The Zambia Open Community Schools (ZOCS) organisation has provided opportunities for education to Out of School children (OOSC) through Community Schools (CS). ZOCS mission is to secure education opportunities for learners outside the government school system by eliminating barriers through empowering communities, supporting learners, building partnerships, influencing policy and legislation, and creating conducive learning environments in community schools.” This report demonstrates the contribution ZOCS has made in the lives of OOSC by opening up alternative opportunities for education. It specifically elaborates the path ZOCS has taken in promoting the principle of open community schooling. In doing so, the report highlights the key turning points and successes in ZOCS efforts to address ongoing barriers to education for OOSC. Hopefully, this report will share lessons that might be applicable beyond Zambia, in the Southern Africa and other regions where marginalised children go without an education. Overall, this document highlights ZOCS contribution towards the genesis, evolution and institutionalisation of community schools in Zambia as an avenue of reaching out to OOSC.
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<td>CS</td>
<td>Community School</td>
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<td>MoGE</td>
<td>Ministry of General Education</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NORAD</td>
<td>Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation</td>
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Abstract

The Zambia Open Community Schools (ZOCS) organisation has provided opportunities for education to Out of School children (OOSC) through Community Schools (CS). ZOCS mission is to secure education opportunities for learners outside the government school system by eliminating barriers through empowering communities, supporting learners, building partnerships, influencing policy and legislation, and creating conducive learning environments in community schools.” This report demonstrates the contribution ZOCS has made in the lives of OOSC by opening up alternative opportunities for education. It specifically elaborates the path ZOCS has taken in promoting the principle of open community schooling. In doing so, the report highlights the key turning points and successes in ZOCS efforts to address ongoing barriers to education for OOSC. Hopefully, this report will share lessons that might be applicable beyond Zambia, in the Southern Africa and other regions where marginalised children go without an education. Overall, this document highlights ZOCS contribution towards the genesis, evolution and institutionalisation of community schools in Zambia as an avenue of reaching out to OOSC.

Harriet Miyato – Executive Director
Cleopatra Muma – Programmes and Advocacy Manager

1. Introduction

Going by the 2014 UNICEF report, there are approximately 500,000 Out of School Children (OOSC) of primary and secondary school age in Zambia. Of this number, 249,416 (134,115 boys, 115,301 girls) are children of primary school going age ranging from 7-13 years of age. Despite concerted efforts by the Government and other stakeholders in the education sector to address this challenge, the situation has not changed as may be seen from the picture presented in the Educational Statistical Bulletin (ESB) of 2016, as follows:

Out of School (7 – 13 years)
Female 133,888
Male 115,698
Total 249,586

Furthermore, both the UNICEF report of 2014 and the 2016 ESB show that rural children are much more likely to be out-of-school with almost a quarter (23 per cent) of primary age children not in school compared to only 9 per cent in urban areas. The work of the Zambia Open Community Schools (ZOCS) is anchored on the provision of education opportunities to the OOSC especially those in hard to reach areas.

1.1. How are Out Of School Children (OOSC) defined?

Out Of School Children (OOSC) may be categorized as follows:
(i) Children who do not have access to a school in their community
(ii) Children who have never enrolled at a school, despite the availability of a school;
(iii) Children who have enrolled but do not attend school (thereby being very likely to drop out); and
(iv) Children who drop out of the education system.

1.2. The making of ZOCS: How issues of social justice gave birth to ZOCS

The impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, the economic structural adjustment programme (SAP) and poverty in the 1980s combined to produce a generation of Zambian children without a socioeconomic support system. The concept of OVC was born and widely acknowledged by the government, church organisations, development agencies, civil society organisations (CSOs) and communities. HIV and AIDS severely weakened communities’ capacity to support OVC. Child-headed households, street children and overburdened grandparents became the norm in rural and urban areas. OVC were a social phenomenon unlike anything that Zambia had experienced in its colonial and post-colonial eras. The government social services were ill-equipped to handle issues of deprivation for OVC. At the time, there were calls for SAP ‘to have a human face’. OVC, and their poor grandparents, who mostly cared for them, were the indisputable human face of economic turmoil, unemployment, poverty, HIV and AIDS and socioeconomic injustice.

