



Second Chances for Girls: The Zambian Re-entry into School Policy

This case study of two government secondary schools presents evidence on the factors that support implementation of the 1997 Government of the Republic of Zambia Re-entry Policy.

Visitors to Mcenga* Secondary School's grade 12 class may be surprised by the fact that many female learners are poised to complete their secondary education upon returning to school after maternity leave; a few even after being away for prolonged periods or marriage. Recently, one returning girl completed grade 12 at the top of her class. Some of the teachers themselves took maternity leave at Mcenga Secondary School, completed university, and returned in a new capacity: as teachers and role models for other young girls. Such stories are rare in Zambia where many girls permanently drop out of school due to pregnancy. Mcenga Secondary School, however, is a place where most girls reenter school after pregnancy and complete grade 12.

For many years Zambian girls were obliged to leave school permanently if they became pregnant. In 1997, the Government of the Republic of Zambia introduced the Re-entry Policy that requires all schools to grant girls maternity leave and readmit them to facilitate girls' education. Research on the policy's implementation and impact is scarce. One of the few studies of the policy found that, nationally, secondary school reentry rates among girls who became pregnant decreased from 79 percent in 2002 to 65 percent in 2008, where they remained until 2014 (Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) 2002-2014).

**The names of schools have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants in the study.*

By Vera Wedekind and Tomaida Milingo

Time to Learn

Plot No. 203B
Off Kudu Road, Kabulonga
Lusaka, Zambia

This publication is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was produced by EnCompass LLC for the Time to Learn Project, which is funded by USAID in Zambia under Contract No. AID 611-C-12-00002 and implemented by Education Development Center (EDC). The contents of this study are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggests that the variation between schools is wide. It is currently poorly understood why the proportion of girls reentering school after pregnancy is not increasing, and why reentry is more common in some schools than in others. A comparison of two secondary schools—one in which most girls are returning to school after pregnancy and one where girls are returning at a lower, and more typical, rate—identifies several key factors that create an environment conducive to girls returning following maternity leave. These cases may offer lessons to help the Zambian government and its partners increase the reentry rate, thereby improving the prospects for all Zambian girls to fulfill their right to education.

ZAMBIA'S RE-ENTRY POLICY

Approximately 30 percent of the Zambian female population begins childbearing by the age of 19 (Central Statistical Office 2007 and 2013-14), and secondary school enrollment and graduation rates are consistently lower for female than for male learners (MESVTEE 1996 and 2014). It is a declared goal of Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) to increase the numbers of girls who complete secondary education (MESVTEE 2011, 2005 and 1996) because of the well-established benefits of girls' education nationally. These include reduced risk of domestic and other physical violence, reduced infant and child mortality, and a later start to childbearing, which is associated with lower levels of fertility and improved employment and educational opportunities. Higher levels of education are also associated with higher levels of wealth (Central Statistical Office 2013-2014).

In order to facilitate graduation among female students who become pregnant, Zambia's Re-entry Policy established a process by which maternity leave should be granted. To initiate maternity leave, the girl requesting the leave, the administration of the secondary school she attends, the girl's parents, and the child's father fill out a form stating the date on which the girl agrees to return to school (from 6 months to 2 years after she begins her leave). The Re-entry Policy also obliges schools to ensure a paternity leave of the same length as the maternity leave for the child's father, if he is a schoolboy, to facilitate joint caretaking of the infant. The girl's parents and the child's father are asked to sign the maternity leave form in order to mutually accept responsibility for caring for the baby and for supporting the girl's return to school (MESVTEE, 1997).

Initially, the policy was not widely known or understood so the Zambian government commissioned a study in 2010 that led to the development of implementation guidelines in 2012. These guidelines aimed to improve the understanding and implementation of the policy (MESVTEE, 2012). In particular, the Government of the Republic of Zambia commissioned a study that found that girls are more likely to return to school if they informed the administration of their pregnancy before leaving, stayed in school past the first trimester, and were 20 years of age or older (Mutombo and Mwenda 2010). The guidelines were to be distributed to schools in order to inform students and teachers about the Re-entry Policy, and assist schools and other stakeholders, such as parents and guardians, to enable girls to complete their education after giving birth.

ZAMBIA'S SCHOOL-BASED GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING SYSTEM

Every Zambian government school has a teacher who also serves as a guidance counselor. Such teachers have usually undergone university-level training in order to be qualified for this role. Each school also has a guidance and counseling committee designed to support the guidance counselor. Teachers, regardless of their qualifications, are appointed to serve on this committee for a period of time.

