improvement plans to include minimum benchmarks of quality.* In Year 2, STEP-Up applied a substantial amount of resources on supporting provinces and districts to translate the determination ignited by their ground-truthing visits into action through the development of management tools, including strategic plans to improve learner performance. To date, all 10 provinces and over 65 districts have developed and are beginning to implement their learner performance improvement plans. The Ministry has set a deadline to have all learner performance improvement plans finalized by November 30, 2013, so that implementation of the plans can be accelerated.

To help the Ministry achieve this goal, in the beginning of Year 3, STEP-Up provincial advisors will assist provinces and districts to review and finalize all outstanding learner performance improvement plans. It is fundamental that the provinces, districts, and schools have accurate baseline information in order to set realistic targets for where they would like to be and how they plan to get there. Therefore, in addition to helping the Ministry to finalize the various plans, STEP-Up is doubly focused on ensuring plans meet certain minimum quality standards, especially related to setting realistic reading targets premised on data including reading level baselines, enrollments, and other acceptable measures. To facilitate this, STEP-Up is developing a rubric for benchmarking the quality of learner performance improvement plans to provide some level of uniformity on the minimum standards of the

plans. Using the rubric for benchmarking quality, provincial advisors will support provinces and districts to evaluate their respective plans to ensure that they contain for instance, information on reading level baselines for the year that is considered as the base year, realistic reading targets based on available data, a monitoring and evaluation plan, and a communication strategy, to name a few. The idea of applying the rubric/measure is not to hold back implementation of the plans until they are deemed perfect. Rather, the rubric is intended to be a useful tool to help provincial advisors guide counterparts on understanding the elements of truly good plan, provide ideas for improving the plan over time, and recognize improvements that have been made to the plan as well as progress on its implementation. Once finalized, provinces and districts will submit their plans to the Director of Standards and Curriculum as reference documents in the monitoring and oversight process. The Director of Standards and Curriculum has served as a leading change agent within the Ministry, and STEP-Up will support the Director and her team to utilize internal Ministry communication platforms, like senior management meetings, to discuss and share the plans with the Permanent Secretary and other Directorate heads in the Ministry in an effort to get the buy-in of a wider ministry audience for the planning process.

*Improve monitoring and reporting mechanisms within the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum to foster a culture of accountability for results.* While the learner performance improvement planning process is important, the true value of the plans will be a result of their implementation. The Directorate of Standards and Curriculum understands this but needs help developing improved oversight tools and processes that ensure that the plans are not just documents collecting dust on shelves, but are instead management tools that are actually used and form the basis for all operations. The plans will need to be translated into operational work plans that articulate specific, time-bound actions. When fully executed, both the learner performance improvement plans and accompanying operational work plans become accountability tools for PEOs, DEBS, and the Directorate of Curriculum and Standards at the national level. To support this, STEP-Up will support the Directorate to analyze and synthesize the reporting and communication practices and protocols across national, provincial, and district levels of governance with an aim of developing and/or strengthening reporting and communication practices for the effective implementation, monitoring, and reporting on the progress and results of strategic and operational plan implementation. STEP-Up will also support provinces and districts to report progress on the implementation of their work plans against each of their strategic goals.

STEP-Up believes that changes in how the Ministry communicates, shares knowledge, and monitors and reports on results, with a particular focus on learner performance improvement plans, will help bring about a culture of accountability for results as well as increase oversight and management proficiency within the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum. It should be noted that in Year 3, STEP-Up will endeavor to strengthen relations with all the lead directorates in the Ministry as well as with the office of the Permanent Secretary so that change filters throughout the entire MESVTEE system. STEP-Up will leverage the successful reforms underway at the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum to demonstrate to the rest of the Ministry how the development and implementation of a management tool, such as a strategic plan, can successfully be used to improve management performance. STEP-Up plans to support other Directorates within the MESVTEE to adopt the best practices being implemented within the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum as they try to achieve their strategic goals through decentralized management. STEP-Up anticipates by the end of Year 3, the MESVTEE will be able to confidently articulate the rationale for the new metrics for

management and performance and demonstrate their effectiveness by reporting field results from provinces and districts.