This situation triggered compassion and a collective conscience for social justice, among several actors, for OVC. The Sisters of Charity, Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, individuals and others concerned about plight of OVC resolved to do what they could. Indeed, spontaneously, Community Schools began to emerge as an alternative for OVC to access education. The ambition of the collective to address the emerging crisis reflected their optimism that the situation of OVC could be resolved quickly if only enough effort was put into supporting them. In fact, most agencies that were in a position to help did not foresee that OVCs and HIV and AIDS would become a long-term socio-development challenge. ZOCS’ founders were clearly getting ahead of many actors in addressing the situation of OVC.

ZOCS’ founding was prompted by Dr. Jan Stevens an American neurosurgeon who came to Zambia each year in the early 1990s to work with medical students at the University Teaching Hospital (UTH). Dr. Stevens then contacted one of the Sisters of Charity and asked if it would be possible to help Out-Of-School Children especially girls. Dr. Stevens’ medical work brought her into contact with the plight of OVC as the HIV and AIDS pandemic ruined the lives and hopes of orphaned children. She came each year with small donations from friends that she offered to Sister McKenna who ran a tailoring school with Sister Anne Kennedy for the Sisters of Charity in Kabwata Township. These donations prompted the two Sisters of Charity to start the first open community school in 1992 enrolling 48 girls, who were out of school, in Lusaka’s Misisi Compound. The first Community School volunteer teachers were young.
women who had enrolled in tailoring training with the sisters after dropping out of school in grade nine due to pregnancy.

The Sisters of Charity established the Misisi Community School to provide a pragmatic response to the challenge of meeting the education needs of OVC who were out of school. The goal was to act quickly and resourcefully. Their vision was to offer education to OVC focusing on providing a quality learning experience of basic skills (reading, writing and life skills). Learning would start earnestly on a piece of land that the church had bought in Lusaka’s Misisi Compound. The first learners were recruited by Sister Benedetti McKenna in Misisi Compound and Kabwata Township. Other children joined in because their friends had started school. Others still joined because the Sisters also provided feeding at the school. Three of the early recruits, Zenobia Nyambose, Lilian Mwale and Zeliya Nkunika (now mothers aged 40, 38 and 34 respectively) explained that although they were not orphans, their families did not care to take them to school. Zenobia Nyambose explained that she sold sugarcane on behalf of her mother when Sister Benedetti McKenna approached her in Kabwata Market to start school. Her close friend, Lilian Mwale, who joined her at the Community School, also sold vegetables.

The Sisters of Charity were supported by other congregations that were gathering donations, which they channelled to the Misisi Community School. As the efforts to support OVC grew due to the rapidly developing demand, there was an emerging need to form an organisation that would coordinate the assistance. Sister Mary Rose of the Holy Rosary Congregation who managed the donations side and other aspects of the programme then urged Sister McLoughlin of the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary to take over the co-ordination of assistance. Sister Eileen McLoughlin enthusiastically embraced the role to coordinate support to the community schools. She had come to Zambia in 1994 to open a house for her congregation and was asked to conduct a workshop for untrained community school teachers. This interaction with the teachers would introduce her to community schools and lead her to chart the formal establishment of ZOCS coining the name in 1995.

On September 4, 1996, Sister McLoughlin formally registered ZOCS. The first ZOCS office was in a room that was in her congregation’s house along Lake Road in the Woodlands residential area and the first secretary was Ms. Pauline Sakala who lived in Bauleni Compound. ZOCS continued to operate from this office until NORAD provided funding to rent a place, which provided more operational space, in Lusaka’s industrial area. With the expanded operational capacity and support of UNICEF, ZOCS began to meet and share ideas with other groups such as the Salvation Army and the Reformed Open Community Schools (ROCS) who were also running Community Schools.
The vision was to provide education to all 150,000 plus OVC estimated to be out of school. That same year, the Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the national education policy, Educating Our Future, which explicitly supported the establishment of Community Schools. In 1995, ZOCS had sought assistance from UNICEF to develop a strategic response which, in 1996, formed the basis of a landmark ‘Indaba’ to support Community Schools. This meeting, which was led by the MOE, was attended by the University of Zambia (UNZA), UNICEF, Save the Children and other CSOs. This meeting led to the creation of the Zambia Community School Secretariat (ZCSS). ZCSS was established to coordinate support to community schools. UNICEF would then support the development of the SPARK curriculum for community schools. ZOCS would be joined by ROCS in supporting OVCs and community schools.