In many schools with scholarship programs for girls (typically payments of school and transport fees, as well as school uniforms and learning materials from nonprofit organizations), a *teacher-mentor* is appointed to also provide guidance and counseling. The teacher-mentor is specifically responsible for mentoring scholarship recipients and receives a two-day training from the scholarship provider on their mentoring role. This teacher is tasked with reporting dropouts, pregnancies, reentries, and exam results to the scholarship provider. Similar to the guidance counselor, the teacher-mentor's role is in addition to a full-time teaching load.

CASE STUDY DESIGN: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CASE SELECTION

Limited research has been done on obstacles to reentering school after pregnancy in Zambia (Mutombo and Mwenda 2010) and even less on success factors. This case study seeks to answer the following questions:

Why do girls reenter secondary school after childbirth at some schools, but not at others?

Sub-question: What factors allow some secondary schools to implement the Re-entry Policy more successfully than others?

This case study compares and contrasts an atypical school where most girls who became pregnant between 2012 and 2014 returned to their studies (Camfed 2012-2014) with a school where reentry was more “typical,” meeting the national average in some years, while staying below it in others. Both schools are co-ed government boarding schools with grades 8 to 12 (also accepting day scholars), located in district capitals and, thus, representing typical secondary schools.

Data collection occurred at Tsidya and Mcenga secondary schools during week-long visits, that entailed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with head and deputy head teachers, teachers, teacher-mentors, guidance counselors, members of parent teacher associations (PTAs), parents, grade 12 boys and girls, staff of an international nonprofit organization that provided scholarships, and MESVTEE officials.

By examining factors that support girls returning to these two secondary schools after pregnancy, this study offers concrete examples and specific recommendations that may help education policymakers and program implementers achieve higher progression and completion rates for girls at other secondary schools in the future, as desired by the Zambian government.

A COMPARISON: TSIDYA AND MCENGA SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Overview of the Two Schools

Founded shortly after Zambia's independence, Tsidya Secondary School is the largest secondary school in its district. It boasts an excellent infrastructure and technological resources, including Wi-Fi, and has a large science and computer lab. Near the banks of one of Zambia's largest rivers, it is located a few kilometers from the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) office. At the time of data collection, the school had over 70 teachers and more day scholars than boarding students. The school's grade 12 pass rates have varied over the last 5 years from below 50 percent to nearly 100 percent, without a clear trend. About 15 percent of its learners (or 30 percent of the girls) received scholarships from an international nonprofit organization.

Mcenga Secondary School is located in the district center of Mcenga along one of Zambia's largest rivers and only a few kilometers from the MESVTEE district office (DEBS). It was founded in the mid-1990's as a boys-only institution and the first secondary school in the district. Girls were admitted in 2000 at which time female teachers were introduced, who currently make up about 25 percent of over 30 teaching staff. The middle-sized school enrolled more girls than boys at the time of data collection, and about 25 percent of learners received financial scholarships, of which over 90 percent were girls. While the school had day scholars, it largely catered to learners from very remote villages characterized by high illiteracy rates and an active tradition of early marriage. According to the school, many learners are orphans who live with relatives when they are not in school. According to learners, parents,

and teachers, the school has a reputation for "serious learning" and preparing learners for university studies. Pass rates for grade 12 national exams have been above 60 percent. Learners can join different clubs one afternoon a week, for example sports or debate. The debate club successfully competes with other schools, of which the school community was very proud.

Annually, several dozen girls become pregnant at Tsidya Secondary School (up to 5 percent of the female school population) and between 30 and 60 percent return, depending on the year (Tsidya 2013-2015). Similarly, Mcenga Secondary School experiences at least a dozen pregnancies per year (also up to 5 percent of the female school population), but over 80 percent of the girls return after a maternity leave (Mcenga 2012-2014). According to both school communities, pregnancies are largely a result of transactional sex with local community men or during school breaks with men in the girls' home villages; rarely with schoolboys. Poverty and peer pressure were also consistently mentioned.

Implementation of the Re-entry Policy

According to learners, teachers at Tsidya Secondary School do not talk to them about the Re-entry Policy. Many learners are aware of the policy through friends, fellow classmates, or relatives who have experience with the policy, but the school does not introduce the topic to students, teachers, or parents. Despite this lack of communication about the policy, all participants reported that the school is largely in favor of the policy.

