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

**YEAR 4 WORK PLAN  
FY 2015: 1 OCTOBER 2014 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2015**

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## ACRONYMS

CHW	community health worker
CS	communication specialist
CLCE	Charles Lwanga College of Education
CSEN	children with special education needs
CIDRZ	Center for Infectious Diseases Research in Zambia
DA	decentralization advisor
DEBS	district education board secretary
DESO	district education standards officer
DHRA	directorate of human resources and administration
DSC	directorate of standards and curriculum
DMC	data management committees
DPI	directorate of planning and information
DPO	district planning officer
DRCC	district resource center coordinator
EBS	education broadcasting service
EMIS	education management information system
ETV	education television
GIS	geographic information system
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
HCT	HIV counseling and testing
HEI	higher education institution
HMF	health market fairs
HRO	human resource officer
ICT	information and communication technologies
IEC	information, education and communication
IMA	information management advisor
IM	information management
IMT	information management team
LEMIS	local education management information system
LPIS	learner program improvement strategy
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MESVTEE	Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
NAC	National AIDS Council
NAS	national assessment survey
NIF	national implementation framework
NIPA	national institute of public administration

NSC	national statistic census
OVC	orphans and vulnerable children
PA	provincial advisor
PAF	performance assessment framework
PEO	provincial education officer
PESO	provincial education standards officer
PMEP	performance monitoring and evaluation plan
PO	planning officer
PRCC	provincial resource center coordinators
PRTA	policy and research task area
PRO	public relations office
PSW	para social worker
PTA	parent teacher association
PPP	public private partnership
QC	quality control
RFP	request for proposals
RTS	Read to Succeed Project
SAF	special activities fund
SIR	sub-intermediate result
STTA	short-term technical assistance
SPLASH	Schools Promoting Learning Achievement through Sanitation and Hygiene Project
STEP-Up	Strengthening Educational Performance-Up Zambia project
TESS	teacher education and specialized services
TOT	training of trainers
TTL	Time to Learn Project
WFP	World Food Program
UMN	University of Minnesota
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNZA	University of Zambia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZAMISE	Zambia Institute of Special Education

## **Introduction**

USAID/Zambia's Strengthening Educational Performance-Up (STEP-Up) Zambia project assists 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 MESVTEE, 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 upon school systems that have demonstrated significant performance improvement as measured by learning outcomes. The project's 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 4 work plan covers the period of October 1, 2014 through September 30, 2015, 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 4 work plan is based on the revised scope of work approved and signed by USAID/Zambia on June 26, 2014. 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 yearly project targets. STEP-Up held a three-day workshop with MESVTEE staff in October 2014 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 three 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 Standards and Planning Directorates and our partner USAID/Zambia education projects.

The results framework (see Exhibit 1) outlines the results needed to support achievement of the development objective: *human capital improved* and the intermediate result of *improved educational achievement in reading by 2017*. STEP-Up works toward three sub-intermediate results (SIR) and five aligned task areas. The sub-intermediate results are:

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

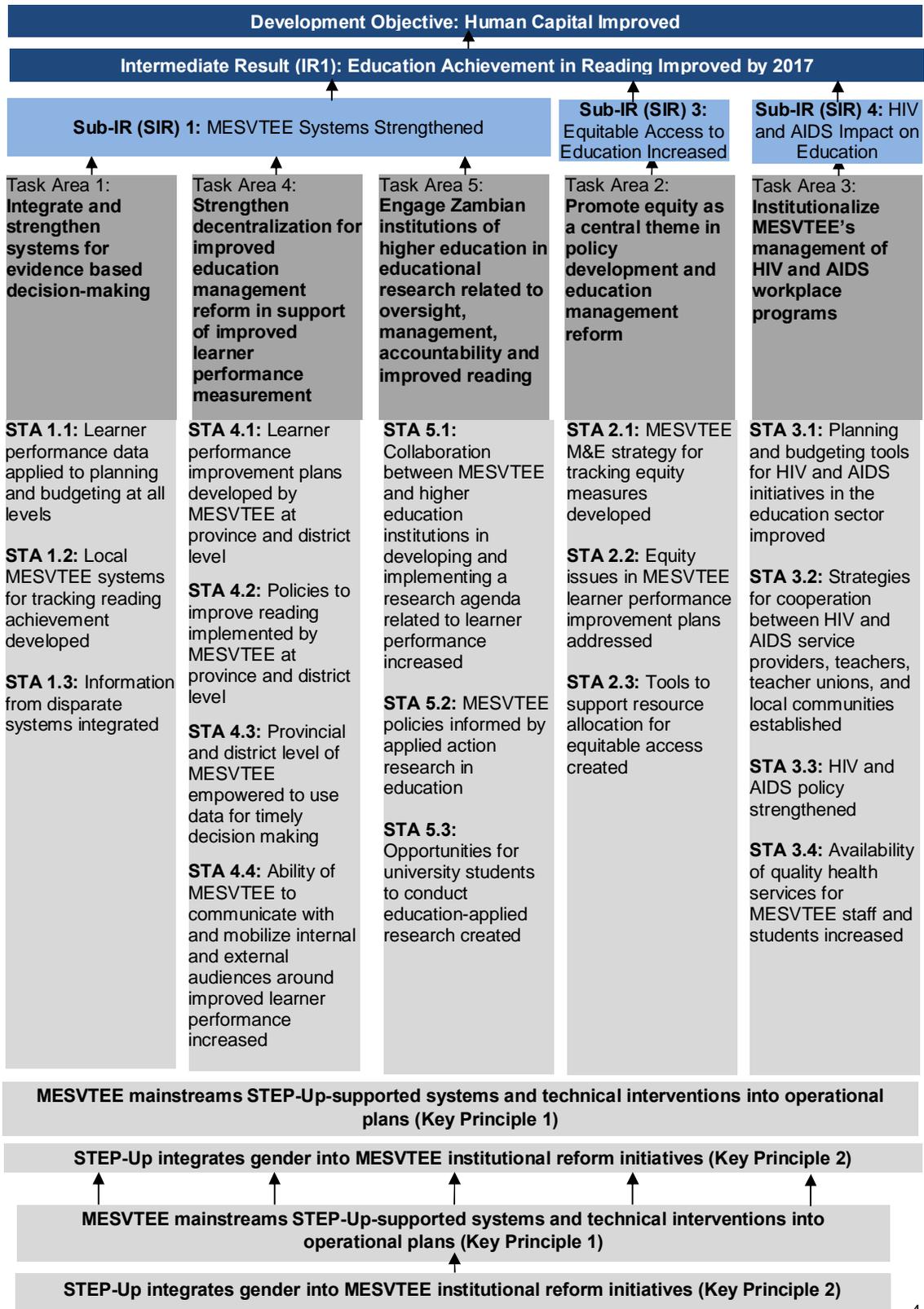
STEP-Up's five task areas are:

1. Integrate and strengthen systems for improved 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 learner performance (aligns with SIR 1)

5. Engage Zambian institutions of higher education in educational research related to school effectiveness and learning achievement (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 performance monitoring and evaluation plan (PMEP).

## Exhibit 1. STEP-Up Zambia Results Framework



## B. Year 4: ‘Making Things Stick’ at provincial and district levels

*Project Trajectory.* In 2014, the MESVTEE with the support of the cooperating partners and civil society initiated a new chapter in its search to improve learner achievement in schools, with a specific focus to improve reading skills at the lower primary school levels. Based on SACMEQ tests for 2008 and 2010<sup>1</sup>, Zambia remains in the bottom third of the Southern Africa region in relation to reading and mathematics results. For this reason, improving the literacy levels of Zambian children, especially those in rural areas whose mother tongue is?? other than English, has been the government’s focus since the early 2000s. More specifically, the Ministry through the Center for Curriculum Development has revamped the national (new) curriculum. The changes include carefully sequenced literacy instruction in seven official familiar languages as the medium of instruction to help children accelerate the acquisition of language and reading comprehension skills in grades 1 to 4. With successful piloting in 2013, the Ministry launched the revised national curriculum at a national level starting with grades 1, 5, 8 and 10<sup>2</sup>. STEP-Up supported the national launch of the revised curriculum together with the *Let’s Read Zambia* mobilization campaign on January 17<sup>th</sup> at Kabulonga Primary School led by the honorable Dr. John Phiri, Minister of Education.

In the first three years of the project, a significant change in the mindsets and practices has been seen in individual education officers becoming increasingly accountable for learning outcomes at school level. These officers had to overcome the traditional education management mindset of *inspectors of a system* versus *agents of change* or *learning promoters* who enable struggling schools to improve learning outcomes. This traditional mindset undermined the motivation to expand reform from small scale successes at an individual school or district level (*patches of green*), to large-scale systemic change (*fields of green*) in the overhaul of Zambia’s education system. STEP-Up is serving as an agent of change to promote improvement from the ground up involving Ministry officers by improving their management skills.

### **Mwinilunga District Takes Action**

During the roll out of the curriculum for grade 1, the district tracked achievement using assessment data each month and directed extra materials or teacher training resources to the schools that were behind. By actively using data to focus scarce resources more effectively, schools reporting data improved from 61% to 100% in the 2014 school year. At the end of term 2, the district tallied 1,121 new break-through learners in Grade 1.

In year one, the STEP-Up team initiated this change journey by taking Ministry leaders to visit schools and ask a simple question: “How many of your children are reading?” Exposure to what was really happening in schools ignited a desire to do something about what they

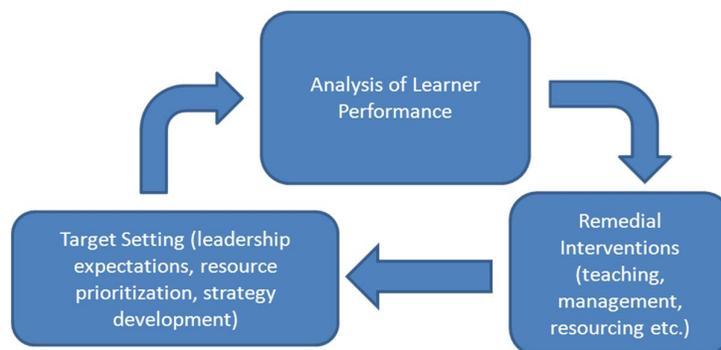
<sup>1</sup> SACMEQ is the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring and Evaluation of Quality survey.

