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Women and Girls Fund (WGF)

Country Gender Profile – Zambia

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List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

Acronym	Full Form
ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
ADVANCE	Agricultural Development and Value Chain Enhancement
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BDPfA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
BOZ	Bank of Zambia
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEEC	Citizen Economic Empowerment Commission
CEFM	Child Early and Forced Marriage
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CPs	Cooperating Partners
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDCCs	District Development Coordinating Committees
DFID	Department for International Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECM	Ending Child Marriage
FAWEZA	Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FIC	Financial Intelligence Centre
FISP	Farmer Input Support Programme
FSP	Food Security Pack
GEEA	Gender Equity and Equality Act
GEWEL	Girls Education and Women's Empowerment Livelihood
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCF	Gender Consultative Forum
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFPs	Gender Focal Points

GSR	Gender Status Report
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IBSA	India, Brazil, South Africa
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KGS	Keeping Girls in School
MCDSS	Ministry of Community Development and Social Services
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MMR	Maternal Mortality Rate
MNDP	Ministry of National Development Planning
MOG	Ministry of Gender
MOH	Ministry of Health
MP	Member of Parliament
NCD	Non-Communicable Diseases
NDP	National Development Plan
NEP	National Energy Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NGOCC	Non-governmental Gender Organisations Coordinating Council
NHSP	National Health Strategic Plan
NLACW	National Legal Aid Clinic for Women
PPAZ	Planned Parenthood Association of Zambia
PHC	Primary Healthcare
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SCT	Social Cash Transfer
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SWL	Supporting Women's Livelihoods

TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VSU	Victim Support Unit
WB	World Bank
WfC	Women for Change
WGF	Women & Girls Fund
WGLOs	Women and Girl Led Organisations
WLSA	Women and Law in Southern Africa
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association
ZARD	Zambia Association for Research and Development
ZAW	Zambia Alliance for Women
ZDHS	Zambia Demographics and Health Survey
ZGEN	Zambia Gender and Energy Network
ZIFL-P	Zambia Integrated Forest Landscape Program
ZNWLG	Zambia National Women's Lobby Group
ZP	Zambia Police

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the years, the Government of the Republic of Zambia has prioritised gender equity and equality in development programmes and to achieve this, the Government formulated and implemented the 2000, 2014 and 2023 National Gender Policies. The Constitution (Amendment) Act, No. 2 of 2016 was also enacted and provides for the equal worth of women and men and their rights to freely participate in, determine, and build a sustainable political, legal, economic and social order. The Gender Equity and Equality Act, No. 22 of 2015 was also enacted to strengthen the legal framework for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls. Gender equity and equality have also been a priority in national development plans. These efforts are in line with Vision 2030 which aims at attaining a prosperous middle-income nation.

Despite these efforts, progress in real terms has been slow. Inequalities persist in accessing productive resources and in decision-making positions. Representation of women in key decision-making positions, and participation in economic activities remains low. Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM), and teenage pregnancy rates remain high. Patriarchal tendencies and restrictive cultural and social norms remain factors contributing to power imbalances between men, women and other vulnerable groups thereby negatively affecting human and social development. This has resulted in increased vulnerability of women and girls, perpetuating gender-based violence and child, early and forced marriage, amongst other issues.

The coordination of the implementation of interventions at all levels has also been inadequate. Lack of institutional and human resource capacities, coupled with the persistence of patriarchal cultural beliefs or norms and Zambia's dual legal system (though recently revised to give supremacy to constitutional law) continue to hamper efforts aimed at achieving the full participation of women, girls, and the youth in various sectors, notably in education, sexual and reproductive health, and access to resources and economic opportunities, among others.

1.2 Rationale for the Gender Country Profile

As part of understanding the context within which the Women and Girl Led Organisations (WGLOs) operate, the development of Gender Profiles was commissioned as one of the first activities on the project and was undertaken in three participating countries (Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia). The Country Gender Profile aims to provide an overall background on the gender equality situation in Zambia in order to facilitate contextualisation of issues and inform discussions/dialogue with WGLOs, and ultimately help in the identification of relevant advocacy projects supported via the Women and Girls Fund. At the same time, the Country Gender Profiles will provide important context for the project team working on delivery of the fund.

The profile will document existing gender inequalities at the micro (grassroots), meso (institutional, sectoral) and macro level (national), taking into consideration the different backgrounds and diversity between women and men. This will provide reliable information on potential advocacy issues that WGLOs may put forward. It will also serve as information for decision-making purposes for the WGLOs as well as for the project as a whole. Differences in gender equality and related issues across areas/regions of the country have been considered in the Country Gender Profile (to inform the geographical focus of the fund, as relevant).

1.3 Objectives of the Country Gender Profile

1.3.1 General Objective

To develop a country gender profile identifying: gender issues/gaps, gender-related barriers to and priority interventions for the national gender discourse, including regional/area-specific issues/differences, as relevant; a review of the country's legislative and policy context; an assessment of the institutional framework and implementation capacity of key national institutions for gender mainstreaming initiatives and the service delivery capacity of key stakeholders with the remit for gender and women's issue.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- ▶ Provide a comparative analysis of the current situation of women and men in the country, identifying gender discrepancies in the enjoyment of social and economic rights, and cultural and political rights, including regionally/specific to certain areas, as relevant. This will help create an understanding of existing gender disparities in the country and identify barriers to gender equality across thematic areas. Where data is available at the sub-national level, this should be included.
- ▶ Document the legislative and policy frameworks relevant to gender equality – gaps, policies/laws under review etc.
- ▶ Describe the gender Institutional framework/ gender machinery, i.e. - the Gender Ministries, and Divisions available.
- ▶ Document any customary laws being implemented in relation to the promotion of gender equality in the country and in the geographical areas of operation.
- ▶ Document examples of key national and sector-specific programmes being implemented by the Government to deal with gender inequalities in the different sectors.

2.0 National & Sub-Regional Context

2.1 The Gender Indicators

Zambia's population as of 2022 stood at 19,610,769 out of which 10,007,713 (51%) were female while 9,603,056 (49%) were male with 60% of the total population residing in rural areas and 40% in urban (ZamStats: 2022)¹. Every year, the World Economic Forum produces an Insight report – the Global Gender Gap Report which looks at gender-based gaps among four key dimensions and tracks progress towards closing these gaps over time. These dimensions are: Economic participation and opportunity; Educational attainment; Health and survival; and Political empowerment. The 2024 report shows that Zambia ranks 92 globally out of 146 countries assessed by the index and this is a drop from the ranking of 85 in 2023². In addition, in terms of the Gender Inequality Index, the 2024 United Nations Human

¹ https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@africa/@ro-abidjan/@ilo-lusaka/documents/genericdocument/wcms_888660.pdf

² <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/>

Development Report ranked Zambia at 137 out of 193 countries with the value of 0.526 slight improvement from 0.627 in 2011³.

2.2 Gender Sensitive Poverty Profile

Zambia continues to grapple with high poverty levels, and at the national level the incidence of poverty was estimated at 60% in 2022 compared to 54.4% in 2015. The country ranks among the countries with the highest levels of poverty and inequality globally. The high levels of poverty and inequalities persist across and within provinces. About 60% of Zambians live in poverty (national poverty line) compared to 41% across Sub-Saharan Africa. Poverty in Zambia remains more pronounced in rural than in urban areas with recent statistics showing that 78.8% of the rural population was poor (76.6 % in 2015) while in urban areas it rose to 31.9% from 23.4% in 2015 (Zambia Statistics Agency: 2023).

The 2022 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey Report shows that Muchinga Province had the highest proportion of the population that was poor at 82.6% with Western and Northern provinces being second and third highest at 78.6% and 78% respectively. Although Copperbelt and Lusaka provinces had the lowest poverty levels among the 10 provinces in 2022, relative to 2015, poverty levels in both provinces increased by 5.1 and 6.8%, respectively. Furthermore, the survey report shows that 58.8% of male-headed households compared to 63.4% of female-headed households were poor at the national level (Zambia Statistics Agency: 2022).

Women in Zambia continue to experience high poverty levels, low income, and unsustainable income-generating activities due to inadequate entrepreneurship skills and limited access to microfinance credit schemes. Addressing poverty among women and men while empowering those who are vulnerable and ensuring their control over resources is essential for realising gender equality, and consequently, accelerated sustainable development. The Government of Zambia has, for that reason, focused on increasing the ability of women and girls, as well as the youth, to actively seize economic opportunities that enhance their well-being, and in the case of women and girls, that enable them to compete favourably with their male counterparts in the development arena (GRZ: 2021b).

There is strong evidence showing that gender equality plays a huge role not only in economic growth but also in poverty reduction and that empowering women to become active in their economy boosts productivity. Gender equality which sees women participating in the economy, results in women and girls reinvesting an average of 90% of their income in their families versus 30% to 40% for men (Clinton Global Initiative: 2022). This ultimately helps the poor rise out of poverty and build healthier, wealthier, and more educated communities.

The National Gender Policy (2023) acknowledges that poverty remains a challenge for many families in Zambia and that in order to reduce poverty levels, particularly among women and other vulnerable persons, the Government has prioritised livelihood and empowerment programmes, particularly those that target women, aimed at uplifting the living standards through the provision of financial and material grants, mentorship and saving groups, life and business skills. The Government has prioritised both the provision of regular targeted social assistance programmes through the Social Cash Transfer Scheme, the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme and livelihood and empowerment through the Food Security Pack (FSP), Supporting Women's Livelihoods (SWL) and other Women Empowerment Programmes.

³ <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2023-24reporten.pdf>

2.3 Macroeconomic Overview

The World Bank notes that Zambia's Human Capital Index is low at 0.4, meaning that children born in Zambia today may only realise 40% of their productive potential in adult life compared to what could be the case if they enjoyed complete education and total health, (World Bank, 2020). The Bank also noted that Zambia experienced a generally positive economic trajectory from 2006 to 2014. However, in 2015, the country experienced a downward economic journey. Economic growth substantially declined by 3.5% in 2015, 3.2% in 2016, 3.4% in 2017, and 3.7% in 2018 due to dropping copper prices and the 2015–16 drought, which resulted in a poor agriculture harvest, among other issues. Like many other countries, between 2019 and 2022, Zambia experienced the negative effects of COVID-19 which exacerbated the poor economic situation as it has led to many people losing their sources of livelihood and a shift of attention to fighting the pandemic at the expense of investments in other sectors.

To restore macro and fiscal stability, the Government, with support from international partners like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), embarked on bold macro-fiscal and structural reforms aimed at restoring fiscal and debt sustainability in 2022. The efforts began to show promise, as the primary fiscal balance returned to a surplus of 0.8 % of GDP in 2022 and 0.6 % of GDP in 2023. Therefore, in 2024, real GDP growth was projected to grow at 4.7 % in 2024, with inflation expected to reduce toward the 6-8 % range. However, the severe 2023/24 drought the worst in years has drastically revised growth forecasts downward to 2.3 % (ZIPAR and UNICEF: 2024).

The African Development Bank argues that Zambia's real Gross Domestic Product has grown steadily, from 5.2% in 2022 to 5.8% in 2023, driven by wholesale and retail trade, agriculture, and mining and quarrying on the supply side and by household and corporate consumption on the demand side. Inflationary pressures persist, with inflation at 11.0% at the end of 2022 and 10.9% at the end of 2023, driven mainly by food, transport costs, and the nominal exchange rate. The fiscal deficit improved marginally, from 8.2% of GDP in 2022 to 6.6% in 2023, owing to higher mining sector revenue collections (AfDB: 2024). Analysis of the Human Development Index shows that when the Human Development Index (HDI) was just introduced in 1990, Zambia had an HDI of 0.417, today its HDI value has grown by over 36% and currently sits at 0.569 – leaving the nation with a rank of 153 out of 193 countries and territories. While this grants Zambia middle-income status, the nation has many strides to make before it can be considered a high-income state (UNDP: 2024).

Studies have shown that gender equality has a positive impact on a country's GDP as seen in Booz and Company report entitled "Empowering the Third Billion: Women and the World of Work in 2012", which estimated that raising female employment to male levels could boost GDP between 5% to 34% in various countries surveyed in the study. Similarly, the McKinsey Global Institute estimates that achieving gender equality would add between \$12 trillion and \$28 trillion to global growth by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute: 2015).

Gender equality has been found to boost business performance and the same goes for general diversity in leadership roles. According to Hunt et al: (2015), companies with the highest levels of diversity (either gender, ethnic, or racial) are anywhere from 15 per cent to 35 per cent more likely to have financial returns above their industry's national average. Clearly, this could be due to the widened pool of talent and quality human resources available from which staff would be hired.

2.4 Human Rights of Women

The Constitution of Zambia is the supreme law and is also a point of reference for the protection and promotion of human rights. The Constitution confirms the equal worth of women and men and their right

to freely participate in, determine and build a sustainable political, legal, economic and social order. Further, the Bill of Rights states that women and men have the right to equal treatment and opportunities; women and men have an equal right to inherit, own, use, administer and control property; a woman and a man have equal rights in the marriage and at the dissolution of the marriage; without limiting a right or freedom, women and men have the right to reproductive health, including family planning and access to related information and education.

The Zambia Police Service through the Victim Support Unit presented the 2024 Third Quarter Gender-Based Violence data analysis which shows that a total of 10,782 Gender Based Violence (GBV) cases were reported across the country reflecting a 3.3% increase compared to 10,434 cases recorded in the same period of 2023. 4,119 of the cases were classified as non-criminal, accounting for 38.2% of the total GBV cases and when the data was disaggregated by age, it showed that 2,511 were children and 1,870 (74.5%) were abused in the criminal case category comprising 26.2% boys and 73.8% girls. For the adult abuse cases, 82.7% (6,839) were women and 17.3% (1,432) were men. Further analysis of the geographical coverage shows that Lusaka Province recorded the highest GBV criminal cases with 1,786 cases translating to 26.8%; followed by Copperbelt Province with 904 cases translating to 13.6% and Northern Province had the least cases with 148 (2.2%).