At Mcenga Secondary School the Re-entry Policy was introduced in the early 2000s as part of the Program for the Advancement of Girls'

Education (PAGE), a cooperative activity undertaken by the MESVTEE and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The MESVTEE informed the school about the new policy through a circular and also provided the school with hard copies of the policy and the maternity leave form. PAGE staff orientated different stakeholder groups in the district such as traditional leaders and local politicians. Later, nonprofit organizations oriented head teachers on the policy. Orientation sessions were held in different villages in order to encourage communities to allow their girls to reenter school. Since then, the school has earned a reputation for encouraging girls to reenter school after pregnancy. There are several church-based schools in the area that do not accept girls back after pregnancy so these girls often transfer to Mcenga Secondary School because they know that they will be accepted.

Learners indicated that they had heard about the Re-entry Policy through multiple channels, for example teachers in class or via the debate team. Many teachers reported discussing the dangers of early pregnancy with their learners, especially before term breaks, and encouraging abstinence in order to prevent pregnancies. Members of the scholarship selection committee have visited the school irregularly (each term in 2014 and not at all in 2015) to inform girls who received financial scholarships about the dangers of early pregnancy and the benefits of the Re-entry Policy. Very rarely has the school held meetings with all girls about these topics. Overall, learners demonstrated a good understanding of the policy in group discussions, including its implications for boys. Grade 12 boys specifically stated that they use condoms to avoid pregnancies because they know the effects of a pregnancy for the girl and themselves, i.e., that they would have to take a

paternity leave, which happened to a boy at the school a few years ago. Very few girls indicated that they did not learn about the policy in school. All awareness-raising activities at the school focused on girls and most boys reported that they learned about the policy through friends instead of through the school. The school did not have a structured way to inform teachers or parents about the Re-entry Policy. Parents generally learned about the policy through their children.

Reportedly, support for the Re-entry Policy, when it was first introduced, was low at Mcenga Secondary School, both among teaching staff and parents. Many initially thought that letting girls reenter would be a “waste of time and money” because they would not be studying seriously. With time, successes began to show as many reentered girls started graduating from grade 12. Many now successfully hold respectable jobs and are supporting their families, for example as teachers. Participants agreed that this was one of the key factors in changing minds of skeptical parents and teachers. Other positive effects mentioned were that educated girls are in a better position to raise their babies well, and that the Re-entry Policy helps reduce poverty countrywide in the long term by supporting girls’ education and, thus, contributing to the country’s development. Following these successes, a large majority of the school community appreciated and supported the policy. Participants remarked that, unlike in the early days of the policy, everyone now expects girls to return to school after pregnancy; it has become the norm.

“Now I see that everyone is just human, so they should have a second chance.”
(Female teacher, Mcenga)

“That is not the time to blame each other. We need to come on board as a community at large. This is not the end. We say: just come, you are ours. The sky is the limit.” (Male teacher, Mcenga)

“What has happened has happened. They should complete their education without feeling shy.” (PTA chair, Mcenga)

“Even in the same church we are all sinners. The church does not all expel us.” (DEBS, Mcenga)

Pregnancy Detection

Pregnancies at Tsidya Secondary School are usually detected during a mandatory monthly pregnancy test for all girls conducted by the dormitory supervisor. Pregnancy tests involve pressing heavily on the girl’s stomach and squeezing her breasts, through which it is believed that pregnancies of 3 months or more can be detected. The school introduced these tests nearly a decade ago to detect pregnancies early. Sometimes learners approach the dormitory supervisor, a teacher, or friends who then speak to an adult on the girl’s behalf. The school finds out about most pregnancies through this “pregnancy test,” but there are a few cases each year in which a girl “disappears” from the school without notifying anyone, which is believed to indicate a pregnancy.

Mcenga Secondary School usually learns about a girl’s pregnancy either by the girl confiding in a school staff member or through friends whom the girl sends in their stead. Whoever learns about the pregnancy arranges for the girl to be accompanied to the local clinic for a pregnancy test. That person also involves the teacher-

mentor if the girl has a scholarship or informs the school management, which in turn regularly informs the mentor, guidance counselor, PTA, and the scholarship selection committee. It hardly ever happens that a girl “disappears” from Mcenga Secondary School without anyone learning about her pregnancy.

