



AN ANALYTICAL BRIEF OF THE **2025**

SOCIAL SECTOR BUDGET

**THEME: CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL EQUITY-
BALANCING BUDGET PRIORITIES**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary..... 3

Balancing the Scale:

Towards Quality Education for All.....4

Social Protection:

Not all that Glitters is Gold.....9

Towards Greater Inclusion:

Gender and Disability mainstreaming..... 15

Shrinking WASH Budgets in the Wake of the Drought.....19

Building Resilience through Increased Access to Health..... 22

Restoring Food Security:

Ensuring Access and Nutrition After Drought..... 28

Conclusion..... 32





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025 National Budget demonstrates the Government’s commitment to addressing Zambia’s current human and social development challenges, worsened by the recent drought and lingering effects of COVID-19. While social sector allocations have risen to K 73 billion from K60 billion in 2024, their share of **the total budget has remained the same at 34%, reflecting the tough trade-offs in managing competing national priorities, especially the resumption in sovereign debt servicing following successful restructuring.**

The harsh realities of rising poverty—now at 60%—food insecurity and inadequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services continue to strain the population, particularly vulnerable groups such as children, women and Persons with Disability. The free education policy, while a positive step, has introduced additional pressures on resources, highlighting the need for more teachers, infrastructure and learning materials.

Looking ahead, 2025’s normal to above-normal rainfall forecasts bring additional climate risks, with the threats of floods compounding existing challenges. This makes it more crucial for Zambia to prioritise building climate resilience in order to safeguard livelihoods. Against this background this brief offers a detailed analysis of the social sector measures in the 2025 National Budget, highlighting funding trends and gaps and proposing more efficient use of limited resources to build resilience and foster inclusive growth.

**BALANCING THE SCALE:
TOWARDS QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL**



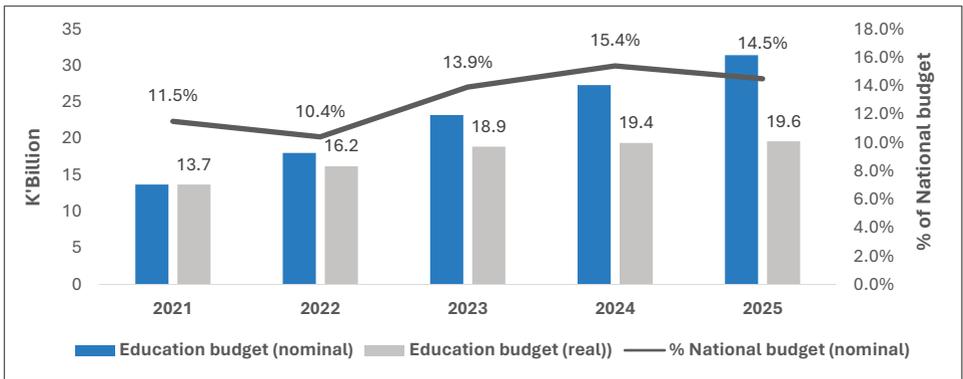
Key Messages

- Nominal increase in the education budget reflects Government's growing commitment to the development of education. Reduction in the share of the budget underscores rising competing needs against limited resources.
- Early Childhood Education budget has grown by over 30% re-emphasizing Government's commitment to the continuous improvement of the sector to influence education outcomes of early learners as they prepare to enter primary school.
- ICT integration in schools could benefit from additional resources given the rising role of ICT in global development and the lack of ICT equipment and teachers currently prevailing.

The Education budget increases in nominal terms but declines as share of the total budget reflecting competing national priorities.

A total of K31.4 billion has been allocated to education, up from K27.3 billion, representing a **15% increase** from 2024 in nominal terms. However, as a share of the total national budget there is a decline from by about **9% percentage points from 15.4% in 2024 to 14.5% in 2025** which is below the Education 2030 Framework for Action that calls on Governments to allocate at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure to education. This reflect rising competing demands for national resources including the resumption of public debt servicing following successful restructuring of Zambia's sovereignty debt. The additional funding will be key in addressing existing challenges within the sector, particularly the need to improve education quality and infrastructure expansion, particularly in underserved rural areas. It will also enhance access for vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities and those in remote areas, and support the integration of modern technology into the school system.