The National Gender Policy (2023) states that Gender Based Violence (GBV) has been recognised as a public health issue and a violation of human rights and that although GBV affects both sexes, most victims have been females, while the perpetrators have been predominantly males. This is due to the unequal power relations between men and women as well as boys and girls. Women and girls in Zambia have a lower status which is often perpetuated by harmful traditional practices and negative social norms which often leads to discrimination and abuse of their human rights. A Human Rights Report for Zambia also showed that traditional and cultural factors prevented women from participating in political life on the same basis as men (US Department of State: 2023 - Zambia Human Rights Report).

2.5 Persons with Disabilities

Data on persons with disabilities are scarce since the registration of persons with disabilities led by the Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities (ZAPD) is incomplete. It has registered only 63,340 persons as of August 2023. The tendency is to rely on outdated data from the 2015 National Disability Survey while awaiting the newly calculated disability prevalence to be generated from the National Census of Population and Housing of 2022. Under the 2015 survey, the overall average disability prevalence was estimated to be 7.7%, which with the 2022 population count of 19,610,769 amounts to 1,510,029 persons with disabilities (UNICEF, 2023).

Disability is an important development issue with an increasing body of evidence showing that Persons with Disabilities are amongst the most marginalised groups that experience worse socio-economic outcomes and poverty. Women and girls in Zambia have a lower status which is often perpetuated by harmful traditional practices and negative social norms which often leads to discrimination and abuse of their human rights. Furthermore, disability exacerbates women and girls' position and places them at higher risk of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation (GRZ: 2023)⁴.

⁴ https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/528267_ZAMBIA-2023-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf

2.6 Representation of Women at Decision-Making Levels

The Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) has both signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development which calls for 50% female representation in leadership roles. Additionally, the Government has made strides in increasing women's representation within the civil service by promoting affirmative action, enhancing capacity-building programmes for women in senior decision-making roles, and raising awareness of gender issues among policymakers. Gaining access to decision-making positions is vital because it significantly influences the distribution of roles and responsibilities, as well as the allocation of resources and benefits at the national, community, and household levels (Zambia Gender Assessment, 2023: 50).

However, disparities in representation at leadership levels persist. In 2022, women held 16% of Cabinet Minister positions, a decline from 25% in 2016. In Parliament, 15.2% of members were women in 2021, compared to 16% in 2016. For local government, 8% of Councillors elected in 2021 were women, with only 10% of elected Mayors or Council Chairpersons being female.

Table 1: Zambia General Election Gender Analysis

	2016 elections	No of Men	No of women	% Women	2021 elections	No of Men	No of women	% Women
Councillors	2016	1516	126	8%	2021	1701	140	8%
Mayors	2016	15	2	12%	2021	14	5	26.3%
Council Chairperson	2016	93	7	7%	2021	87	10	11.5%
National Assembly	2016	167	30	18%	2021	135	20	13%
Presidential elections Candidates	2016	16	1	6%	2021	16	1	6%

Source: Gender Links. Zambia 2021 General Election Gender Analysis Base Information (2021)

A case study of the gender gap in the general elections in Zambia can be given of the 2016 and 2021 Parliamentary election results for Lusaka and Central Provinces. In 2016, Lusaka had a total of 14 constituencies and out of which 6 had female members of Parliament while the rest (8) had males. In 2021, one of the Constituencies (Mwembeshi) was moved from Lusaka to Central Province thus out of 13 Members of Parliament (MPs) in Lusaka, 9 were male and only 4 were female. On the hand, Central Province had a wider gender gap in that out of 15 MPs in 2016, only 4 were female and 11 were male while in 2021, out of 16 MPs only 3 were female with 13 were male⁵.

⁵ Data was analyzed by the author from the raw results obtained from the Electoral Commission of Zambia website.

In 2018, men dominated management positions in state-owned enterprises, holding 79% of roles, while women occupied 21%. Additionally, in 2019, male Directors accounted for 67.9% of positions in the Civil Service, and women held 32.9%. Only 23.6% of Permanent Secretaries were female in that same year, while men occupied 76.4% (NGP, 2023: 19).

Despite low female representation in decision-making, Zambia achieved some milestones. In 2015, the country appointed its first female Chief Justice, and by 2022, 62.5% of judges were women, though female Magistrates represented only 26.5%. Following the 2016 General Election, Zambia saw its first female Vice President and first female Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. Additionally, prominent institutions such as the Judiciary, Zambia Police (ZP), Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), and Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) have been headed by women. In 2021, Zambia had its second female Vice President and the first female Speaker of the National Assembly (NGP, 2023: 20).

Despite some progress made, female participation remains constrained across various levels. Zambia has not yet seen a woman hold the positions of President, Defence Chief, Secretary to the Cabinet, Secretary to the Treasury, or Governor of the Bank of Zambia. In rural and peri-urban areas, traditional leadership roles (for chiefdoms and villages) are predominantly male, and women are often excluded from crucial decision-making processes that affect community welfare, resource allocation, and land rights.

Key Constraints in the Governance Sector

Zambia is yet to reach the 50% threshold for women's representation in decision-making positions, as stipulated in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. However, several constraints may hinder its governance sector from achieving gender equality, including:

- ▶ Deep-rooted traditional beliefs and gender roles discourage women from participating in politics and leadership, limiting their access to decision-making positions.
- ▶ Women in Zambia often face economic disadvantages, such as limited access to resources, capital, and job opportunities, which reduce their ability to engage in governance roles or political campaigns.
- ▶ High illiteracy rates and limited access to education for women, particularly in rural areas, restrict their opportunities to pursue leadership positions or develop the skills necessary for governance. For instance, the lack of a grade 12 school certificate is the minimum qualification to stand as a Member of Parliament (MP) hinders women's participation (GSR, 2019: 23).
- ▶ The internal structures and practices of political parties often do not prioritize gender inclusivity. Women often struggle to gain support or candidacy positions due to male-dominated leadership and gender-biased selection processes.
- ▶ While Zambia has policies aimed at promoting gender equality, weak enforcement of these laws and inadequate resources for implementation undermine progress in the governance sector.
- ▶ Women lack access to influential networks, mentors, and role models within political or governance structures, making it difficult for them to gain visibility and opportunities for leadership.
- ▶ Women in politics and governance often face gender-based violence, intimidation, and harassment, discouraging their participation in public roles and decision-making processes.

- ▶ Without strong commitment and political will from leadership to prioritize gender equality, progress in achieving balance in governance structures can be slow.

Key Opportunities in the Governance Sector

Programmes encouraging women's participation in politics, such as capacity-building initiatives by the Gender Division and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) like the Non-Governmental Gender Organizations' Coordinating Council (NGOCC) and the Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL), aim to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions. These include programmes like the "Strengthening Women's Capacity to Participate in Decision Making in Zambia Project, Phase I & II" and the "Empowering Women in Politics for Enhanced Leadership and Decision-Making Project." These programmes provide women with the skills needed to engage in governance and decision-making processes at national and local levels.

Through partnerships with international bodies, Zambia has opportunities to implement gender quotas and electoral reforms to enhance women's representation. Initiatives that promote fair and equitable participation, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) gender commitments, advocate for the increased representation of women in Parliament and local councils.

The government, alongside development partners, implements economic empowerment programmes aimed at strengthening women's financial independence. By improving access to credit, entrepreneurship training, and resources for women, these programmes provide opportunities for economic participation, which is a critical element in governance.

Through donor-funded programmes such as those supported by United Nations agencies, the Zambian government is integrating gender mainstreaming across all sectors, including governance. These programmes offer opportunities for institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting and planning within government ministries and local governments.

Zambia benefits from regional and international frameworks, including the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5). These frameworks provide guidance and resources for advancing gender equality in governance.

3.0 Policy, Legal and Institutional Framework

3.1 International and Regional Commitments to Gender Equality

Zambia has committed to numerous international and regional frameworks that uphold gender equality and women's rights. These commitments are instrumental in guiding national policies, legal reforms, and gender-responsive development programmes. Some of the key instruments include:

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): Known as the International Bill of Rights for Women, CEDAW is one of the most comprehensive frameworks for addressing gender discrimination globally. Zambia ratified CEDAW in 1985, committing to eliminate discrimination against women in all forms, including in political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. The country regularly submits progress reports and faces scrutiny on areas that require improvement, highlighting ongoing efforts to align national laws with CEDAW standards.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA): The BPfA, adopted in 1995, serves as a blueprint for advancing women's rights and gender equality. Zambia has endorsed this Platform, which prioritizes twelve critical areas of concern, including women's education, health, political participation, and violence against women. The government's commitment to BPfA underscores its dedication to accelerating gender equality by implementing gender-sensitive policies and programmes.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 5 of the SDGs aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030. Zambia's integration of the SDGs into its national development agenda reflects its commitment to addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV), promoting women's economic empowerment, and increasing women's participation in decision-making processes.

African Union Gender Policy and the Maputo Protocol: At the regional level, Zambia is a signatory to the African Union's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). The protocol emphasises the protection of women's rights within an African context, focusing on eliminating harmful practices, ensuring women's access to health services, and enhancing their rights in marriage, education, and political participation.

Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want: Agenda 2063 is Africa's strategic framework for inclusive and sustainable development, emphasizing gender equality as a cornerstone for achieving the continent's aspirations. Zambia's alignment with Agenda 2063 showcases its commitment to enhancing the role of women and girls in transforming African societies through education, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA): The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) continues to serve as a key reporting tool utilized by the African Union (AU) to advance Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment across the continent. It has also played a significant role in fostering ownership of the gender equality agenda and ensuring that these issues remain a priority at the highest levels of political leadership in Africa.

Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development: The SADC Protocol, to which Zambia is a party, aims to empower women, eliminate discrimination, and achieve gender equality through the development and implementation of gender-responsive legislation, policies, and programmes. This regional commitment reinforces Zambia's efforts to integrate gender equality into all governance and socio-economic development aspects.

COMESA Gender Policy: In accordance with Articles 154 and 155 of the COMESA Treaty and acknowledging that sustainable economic and social development in the region depends on the active involvement of women, men, and youth, the COMESA Gender Policy promotes the equal and comprehensive participation of women in all areas of COMESA's activities and regional operations.

3.2 Legal Framework and Women's Legal Status

Zambia has a dualist legal system that aims to provide legal protection to Zambians according to their values. The form of dualism adopted was a means for developing a uniquely Zambian combination of African customary law, the common law tradition and modern constitutional principles. In order to achieve the aim of creating this Zambian legal system, the dualist framework incorporated several means by which law could be developed by Zambian jurists and legislators. These included the recognition of customary law as the law of the land and mechanisms of free choice by citizens regarding which legal regime they wished to use to regulate important aspects of their lives (especially as regards family and property). Discriminatory customary laws prevail in areas of personal status, marriage, divorce and inheritance.

Customary law helps to keep women in a poverty trap and is principally based on male power, authority, and domination over women, and in general, women and girls enjoy significantly fewer rights under customary law than statutory law⁶. Statutory law takes precedence over customary law in cases of conflict. The Constitution, as the supreme law of the land, ensures that all laws, including statutory laws enacted by Parliament, must align with it. Customary law is recognized only to the extent that it is not “repugnant to justice, morality, or equity” as per common law standards. This hierarchy ensures a unified legal framework but often creates tension in areas such as land rights and family law, where customary practices remain influential. The dual legal system can lead to legal ambiguities, especially in rural areas where customary law is deeply embedded in social structures, affecting issues like land inheritance, marriage, and community governance. Therefore, working with traditional leaders is cardinal in trying to promote gender equality.

The Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) has made significant strides in establishing legislative and policy frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination against women. These frameworks address various areas, including human capital (such as health and education), economic opportunities (like employment and asset ownership), and voice and agency. Notable legislative measures include:

- ▶ **The Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act No. 2 of 2016**, Article 11, upholds the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms for individuals, explicitly prohibiting discrimination on grounds such as race, origin, political beliefs, colour, religion, gender, or marital status. Additionally, Article 23 forbids any legislation that discriminates based on these attributes.
- ▶ **The Gender Equity and Equality Act (GEEA) No. 22 of 2015** domesticates numerous international and regional human rights standards on gender into the national legal system, including the CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Maputo Protocol, and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. The GEEA addresses issues such as sexual harassment and harmful cultural, social, and religious practices, aiming to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. The Act also emphasises that employers cannot discriminate against women based on factors, such as sex, marriage, disability, pregnancy or maternity leave. The Act ensures that women are not subjected to dismissal, demotion or any other employment disadvantage based on these grounds and aim to promote equal opportunities and fair treatment for all women, including those with disabilities, within the employment sector in Zambia. Section 6 (1) of the GEEA establishes the Gender Equity and Equality Commission, which is responsible for mainstreaming, monitoring, investigating, and providing guidance on gender equity and equality matters. Despite these progressive provisions, many aspects of the law remain unimplemented as the Commission has not yet been operationalised.
- ▶ **The Anti-Gender Based Violence Act No. 1 of 2011** was Zambia’s first law to formally define Gender Based Violence (GBV). This law acknowledges the necessity for focused measures to address Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), requires support for the protection of survivors of GBV, and creates both the Anti-GBV Committee and the Anti-GBV Fund. Significantly, Section 2(2) of the Act specifies that, apart from the Constitution, its provisions take precedence over those of other laws.
- ▶ **The Anti-Human Trafficking Act No. 11 of 2008** establishes measures for the prohibition, prevention and prosecution of human trafficking and incorporates the UN protocol designed to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons. However, although the legal framework is

⁶ Make Every Woman Count (MEWC) African Women’s Decade 2010-2020: 2012 Annual Review.

in place, human trafficking remains widespread in the country, with notable cases of both labour and sexual exploitation. Additionally, Zambia serves as a transit route where traffickers move their victims to other locations. In response, the Government has set up an Inter-Ministerial National Steering Committee and is working with various anti-human trafficking stakeholders to enhance its efforts. The Government has also launched a 24-hour toll-free counter-trafficking hotline (990) that operates in all ten (10) provinces.