<sup>2</sup> Roll out is planned in a staggered way as follows: in 2016, Grades 2, 6, 9 and 11; in 2017, Grades 3, 7 and 12, and in 2018 conclude with Grade 4.

saw. After a critical mass of Zambia’s central, provincial and district officers had their own “aha moments” through dozens of experiential visits, STEP-Up worked with counterparts in the Directorate of Standards to develop the learner performance improvement strategy (LPIS). This tool helped establish targets to improve reading outcomes and to plan and allocate their management efforts and scarce resources toward achieving goals. Throughout much of Year 2 and 3, STEP-Up provincial advisors guided all ten provinces and (81) districts through the strategic planning process, which put learner performance at its core. Provincial and district education officers were empowered to lead the effort through self-assessment of their own plans, grading their progress against standardized criteria and taking actions to rectify where necessary; they set their own reading targets and identified the practical steps needed to progress towards their goals based on early evidence from the data collected through their end-of-term assessments of reading proficiency. Through a ground up process, MESVTEE officers from central to the school level understand learner performance is at the heart of how Zambia will improve its National Implementation Framework (NIF) quality indicators, especially literacy. As a result, the project helped the MESVTEE develop and institute 62 policies and guidelines in areas such as distribution of textbooks, provincial teacher transfers to match language of instruction, in addition to reallocating existing resources to better focus scarce resources towards learning achievements.

In Year 4, STEP-Up will build on the momentum and positive excitement created from the early grade reading results in Grade 1 to motivate provincial and district leaders to redouble efforts in tracking the LPIS against their reading targets for 2015. The overarching goal will be to help Zambia achieve the Ministry’s goal of one million new readers by the end of school year 2016. 2015 is the year to get change to stick at the provincial and district levels, because it is at these local levels where reform takes hold in the long run. STEP-Up will hone in on sharing best practices with respect to resource planning, budgeting by results and evidence-based management decision-making in 40 targeted districts across all ten provinces.

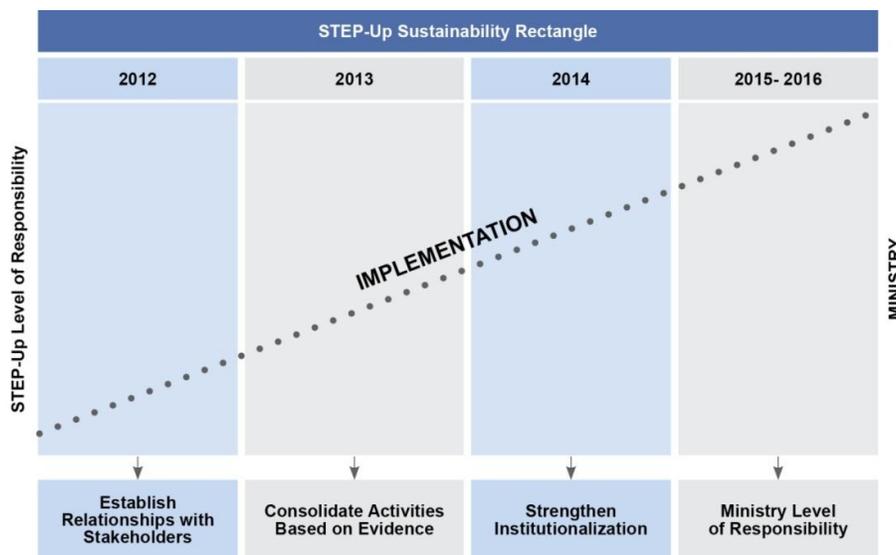
**Figure 1: Learner-Centered Education Management Reform**



During this year, the project team will enable provinces and districts to link data from local education management information system (LEMIS) with the policy actions and better management decisions based on each provincial strategic plan. Linking improved results in

schools due to improve policies at the district level will prove to be a powerful incentive for provinces to keep tracking their data and seeing the direct outcomes of each priority area. As the project approaches Year 5, the goal is to shift from project-based technical assistance to one built on a peer-to-peer network among provincial education officers (PEO) and district education board secretaries (DEBS). To this end, each STEP-Up task manager will be working with each provincial team to design a step-by-step hand over process and an exit strategy from each province. The project will leave each provincial team well trained and motivated to 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 4:* Critical to Year 4 activities, STEP-Up will connect data from existing sources to a locally managed LEMIS tool. Additional highlights include the following:

- Implementation of the project’s gender gap analysis recommendations, specifically improving reporting on locally-specific equity matters such as disaggregated reading assessment data, OVCs and other gender-sensitive data from the school census.
- Approval of the Ministry’s revised HIV and AIDS policy for the education sector.
- Expansion of the *Let’s Read Zambia* mobilization campaign and the MESVTEE communications strategy to promote public-private partnerships with the broader non-government sector, including private businesses, foundations, faith-based and civil organizations.
- Promotion of action research at the provincial level linking local MESVTEE officers with local higher education institutions to use applied research for policy dialogue on local education issues.

These are just a sampling of activities of the year ahead; details about all of our Year 4 activities and milestones for each task area can be found in Section C and the accompanying Gantt chart.

In the coming year, STEP-Up will continue operating side-by-side and in full support of the Ministry's national strategic plan objectives in order for the proposed activities in our work plan to be embraced at all levels of the institution. To facilitate the Ministry's collaboration and ownership of the work plan, the project convened on September 4, 2014, for a one-day round-table discussion with all ten Provincial Education Officers (PEOs) and central Ministry staff to discuss project's progress to date and expected provincial goals for the coming year. This information was shared and served as a starting point for the activities outlined in this year's work plan.

In summary, the project will continue to build the capacity of education administrators through one-on-one mentoring and targeted technical workshops on planning, budgeting and resource allocation at the district level, particularly linked to the roll-out and needs associated with the revised curriculum.

In line with project's trajectory, we will apply the following strategies in Year 4:

*Ensure all actions are focused on learner performance as a measure of accountability.* In line with MESVTEE priorities, STEP-Up will continue placing learner improvement at the core of all activities. Our approach to learner-centered education management reforms proposes a continual cycle analyzing learner performance based on reading and math data versus expected targets that in turn generates policy discussions and interventions to improve performance. When interventions are built around learners, resources can be directly linked to beneficiaries and tracked during each school term. For this reason, STEP-Up will work with MESVTEE units to strengthen the district's reporting mechanisms and link learning achievement and other outcomes to local financial and technical resources.

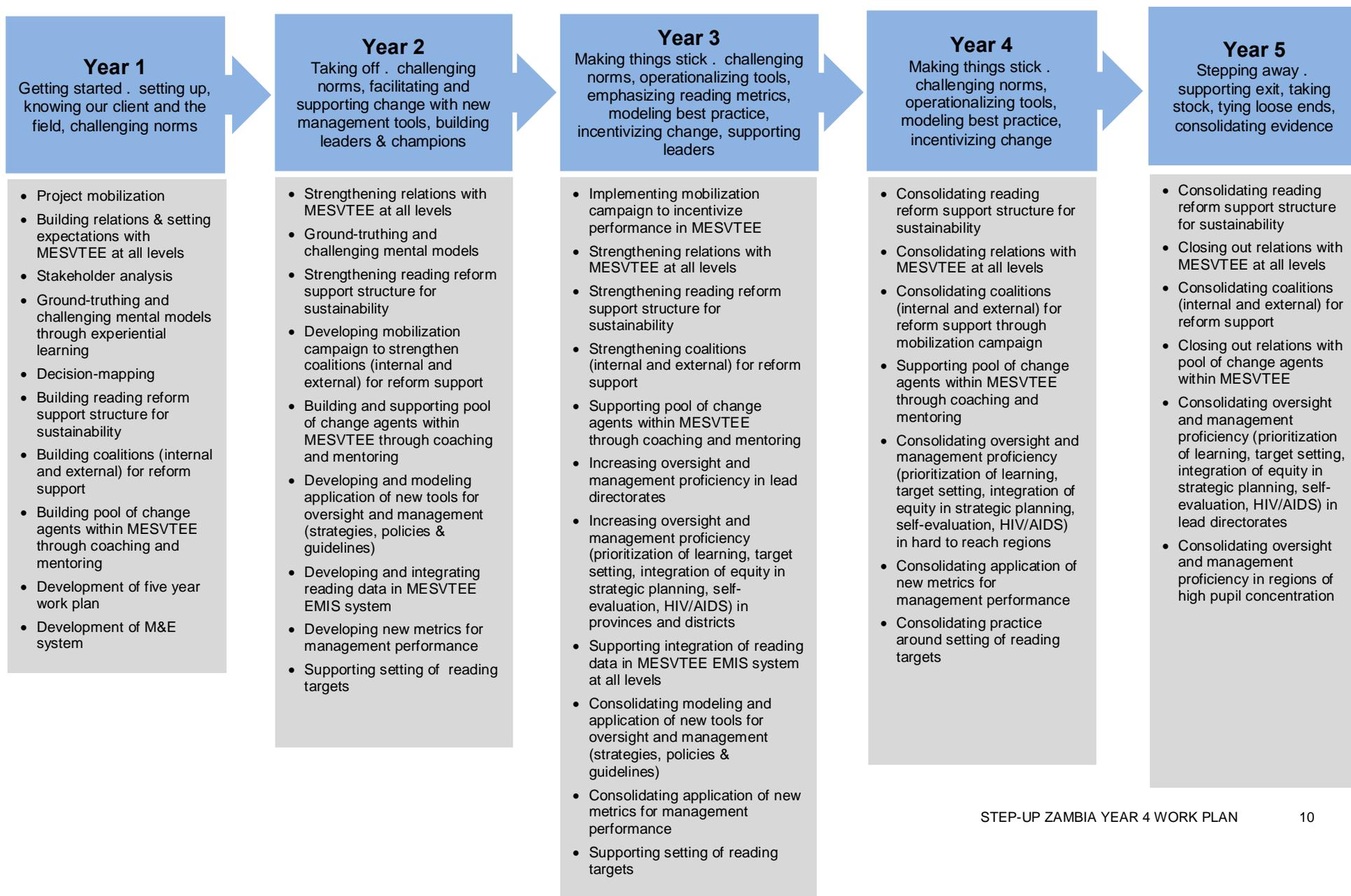
*Increase collaboration and integration across USAID-funded projects.* STEP-Up's programming offers cohesive support to the Ministry at all levels through the integration and strengthening of management practices and systems for improved decision-making. In Year 4, STEP-Up will leverage its successful relationship with the MESVTEE's Permanent Secretary, Directorates of Standards and Curriculum, Planning and Information and Human Resources and Administration to the remaining Directorates so that real systemic reform can happen. Furthermore, STEP-Up will redouble efforts to coordinate activities at the provincial level with USAID-funded sister projects in the specific districts where we intersect. The project will incorporate lessons learned from other partners in order to help districts fine-tune their current targets and improve supervision of schools to attain better learner reading results. As the project completes year 4, STEP-Up's provincial advisors will play a more facilitation role with their PEOs and DEBS to help them lead tracking results against established targets as the project initiates its exit from each province.

