



# Education in Zimbabwe: Working Together for a Better Future

Summary of Harare Conference, 12-13 July

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## 1. Overview of proceedings

The seminar was opened by David Coltart, Minister of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture. Following his opening remarks, the Ministry's Planning Team presented the Draft Interim Strategy entitled "*Back on Track: Reviving Pre-Tertiary Education in Zimbabwe*". The presentation developed by the team with the assistance of Peter Buckland, a consultant from the World Bank, began with a situational analysis outlining the current challenges facing the education system and the resource constraints within which it has to operate. It went on to identify the main strategic objectives recommended for the Government to pursue and priority areas for action in the next 18-month period - the time-frame for the interim plan of action. Team members identified six priority areas:

- restoring the professional status of teachers;
- re-establishing minimum conditions of learning;
- improving the quality of learning;
- reinvigorating school and system government;
- focusing resources on those with the greatest need; and
- strengthening sport, arts and culture.

Within each area, the team proposed realistic targets for action in the 2010-2011 period. These 'strategic interventions' fall into two categories (a) outputs that the team considered to be realisable before the end of 2011 (e.g. improved teachers' pay levels, textbook availability for all primary and secondary pupils as a result of donor support under the Education Transition Fund) and (b) capacity-building for the longer term through institutional improvements that will yield their main benefits in the period 2011-2015 and beyond.

Following the presentation of the plan, there was an extended plenary session providing participants with the opportunity to respond. On the second day participants separated out into Working Groups, one for each of the six priority areas identified above. The concluding session of the Conference was devoted to presentation of the Working Groups' summary conclusions and a final plenary panel.

This report contains a summary of the points raised by Harare participants in response to the presentations they heard, the main points made in the final plenary panel and summary of conclusions from the six Working Groups.

## 2. Summary of plenary discussions

### *General*

The production of the Interim Strategy was welcomed as lending greater purpose and direction to the Ministry's efforts. Participants were generally realistic about Zimbabwe's economic situation and recognised the necessity to make hard choices and to set priorities. They appreciated that only so much could be achieved in the period of the Interim Plan (2010-2011). Several participants made the point that advocacy for education with the economic ministries had to underline that this was long-term investment with consequences for economic development and social order, rather than consumption; but also that ministries of finance and planning were interested in hard facts and measurable outputs. There was general agreement that a precondition for making progress with education development was to establish more reliable databases, and more timely release and sharing of information, with the strengthening of the Ministry's EMIS system a high priority. There were very many areas of concern for policymaking – some of them of central importance like the proportion of children attending and actually being taught in school - where the dearth of information was a hindrance in reaching sensible decisions. There was a need for sound survey work and other research. World Bank participants acquainted delegates with possible information-gathering initiatives that the Bank might be able to support.

As one delegate pointed out, the Plan defined some short-term priorities and actions but it did not – at least in the form presented to participants – amount to a coherent statement of policy. Others were concerned that so little was said about implementation, given the frequent disconnect between Ministry intention and actual change in school-level situations and practice.

The presence of representatives from partner ministries and other public bodies at the seminar was most welcome given the dependence of education progress on inter-ministerial co-operation. This was not only true of ministries with co-ordination functions, like Planning and Finance, but was particularly obvious in the case of Higher and Technical Education which produced teachers for schools under MoESAC direction; of the Public Service Commission that regulated teachers' terms of service; and of the Ministry of Labour and Social Services that ran the BEAM programme enabling the school enrolment and attendance of over half a million school children. At different times in the Seminar pleas were heard that these various functions properly belonged with MoESAC or to a Teachers Service Commission. So long as they were housed elsewhere, constructive dialogue in the national interest had to be pursued.

### *Teachers*

There was general support for the proposition that restoration of the morale and status of teachers had to be accorded top priority in the Plan. This was partly a matter of material incentives like salary and allowances but was also an issue of professionalisation.

There was much discussion about comparative levels of remuneration for teachers and other groups of public sector workers, some of whom – for example health workers, university employees, the armed forces and some parastatal employees - appeared to enjoy a privileged position. There may have been particular circumstances in which some of these groups had been able to obtain special terms. As a general principle it was felt that public service workers with similar levels of qualifications and responsibilities should receive roughly equivalent levels of overall remuneration, with allowances where the particular nature of the job required them. All were agreed that the pay of teachers should be raised as soon as possible, but the Deputy Minister sounded a word of caution about tying any target level of increase to the Poverty Datum Line (PDL) because of the danger this might be revised downwards if ZimStats took over responsibility for computing the Consumer Price Index. Another dimension of reforming teachers' pay was the need for a more differentiated pay scale giving due recognition of extra responsibility and experience.

