



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON LEARNING POVERTY

BY

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

I rise today to address this August House on a matter of profound importance to the future of our nation: the challenge of learning poverty and our Ministry's steadfast commitment to overcome it. I am especially proud to announce the **official launch of the End Learning Poverty for All in Africa (ELPAF) Campaign in Namibia**, scheduled to take place from **29th to 31st July 2025 in Outjo, Kunene Region**. This national launch represents a pivotal moment, reaffirming Namibia's dedication to inclusive, quality education in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). This initiative follows a continental conference on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 5th to 6th September 2024, which brought together key education stakeholders from across the African continent to address persistent challenges in foundational learning.

(Current Status of Learning Poverty in Namibia)

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

Our nation, much like many across Africa, faces a foundational literacy and numeracy crisis. Namibia commits to confronting this reality, where currently **seven out of ten children cannot read a simple text or complete basic mathematical tasks**. This widespread issue has profound implications, restricting our ability to engage in knowledge-driven industries and impacting economic growth and social stability. Namibia's learning poverty challenges stem from systemic deficiencies across multiple areas, limiting the country's ability to develop skilled professionals.

Recent assessments underscore the urgency of this challenge. The **2024 National End-of-Phase Grade 3 Literacy and Numeracy Assessment** revealed sobering statistics:

- In **numeracy**, only **32% of learners achieved the minimum pass rate of 40%**, with a mere 5% scoring 75% or higher. Disturbingly, **82% of sampled learners did not achieve expected counting competency**, 62% struggled with comparing numbers, and 70% found it difficult to demonstrate understanding of place value up to 999.

- For **literacy**, the situation is similarly critical: **only 28% of learners met the minimum pass rate of 40%**, and a mere 3% scored 75% or higher. A prevalent difficulty identified was distinguishing between the letters "b" and "d". While we acknowledge pockets of excellence, such as in Oshana, Erongo, and Khomas regions where over 20% of learners demonstrated higher-order thinking skills in reading and strong written expression, the national picture demands our collective, urgent intervention.
- The end of phase assessment also included learners with hearing impairment and visual impairment.
- For Windhoek visually impaired school, out of 15 learners, only 1 learner met the basic competency and for numeracy none of the learners met the basic competencies. In Eluwa resource school, out of 7 visually impaired learners, for literacy no learners met the basic competencies and for numeracy 2 learners met the basic competencies.
- At the school for the Hearing Impaired in Khomas, out of 8 learners no learners met the basic competencies for literacy and for numeracy no learner met the basic competencies. At Eluwa resource school, out of 17 learners with hearing impaired, 8 learners met the basic competencies for literacy, however none of the learners met the basic competencies for numeracy.

(Impact of Learning Poverty on Economic and Social Development)

Without strong foundational literacy and numeracy, learners struggle to progress academically, diminishing long-term employment prospects and workforce readiness. The economic impact of learning poverty includes:

- Slowed national development: Weak early-grade learning outcomes hinder higher education accessibility, limiting the country's ability to develop skilled professionals.
- Reduced productivity: A workforce with limited literacy and numeracy competencies restricts Namibia's ability to engage in knowledge-driven industries.
- Deepened inequalities: Children in rural areas face greater learning disadvantages due to lower access to structured learning interventions, healthcare, and nutrition.

Investing in structured pedagogy, teacher training, multilingual education, and early-grade assessments will create a stronger foundation for lifelong learning, workforce preparedness, and economic growth.

(Interventions the Ministry is taking)

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

Our Ministry is not standing idly by. We have systematically implemented comprehensive interventions to address these foundational learning challenges, aligning our strategies with the African Union's broader objectives.

A cornerstone of our strategy is the **Jolly Phonics and Jolly Grammar program**, a multi-phase national initiative that began with successful pilots in 2017 in the Oshana region. Its overarching aim is to embed essential foundational English literacy skills in the Junior Primary Phase, facilitating future academic achievement:

- The **Jolly Phonics program** was initially rolled out in **2022 to Grade 1 teachers across all government schools**, benefiting approximately **1,023 schools, 2,665 teachers, and over 90,000 pupils**. This phase focused on foundational phonics skills like letter-sounds, blending, and segmenting. Jolly Learning Ltd, through its Jolly Futures program, made a significant philanthropic donation of over N\$28 million, covering trainer costs and materials.
- This was followed by **Jolly Grammar 1 in 2024**, targeting **2,742 Grade 2 teachers** to ensure continuity and introduce grammar concepts. Crucially, **651 Heads of Departments (HoDs) were trained to monitor and mentor teachers using the Jolly Monitor App**. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) allocated over N\$1.7 million for training and over N\$1.8 million for materials in this phase.
- Most recently, **Jolly Grammar 2 is being implemented in 2025**, focusing on **2,678 Grade 3 teachers and 225 HoDs** to ensure smooth progression and strengthen sustainability through continued HoD capacity building. For this phase, the MoEAC committed over N\$1.9 million for training and over N\$2.1 million for materials.