- ▶ **Zambia Police (Amendment) Act No. 14 of 1999**, Section 53, establishes the Victim Support Unit (VSU) which provides support and assistance to victims of Gender Based Violence, including counselling and guidance on legal procedures.
- ▶ **Penal Code (Amendment) Act No. 20 of 2023**, Amendments to the Penal Code have strengthened the legal provisions against sexual offences and domestic violence, providing more severe penalties for perpetrators of Gender Based Violence.
- ▶ **Marriage Act and Matrimonial Causes Act**: These acts address issues related to marriage and divorce, including provisions for addressing domestic violence within marriages.
- ▶ **The Intestate Succession Act**, Chapter 59 of the Laws of Zambia outlines the rules for property inheritance for surviving relatives following the owner's death. The purpose of this legislation is to prevent property grabbing, particularly concerning women and children.
- ▶ **The Education Act No. 23 of 2011** aligns the United Nations (UN) 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) with local education standards. This Act prohibits a learner who is a child from entering into any form of marriage, any person marrying or marrying off a learner who is a child, and any person preventing or stopping a learner who is a child from attending school to marry or marrying off the learner.
- ▶ **Children's Code Act No. 12 of 2022** is a comprehensive law which provides for the protection of children's rights, including measures against child abuse and exploitation, and establishes procedures for handling cases of Violence Against Children (VAC). This Act criminalizes harmful practices such as child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The Act is inclusive of children with disabilities, including recognising that "a child with a disability has the right to be treated with dignity and respect in accordance with the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2012."
- ▶ **The Employment Act No. 3 of 2019** outlines the rights that protect workers in the country and forbids discrimination in the workplace based on sex, gender, origin, ethnicity, religion, nationality, and other factors. Significant progressive provisions include family responsibility leave, safeguards against termination related to maternity leave, nursing breaks, and paternity leave, to mention a few. Additionally, the employment code sets forth regulations regarding the employment of children. In Section 5, the Act prohibits discriminatory practices against employees because of disability and ensures employers' compliance with the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2012, and the Mental Health Act of 2019.
- ▶ **The Citizens Economic Empowerment (Amendment) Act (2021)** explicitly prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in employment. The Act states that "a person or company shall not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee in any employment policy or practice due to that employee's status, disability, or gender."
- ▶ **Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 6 of 2012** provides for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against Persons with Disabilities.

- ▶ **The Citizens Economic Empowerment (Amendment) Act (2021)** explicitly prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in employment. The Act states that “a person or company shall not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee in any employment policy or practice due to that employee’s status, disability, or gender
- ▶ **The Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1972**, which allows for abortion.

Policy Framework

Notable national level policies include:

- ▶ **The 2023 National Gender Policy** aims to expedite the achievement of gender equity and equality. It will bolster the coordination of a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach for implementing gender programmes across all sectors. Additionally, the Policy will promote women’s involvement in economic activities by creating a supportive environment that ensures fair access to productive and economic resources, in collaboration with the private sector. This initiative will facilitate a fair distribution of opportunities and national resources between women and men, as well as girls and boys, contributing to poverty alleviation and ultimately, national development. This aligns with international, continental and regional commitments to which Zambia is committed.
- ▶ **The 2022-2026 National Health Strategic Plan (NHSP)** incorporates gender considerations in health service delivery, with a focus on maternal and reproductive health, HIV prevention, and addressing health inequalities between men and women.
- ▶ **The 1996 Re-Entry Policy** permits girls who became pregnant to return to school after they have given birth. This Policy aims to tackle the gendered education structure that disproportionately affects women. While women make up the majority of students at the primary level, many begin to drop out as they advance through their education due to issues such as child marriage and teenage pregnancies.
- ▶ **The Zambia National Land Policy (2021)** aims to enhance fair access to land and secure tenure, while actively preventing discrimination related to sex, age or disability. Specifically, Objective eight (8) focuses on implementing affirmative measures in land distribution, to ensure that women receive 50% of the land designated for allocation.
- ▶ Currently under review, the **National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage in Zambia 2016 – 2021** outlines an ambitious plan aimed at reducing VAC, with a particular focus on ending child marriage. The goal is to eradicate this vice by 2030.
- ▶ The **Citizens Economic Empowerment Fund** is designed to offer loans at low interest rates to all citizens, including women.
- ▶ The **National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2017-2022)**, implemented by the Bank of Zambia (BOZ), aimed to boost women’s formal financial inclusion to 70% by the year 2022.
- ▶ **The Eighth (8) National Development Plan 2022-2026** outlines Zambia’s approach to sustainable development from 2022 to 2026, focusing on eliminating poverty and inequality among its strategic areas. The 8NDP specifically emphasizes the government’s commitment to prioritizing actions to address GBV, teenage pregnancies, child abuse, and violence as key development objectives.

- ▶ **Zambia's Vision 2030** outlines the country's long-term development goals, including gender equality as a critical element of social development. It emphasizes the need for women's empowerment and equitable access to resources.
- ▶ **National Youth Policy** integrates gender aspects to address the specific needs of young women, focusing on promoting gender equality in employment, skills development, and participation in decision-making processes.
- ▶ **The 2015 National Disability Policy** provides guidance to mainstream disability in national development. The Policy also paves the way for legal reforms that will enhance the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities and create an enabling environment that takes into consideration their diverse needs. Unfortunately, there is very little effort being made to find and target the children and adolescent boys and girls with disabilities on SRHR interventions.

3.3 Institutional Framework

Gender in Development Division at Cabinet Office under the Office of the President: The Gender in Development Division (GIDD), situated within the Cabinet Office under the Office of the President, serves as Zambia's principal coordinating body for gender mainstreaming at the highest level of government. GIDD's mandate includes formulating gender-responsive policies, monitoring implementation across sectors, and integrating gender perspectives into national development planning. It plays a pivotal role in advising the President and Cabinet on gender issues, ensuring that gender equality is embedded in national priorities. GIDD also collaborates with various stakeholders, including ministries, civil society organizations, and Cooperating Partners (CPs), to advocate for gender-sensitive legislation and promote women's empowerment initiatives across the country.

Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs, Governance, Human Rights and Gender Matters: The Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs, Governance, Human Rights, and Gender Matters is a key legislative body in Zambia that provides oversight and scrutiny of laws, policies, and programs related to gender equality and human rights. This committee plays an essential role in reviewing proposed legislation and government actions to ensure they are aligned with Zambia's commitments to gender equality, as outlined in the Constitution and various international conventions. The committee also facilitates public hearings, consults with experts, and engages with civil society to gather insights on issues affecting women, children, and other vulnerable groups, ultimately influencing the legislative agenda towards creating a more inclusive society.

The Gender Consultative Forum: The Gender Consultative Forum (GCF) is a multi-stakeholder platform established by the Government of the Republic of Zambia and became operational in 2003, aimed at enhancing coordination and dialogue on gender and development activities in the country. The GCF is hosted by the Gender Division under the Office of the President (formerly Ministry of Gender) and it brings together representatives from government, civil society, the private sector, international organizations, churches, academic institutions, development partners and the labour movement to discuss, monitor, and advise on gender policies and programmes. The forum was established to serve as a key mechanism for fostering collaboration, sharing best practices, and addressing challenges in the implementation of gender equality initiatives. It also aimed at providing an avenue for stakeholders to voice concerns, propose solutions, and align efforts towards achieving the gender objectives set out in national development plans, including the 8NDP.

Since the GCF's establishment, the funding was allocated on an ad-hoc basis. A bulk amount from the government was supplemented by donor grants directed towards specific projects with varying time horizons. On the other hand, GRZ funds were often delayed or not released at all, creating challenges with predictability and disrupting continuous processes. Line ministries rarely had budgets for gender-specific activities and faced limited or no access to technical and administrative support. The Gender Consultative Forum frequently reported irregular meeting schedules, and the collection of sex-disaggregated data, often highlighted as a major challenge to gender mainstreaming in the country, was carried out inconsistently. Nevertheless, the GCF is still functional, and meetings are still being hosted by the Gender Division.

Gender Focal Points in Planning Units of Line Ministries, Specialized Government Agencies, Provincial Planning Units, and District Development Coordinating Committees: Gender Focal Points (GFPs) are designated officers embedded within the planning units of line ministries, specialized government agencies, Provincial Planning Units, and District Development Coordinating Committees (DDCCs) in Zambia. These GFPs are tasked with integrating gender considerations into sectoral planning, budgeting, and program implementation processes. Their role is crucial in ensuring that gender is not treated as a standalone issue but is mainstreamed into all facets of government operations, from policy formulation to service delivery. At the provincial and district levels, GFPs work closely with local authorities to tailor gender-responsive interventions that address specific regional challenges, thereby promoting inclusive development that reflects the needs of women, men, girls, and boys across Zambia.

However, the institutional structure is weak and almost non-functional across various levels, especially within line ministries and at provincial and district levels. Despite this situation, there is strong collaboration between the government, cooperating partners and NGOs, with partners providing substantial support to both the government and NGOs in multiple areas. The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) sector has a structure - Non-Government Organisation Coordinating Council (NGOCC) which serves as a counterpart to the Gender in Development Division (GIDD), focusing on advancing women's and gender issues. Together with affiliated gender-focused NGOs, the NGOCC monitors the ratification and implementation of gender-related instruments at various levels. GIDD works closely with the NGOCC on various programmes, especially on reviewing and developing the National Gender Policy (NGP).

4.0 Gender Analysis by Sector

4.1 Gender and Employment

Gender dynamics have a major influence on the quality and accessibility of work opportunities in Zambia, which affects economic outcomes and sustains social inequality. Economic conditions, regulatory frameworks, sociocultural expectations, and educational achievement all influence gender differences in the workplace. For occupations to be productive and long-lasting, employment and labour market institutions and regulations are essential. Social advancement, poverty alleviation, and economic prosperity all depend on equitable access to jobs and income prospects. The government has established a legal framework that facilitates employment and labour, which includes regulations for minimum pay, nursing breaks, and maternity and paternity leave (NGP, 2023).

The Zambian labour market participation is gendered. According to the 2020 Labour Force Survey (LFS), 32.2% of women and 67.8% of men worked in the formal sector. Men and women made up 57.5 and 42.5% of the workforce in the informal sector, respectively. Of the unpaid contributing family workers, 68.8% were women, and they had a higher unemployment rate compared to men. Between 2016 and 2019, the employment-to-population ratio dropped dramatically from 71.1% to 30.9%. For women, the ratio decreased correspondingly from 73.1% in 2016 to 23.2% in 2019, while for men, it decreased from 70.6% in 2016 to 39.4% in 2019. Additionally, in 2020, the employment-to-population ratio fell to 30.2%, with 38.5% of men and 22.7% of women employed. The percentage of women in employment has decreased more than that of men. This gendered trend is also seen in rural and urban regions, where the labour force participation rate is lower in rural areas (22.4%) and greater in urban areas (49.1%).

In several industries, women's employment rates have lagged behind men's, and they have mostly been in low-skilled positions. The advancement of better economic growth based on inclusive participation is hampered by the disproportionate presence of women. For instance, women made up 4.2% of the workforce in the water, sanitation, and waste management industry, compared to 95.8% of males (LFS, 2020).

Women have historically held the lowest-paying and least-skilled positions in the tourist business. The 2020 Labour Force Survey shows that women made up 71.2% of workers in the food and lodging sector, while their male counterparts made up 28.8%. Long work hours and irregular schedules are required by the industry, which raises protection risks such as sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), unhealthy coping mechanisms, and unfavourable attitudes toward women.

Compared to their male counterparts who make up 78.9% of the workforce, women's employment participation has been extremely low, at 21.1%. More women than men work as sales assistants in wholesale and retail trade in the commerce, trade, and industry sector. Moreover, women make up 47% of the workforce in the micro, small, and medium-sized business sector, which employs 18% of the workforce. Male employment in the mining and quarry sector was 92.2%, while female employment was 7.8%. In the construction industry, men made up 96.4% of the workforce, while women made up 3.6% (LFS, 2020).

Sectoral Distribution and Occupational Segregation

The Zambian economy shows significant occupational segregation, where women and men tend to work in different sectors. For the majority of Zambians, both in the formal and informal sectors, small-scale farming is their primary source of income and employment. Approximately 64.5% of males and 35.5% of females are employed in forestry, fishery, and agriculture (LFS, 2020). Despite their active involvement in the agricultural industry, women still encounter several cultural obstacles that limit their access to and control over labour and other productive resources, which are still crucial factors in determining a farmer's ability to embrace new technology (Djurfeldt, et. al, 2018). To combat gendered dynamics and provide them with the means to enhance their contribution to food production, among other things, culturally sensitive policy measures must be implemented.

Women's representation in professional and technical jobs remains low, with men dominating high-skilled roles in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. This segregation limits women's access to high-paying opportunities and confines them to sectors with limited prospects for career advancement.

Gender Wage Gap

A persistent wage gap exists between men and women in Zambia, with women earning approximately 25-30% less than men on average (Nsokolo, 2017). This disparity can be attributed to occupational segregation, differences in education levels, and the undervaluing of jobs typically performed by women. Additionally, women in formal employment are less likely to hold leadership positions, which further impacts wage disparities. Cultural biases often lead to the perception that men are “breadwinners” and should, therefore, receive higher pay, reinforcing structural inequalities in income.

Informal Employment and Vulnerable Work

A large portion of Zambia’s workforce, especially women, operates in the informal sector, which is characterised by a lack of social protection, job insecurity, and low earnings. Women dominate informal markets as vendors, traders, and home-based workers. This informal employment lacks basic protections such as maternity leave, health benefits, and retirement plans, leaving women more vulnerable to economic instability. The informal sector’s lack of regulation also exposes women to exploitation, abuse, and unsafe working conditions.