*Invest project resources as an incentive (catalytic agent) to promote local change champions.* STEP-Up's revised scope of work and budget realignment is premised on the idea that the MESVTEE allocate its own resources and leverage external sources such as PPP investments more effectively towards learner performance outcomes. As the project reaches the end of Year 4, STEP-Up will continue to find opportunities to share costs with the Ministry, cooperating partners and other USAID/Zambia education projects when themes overlap or specific activities are complementary, especially in common themes around the *Let's Read, Zambia* mobilization campaign. At local levels, STEP-Up will coordinate project trainings around the Ministry's calendar of events capitalizing on times where administrators will already be brought together for their own planning meetings. Further, STEP-Up task managers working at the project's offices at the MESVTEE will continue to improve coordination with key Directorates and plan our activities closely in line with Ministry's national activities timetable such as start and end of terms and examination periods from October to December of each year.

*Carry out Year 4 activities with an exit strategy for each province in mind.* In the first quarter of 2015, the project will present an exit strategy paper for the project's interventions in the provinces. The specific exit strategy actions will begin in school year 2015 with the provincial advisors and continue into 2016 through periodic follow up technical assistance visits. At the central level, the exit strategy will include defining the 'home' within the Ministry's management structures for each task area and engage the respective counterparts early on to ensure a smooth and methodical transfer of materials, tools and practical 'know-how' from each project task area. These actions are premised in the principle that sustainability of our interventions depends on achieving a critical mass of education administrators demonstrating the new management practices and leadership based on improved evidence-based decision making, active leadership and improved reporting for accountability. For this reason, the project's goal is to target 40 leading district in each of the ten provinces to serve as models for their peer districts.

Exhibit 3 illustrates the overall trajectory and priorities of Year 4 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 towards an overall improvement in system performance.

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



## C. Detailed Year 4 Activities by Task Area

In the following section, we provide a detailed explanation of the activities that STEP-Up plans to undertake in Year 4. 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 improved evidence based decision-making**

*Task overview.* A key objective for STEP-Up under Task 1 is to assist the MESVTEE to meet the informational needs of central, provincial and district education managers as well as school head teachers, teachers and parents. Meeting the demand for information is part of a broader goal to help the MESVTEE assume ownership of developing more effective management practices. Access to relevant, timely data equips district administrators with the information needed to better manage resource allocation and develop new education policies and plans that address equity gaps and improve learner performance especially through early grade reading.

Improving the process of collection, integration and analysis of learner performance data will be crucial in Year 4. As such, STEP-Up is working with the MESVTEE to leverage its existing education management information system (EMIS) to serve as the official reference to improve accurate school count and tracking of learners. More accurate and reliable school census data ensures that data collected through other various mechanisms (i.e. EGRA, water and sanitation surveys and feeding programs among other) can be connected through standard geographical and school coding. This standardization enables data to be collated, cross-checked and analyzed at the district level. In Year 4, STEP-Up will finalize a simple learner tracking tool based on the red-level tracker system, already in use in all schools, which will link to the LEMIS. The effort is meant to nurture a management culture from the ground up that uses data for decision-making, which is a shift from the traditional organizational culture of collecting data for the sole purpose of reporting upwards to one that first analyzes data to address local needs.

*Key achievements in Years 1, 2 and 3.* In the first three years, STEP-Up provided technical assistance to the MESVTEE in core concepts and technical skills related to processing the collection of the annual census data using Ed\*Assist<sup>3</sup>. STEP-Up invested in the most pressing data needs, including updating software, validating data and ensuring that schools in all 103 districts were accounted for in the system appropriately, particularly in districts that recently split into two or more new districts. Due to the project's ongoing support, the Ministry was

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<sup>3</sup> Ed\*Assist is a legacy MS-Access database system running since the early 2,000s that collects the Ministry's annual national census statistics.

able to disseminate their statistical bulletins with graphics and tables of key education indicators to a wider education sector audience in a timely manner.

In FY2014, STEP-Up worked with MESVTEE to obtain the Permanent Secretary's endorsement to formalize the DMC structure within Ministry functions as a mechanism to track learner performance results and management accountability at the district level. The Permanent Secretary approved and disseminated the circular and guidelines to PEOs in February 2014. In turn, the PAs worked in their respective provinces to facilitate the formation of and kick-start provincial DMCs with PEOs as the focal point persons for quarterly meetings. Similarly at the district level, the DEBS will form their DMCs and serve as the focal point person. In the first quarter of Year 4, STEP-Up will support harmonization of data across districts by developing a common data dictionary, ensuring there is agreement on the interpretation of education indicators as part of the DMCs' data collation, use and analysis activities.

*Key goals for Year 4.* In Year 4, STEP-Up will focus on three interlinked activities based on the technical scope of work deliverables and expected targets in our PMEP. First, the project will promote raising awareness and momentum based on the early reading assessment results of Grade 1. By raising the Ministry's knowledge and importance of this indicator, STEP-Up will build training and capacity building peer-to-peer workshops on the use and analysis of district data through the data management committees. Secondly, we will pilot the use of LEMIS as a tool to systemically collect and track learner grades, contact hours/days and other key indicators at school-level that impact learning. Classroom-level grades will be compiled and entered into the system to track language and math results for each grade in each school. The LEMIS will help standardize the information and provide a summarized report on the progress of each district after each term. As a third and final step, the project will bolster instant information dissemination through the use of an innovative off-the-shelf mobile data application for data retrieval and consultation on Internet-enabled devices<sup>4</sup>. This information will allow end users with basic smartphones or computers with access to the Internet to consult and use LEMIS information for each district.

**Task 1: Year 4 Key Milestones**

- Data management committees in all ten provinces track learner performance data based on their monthly results
- Target districts adopt the district management tool (LEMIS)
- National policy dialogue forum on Zambia's education quality, equity and efficiency indicators

During the coming year, technical activities will be carried out by an Information Management Team (IMT) composed of STEP-Up specialists and a cadre of short term systems support and data analysts. The tasks will be conducted through targeted scopes of

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<sup>4</sup> Devices here are any data-enabled device. The purpose of off-the-shelf product is to ensure that patches and upgrades continue after the initial application is developed.

work and specific deliverables in close coordination with the needs of the provinces and districts. STEP-Up will double its efforts to coordinate collaboration with the other three USAID-funded education projects: Time to Learn, Read to Succeed and SPLASH, as well as with the WFP, UNICEF, CAMFED and other data harmonization initiatives at local level.

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**

*Promote use of learner performance data in provinces and districts.* The project will continue working with provincial advisors who will convene and lead the initial DMCs monthly meetings in the 40 targeted districts with pre-defined topics and assignments. Through a well-scripted series of assignments for each DMC, STEP-Up will promote an environment where PEOs and DEBS come to expect and demand school reports and performance data on a regular basis. Provincial advisors will roll out an accelerated DMC training agenda in first quarter of 2015. The initial themes and assignments for the DMCs will be proposed in consultation with the central Ministry. Issues related to data collection, verification and analysis based on districts' information needs will eventually become part of this training agenda. Some of the key topics will be completing a master list of schools and accounting for fledgling community schools, especially non-gazetted<sup>5</sup> schools with volunteer teachers that serve hard to reach and extremely poor populations, sometimes unaccounted for in the national census.

Through the DMCs, the PAs will lead basic review courses on the most common education indicators, how they are calculated, and most importantly how they should be interpreted in the context of their own district. These exercises will enable district officers to better appreciate the importance of validated data and their significance as an essential skill for district administrators. However, in order to be able to calculate reading and math levels, a solid DEBS needs to encourage and enforce school reporting of week 5, 10 and 13 data for each term as required. Recent ad-hoc project surveys revealed a correlation between reliable school reporting schedules and strong district leadership. During Year 4, the project will strengthen the link between strong district leadership with their ability to report learner results for their districts on a timely basis.

*Review the planning and budgeting process and initiate alignment of operational plans with resource allocation at the central, provincial and district levels.* Through the existing bottom-up approach, the project will strengthen the link between the decision-making of financial resources to provincial learner performance results. Building on the Ministry's own processes, STEP-Up will actively prepare for the provincial bi-annual review to provide technical assistance on how budgeting and execution of resources is affecting (or not)

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<sup>5</sup> Gazetted is the colloquial term for community schools that are officially recognized and supported by the MESVTEE through the assignment of a government-paid teacher(s) and/or provision of other resources.

provincial learning outcomes. This process will enable provinces to prepare for their yearly planning and budgeting plans for 2016. For example, the project will select a list of priority districts based on their high and low performance data to improve their work planning and budgeting to identify resource gaps and priority areas to invest their funds. The activity will be based on the Ministry's calendar starting in June 2015. It will be conducted in two stages: STEP-Up will initially hold a one-day workshop at the central Ministry with selected officials from the Directorates of Standards, Curriculum, Planning and Information on how to drill-down and use district-level data in their learner performance improvement plans for their annual budgeting process. Based on this initial work, the project will replicate the exercise in the provinces and priority districts to ensure similar criteria and data is referenced and used to prepare their budgets. STEP-Up will utilize the experiential learning model based on actual cases and examples to the greatest extent possible, to get real buy-in from the Ministry.