Now based in the Mother House in England, in a place just outside London called Chigwell, Sister McLoughlin is serving on her congregation’s Leadership Team until 2020. She notes firmly that although the catholic sisters were involved in ZOCS right from the beginning, it was always very clear that their guiding vision was the education of the most disadvantaged children, especially girls, regardless of religion or any other criteria. For the founding sisters, the idea of an ‘open community school’ represented an education opportunity without barriers to entry and participation. The ‘open community school’ embraced OVC of all ages to provide them with a quality learning experience of basic skills.

2. The Zambia Open Community Schools Organisation
For much of its existence, ZOCS has used a three-pronged approach and structured its work around three pillars:

- **Advocacy & influencing**: Approaches aimed at influencing government policy and legislation to benefit OVC’s access to quality education;
- **Capacity building**: Increasing teacher and community capacity to provide quality education to OVC; and
- **Service delivery**: Supporting the development of schools, providing material resources and financial assistance to schools, teachers, learners and communities to create an enabling environment for enhanced educational opportunities for OVC.

A lot has changed since ZOCS’s founding. Then, it was estimated that over 150,000 OVC were out of school. Community schools were informal and largely served overaged learners who were excluded from the formal education system. Community schools used the Skills, Participation, Access to Relevant Knowledge (SPARK) curriculum to fast track the learners through primary education. Now, over 600,000
children are accessing education through community schools. The make-up of children attending Community Schools has changed over the years with a significant number now being of school age. This has resulted in the more than 2,400 Community Schools adopting the national curriculum and operating like regular schools. Community Schools now make up over 20 percent of primary school enrollment helping Zambia to achieve the goal of increasing access to primary education with a net enrollment of 96 percent. ZOCS has provided direct support to 665 Community Schools across the country.

The transformation in the situation of Community Schools is the result of the advocacy and direct service delivery work done by ZOCS, other NGOs, funding agencies and individuals. Negative attitudes towards Community Schools have largely changed and, importantly, the Government has instituted policy and legislation to formerly recognise the learning institutions as the fourth tier of education delivery (joining government, grant aided and private schools). But the principal of open community schooling faces many challenges not least because the traditional perception of how schools should be organised, in fixed formal ways (following prescribed curricula, requiring uniforms, trained teachers, paying fees, government owned), still persists. Since there is still an estimated 500,000 children that are currently out-of-school, ZOCS and other organisations serving OVC need to work innovatively to overcome the barriers to entry and participation in education. The remaining four parts of this report present the salient aspects of ZOCS’ journey in serving OVC, Community Schools and local communities.

3. Key turning points and successes in addressing barriers to education for OOSC
ZOCS development as an organization has been intimately linked to the education needs of OOSC. Regardless of the context, ZOCS work has been to provide quality of education whether under a tree, in church building, a rundown community building or any other challenging situation. The success of ZOCS work has been built around its three pillars premised on flexibility, innovativeness, sustainability and building strong partnerships.

3.1. Advocacy & influencing
A critical part of ZOCS work is centred on approaches aimed at influencing government policy and legislation to benefit OOSC’s access to quality education.

a) Flexible Learning Strategies, Innovation and Education
The continuing challenge posed by a multitude of complex barriers means that a ‘business-as-usual’ or ‘one-programme-fits-all’ approach was not the answer to providing learning opportunities for all of those who are out-of-school. Innovations are required in all aspects of the strategy and across disciplines –
including policy, governance, finance and partnerships, human capacity development, curricula, pedagogies as well as school management and leadership at all levels.

**Governance**

*b) Policy and Legislation*

Education is a fundamental human right, a public good and an imperative for building a stronger and a more peaceful, resilient and equitable society. The policies in education must set clear visions of longer-term education related goals that ensure lifelong learning for all its citizens, as opposed to a standardized screening system, which excludes a significant number of children from basic education. This forms the basis of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Also, in line with the goal, the policies and implementation plans should include completion of secondary education and access to pre-primary education. Equity based policies that prioritize disadvantaged children to be set with flexible strategies to ensure continuous learning across programmes of learning institutions, geography and localized contexts.