Barriers to Equal Employment

- ▶ **Education and Skill Gaps:** Education attainment, particularly in rural areas, remains a challenge, with girls facing obstacles such as child marriage, domestic responsibilities, and limited access to secondary and tertiary education. The lower educational levels among women reduce their employability and access to high-skilled jobs.
- ▶ **Cultural Norms and Gender Roles:** Gender stereotypes reinforce the expectation that women prioritise family responsibilities over employment. This dynamic limit women’s availability for full-time employment and affects their career progression. Employers may perceive women as less reliable, leading to discriminatory hiring and promotion practices.
- ▶ **Legal and Institutional Barriers:** Although Zambia has made significant strides in enacting laws against gender discrimination, enforcement remains weak. Women’s land ownership rights are limited in practice, and without collateral, they face difficulties securing loans and capital for business ventures. Additionally, there is limited legal recourse for addressing workplace discrimination and harassment.
- ▶ **Workplace Policies:** Few companies provide maternity leave beyond the minimum legal requirement, and affordable childcare options are scarce. This lack of supportive policies makes it challenging for women to balance work and family obligations, often forcing them out of the workforce. Companies in Zambia are required by law to have sexual harassment policies as per the Employment Code of 2019, which mandates employers to establish workplace harassment policies. Additionally, section 137A of the Penal Code criminalizes sexual harassment in the workplace. However, despite legal requirements, enforcement is inconsistent. Many incidents go unreported due to fear of retaliation or job loss, and cultural stigma around discussing harassment further complicates the issue.

Addressing gender disparities in employment is crucial for Zambia’s economic development and the empowerment of women. Efforts to improve gender equality in the labour force must focus on education, social protection, workplace policies, and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. Transforming these

areas will not only enhance women's economic participation but also contribute to sustainable economic growth and social equity in Zambia.

4.2 Gender and Agriculture Sector

The Government of Zambia has declared agricultural development as a priority in poverty reduction and food insecurity (GRZ: 2011a) thus development interventions targeted at the agriculture sector would have positive impacts on not only the household level but also the country's economic outlook. Agriculture is the mainstay of the rural economy in Zambia and access to land is one of the most critical resources that can help in attaining gender equality in the agriculture sector. Access to and control over land empowers both men and women to make decisions on land use ultimately influencing their access to water, agriculture, collateral for financial services, housing and general social and economic security. It is for this reason that the Zambian government through the 2021 National Land Policy states that 50% of available land for alienation is allocated to women. This was done after recognizing that women were still facing traditional discriminatory practices that hindered them from owning land and other economic assets.

The total land area for Zambia is 752,612 square kilometres and about 58 % of this (39 million hectares) is potentially good for agricultural production although most of this arable land is yet to be fully exploited for the purpose of increasing the contribution of the Agricultural sector to the National economy (Zambia Statistics Agency: 2022). The 2022 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey Report shows that out of 2,910,006 employed persons in the informal sector, 37.7 % were employed in the informal agriculture sector and that relative to their male counterparts, a higher proportion of females were employed in informal agriculture (Females: 38.5% vs Male: 36.8%). Further analysis shows that the North-western Province accounted for the highest proportion of persons aged 12 years or older employed in the informal agriculture sector at 45.2 % (ibid).

Over the years, statistics have shown that women are the main contributors to the agriculture sector and contribute mostly to cheap and unpaid labour. The 2018 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey shows that women engaged in agricultural work are more likely (37%) than women not working in agriculture (9%) to not be paid for their work. Among the male counterparts, men engaged in agricultural work are more likely to not be paid (26%) than those not working in agriculture (11%). Since the Agriculture sector is one of the biggest employment sectors in Zambia, women's agricultural work deserves recognition and ensure that they are paid for their labour. When creating jobs and seeking labour in the agricultural value chains, care should be taken in putting in place interventions that will provide equitable pay for men and women.

National programmes and initiatives such as the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP), Constituency Development Fund (CDF), funding opportunities under the Citizen Economic Empowerment Commission and other cooperative or community support programmes create room for ensuring that both men and women's needs, priorities and concerns are recognised and addressed. These initiatives can help promote climate-smart agriculture in crop production, livestock production, aquaculture, and forestry thereby playing a fundamental role in achieving sustainable development and poverty reduction. However, the agriculture sector in Zambia is confronted by a number of challenges which are hindering the sector's progress as far as gender equality is concerned and these are outlined below.

Key Gender-Related Challenges Facing the Agriculture Sector

- ▶ **Inadequate Access to Productive Resources** - Despite the fact that women comprise the majority of the workforce in the agriculture sector, they face gender-based constraints, such as inequalities in access to land, credit, services, training and extension services and as a result, they do not adequately respond to the opportunities being created by the liberalized environment (National Agriculture Policy: 2011).
- ▶ **Gender Inequalities over Land Tenure** - Access, control, and ownership of land for women in Zambia is limited under both state and customary land administration. Under customary land administration, men dominate decision-making, and control of land and women's participation and benefits are through male relatives. This is due to the fact that under customary practice, land is allocated by chiefs/headpersons who mostly allocate land to men by virtue of their role as head of the family. This lack of access to land limits women's productive potential, which negatively impacts household income and women's ability to be economically independent (GRZ: 2021a).
- ▶ **Unpaid work** – Gender-biased social norms, laws and practices limit women's involvement in gainful work hold them back from other income-generating opportunities in agriculture and relegating them to unpaid work in the sector. This coupled with their unpaid domestic work puts them in a disadvantaged position thereby continuously perpetuating gender inequality.
- ▶ **Lack of sound monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** – Some conventional Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) systems are gender blind and thus do not capture gender differences in access to inputs and resources critical in the agriculture sector as well as the impacts. While the overarching national policies and development plans in Zambia present clear provisions for gender mainstreaming, programmes lack sound monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress (FAO: 2023).
- ▶ **Gender stereotypes and livestock production** - Gender norms and stereotypes are often linked to livestock ownership in that, in some parts of the country, ownership of large livestock such as cattle is a symbol of a man's social prestige and women are more likely to manage small livestock such as goats and chicken compared to men. Women's livestock is usually kept for household consumption, whereas that of men is often for commercial transactions. Consequently, men are able to obtain much greater income from livestock than women (GRZ: 2021a).
- ▶ **Inadequate knowledge and skills in gender mainstreaming in the Ministry of Agriculture** - The Ministry of Agriculture in Zambia faces significant challenges in gender mainstreaming due to limited expertise and coordination across sectors. Although national policies, such as the revised National Gender Policy, advocate for equal representation of men and women, there is inadequate implementation, particularly in agriculture, natural resource management, and climate change programs. This lack of gender-sensitive skills and frameworks leads to minimal female participation in decision-making processes, hindering equitable resource distribution and economic development. There is also a lack of gender-disaggregated data within the Ministry which makes it difficult for the Ministry to adequately deal with the gender issues affecting women in the sector.

Addressing the gender related challenges in the agriculture sector is a key component of sustainable development strategies while increasing rural women's access to decent employment opportunities is key to improving their productivity and earning power, which in turn improves the households' welfare. If we tackle the gender inequalities endemic in the agriculture sector and empower women, the world

will take a leap forward in addressing the goals of ending poverty and creating a world free from hunger (FAO: 2023).

4.3 Gender and the Infrastructure Sector

The Government of Zambia through the National Infrastructure Policy of 2023 recognizes that the development of infrastructure has inherent and different impacts on both men and women, children, youth, elderly and the persons with disabilities and that is why one of the objectives for the policy measures is to 'promote the participation of women, youths, and other vulnerable groups in infrastructure development project cycle'. The Policy acknowledges that women, children and the youth are rarely represented in public participation processes for infrastructure projects that significantly impact on access to water, like dams and mines, and yet women are more likely to collect water for their families, with overarching interest in water quality.

The infrastructure sector in Zambia is guided by a number of pieces of legislation that supports its operations. These pieces of legislation include the National Housing Authority Act, Cap 195; the Public Roads (Amendment) Act No. 9 of 2022; the Zambia Institutes of Architects Act, Cap 442; the Quantity Surveyors Act, Cap 438; and the Engineering Institution of Zambia Act, No.17 of 2010. Unlike the National Infrastructure Policy which integrates gender in its provisions, all the above pieces of legislation are completely gender blind. Therefore, to strengthen the implementation of the policy, there is need to review and streamline the pieces of legislation to gender equality.

The Government of Zambia has been undertaking significant infrastructure development in the health, water, education, transport, energy, communication, agriculture, tourism sectors among others. The participation of women has been low in the construction sector. There have been few women trained in construction. In 2019, of the total 18,975 enrolled in construction courses, 95% were men as compared to 5% women. To improve enrolments, the National Construction School reduced enrolment fees for women and has been conducting awareness on construction related courses in girls' schools to encourage women participation (GRZ: 2023). The National Transport Policy acknowledges this gap and states that, 'Gender has not sufficiently been mainstreamed in the transport sector as there are no deliberate programmes in the sector for gender mainstreaming. Most of the jobs ranging from construction to service provision are dominated by males. Most rural transport is not gender sensitive as it has no provision to cater for the needs of women' (GRZ: 2019b).

Furthermore, even though one of the guiding principles for the 2023 National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy states that the national provision of ICT technologies shall not discriminate against any citizen on the basis of sex, gender, age, race, tribe, differently abled or any other form of discrimination as enshrined in the national Constitution; the Policy also states that access and usage of ICTs is characterized by inequalities. These inequalities are seen in lower levels of access particularly noted in marginalized groups such as rural populations, lower-income households, women, youth, and persons living with disabilities (GRZ: 2023b).

Key Gender-Related Challenges Facing the Infrastructure Sector

- ▶ **Gender Blind Infrastructure** – Infrastructure in the water, education and transport sector fails to consider the needs of women and children, and how this affects their ability to use these services. Additionally, most infrastructure designs have been gender blind as they do not provide for facilities suitable to women (GRZ: 2023a). For example:

- ▷ The lack of boarding facilities has had a significant impact on girls' education, as many parents are reluctant to send their daughters to school due to concerns about their safety and security.
- ▷ There is a lack of gender-sensitive sanitation facilities, particularly in rural areas and schools. Insufficient access to safe, private toilets can discourage girls from attending school during menstruation, leading to higher dropout rates.
- ▷ Poorly lit streets and public spaces increase women's vulnerability to harassment and violence, restricting their freedom of movement, especially at night.
- ▶ The Draft National Policy on Disability (2023) identifies that public infrastructure “remains largely inaccessible...and this is worsened by inadequate capacities of ZAPD to inspect infrastructures and ensure compliance to specification regarding accessibility. The staff sitting in as inspectors are inadequately qualified and lack the authority to enforce standards.” Mainstreaming accessibility criteria to public procurement to ensure new infrastructure, goods and services do not create additional barriers for persons with disabilities is therefore not apparent (UNICEF (2023).
- ▶ **Low Representation of Women** - Women remain under-represented across the infrastructure value chains that range from project scoping, assessment, approval, construction, and operationalisation. The low participation is due to due to limited skills, inadequate access to capital, lack of education qualifications and gender stereotypes.
- ▶ **Women Taking up Low-Paying Jobs** – Due to their lack or lower educational qualifications in construction, engineering and other fields, women end up taking low- paying jobs (flagger jobs) where their responsibility is to direct vehicles around the construction sites, placing barricades, signboards, and traffic cones among others yet their male counterparts enjoy the high paying jobs.
- ▶ **Inadequate Access to ICT** - Few women and youth have access to smartphones and computers with internet connectivity and are unlikely to harness significant benefits from the technology due to the high cost of devices and internet services as well as low levels of literacy among women (GRZ: 2023b). The lack of access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has wide-ranging consequences for human development. Significant improvements in human development, including improvements in health, knowledge, and access to basic living standards, are linked to policies aimed at advancing ICT (Asongu and Roux, 2017). In response to this issue, the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) has shown an increased dedication to expanding access to (ICT) infrastructure that is both economical and effective. The latest demand-side survey undertaken by ZICTA revealed that the uptake of ICT services among the population is still relatively low. For example, only 14.3 % of the adult population reported having access to and being able to actively use the internet. Furthermore, only 53.5 % of the adult population have access to mobile phones with a further 29.6 % of mobile phone owners having smartphones. There are also a number of disparities in access and usage among groups such as persons living with disabilities, the rural versus urban population and along gender lines. (Ministry of Technology and Science 2022; and Ministry of Health, 2023).
- ▶ **Gender Stereotypes and Biases** - Patriarchal beliefs have continued to hinder women from actively engaging in certain sectors like that of infrastructure. Women shun the transport sector in Zambia because of the deep-rooted gender biases, the harsh conditions that do not consider the specific needs of women transporters, as well as the exploitation and harassment in the sector, which is seen as an area of work for men (GRZ: 2021b).

- **Gender Blind Legislation** - Infrastructure has a number of pieces of legislation, but they are all gender blind. This lack of gender responsive legislation will not only make it difficult to implement some gender provisions in the policy framework but will also not illuminate the men's and women's specific and different needs and interests in the sector altogether.

4.4 Gender and the Health Sector

Everyone has the right to quality healthcare as a basic human right. Both men and women deserve access to the best possible physical and mental health care, which is essential for their overall well-being and quality of life. Women, specifically, have distinct reproductive health needs. This involves the right to a safe and satisfying sexual life, along with the freedom to make informed decisions about if, when, and how to have children.

However, gender disparities continue to pose significant challenges in the pursuit of better health outcomes in Zambia. Women, particularly, bear a greater burden from inadequate health systems, especially regarding sexual and reproductive health services. Awareness of at least one family planning method is prevalent across different age groups and sexes. The 2018 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS) indicates that 98.1% of adolescent girls and 96.1% of boys had access to information on sexual and reproductive health services. The unmet need for family planning was particularly high among unmarried women aged 15-49, reaching 58.8%, the highest of any age group. Access to family planning products and services, such as contraceptives, was significantly lower among young people, with only 12% coverage compared to 48% among adults. Young people are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation and intergenerational sexual relationships, making it difficult for girls to negotiate safer sex with older partners due to cultural and societal norms (NGP, 2023: 17).