Maternity Leave

According to Tsidya Secondary School staff, girls may obtain a maternity leave form from the dormitory supervisor or teacher-mentor and then must go to the hospital for medical confirmation of their pregnancy. After the hospital stamps the form, the girl must meet with the head teacher or deputy head teacher to agree upon a date when she will return. According to the school management, girls are sent on maternity leave immediately after the pregnancy is confirmed. The school management invites both the girl’s parents and the child’s father for a meeting at which all parties sign the maternity leave form. Sometimes parents are unable to attend these meetings if they reside some distance away and travel is difficult and, in most cases, the child’s father does not accept responsibility. In these cases, maternity leave is still granted. The school management reported that in the early days of the policy implementation, the child’s father was not invited to these meetings, nor were girls asked about the identity of the child’s father, but this has changed in recent years. In a few cases where a boy at the school was found to be responsible, paternity leave was implemented. Because of the large number of pregnancies, the school reported not being able to offer girls much support in conducting the different steps of the process, such as accompanying the girls to the local hospital for the pregnancy test.

Pregnancies at the school are common and do not draw much attention from Tsidya Secondary School staff. For example, a girl walked in with her mother during an interview with the teacher-mentor and guidance counselor to report a pregnancy and was nonchalantly given the maternity leave form and advised to go to the hospital for a pregnancy test. This all happened without interrupting the interview even though the teachers were offered the opportunity to stop the interview in order to attend to the girl.

In contrast, at Mcenga Secondary School, once the school management learns about a pregnancy, they ensure someone meets with the girl to encourage her to request maternity leave and return to school. This person can be the teacher-mentor, guidance counselor, member of the guidance and counseling committee, PTA chair, or scholarship selection committee member (all of whom are involved in counseling and mentoring the girls). The school management then informs and invites the girl's parents and the child's father – and his parents if he is a minor- for a meeting. At the meeting, the head teacher explains that the parents and child's father are expected to support and look after the baby, and all parties sign the maternity leave form. At the meeting, the parties also agree upon the date on which the girl will return to the school. Girls are encouraged to stay in school as long as possible during the pregnancy and are told that they must notify the school if they cannot come back at the agreed time.

If parents do not support their daughter's reentry, teachers or scholarship selection committee members meet with them. If parents or the child's father cannot attend the meeting, the girl is still granted maternity leave. If the child's father refuses to attend the

meeting or take responsibility for the pregnancy, the head teacher notifies the girl and her family that they can prosecute.

The head teacher, who has been with Mcenga Secondary School for over a decade, was described by teachers as handling these meetings particularly well by being encouraging and making sure everyone understands what is expected of them. The head teacher said that, as a government employee, it was his duty to implement the policy as well as possible.

Most girls at Mcenga Secondary School begin their maternity leave around the 7th month of the pregnancy. If a girl lives nearby, the school maintains contact with her during the pregnancy and she might receive a visit by the PTA chair or teacher-mentor after delivery.

Return to School

Tsidya Secondary School statistics show that 30 to 60 percent of girls returned to school after maternity leave between 2013 and 2015. School staff, parents, and learners alike named three factors that supported girls returning to school: (1) ability to pay school fees even with the new financial burden of an infant, (2) availability of a caretaker for the baby, and (3) lack of concern about stigma at the school. If these factors did not come together, girls did not return to Tsidya Secondary School. There are girls who chose to reenter other schools where no one knew about their situation to avoid stigma. In the words of the deputy head teacher, school management facilitates the girl's reentry "by the book" because it is their duty as government employees. A handful of girls temporarily left school without reporting their pregnancies, seeking to reenter after some time. In these cases, the school management accepted the girl without

difficulties, filing out the maternity leave form retroactively.

Financial constraints and care of the infant were both identified as key factors hindering girls' ability to reenter school. School staff, parents, and learners all reported that most girls were able to return to school only because they received a financial scholarship. Reportedly, the scholarship selection committees are encouraged to pay special attention to such girls during the selection process. If girls returned to school, it was usually their parents or a female relative who looked after their baby. Orphaned girls sometimes struggle to find a caretaker and cannot return to school.

At Mcenga Secondary School, most girls returned after the agreed upon leave period, leaving their baby in the care of their parents. When a girl does not report back on time, the head or teacher-mentor tries to contact her via phone. This only works in areas with a network, so the school cannot reach out to girls in the most remote areas. Sometimes girls have contacted the school themselves if they cannot report back on time. Participants consistently listed lack of money for tuition or transportation, fear of stigmatization by other learners, or illness of the baby as key reasons for girls not returning to school on time. Very rarely, girls got married during the leave period. Girls who have scholarships retain them when they return to school and participants uniformly said that, without this sponsorship, most girls would not be able to return to school.