Figure 1: Education (Functional Classification) Budget Allocation, Nominal vs Real, 2021-2025



Source: Government of Zambia, 2022- 2025 Yellowbook Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure (Output-Based Budget)

While the share of ECE funding remains small, Government has progressively increased allocations to ECE. The Government’s commitment to continuous development of ECE is reflected in the 2025 budget, which has increased to K 702.5 million from K 528 million in 2024, representing growth of 33%. This trend has remained consistent since 2022 when the Government launched the sector strategy which focuses on ensuring access to ECE is expanded through infrastructure development, provision of learning materials and employment of ECE teachers. This increase is earmarked for expanding access by creating new ECE hubs across the country and improving quality through teacher training in age-appropriate curricula. Further, the Government aims for 60% of grade 1 entrants to have ECE experience in 2025, up from 42% in 2024¹, highlighting important progress in enhancing ECE and foundational learning.

The Government visibly seeks to improve the quality of education, as demonstrated by its continued implementation of the free education policy in 2025: The Government’s free education policy introduced in 2022, aims to improve educational outcomes by removing financial barriers to access education facilities

¹ <https://zambia.vvob.org/news/teacher-recruitment-zambia/>

and ensuring that no child is excluded from schooling due to inability to pay. This policy has led to a significant increase in enrolment, with over 2 million learners returning to school. The significant increase in primary education funding from K13 billion in 2024 to K15.5 billion in 2025 illustrates continued national efforts to improve educational outcomes at the most crucial level of the education ladder. However, efforts such as teacher recruitment are critical for improving quality indicators such as teacher-pupil-ratios which have changed since free education policy. In 2020, teacher pupil ratios stood at 1:58 in primary schools and 1:38 in secondary school, up from 1:43 and 1:21 respectively . These have likely gone up higher for reasons already stated and pronouncements to recruit more teachers could address the concerns.



The Government continues to prioritise infrastructure development of secondary education to improve educational outcomes: Secondary education has received significant boost, with an allocation of K7.6billion from K5.5 billion in 2024. The increased allocations will be directed towards building infrastructure, enhancing gender parity, and boosting the completion rates for grades 9 and 12 which stood at 61.9% and 32% respectively in 2020², while transition rates for grade 9 stood at 63% in the same year. The partnership with international organizations like the World Bank to construct 120 secondary schools further underscores the critical role infrastructure plays in advancing educational outcomes.

In higher education, the Government has allocated K 2.1 billion in 2025, marking a 38% increase from 2024, highlighting Government's strategic focus on improving public universities. The funding is earmarked for improving research capacity and modernizing curricula at key institutions such as the University of Zambia and Copperbelt University. Additionally, the investment will support crucial infrastructure projects, including the completion of student accommodation, ensuring universities are well-equipped to provide high-quality education and contribute to national development.

²Education Statistical Bulletin 2020



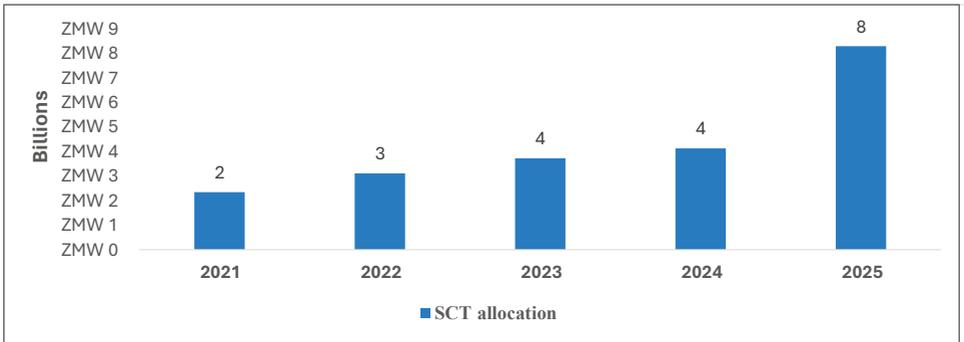
**SOCIAL PROTECTION:
NOT ALL THAT GLITTERS IS GOLD.**

Key Messages

- Social protection represents one of the largest growing sectors in terms of resource allocation and accounts for an historical high of 7.5% of the total budget.
- Social protection growth in resource allocation includes both horizontal and vertical expansion for the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) and Cash for Work, but these end in June 2025 implying that the perceived increase is temporary.
- Implementation of Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) and Cash for Work should be accompanied by additional interventions or linked to other existing programs to ensure sustainability beyond June 2025.