Rebuilding the teaching profession was about much more than improving pay. Many advocated the creation of a Teachers' Professional Council with responsibility for overseeing the maintenance of

professional standards and drawing up codes of conduct. Concern was expressed about the state of teacher education, where there should be more emphasis on imparting teaching skills, and where supply and demand of teachers should be better planned. Pleas were heard on all sides for teachers to be provided with better opportunities for professional development to improve their skills and to prepare them to take increased responsibility. There was strong advocacy for higher priority to be given in the Interim Plan to the training of heads on whose shoulders the main responsibility for keeping the system running fell, because of the limited capacity of most district and provincial offices to support them. Lack of clarity about the proper distribution of functions and responsibility over school matters between SDCs and the Head greatly complicated the task of Heads and the intention to address this in the Plan was welcome. A particularly unsatisfactory feature of the system in some places was the way that some teachers were left in “acting” appointments for as much as seven or eight years without confirmation of promoted status.

It was generally agreed that where it occurred the practice of appointing recent school leavers as temporary unqualified teachers in schools where they had recently been studying – in some cases not very successfully – was one to be discouraged and should be discontinued.

The Interim Plan outline had drawn attention to the increasing ‘feminisation’ of teaching. It was unclear that this was in any way associated with poor learning performance of pupils, but there could be adverse effects on the socialisation of children if either male or female role models were absent from the school.

### ***Infrastructure for learning***

The inadequate state of school facilities and the lack of equipment books and materials were a cause of great concern, because of the impact this had on children’s ability to benefit from school attendance. Capital spending and non-salary recurrent expenditure had shrunk to virtual extinction, and some way needed to be found to protect a critical minimum spend on these inputs. It was an area where development partners were helping and a more substantial major-donor input should be sought – the 50m US dollar Education Transition Fund (ETF) with its significant textbook supply programme showed what was possible. But even the kind of large-scale support that the ETF support of textbooks represented might not completely fill gaps: the textbook programme itself covered core books for every pupil in only four out of 13 primary subjects and it was unclear what kind of renewal and replacement arrangement would take effect as books wore out.

### ***Marginalised and out-of-school children***

There was general agreement that a much clearer picture was needed of the number of children either not enrolled in school, or enrolled but rarely attending, or attending but not being given lessons because they had not paid their dues. This needed to be examined in terms of registered and unregistered establishments, for boys and girls separately and – given the serious inequalities in Zimbabwe between different districts – on a geographical basis as well. Zimbabwe was in serious danger of failing to meet the Education for All targets. These included early childhood education and adult education, and some participants expressed disappointment that the Plan did not give higher profile to those areas of education provision.

The Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) covered only a proportion of the many children in need of financial assistance. Improvements to the programme would involve expanded funding and more timely disbursement of funds, but also wider participation in the selection of children deserving help.

### ***Supervision, support and local capacity building***

The Planning Team had drawn attention to the high proportion of vacant posts in district and provincial offices. Coupled with the absence of vehicles, with only eight out of 73 district offices having access to one, and the lack of other essential equipment like computers, this meant that many local offices were barely functioning. In consequence schools lacked contact with the administration and were without effective supervision and support. Doubts were expressed about

the calibre and competence of some inspectors/monitors and there was need for professional development of that cadre.

Emphasis was therefore placed on the need to develop capacity and good governance at the school and community level, and accompanying support at the district level. Providing for more decisions to be taken at school level was seen as essential. This required working out respective roles of the SDCs and the Heads, clarifying the latter's authority over the conduct of the school and supporting Heads' leadership role in improving the professional capacity of teachers serving under them. It was also necessary to reactivate earlier initiatives to assist SDCs to formulate and implement school development plans.

### ***Curriculum and Quality***

The Team's presentation had drawn attention to the declining performance of pupils in public examinations and the need for curriculum renewal. One of the Working Groups considered the analysis and recommendations made but in plenary there were few references to the content of education beyond the importance of sport, arts and culture in the curriculum (see below) and the teaching of local languages and their use as the medium of instruction in the early grades of primary school. It was reported that the latter issue had surfaced quite frequently in the outreach consultations undertaken as part of the Plan preparation process.