“If a girl came back to school and no one talked to her, she could feel out of place. If everyone supports the policy and girls do not worry that people will say this

and that, all is going to be well. So many girls go to better their lives through the Re-entry Policy. If more girls finish school they will do so many things to improve our communities and the country as a whole.” (Teacher-mentor, Mcenga)

School Life After Reentry

Members of the Tsidya Secondary School community described school life after reentry as difficult for the girls. Girls tended to experience stigma, such as being called names by fellow classmates (e.g., “mother,” “parent,” or “old”). Learners reported that many think that girls who receive scholarships do not work hard and waste the chance the sponsorship gives them. While most teachers appreciated the Re-entry Policy, some thought that letting girls return to school was a “waste of time and money” given the poor performance and frequent absence of many returning girls. Such teachers publicly call the reentered girls out on their situation: “You are already so old and still do not know the right answer.” According to school staff, many reentered girls struggled to concentrate in class, especially if their baby was sick, or missed a lot of classes if they returned to their villages to take care of an ill child. School staff reported that babies are often sick, which is common to children born to young and poor girls and women (Central Statistical Office 2007 and 2013-14). This poses an additional childrearing challenge to the girls.

Due to the large size of Tsidya Secondary School and the high number of pregnancies, the teacher-mentor and guidance counselor cannot provide individual counseling to each returning girl. Instead, most girls are mentored in an impersonal way, once a week, during a group

meeting with the dormitory supervisor where girls receive general words of encouragement about focusing on school.

Alternatively, once a girl returns to Mcenga Secondary School, an adult (PTA or scholarship selection committee member, teacher-mentor, guidance counselor, teacher, or guidance and counseling committee member) meets with her to make sure she feels welcomed and included in school activities.

Mcenga Secondary School staff reported that stigmatization of reentered girls takes place to some extent. For example, classmates might laugh at a girl and call her “old” or a “mother.” Teachers said that some girls who experienced stigma struggled with concentrating in school and feeling isolated. Sometimes teachers publicly make fun of reentered girls, for example by pointing out that they do not know an answer despite their “old” age or saying that they cause trouble. However, it appeared that such instances were not the norm and most teachers reported that they encouraged reentered girls to participate actively in class like everyone else to help them overcome the initial shyness after their return. Many learners reported that they stayed friends with reentered girls because they would not want them to be lonely and that they encouraged them to study a lot. Some learners have gone to a peer educator training or are appointed as “senior learners” by school management and feel obligated to help pregnant and reentered girls because of their position at the school.

Most girls struggled at first with studying when coming back to school, for example, because they worried about their baby, which was distracting. It is especially problematic when the baby gets sick because the girl misses class to go back to her village to take care of her

baby. However, girls’ performance usually increases over time and most manage to graduate from grade 12. It was very rare that girls would get pregnant a second time or drop out permanently after reentering Mcenga Secondary School. Staff participants observed that girls were extremely eager to complete school on time after their return. One aspect that school staff identified as key for girls’ high motivation to stay in school is that their “exam number”—the number they receive for their grade 9 final exams that they need to use again for the grade 12 exam—expires if they graduate more than 1 year late. Without the exam number, graduation as a regular learner is not possible and learners have to pay extra fees for graduating as an “adult learner” and obtaining a General Certificate of Education, which most learners cannot afford financially. Mcenga Secondary School only learned about this MESVTEE policy in 2011 or 2012 and has made learners aware of it since then.

Mcenga Secondary School has a more extended timetable than many other schools. The school used to have poor pass rates for grade 12 exams so learners now study longer hours each day, including self-study time, and have more hours with teachers. Term holidays for grade 12 learners are 2 weeks shorter than for other grades to give these learners more time to study, and the school does not charge extra fees for these weeks. While none of these measures were taken specifically to benefit reentered girls, school staff observed that it helps them catch up and grade 12 exam pass rates have visibly improved since, from below 50 percent to well over 50 percent.

Experience with Implementing the Policy

Across the board, Tsidya Secondary School stakeholders saw the *lack of parental*

understanding of and support for the Re-entry Policy as one of the major challenges to its implementation. Many parents outside the district center did not know about or understand the policy, or were opposed to it. School staff and PTA described a tradition of early marriage in the school catchment area, especially among poor families. Some parents married their daughters when they became pregnant to get a bride price. If a pregnancy does not result in a wedding, parents are paid a financial fee by the child's father or his family for the "damage" of the pregnancy. Sometimes parents did not want to send their daughters back to school because they worried that the baby might die from lack of care, like breastfeeding, and that the child's father's family would then demand back the "damages" fee they paid for the pregnancy. Many parents found marriage to be a good option for their daughters because they did not see how they could get a job that would benefit their families in the long term. Therefore, participants identified the need for outreach to parents regarding the benefits of educating their daughters and the risks of early marriage.