*c) Sustainable Financing*

Forty-six percent of public resources allocated fall within only 10 percent of students who are the most educated in low-income countries, with very little trickling down to street children, boys and girls in remote rural areas, those in conflict areas, or urban slums. It is absolutely imperative that funding is increased to meet the finance gap, explicitly with a view to bolstering investment in areas that directly benefit the most marginalized communities in society.

Provision of earmarked taxation for education can be considered to ensure a wider tax base and more domestic resources for education. This also promotes a more equitable distribution of resources and improves the effectiveness of overall education spending. Equity-based budgeting should be carried out with a view to robust equity-based policies and practice. The reality of those who are marginalized is that their situations are often more complex when they are migrating, become stateless or become part of ethnic minority groups. Innovative financing at various levels has been practiced in a number of countries to increase support for marginalized children and most vulnerable groups through more effective partnerships between the public and private sector. It is vital that lessons are drawn and learnt from successful cases of efforts to work together to solve the challenges of financing and promote

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1 The investment case for Education and Equity, UNICEF HQ 2015
2 Innovative financing for OOSC UNESCO Bangkok, 2016
collaborations to solve, innovate organizations and nations working on local solutions that are cost-effective, innovative and appropriate.

\textit{d) Partnerships}

For representatives of Government; non-governmental organizations (NGO); business; inter-governmental organizations, such as the United Nations; It is everyone’s role to look into the challenges and complexities faced in order to provide learning opportunities for OOSC unequivocally. Collaboration through effective partnerships toward this fundamental cause in view of shared values, shared missions and collective objectives towards achieving a more equitable and a more prosperous society. Through the sharing of valuable information, learning and working together, it is becoming easier than ever before, through more effective systems and channels, catalyzed by robust equity-based policies of collaborating states and governments. The vision of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century is a sharing economy, an international meeting – a space for ideas through which partnerships and collaborations become the cornerstone principles for sustainable society and peace.

3.2. Capacity building

Increasing teacher and community capacity to provide quality education to OOSC requires teachers and care givers who are well placed to provide love, care and psychosocial support

\textit{a) Role of Teachers}

The teacher is an important asset towards developing education systems that are high quality, equitable and inspiring for its learners. Critically, teachers are to be invested in and supported. Teachers are the keystone towards a just and quality-rich education system and in tandem the agents of change with which education provides empowerment and a love of learning for its citizens. It is vital that teachers are empowered and equipped with the knowledge and skills to undertake the challenges that OOSC bring, to provide support to OOSC and deliver a rights-based education to children. Teachers are leaders in the field, actors of change and inspirational figures to all children, fostering a love of learning, realizing the potential in every child and providing support and assistance to those that need it at every step of the way. Education systems should provide necessary training through pre-service and in-service, incentives and trust and continuous professional development and support for teachers to perform effectively, to be ambassadors for justice, equality, inclusion and peace.
b) Curricula, Pedagogies, and personalized Learning

Flexibility in the curriculum and in pedagogy is important to include and retain children in programmes of learning as well as to offer relevant and suitable content to them in their localized context. Flexible curriculum must be critically and officially linked to formal education system through robust equivalency so that learners can be critically and officially linked to formal education systems. The most important point is that curriculum and mainstream policy should not create barriers to exclude children or obstruct their progression through systems of education. Curriculum and pedagogies concerned with teaching and learning methodologies should be tailor-made according to the localized context and multifaceted situations that OOSC face. Multi-grade teaching, multi-age teaching and multi-lingual education, promoting use of the mother tongue, must be effectively implemented with adequate training provision for teachers. ICT has enormous potential to facilitate teaching and learning as a tool for OOSC and to deliver further training and provision to teachers. It is crucial to recognize that ICT devices will not automatically improve effectiveness in teaching and learning without the effective design of learning content, teacher provision and adequate teacher capacity development.