This program is a testimony to the long-standing partnership between Jolly Futures (a division of Jolly Learning Limited) and our Ministry (now MEIYSAC). **Namibia is noted as a leader in Africa for its national progression from Jolly Phonics to Jolly Grammar.** We have also made a significant investment in training all Grade 1 to 3 teachers in these programs as a literacy intervention and are actively working towards its long-term sustainability. The Jolly Monitor App and Jolly Monitor Dashboard are playing a crucial role in providing real-time data and tracking progress at national, regional, and school levels, enabling informed decision-making and targeted support. The Ministry is also busy, with the support of the UNICEF and the University of Namibia in conducting and impact analysis on the Jolly Phonics Programme.

Beyond literacy, Namibia is committed to **developing multilingual decodable readers** to support early literacy acquisition in our indigenous languages, fostering inclusivity within our diverse linguistic landscape. We are also developing phonics-based literacy frameworks tailored for Namibia's 11 languages. Our foundational learning strategy emphasises inclusivity and equitable access, recognising that effective intervention begins by understanding a learner's needs. Our commitment to early childhood development (ECD) reflects the AU's strategy of ensuring learning interventions begin in infancy, fostering cognitive development. This includes leveraging the ECD Curriculum Framework (ages 0–4) to facilitate a smooth transition to formal schooling.

The Ministry of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture continues to accelerate its commitment to foundational learning with a renewed focus on **early-grade numeracy** that was developed this year. The *2025 Engeza Numeracy Roadmap* presents a strategic and operational plan to enhance mathematics instruction from **pre-primary through Grade 3**, directly addressing the findings of the **2024 Grade 3 national assessment**, which revealed wide gaps in basic numeracy proficiency.

The roadmap defines clear, actionable priorities for system-level improvement:

- **Curriculum and Pedagogy Reform:** Revise the junior primary numeracy curriculum to better align with learner readiness, instructional time, and localised teaching contexts. Improve guidance on using teaching and learning materials (TLMs) effectively in the classroom.
- **Teacher Preparation and Support:** Harmonise pre-service teacher training across institutions, ensuring that teachers are confident in delivering mathematics in both the **language of instruction (LOI)** and in preparation for **Grade 4 transition**. Expand in-service programs with more frequent, practical, and classroom-relevant support.
- **Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs):** Review and enhance the numeracy TLM supply chain, define what constitutes “core” and “supplemental” resources, and streamline processes for adaptation, production, and equitable distribution.
- **System Coordination and Monitoring:** Strengthen coordination among Ministry departments, NIED, regional offices, and partners. Establish clear tracking mechanisms and accountability loops for early-grade numeracy outcomes.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Address disparities in access and quality across regions, and integrate inclusive teaching strategies to support learners with diverse needs and learning profiles.

This roadmap reinforces the Ministry's determination to deliver **practical, context-relevant numeracy solutions** that reach every learner from the start of their schooling journey. By building strong foundational numeracy skills, Namibia strengthens the entire education system—paving the way for a future where every child can confidently learn, count, reason, and thrive.

The Ministry is also developing a targeting intervention for foundational literacy and numeracy for learners with visual and hearing impairment. The training will target all Junior Primary teachers and Grade 4 teachers. To ensure the intervention is

effective, the training will be practical and in the classrooms to improve the quality of pedagogy. We will also strengthen the capacity of regional SEO's to be able to provide support and oversight for the schools. We are also working with development partners and Namibia National Association of the Deaf to develop and application that will bridge the gap of communication at a foundational level, giving parents a tool with which to learn sign language and communicate with their children.