#### **Sub-Task Area 4.2: Policies to improve reading implemented by MESVTEE at province and district level**

*Support the strengthening of learner performance monitoring protocols, practices, and policies.* STEP-Up will assist the Directorate of Curriculum and Standards to strengthen the link between education management and pedagogical practices through clearly defined strategies and operational plans that improve learner performance with a focus on reading. At a meeting convened by the Director of Standards in September 2013, one of the most profound observations that was made was that the standards monitoring that the Directorate was engaged in was having very little impact on instructional delivery and learning because it is more process and administrative-oriented, i.e. more focused on administrative reporting and less on quality and effectiveness of instruction, and the feedback loop to support improvements in the teaching and learning process was weak.

Therefore, in Year 3, STEP-Up will support the strengthening of learner performance monitoring protocols and practices so that the entire process and practice of monitoring prioritizes learning in a stronger way than it currently does. STEP-Up will work with the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum to review the existing monitoring and reporting templates, tools, and instruments as well policies and guidelines on reading and will support their revision and/or development of new ones as needed.

*Help MESVTEE disseminate information about new policies, protocols, and tools and build capacity of lower levels to implement new reforms.* In order to ensure that all service delivery levels are continuously aware of and preparing for changes to various Ministry processes and procedures, STEP-Up will help the Directorate develop a communications/roll-out plan to effectively disseminate pertinent information and tools. STEP-Up will also support the Directorate to coach and mentor the service delivery functionaries at decentralized levels to effectively use standard tools and engage in practices that focus on monitoring and reporting on learning outcomes, especially in early grade reading. At the decentralized levels, provincial advisors will also coach and mentor provincial and district level functionaries to utilize and adapt the tools and provide reports that help the Director of Standards and Curriculum to make policy decisions, allocate resources, and plan strategic goals for subsequent years.

*Build capacity and functionality of resource centers.* Additionally, STEP-up will continue its work with existing provincial and district resource centers which have the potential to be very important service delivery and reading reform support structures at the local/decentralized level. STEP-Up will therefore support the Ministry in strengthening capacities and functionalities of resource centers so that they become more active and take a lead role in consolidating the management of learner performance at provincial and district levels. One of the key activities STEP-Up will undertake in Year 3 will be to support the review of resource center guidelines for endorsement by the Ministry. The review of guidelines is meant to help the resource centers become more robust and proactive structures to contribute to the improvement of learner performance. In addition to the guidelines, STEP-Up will support provincial and district resource center coordinators to develop and implement plans and programs that support the prioritization of learning, support the carrying out of evidence-

based coaching and mentoring, and promote internal and external linkages. This will include activities such as helping resource center coordinators to:

- Compile tool-kits that can be used at different levels to share and document good/best practices that have yielded tangible results;
- Create checklists and tool kits for strengthening the practice around continuous professional development (CPD);
- Develop and implement strategies and programs for supporting provinces and districts to consolidate reading targets and report on their learner performance improvement plans; and
- Identify innovative ways to disseminate different types of information.

#### **Sub-Task Area 4.3: Provincial and district level of MESVTEE empowered to use data for timely decision making**

*Support the Ministry (national, provincial, and district) to improve the frequency and procedures for reviewing and using National Assessment Survey and other performance data.* Currently, the Ministry's reporting to the nation on the quality of education is largely limited to an annual Ministerial statement which focuses on the results of grade 7, 9, and 12 examinations. This year, it will be important for the Ministry to also start reporting on other specific aspects of education quality, particularly learner performance in reading. In this way, the issue of early grade reading can become part of the Ministry's regular dialogue and barometer of success.

To support this objective, STEP-Up will engage the Examinations Council of Zambia and the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum to better understand the practice around the use of National Assessment Survey (NAS) and other performance data at all levels of the service delivery system. STEP-Up will also support the improved use of NAS data (particularly focused on literacy levels) in Zambia's education service delivery system. This stems from the general observation that NAS data is usually released at a meeting convened by the Examinations Council of Zambia attended by cooperating partners in the education sector (donors) and ministry staff. The gathering is simply told about the findings and provided with copies of the reports. The ECZ and the Standards Directorate do not do much in terms helping the recipients of the reports with deeper insights on what they can do with the data, how they can use it for trends analysis and decision making at decentralized levels and at the center. It is worth noting that at the dissemination meeting held in September 2013 to release NAS for 2012, the Minister of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education challenged the ECZ in particular and the MESVTEE have a more analytical and proactive approach to communicating NAS data so that it becomes meaningful to recipients and can be used for effective decision making. STEP-Up therefore intends to support the ECZ and the Ministry create such a practice.