*Strengthen data management committees at provincial and district levels as hubs for data analysis and dissemination.* STEP-Up's IMT, in collaboration with the central Ministry's Directorates for Planning & Information and Curriculum & Standards, will coordinate how the DMCs serve as the engine for data harmonization and integration at the local level. STEP-Up will carry out targeted meetings to sensitize the members of the DMCs on their roles and responsibilities as a key structure for monitoring and reporting school performance and learner improvement results in their provincial and district offices. As stated in the Permanent Secretary's circular creating the DMCs, our 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 provincial level. For example, the DMC will seek to connect teacher-pupil ratio, absenteeism or lack of materials with data coming from different sources (i.e. teacher transfers, school feeding programs, early marriage) to be able to find potential linkages between learner test results and external factors impacting performance.

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

The MESVTEE has successfully maintained more than ten years of school census data through their central education management database based on yearly school questionnaires. This legacy database system, called Ed\*Assist, contains an impressive amount of data on roughly 9,000 schools, 94,000 teachers and 3.5 million pupils. As mentioned above, this database serves as the official reference and link to other systems and databases based on the unique school code. However, this database does not include quality indicators to track school, teacher or learner performance. To supplement this information, STEP-Up has supported provinces to develop simple but effective tools to track both assessment and reading levels throughout the school year. These Excel-based sheets serve as a basis for districts to report breakthrough readers. The challenge is to capture and link this data to the national EMIS data. STEP-Up will work through the DMCs to ensure the LEMIS can link into annual census data with termly school reports including enrolment, learner grades, teachers present and days off. The LEMIS will provide up-to-date, easy to manage learning data across the district to help improve management practices based on performance. The

tool will aggregate district data for the provinces to systematize, capture, process and report on data that is timely, accurate and most importantly relevant to track reading and math results at the end of each term.

*Continue development and roll out of LEMIS application.* In line with STEP-Up's standard procurement process, the project will release a request for proposals (RFP) for both local and international firms, evaluate technically-sound bids for best value and make an award. The selected subcontractor will develop and implement the tool(s) according to the RFP's technical requirements based on the inputs and outputs required for the LEMIS. For the technical requirements, the project has taken into account the existing data collection tools in selected provinces as reference on actual user needs and information requirements for the LEMIS. The subcontractor will collaborate with STEP-Up's IMT, the Ministry's Planning and Systems Directorate, sister projects and other key representatives to ensure the tool utilizes consistent school coding based on harmonization exercises conducted at the DMCs. Furthermore, the project will seek to strengthen the usefulness of the tool by linking it with Examination Council's test results for Grades 5, 7, 9 and 12 using the unique EMIS school codes in order to access school level assessment results. As part of the LEMIS roll-out process, the subcontractor will conduct end-user training, targeting staff from various levels of the MESVTEE, especially local planning officers, district education standards officers and human resources officers.

In addition to the software development, STEP-Up's IMT will identify the human and computing needs for the system to be adopted and operated successfully at the district level. With support from short-term local ICT experts, the IMT will work alongside the project's PAs to assess the skills of the targeted district's human resources and infrastructure capacity. This assessment includes measuring simple statistical abilities such as calculating the average, median and mode of test results and more advanced analysis such as frequency and projections based on monthly school data.

In order to maximize data use and reporting of the LEMIS, STEP-Up will take into account the district's ICT infrastructure (existing and ideal hardware platform, connectivity, etc.) and other logistical constraints that might impact the long-term sustainability of a LEMIS. STEP-Up will revive the existing Ministry's school map information already stored in legacy EMIS database and contract short technical assistance to update new schools and clean existing 8,500 school geo-coordinate points already captured in the database. With an updated longitude and latitude coordinates, the project will maximize the power of maps to present school, teacher and learner data on a geographic information system (GIS) platform using thematic coloring, bubble graphs and other graphic techniques to reflect trends, clustering and outliers with respect to reading next to other key data such as girl dropout rates, pupil-teacher ratio, access to main roads and other factors affecting school performance.

*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. They will also review 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 MESVTEE with education dashboard based on existing technology and mobile communication tools to improve access to information.* In order for data to affect policy and management decisions, it is necessary for the data to be readily available in an easy-to-use Web-format dashboard. For this reason, STEP-Up will explore options to access more in depth data mining of existing data sources and reflect the results of such analysis in a simple user-friendly online dashboard of key performance indicators. The education indicators will be determined in close collaboration with MESVTEE and its directorates. For example, the project will pilot tracking certain PAF indicators at the provincial level such as breakthrough readers, teacher pupil ratios and end-of-year results. The dashboard will take further advantage of as many publicly available data sources such as national population census from the Central Statistical Office (CSO), ECZ examination results and its national assessment survey (NAS). The linking of the data with statistical open source software tools will empower the Ministry to produce new information based on available data sources. The dashboard will be shared in an online and offline (hard copy) version to promote policy dialogue on key educational issues especially at the district level. The dashboard will provide easy-to-read graphics for policy dialogue and dissemination. Under this effort, the project will pilot a mobile solution to retrieve information for reference and decision making on data-enabled smartphones.

### **Sub-Task Area 1.3: Information roadmap to integrate disparate systems in support of improved education management developed**

*Assess data access and communication between administrative, financial and educational information systems.* The MESVTEE has a handful of 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 administrative systems contain interrelated information, which should be linked and accessed in an integrated platform. Currently, these systems are not linked nor communicate to each other, making analysis of critical information difficult and inaccurate. Furthermore, these systems are unable to be linked to the extensive school and student data housed in the EMIS and LEMIS. Part of the challenge is the lack of an updated Ministry ICT strategy that can help frame the current data constraints, accessibility and more importantly, the type of reports that can be prepared by linking data from each source. A strategy can help frame expectations and provide a roadmap for a more effective information platform to link and retrieve information across systems. For this reason, STEP-Up will utilize short-term technical assistance to prepare a report with technical and cost recommendations to allow these disparate systems (i.e. financial, bursary and human resource) to communicate based on

a common standard platform centered on learner results to better inform policy reforms and resource allocation. Following this assignment, STEP-Up will produce a brief report with recommendations for a common information platform (often called Enterprise Resource Planning system ERP) that will be used to inform the MESVTEE on their key reports. The analysis will tap into the best practices in data mining, retrieval and visualization.

***Critical assumptions and potential challenges.*** Achievement of the strategy for this task and the activities outlined 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
- Central Statistics Office (CSO) for population census data
- Examinations Council of Zambia for examination results
- Other USAID-funded education projects ó Time to Learn, Read to Succeed and SPLASH
- Other PEPFAR implementers
- Other education cooperating partners and relief agencies: DFID, UNICEF, WFP among others.

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

*Task overview.* In line with the *Education for All* framework, special consideration will be given to those categories of learners who tend to fall through the cracks of the educational system: orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), girls, young pregnant students dropping 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 because the education community is not allocating and prioritizing sufficient resources, time or attention to these problems.

To galvanize support for these populations, STEP-Up Zambia is working with the education community as a whole to: develop equity measures and tracking tools, support the prioritization of equity issues within MESVTEE strategic and operational plans and strengthen resource allocation management tools at the provincial level.

*Key achievements in Years 2 and 3.* In Year 2, STEP-Up conducted a gender and equity assessment that provided recommendations and an action plan on tangible steps the project and the MESVTEE can take to better address equity issues. 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 review data to prioritize equity issues, but there is a lot of work to do in Year 4 to ensure all provinces and districts follow suit.

**Task 2: Year 4 Key Milestones**

- Equity gaps analysis disseminated to Ministry
- Equity indicators and data incorporated into LEMIS
- **Equity guidelines and reforms adopted based on local data**

*Key goals for Year 4.* STEP-Up with Ministry counterparts are leading home-grown equity initiatives to improve access to education for all. With STEP-Up leadership, PEOs will lead DMC reviews of updated, disaggregated data to identify specific equity gaps, magnitude of gaps and data trends in order to devise recommendations for policies and guidelines to narrow these gaps. This activity provides a forum for provinces to regularly track progress of equity initiatives, including resource allocation and services for disadvantaged populations. This forum also institutionalizes feedback loops, allowing provinces to evaluate the effect of initiatives and continually fine-tune approaches to maximize impact or scale successful programs into system-wide reforms.

The key activities under Task 2 are as follows:

**Sub-Task Area 2.1: MESVTEE gender strategy for tracking equity measures developed**

*Review 2010 - 2013 data by district to identify equity gaps.* To better understand existing equity gaps, PAs will work with provincial officers to 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 and gender disaggregation). This task will be done in collaboration with Task Areas 1, 3 and 5 with support from short-term local experts who will work with the STEP-Up M&E team. This exercise will result in an equity gap analysis papers based on locally-specific and current data with recommended follow-up action plan for each province.

*Collaborate with MESVTEE to develop equity measures.* Currently the Ministry only disaggregates data by sex, grade and age, while learner performance indicators have been equated solely with progression rates from grade to grade and pass rates on national exams at Grades 7, 9 and 12. In addition, they do not adequately track how students from disadvantaged groups are doing or how effective existing policies related to disadvantaged groups actually are. In collaboration with Task 1, STEP-Up will work with the MESVTEE to incorporate equity indicators as required data inputs for the LEMIS. This will result in measuring effectiveness of existing policies and providing the opportunity to the Ministry to continually assess and adjust programming through provincial management.

*Revise and refine data collection tools to include required equity data.* Last year STEP-Up reviewed 179 MESVTEE reading improvement tools to identify equity data fields. The review revealed that almost no instrument included equity data except for sex. For this reason, STEP-Up will work to connect equity data from annual school census with LEMIS data to be able to cross-reference equity-related data such as OVCs served by type, physically/mentally ó impaired students, children with learning difficulties and children living with HIV and AIDS. This cross-reference based on equity indicators will help the MESVTEE generate fresh information on equity issues in their provinces.