(Successes and Challenges)

Honourable Speaker,

Our efforts have yielded notable successes, demonstrating strong commitment and positive impact across the country:

- We have seen **high attendance rates for both teachers and Heads of Departments** in training sessions, often exceeding expected numbers.
- Feedback from participants and officials on the training quality, content, and trainers has been **overwhelmingly positive**.
- There has been a **demonstrable improvement in participants' knowledge and confidence** in Jolly Phonics and Jolly Grammar concepts post-training.
- Our approach has effectively utilised **multi-sensory and practical teaching methods**, complemented by supplementary digital resources like Padlets and the Jolly Phonics Lessons App.
- Crucially, we are strengthening sustainability through the **development of local Namibian trainers in Jolly Phonics**.

However, we also face recurring challenges that require our continued attention and strategic adjustments:

- High cost of in-service training for teachers is problematic.
- There have been **delays in the timely delivery of physical handbooks and materials**, which impacts program implementation.

- A significant concern raised by Grade 3 teachers is the **inconsistent implementation of Jolly Phonics and Jolly Grammar 1 in lower grades**, which makes progression challenging for their learners.

Honourable Members,

Our journey is far from over. Our plans going forward are ambitious, comprehensive, and aligned with national and continental objectives, including the eleven strategic recommendations that emerged from the AU conference. We are engaged in ongoing efforts to address logistical hurdles and ensure long-term sustainability and effective implementation.

Key strategies include:

- **Strengthening Supply Chains and Resources:** We will conduct a supply chain analysis and develop core literacy and numeracy learning support material (LSM) packages, including centrally developed resources.
- **Curriculum and Assessment Adaptation:** We will develop and adapt the Early Grade Maths Assessment (EGMA) tool, pilot it, and create a comprehensive numeracy roadmap.
- **Systemic Integration and Monitoring:** We will strengthen synergy between basic and higher education, harmonising educational content across different levels, and leveraging technology for integration. Effective monitoring and evaluation, integrating data-driven approaches, are essential for success. We will also prioritise regular literacy and numeracy assessments, using insights from the ECD sector's national survey reports. Impactful, structured accountability systems are necessary to maintain alignment with the AU's Learning Poverty Drive and Namibia's national objectives.
- **Multi-sectoral Collaboration:** Namibia's ability to tackle learning poverty relies on robust multi-sectoral engagement, involving Government, development partners, NGOs, and the private sector.

Call for National Commitment

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

This is a crucial moment in Namibia's educational transformation. The numbers demand urgent action, and it is clear that addressing learning poverty requires a collective national commitment. Education is more than a policy; it is a promise to every child. Our roadmap reinforces the Ministry's determination to deliver practical, context-relevant numeracy solutions that reach every learner from the start of their schooling journey. By building strong foundational numeracy skills, Namibia strengthens the entire education system, paving the way for a future where every child can confidently learn, count, reason, and thrive.

Therefore, I issue a **call to action to all stakeholders**:

- **To our esteemed Members of Parliament:** Your unwavering support for legislative frameworks and budgetary allocations is paramount to ensuring our foundational learning reforms are sustained and strengthened.
- **To our dedicated Educators, Teachers, and Principals:** You are on the frontline of this battle. Your passion, your adoption of structured pedagogy, and your commitment to every learner, especially in the early grades, will define Namibia's future. We urge you to ensure internal efficiency in the distribution of stationeries to schools in terms of timely delivery, and to utilise all provided resources before seeking parental contributions. We condemn any inhumane and embarrassing way of treating parents and learners.
- **To Parents and Guardians:** Your moral obligation and voluntary contributions towards the upkeep, maintenance, and improvement of schools are deeply appreciated. We encourage continuous communication with schools regarding financial reports and urgent needs. Remember, no child should ever be denied access to education or progress to the next grade for non-payment of voluntary contributions. Your engagement with school management and school boards is vital to ensuring quality education for our children.
- **To our Training Institutions and Development Partners:** Continue to partner with us in strengthening teacher

development, curriculum innovation, and providing essential resources. Your support is crucial for scaling up our interventions and building sustainable capacity.

- **To Civil Society and Communities:** Your active participation in school affairs, your oversight, and your advocacy are indispensable. Let us work together to ensure that every child can confidently learn, count, reason, and thrive.

This journey requires all of us – government, educators, parents, civil society, and global partners – to commit to a future where no child is left behind. The African Union's ELPAF Campaign has set the stage, but **we must lead the charge in Namibia**. We invite all our esteemed members of parliament to join us at the ELPAF launch.

Let us invest in our children. Let us build a nation where every child can read, solve problems, and thrive.

Are you ready to make a difference? Let us take this step forward together.

I thank you!