STEP-Up will also provide ongoing support to all levels of the Ministry to ensure that there is a learner performance focus (reading and literacy trends) in the preparation for and convening of scheduled multi-stakeholder meetings such as the Joint Annual Review and quarterly and bi-annual review meetings.

#### **Sub-Task Area 4.4: Ability of MESVTEE to communicate with and mobilize internal and external audiences around improved learner performance increased**

*Support implementation of central ministry's communications strategy.* In Year 2, STEP-Up supported the MESVTEE, through its Public Relations Office, to develop a sector-wide communications strategy to respond to communications gaps that contribute to substandard education delivery and poor learner performance. In this strategy, the MESVTEE has identified poor information flows, ineffective sharing of good education practices, inadequate partnerships with stakeholders, and low demand for quality education among the Zambian public as key challenges for the education sector. To implement the strategy, the MESVTEE has appointed a communications committee to oversee and manage internal and external communications affairs. For Year 3, STEP-Up will support the communications committee to launch and implement a national campaign to mobilize the education sector and its partners around improving reading levels; share good education practices through compelling publications and films; and develop strategic partnerships with the private sector to enhance investments in education.

STEP-Up will work closely with the MESVTEE to promote and build the capacity of the Ministry's Public Relations Office to house the communications committee and support it to finalize and implement the central Ministry's communications strategy as well as strengthen the production of education programs using the Education Broadcasting Services (EBS). By December 2013, STEP-Up will have supported the committee to finalize the strategy so that it is endorsed by the Minister of Education. STEP-Up will also assist the committee to develop its terms of reference and action plan for 2013-2014 and provide guidance for its implementation.

*Develop and launch national mobilization campaign.* In Year 2, STEP-Up procured a subcontractor to develop strategies and action plans for the MESVTEE's national campaign to mobilize the education sector, Zambian public, and private sector to participate in improving quality education. STEP-Up will work with the local subcontractor and the MESVTEE's communications committee to launch the national mobilization campaign in November 2013 and to implement it throughout 2014 and for the following two years.

The campaign will have an external and an internal focus. The external campaign will serve to engage the public to support education and have higher expectations about quality. To leverage resources, STEP-Up will engage the private sector, to support the Ministry's campaign to promote early grade reading. For example, television and radio stations will be engaged to offer airtime for activities such as the "Quote of the Day" and call-in programs to discuss education. In parallel, to maintain attention among district and provincial education officers on learning outcomes, the internal aspect of the campaign will focus on the importance of education management and systems strengthening in achieving better results and will reward districts and provinces that have made the most progress in achieving their targets for improved reading achievement as laid out in their respective learner performance improvement plans. Furthermore, the internal mobilization campaign will also seek private sector support in the form of donations for prizes and more substantial PPP engagement to support improved education. It will also create demand among schools and districts to use data in decision-making that will be captured and managed through the LEMIS.

*Strengthen MESVTEE knowledge sharing mechanisms.* In Year 3, STEP-Up will continue to engage the MESVTEE to incorporate knowledge-sharing and development communications

in its systematic effort to improve learner performance. STEP-Up will work with the communications committee to develop four issues of a magazine of good education practices to be disseminated to education managers and schools so that they are exposed to initiatives that positively impact learner performance. The communications committee will identify officers from the Directorate of Teacher Education and Specialized Services (TESS) to contribute stories to the newsletter. In addition to the magazine, STEP-Up will work with the MESVTEE to develop short videos of good practices, as well as longer documentaries. To develop the videos, STEP-Up will work with both the MESVTEE's Education Broadcasting Services and private media. Additionally, to allow education officials to experience change, STEP-Up's provincial advisors will facilitate exchange visits among educators to expose them to good practices occurring in various localities.