3.3. Service delivery

Supporting the development of schools, providing material resources and financial assistance to schools, teachers, learners and communities to create an enabling environment for enhanced educational opportunities for OVC

a) Responding to Challenges

i. Gender

It is of critical importance for girls to have access to learning programmes that effectively meet needs for their safety, privacy and a rights-based education, towards delivering the best possible learning, which above all, values her presence and her potential\(^3\). While explicitly highlighting girls as a priority point of gender concerns, dropouts and poor learning outcomes of the boys in many Asian countries requires significant attention.

ii. Disability

Social, institutional and environmental barriers need to be addressed for children with disabilities. These concerns are highlighted in inadequate infrastructure at schools and learning centers, teachers without adequate knowledge and skills, the stigmatization that prevent children with disabilities from accessing their right to a quality education and equitable learning opportunities. Personalized curriculum and pedagogies will be key to providing education for children with disabilities. Effective usage of assistive

\(^3\) Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for all, UIS and UNICEF 2015
technologies can facilitate further access to learning programmes as well as to provide scalable and more personalized solutions. Human resources within the Ministry of Education (MoE) are to be developed with the partnership of the Ministry of Health, with NGO collaboration and advisement and other assistive organizations.

4. **Synergies with the Government Structures**
ZOCS delivers its interventions through established government systems, especially those of the Ministry of General Education. The relationship with MOGE is strengthened and guided by a five year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU 2016 – 2020). Guided by the MoU, ZOCS ensures that its programmes are jointly implemented with the Ministry of General Education and other government structures to ensure sustainability. As in case in point, training of volunteer teachers is conducted by MOGE personnel in charge of teacher capacity building at various levels to ensure that prescribed standards are adhered to. Furthermore, MOGE personnel from the Directorate of Standards and Curriculum monitor Community Schools to ensure adherence to the set standards.

5. **The role of Communities in Education**
The families and communities play a vital role in the education their children. ZOCS works closely with Families and communities to provide support to learners and ensure the enrolment and retention of OOSC. ZOCS structures include Parent Community School Committees (PCSC) and Community Action Groups (CAGs) in each target Communities to mobilize, identify and register OOSC in school. Furthermore, the PCSC and GAG members provide psychosocial support and counselling to OOSC and their households on the importance of Education.

6. **Case Study: Showcasing Rosamystica – The Open Community School**
Founded in 1996 by Mrs. Rose Mwitelela, Rosamystica Community School started as a personal effort to help two orphaned children to learn. Upon retiring as a teacher in 1996, Mrs. Mwitelela worried about the plight of Lenard Njobvu and Caroline Nyangu who attended Chitanda Primary School in Lusaka’s Matero Township as fourth grade pupils. Soon after Mrs. Mwitelela retired, Lenard and Caroline would follow her home to learn. After asking for teaching and learning materials from the head teacher at Chitanda Primary School, Mrs. Mwitelela started teaching the two children from her kitchen. Gradually, the two children would invite their friends to join them to learn at Mrs. Mwitelela’s house. As numbers grew, Mrs. Mwitelela requested the help of three of her own children (Patrick, Emmanuel and Nalucha) to teach the growing class even though they were not trained teachers. They only had grade 12 certificates.
As her unintended school became even more popular, she approached a priest, Father Joseph, at Matero Parish near her home for space to teach the children. The priest was impressed by Mrs. Mwitelela’s charity work and offered her space at the parish, the school popularly called ‘the Pillars’. Father Joseph eventually encouraged Mrs. Mwitelela to contact ZOCS for assistance. For the ever growing numbers, Mrs. Mwitelela invited two of her former colleagues that had also retired from Chitanda Primary School to join her. Mrs. Tembo joined her in 1996 and has been the deputy head since then. Another priest at the parish also helped out with teaching. Rosamystica Community School eventually got assessed by Sister Eileen McLoughlin and it began to receive support from ZOCS in 1996. This support included teaching and learning materials, school feeding and allowances for teachers. ZOCS would also later purchase a building that was developed into a school in 2004 where Rosamystica currently operates.

