

# Zambia's Education System in Historical Context:

Spark Ventures & a Qualitative Analysis of Hope Ministries' Operational Environment

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# Introduction

Spark Ventures is a Chicago-based 501(c) (3) organization, investing in sustainable solutions that lift children out of poverty. Founded in 2007 after a volunteer trip to Zambia, the organization's three co-founders formed Spark Ventures to partner with and strengthen organizations across the globe to help educate and empower children in developing countries. Spark Ventures has first partnered with Hope Ministries in Zambia, which serves children in the rural Twapia community, and has been assisting Hope by providing human resources, strategic guidance and financial capital. Together, Spark and its partner in Zambia have launched a large-scale poultry farm, whose profits are meant to ensure the sustainability of Hope Ministries-run primary school and orphanage. The goal of the business is to grow and expand, while providing a continuous source of revenue for Hope's programming and minimizing financial dependency on donors.

Spark, recognizing the importance of understanding the local context, believes that stepping back and looking at the longer-term factors and dynamics that have shaped Zambia's development and educational institutions is integral to developing a more practical methodology when it comes to addressing a problem as nuanced as poverty. Spark is therefore committed to research that understands the broader historical, socioeconomic, and cultural forces that shape Spark's target communities, in order to have a more lasting and meaningful impact. Attempting to understand and improve the performance of Hope School requires identifying the origins, structure, and persistence of local social and educational institutions to better comprehend the challenges to Spark's development outcomes.

# Overview

Recent estimates of Zambia’s population place it at close to 14,500,000, making it one of the more sparsely populated countries in sub-Saharan Africa (CIA 2012). The population growth rate is eleventh highest in the world and close to half the population is under age 15 (CIA 2012). As of 2010, Zambia’s population was still living predominantly in rural areas, with slightly over one third of the total population living near urban centers (GeoHive 2010). Ndola, one of the two locations where Spark supports its partner in Zambia, is the second most populous city in the country. Ndola is situated in Zambia’s Copperbelt province, which was the backbone of the colonial and early postcolonial economy because of its mineral wealth.

By 1983, the Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) in primary schools had reached nearly 100 percent, an astonishing

achievement. However, by 1999 GER had declined to 75 percent, meaning the gap between population and enrollment growth has widened (Haambote, 51). This can be attributed to the economy contracting during the late 1970s through the 1980s. According to recent research, the country seems to have returned to more successful GER levels in recent years. In 2005, it was estimated that GER for boys and girls were over 100 percent, and that if these rates maintain their current levels and dropout rates between grades 1 and 7 remain low, then Zambia has the capacity to achieve universal primary education before 2015, the year set forth by the Millennium Development Goals (Haambote 2009, 66).

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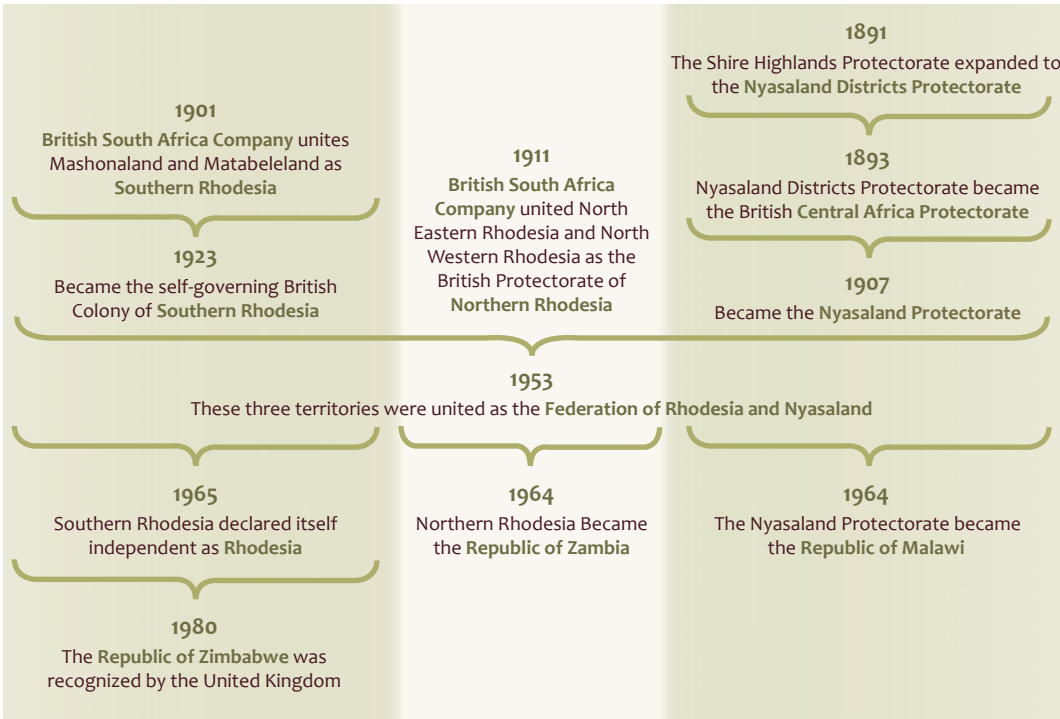
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Resurgence in school attendance may, however, be mostly true for Zambia’s government schools only, which are accessible to those families who are able to afford paying for these theoretically “free” institutions. For Community Schools, a category that Hope falls into, enrollment levels are more challenging to accurately