*Produce and disseminate project communications materials.* STEP-Up's communications team regularly produces various information, education, and communications (IEC) materials for education officers. These IEC materials include posters, brochures, and factsheets that detail how the MESVTEE and its partners can improve education quality in their localities. IEC materials are co-branded with the MESVTEE and are generally disseminated to districts by provincial advisors. For Year 3, STEP-Up's communications team will produce IEC materials supporting the messages of the national mobilization campaign.

In addition to these IEC materials, STEP-Up also produces six contractually required success stories to USAID on the project's impact in the education sector. This year, success stories will be packaged to be shared with the MESVTEE and its partners.

*Engage private sector to further support MESVTEE in partnerships to improve learner performance.* As a result of provincial-level PPP meetings facilitated by STEP-Up, PPP discussion lists have been created which provide a much needed forum for increased dialogue between key private sector actors and the MESVTEE. These PPP meetings have already produced results. For example, in Western Province, a mining company based in Solwezi has committed to providing incentives for the best performing teachers in the province. In Year 3, STEP-Up will utilize two approaches of facilitating PPPs. At the central level, STEP-Up will work closely with the MESVTEE to mobilize support from corporate institutions for both the external and internal aspects of the mobilization campaign. At the provincial and district levels, STEP-Up will facilitate interaction among civil society, the private sector, and the MESVTEE through a series of meetings that are focused on sharing challenges of education services delivery and the important role corporate institutions and civil society can play to improve learner performance, with a special concentration on improving early grade reading. This will build on past experience working in Northwestern, Copperbelt, and Southern provinces.

*Critical assumptions and potential challenges.* Achievement of the strategy for this task and the activities proposed will depend on the following assumptions and mitigation of the following potential challenges:

- There is leadership stability, particularly in the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum, which has been the task area's key entry point.
- The MESVTEE, through the Permanent Secretary, continues to take ownership of the strategic planning and implementation process by deliberately engaging in monitoring, supervising, and reporting on progress and learner performance using the learner performance improvement plans.

- The MESVTEE fully embraces the belief that reading and reading levels are a key barometer of success, and thus maintain the issue of reading levels as a central theme in their conversations and actions.
- The MESVTEE assumes a leading role in the mobilization campaign and provides feedback in a timely manner.
- The MESVTEE’s communications strategy is completed and approved.
- Private sector and other stakeholders are willing to enter into PPPs and contribute in other ways to mobilization campaign and other MESVTEE initiatives.

*Coordination points (key stakeholders).* Key stakeholders in implementation of activities under this task are:

- MESVTEE, all directorates and levels
- Other USAID-funded education projects
- Local communities, traditional and civic leaders
- Civil society organizations
- Private sector

#### Task 5: Engage Zambian institutions of higher education in educational research related to oversight, management, accountability and improved reading

*Task overview.* Although the MESVTEE conducts research, it is neither systematic nor strategic. There is a need to support a research agenda and nation-wide collaboration to address the many questions posed by the status of the education system in Zambia. Activities under this task are designed to encourage collaboration between the MESVTEE and universities and colleges around a common research agenda in education.

STEP-Up Zambia will provide assistance in bringing together applied action research on key policy issues now faced by the Zambian education system. This will be accomplished through a learning-by-doing strategy, in which faculty and graduate students from selected colleges, universities, and other higher education institutions (HEIs) work together in designing, conducting, and interpreting findings of field-based studies. Research questions will be generated through joint reflective sessions on key challenges identified from ministerial documents, including provincial learner performance improvement plans and other national documents including the national education policy, national implementation framework, as well as key informants in the system that are familiar with the challenges faced in daily work. Through this process of joint reflection, higher education institutions, ministry staff, and STEP-Up will effectively leverage their respective contributions as researchers, practitioners, and collaborators to bring about the required evidence for change to occur. This process of working together in identifying, recognizing, and appreciating each others’ contributions is intended to ensure that recommendations for policy shift or enhancement finds space in the Ministry’s national development priorities for education. The studies being proposed under this task also provide practicum experiences (e.g. internships) for graduate and post-graduate students.