HIV and AIDS

HIV Infection rates: Data from the 2018 ZDHS illustrates that about 32% of adolescents aged 15-17 and 60% of those aged 18-19 are sexually active in Zambia, and therefore are at high risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially as only 40% of them report regular condom use. As a result, 5.6% of female youth (15 – 25 years) and 1.8% of male youth are living with HIV.

The HIV incidence in Zambia exhibits a notable gender disparity, particularly affecting young women. According to the Zambia Population-Based HIV Impact Assessment (ZAMPHIA) 2016 report, the annual HIV incidence among adults aged 15 to 59 years was 0.61%, with a higher rate among females (0.93%) compared to males (0.29%). This disparity is especially pronounced among young adults. The 2018 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey reported that HIV prevalence among females aged 15-49 years was 14.2%, compared to 7.5% for males in the same age group. These statistics highlight a significant gender bias in HIV incidence, with young women being disproportionately affected. This situation underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the vulnerabilities of this demographic group.

Teen Pregnancies

The Zambia Statistics Agency (2018) reports that the teenage pregnancy rate is at 29% and that the percentage of girls aged 15-19 years who have begun childbearing increases with age, from 6% among those aged 15 to 53% among those aged 19 years. In addition, the teenage pregnancy rate is higher in rural areas (37%) than in urban areas (19%). In relation to Pregnancies and readmissions to schools, there were 12,330 pregnancies with 5,078 re-admissions at the primary level and 4,089 pregnancies

and 2,876 readmissions secondary level in 2020⁷. The highest number of pregnancies was recorded in the Eastern province and the lowest number in Muchinga Province.

Table 2: Pregnancies and Admissions to Schools – 2020

Provinces/Grade Group	Grades 1-7		Grades 8-12		Grades 1-12	
	Pregnancies	Re-Admits	Pregnancies	Re-Admits	Pregnancies	Re-Admits
Central	1 356	478	433	289	1 789	767
Copperbelt	1 035	360	598	413	1 633	773
Eastern	2 422	625	378	260	2 800	885
Luapula	1 073	472	271	238	1 344	710
Lusaka	986	365	382	244	1 368	609
Muchinga	455	336	214	173	669	509
North Western	1 242	628	498	378	1 740	1 006
Northern	899	426	374	295	1 273	721
Southern	1 906	792	573	321	2 479	1 113
Western	956	596	368	265	1 324	861
Total	12 330	5 078	4 089	2 876	16 419	7 954

Source: Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletin 2020, 2022

Teen Marriages

Zambia has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world, according to UNICEF⁸. In Zambia, women tend to marry earlier than men, with a median age at first marriage of 19 years compared to 24.5 years for men in 2018. This rate only slightly improved over the past 25 years with a median age of 17.5 for women and 23.5 for men in 1992⁹. Also, adolescent marriage is alarmingly high, with 6% of girls and less than 1% of boys being married before the age of 15¹⁰. The median age at first marriage among women aged 25-49 years in urban areas is on average two years higher than in rural areas, and also increases in direct correlation with improved levels of education and wealth¹¹.

The prevalence of child marriage among women aged 20–29 was 44.4 % in 2018, declining from 51.5 % in 2007. Women with secondary or higher level of education [and those whose age at first birth was (15–19 years) or (20–29 years)] were associated with less likelihood of experiencing child marriage. Communities with a high percentage of women who gave birth at a young age were more likely to experience child marriage. Individual and community-level characteristics accounted for 35% of the overall variations in communities' likelihood of experiencing early marriage. Even after controlling for both individual and community-level influences, the intra-class correlation revealed that around 4.5 % of the overall variations remained unexplained¹².

Adolescents also face physical vulnerabilities that increase their risk of maternal complications, potentially leading to fatal outcomes. The 2018 ZDHS found that 9.1% of girls were married by age 15¹³. Early childbearing rates were considerably higher in rural areas (37 %) compared to urban settings (19%), limiting girls' human rights and impeding their potential for socio-economic advancement. Early sexual activity exposes teenagers to heightened risks of pregnancy and childbirth, with high teenage

⁷ Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletin 2020, 2022.

⁸ Phiri, M., Musonda, E., Shasha, L. et al 2023.

⁹ UNICEF Zambia (2019): Annual Report 2018.

¹⁰ Zambia Statistics Agency (2020): Zambia Demographic and Health Survey 2018.

¹¹ UNICEF (2018): Zambia Country Profile. Accessed: 27.02.2020.

¹² UNICEF, Case study on ending child marriage in the Republic of Zambia, April 2021.

pregnancy rates often stemming from a lack of accessible and adolescent-friendly family planning services, as well as delays in decision-making regarding family planning methods.

Maternal mortality remains a leading cause of illness and death among women. The ZDHS 2018 reports a decline in the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) from 483 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010 to 252 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2018. Contributing factors to maternal health issues and related fatalities include high rates of teenage pregnancies, malnutrition in girls and women, harmful cultural practices, long distances to healthcare facilities, and a shortage of skilled healthcare professionals capable of managing pregnancy and delivery complications. Additionally, the prevalence of home births, rather than institutional deliveries, exacerbates maternal health risks.

In addition, the burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) is increasing among women, particularly cancers such as cervical and breast cancer. However, screening and treatment services are often inadequate, and cultural stigma can prevent women from seeking care (Zulu, 2017).

Key Constraints in the Health Sector

- ▶ **Getting the SRHR messages to the boys and girls:** The Government has launched life skills and health education (L-SHE) in schools through clubs. The programme which is a global fund-supported initiative is aimed at ensuring that health education is provided to all adolescents in schools through clubs called Adolescents Health Clubs. Unfortunately, its implementation is dependent on the teachers delivering different subjects and some may choose not to deliver the L-SHE messages completely.
- ▶ **Lack of sign language interpreters in the health facilities:** The lack of sign language interpreters in Zambian health facilities creates significant barriers for deaf women and girls, impacting their access to essential health services. This communication gap often leads to misdiagnoses and inadequate care, particularly in sexual and reproductive health, where sensitive and clear communication is critical. Women with disabilities in Zambia are disproportionately affected by this issue, as many health professionals assume they are not sexually active, leading to neglect of their specific health needs. This results in limited access to family planning, maternal health, and other critical services.
- ▶ **Inadequate infrastructure in the health facilities to cater for women and girls with disability:** The lack of disability-friendly infrastructure in Zambia's health facilities, such as ramps, accessible toilets, and proper signage, significantly limits access to healthcare for people with disabilities, particularly women and girls. This exclusionary environment increases their vulnerability to poor health outcomes, as they often face difficulties in physically reaching and navigating healthcare services, leading to delayed or missed treatments.
- ▶ **Inadequate access to SRHR services:** Adolescents and young women in Zambia face significant challenges in accessing comprehensive reproductive health services. Limited knowledge, cultural barriers, geographic disparities, stigma, and lack of youth-friendly services are among the key obstacles. These challenges can have serious consequences for their health and well-being, including increased risk of unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortions, STIs, and other reproductive health problems.
- ▶ **Inadequate menstrual hygiene management:** Menstruation is one of the most important and inevitable changes that occur in girls during their adolescent years. However, its onset comes with numerous challenges that affect the well-being of girls especially when it comes to managing their menstruation in the school environment. MHM entails, "women and adolescent girls use a

clean material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, and this material can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of menstruation. MHM also includes using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials.” The definition emphasises the use of clean and adequate material, privacy, the use of soap and water and access to disposal facilities. All these elements are required to be present for proper MHM. Girls and young women face several challenges in ensuring menstrual hygiene management, included in the challenges are: In Zambia, Issues around menstruation are rarely discussed openly and therefore, remain a secret. There are many myths and taboos still hovering around menstruation that lead to negative attitudes toward this biological phenomenon.

- ▶ **Affordability:** The biggest barrier to girls using safe, comfortable, and effective sanitary products is affordability at the household and school levels. Studies show how girls resort to using cloth when they cannot afford pads.
- ▶ **Availability / Accessibility:** Closely tied to the affordability barrier is the inability of girls to access sanitary materials. Many girls report having to use cloth because they cannot access absorbent menstrual materials, like cotton wool, from shops or cotton fields.
- ▶ **Negative attitudes of health facility personnel towards youth especially girls and young women:** Negative attitudes from health workers towards young girls, especially in reproductive health services, can discourage them from seeking necessary care. Many girls face judgment or discrimination, particularly when accessing services related to contraception or sexual health, leading to feelings of shame and reluctance to return. This stigma often results in delayed treatment, increasing the risk of health complications, unplanned pregnancies, and unsafe abortions.
- ▶ **Lack of access to skilled birth attendants:** A lack of access to skilled birth attendants significantly impacts maternal and neonatal health, leading to higher mortality rates due to unmanaged complications like haemorrhage, infections, and birth suffocation. Unsafe delivery practices increase the risk of infections, while delays in emergency care exacerbate preventable outcomes. This contributes to poor health for mothers, including conditions like fistulas and psychological trauma, and places a heavy burden on healthcare systems. Families face economic hardships from medical costs or the loss of income due to maternal or neonatal deaths, hindering broader societal development. Addressing this gap is essential to improving survival rates and fostering healthier communities.

While progress has been made, Zambia still faces high maternal and child mortality rates. Many women lack access to skilled birth attendants and maternal health services, particularly in rural areas. Healthcare facilities, particularly in rural areas, are often inadequate. Many health centres are under-resourced and lack essential medical equipment, which compromises service delivery.

There is a critical shortage of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers with an uneven distribution of professionals between urban and rural areas. This shortage leads to a high patient-to-provider ratio, affecting the quality and accessibility of care. The health sector is underfunded, with the budget often falling short of what is needed to address critical health challenges. Limited financial resources affect the availability of drugs, medical supplies, and the maintenance of facilities.

High burden of communicable diseases such as HIV and AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, alongside the rising incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) like hypertension and diabetes. This double burden stretches the capacity of the health system. Geographical barriers, particularly in rural

areas, limit access to healthcare. Many Zambians live far from health facilities, and the lack of proper roads and transportation exacerbates this issue.

Frequent shortages of essential medicines and medical supplies are common due to inefficiencies in the supply chain. This affects the timely treatment of patients and the overall effectiveness of healthcare delivery. The health sector suffers from weak health information systems, which hampers effective data collection, monitoring, and decision-making. This affects resource allocation and the ability to respond to emerging health challenges. Many skilled healthcare professionals seek better opportunities abroad, leading to a loss of qualified personnel and exacerbating the shortage of medical staff within the country.

The Persons with Disability Act (2012) (Article 27) compels the Minister of MCDSS to collaborate with the Minister of Health to “take appropriate measures to ensure access for persons with disabilities to health services that are gender sensitive and to health-related rehabilitation...and shall in particular include sexual reproductive health services...And provide health care as close as possible to people’s own communities including rural areas...” On accessibility, Article 40 also states that “...the Minister shall take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, the physical environment, transportation, information and communication and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and rural areas...” and Article 42 further states that “A person who provides services to the public shall put in place necessary facilities that make the services available and accessible to persons with disabilities in the prescribed manner,” (UNICEF 2023).

Key Opportunities

Zambia has a strong focus on Primary Healthcare (PHC), which presents opportunities for expanding access to essential health services, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Programmes aimed at building resilient PHC systems through investments in infrastructure, healthcare worker training, and supply chains are critical. This includes the provision of services such as maternal and child health, immunization, and treatment of communicable diseases.

Programmes aimed at reducing maternal and infant mortality through better prenatal care, skilled birth attendance, family planning services, and nutrition programmes offer key areas for growth. Strengthening the referral systems and emergency obstetric care also remains a priority.

With the growing recognition of mental health as a critical component of overall well-being, there is an increasing need to develop mental health services in Zambia. Opportunities exist for the establishment of more mental health facilities, integrating mental health services into primary healthcare, and raising public awareness of mental health issues.

The construction and renovation of hospitals, health centres, and clinics—especially in remote areas—can significantly improve access to healthcare services more so if they consider the importance of ensuring the facilities are disability friendly. This also includes digital health infrastructure, such as telemedicine services, which have the potential to bridge healthcare access gaps in underserved regions.

There is a need to invest in the training and capacity building of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, midwives, and community health workers. This training should include training in disability inclusion, sign language interpretation and dealing with youth, especially girls. This can be achieved through partnerships with universities, training institutions, and international health organizations, which provide opportunities for scholarships, exchange programmes, and continuous professional development for health workers.

The health sector has numerous opportunities for collaboration through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). Private investments in healthcare infrastructure, pharmaceutical supply chains, health technology, and health insurance can complement government efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of healthcare services.

The rise of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancer offer opportunities for targeted interventions. Programmes promoting healthy diets, physical activity, and regular screening for NCDs are critical. Furthermore, nutrition interventions to tackle malnutrition and stunting, especially among children, present an opportunity for improving long-term health outcomes.

Zambia has opportunities to expand its role in health research and development, especially in areas such as tropical diseases, public health, maternal and child health, and health systems strengthening. Collaborations with academic institutions, international organizations, and research bodies can boost evidence-based interventions and policies to improve health outcomes.

4.5 Gender and the Education Sector

The Government of the Republic of Zambia has made consistent and sustained progress in closing the gender gap in education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Gender parity is achieved during initial primary school enrolment, but as students move through upper primary and secondary school, completion rates for both boys and girls begin to drop. Completion rates in grades 7 and 9 are encouraging. According to the 2018 ZDHS report, grade 7 completion rates were 99.8 % for girls and 94.8 % for boys, while grade 9 completion rates stood at 77.3 % for girls and 76.6 % for boys.