### ***Sport, Arts and Culture (SAC)***

These areas of the Ministry's responsibility absorbed only about 3% of the budget. Some questioned whether they should be a high priority at the present time but a great majority of those who spoke on this issue in plenary stressed that the SAC responsibilities of the Ministry should not be considered only in terms of national institutions serving the public at large. There was a very close link between 'E' and 'SAC' in the Ministry's title and education was impoverished if values and creative expression embodied in SAC were missing. Among the many gaps in current education provision were adequate school libraries.

## **3. Summary of closing panel on 'next steps and way ahead'**

*Panellists: Senator David Coltart, Minister of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture; Dr Stephen Mahere, Permanent Secretary, MoESAC; Mr Peter Buckland, Consultant to the World Bank; Mr Cris Bowora, Principal Director, MoESAC*

**The Minister, Senator Coltart**, said it was important to mobilise consensual support for the Plan both domestically and internationally and he expressed the hope that organisations present would buy into the framework, while continuing to suggest ways in which the content could be modified and improved.

Domestically he would take the Plan to Cabinet, hoping to be able to stress that it had the support of leading educators and development partners. He stressed that it was crucial to get the Ministry of Finance on board if the Plan was to represent more than a mere piece of paper. But, however benign the attitude of the Ministry of Finance, that ministry simply did not have the resources to fund more than a fraction of what was needed. So in parallel he would be seeking international support, making the argument that stabilisation of education in Zimbabwe was crucial for the socio-political stability of the whole region.

**Dr Stephen Mahere** supported the Minister's call for full endorsement of the strategy by education-sector partners. He focused his remarks on the teaching profession which was central to the implementation of the plans. Teachers needed to feel satisfied that they were getting a fair deal and that they were members of a truly professional cadre. The proposal for a Teachers' Professional Council was among the most important recommendations that had been made and extra resources would be needed for professional upgrading and support with proper provision for induction and

continuous professional development. The issue of employment of temporary teachers would have to be re-examined.

Dr Mahere also stressed the importance of ensuring that inspectors were fully capable and had sufficient expertise in their subjects to exercise authority and give guidance. He also drew attention to the need to provide more congenial learning conditions by improving school infrastructure, and the need to reinvigorate school governance. He pleaded for a wider interpretation of learning attainment to include more than academic achievement and suggested that report cards could be modified to reflect this.

**Peter Buckland** stressed the need for continuing the dialogue begun at the seminar especially with the development partners who had information, data and costing expertise, and with external donors. It was important to engage with the financial authorities in Zimbabwe, to ensure that MoESAC and the Ministry of Finance were using the same sources and data on e.g. number of teachers in employment, and that MoESAC adjusted its plans to the size of the resource envelope. They would have to convince the Ministry of Finance that funds were needed for infrastructure as well as salaries. Increased communication with donors was also important because donors needed to persuade head offices in their capitals that Zimbabwe was worth supporting.

Mr Buckland canvassed a suggestion for moving forward to the next stage of creating an implementation plan. This was that small core teams of four or five people, embracing both the relevant Principal Director and technical staff with more time – and including in appropriate cases representatives of development partners - should be established to follow up each line of action.

**Mr Cris Bowora** endorsed the need for all the partners to work together in carrying the strategy forward. Each education partner should find a niche where they could make the best contribution in the light of their expertise and capacity.

**The Minister** concluded the discussion with observations about devolution of authority and the issue of the affordability of recommended priority programmes. He had noted the many calls for devolution of authority to school communities as well as to provinces and districts, which linked up with the Government's constitutional reform efforts. There seemed to be strong consensus for devolution.

He said that Conference participants had to recognise that the priorities they had selected were still a 'wish list' until resources were found. His own priority was teachers but donors were unwilling to fund teachers' salaries on the grounds that they represented recurrent expenditure. Some parts of any forward movement were always going to be subject to the dictates of donors. They often had short-term perspectives and needed to show value for money. For donors the provision of textbooks through the ETF was a fairly straightforward exercise but it was not clear that that success could be easily replicated elsewhere.