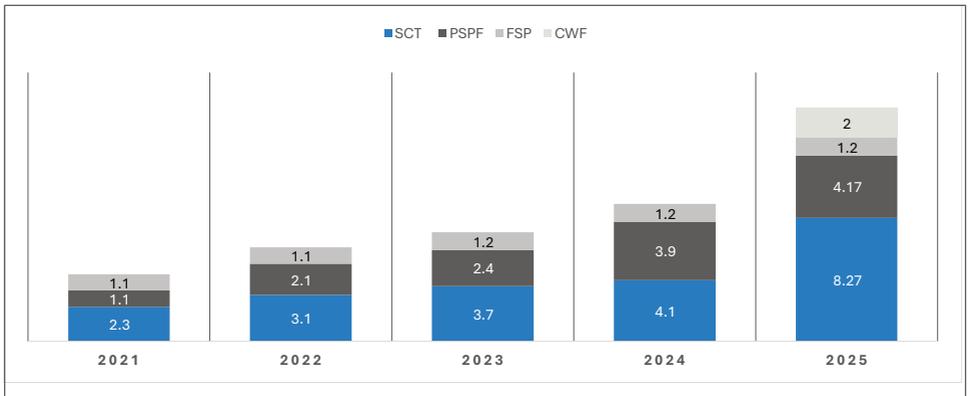
The Government is scaling-up its social protection budget in 2025, driven by the need to continue shielding those affected by the drought and other vulnerabilities. In both nominal terms and as a share of the total budget, the social protection allocation has increased. The budget rose by 67.1%, from K 9.7 billion in 2024 to K 16.2 billion in 2025. As a proportion of the total budget, this represents an increase from 5.4% of the total budget in 2024 to 7.4% in 2025. The allocation to the social cash transfer saw the largest nominal increase, with a notable 100% rise from 2024 (Figure 2). The increase in the budget allocation is driven in part by the **Emergency Social Cash Transfer**, which has been allocated **K1.8 billion**, and the introduction of the **Cash for Work program**, which stands out as a critical intervention, receiving **K2 billion** in funding. Overall, these expanded efforts reflect the Government's commitment to protecting livelihoods, particularly in communities hit hardest by the drought.

Figure 2: Allocations to the Social Cash Transfer Programme



Source: Government of Zambia, 2022- 2025 Yellowbook Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure (Output-Based Budget)

Figure 3: Allocation towards social protection programmes (K'billions)



Source: Government of Zambia, 2022- 2025 Yellowbook Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure (Output-Based Budget)

SCT allocation: doubling or reduction? At first glance, the 2025 National Budget allocation for the SCT programme appears to have doubled **from K 4.1 billion in 2024 to K 8.2 billion as earlier observed. However, when factoring the K 5.2 billion supplementary budget in 2024, the total SCT allocation for that year rises to K 9.3 billion, making the 2025 allocation K 1.1 billion lower.** The increase in the 2025 SCT budget primarily reflects the inclusion of over 950,000 new beneficiaries added through ECT programme, a key response to the severe drought.

Additionally, the allocation includes a K200 cash top-up for regular SCT beneficiaries, which will continue until June 2025.

After June 2025, the beneficiaries of the ECT will be off-boarded, and the regular SCT programme will revert to its previous structure, explaining the slight reduction in overall allocation for 2025.

However, reverting regular SCT transfers values to K200 is concerning, especially in the face of the current high inflation rate of 15% and the extended recovery periods households typically need after droughts³. Given, the likelihood of La Niña-induced weather irregularities during the 2024/25 farming season, food inflation could rise further, placing additional strain on household incomes. Reducing social assistance at this critical period risks undermining the gains established through investments made during the ECT period, leaving household less able to cope with economic and climate-related pressures. **Government must maintain the K400 for regular beneficiaries and off-board ECT beneficiaries into more productive programs:**

A possible solution is to integrate cash transfers with other existing programs, allowing recipients to benefit from multiple interventions through the **CASH PLUS approach**, which Cabinet has approved. This integration can build resilience by providing households with comprehensive support and enhancing their long-term welfare.

Reverting the SCT transfer value to K200 in 2025 would significantly undermine the Government's commitment to poverty reduction efforts: The SCT program has been a cornerstone of Zambia's poverty alleviation strategy, with the government committing to peg the SCT value at a minimum of 20% of the poverty line, equivalent to K 632. A reduction of the SCT transfer value to K200 would fall short of this target dampening ongoing poverty reduction efforts. A 2021 study by UNICEF and the World Bank projected that the expansion of the SCT program in

³Impact of climate-smart agriculture adoption on food security and multidimensional poverty : Impact of climate change on biodiversity and food security : Study finds drought recoveries taking longer

2022 would lead to a 6-percentage points reduction in poverty, showing its potential to lift hundreds of thousands of Zambian households out of poverty. This reduction would not only deviate from the Government's pledge but also risks reversing the substantial progress made in poverty alleviation.