**Figure 1: Copperbelt Province, Zambia**



**Figure 2: Colonial History of Zambia**



Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) and mining in South Africa. BSAC believed educating Africans served little purpose and would not contribute to the territory's economic development (Kuster 1999). It wasn't until 1929 that the first primary school for Africans was developed and African secondary schooling was not implemented by colonial authorities until shortly before World War II (Kuster, 232).

Rather than educate the African population to prepare them for skilled and low-skilled labor jobs

assess. Community Schools, by definition, are those that spring up and are supported by communities and private entities, particularly in very poor and rural areas where children face significant challenges in being able to attend school. Community Schools differ from Government Schools in that they don't charge tuition, don't require uniforms and shoes, and do not mandate that children need to be within certain age brackets that correspond to specific grade levels in order to attend. Available data on educational trends in Zambia does not appear to reflect the full reality on the ground, however, which is made up of dynamics that incorporate different types of schools.

## Colonial History

Zambia itself was considered a "tiresome appendage" of the British South African Company (BSAC), who ruled the territory as Northwestern Rhodesia and Northeastern Rhodesia until transferring it to Britain in 1924 when the territory became known as Northern Rhodesia (Kuster, 231). BSAC was more interested in keeping the territory out of the hands of other European colonial powers and using it as a labor pool for more prosperous white settler farming in Southern

necessary for the later development of the mining sector, both BSAC and later Britain preferred to recruit European workers from Southern Rhodesia. In colonial times, the primary and secondary education system in Zambia was designed to function only for children of white settlers. There was little attempt to educate the colony's African population until shortly before Zambia's independence in 1964.

## Initial Postcolonial Developments

Zambia in general and the Copperbelt District in particular emerged from the white settler-dominated colonial period with an education system ill-suited to educating the newly independent state's African population. By the time of independence, the education system was perhaps the most poorly developed of all of the British Empire's colonies (Hoover 1979). The post-colonial Zambian government thus faced an enormous task of building a national education system to meet the needs of Zambia's population after independence in 1964. For example,

there were less than 100 university graduates by the time of independence after 1964 (Hoover 1979). It was also estimated at independence that only one to three percent of the entire Zambian population of close to two million Africans had completed primary school (Hoover 1979).

Initial commitments by the postcolonial state to improving access to primary and secondary education were ambitious. Significant gains were made in the years following independence. By 1965 roughly 1,500 students had completed senior secondary school (Form 5) and 6,000 had completed junior secondary school (Form 2). An Act in 1966 abolished racial segregation in the schools, and government assistance covered tuition, boarding, and teacher salaries in addition to nationalizing private and mission schools (Musambachime, 83). A major early obstacle to improving rates of schooling was a bias towards placing schools in urban areas when the Zambian population was still predominantly rural. The Copperbelt province, where Spark supports its local partner Hope Ministries, historically had the highest ratios of secondary school enrollment (Hoover 1979). This may be due to higher population density within the Copperbelt, however.

Marked expansion in school enrollment continued over the next decade, as primary level enrollments rose from 378,000 in 1964 to 810,000 in 1973, and those at secondary level from 13,850 to 65,750. Technical and vocational training colleges enrolled about 3,000 in 1973 as against none at all in 1964. Enrollment at the University of Zambia grew from 312 in 1966 to 3,000 in 1973 (Musambachime, 84).

Despite sizable growth in post-colonial primary and secondary school enrollment, Zambia still had a desperate shortage of persons with enough education to perform managerial, engineering, and technical jobs. Additionally, the small number of Zambians who made it through secondary school often took better-paying jobs outside of the school system. In the mid-1970s, civil servants received a twenty percent increase in salary, contrasted with school teachers whose salaries remained stagnant.