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

*Support policy actions to mitigate equity gaps at the province level through the data management committees.* Based on the equity gaps analysis, STEP-Up will work with DMCs to propose local policies and guidelines on how to address the equity gaps identified according to each province. The policies will determine how they will address issues of inequity in primary education for disadvantaged groups including rural populations, girls, OVCs and children with special educational needs.

*Facilitate sharing of best practices between provinces and districts.* STEP-Up will support the PEOs as they guide the districts to include equity activities in the district and school level learner program improvement strategies (LPIS). It is important that the PEOs take on a stronger leadership role in the process, to build their capacity and ownership of the activity. Through collaboration with the Task 1, 3 & 5 teams, a measurement of the extent to which equity issues are addressed and implemented will be discussed during provincial review meeting and quarterly DMC meetings facilitated by the PEOs. As an example, STEP-Up supported the local DEBS for Mpulungu district to provide services for a physically impaired

pupil. The DEBS informed the Ministry of Community Development and Mother & Child Health (MCDMCH) who immediately brought a wheelchair to allow the pupil to attend school. The case was followed up with a trip with the DEBS and the STEP-Up team to check the pupil's progress. This example can serve show case the best practice to other districts and schools. They can learn how to equity issues that are cross-cutting and can be resolved through partnerships between ministries, local community and school. For this reason, STEP-Up will capture specific examples and best practices to share with MESVTEE staff, including zonal heads and teachers.

### **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 like MCDMCH to track data about resource allocation for disadvantaged groups. In collaboration with the Ministry, STEP-Up will facilitate the process of linking existing EMIS data on disadvantaged groups to the LEMIS in order to evaluate equity at local level.

STEP-Up will also provide technical support to key managers at the provincial and district levels on performing brief equity surveys focused on issues in the LPIS process and effective resource allocation for disadvantaged groups. Technical support will include ongoing mentorship to provincial officers to ensure their strategic plans, annual work plans and budgets include an equity and gender component.

*Raise awareness and promote discussion on equity gaps during Ministry's bi-annual review meetings at provincial level.* STEP-Up will encourage the Ministry to share progress made on identified equity gaps and how they were addressed within respective provinces. The provinces will also be encouraged to share budget breakdown allocations towards equity and gender cases including how they managed to track resource allocation using LEMIS and other available systems. STEP-Up will encourage provinces or districts to share how they have handled issues around early marriages, pregnancies, reducing distances between schools in rural vs. urban areas and OVC.

***Critical assumptions and potential challenges.*** Achievement of the strategy for this task and the activities outlined 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
- PAs, 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, Directorates of Curriculum and Standards, HRA, Special Education
- FAWEZA, CAMFED and ZAMISE
- Leaders of special education schools
- Ministry of Gender and Child Development (MGCD)
- Parents Teacher Associations (PTA)
- Local traditional leaders and the private sector
- MCDMCH

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

*Task overview.* Under Task 3, STEP-Up will continue to support the MESVTEE to address work place stigma and ameliorate impact of HIV and AIDS and ill health on quality education services provided in school. HIV and AIDS related illnesses killed approximately 31,000 Zambians in 2011 (UNAIDS, 2012). Many teachers and pupils are absent from school because they are managing their illness or that of a family member. STEP-Up is assisting the MESVTEE to develop and implement HIV and AIDS workplace policies to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS by supporting teachers and pupils in living 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 programming in the education sector is multi-dimensional; it includes interventions for teachers, other staff, learners and the community. A demand-driven approach ensures that policies in place are implemented, especially at district and school levels.

*Key achievements in Years 1, 2 and 3.* Over the last three years, STEP-Up has increased the uptake of HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) services in the education sector. For individuals that have tested positive for HIV and AIDS the intervention aims to decrease absenteeism and attrition through increased uptake of HIV and AIDS services, specifically HCT and ART treatment. To date, the project has reached 107,362 teachers, other staff, learners and community members with HIV awareness-raising and mobilization activities. A total of 84,453 were reached in Year 2 covering five provinces: Copperbelt, Lusaka, Central, Eastern, and Northern. In Year 3 the remaining 22,909 were attended to in the other

five provinces, namely Southern, North Western, Western, Muchinga and Luapula. To strengthen community health and address health gaps that impede quality education, nearly 40,318 teachers, other staff, learners and community members have been counseled and tested for HIV and AIDS; nearly 24,000 in Year 2 in five provinces: Copperbelt, Lusaka, Central, Eastern, and Northern. In Year 3, an additional 16,318 of the targeted group accessed HCT in the other five provinces.

Another key achievement includes training 1,500 Para Social Workers (PSW) and Community Health Workers (CHW). This group is now equipped with skills to identify structures and systems available to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS and provide care and support services at local level to individuals requiring these services. In Year 2, 1,000 CHWs were trained in four provinces: Lusaka, Central, Northern and Eastern. In Year 3, an additional 533 CHWs received training in the other six provinces: Copperbelt, Southern, North Western, Western, Muchinga and Luapula.

MESVTEE re-engaged STEP-Up to provide technical assistance with finalizing the national HIV and AIDS education sector policy, which earlier had been submitted to the Cabinet Office and was returned to the MESVTEE with requests for revision. Technical assistance included incorporating the required national Cabinet Office structure for national policy documents, integrating needs of newly established MESVTEE after the merger of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Vocational Training, and including clear steps and strategies to attain the stated objectives. The language of the policy was also clarified to include not only workers in the education sector, but also learners as well as OVC and children with special education needs (CSEN). As a result of these amendments, the HIV and AIDS strategic plan and the implementation framework that accompanies the policy, were also reviewed and updated to ensure consistency. The MESVTEE, through the Directorate of Planning and Information, submitted the policy to the Cabinet Office for final approval and dissemination.

*Key goals for Year 4.* In Year 4, STEP-Up will support the MESVTEE to implement the rollout and dissemination of the revised education Sector HIV and AIDS policy and its related strategic plan and implementation guidelines. The revised education sector policy will provide a regulatory framework within the Ministry that will respond to issues of HIV and AIDS in schools. It will help provide an environment that does not discriminate and is stigma free. The HIV and AIDS strategic plan and implementation guidelines will be tools that will help national, provincial and district level staff to plan, implement, manage and monitor HIV programs. The policy encourages the importance of wellness and good health for teachers and learners through the provision of HCT. In the last two years, STEP-Up has supported the provision of HCT to members of the education community through designing and hosting teacher health market fairs, by working with district and zonal education officials.

In Year 4, STEP-Up will work with the district and zonal education staff to host teacher health market fairs and provide HCT in districts where the fair was not yet implemented. An

addition to the implementation strategy for the teacher health market fairs will be a follow-up monitoring requirement of individuals with a sero-positive status.

In addition, STEP-Up will provide technical support to PEOs and selected DEBs in districts where health market fairs have previously been implemented to collaborate with health service providers to provide HCT services to the education community. As part of transitioning to local ownership and leadership, this process will facilitate the usage of their own resources for the future health market fair initiatives. The success of institutionalization and of future HIV programming depends in large parts on MESVTEEs leadership support for the program. STEP-Up through its PAs will continue to provide technical support to the PEO and selected DEBs to collaborate with health service providers in providing HCT to the education community.

The key activities under Task 3 are as follows:

**Sub-task area 3.1: Planning and budgeting tools for HIV/AIDS work place initiatives improved**

The narrative for this Sub-Task is combined with Sub-Task 3.3.

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

The narrative for this Sub-Task is combined with Sub-Task 3.4.

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

*Assist MESVTEE with rollout of updated education sector HIV and AIDS policy.* In the last three years, STEP-Up and other stakeholders (UNESCO, UNICEF and the teachers union) supported the revising and updating of the policy, its related strategic plan and implementation guidelines. The policy was anticipated to be endorsed in 2013 by Cabinet, yet remained dormant and was resubmitted for final approval. In Year 4, STEP-Up will work with other USAID projects and stakeholders in the education sector to lobby with MESVTEE to expedite the policy submission process. Once the policy is endorsed, STEP-Up will support the printing and launch of this policy including the linked strategic plan and the implementation guidelines. These documents will also be made available on CDs. STEP-Up will provide technical assistance to the MESVTEE's HIV and AIDS Coordinator on the

**Task 3: Key Milestones for 2014**

- ~ Final round of HMFs to reach 10,000 individuals with HCT with monitoring and follow up at the local level
- ~ HIV and AIDS policy approved, printed and disseminated in all ten provinces for implementation

process of rolling out the updated policy to PEOs, DEBS and zones to ensure all cadres understand the policy and steps for implementation. In parallel, STEP-Up PAs will work with the PEOs and DEBs to disseminate and implement the HIV and AIDS policy and related national strategic plan initiatives at local level.

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

*Organize health market fairs (HMFs).* Health market fairs provide a centralized and manageable entry point for bringing education stakeholders together and provide encouragement and support for overall positive health. It is a gateway to increase access to HCT services for members of the education community. In Year 4, the focus will be to provide HCT in target districts determined by data on prevalence, saturation and access to local health services. The project will use data from the education statistical bulletin on teacher attrition attributed health related mortality and morbidity, HIV prevalence and accessibility to HIV services to select districts and zones to target HCT and other epidemiological data sources such as CIDRZ to identify target districts.

The lessons learned from HMF implementation in Years 2 and 3 will help inform the design of the Year 4 fairs. For example, in Year 2 there was a need for separate booths for teachers, learners and community members to enable additional privacy, comfort and confidentiality. In Year 3, many learners asked to access HCT. However, most of them could not be tested, as they needed consent from their parent or guardian due to their age. In Year 4, implementation strategies will be devised on getting parents of learners on board to provide parental consent for their children to get tested for HIV. These learners provide the window of opportunity for Zambia's quest in having an HIV and AIDS free generation.