## **4. Summary of working group discussions**

### ***GROUP 1: Restore the Professional Status of Teachers***

*The Working Group on restoring the professional status of teachers considered ways to return teachers to the position of respect they had previously enjoyed in Zimbabwean society.*

The Group was clear that teachers' status had declined considerably in recent years. Teacher training courses were no longer able to attract the best applicants. There were both material and professional dimensions to the status of teachers: the social respect in which teachers were held reflected both. On the material side teachers and education officers had suffered an erosion in their comparative position as regard pay and benefits affecting their ability to afford good housing, ownership of a car etc. These were not only important in ensuring a comfortable life for the teacher but also gave signals to the rest of society about how the authorities regarded teachers. The Group therefore concluded that teachers pay needed to be increased to a level higher than the Poverty Datum Line, allowances should be restored, and the possibility of providing access to loans for housing and transport should be explored with donors. On the professional side the personnel management of teachers left much to be desired and a more efficient, supportive and caring regime was called for. Teacher regulation of professional standards through a Teachers' Professional Council, overseeing a code of conduct and ensuring adequate access to professional development opportunities, and the establishment of a Teachers Service Commission were favoured approaches to bringing about improvements in teacher status. The authorities also should act to provide teachers with greater physical security in face of discrimination on political grounds. The UNESCO/ILO Recommendation on the Status of Teachers and guarantees of their civic and employment rights seemed more relevant than ever.

### ***GROUP 2: Re-establish minimum conditions of learning***

*The Working Group on improving the learning environment focused on issues around rehabilitating school infrastructure and facilities.*

The group's discussion focused on refining the key challenges within the area. The group accepted the challenges and interventions laid out in the plan but called for a few modifications. The primary concern was with the statistics provided and numeric targets set. Delegates emphasised the need for more precise quantification in order to assess the extent of the problem. They highlighted the need to break infrastructure shortage data down by primary, secondary and ECD and to identify precisely which specialist rooms and equipment are most needed (libraries, labs, practical subject rooms etc). Similarly, when discussing textbook provision they felt that both data and objectives should be quantified by subject and priority subjects identified. On infrastructure needs they recommended differentiating between the demand for rehabilitation of existing structures and the construction of new facilities. They also suggested that power shortages should be explicitly addressed. The immense challenge posed by satellite schools in terms of poor infrastructure and facilities was also specifically highlighted. Finally, both in terms of objectives set and data gathered the group felt the figures should directly reference special needs facilities, including the presence of suitable access, toilets, braille textbooks and hearing aids.

### ***GROUP 3: Improve the quality of learning***

*The Working Group on improving quality of learning focused on curriculum development and standards of achievement.*

The group accepted the challenges and outputs identified, with a couple of refinements. They felt that the proposed curriculum advisory board should be an operational body actively furthering curriculum research and capacity. They also noted that when strengthening the institutional capacity of EDS and Zimsec, the Ministry should remember the importance of curriculum inputs from universities, teachers' colleges and polytechnics and provide linkages for curriculum development. The group acknowledged that a lot of data was available, but stressed that this needed refining and called for the inclusion of comparative research with other countries in the

region on both curriculum development and standards of achievement. Development partners too called repeatedly for better data to help support proposals and mobilise funds, but nevertheless expressed their support for the process and willingness to participate. Overall, delegates felt that the plan's objectives were achievable, subject to sufficient financing for external consultants, preferably from the diaspora, to assist local staff. They emphasised that training would be a key element.

#### **GROUP 4: Reinvigorate school and system governance**

*The Working Group focused on the role of district offices in the supervision of schools and on supervision within schools.*

The group's primary emphasis was on the need to distinguish between school and system governance. Delegates felt that both are essential and that the plan's language should reflect this more clearly. On internal school supervision, discussion focused on the need to clarify reporting chains, particularly for school heads, and on the introduction of induction programmes. At the system level, delegates stressed the need to look at the system as a whole and to again clarify communication channels and responsibilities. They noted that lack of effective governance is an obstacle to the successful implementation of a strategic plan and felt that there was an urgent need to refocus and clarify the roles of school development committees in particular. Indeed, district level functionality was seen as key to sustainability. In addition, delegates noted that lack of capacity and lack of continuous systematic training are major obstacles at school, district and national level, and that they exacerbate one another. Finally, weak financial management at school and district level was highlighted as a priority area. Delegates discussed the need to increase donor trust in government at all levels. Donors need to be confident that MoESAC at district or national level has the capacity to manage resources if they are made available. Participating development partners concurred and stressed that they had a role to play in supporting the process of planning and prioritising. They were clear that a greater level of coordination and prioritization would help them to contribute more efficiently, and highlighted how important it is that SDCs have clear governance chains, particularly in finance, to make it easier for donors to co-operate with them. The group concluded that their discussions had demonstrated that there was scope for a further session on this topic alone.