Completion rates tend to drop sharply at the Grade 12 level. In 2018, only 31.6% of girls and 40.4% of boys completed this level of education. Various factors contribute to the decline, especially for girls. These include teenage pregnancy, early marriage, long travel distances to schools, limited access to boarding facilities in rural areas, financial challenges, poor Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) facilities, unsafe school environments, and deep-rooted patriarchal norms that favour boys over girls in educational opportunities (ZDHS, 2018). These norms influence family decisions on educational investment, often resulting in girls being pulled out of school to care for younger siblings or assist with household chores.

Retainment of Girls in Schools/ Dropout

Secondary school net enrolment rates, though registering improvements from 23% in 2006 to 37.6% in 2020, remain very low. The low enrolments at secondary school reflect the low number of school places at Grade 10 as indicated by the low transition rates for Grade 9 to Grade 10 that stood at 46.8% in 2020. The completion rate at grade 12 stood at 32% in 2020 up from 17.7% in 2006. Although an improvement, these figures suggest that less than one-third of concerned young people obtained sufficient functional literacy to allow them to have a productive life¹⁴. Overall, girls continue to be at a disadvantage with many dropping out in the upper primary and secondary grades and they have poorer levels of transition to junior secondary and senior secondary levels.

Dropout Rates

The dropout rate indicates the proportion of pupils who leave the system without completing a given grade in a given school year. In 2020, dropout rates with Luapula recording the highest at 3.0% while

¹⁴ Government of the Republic of Zambia: 8th National Development Plan 2022 Dropout Rates

Copperbelt and Lusaka and Copperbelt recording the least at 0.8% at the primary level. At the secondary level, Northern Province recorded the highest at 2.2% while Copperbelt and Lusaka recorded the lowest rates at 0.6%¹⁵.

To address the high dropout rates among girls and encourage their return to school, the Re-entry Policy was introduced in 1997 and later incorporated into the Education Act, No. 23 of 2011. FAWEZA (2018) highlights that despite the existence of the Re-entry Policy, most of the girls do not resume their education after giving birth. Its implementation still faces challenges. For instance, while 56 % of the 15,724 girls who dropped out due to pregnancy in 2019 were readmitted, some schools have not fully implemented the policy, and some girls have been reluctant to return due to stigma, childcare responsibilities, and weak enforcement mechanisms (NGP, 2023).

In 2022, the Zambian government introduced the implementation of the Free Education Policy, covering Early Childhood to Secondary School levels in all public institutions, leading to a sharp rise in student enrolments. However, some stakeholders have noted that the surge in enrolment has created a mismatch between the number of students and available teachers, resulting in overcrowded classrooms and challenging conditions for both learners and educators. Concerns have been raised that if the overcrowding issue is not effectively addressed, it could compromise the quality of education. Additionally, others have argued that the education system was unprepared for such a reform, leaving schools and teachers struggling to cope with the increased demand (NAZ, 2023).

Zambia has made strides in achieving gender parity in certain university programmes and skills development areas. Female participation has increased in commercially oriented fields such as humanities, business, and education, where women now make up 50%. However, according to the National Higher Education Policy of 2019, female representation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) remains low, with women accounting for just 25% of learners in these fields. This underrepresentation may stem from the absence of female role models to inspire young learners and the persistent perception that STEM subjects are too challenging for girls is another contributing factor (NGP, 2023).

Key Constraints in the Education Sector

- **Inadequate school facilities especially in the rural areas:** There were 9,441 primary and 1,290 secondary schools in 2020 representing an increase of 1.7 % in primary schools and 0.2 % in secondary schools for the period 2019 - 2020. Most schools in the country are located in rural areas at 7760 (82.2%) and 880 (68.2%) of all primary and secondary schools, respectively (Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletin 2020). Despite having more schools, the greatest challenge faced in the rural areas is still the distance to schools, both primary and secondary. Inadequate educational facilities impact on transition rate (also called the promotion rate). This showed an increasing trend from 2014 (59.3% to 63.0% in 2020) at the primary level. However, comparing the 2019 and 2020 transition rates, there was a decline of -11.0 percentage points. In Grades 9-10, the trends of the transition rate have increased from 2015 (46.2%) to 2020 (46.8%). However, comparing 2019 and 2020 transition rates, there was a decline by -6.2 percentage points in 2020. In grades 9-10, North Western had the highest transition rates (54.1%) while the lowest is Eastern Province at 34.6%¹⁶.

¹⁵ Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Bulletin, August 2022.

¹⁶ Ministry of Education (2020).

- ▶ **Inadequate number of boarding facilities at schools especially in the rural areas.** According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), only 20% of rural schools in Zambia have boarding facilities. This lack of adequate accommodation in rural areas has contributed to low school enrolment rates, high drop-out rates, and low academic performance among children. Moreover, the lack of boarding facilities has had a significant impact on girls' education, as many parents are reluctant to send their daughters to school due to concerns about their safety and security. In the absence of boarding facilities at the schools, the children rent rooms in the communities close to the schools. While this practice allows girls to attend school, it also makes them vulnerable to various risks. Many girls are forced to live in boarding houses that lack basic amenities such as clean water and toilets, which puts their health at risk. Additionally, girls living in boarding houses are often subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation by male teachers, caretakers, and fellow students, which poses a significant threat to their safety and well-being World Health Organization (2014). Global status report on violence prevention 2014. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization
- ▶ **Deteriorating quality of education:** The quality of education in Zambia has been a matter of concern for many years. Despite government efforts to improve access to education, the quality of education in the country remains poor, particularly in rural areas. According to a report by the World Bank (2018), nearly 60% of Zambian children who complete primary school cannot read or write at the expected level. One of the major challenges facing the education system in Zambia is a lack of resources. Many schools in the country lack basic facilities such as textbooks, classroom space, and qualified teachers. The shortage of teachers is particularly acute in rural areas, where schools struggle to attract and retain qualified staff. Parents are aware of the deteriorating conditions in schools and may be reluctant to send their children especially girls to school.
- ▶ **Gender-Based Violence in Schools:** Girls face a higher risk of sexual harassment and violence in and around schools, discouraging attendance and affecting their mental health. Sexual harassment in Zambian schools, particularly among girls in primary and secondary institutions, remains a significant problem. One of the primary challenges is the underreporting of sexual harassment incidents. Many girls are hesitant to report such experiences due to fear of stigma, shame, or lack of trust in the school administration. This makes it difficult to accurately assess the extent of the problem and to implement effective measures to prevent it. Another contributing factor is the lack of awareness and education about sexual harassment among students, teachers, and school administrators. Many individuals may not recognize sexual harassment when it occurs, or they may not know how to respond appropriately. Finally, inadequate enforcement of existing laws and policies against sexual harassment can hinder efforts to address the problem. In some cases, schools may fail to take appropriate action against perpetrators, which can send a message that such behaviour is tolerated. To effectively address sexual harassment in Zambian schools, it is essential to create a safe and supportive environment for girls to report incidents without fear of retaliation.
- ▶ **Inadequate infrastructure to help the girls deal with menstrual health and hygiene:** Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services play a significant role in keeping girls in school. For example, providing clean school latrines, sanitary materials, water, soap, and privacy increases school attendance and reduces absenteeism among girls, especially during menstruation (Chinyama et al., 2019).

- **Inadequate training on gender among the teachers:** In addition, schools often do not have enough qualified teachers, and many teachers lack proper training on gender-sensitive teaching and supporting girls' education¹⁷.

Many schools, especially in rural areas, suffer from a lack of sufficient classrooms, desks, and learning materials. Overcrowded classrooms and dilapidated buildings make it difficult to create conducive learning environments. There is a significant shortage of trained and qualified teachers, particularly in remote and rural areas. Additionally, many teachers lack the necessary skills to effectively deliver the curriculum, especially in subjects such as science, mathematics, and technology. This affects the overall quality of education.

Despite progress in increasing enrolment, access to education remains a challenge in certain regions, especially for marginalized groups such as girls, children with disabilities, and those in rural areas. Factors such as long distances to schools and socio-cultural barriers further contribute to disparities in access. Girls face numerous barriers to education, including early marriage, pregnancy, household responsibilities, and socio-cultural norms that prioritize boys' education. This leads to lower enrolment, retention, and completion rates for girls, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels.

The education sector is often underfunded, leading to a lack of essential resources such as textbooks, teaching aids, and infrastructure maintenance. This financial constraint limits the government's ability to expand access to education and improve its quality. Dropout rates, especially at the secondary level, are high due to poverty, teenage pregnancies, child labour, and other socio-economic factors. Many students are forced to leave school early to support their families financially.

Zambia's education system has historically placed more emphasis on academic education, with limited opportunities for vocational and technical training. This mismatch between education and the needs of the labour market affects employability, especially for youths who are unable to pursue tertiary education. There is limited access to early childhood education, which is essential for laying a strong foundation for future learning. The lack of ECE centres, particularly in rural areas, limits children's cognitive development and readiness for primary education.

Key Opportunities in the Education Sector

- **Early Childhood Education (ECE):** The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 suggests that one tool to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education is through providing both girls and boys with equal access to quality pre-primary learning. The Government of Zambia recognises the importance of laying a strong educational foundation through Early Childhood Education (ECE) as this helps expand access to affordable, quality ECE programmes, especially in rural and underserved areas, thereby helping bridge learning gaps early on. A Gender-Responsive Pedagogy for Early Childhood Education study conducted in Chibombo District shows school leaders have made changes in their schools that promoted gender responsiveness e. g. tasks that used to be assigned to boys only or girls only were now being assigned to both boys and girls. Furthermore, the study also shows that teachers acquired knowledge on how to challenge and neutralize gender stereotypes and the importance of play and its implementation in the classrooms and understanding the importance of creating equal opportunities for boys and girls, men and women in the school (VVOB: 2021).

¹⁷ <https://data.unicef.org/country/zmb/>

- ▶ **Free Education:** Prior to the introduction of free primary education, many girls dropped out of school due to the inability to pay school fees or cultural beliefs that prioritised boys' education over girls. However, with the abolition of school fees, more girls have been able to enrol and stayed in 16 school, leading to improved gender parity (National Assembly: 2023).
- ▶ **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) Programmes:** A report by the National Assembly (2023) states that the Comprehensive Sexuality Education programme was necessary and critical in providing information on issues of sexual reproductive health and rights. The report observed that the reluctance in the implementation of this programme was the reason why pregnancy cases among the girls remained high. There it was recommended that the Government consider heightening comprehensive sexuality education programmes in schools, as this would contribute to not only reducing the number of pregnancies among the girls, but also to contribute to the implementation of the School Re-entry Policy. In addition, there is compelling evidence that in-school CSE leads to improved HIV/SRH knowledge, increased condom use, reductions in number of sexual partners, increased self-efficacy for HIV protection, more favourable attitudes towards safer sex, and delayed sexual debut (Mbizvo: 2023).
- ▶ **Constituency Development Fund Scholarships:** Through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the Government of Zambia provides bursaries for Secondary Boarding School and Skills Development. The skills development programmes provide an opportunity to equip students with practical skills, particularly in agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and ICT, which can lead to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities especially for females who may not have opportunity to do so in other tertiary institutions that may require unaffordable fees.
- ▶ **School Feeding Programmes:** School feeding helps to promote access to education for orphans and vulnerable children thus contributing to gender equality. Education has additional benefits for girls as they are less likely to engage in child marriages and other vices which hinder them from attaining their full potential hence (Ministry of General Education: 2020). The effect of school feeding on grade repetition, dropout rates, learning achievements and school performance are all interrelated, and the feeding programmes have shown increased school enrolment and attendance, especially for girls (ibid).
- ▶ **Inclusivity:** In the 2023 teacher recruitment exercise, 451 of the 7,221 newly recruited teachers were persons with disabilities, reflecting the Government's dedication to inclusive education. However, challenges such as stigma, discrimination, and lack of accessibility continue to impede equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. Grants for special education needs under Ministry of Education increased from K15 million to K28 million in 2024 (UNICEF: 2023). Therefore, room remains for the government, cooperating partners and civil society organisations to do more to ensure that more teachers with disabilities are recruited as this as shown to inspire school going children with disabilities as it is vital for creating an inclusive culture, among many other things¹⁸.

4.6 Gender and Water

According to the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (2018), 72% of Zambian households have access to an improved water source although access is more predominant in urban (92%) than rural

¹⁸ <https://www.ukfiet.org/2024/being-a-teacher-with-disabilities-experiences-from-across-five-countries/>

(58%) households. Access to basic drinking water service varies widely by province, from 36% in Northern to 91% in Lusaka. Despite this relatively good picture of access to basic water, the same survey showed that only 33% of the population had basic sanitation service, 41% in urban areas and 28% in rural areas. Further analysis shows that by province, the proportion of the population with improved sanitation facilities varies from a high of 80% in Lusaka to a low of 6% in Western. The proportion of the population engaging in open defecation is highest in Western (50%) and lowest in Copperbelt, Lusaka, and Northern (1% each).

The National Water Policy of 2024 recognises that although considerable milestones have been achieved since the water sector reforms in Zambia, progress in the rural areas continues to lag behind than that of urban areas, hence disadvantaging the rural population, especially women, children and the elderly. The policy also states that social and economic development can only be attained when there is equal participation of both men and women in the development process thus the sector requires gender mainstreaming and social inclusion in the design and delivery of WASH facilities, products and services. The legal framework on water resources in Zambia is mainly anchored on the Water Resources Management Act No. 21 of 2011.

The Government of Zambia through the Ministry of Water Development and Sanitation developed the Zambia Water Investment Programme - ZIP (2022–2030) which aims to support the attainment of Zambia Vision 2030 - a prosperous middle-income country by 2030. Among the nine components of the ZIP, one of them (sixth) addresses aspects of gender equality and social inclusion in relation to water security investments. The focus of this component is on addressing gender equality; youth and child development and empowerment through water investments; and ensuring that the water, sanitation and hygiene needs of people living with disabilities are adequately addressed when investing in water security and sanitation. The objective of the component is to address aspects of gender equality and social inclusion within the context of water security investments. This entails addressing the special and specific needs regarding water and sanitation for women, men, girls, boys, youths, children and people living with disabilities.