Action research for education managers has been added as a new activity to this Year 3 work plan and will serve to integrate research into day-to-day work for education managers and leaders. While Zambia is already using action research as a tool to improve teacher instruction and student learning, it should be used to a greater extent to address issues related to learner performance and reading. Action research involves a cycle of identifying a problem, trying out an intervention to address the problem, and investigating how well it worked. The manager will repeat the cycle until a workable solution emerges based on experience. Action research is particularly helpful for managers who want to address complex problems with no known solution through repeated attempts to see what works best in their given context. It is also helpful to bring life to plans and transform ideas into actions since action research requires an intervention and follow-up analysis and reflection on how well the intervention worked to address a problem.

*Key achievements in Years 1 and 2.* During Years 1 and 2, STEP-Up, in consultation with various stakeholders at the national and district level, developed a collaborative framework for the process of research collaboration. This framework outlines the mechanism of how policy change is anticipated to take place premised on the project’s theory of change that “*when we improve oversight and management, we will get the results we wish to see in schools*”. In this context, HEIs are intended to offer evidence based on research conducted collaboratively with the MESVTEE to examine what can be done at various levels (school, district, provincial, and national) to improve education achievement through policy changes.

In Year 2, STEP-Up was able to successfully apply the research collaboration model with Charles Lwanga teacher training college and provincial and district staff from Southern Province. This model was used to undertake three collaborative studies focused on management of teaching and learning materials in schools, monitoring of teachers for effective learning, and learner assessment (see text box). These studies resulted in a set of policy recommendations that are now being acted upon by both the college and national and district level officials in the MESVTEE.

STEP-Up also oversaw the completion of 28 internships by students at Charles Lwanga College of Education, exceeding the project’s

**Recommendations Resulting from  
Year 2 Charles Lwanga Research Activities**

To improve **management of teaching and learning materials**, the MESVTEE should formulate policies and practices that seek to:

- Increase accessibility and use of teaching and learning materials
- Strengthen the use of talking walls in schools
- Educate parents on the importance of teaching and learning materials for their children’s education
- Encourage more writing exercises in both schools and colleges of education
- Better inventory existing materials at school, district, provincial, and central levels

To improve **monitoring of teachers for effective learning**, the MESVTEE should formulate policies and practices that seek to:

- Revise pre-service coursework and orientation programs
- Strengthen systems for internal monitoring
- Increase the number of in-service courses for teachers and administrators on reading methodologies for primary school
- Increase the availability of reading resources at all reading levels

To improve **learner assessment**, the MESVTEE should formulate policies and practices that seek to:

- Better address issues of gender equity and sensitivity
- Assess and communicate pupil reading levels
- Implement effective homework policies

annual target of 10 internships completed per year. Given planned activities for Year 3, it is likely STEP-Up will meet or possibly exceed its life of project target of 50 internships.

*Key goals for Year 3.* Building on achievements to date under Task 5, STEP-Up will help the MESVTEE begin putting into practice the recommendations of completed policy briefs, particularly in Southern Province. This will be carried out in accordance with the Gantt chart detailing actions and deadlines agreed upon with the Southern Province PEO in September 2013. Also, given the timeliness of this initial research in Southern Province in relation to policy development plans at MESVTEE headquarters, a key priority for STEP-Up this year will be the sustained dissemination and integration of these policy briefs at strategic MESVTEE and/or education sector forums. These efforts will help build a critical mass of education managers, practitioners, and other stakeholders that appreciate the significance of the policies developed or adjusted as a result of research efforts. This critical mass of people will equally be necessary for the continued efforts by HEIs to conduct policy-oriented research and also for other stakeholders to continue recognizing the importance of evidence-based policy.

STEP-Up will continue to prioritize internships in applied research studies and action research efforts. Education managers at provincial education offices will be encouraged to identify possible action research topics and also assist in analyzing and using this information for decision making and effecting operational change. In Year 3, we plan to work primarily with Eastern, Luapula, Central, North-Western, Northern, and Muchinga Provinces. Aside from Muchinga, where no HEI currently exists, these provinces have been targeted primarily due to the levels of interest and quality of proposals submitted during the 2013 call for proposals for HEI collaboration. These criteria should assist in ensuring the research efforts and change theory of STEP-Up is sustained as the project begins to scale down activities in 2015.