Tsidya Secondary School staff and parents reported that many *learners were unclear about why they were in school*. Girls, especially from poor families, tended to view marriage as an alternative to education, could not picture the opportunities an education provides, and struggled to maintain a focus on their education. Tsidya Secondary School staff, DEBS, PTA, and nongovernmental organization staff commented that it would be useful for girls to get more exposure to women who achieved an education after maternity leave and successfully hold jobs, like nurses or police officers. School staff and PTA members also expressed the desire for scholarship providers

to visit the school more often to give "words of encouragement" to the girls and help them focus on their education. They found this particularly important because, according to school records, pregnancies mostly occur among girls who received scholarships.

All Tsidya Secondary School stakeholder groups would like to *reduce the number of pregnancies* at the school, and many suggested implementing sexual and reproductive health education that went beyond "abstinence only" and included information on contraceptives. Learners reported that they did not learn about sexual and reproductive health at the school beyond the recommendation to "practice abstinence."

No one at the school had a copy of the 2012 Re-entry policy implementation guidelines, nor had they received any training related to them. Tsidya Secondary School is not alone in this regard. According to the DEBS office, there were *not enough copies of the implementation guidelines* for all schools in the district so head teachers were supposed to get photocopies of the guidelines from the DEBS office if they wanted to have them. The DEBS pointed out that many schools in his district do not implement the Re-entry Policy correctly due to a lack of information, training, or needed materials.

On the other hand, the Mcenga Secondary School community is content with implementation of the Re-entry Policy at large and all stakeholder groups mentioned several wishes for further supporting girls' education. Most importantly, they would like to *reduce the high number of pregnancies* at the school that affects all grades in order to ensure that each girl can complete her education without the challenge of reentry. How important this topic

is to the school is evidenced by the fact that nearly every stakeholder group raised it, even though the research team did not ask any questions about pregnancy rates. All stakeholders agreed that many learners are sexually active and that “preaching abstinence” does not work. Therefore, they strongly wished for sexual and reproductive health education at the school and learners’ access to contraceptives. Mcenga Secondary School staff expressed concern that over 50 percent of pregnancies occurred among girls who received scholarships.

Mcenga Secondary School would like to *conduct awareness-raising activities about the Re-entry Policy* with the local community in the district center and in the learners’ home villages, but is hindered by distance. The adult informants explained that many parents would try to keep their daughters at home when they got pregnant because they do not know the Re-entry Policy. Given the tradition of early marriage, many parents saw a pregnancy as an occasion to marry their daughter. Reportedly, girls’ education often is not highly valued because it is hard for families to see how they would benefit from an educated daughter.

The teacher-mentor and guidance counselor had *heavy workloads*. The high number of pregnancy cases made it impossible for teacher-mentors and guidance counselors to attend to each girl with the desired intensity. Although many actors at the school were involved in mentoring and counseling, often they are not trained in this area. The school used to have a club that covered topics like the value of education, dangers of early pregnancies, and the Re-entry Policy, and some learners were trained as peer educators, but with a congested schedule and overworked teachers the club was inactive this year.

ANALYSIS

Comparing the findings from the two schools, several factors emerged that contribute to an environment in which girls successfully reenter secondary school after delivery:

Counseling and Mentoring Before and After Pregnancy. Close counseling and mentoring of pregnant and reentered girls seems to be a key factor to girls’ reentry into school after pregnancy. While Mcenga Secondary School provides girls with counseling and mentoring at each step of the reentry process, girls at Tsidya Secondary School largely have to go through the whole process alone. While both schools struggled with the shortcomings of the current counseling system, such as the very limited time the teacher-mentor and guidance counselor have available, Mcenga Secondary School alleviates these by involving a multitude of actors. Close collaboration between the different actors seemed to contribute to an overall welcoming atmosphere for pregnant and reentered girls at Mcenga Secondary School who felt free to turn to any adult for help and, in turn, many members of the school community felt responsible for helping them. Ideally, counseling and mentoring take place both before and after reentry, like at Mcenga Secondary School. Mentoring after reentry can include academic support such as extended study time.