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Asked what she understood an open community school to be, Mrs. Mwitelela spoke unequivocally about giving unfettered access to education to people of all ages to ensure they got a chance to learn. For this reason, Mrs. Mwitelela has not abandoned the SPARK curriculum that UNICEF developed to support the instruction of older children. Mrs. Mwitelela had advocated to the school’s Parent Community School Community (PCSC) to continue using the SPARK to help the older learners to access education. The SPARK curriculum was designed to fast track older learners through primary education. Instead of the normal seven years, the SPARK’s four levels of education (i.e. Level 1 combines grades 1 & 2; Level 2 is 3 & 4; Level 3 is 4 & 5 and Level 4 is grade 7) cuts back the duration of primary education by three years. The SPARK curriculum also allows multi-age and multi-grade teaching. A visit to the Rosamystica school shows multi-age children learning in one classroom (age ranges between 9 and 19). Key to the instructional approaches used by the school is to ensure that children are assessed and assigned to level that fits their learning ability. The children only progress to the next level upon satisfactory performance in progression assessments. The school also ensures that children have reading skills. Lately, however, the school introduced a class that uses the regular primary school curriculum for younger children.

In keeping its commitment to open opportunities for education to all ages, the school has a class for parents who go to learn. Rosamystica has a class of eight women who attend school as time allows. They learn different skills including reading and writing. One of these women interviewed came to the school because her daughter, who attends Rosamystica, told her about other mothers who were learning. Growing up in a rural area in Mbalalala, this 27 year old mother had failed to complete her education due to lack of support. Asked if she is embarrassed when her daughter sees her at school, she said was not but did not want her daughter to know that she is doing handwriting in case she offered to teach her at home! Otherwise, she is hopeful that her education will help her to get a better job. She had recently missed out
on an opportunity to work for PEP Stores because she could not write well and did not have education certificates.

Many OVC that have gone through Rosamystica have excelled. Former learners interviewed for this review, who now are men and women with their own children, spoke appreciatively about the second chance opportunity and support that the community school provided. Most prominently, William Njobvu, who attended Rosamystica Community in its early years completed a BSc in Economics and Finance at Michigan State University in the United States of America in May 2017. William joined Rosamystica when he was 12 years old and had never been to any other school previously. Generally, members of Parent Community School Committees (PCSC) spoke to for this review proudly talked of the successes achieved by community schools as their learners have gone on to colleges and universities locally and internationally. OVC, however, do face challenges getting sustained support to enable them to complete tertiary education. Indeed, beginning with the first learners that ZOCS supported in Misisi Compound, the challenge was always the ‘what next’ after completing the four levels of SPARK. While now OVC attending community schools progress to secondary education there is still a challenge for those that fail to continue.

Despite pressures to conform, Mrs. Mwitelela recognises that some efforts to improve the quality of education in community schools may inadvertently create barriers to access and participation for OVC. For example, the national primary school curriculum automatically excludes older learners and trained government teachers are often insensitive to the situation of OVC. The former learners at Rosamystica talked of how the school was like home and they got more than educational support. As Mrs. Mwitelela noted emphatically, children attending her school need love. Because they are loved, they children are reluctant to go home after school. She explained that the teachers at the school know where all the children come from through home visitations.

A new entrant to the school, a young girl whose mother removed her from a government school because she was not doing well academically, referred to Mrs. Mwitelela as her grandmother. Mrs. Mwitelela explained that the little girl was now doing well and her mother reported that she is always anxious to come to school early every day. It is now not uncommon for parents to remove children from government schools and move them to community schools. For example, Kaloko Kantanshi Community School in Ndola enrols close to 1,000 learners despite being located next to a large government school. The head teacher, Mr. Sitali, explained that because of the school’s high pass rates in grade seven public examinations, parents seek school places.
Yet, for everything Mrs. Mwitelela and her staff give the learners, they get very negligible financial compensation. As she explained, each teacher currently gets approximately K250 (less than US$30) per month during the school term. They do not get the allowance during term break. There have also been times when they have gone for months without pay. While Rosamystica has received support from different benefactors, including parents in its PCSC, the school is financially strapped. While the school charges a small fee (K60 per term), they learners are unable to pay due to poverty. Only 89 of the 215 enrolled in 2017 have paid the fee. The school has received small amounts of funds from the MOGE through the Lusaka District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) since 2014 but only infrequently. Generally, the plight of all community school teachers in Zambia is that their work is not compensated. Even as volunteers, the teachers need financial assistance. ZOCS provided allowances in the early years but not presently. In 2016, ZOCS secured government funds to give allowances to teachers in needy areas. ZOCS has also sought to help teachers to sustainably improve their financial compensation through supporting income generating activities.