The key activities under Task 5 are as follows:

**Sub-Task Area 5.1: Collaboration between MESVTEE and higher education institutions in developing and implementing a research agenda related to learner performance increased**

*Conduct two applied research projects with University of Zambia and Zambia Institute of Special Education.* In Year 2, STEP-Up and its partner, the University of Minnesota, executed a request for proposals (RFP) to seek out two higher education institutions (HEIs) that would be keen to collaborate in two applied research projects. This RFP was issued to all HEIs supported by the MESVTEE that are providing primary teacher training. The RFP was used as a basis for evaluating the competency of the institution on the basis of selected criteria such as the past performance of the institution with regard to education research and

**Task 5: Year 3 Key Milestones**

- Two subcontracts to higher education institutions to undertake applied research in coordination with MESVTEE executed with at least 1 focused on equity
- HEI and/or partners provide a plan for policy and research integration
- Research symposium held and results of collaboration between STEP-Up and HEIs shared
- 10 action research projects conducted by MESVTEE staff
- 32 internships completed according to established criteria
- Action research activity included in at least 6 provincial work plans for 2014

educational activities; institutional capacities with emphasis on a vision for policy research; its personnel; and also the quality of the technical proposal.

It is from this selection exercise the University of Zambia and Zambia Institute of Special Education emerged as the top two institutions readily available to collaborate with STEP-UP. In Year 3, STEP-Up intends to engage in budget and work plan negotiations with these institutions as steps towards the award of two fixed price sub-contracts.

STEP-Up will follow the model of the collaborative framework developed in Year 1 to execute the sub-contract. This framework provides the guidance on expected roles and responsibilities of MESVTEE structures, HEIs, and STEP-Up throughout the research process and also formed the basis for execution of the pilot effort with Charles Lwanga College of Education. Furthermore, the project will continue to follow this framework by providing planning support for student preparation to undertake research, data analysis, and dissemination of results. STEP-Up will carefully monitor data collection to ensure timely and quality deliverables. This monitoring will be done with the participation of the Lusaka Province PEO, and to the extent possible, the MESVTEE headquarters, so that the Ministry in its entirety is engaged in the research policy process. A target of 32 interns from the HEIs will also be engaged during the research process. STEP-Up understands it is paramount that this research process translates research findings into actionable steps that improve learning outcomes. Therefore, STEP-Up will ensure all recommendations have a policy focus with respect to either improving existing policy in specific aspects or providing the evidence required to create a new policy where no policy exists. Part of the process also entails building political will and capacity to act on research findings so that learners are impacted.

*Support HEIs and/or MESVTEE to provide a plan for research and policy integration.* One of the strengths of STEP-Up support with regard to engaging HEIs in applied action research is the capacity to support evidence-based decision making for policy. STEP-Up will use results from the research undertaken in Year 3 and previous years to engage education policy decision makers in discussion on the meaning of these results. Ideally, the research information should guide a shift in the policy-making process from a subjective and rhetorical perspective to one that is based on sound evidence derived from research. STEP-Up will assist the Ministry in articulating a plan for policy and research integration. This plan will be informed by the recommendations and action items from the policy research so conducted. Policy and research integration activities include activities such as follow-up with Charles Lwanga, UNZA, and ZAMISE and the MESVTEE to develop policy and to continue a research relationship to use evidence for decision making; data dissemination events for research participants; learner performance improvement plan and work plan integration; and where feasible, defining memoranda of understanding with STEP-Up for continued interaction around research and policy development. The national research symposium will continue to be a foundational aspect of policy integration, and STEP-Up will facilitate the participation of its HEI partners on policy research.

### **Sub-Task Area 5.2: MESVTEE policies informed by applied action research in education**

*Identify a locally-based research agenda and provide guidance for policy-making.* The STEP-Up research collaborative framework is founded on supporting the MESVTEE's decentralized structures to carve out a research agenda that is relevant to policy and practice.

As reading is a foundational skill to improve learner performance, literacy skills will be a key focus of studies supported by STEP-Up in identifying a locally based research agenda.