Stagnation in Food Security Pack (FSP) allocations miss critical opportunity to

enhance resilience. The FSP programme remains unchanged for 2025, with allocations holding steady at K 1.2 billion and beneficiaries remain unchanged, as they have for the past three years. Given the confirmed forecast of above-normal rainfall to assist in drought recovery, an expansion of the programme was expected. However, the harsh reality is that vulnerable farming households may continue to struggle in their recovery from the drought's immediate impacts, requiring additional support to ensure food security and prevent long-term setbacks. Increased funding could have mitigated these risks, aiding in recovery efforts and providing necessary resources for affected communities to stabilize post-drought. This is especially important given the risk of intermittent heavy rainfall and potential flooding in flood-prone areas during the 2024/25 seasons which could further compound the challenges facing affected communities.

Child protection services receive a boost, but the social welfare workforce requires strengthening:

The budget demonstrates a strong commitment to implementing the Children's Code Act, recognizing children as key stakeholders in the fight against multidimensional poverty, which remains high at 70.6%. Significant progress has been made in boosting key areas such as Juvenile Welfare and Probation Services, with allocations rising sharply from K 2.6 million to K 25.1 million, and Welfare and Counselling Services increasing from K 3.6 million to K 9.8 million. Additionally, the budget for protection and welfare services has seen an almost 100% increase, from K 42.7 million in 2024 to K 83.3 million in 2025. These increased allocations reflect a targeted approach to improving the welfare of children, which is crucial for breaking the cycle of abuse and vulnerability.

Sustaining and expanding these investments over the coming years will enhance the coverage of welfare services for children and their families, ultimately reducing the economic costs associated with violence against children, which is estimated to cost Zambia 9.12% of GDP each year (UNICEF, 2024). Strengthening the social workforce remains essential to achieving these objectives, improving human development, and enhancing the long-term productivity of the Zambian population.

Absence of support towards extending health coverage for the poor and vulnerable, could impact negatively on efforts to attain Universal Health Coverage:

Despite the Government's efforts to advance Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by linking the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) with the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) in line with the NHIMA Act, the 2025 budget does not address this need. NHIMA's initial pilot supported by the Global Fund launched mid this year could benefit from Government support through subsidizing of health services for the poor and vulnerable beyond the pilot. A closer look at the 2025 yellow book estimates reveals that allocations to the National Health Insurance Management Authority (NHIMA) are primarily directed towards administrative and management support, with no specific targets set for expanding coverage. In 2024, the social insurance scheme reached less than 1 percent of beneficiaries, with alarmingly no clear goals outlined for 2025, raising concerns about the government's commitment to truly achieving Universal Health Coverage for the most vulnerable.



TOWARDS GREATER INCLUSION: GENDER AND DISABILITY MAINSTREAMING

Key Messages

- The increase in allocations to programs such as social protection where many beneficiaries are women increases the chances of women receiving support, being empowered and becoming resilient.
- The scaling up of the Keeping Girls in School programme provides an opportunity for many girls to get an education and increase the chances of becoming self-reliant adults.
- Allocations to disability inclusion programs indicate strong commitment of the government to mainstream disability in many national issues. Implementation of the same would have a positive effect on Persons with Disability.

The proposed increase in Social Protection has significant potential to advance gender equality, given that poverty in Zambia disproportionately affects women due to lower economic participation and limited educational opportunities. The Government has made commitments to reduce gender inequalities through initiatives like the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and has highlighted gender equality as a key pillar for development in its Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP). While increased allocations to programs like the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP), SCT, and FSP present an opportunity to include more women, a clearer strategy is needed to ensure their active participation, as most of the social sector programmes currently favour males. The increase in the amounts allocated to KGS represent opportunities that promote empowerment of more women.

The 2025 National Budget demonstrates the Government's strong resolve to advancing girls' education. The budget allocates ZMW 281.75 million to the Keeping Girls in School (KGS) programme, reflecting a 652% increase, and K15 million to the Women Empowerment Sub-programme, reflecting the government's

commitment to girls' education. This funding boost will likely contribute to reducing early school dropouts for “at-risk” girls who are likely to dropout due to socio-economic challenges. **However, the reduction in the number of beneficiaries for the GEWEL programme has reduced its target for empowering women's groups from 50,000 in 2024 to 13,000 in 2025, due to the transition from GEWEL I to GEWEL II.** This reduction could result in setbacks, including increased child marriages, which would threaten girls' education and empowerment.