ZOCS has also supported in service teacher training for volunteer teachers. For teachers eligible to enrol into college, ZOCS has supported volunteer teachers to enrol in advanced teacher training programmes with an understanding that they would serve in a community school for at least two years. One teacher at Rosamystica is enrolled at Charles Lwanga Teacher Training College. But not all teachers are able to get acceptance into college. Long-time serving teacher and daughter of Mrs. Mwitelela, Nalucha, who has been with the school since inception is unable to get acceptance. Although lacking qualifications, Nalucha was fondly acknowledged by her former learners, including some that have gone on to higher education, as having made a huge difference in their lives.

The story of Rosamystica mirrors that of ZOCS. Both emerged spontaneously and are the result of a heart-warming commitment of people dedicated to the cause of helping less privileged people. Driven by the principle of open access to education for all, Rosamystica has watchfully guarded the intrusion of barriers to OVC participation in school. Unfortunately, despite the valiant commitment, some barriers, such as the cost of running schools, are difficult to overcome. Rosamystica School is also constrained in its capacity to help children with disabilities. Mrs. Mwitelela explained that the school is only able to refer the learners to get help at the health facility. With 215 learners and only seven teachers, the school is unable to provide specialised attention to children with learning disabilities. For other support including guidance and counselling, the school has leveraged initiatives such as the Zambia Family (ZAMFAM).
project, Dreams Project and Serenity Harm Reduction Programmes (SHARPS) Zambia to help the learners deal with other social issues.

Ultimately, the biggest challenge for Rosamystica School and the children and other people that depend on it, is that of sustaining the passion and compassion of Mrs. Mwitelela and her staff. Beyond their personal qualities and commitment, however, ZOCS can borrow and replicate some of the best practices at Rosamystica School. For example, Mrs. Mwitelela demonstrated the relevance of the SPARK curriculum for multi-age and multi-grade teaching. She also explained the importance of assessment in assisting the instruction of learners. Additionally, she demonstrated the importance of love and care in supporting OVC. She has also helped to place learners that are unable to continue to secondary school as interns in small businesses doing mechanics and carpentry to enable them to acquire vocational skills. Financial challenges typically prevent learners who complete primary school at Rosamystica from continuing to secondary education. Above all, Rosamystica School has shown itself to be a centre of excellence for the principle of open learning, a cause that ZOCS will need to rejuvenate as it looks into future efforts to capture an ever growing number of out-of-school children.

7. What does the future of supporting OSSC look like?

The future of supporting OSSC lies in overcoming the ever evolving barriers to access and participation in education which come in many forms, especially the fixed formal ways of delivering education (i.e. following prescribed curricula, requiring uniforms, trained teachers, paying fees) that still persist. Since there is still an estimated 500,000 children that are currently out-of-school, ZOCS and other organisations serving OVC need to work innovatively to overcome the barriers to entry and participation in education. The transformation in the situation of community schools is the result of the advocacy and direct service delivery work done by ZOCS, other NGOs, funding agencies and individuals. Negative attitudes towards community schools have largely changed and, more importantly, the government has instituted policy and legislation to formerly recognise the learning institutions as the fourth tier of education delivery (joining government, grant aided and private schools). But the principle of open community schooling faces many challenges because of the traditional perceptions of how schools should be organized.

7.1. Innovations around curriculum – revisiting SPARK for fast track

7.1.1. Teacher training; love and care for learners

Traditionally, trained teachers concentrate on getting their planned work for the term or year completed according to their scheming in line with the official curriculum and specifications therein. Often times this is done without due consideration of the different
abilities of their learners. Usually the varying learners’ abilities are affected by a complexity of factors including their home backgrounds, their ages, gender and disability. Therefore, teacher training plays a critical role in equipping teachers with appropriate skills in order for them to effectively address the needs of OOSC. “Empowered, trusted and connected teachers can provide effective support for OOSC and their families, promote a quality and engaging learning keeps students at school and even establish the school as a learning and development hub of the community” (UNSECO, 2016). Teachers who are going to work with multi-age learners, need a variety of psychosocial skills including those of love and care for the learners to feel accepted and fit into school environment.