The focus of our HMF exit strategy is to support selected districts to collaborate with local health service providers to implement similar activities for HCT access to members of the education community. The MESVTEE will use the lessons learned and experience gained during the health fair organization to help implement similar activities. MESVTEE will provide resources and STEP-Up technical assistance on planning and organizing health events. To leverage resources and unify planning, MESVTEE will be encouraged to attach HCT to already institutionalized activities within the MESVTEE calendar like the school health and nutrition activities in July, the World Teachers Day in October and the World AIDS Day on December 1. In addition, once the national education sector HIV and AIDS Strategic plan and management guidelines have been disseminated, the districts will have a framework to develop locally driven HIV and AIDS programs.

***Critical assumptions and potential challenges.*** Achievement of the strategy and the activities outlined will depend on the following assumptions and mitigation of the following potential challenges:

- The revised Education Sector HIV and AIDS policy will be approved by the Cabinet Office
- The MESVTEE will make the necessary resources available to PEOs, DEBs and zones for the full dissemination of the revised policy and strategic plan
- PEOs, DEBs, and zones will actively engage in the design and rollout of the health fair activities as a learning and implementation process.

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

- MESVTEE
- MCDMCH
- Civil society organizations
- Ministry of Health (MOH)
- National AIDS Council (NAC)
- Teachers' unions and teacher support groups
- Community-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations, 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 learner performance**

*Task overview:* The National Implementation Framework (NIF) for 2011-2015 expresses that, the Ministry shall continue to strive to put in place an effective and efficient education delivery system that is founded on a decentralized mode of service delivery, targeting the resources and skills at the lower levels in a manner that is inclusive and consultative. Task 4 is working with the central, provincial and district levels of the Ministry to actualize this reform effort by strengthening their management and oversight proficiencies as well as internal functionalities and accountability mechanisms. This will ensure that the learner is at the center of service delivery, and that learner performance in reading is one of the key barometers of success.

*Key achievements in Year 3:* STEP-Up continued to strengthen relationships and foster coalitions with key actors and decision makers in the Ministry, with one key accomplishment being the recognition by the Directorate of Planning and Information (DPI) of the role that the project has played to support provinces and districts develop and implement the LPIS.

The Ministry has embarked on a process of developing a comprehensive strategic plan, which is linked to the national implementation framework (NIF) and performance assessment framework (PAF) indicators. The strategic plan is expected to inform the planning and annual budgeting process. On account of the support provided to the provincial and district strategic plan development process, STEP-Up has been requested by the DPI to be part of the Ministry's technical team and help bring to the fore the learner performance and reading improvement focus as emphasized in the provincial and district LPIS.

The following results feed into Year 4 milestones:

- LPIS plans developed for all provinces and targeted districts in conformity with STEP-Up quality standards. STEP-Up developed a quality assurance rubric to benchmark standards of quality strategic plans. STEP-Up Provincial Advisors, working with their counterparts at Provincial and District levels, applied the rubric to monitor the quality of the plans and make necessary adjustments.
- 57 Districts in eight provinces self-assessed and monitored their LPIS plans using the rubric to measure management and leadership performance of provincial and district offices. This was an extremely well received self-assessment activity, which provided districts with useful evidence about the implementation status of their strategic plans, and helped them identify areas for further improvement. The evidence from the exercise is an indication that the 56 districts have adopted the LPIS as a management tool to guide implementation of activities.
- Though slight, there is a change in the standards monitoring practice of national level standards officers in that they are asking questions about learner performance in reading as they conduct standards monitoring visits in schools. This is in line with the Directorate's operational plan for 2014, which emphasizes the need to move from solely focusing on compliance and administrative monitoring to incorporating the monitoring of student learning outcomes as part of their reporting to the central level.

*Key goal for Year 4:* STEP-Up will continue to support provinces and districts to increase management and oversight proficiency by assisting them in monitoring and documenting the implementation of their strategic plans to improve learners' performance. In Year 4, one key goal is to work with lead Directorate Standards & Curriculum on strengthening their oversight capacity and institutionalizing decentralized performance management.

The key activities under Task 4 are as follows:

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

- Provinces and Districts apply the rubric for monitoring the implementation of strategic plans and measuring levels of district management skills and strengths in order to measure and demonstrate change in knowledge, attitude and practice as a result of using the LPIS as one of the key management tools for service delivery;
- Accountability and response mechanism (comprising the relevant tools, templates and protocols) relating to strategic plan implementation and reporting between the Directorate of Standards and Provinces consolidated;
- Annual summary of challenges and recommendations, bringing out the findings from the management rubric and relating these to learner performance (early grade reading and/or grade 7 exam results). It is anticipated that this dialogue would contribute to the formulation of policies (local and otherwise) to improve learner performance.

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

*Support the DSC to monitor implementation of strategic plans in provinces and districts. The development and review/revision of LPIS has been fully taken over by the provincial and district leadership following the project's technical facilitation to the Ministry in Years 1, 2 and 3. However, the quality still needs to be looked into and supported, particularly in the area of articulating realistic reading targets. STEP-Up will continue to work with provinces and districts to ensure that plans are developed and existing plans maintain their quality standards are maintained and plans are realistic and achievable. This will be done through provision of*

technical facilitation during local strategic planning meetings as well as through coaching and mentoring that takes place in the regular interactions between PAs and Ministry staff at province and district.

#### *Accountability & Response Mechanism on Strategic Plan Implementation*

- Essential reporting criteria and indicators defined;
- Reporting template and format developed and communicated to Province and Districts;
- Capacity building of central level standards officers and Provincial and District staff on the use of the tool;
- Monitoring and populating template by Provinces and Districts, self-assessment and submission to central level;
- Analysis, feedback, decision making, coaching and mentoring.

*Support the development and implementation of an accountability and response mechanism for the DSC to monitor progress of curriculum roll out at provincial and district level. With the responsibility of developing and reviewing LPIS fully in the hands of provincial and district leaders, the focus in Year 4 shall be towards supporting the DSC to develop and implement a simple but reliable mechanism to monitor how the provinces and districts are implementing their strategic plans.*

Information on the progress, challenges and reading levels is not reaching the central

Ministry in a coherent and well-structured manner, or in many instances not at all. In this regard, STEP-Up will continue to support the DSC to activate an accountability and response mechanism that will facilitate communication and feedback between national and sub-national levels regarding progress and results of strategic plan implementation. To get the accountability and response mechanism in place, the decentralization team will conduct the following steps:

1. Define, document, and communicate the essential criteria/indicators of adequate reporting on the implementation of LPIS including specifications about its format and frequency.
2. Translate these criteria/indicators of adequate reporting into a template that will help provinces and districts report to the DSC on the implementation of LPIS and achievement of reading targets.
3. Provide support and capacity building to DSC on how to analyze the provincial and district reports and provide feedback, technical facilitation and coaching and mentoring to provincial and district staff.

The project envisions that such a mechanism will provide fresh evidence that can be communicated to central level for planning and negotiation in a bid to strengthen its internal tracking of the system. The mechanism will also help the DSC to provide provinces and districts with differentiated support on how to conduct decentralized management based on their own strategic plan targets.

*Support the Director of Standards & Curriculum to convene a strategic engagement meeting with the provincial leadership based on evidence in order to support the development, implementation and consolidation of new metrics for managing performance.* STEP-Up will support the Director of Standards & Curriculum to continue to engage in strategic and issue based interactions based on evidence from the field. This shall serve the purpose of engaging in common vision sharing and joint planning between national and sub-national levels.

*Support the enhancement of leadership and management skills and competencies for Provincial and District education leaders for effective management of education.* To improve human resource capacity of provincial and district teams to keep up with the demands of meeting LPIS targets, STEP-Up will support the DSC to equip provincial and district leaders with a day-to-day reference guide and toolkit that describes essential and effective leadership and management skills. For this purpose, the project will involve leading sources of public management education and instruction such as the National Institute for Public Administration (NIPA) for reference and support. In addition, the project will leverage best practices from similar projects in systems strengthening to build a robust training agenda. This activity will be closely coordinated with the Ministry's own training calendar of workshops especially for DEBS, DESOs, DPOs and other district level officers.

*Organize experiential learning visits to at least 4 provinces and selected districts for selected staff from the Ministry headquarters to strengthen mutual accountability for performance and*

*decentralized management.* STEP-Up will support the undertaking of experiential learning field visits for key staff from central Ministry to enable them to interact with field staff, and ground-truth their assumptions about what districts and provinces can and should be able to report about the implementation of LPIS. First-hand knowledge of district and province realities could result into better appreciation of the implementation side of the reading reform agenda, hence influencing planning and practice at the central level.

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

*Improve organizational capacity to monitor and track implementation for purposes of generating information for evidence based decision-making.* While the process of developing learner performance improvement strategic plans is important, the true value of the plan will be a result of its implementation. Therefore, the focus in Year 4 is to improve the organizational capacity of provinces and districts to implement their strategic plans by strengthening capacities to monitor and track the implementation of the plan.

The main tasks to be undertaken are as follows:

*Review, revise and roll out monitoring rubric.* In Year 3, STEP-Up developed a rubric to monitor the implementation trajectory of the strategic plans and provide evidence on strategic plan performance in relation to targets. 57 Districts were supported to monitor and report on the status of implementation. Apart from reporting on the status of strategic plan implementation, the rubric was able to help draw inferences on management and leadership capacities and proficiencies of the various districts and provinces. The provincial and district leaders and change agents who were introduced to the rubric expressed support and interest to use it as a tool for self-evaluation and assessment. The results of the rubric analysis were also shared with the Director of Standards & Curriculum who was of the strong view that modifications could be made to the rubric so that it can also be used to strengthen and improve the quality, process and practice of standards monitoring.

In view of this, the rubric will be reviewed and revised in collaboration with the relevant operatives in the Ministry at all levels so that there is a high level of buy-in that will foster adoption and use of the tool in the daily management practice (institutionalization) as well as cultivate an attitude or interest to adapt the tool to respond to varying needs and circumstances. It is envisaged that this process will help to increase and consolidate oversight and management practices at all levels, strengthen decentralized performance management, as well as support the continuous development of new metrics (measurements) for management performance.