#### **GROUP 5: Focus resources on those with greatest need**

*This Working Group focused on identifying and addressing the needs of marginalised groups.*

Initial discussion focused firstly on data availability, and secondly on definitions of marginalisation. On the first, delegates called for situational analysis of marginalisation by province, segregated by gender and other categories of marginalisation. They felt that this would allow for prioritisation of interventions to the areas most at need. Delegates also noted that existing statistics are too generalised. They emphasised the need to liaise with organisations involved in the collection of data (e.g. ZIMSTATS, NAC, UNICEF etc) and to share knowledge in order to identify gaps. On the second issue, the group felt that the definition of marginalisation needs to be clarified, not only in terms of income and resources, but also in terms of circumstances (e.g. distance to school). Single parent and child headed households need to be considered. On the question of definitions, delegates also noted on that "back yard schools" could have two faces: on the one side marginalisation (poor quality schools for those unable to afford fees) and on the other those supplementing state education with private tuition. Delegates supported the plan's outputs for 2011, but made some additions. Firstly, they suggested that the EMIS system to capture information on the marginalised could be improved and consolidated, and circulated more widely to ensure the identification of gaps. Secondly, they called for the Ministry to review, refocus and re-capacitate BEAM for greater coverage. Thirdly, the group supported the proposal for the establishment of a "Back to School Campaign" – a sustainable campaign targeting the most marginalised. Finally, delegates highlighted the need to strengthen the capacity to respond to special needs education.

## **GROUP 6: Revitalise sports, arts and culture**

*The Working Group on Sports, Arts and Culture (SAC) focused on the role and management of SAC both within schools and more widely.*

The discussion focused on the need to raise the status of SAC in Zimbabwean schools and more broadly. They agreed with the interim plan's objectives and proposed interventions, particularly the need to initiate the development of an information system for management and strategy development and the need to survey and gather data for decision-making and monitoring purposes. They emphasised the lack of investment in SAC policies to date and called for SAC's policy status (which dates back to 1985) to be revisited. There were similar calls for policy on SAC subjects in schools to be revised and strengthened. Discussion also focused on the need to develop legislative capacity to raise finances within SAC. Additional proposals included the need to work with communities and schools to establish community SAC centres to help increase the sustainability of disciplines and the need to develop new teaching and learning materials for SAC. Finally, the group highlighted the need for increased international facilitation and suggested that trained ambassadors to promote Zimbabwean SAC internationally were needed.

## **5. Summary of delegate views on next steps**

The evaluation forms completed by delegates suggested that the overwhelming majority of participants had found the seminar a useful forum in which to communicate with other stakeholders and increase awareness of each others' priorities. The consultative ethos of the event and the strategic process were noted. Lack of time to prepare prior to the event and a feeling that there was more to discuss than was possible in two days, were felt to be the main shortcomings.

Looking ahead, delegates highlighted areas that they felt could have received greater focus during the seminar discussions and that they recommended focusing on going forward. These included:

- Introduction of clearer structures within which development partners can commit to the strategic plan
- A review of the operational structure and culture within MoESAC – delegates felt that ministry executives needed support to help iron out issues of policy, governance, and transparency
- Assessment of the role of Higher and Tertiary Education and how this could be integrated into MoESAC operations.
- Training of education personnel at all levels and teacher training specifically needs to be addressed

In terms of next steps, delegates suggested the following options:

- Ongoing feedback to development partners on the implementation process and progress made
- Further small meetings or seminars focusing on specific themes – continuing with the themes discussed in the Working Groups was thought to be of value
- Follow up meetings at provincial level to discuss the plan and targets – greater involvement of DEOs, teachers and SDCs was thought to be important
- Follow-up meeting at national level to discuss changes made to the plan and pledged support