7.1.2. Assessment and proper instruction
The current practice at entry in Grade 1 gives first priority to children that have passed the age of seven (7) years. For over-age children entering into a school, assessments are important to determine at what level of instruction they are to be placed. Continuous assessments over the course of instruction are needed for each child not only for remediation but also for determining the path of acceleration. However, assessment and instruction has not taken cognizance of the progress of these children in grades versus their age. Therefore, some of these children drop out of school in early grades of primary schooling.

7.1.3. Academic and vocational skills
Even with all the care and efforts taken to cater for the OOSC, the national average transitional rate from Grade 7 to 8 stands at 66.2% (MOGE ESB, 2016). It is imperative to link learning to critical life and vocational skills to help children who cannot progress further “unlock their fullest potential” (ZOCS SP, 2016 – 2020). Therefore, it is important to promote public private partnerships to ensure that children that fall of the education system are linked to locally available vocational centres in communities such as carpentry and metal workshops and various handcrafts.

7.2. Issues of policy and legislation
In order to influence policy, ZOCS undertakes a process where issues are identified, evidence gathered through research and consensus is built with other likeminded stakeholders including the Government. Examples include the following:
Community school upgrading ‘policy’
While the intention to upgrade Community Schools was good, it lacked a framework to guide the implementation process. The absence of clear guidelines on upgrading resulted in:

- Volunteer teachers suffering most, through loss of jobs and lack of opportunities to upgrade their knowledge and skills
- De-motivation of School Managers and volunteer teachers
- PCSCs having no mandate to supervise government teachers in the absence of clear guidelines (Teachers cannot be controlled by PCSC)
- Waning community involvement Severed long standing relationships between pupils and teachers

As a way of responding to this gap, ZOCS engaged the Ministry of General Education to ensure that clear guidelines on upgrading of community schools are provided through a communiqué (MOGE Communiqué Upgrading of Community Schools, 2016)

Other policies on which ZOCS is engaging MOGE include finalization of the national disability policy and implementation of Operational Guidelines for community schools

7.3. Innovations around financing
ZOCS employs innovative ways around financing in order to effectively reach out to OOSC in the most hard to reach areas. Some of the innovations around financing include promoting Public private partnerships and internships for learners as well as empowering Community Schools with revolving funds for income generating activities.

7.4. Inclusion
Access to quality education is a fundamental human right. It is important for girls to have access to best possible quality learning programmes to meet individual needs. ZOCS has been working with community leaders, school administrators and parents to end child marriages across the country. Furthermore, ZOCS promotes innovations, such as implementation of the Re-entry Policy provision of school bursaries and creation and promotion of safe clubs in schools aimed at ensuring that girls retained, progress and complete their education.

Social, environmental and institutional barriers need to be addressed if meaningful education is going to be attained by children with disabilities. In order to ensure inclusive education is promoted in the classroom, comprehensive teacher education and training and specialized teaching and learning
materials are in place. To meaningfully mitigate against the barriers faced by learners with special education needs and disabilities, ZOCS:

- Conducts awareness campaigns through, community meetings and radio programmes,
- Conducts inclusive education training for teachers in Community Schools,
- Provides assistive devices and teaching and learning materials,
- Engages Government on the need to provide appropriate resources and materials

ZOCS is developing and promoting disability inclusion models through schools earmarked to be centres of excellence.

8. Conclusion
The challenge of OOSC in Zambia, like in many other countries of the Sub-Saharan Africa, is a huge one. This challenge is compounded by other factors ranging from low transition rates from Grade 7 to Grade 8, high dropout rates at every grade level due to various causes including lack of love and care for learners, non-availability of schools within children’s reach especially in rural areas and hidden costs passed on to parents and caregivers.

It is evident that the burden of OOSC should not be left to Government alone. It requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders in the education sector: the Government, Cooperating partners, civil society organisations and indeed, every Zambian with a heart for the affected children. It is for this reason that the ever evolving story of ZOCS will continue being written until there are no OOSC anymore in the country.

The question to ask is “If they are not in school, what are they doing?”
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