*Supporting provinces and districts to document, communicate and develop relevant follow up actions (policies, strategies, guidelines).* STEP-Up will continue to support the provinces and districts to track and monitor strategic plan implementation, as well as strengthen learner performance monitoring protocols, practices and policies in order to tighten the connection

between monitoring results and developing actionable provincial and district policies to improve reading. STEP-Up PAs will work with their province and district counterparts to assess the relationship between strengthening performance monitoring and improvement in students' reading outcomes. Results from the assessment will be used to inform the alignment of province and district monitoring with reading outcomes. Examples of better alignment include using the strength of the correlation between monitoring and learning, or lack thereof, to identify areas of policy change that support improvement in students' learning (for example, teacher supervision, teachers and administrators' professional development, time-tabling, availability of learning materials, contact time with teachers).

The project will also support interventions to assist provincial and district leadership to develop and apply new tools for oversight and management. These would include new local policies, strategies and guidelines that can accelerate the implementation of the strategic plan and contribute to greater strides in improving learner performance at local levels. Provinces and districts as well as central level staff in the DSC will further be supported to improve documentation and communication with internal and external stakeholders.

*Support peer-to-peer learning to promote knowledge development, knowledge management, and evidence how policies at province and district levels can improve reading.* Connecting capacities through peer-to-peer learning promotes knowledge development, knowledge management and building communities of practice.

The main activities to be undertaken will include the following:

*Support national exchanges between provincial education offices on policies and management and oversight interventions and practices that worked to improve early grade reading and learner performance.* STEP-Up will, therefore, facilitate peer-to-peer exchange visits to help create professional communities of districts and provinces who document their plans, defend their priorities, highlight challenges and describe strategies that worked in improving reading. By providing fora for peer-to-peer learning, STEP-Up's goal is to build provinces and district capacity to join a community of peers that values local expertise and collaborate to build capacity to successfully implement MESTVEE policies regarding improving learners' performance.

*Leverage learning and best practices from other education partners and projects.* At the national level, STEP-Up envisions coordinating with USAID supported education projects such as Read to Succeed (RTS), Time to Learn (TTL) and SPLASH, as well as other education programs to share knowledge about practices that have worked to help inform local and national policies about improvements in early grade reading and learner performance. Through making information available, STEP-Up will also support the Ministry leaders at national and sub-national level to ensure that the positive effects of interventions that are being implemented by various education projects in individual districts and schools become part of a district or provincial program so that the gains do not remain in isolated pockets, but are spread throughout a province or district. In this way, higher chances of sustainability

would ensue, as activities/interventions would become part of a provincial or district program rather than an isolated intervention in specific schools or districts.

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

*Provide support to resource center coordinators to play an effective role in the data management committees.* Working closely with interventions articulated under Task 1, STEP-Up will provide support to resource center coordinators to play an effective role in data management committees by ensuring that they avail assessment data and analytical reports based on data for use by the DMCs. The project will also nurture information sharing among provincial resource center coordinators and support them to work together to share lessons and practices that contribute to improving early grade reading and learner performance as well as local policy development.

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

- Continued leadership stability, particularly in the DSC, which has been the key entry point
- Ministry 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
- Development of a comprehensive strategic plan by the Ministry will include early grade reading levels as one of the key indicators of performance that will be tracked regularly.

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

*Support finalization of the Ministry's new revised communication strategy.* In Year 2, at the request of the Ministry, STEP-Up helped to draft a Ministry-wide communication strategy. In Year 3 the document was unable to be finalized because the consultative stakeholders meeting did not take place. In Year 4, STEP-Up will support the Ministry's Public Relation Office to vet the draft strategy document with key stakeholders and finalize for dissemination. STEP-Up will then convene a stakeholders meeting to present the latest version and solicit feedback to strengthen the document. As envisioned back in Year 2, the strategy will serve as a guide to improve information flows within the Ministry and amongst the wider education community. The strategy places attention on improving external communication with parents, increasing public demand for quality education and forging partnerships with communities, especially the private sector, to address local education needs.

These priorities align with STEP-Up's mobilization campaign. After the stakeholders' meeting the feedback will be incorporated before the draft strategy is circulated for final comments. Once that process is complete the document will go to the Permanent Secretary for signatory approval, be printed and then disseminated as recommended by the strategy.

*Support to mobilization of public opinion and action of the Ministry through the Let's Read Zambia campaign.* Year 3 saw the launch of Zambia's national reading campaign. STEP-Up supported the MESVTEE's launch of the *Let's Read Zambia* campaign, led by the DSC Development Center. With STEP-Up's technical and logistical support, the Minister of Education launched the campaign in the presence of a broad group of education stakeholders and leaders. More than 500 people attended the event and it received widespread coverage by national media outlets. STEP-Up and partners also supported the Ministry with a media workshop on messages around the revised curriculum. In addition, the project developed communication materials, including a FAQ brochure about the curriculum and was a key partner in supporting all ten provincial launches of *Let's Read Zambia*.

To continue the momentum in Year 4, STEP-Up is finalizing with the Ministry a campaign post-launch strategy. This includes improving the collection and use of information on learner performance. More specifically, the project will assist with the standardization and presentation of early reading data, both for use by DMCs and for sharing with the public at regular Ministry-led community meetings. To encourage the practice of providing education data for decision-making and for external communication, STEP-Up will help to establish incentive mechanisms, such as a 'province of the month' recognition for the timely submission of data. This award will recognize the district that provides the most complete and timely assessment data.

STEP-Up, in collaboration with the public relations office (PRO), will also continue to support media coverage of education events and activities. Ministry resources, including the Education Broadcasting Service (EBS) and Education Television (ETV), are willing to share footage for the production and broadcast of a 13-part television documentary on early grade reading. This is an opportunity for the project to identify and support the main issues and opportunities around reading and improving and tracking learner performance.

In addition, STEP-Up will support community radio programming in all provinces on the messages and issues relevant to the *Let's Read Zambia* campaign, and complement national TV efforts with support for local TV in Chipata and Solwezi. Furthermore, the project will seek to promote regular education information through quarterly newspaper supplements and publishing articles in local magazines such as ZACCI journal. This will showcase Ministry efforts in early grade reading, including graphic presentation of data and featuring outstanding pupils, teachers and schools. These supplements will be an opportunity for sponsorship by the private sector.

*Develop strategy to build capacity of Ministry to engage private sector and other stakeholders to establish PPPs in support of early grade reading.* A top STEP-Up priority

for Year 4 is facilitating local partnerships in support of early grade reading. Such partnerships are traditionally with the private sector but can also extend to any community presence (church, Rotary, media outlet, etc.).

At provincial and district level there is the need for orientation on how to approach or pitch to businesses. This will involve understanding local operators, including their corporate social responsibility priorities and preparing relevant data and information to sell education investments that address local needs. To accomplish this, STEP-Up will support provincial teams to create presentations and one-pagers that reflect needs and opportunities specific to that area, resulting in a provincial business plan for engaging private sector support. These business plans will then be shared at meetings with education officials to arm with the materials and strategies on approaching local businesses and other potential partners. Through these efforts STEP-Up plans in Year 4 to see partnerships established towards the eventual project goal of PPPs in the provinces. All partnerships will be costed, both cash and in-kind contributions. The project will seek ways of recognizing and publicizing all forms of community support for early education.

*Expand videos and other communications materials for literacy promotion.* In Year 3, STEP-Up created a number of materials including a one-page document on the *Let's Read Zambia* campaign, a revised organizational brochure, and the FAQ brochure on the revised curriculum. In Year 4, this line of action will continue for both internal and external communication needs. Internally, the project will subcontract short term assistance to update STEP-Up's vast videos and photos inventory, create a short video to capture the *Let's Read Zambia* campaign and other STEP-Up efforts. External communication items may include reading promotion stickers, bookmarkers and other simple paraphernalia.

Recording project activities and successes will continue in Year 4 through regular uploads of video and photos from the provinces. At a minimum, submissions of raw photos and videos will take place at least once per quarter per province for posting on USAID's Facebook page. This is a priority for the Zambia mission and an opportunity to regularly showcase and share project work. In addition to social media, each province will submit one early grade reading success story per quarter.

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

- Leadership stability, particularly in the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum, which has been the task area's key entry point
- MESVTEE takes ownership of the strategic planning and implementation process by deliberately engaging in monitoring, supervision and reporting on learner performance progress using the learner performance improvement plans

- MESVTEE continues to prioritize reading and reading levels as the key barometers of success and thus maintain the issue of reading levels as a central theme in their conversations and actions
- MESVTEE assuming a leading role in the *Let's Read Zambia* mobilization campaign
- MESVTEE's communication strategy is completed and approved
- Communities regularly informed on the state of local education and on opportunities to improve it. By engaging communities, particularly parents, awareness increases on the value of reading
- Private sector and other stakeholders willing to enter in strengthening learner performance through innovative PPPs, benefitting from better public relations and from cultivating tomorrow's workforce and contribute in other ways to the 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
- Media

**Task 5: Engage Zambian institutions of higher education in educational research related to school effectiveness and learning achievement**

*Task Area Overview:* Activities under this task are designed to encourage collaboration between the MESVTEE and universities and colleges around a common research agenda in education related to school effectiveness and learning achievements. STEP-Up provides assistance in conducting collaborative applied research on key policy issues faced in the Zambian education system. This is being accomplished through a learning-by-doing strategy, by which faculty and student interns from selected colleges and universities, referred to as higher education institutions (HEIs), work together in designing, conducting and interpreting findings of field-based studies. Research questions are generated through joint reflective sessions on key challenges identified from ministerial documents, including provincial

<p><b>Task 5: Year 4 Key Milestones</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two study reports developed in collaboration with faculty and student interns.</li> <li>• In-depth research in two additional districts or on new themes to further investigate critical issues found in the initial studies conducted by HEIs</li> <li>• At least two local policies, guidelines or circulars developed in the 40 LEMIS districts from 2013/2014 research results</li> </ul>
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strategic plans, the national education policy –Educating our Future–, national implementation framework (NIF), as well as key informants in the system faced with daily work challenges. Through a process of joint reflection, HEIs, Ministry staff, and STEP-Up effectively leverage their respective contributions as researchers, practitioners and collaborators to bring out the required evidence for identifying solutions that could bring about desired change. This way, recommendations for policy shifts enhancements find space in the Ministry’s national development priorities for service delivery in education as the implementers share in the identification of solutions. The studies under this task area also provide practicum experiences (e.g. internships) for graduate and post-graduate students to strengthen their research skills and abilities.