The 2025 National Budget reflects a mixed picture for disability affairs, with funding cuts in some areas and increases in others. While the allocation for **disability affairs under the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services has been reduced by 11%**, funding for the Zambia Agency for Persons Living with Disabilities (ZAPD) has gone up by 15.9% and allocations for inclusive education have also risen. The ZMW 21.6 million allocated for special education in

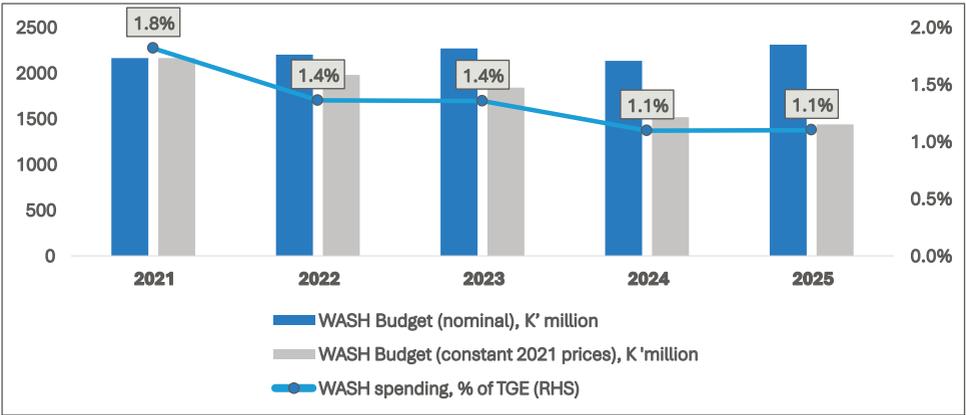
2025 represents a 20% increase, alongside a 25% rise in special education grants to ZMW 12.5 million. Despite this funding boost, performance gaps remain. **Only 71% of targeted persons with disabilities (PWDs) receive educational support and just 20% access rehabilitation services.** To improve outcomes, increased staffing and resources at the subnational level are essential, especially as the ongoing drought worsens the challenges faced by PWD.



SHRINKING WASH BUDGETS IN THE WAKE OF THE DROUGHT

The 2025 budget allocation to the water sector presents an opportunity to reassess Zambia’s commitment to addressing the extensive water supply, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) challenges confronting Zambia, particularly considering the ongoing drought. Over the past 5 years (2020 to 2024), WASH allocation as a share of the total budget have decreased (see Figure 4). This persistent trend is concerning, especially as Zambia faces recurring threats from Cholera outbreaks and other waterborne diseases, exacerbated by drought conditions that disproportionately affect already vulnerable communities. The decline in budgetary allocations is a continuous deviation away from the eThekweni declaration of 2008 where 32 African heads of states and delegation leaders committed to spend 0.5% of their GDP on water and sanitation⁴. The 2025 budget allocation represents 0.2% of GDP.

Figure 4: Allocations to WASH



Source: Government of Zambia, 2022- 2025 Yellowbook Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure (Output-Based Budget)

The 2023/24 drought has further highlighted the consequences of chronic underfunding in the water sector, leaving many without access to safe and clean water, and sanitation and hygiene services which are essential for health, livelihoods and overall well-being. Increased investments in WASH could greatly enhance resilience against water insecurity and disease outbreaks,

⁴WHO (2012)

especially in a time when these challenges are more pressing. Without focused investment, Zambia may struggle to meet its national development goals and to prepare adequately for both immediate and long-term water-related crises. drought worsens the challenges faced by PWD.

The 2025 budget could be enhanced by more explicitly addressing the potential impacts of looming water crisis. Water scarcity is intricately linked to climate change which has overtime affected access to water, sanitation, and hygiene. The 2024 Drought crisis has shown the nexus between water, energy, food, and environment. For Zambia, people and businesses water security is one of the greatest challenges to economic and sustainable development hindering secure provision of food and energy. Further, the inefficiencies of the Commercial Utilities especially during the current power crisis have not been addressed in the budget. A more responsive and needs-based budgeting approach is needed to ensure that resources are strategically allocated to maximize impact and achieve sustainable water security for all Zambians.

The 2025 budget could be strengthened to address emerging public health concerns. The 2025 budget could be strengthened by more directly addressing critical public health concerns, such as cholera and Mpox, which are often exacerbated by inadequate water access and sanitation. While the budget includes some provisions for water infrastructure, it could further prioritize investments in infection prevention and control (IPC) measures, particularly in healthcare facilities. Strengthening IPC protocols, including hygiene, water, sanitation, waste management, and environmental cleaning, is essential to ensure patient safety and minimize the spread of infections. By increasing resources for these critical components, the budget can better support efforts to combat infectious diseases and improve overall health outcomes in Zambia.