Key Gender Related Challenges Facing the Water Sector

- ▶ **Water Technologies:** The designs of certain technology for water sources such as hand pumps have proved not to be user friendly mostly to the People with Disabilities, children and the elderly unlike other technologies like water kiosks. Furthermore, service provision, site selection, designs and construction of water supply and sanitation infrastructure have not adequately considered the requirements for persons living with disabilities. This has resulted in some facilities not being accessible by disabled people (National Water Policy: 2024).
- ▶ **Extreme Weather Conditions:** Weather conditions such as floods and droughts have affected the access to clean safe water for many households. Due to droughts, women and girls have to walk longer distances to collect water and men and boys equally have to cover the same long distances for animal watering.
- ▶ **Low School Attendance among Girls:** Some adolescent girls miss school during their menstrual periods due to lack of water to wash or clean themselves. This has contributed to low school attendance rates among girls leading to lower academic performance and reduced future opportunities, further perpetuating gender inequalities (UNICEF et. al.: 2024).
- ▶ **Lack of Gender Disaggregated Data:** Collecting water data disaggregated by Gender is a critical step in better understanding how water is used, managed, and distributed. However,

gender data gaps in the water sector impacting evidence-based decision making for gender equality. Currently, the Zambia national statistics in terms of access to water and sanitation for men and women are not disaggregated (GRZ: 2024).

- ▶ **Inadequate Participation of Women in Key Decision-Making Positions:** The water sector in Zambia has been confronted by low numbers of women in key decision making positions partly resulting from few women taking up water related educational programmes and partly due to lack of deliberate and intentional steps being taken in appointing women to such positions from the national, provincial, district and community levels.

Despite an attempt to promote gender mainstreaming in the water sector, there is no mention about gender inequalities and their causes or statements addressing them when mainstreaming gender into the policies, programmes and activities relating to water resource management development. Therefore, the minimal effort to address gender inequalities may not necessarily hinder but create an opportunity to promote affirmative action towards gender equality in water security in the country.

4.7 Gender and Mining

Mining has been a major economic driver in Zambia, contributing significantly to GDP and employment. Historically, mining roles have been male dominated, with mining communities largely structured around traditional gender norms. This has often relegated women to roles in the informal mining economy, including artisanal mining, while men occupy formal positions in large-scale mining operations. Gender roles in mining communities tend to reflect broader Zambian societal norms, where men are often viewed as primary earners, while women may be confined to caregiving, household, and support roles. This dynamic has influenced not only employment patterns but also the distribution of mining revenues within communities, with men largely controlling these financial flows.

Key gender issues in the mining sector include the following:

- ▶ **Employment and Economic Participation:** Women's participation in formal mining jobs remains low, partly due to persistent gender biases, lack of training opportunities, and limited access to capital. Despite affirmative policies encouraging diversity, there is a gender imbalance in hiring, especially in technical and leadership roles. Women who do enter formal mining roles face challenges related to workplace safety, gender-based discrimination, and inadequate protective measures against harassment.

Many women in Zambia are engaged in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM), where they often take on informal, lower-paying roles such as crushing, washing, and sifting minerals (Phiri and Chileshe, 2015). ASM is generally less regulated, with limited access to safety measures, health resources, and fair compensation. The economic contributions of women in ASM are substantial, but they are largely overlooked in formal economic assessments, limiting support and investment in their development. According to the 2019 Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) research, 83 % of the mines in the ASM sector were owned by males, while just 17 % were held by women. Many obstacles prevent women from participating in Zambia's ASM industry. These include cultural norms that restrict women's participation in the industry, restricted access to mining licenses, and a lack of knowledge and funding to enable them to purchase basic mining equipment (ASM, 2019).

- ▶ **Gendered Impacts of Mining on Communities:** Mining activities have led to environmental and social changes that affect men and women differently. Pollution, deforestation, and water

contamination have health impacts that disproportionately affect women and children, who are often the primary water collectors and food providers. Women in mining communities face increased health risks due to proximity to polluted water sources, exposure to toxic substances, and limited access to healthcare services (ASM, 2019).

The influx of male workers into mining areas can strain social dynamics, leading to increased rates of Gender Based Violence (GBV), exploitation, and health issues such as HIV and AIDS. Women's lack of access to social and economic resources compounds these issues, making it difficult for them to advocate for their rights and better community health and safety practices.

- ▶ **Policy and Legislative Landscape:** Zambia's National Gender Policy recognises the need for gender equality across economic sectors, including mining. The Mines and Minerals Development Act No. 11 of 2015 has provisions for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), though it lacks specific clauses addressing gender disparities. Implementation of gender-responsive policies in mining remains limited, with minimal enforcement mechanisms to ensure that mining companies address gender equity, workplace safety, and community health concerns.

Efforts to empower women in mining have been partly supported by the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development. However, uptake has been slow, and substantial gaps remain in training, mentorship, and access to financing for women.

- ▶ **Education and Skills Development:** Low levels of education and skills training are significant barriers to women's entry into formal mining roles. There is a need to increase access to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education for women and girls, especially those in mining regions. Organisations like FAWEZA play a crucial role in promoting STEM and vocational training for women, which can help close the skills gap.

Scholarships, mentorship, and community-based training programs could be expanded to equip women with skills relevant to both artisanal and industrial mining sectors. Addressing cultural biases in education and professional development could further support women's entry into technical and management positions within mining.

Economic Empowerment Initiatives for Women in Mining

Women in ASM often face difficulties in accessing capital, technology, and formal markets. Limited access to financial resources restricts their ability to scale up their operations or transition to formal mining. Micro-finance and loan schemes specifically tailored for women miners, coupled with training on financial literacy and business management, could significantly boost women's economic independence.

Empowering women through ownership of mining licenses and providing them with direct market access could enhance their participation in value chains and allow for greater financial security and independence. Women-led cooperatives and associations are potential vehicles for advancing these objectives, providing women with collective bargaining power and better negotiating positions in the mining sector.

Challenges and Barriers to Gender Equality in Mining

- ▶ **Cultural and Social Norms:** Deep-rooted gender stereotypes continue to hinder women's full participation in mining. Community perceptions of mining as a "man's job" discourage women from pursuing careers in the sector and affect the support they receive within their communities and families.
- ▶ **Health and Safety Risks:** The mining sector has inherent health and safety risks that disproportionately affect women. The lack of adequate protective gear and safety protocols tailored to women's physical needs, coupled with limited access to gender-sensitive healthcare, exacerbates health inequalities.
- ▶ **Inadequate Support for Childcare and Family Responsibilities:** Women in mining often balance household duties with their work, which is particularly challenging in the ASM sector, where hours are long, and childcare options are scarce. Supportive policies, such as onsite childcare facilities or flexible work arrangements, would help women balance work and family life, allowing for increased participation in mining jobs.
- ▶ **Inadequate Gender Policies within the Mining Companies:** Mining firms in Zambia also lack comprehensive gender-sensitive corporate policies, which reinforces the adverse effects on women, particularly in terms of inadequate compensation and resettlement measures. This highlights the need for stronger enforcement of gender-inclusive policies and greater support for women's participation in both mining operations and community decision-making.

4.8 Gender and Energy

According to the Living Conditions Monitoring Survey (2022), only about 33.8% of households in rural areas had connection to an electricity source while in urban areas 80.2% of households had connection to an electricity source. Further analysis shows that households in Lusaka (77.6%), Copperbelt (63.7%) and North-western (35.9%) provinces used grid electricity as a source of energy for lighting while the largest proportion of households in each of the remaining 7 provinces used a torch as source of energy for lighting with Western and Eastern provinces accounting for the largest and second largest proportions at 51% and 48.4% respectively. In addition, Southern and Central provinces were two provinces with the largest and second largest proportions of households that used solar lighting systems at 17.8% and 15.7%, respectively while 17.5% and 10.8% of the households in Muchinga and Copperbelt provinces, respectively, used a candle for lighting. Energy is a critical resource in every household and in rural areas, women have the primary responsibility of securing energy for cooking and other domestic purposes like preservation and processing of food, lighting and heating and recent statistics show that in rural areas, 81.9% of the households used firewood as the main source of energy for cooking (Zamstats: 2022).

The Ministry of Energy in Zambia has made significant progress as far as formulating gender related policy documents is concerned. This is demonstrated through the formulation of the 2022 Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan and the launch of the 2023 Integrated Resource Plan for the Power Sector in Zambia which has a component on gender and social inclusion. The latter identifies opportunities to enhance women's representation, empowerment and access to energy-related opportunities and develops social safeguard standards to help operationalise the key objective of increasing social and gender integration in energy infrastructure projects (Ministry of Energy: 2023). Furthermore, the Ministry of Energy established the Zambia Gender and Energy Network (ZGEN) in 2010 and later re- launched it in 2022

The 2019 National Energy Policy (NEP) governs the Zambia's energy sector development and as part of its rationale, it reaffirms the mainstreaming of gender as a critical tool for promoting efficient allocation of resources and promoting equity with one of its objectives being 'to mainstream gender, climate change, and health and safety in the energy'. Despite having a gender responsive policy framework, energy laws in Zambia are gender blind. The Rural Electrification Act No. 5 of 2023; the Energy Regulation Act No.12 of 2019, the Electricity Act No.11 of 2019 and the Petroleum Act No. 8 of 1995 do not make provisions for any gender differences in the access to or use of energy especially on the promotion of clean energy for domestic use which is dominated by women. The Energy sector faces some gender related challenges which are outlined below.

Key Gender Related Challenges Facing the Energy Sector

- ▶ **Gender Blind Energy Laws:** The lack of gender related legal provisions in the energy laws makes it difficult to mainstream and implement any gender and social inclusion interventions in order to establish the gender inequalities in the energy value chains and how to address them.
- ▶ **Low Representation of Women in the Energy Sector:** The gender gap in employment and on boards of the energy sector is attributed to the low number of women undertaking STEM programmes, for instance, in 2020, approximately 5% out of 46,546 engineers registered with the Engineering Institution of Zambia were women and this includes both working professionals as well as students. It has also been argued that these low numbers are partly due to persisting gender norms which discourage girls and women from pursuing such programmes as they are considered to be too technical and demanding and some young female engineers have encountered sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace (Ministry of Energy: 2022 and 2023).
- ▶ **Inadequate Access to Electricity in Rural Areas:** The lack of access to adequate electricity coupled with the use of firewood in rural areas places a burden on women as they have the responsibility of collecting and transporting firewood for household use. increasing work burdens for women.
- ▶ **Lack of sex disaggregated data:** Lack of adequate, reliable and accurate sex-disaggregated data in the energy sector possess a challenge of not knowing how many women and men have access to (and use) a particular energy source and thus makes it difficult to assess and make decision about who is benefiting and who is not. As a result, gender inequalities may be perpetuated in outputs and decision making.

4.9 Gender and Media/Information

In Zambia, the media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion and cultural norms. However, like in many other societies, gender biases within the media landscape affect how men and women are portrayed, the issues that receive attention, and who is given a voice. Despite some progress, Zambian media still grapples with systemic gender inequities in representation, access, and coverage.

Gender Representation in Media Content

In Zambian media, gender representation often leans toward traditional stereotypes. Women are typically portrayed in roles associated with family, caregiving, or passive societal roles, while men appear in more dynamic roles related to politics, economics, or public leadership. This tendency reinforces gender stereotypes and limits the public's understanding of the diverse roles women occupy

in society. Women in Zambian media are often underrepresented in stories about business, politics, and other critical sectors, even though women contribute substantially to these areas. Gender stereotyping in media is especially prevalent in entertainment programming, advertisements, and news stories, where women are often depicted in ways that reinforce traditional perceptions of beauty, femininity, and subordinate. According to the 2017 SADC Barometer, only 37% of senior management positions were held by women, with 19% of women in sources and 25% of women in images.

Female Voices and Perspectives

Although women constitute nearly half of the Zambian population, their voices are not equally heard in the media. Men predominantly occupy positions as news sources, expert commentators, and primary voices in news stories, particularly in hard news segments (Dibetso, 2015). Conversely, women are often quoted in human-interest stories or featured as sources in stories related to health, fashion, and lifestyle. This lack of representation in critical areas such as politics, economics, and governance limits the diversity of perspectives presented in the media and fails to highlight the expertise women bring to various fields (SADC Barometer, 2017).

One barrier to women's voices being represented is the limited number of female media professionals in decision-making positions (GRZ, 2017-2019). Although women are increasingly joining the media industry, they are underrepresented in senior roles such as editors, producers, and news directors, where decisions about content and representation are made. Consequently, issues affecting women are often sidelined or underreported.

Media Coverage of Gender Based Violence

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a significant issue in Zambia, and media coverage has played a role in raising public awareness. However, there are critical gaps in how GBV is reported. Stories often focus on sensational aspects of violence, emphasising the event itself rather than exploring underlying societal issues or focusing on solutions. Furthermore, coverage can sometimes lead to victim-blaming narratives or inadvertently re-traumatize survivors by failing to use sensitive language and approaches (Moonga, 2021). In this regard, Moonga advises that the media should focus on providing support service details such as hotlines, shelters and crisis centres, and draw attention towards positive stories of resilience and empowerment as survivors often act as agents of change. Training for journalists on covering GBV sensitively and effectively can improve how these stories are framed and increase public awareness around prevention and support services.