*Key achievements in Years 1, 2 and 3.* During Years 1, 2 and 3, STEP-Up, succeeded in collaboratively conducting three applied policy studies on pressing education challenges in the Zambian education system. These challenges related to identifying existing knowledge gaps, perceptions, experiences and practices, in primary schools and teacher training colleges among pupils, student teachers, lecturers and administrators. Policy briefs were developed and shared as a result of the studies to inform actions that different education actors could take to make improvements to their work. Through STEP-Up engagement with multiple administrative tiers in the MESVTEE, DEBS, PEO, headquarters, education managers and administrators have been learning by doing applied policy research studies that directly relate to their work. Through collective and individual reflections by MESVTEE staff, the studies’ recommendations and the research process is designed to provoke actions that could potentially be translated into documented local or even national policy. In July 2014, seven provincial dissemination meetings convened key decision makers including lead teachers from zones, district resource center coordinators from DEBs, provincial education standards officers (PESO) and PEOs to identify research insights and possible local implications. This effort was followed up with a national policy roundtable meeting involving high level decision makers from MESVTEE headquarters and representatives from all ten provinces to develop actions based on the results of the three studies.

During the course of conducting these policy studies, MESVTEE staff from district, provincial and national level participated in various ways, including in the design of the study, analysis of data and writing results into policy briefs for stakeholders to use to inform policy and practice. A key outcome was that the skills and research capacity of 51 student interns within education studies programs in colleges and university were improved. Faculty members of participating HEIs also indicated that the experience had improved their research methods and connecting policy and practice in the research process. This was achieved through structured support provided by faculty from the University of Minnesota (UMN), the partnering HEIs, MESVTEE staff, and STEP-Up team members.

*Key goals for Year 4.* Building on achievements to date under Task 5, STEP-Up will continue to build relationships with selected HEIs, Zambia Institute of Special Education (ZAMISE) and University of Zambia (UNZA). Together these institutions, their staff and student interns of the study will form part of a core team or critical mass of change agents that should

demonstrate the significance of evidence-based decision-making for policy development. In Year 4, the project will focus on connecting evidence informed practice throughout the system, with strategic connections and joint activities related to LEMIS, equity, decentralization and overall sustainability of newly developed Ministry efforts. The first step is having a research practice to formulate evidence in the system, followed by dissemination and use of the data, information and implications of research studies.

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**

*Advance UNZA research on teacher training institutions response to literacy and ZAMISE's study on struggling readers with more in-depth analysis resulting in a research paper for distribution to practitioners.* In Year 3, STEP-Up and its partner UMN engaged UNZA in a nationwide study on teacher training in Zambia. The main product of the study was a policy brief outlining the main findings and policy actions that could be taken based on the study area. The main product of the ZAMISE study was a set of four policy briefs outlining the challenges of learners at school, home and at district level. The issues outlined in the briefs related to the use of local languages in the teaching of literacy in schools, the management of teaching and learning materials and home life and its effects on learners. In Year 4, STEP-Up intends to continue this institutional capacity building in research skills while also expanding engagement between HEIs and MESVTEE in applied research. This will be done through weekly analysis and writing assignments for two faculties and two students from UNZA and ZAMISE respectively, as well as representatives from MESVTEE. The results of this engagement will be a research paper expanding on the results indicated in policy briefs from the first two studies to make the most of the data and research experience. This in-depth desk analysis on selected aspects of the policy briefs to advance the research by exploring unanswered questions arising from the studies. It is anticipated that the process of developing of this research paper will be from October 2014 to May 2015 with dissemination meetings and events of the paper in June to September 2015.

*Expansion of ZAMISE (struggling readers) & UNZA (teacher training preparation for literacy) studies in two districts.* In Year 4, STEP-Up under the leadership of UNZA and ZAMISE with technical support from the UMN will undertake another round of policy studies using a learning-by-doing approach. New districts for investigation will be selected to expand the studies, at least in part, on the basis of personnel from those districts that have expressed interest in the current research during the provincial dissemination meetings following the Policy Roundtable in August 2014. It is anticipated that the first of the UMN consultant trips, anticipated in January 2015 would be to work with UNZA, ZAMISE and personnel from the selected districts to plan the study, develop instruments and formulate a logistics plan. The actual data collection would then be the responsibility of the UNZA and ZAMISE teams with remote check-ins via email and phone with the UMN team. The

collaborative work will be structured so that ZAMISE and UNZA take on the research process themselves, with technical assistance as needed. The second consultant trip in August 2015 would be to work with UNZA and ZAMISE to advance data analysis and interpretation. Ideally the partners would have already analyzed the data prior to this visit so that the policy briefs can be drafted during the second trip. As these teams have already been trained and have some experience in entering data and conducting analysis, STEP-Up anticipates compression of this work into the second trip, yet remain open to the possibility that hands-on support may be necessary. The effect of this engagement is anticipated to provide the opportunity for UNZA and ZAMISE to relatively independently conduct applied research for use by the MESVTEE. It will assist them to figure out how they can institutionalize policy research practices focused on system improvements within their own institutions and in collaboration with MESVTEE. This is an important step in building local capacity to a level that these institutions could undertake additional policy research at the district level without external technical assistance.

*Define a local research agenda for priority problems in Copperbelt province, other provinces as needed.* STEP-Up's research collaboration supports the MESVTEE's decentralized structures to carve out a research agenda that is relevant to policy and practice. In Year 4, STEP-Up intends to promote sustainability by further extending the skill sets and experience needed to conduct policy relevant studies within the provinces. STEP-Up will consolidate the learning of higher education institutions engaged thus far to support the identification of studies, local partners and implementation strategies to advance on the ground research work toward improving educational outcomes. At this point, Copperbelt province has moved forward with some research plans, while others may also emerge. The STEP-Up PAs will work with local education stakeholders to guide this effort with technical support of the policy and research task area (PRTA) as requested.

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

*Disseminate, discuss and use research results to inform practice guidelines and local policies at provincial and district levels in the 40 LEMIS districts to formulate at least one local policy or guideline.* In Year 4, STEP-Up intends to continue research dissemination of the studies in the 40 LEMIS targeted districts and in close collaboration with PEO teams and the Ministry of Education Directorates of Planning and Information, Teacher Education and Specialized Services and Curriculum and Standards. STEP-Up will utilize facilitation expertise from provincial, district and zonal level staff who participated in the national education roundtable meeting in August 2014. District-level policy roundtable workshops are aimed at engaging district education officials in a more detailed examination of school and district level policies and/or guidelines and will be held in the 40 LEMIS districts. The intended outcome of this process will be the development of content for local policies and/or guidelines that could further increase effectiveness in schools. This activity will overlap with Tasks 1, 2 and 4 to build a foundation of understanding policy action resulting from the

efforts of the provincial and district decision makers who participated in the national roundtable meeting and the provincial dissemination meetings. This will enable the integration of personal commitments made by these meeting participants into local policy actions. This team work will facilitate developing new policies and also ensure that existing policies are supported with follow-up and appropriate action such as discussions, orientation to new approaches or procedures and action plans for the associated policy actions or programs.

*Symposia to share evidence to inform policy locally and nationally during Literacy month.* STEP-Up will promote opportunities to share existing research during relevant events and designated periods such as the joint annual review forum, the National Literacy Symposium and National Literacy Month.

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

*Engage UNZA and ZAMISE in analysis of 2014 study data towards a research paper.* By Year 5, the project will have intended to engage a total of 50 interns. During Year 2, a total of 28 internships were completed by ten student teachers and 18 lecturers on a Master's program by CLCE. In Year 3, STEP-Up engaged 23 interns including 12 Masters students from UNZA and 11 student teachers from ZAMISE. These interns were involved in data collection and analysis. The quality of their outputs was measured by outputs such as the policy briefs.

In Year 4, STEP-Up intends to reap additional payoff from the policy and research studies already undertaken by institutions where the interns are drawn from. Additional in-depth analysis based on the data collected over the last two years will further demonstrate the value of the research investment to-date and also inform publications appropriate for a larger, international audience. There is potential to involve Zambian students and lecturers who have shown promise in research efforts to engage in the publication process, which strengthens the quality of internship outputs while advancing interns' research capacities. A total of four interns, two from UNZA and two from ZAMISE will add depth to their research skills and expertise while drafting the research publication discussed in Sub-Task Area 5.1.

STEP-Up will develop an internship agreement through a letter of understanding with UNZA and ZAMISE as a way of assessing the internships. Quality of internship services and management will be monitored through weekly assignments and monthly reports to be administered remotely by UMN between October 2014 and May 2015. The primary focus of the assignments will be advanced data analysis and writing results.

### **Critical assumptions and potential challenges.**

Achievement of the strategy for this task area and the activities outlined depend on the following assumptions:

- MESVTEE headquarters will take leadership in the research to policy development process in all ten provinces by participating in development of policy content
- UNZA and ZAMISE commit to continue to work on applied research studies and publications
- Available financial resources of higher education institutions to cover the time and expenses of faculty and students to participate in the research process.
- Local policies and guidelines are viewed as viable resources by the Ministry and schools to spread research-derived ideas across classrooms.
- Provinces recognize that research done in one locality can inform similar situations in another.
- STEP-Up, MESVTEE and university approvals and accompanying resources for activities described above are received in a timely manner.

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

- UNZA and ZAMISE staff, faculty and graduate students
- Policy and research unit of MESVTEE Planning and Information Directorate, Director Curriculum and Standards and Teacher Education and Specialized Services.

## **ANNEX 1: Work Plan Gantt Chart**