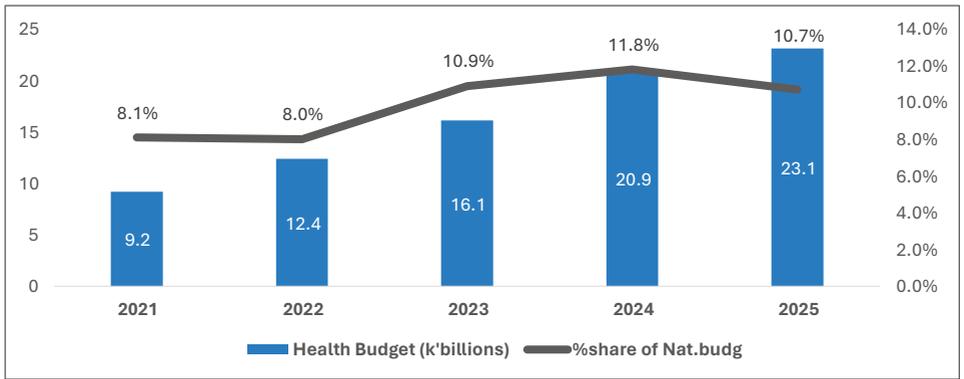
**BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH
INCREASED ACCESS TO HEALTH**

Key Messages

- Allocation to Health continues to reflect an upward trend but still falls below the Abuja declaration of allocating at least 15% of the national budget to health.
- Prioritization of recruitments in the sector are on course in meeting the 70% target by 2026 and closing doctor and nurse patient ratios.
- Stock availability of drugs and medical supplies surpasses the WHO benchmarks.
- Government's commitment to improving and enhancing quality of health infrastructure must be matched with adequate WASH services in health facilities.
- Implementation of a digital inventory management system is progressive and will promote transparency.

Reduction in the health budget as a share of the total budget allocation to 10.7% falls below the 12% 2025 projection in the MTBP and could compromise the health systems ability to address rising public health risks such as Cholera outbreaks and increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases. In underscoring the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) agenda and aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), budget allocations towards the health sector increased from K20.9 billion in 2024 to K23.1 billion in 2025 (Figure 5). Despite this increase in allocation, the share of the total budget decreased from 11.8% to 10.7% in 2025. This reduction not only falls below the year's MTBP projected target of 12% but, it also threatens Zambia's commitment to the Abuja DeclarationTarget of allocating at least 15% of national budgets for health spending to improve health care, which hinder the country's efforts to address rising public health risks such as Cholera outbreaks and non-communicable diseases.

Figure 5: Allocations to the Health Sector



Source: Government of Zambia, 2022- 2025 Yellowbook Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure (Output-Based Budget)

Regardless of reduced allocation, the Government has prioritized recruitment of health workers to meet the 70% target by 2026 to reduce doctor and nurse patient ratios. The government has prioritized continued recruitments of health care personnel to reduce the human resource gap and ensure efficient delivery of quality health care services. With 14,276 frontline health workers already recruited in 2022 and plans to recruit an additional 4,000 in 2024 and another 2,000 in 2025, the total will reach 20,276. This progress will reduce the human resource for health gaps that currently exist as well as help the Government attain 70% of the establishment by 2026 to address the doctor- patient and nurse-patient ratios.

Government’s commitment to improving and enhancing quality of health infrastructure must be integrated with adequate WASH initiatives in health facilities. To ensure expansion of health care services across the country, the government has further prioritized allocations to health infrastructure. Notable focus includes construction of specialized hospitals and 123 maternity annexes

largely through the CDF. With a notable focus on addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which accounted for 35% of deaths in the country in 2021⁵, the development of specialized facilities like cancer hospitals and the National Heart hospital is a commendable step towards reducing morbidity and mortality.



⁵<https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2023-08/Zambia.pdf>

To further maximize benefits of the ongoing infrastructure development and expansion, it is critical the government prioritizes adequate Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH) services in all public health facilities and align to the World Health Assembly Resolution on WASH in health care facilities⁶ . By integrating WASH into health infrastructure initiatives, this will enhance effective prevention and intervention of various health emergencies and ensure a robust health system and ultimately, a health population.

Stock availability of medicines and medical supplies surpasses the WHO benchmarks. The government has continued to focus on curbing the erratic availability of medicines and medical supplies by increasing stock availability. While the budget allocation towards drugs remains the same, drug stock levels have increased to 85% at health centres and 76% at the hospital level, up from 37% and 46% in 2021⁷ , these significant improvements exceed the World Health Organization’s recommended threshold of 70% and reflect government’s commitment in addressing historic challenges in drug stock availability using a three- tiered approach, which included bulk procurement. By 2026, the country has set an ambitious goal of 90%⁸ drug stock availability⁹, thus demonstrating proactive commitments by the country to ensure consistent supply of medicines. While drug stock availability improves, challenges still exist in accessibility at facility level, such as logistical, distribution and inventory challenges.