Financial Support, Awareness Raising, and Positive Attitudes. Other factors that appeared to be important were financial support to reentered girls through scholarships (which took place at both schools), parental support for reentered girls, for example through caretaking of the baby or encouragement to return to school (which took place at both schools), a positive perception of most actors of the Re-

entry Policy (which was found at both schools), making learners aware of the policy (which happened at Mcenga, but not Tsidya Secondary School), and a welcoming attitude towards reentered girls with little stigmatization (which was found in Mcenga, but not Tsidya Secondary School where many girls opted to reenter at other schools).

Community Outreach, Involved Children's Fathers, and Reducing Pregnancies. Both schools experienced largely similar challenges implementing the Re-entry Policy. For example, both schools identified community outreach as important, but felt unable to carry it out. Consequently, both schools experienced frequent refusal among the children's fathers to take responsibility, leaving the girls without support. Both schools also struggled to reduce the number of pregnancies with their current means. In both districts, schools either did not have the policy and related documents, or school leadership was not made aware of the policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented above, the following practices have the potential to improve reentry rates of girls into Zambian secondary schools and increase their success after reentry:

- 1) The MESVTEE should ensure that schools have sufficient numbers of policy-related materials such as the policy itself, the 2012 implementation guidelines, and maternity leave forms.
- 2) The MESVTEE should regularly inform school management and oblige schools to regularly make teaching staff aware of the policy in order to encourage accurate implementation. There should be

mechanisms to prevent a loss of knowledge about the policy through staff turnover, like routine orientation at the beginning of each school year.

To improve understanding of and support for the policy, especially the crucial support of learners' parents, the MESVTEE should promote awareness raising in school communities and among learners. For example, the MESVTEE could oblige schools to inform all learners about the policy; male learners to the same extent as female learners. Community outreach could take place through collaboration between the MESVTEE and partners with community radio or television stations. For this purpose, successfully employed women with reentry experience, or their families, could tell their stories. The MESVTEE could also develop short local language versions of the policy for the use in outreach campaigns, and more strategically involve chiefs in order to reach populations in remote areas.

In addition, schools can regularly inform all learners about the policy, for example through weekly clubs or peer educators, and routinely teach school staff about it. Local partners could support this effort, for example through school visits. Schools should seek to actively engage local communities near the school and in the learners' home villages. Schools can invite women with reentry experiences who are now successfully employed – including scholarship alumni - to speak to learners in order to motivate them and serve as role models. The general annual meeting with parents and PTA meetings should be used for awareness raising. Learners can inform their communities about the Re-entry Policy

during term breaks, for example in the form of a school project. It is also possible to invite staff from the scholarship-providing organization or members of the scholarship selection committees to visit learners' villages. Outreach activities should target schoolboys and men, informing them of the obligations pregnancy brings for them and the difficulties it causes for a girl. Outreach could also include information on the disadvantages of early marriage.

- 3) In order to ensure a full implementation of the policy, the MESVTEE should consider taking measures for holding more children's fathers responsible for contributing to the welfare of the girls and the children, for example through improved collaboration with the local justice system if a child's father denies responsibility. It would also be useful for schools if the MESVTEE developed procedures for how to enforce a paternity leave of a schoolboy who impregnates a girl from another school.
- 4) In order to support reentered girls financially, the MESVTEE, together with partners, should provide scholarships. Lack of ability to pay school fees seems to be a major obstacle for girls trying to return to school after maternity leave, which scholarships could effectively alleviate.
- 5) The MESVTEE should consider deploying a full-time trained guidance counselor to all schools, or reducing the teaching load for guidance counselors so that schools can counsel and mentor pregnant and reentered girls more intensively. A full-time counseling staff would not only have more time to mentor girls, but could also work on tasks schools are currently unable to carry out, like community outreach and alerting learners to the negative effects of stigma on

reentered girls. In addition to this, schools can "share the weight" by engaging as many actors as possible in the process of mentoring and counseling pregnant and reentered girls and, hence, create an atmosphere where girls are comfortable approaching adults. Frequent communication between all actors helps create an effective system of collaboration in which each pregnant girl receives encouragement to return to school, is helped with administrative procedures, and is actively welcomed back to school, with her family taken on board. Schools with a high rate of reentered girls should also consider offering academic mentoring, such as extra preparation time or an extended schedule for all learners.