Digital Media and Gender

Digital platforms have opened new avenues for women to engage with media in Zambia, allowing for greater access to information and opportunities for advocacy. Social media platforms have become spaces where women's organisations and activists raise awareness of gender equality issues, promote women's voices, and challenge harmful stereotypes. However, some women in Zambia also face online harassment and cyberbullying, which can discourage them from active participation (HIVOS, 2020). For those with access to internet and social media, these present challenges for young girls. They are particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying, digital sexual harassment which can include sextortion which can have serious psychological and emotional consequences. Online platforms can be a source of misinformation and disinformation, which can mislead young people and contribute to social unrest. Girls may also be exposed to harmful content, such as sexually explicit images or videos, which can be damaging to their mental health and development. Excessive use of social media can lead to addiction, negatively impacting academic performance, relationships, and overall well-being. The results of a

gender analysis undertaken in Eastern and Southern Province document that a key issue raised by traditional leaders as well as men and women is that boys and girls are exposed to the internet (pornography) and are influenced negatively by it. Further, parents complained that they cannot discipline both the boys and the girls because of the way the Government has promulgated children's rights in schools.

Addressing online Gender Based Violence through policies and protections is crucial to ensuring that digital spaces remain inclusive and safe for women.

Opportunities for Progress and Change

The evolving media landscape in Zambia presents several opportunities to promote gender equity in media.

- ▶ **Training and sensitising journalists and media houses on gender-sensitive reporting** can help to shift narratives (Lucy Mulesa, 2012). Media watchdog organisations and civil society groups can monitor and hold media accountable for gender biases while promoting positive stories that feature women in leadership, entrepreneurship, and other critical roles. Additionally, building partnerships with women's organisations can help to create platforms for women's voices and perspectives on important national issues.
- ▶ **Encouraging more women to pursue careers in media** and ensuring they have pathways to leadership positions are essential steps in creating a more inclusive media environment.
- ▶ **Mentorship programmes, scholarships for media studies**, and policies that support women's career advancement in the media industry can contribute to increased female representation.
- ▶ **Use of current laws to stop bullying and harassment** – ensuring public awareness on their availability and use,
- ▶ **Use of community radio stations** in rural areas to get message across to women and men, boys and girls.
- ▶ **Train youth as community journalists:** Availability of youth with smart phones in rural areas that can be engaged and trained as community journalists to cover gender issues in the communities and link to the bigger media houses.

Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

In recent years, Zambia has made strides in establishing policies that address gender equality, but media-specific regulations around gender are limited. Strengthening media policy frameworks to include guidelines on gender-sensitive reporting and equitable representation can help to promote fair portrayal. The Zambian government, alongside media regulators, could incorporate standards for gender equality in media into their evaluation of media houses. In addition, fostering collaboration between the Zambian Gender Policy and media organisations can support initiatives that promote accurate and balanced reporting on gender issues.

A gender-sensitive media is essential for building an equitable society where women's voices, experiences, and perspectives are respected and valued. In Zambia, achieving gender parity in media will require systemic changes, including policy reforms, capacity-building for journalists, and increased representation of women in leadership positions within the media sector. By fostering an environment

where media can challenge rather than reinforce gender stereotypes, Zambia can take significant steps towards ensuring that its media truly reflects and respects the diversity of its society.

5.0 Conclusion

Over the years, the Government of Zambia has made steady progress in formulating gender related policy, legal framework and institutional arrangements. This has resulted in some noticeable gains, for instance, in closing the gender gap in the education sector at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. However, women and girls continue to face significant challenges in access to social-economic opportunities. The Country Gender Profile's situation and gender analysis of the sectors in Zambia shows a clear picture that women still face gender specific constraints hindering their full participation in respective areas due to various reasons including inadequate and lack of gender responsive laws and policies, poor implementation of gender related interventions, traditional norms and practices that continue to perpetuate gender inequalities and unequal opportunities for boys and girls, men and women in education and workforce respectively. There is, therefore, need for the Government of Zambia working together with cooperating partners, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, traditional leaders, the academia, media and general populace to work together in ensuring that all forms of gender inequalities in all sectors are identified and addressed. This will thus help in attaining gender equality and meet the national development goals.

6.0 Recommendations

The Country Gender Profile has clearly outlined the critical challenges faced by the country in various sectors as far as gender equality is concerned and some opportunities for advancing gender equality have been highlighted. Therefore, in order to address the challenges identified, the following recommendations have been made:

- ▶ There is need to integrate gender and social inclusion in the design and delivery of WASH facilities, products and services as well as in the management and governance of water resources especially in rural areas.
- ▶ There is need for a gender transformative media and information space where women and men's voices will be well represented without discrimination and factors reinforcing gender stereotypes addressed.
- ▶ There is need for effective implementation of gender related policies in the mining sector which and include gender audits, women's mentorship programmes and community engagement to help shift cultural norms and practices which hinder gender equality in mining.
- ▶ There is need to strengthen health data systems to collect sex and gender disaggregated data informing targeted health interventions and enhance women's representation in health leadership roles to ensure that their perspectives and needs are not only reflected in health policies and programmes but also implemented.
- ▶ There is need to promote girls' access to quality education, particularly in STEM fields and support more female representation in male dominated sectors and in doing so, the boys should

not be left behind but ensure that education opportunities available lead to gender equity and equality in the attainment of education in all fields.

- ▶ There is need to strengthen the enforcement of employment policies and laws that ensure that women fully participate in the labour force and economic arenas. In addition, support systems for childcare and families should be enhanced to women to join and remain in the workforce.
- ▶ There is need to combat harmful gender norms and discriminatory laws that restrict the full participation of women in the agriculture sector and ensure that they not only access but also have control over land and other vital productive resources.
- ▶ There is need to have gender responsive legislation in the energy sector. Having gender responsive policies without adequate legislation is not enough as the latter puts the former into action: often policies set out goals and planned activities while laws establish institutional and legal frameworks to achieve them.
- ▶ There is need to enhance equitable participation of women and men in transport and infrastructure development and use value chain. This should take into account the challenges, needs, priorities and experiences of men and women, persons with disabilities and ensure gender equality and inclusivity.
- ▶ Stakeholders need to work together and coordinate their efforts by advocating for political will (including investing financial resources) to implement the national policies, legislations and strategies by using gender transformative approaches in tackling the root causes of gender inequalities that are embedded in the various sectors of the country and address them accordingly.

7.0 Annexes

7.1 List of References

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7.2 Government & Cooperating Partner Programmes Promoting Gender Equality

The table below lists out brief descriptions of Government of Zambia and cooperating partner programmes promoting gender equality and women & girls' empowerment.

Thematic Area	Intervention	Aim	Location and Target Group
1. Social cultural behaviour re-setting	1.1 European Union Sexual Gender-Based Violence (EU-SGBV) programme (Natwampane).	Prevent Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and increase SGBV survivors' access to comprehensive support services (EU, 2014).	Implemented in Northern and Luapula provinces
	1.2 GRZ-UN Joint Programme II (GRZ-UNJP II) is a multi-partner programme on Gender-Based Violence.	Strengthening GBV prevention and response systems in Zambia.	24 districts in Zambia, targeting children and adolescents, persons with disabilities (PWDs), People Living with HIV (PLWH) and migrants.
	1.3 UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.	Reduce child Marriages through improved access to education.	Nationwide.
	1.4 Ending Child Marriage (ECM) funded by India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) Poverty and Hunger Alleviation Fund (IBSA Fund), and UN Women East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO).		Piloted in Katete and Senanga districts. Implementation in Mpulungu and Chama districts.
2. Women's economic empowerment	2.1 Girls Education and Women Empowerment and Livelihoods (GEWEL) project funded by the World Bank Group.	Livelihood support to women and increase girls' access to secondary education.	Selected districts in Zambia.
	2.2 GEWEL project additional funding is supported by the WBG, DFID, SIDA under a Multi-Donor Trust Fund for the period 2020-2024 (MoG, 2020).	Harmonize the design, development, programming and implementation of economic empowerment programmes for rural women and youths in Zambia.	
	2.3 Agricultural Development and Value Chain Enhancement (ADVANCE) Project.	To enhance chiefdom-based job, income and wealth creation (MoG, 2020).	

	2.4 50 Million African Women Speak Project (50MAWSP).	To empower women and youth to start, grow, and scale up their businesses, as well as to mentor each other through a real-time, one-stop comprehensive information hub.	Targets women-led Cooperatives (70% women and youths and 30% men) in all chiefdoms.
	2.5 Women at Work (W@W) Project supported by USAID Zambia.	To increase the number of women in leadership positions in the Zambian public, private, and civil society sectors (MOG, 2016).	National.
	2.6 Zambia Integrated Forest Landscape Programme (ZIFL-P) supported by the World Bank (WB).	Provision of economic empowerment, increased capacity in sustainable practices, enhanced land rights, leadership opportunities, and a strengthened role in environmental and climate resilience initiatives (MNDP, 2017).	Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces.
	2.7 Social Cash Transfer (SCT) Programme.	To reduce poverty among vulnerable groups, including women-headed households, the elderly, and persons with disabilities (MCDSS).	Eastern province.
3. Awareness creation	3.1 Publication of Gender Status Report funded by GIZ.	To reduce poverty among vulnerable groups, including women-headed households, the elderly, and persons with disabilities (MCDSS).	Nationwide.
	3.2 Awareness creation activities on mark days i.e., International Women's Day, and 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.	To highlight the country's progress towards gender equity and equality.	Nationwide.
	3.3 HeForShe Campaign UN Women global solidarity movement.	To involve men and boys in achieving equality by taking action against negative gender stereotypes and behaviours (MOG, 2015/16).	Nationwide.
	3.4 Count Her in Campaign Strategy.	Facilitate an inter-sectoral partnership between various stakeholders to improve women's prospects of successfully contesting for elective offices (2014 – 2016).	Nationwide.

4. Gender mainstreaming	<p>4.1 Strengthening National Regional Linkages (SNRL) Project supported by EU, SADC and GIZ (BMK).</p> <p>4.2 Gender mainstreaming training on Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting for National Assembly of Zambia (MoG, 2020).</p>	Capacity building the Gender Division for effective delivery of their mandate.	Gender Division.
5. Legal and policy reforms	<p>5.1 The Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act No. 2 of 2016.</p> <p>5.2 The Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015.</p> <p>5.3 Anti-Gender Based Violence Act No. 1 of 2011.</p> <p>5.4 Domestication of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Provisions.</p>	Domestication of international and regional instruments on gender.	Nationwide.

7.3 Description of Civil Society Programmes Promoting Gender Equality

The table below lists out a brief description of civil society programmes promoting gender equality and women & girls empowerment.

SN.	Thematic Area	Organisation	Intervention and activities	Target/Beneficiary	Operational level
1.	Gender coordination	Nongovernmental Gender Organisations Coordinating Council (NGOCC)	Coordination of member organizations and facilitate linkages with GRZ, CPs, and NGOs to create a vibrant women's movement that advocates for gender and empowerment of women.	Organisations working to promote interests of women and	National

				children.	
2.	Politics	Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (ZNWLG)	Advocacy and lobbying for women's representation in political structures including parliament and local authorities.	Women in Politics.	National.
3.	Social and economic empowerment	Women for Change (WfC).	Social and economic changes that promote access to education for all, empower women and children and end poverty.	Women and Children.	National.
		Zambia Deaf Youth and Women Organization.	Economic empowerment for youths and women living with hearing disability.	Deaf Youth and Women.	Regional.
		Zambia Women with Skills Organisation.	Facilitation of business model training.	Zambia Women with Skills Organization.	Regional.
		Tasintha	Provision of income-generating skills to women and children to prevent transactional sex.	Women in transactional sex.	National.
		Young Women in Action (YWA)	Young women's participation in governance processes.	Girls and young women.	National.
		Zambia Federation of Associations of Women in Business (ZAFAWIB)	Helping women entrepreneurs access finance and financial services.	Women in business.	National.
		Zambia Aged Peoples Association	Provision of care and support services to the aged, PLWH, and widows and children.	The aged, women and girls.	National.
		Oxfam Zambia	Promotion of the rights of women in education, health, and water and sustainable livelihood.	Women and men.	National.

		Zambia National Association of Disabled Women.	Promotion of the rights of women with disabilities.	Women with disabilities.	National.
4.	Education	Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia (FAWEZA)	Advocates policies and programs for quality and inclusive education and provides education, and scholarship for women and girls.	Women and girls.	National.
		Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED)	Child protection and sponsorship for girls' secondary school education.	School-going girls.	National.
		Plan International Zambia	Provision of education and water and sanitation support, and campaigns to end child marriage.	Girls and boys.	National.
5.	Research	Gender Studies Department, University of Zambia	Offers academic and research programmes on gender and development.	Women and men.	National.
		Zambia Association for Research and Development (ZARD)	Gender research.	Women.	Regional.
6.	Legal services	Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA)	Lobby for legal and policy reforms of laws and practices which disadvantage women.	Women and girls.	National.
		National Legal Aid Clinic for Women (NLACW)	Advocacy for policy and law reform on women and children's rights and provide legal services.	Women and children.	National.
		Zambia Law Development Commission (ZLDC)	Responsible for reviewing, reforming, and developing laws to ensure they align with contemporary societal values and international standards	All citizens in Zambia	National
		Law and Development Association in Zambia	Provision of paralegal services for child protection and human rights violations in rural areas.	Girls, boys and women.	Regional.

		Justice for Widows and Orphans Project	Advocacy for legal reform and awareness raising on human rights of widows and orphans.	Women and orphans.	National.
		Zambia AIDS Law Research and Advocacy Network	Promotion of human rights of PLWH.	Women and men.	National.
7.	Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Zambia Police Service Victim Support Unit (ZP – VSU)	Prevention and investigation of GBV including property-grabbing cases.	Women and men.	National.
		Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)	Promotion of Human rights, and GBV response including provision of safety shelter, crisis hotlines, counselling, court assistance, etc.	Women and young people.	National.
8.	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)	Planned Parenthood Association of Zambia (PPAZ)	Advocacy for sexual and reproductive health rights including safe motherhood.	Women, men and youth.	National.
9.	Environment	Zambia Alliance for Women	Advocacy for environmental sustainability and access to land.	Women.	National.
		Enviro Green Association of Zambia	Women’s economic development and empowerment.	Women.	National.