Implementation of a digital inventory management system will promote transparency in medicines distribution. Thus, further, commendable is the

⁶<https://ceh.unicef.org/events-and-resources/knowledge-library/world-health-assembly-resolution-wash-healthcare-facilities>

⁷2025 BUDGET SPEECH

⁸National-Health-Strategic-Plan-for-Zambia-2022-to-2026

⁹National-Health-Strategic-Plan-for-Zambia-2022-to-2026

implementation of the digital inventory management system to combat theft of medicines. The system will ensure monitoring and tracking of medications from procurement stage through to delivery at health facilities and ensure transparency. To enhance effectiveness of these efforts, it is critical to address operational challenges faced by the Zambia Medicines and Medical Supply Agency (ZAMMSA). This includes enhancing logistical capabilities, distribution chains and staffing levels among a few, to support the digital system and ensure a robust supply chain.





RESTORING FOOD SECURITY: ENSURING ACCESS AND NUTRITION AFTER DROUGHT

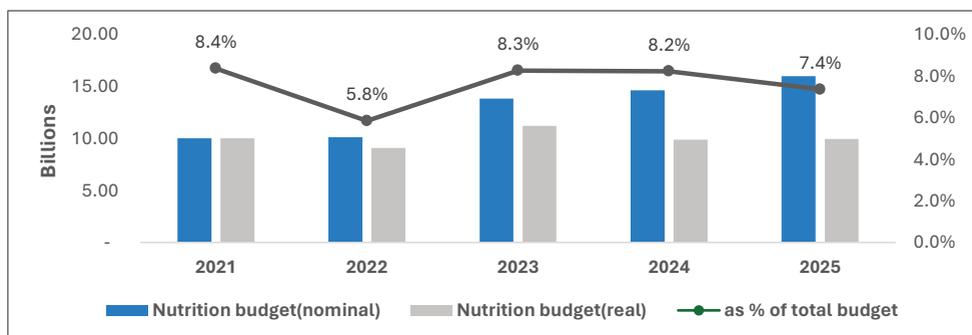
Key messages

- The government has increased its nutrition budget by 9%, from K14.7 billion in 2024 to K16 billion in 2025, reflecting a strengthened commitment to addressing malnutrition and supporting essential programmes for vulnerable populations.
- Allocations for food security have increased from K1.89 billion in 2023 to K3.03 billion in 2024, emphasizing the government's urgent efforts to provide support for those affected by the drought.
- With a per capita expenditure of K104 for the School Feeding Programme, there are significant concerns about meeting the nutritional needs of all school-aged children.

Zambia has historically struggled with high rates of malnutrition, with 35% of children under five already affected by stunting. The extended dry conditions have led to widespread crop failures, compounding pre-existing nutritional issues. Access to nutritious food has been further restricted, particularly in rural areas where poverty is prevalent. Consequently, the prevalence of malnutrition, including stunting and wasting, is expected to rise, and micronutrient deficiencies—such as anaemia that affects around 60% of children—are likely to worsen due to reduced access to diverse diets.

As Zambia faces a profound food security crisis exacerbated by the 2024 drought, the allocation for nutrition within the national budget has emerged as a critical focus. The current crisis has left approximately 9.8 million people food insecure, with 2 million classified as severely food insecure. High food inflation, exceeding 14% by early 2024, has compounded these issues, restricting access to essential staple food, particularly for vulnerable rural families.

Figure 6: Size and trends of nutrition budget, 2021–2025 (K 'billion)



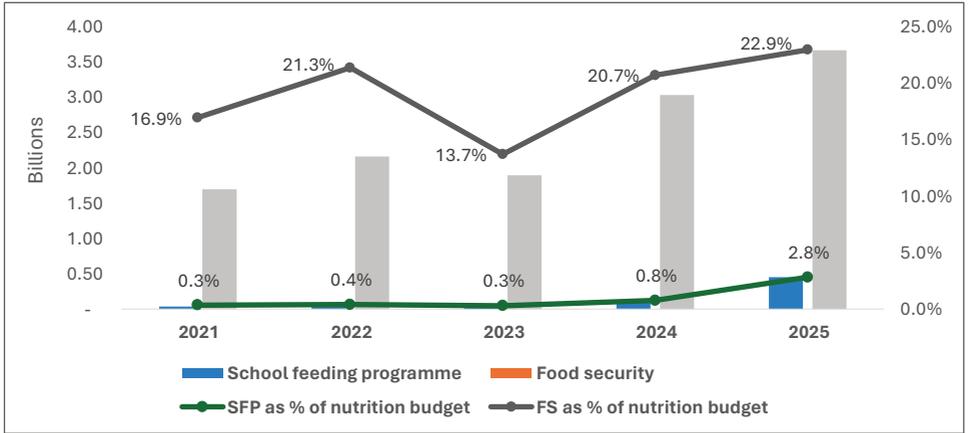
Source: Government of Zambia, 2022– 2025 Yellowbook Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure (Output-Based Budget)