In this regard, higher education institutions will be cardinal to increasing attention paid by the MESVTEE to educational challenges for research and action. Higher education institutions will engage in studies and offer evidence based on research conducted collaboratively with the Ministry to examine what can be done at various levels (school, district, province, and national) to improve educational achievement through policy or operational changes. STEP-Up envisions that an increasingly strategic and focused engagement between HEIs and the Ministry will result in improved collaboration and working relationships between these entities. As a result, the Ministry should be better able to leverage the contributions of HEIs to improve learner achievement through enhanced teacher preparation as well as through the provision of actionable policy recommendations to practicing educators and education managers. This type of ongoing collaboration will continually reinforce to educators throughout their own education and career of the importance of utilizing research and data to inform decisions. It will also allow for a continuum of research topics that eventually seek to address more complex issues facing the education system.

In Year 3, STEP-Up will work with the designated research officers at the MESVTEE to further the realization of a national research coordination committee at headquarters in Lusaka. Additional support will go towards supporting the Ministry in hosting the national research symposium, including the identification of strategic goals and outcomes that further sustainability of the initiative.

STEP-Up Zambia will also facilitate collaborative action research for education managers initially at the provincial and district levels, to eventually be shared at all levels of the system (i.e. MESVTEE headquarters, provincial, district, zone, and school zone levels). This research is intended to focus on quality improvements in management and leadership that influence reading within the primary education system. This is further premised from the notion that any system needs to be constantly reinvigorated. Action research is a tool that, when used creatively and systematically, creates changes to the system through a series of actions and reflection, thus transforming the Zambian educational system into a dynamic system focused on learner performance through responsive actions and management.

While intended to focus on all managers in the system at provincial and district levels, this effort will initially target 6 provinces, with approximately 4-5 staff members in each. It is expected that a total of at least 10 action research projects will be undertaken in Central, North-Western, Eastern, Northern, Muchinga, and Luapula provinces. These provinces have been prioritized because of the quality of proposals that came in following the RFP for applied research that were received; in the case of Muchinga, no HEI exists within the province, so STEP-Up would like to get some traction in the province with regard to engaging education managers in policy research.

### **Sub-Task Area 5.3: Opportunities for university students to conduct education-applied research created**

*Engage future education leaders through internship opportunities.* STEP-Up will engage a total of 50 interns during the life of the project. During Year 2, a total of 28 internships were completed by 10 student teachers and 18 lecturers in the Master's program. In Year 3, STEP-Up aims to engage 32 interns, including student teachers on diploma and postgraduate

students from UNZA. These internships are intended to instruct future education system managers in action-oriented research and implications for education policy. Ideally, interns would be involved in the entire research process – from data collection and analysis to dissemination and use. The success of these internships will be measured by the quality of outputs such as the analysis reports and briefs, and specifically the utility of these for further research and/or policy action.

*Develop internship agreement and tools to assess interns.* STEP-Up will develop an internship agreement and tools to assess interns that can be used on both applied and action research for education managers. Though interns are not yet anticipated for the action research for education managers, they may participate in the future. Since action research involves conceptualizing a small study premised on local data, data collection, and analysis (as well as an intervention), it would serve all of the purposes of the internship, though it would be done on a smaller scale than applied research studies.

*Critical assumptions.* Achievement of the strategy for this task and the activities proposed depends on the following assumptions:

- Assumes MESVTEE will adopt action research as a practice and incorporate it in the provincial work-plans.
- Institutions of higher learning express interest and commitment to participate in this type of policy research.
- Sufficient faculty and students express interest and follow-on commitment to participating in these research activities.
- Sufficient budget is made available by the higher education institutions to cover the time and expenses of faculty and students to participate in research design, data collection, and analysis and interpretation activities.
- Necessary MESVTEE and university approvals and support for activities described above are received in a timely manner.
- MESVTEE hosts research symposium in 2013.

*Coordination points (key stakeholders).* Key stakeholders in implementation of activities under this intermediate result are:

- UNZA and ZAMSIE colleges staff
- Faculty and graduate students at selected universities such as UNZA and where education managers are enrolled in a program
- Policy Unit of MESVTEE Planning and Information Directorate