## International Context

During the 1970s Zambia had become a one-party state dominated by the United National Independence Party (UNIP). Public spending in the education sector

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declined precipitously as the international price for copper dropped during the mid-1970s. Negative developments in Zambia's heavily centralized economy, one almost entirely dependent upon copper, meant that public spending on the social sector necessary to implement significant educational reforms was never accomplished. When the price of copper crashed in the 1970s,

coupled with a worldwide oil crisis, Zambia found itself forced to borrow from international lending institutions and by the mid-1980s had taken on a debt that was unsustainable and crippled spending in education.

The country's national debt rose to \$3.5 billion by 1984 and by 1990 had reached over \$7.5 billion (Musambachime, 84). By this time, the state's loan repayments were equal to the entire amount of the country's yearly export earnings. Zambia underwent Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) implemented by international financial institutions in the 1980s, which resulted in deregulation and privatization of publicly-controlled mining interests, the loss of thousands of public sector jobs, price shocks resulting from cuts to subsidies on consumer goods and locally-produced crops, and severe cuts in social spending. As a result of attempting austerity measures to rein in the budget deficit, the national primary and secondary education systems became severely underfunded and therefore inadequate to meet the country's education needs. As a result,

The quality of education during the period (1983-1988) declined due to financial and other constraints such as excessively large classes, poorly furnished classrooms, dilapidated buildings, and scarcity of textbooks, science equipment and other essential items. A combination of these factors, together with accommodation problems led to a fall in teacher morale (Musambachime, 85).

# SAPs & Primary Education System

The introduction of SAPs in the 1980s led to sharp cuts in employment opportunities in the public sector. The primary education system suffered particularly. Class sizes exploded as enrollment at the primary and secondary level continued to rise as government revenues and expenditures conversely shrunk. In Ndola, available places in the public school system became only available for two thirds of eligible seven year-olds (Musambachime, 85). It also became quite common in Ndola for class sizes to be between 60 and 90 students per one teacher. As a result, the amount of individual attention given to primary students at critical moments of their educational development dropped substantially as teachers were simply overwhelmed by the sheer size of their classes. Those new primary school students who didn't have access to pre-school suffered disproportionately (Musambachime, 86). Another consequence of exploding class sizes was that those students who were bright enough to potentially succeed at higher levels of secondary education were forced to proceed at the same pace as the rest of the class.

Since 2000, Zambia has satisfied many conditions for debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), and in 2005 had much of its debt cancelled. Economic conditions have improved somewhat since 2000, which free-market advocates attribute to the liberalization of the Zambian economy and significant investment in the mining sector by China and the West. However, life expectancy, income per capita, and formal sector employment have all declined substantially since the introduction of structural reforms over three decades ago. Unemployment in Zambia remains high and the World Bank estimated in 2009 that 70 percent of Zambians lived on less than \$1 per day (Haambote, 77). As it pertains to education, by 2002 the government could still not educate enough primary teachers to replace those who were retiring, while also having difficulties paying retirement benefits (Haambote 2009, 73). Interestingly, the Zambian government received a grant from the Netherlands to temporarily cover teacher retirement benefit costs.

Based on Spark's ground assessments and interviews with various community members in July 2012, opinions on educational institutions appear somewhat contradictory to what research indicates. Hope Community School teachers, some of which have tried



to obtain government posts, claim that over the past decade the number of government school teacher positions have increased to the point where the teachers now can't find employment- seemingly the reverse of the situation just a decade ago. The alleged culprit behind this surprising claim is not that there are too few children in the schools to teach as much as it is the government's inability to pay the teachers' salaries. One of the overwhelming challenges in this context, and something that Spark has worked diligently to try to improve at Hope School, includes a lack of educational resources and textbooks. The ratio of available textbooks, particularly in classes that top over 60 students each, tends to be disproportionately small to the actual need, leaving large numbers of students with relatively few books. With widespread poverty, lack of access to resources, and an absence of a culture of reading, national literacy levels hovering at just over seventy percent are perhaps not surprising (UNICEF, 2010).

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parent-guardian survey facilitated by Spark to over 200 individuals in the village of Twapia, a township outside of Ndola in the Copperbelt, the average family size came out to 6 children, with one bread winner being the norm. In families where there was only one guardian alive or if there were elder relatives to support, the occurrence of child labor was almost guaranteed.