In response to this crisis, the Zambian government has made significant adjustments to its budget allocations for nutrition-related programmes. Nutrition-related expenditure has increased by 9% from K14.7 billion in 2024 to K16 billion in 2025. **Over the years 2021 to 2025, the nominal nutrition budget increased significantly, from K10.01 billion to K15.98 billion.** This rise can be attributed to the significant increase in allocations to the FISP, strategic food reserves and the school feeding programme (SFP). **However, when adjusted for inflation, the real budget has been fluctuating. Further, as a share of total government expenditure, the nutrition-related expenditure has been declining from 2023 at 8.3% to 7.4% in 2025.** These trends emphasize the critical importance of prioritizing nutrition, especially as food insecurity challenges continue.

The significant increases in funding for food security and the Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) in 2024 are direct responses to the severe impacts of the drought intended to improve nutrition. Food security allocations rose sharply from K 1.89 billion in 2023 to K 3.03 billion in 2024 and K 3.6 billion in 2025, while the HGSFP funding skyrocketed from K 39.74 million in 2023 to K 111.74 million in 2024 and further to K 449 million in 2025. These increases reflect government efforts to ensure that children and vulnerable populations receive adequate nutrition in this crisis context. The significant increases will also go

towards ensuring increased coverage to reach more children while encouraging them to attend school while improving their nutrition outcomes.

Figure 7: Size and trends of School feeding and food security, 2021–2025 (K 'billion)



Source: Government of Zambia, 2022–2025 Yellowbook Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure (Output-Based Budget)

The food security situation necessitates a strategic focus on inclusive policies that ensure all families, regardless of their economic status, have access to adequate nutrition. The drought has also underscored the importance of building resilient food systems capable of withstanding future shocks. Promoting sustainable and climate resilient agricultural practices within nutrition programming will be vital for mitigating the effects of droughts and ensuring food security. To optimize the impact of these initiatives, it is essential to integrate nutrition objectives within broader agricultural and social protection strategies through a coordinated approach that will enhance resource allocation, ensuring that the nutritional needs of all households are met efficiently, considering the ongoing environmental challenges.

CONCLUSION



In light of the recent drought that has profoundly affected nearly half of the Zambian population, it is crucial to critically assess the effectiveness of the 2025 National Budget in safeguarding livelihoods. With poverty levels escalating to 60% and food insecurity placing immense strain on vulnerable groups—including children, women, and Persons with Disabilities—it is essential for Zambia to adopt a more robust and responsive approach to these pressing challenges.

While the overall social sector budget has seen an increase, the reduction in its share of total allocations—from 30% in 2024 to 24% in 2025—underscores the difficult trade-offs the government must navigate in balancing competing national priorities. Current measures may not adequately address the urgent needs of vulnerable households during their recovery phase following this significant environmental challenge. The decision to revert Social Cash Transfer (SCT) values after mid-2025 raises significant concerns about the ability of households to recover effectively, especially in light of rising inflation that further undermines their purchasing power. This reduction poses a risk to ongoing poverty alleviation efforts and threatens to reverse the significant gains made through a comprehensive social protection system that has historically improved livelihoods.

Furthermore, critical sectors such as health and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) are experiencing declines in budget allocations, despite their vital importance in combating the adverse effects of drought. Insufficient investment in WASH services presents serious challenges to health and livelihood sustainability, as access to clean water and proper sanitation is essential not only for immediate recovery but also for bolstering community resilience against future shocks.

Overall, while the 2025 National Budget has the potential to enhance support for vulnerable populations, it is imperative to develop a comprehensive strategy that integrates social protection with targeted investments in essential services. As Zambia grapples with the multifaceted challenges posed by the recent drought and its lingering effects, ensuring that both the immediate and long-term needs of affected communities are fully addressed will be vital for safeguarding the welfare of its citizens and fostering resilient communities capable of weathering future environmental and economic uncertainties. This holistic approach will not only strengthen social safety nets but also lay the groundwork for sustainable development and enhanced community resilience in the face of adversity.



AN ANALYTICAL BRIEF OF THE **2025**
SOCIAL SECTOR BUDGET

Zambia Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (ZIPAR)

P.O. Box 50782, Lusaka, Zambia

CSO Annex Building

Corner of John Mbita and Nationalist Road, Lusaka

Email: info@zipar.org.zm

Website: www.zipar.org.zm

www.facebook.com/OfficialZIPAR

Twitter: [@ZiparInfo](https://twitter.com/ZiparInfo)

Tel: +260 211 252559

Fax: +260 211 252566