- 6) A reduction in pregnancies and, consequently, reentry cases would enable schools to counsel and mentor reentered girls more closely. The MESVTEE should ensure provision of sexual and reproductive health education to all secondary school learners, including knowledge on how to use different contraceptives, and how and where to access them in accordance with internationally agreed on best practices (UNESCO 2009). Weekly clubs at schools or peer educators could also cover sexual and reproductive health topics, in addition to alerting learners to the Re-entry Policy.

More research is needed to understand if girls who receive financial scholarships for attending secondary school in Zambia generally become pregnant more often than girls who do not receive scholarships, and what causes this possible trend.

CONCLUSION

This case study provides evidence that a high percentage of girls reentering school after pregnancy at some Zambian secondary schools does not come about by chance, but that reentry can be stimulated through targeted interventions. If education policy makers, program implementers, and secondary schools widely implement measures like the ones outlined above, this could lead to a widespread improvement of girls' reentry rates after pregnancy in Zambian secondary schools, as well as to improvements of their school experience after reentry. This would, in turn, contribute to the achievement of the MESVTEE objective to increase progression and completion rates for secondary education, especially for girls.

REFERENCES

- Campaign for Female Education (Camfed). 2014. *2012-2014 pregnancy and re-entry data for Time to Learn supported Camfed scholars* (excel).
- Central Statistical Office. 2007. *Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS)*.
- Central Statistical Office. 2013-2014. *Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS)*.
- Mcenga Secondary School. 2012-2014. *School records*.
- MESVTEE. 1996. *Educating our Future policy*.
- MESVTEE. 1997. *Re-entry Policy*.
- MESVTEE. 2005. *Educating the Nation: Strategic Framework for Implementation of Education for All*. Lusaka, Zambia.
http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Zambia/Zambia_educ_nation.pdf

MESVTEE. 2007. *Operational Guidelines for Community Schools*. Lusaka, Zambia.

MESVTEE. 2011. *The Education Bill*. Lusaka, Zambia.

MESVTEE. 2012. *Re-entry Policy Guidelines*.

MESVTEE. 2002-2014. *Educational Statistical Bulletin*.

Mutombo, N. and M. Mwenda. 2010. *Review of the Re-entry Policy*. Lusaka, Zambia: MESVTEE.

Tsidya Secondary School. 2013-2015. *School records*.

UNESCO. 2009. *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: an evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators*. Volumes 1 and 2, Paris: UNESCO. Published in partnership with UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank the University of Zambia School of Education, Time to Learn, EnCompass LLC, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for institutional support. Zachariah Falconer-Stout and Lyn Messner (EnCompass LLC) provided feedback throughout the writing process and research design, and Abby Ladd (EnCompass LLC) provided comments on the final draft. Jonathan Jones (EnCompass LLC) assisted in the development of research questions. The graphic design and desktop publishing was provided by Crystal Cason (EnCompass LLC). Jelena Simmons (EnCompass LLC) helped bring this publication to its final form. The Campaign for Female Education (Camfed) provided data for the case selection and gave input on the topic, as did Time to Learn staff and partners at

the University of Zambia School of Education, Zambia Open Community Schools (ZOCS), Forum of African Women Educationalists of Zambia (FAWEZA), and MESVTEE officers at the Examinations Council of Zambia, Curriculum Development Center, and the Directorate of Planning and Information. Lucy Lisulu, Margaret Mkandawire, and Mutinta Simunchembu supported the data collection. Above all, the authors would like to thank the research participants who shared their stories with us.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Wedekind, Vera and Tomaida Milingo. 2015. *Second Chances for Girls: The Zambian Reentry into School Policy*. Time to Learn Case Study Series. Lusaka, Zambia: USAID's Time to Learn Project.



Time to Learn's *Case Study Series* provides insight into best practices in the education of orphans and other vulnerable children in Zambia, including an emphasis on Zambia's community schools. Designed for policymakers and program implementers, these case studies focus on key research priorities identified by stakeholders in Zambia's educational sector, including government officials, academics, and civil society.

Time to Learn is a 5-year activity funded by USAID and the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that assists the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) to provide an equitable standard of education service for vulnerable learners, improve reading skills, and implement practical strategies to strengthen school quality and promote community engagement in community schools. Time to Learn is implemented by Education Development Center, Inc. EnCompass LLC is the Time to Learn research and evaluation partner. The *Case Study Series* is embedded in a broader mixed-methods learning agenda, including five evaluations (one baseline, two impact, and two performance) and research capacity building. Case studies draw on knowledge from this broad learning agenda and existing research from the MESVTEE and the academic community.