Unlike other Southern African states, Zambia has not had extremely high levels of gender disparities in primary school enrollment (Haambote 2009, 69). As mentioned earlier, however, gender disparities tend to become more exaggerated as students progress through grade levels owing to socio-economic and cultural factors. In the case of Hope School in Twapia, the ratio of boys to girls is fairly similar between first and fifth grades, and starts to noticeably change in sixth and seventh grades, where there are visibly more boys, at a probable rate of 3 to 1, once they reach their seventh grade exams. Though dropout rates for females are higher than boys, the rates in Zambia again are smaller compared to regional neighbors (Haambote 2009, 70).

In 2001, the government of Zambia's budget allocation to education remained amongst the lowest in Southern Africa. On the positive side, Zambia's budget allocations to education at least have not been as consistently hampered by conflict like much of its Southern African neighbors. Zambia, Malawi and Botswana were perhaps the only Southern African nations to escape armed conflict within their countries from independence to the present. Mozambique and Angola fought protracted battles for independence against Portugal until 1975, only to immediately devolve into states of war against apartheid South African-backed proxy rebel groups until the late 1990s. Zimbabwe was embroiled in a war between black nationalists and white-minority settlers for much of the 1970s. South Africa fought to control South-West Africa/Namibia during decades of guerrilla insurgency seeking independence.

## Regional Context

In other states of Southern Africa, traditional ways of life such as being nomadic pastoralists or peripatetic fishermen have made it difficult to provide primary level schooling to highly mobile populations. Zambia, luckily, doesn't have a large percentage of its population partaking in these economic activities. Additionally, the Zambian landscape is devoid of desert or mountainous regions, making access to schooling somewhat easier in Zambia than in surrounding states. Zambia does share socio-cultural attributes of its Southern African neighbors, however. Rural populations are reluctant to send girls long distances to school for safety reasons and also because of the propensity to marry girls at early ages (Haambote 2009, 69). Additionally, the critical need for children as a source of labor on subsistence agriculture in rural areas keeps many children from regularly attending school and advancing through the grade levels. In a July 2012



# Conclusions

State funding of universal primary education is achievable and with the recent election of Michael Sata, a more populist and pro-labor tone is being sounded from the highest levels of the new government. What this new administration will mean for increased social sector and education spending that expands government assistance and enrollment remains to be seen. Major challenges remain in enrollment and retention for the poorest of Zambian students, this being an ongoing issue at Hope Community school in Twapia as well. Twapia is predominantly rural and impoverished, and thus underserved in terms of access to public schools and resources in general. Though Hope School currently serves almost 350 local children, the need is much higher and there are more students eager to go to school than physical space currently permits. Positively, Spark Ventures and its partner Hope Ministries have targeted a sector of the Zambian population for school enrollment and progression that most desperately needs access to education: impoverished and orphaned children in a rural context, which tend to be ones who are most frequently marginalized and face the greatest challenges when it comes to access to quality education.

Among the available data on the performance and achievement of schools in Zambia, it's quite clear that there is a large need for further research on both the amount of and the performance of community schools, as compared to government and private schools. A 2005 study noted,

Actual data on community schools are still rather scarce. Enrollment and progression data are not yet systematically collected in most African countries; and given the precarious existence of many community schools and their tenuous relationship with the state, available data are likely to reflect approximations rather than precise conditions (Hoppers 2005 Vol. 51 No.2/3).

More monitoring and evaluation by Spark and Hope is needed before true differences begin to emerge. Anecdotally, during their last trip to Twapia in the

summer of 2012, Spark staff found widespread local opinion that community schools perform better than their public counterparts because community school staff appear more devoted to the wellbeing of the students, particularly in the case of Hope where the faculty and students come from the same community. This assertion appears to be supported by the fact that Hope School currently boasts a 100% passing rate of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade national exams, in contrast to just a bit over 80% passing rate at public primary schools. This achievement may also be related to Hope School teachers creating a highly collaborative environment, within which the educators regularly discuss their students' successes and challenges, thereby creating a culture of the next grade picking up exactly where the former left off and providing more individualized assistance.

What should be noted is that there has been a marked increase in foreign direct investment in Zambia recently. The challenge for Zambia and its education system is graduating enough students with the education and skills required for employment in the higher echelons of resource extraction and agricultural processing that are growing most rapidly in the modern Zambian economy. A major challenge in Zambian demographics is that HIV/AIDS has skewed Zambia's population pyramid to the point where half of the population is under 15 years of age. There simply are not yet enough Zambians of legal working age with the requisite education to take advantage of increased foreign direct investment. Spark, through its partnership with Hope Ministries in bringing a community school to an underserved area, is now on the cusp of addressing such widespread challenges, but much remains to be done.

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