



**Active Outdoor Play: An Affordable but Neglected  
Pathway Towards a Healthy Childhood**



**2016**

**THE 2016 ZIMBABWE  
REPORT CARD ON THE  
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH**









## INTRODUCTION

There is a global escalation of lifestyle behaviours such as physical inactivity, sedentary behaviours and unhealthy diets. These behaviours are known risk factors for non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and certain cancers. The World Health Organization reports that non-communicable diseases are now the leading cause of death worldwide. Furthermore, nearly 80% of the deaths that are related to

non-communicable diseases are reported to occur in low-to-middle income countries. Meanwhile, there is evidence suggesting that physical inactivity and sedentary behaviours are increasing among children and youth. Research data from 105 countries show that over 80% of 13-15 year-old children and youth do not meet the World Health Organization's recommendations of 60 minutes of moderate-to vigorous-intensity physical

## ABOUT THE REPORT CARD

This inaugural report card is a comprehensive assessment of physical activity levels among Zimbabwean children and youth, and borrows from similar initiatives in Canada and elsewhere in Africa. It summarizes the best available evidence regarding key indicators of physical activity such as participation in organized sports, active play, school, family, community and the built environment, policy etc. among children and youth. Collectively, the graded indicators shed some light on how Zimbabwe is doing as a country

to promote physical activity among children and youth. The development and authorship of this report card was partly inspired by results from the first Global Summit on Physical Activity of Children and the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance ([www.activehealthykids.org](http://www.activehealthykids.org)), a global network of researchers and stakeholders with interests in the promotion of healthy and active lifestyles for children and youth. The full report can be downloaded from our website available at [www.activehealthykidszimbabwe.com](http://www.activehealthykidszimbabwe.com).

## THE INDICATORS AND GRADING CRITERIA

The 2016 Zimbabwe report card assigned letter grades 'A to F' or 'incomplete' to 10 key indicators of physical activity among children and youth. Due to limited research, only a handful of studies were available for use in developing the 2016 Report Card. The indicators included in this report card are for: Overall Physical Activity, Organized Sport Participation, Active Play, Active Transportation, Sedentary Behaviours, School Environment, Family and Peers, Community and the Built Environment, Non-governmental Strategies and Investments, Governmental Policies, Strategies and Investments. Published and unpublished research articles (without restrictions on when they

were conducted or published), policy documents and materials from non-governmental organizations were used to inform the allocation of grades. The letter grades and their interpretation are: **A (81-100%)**: succeeding with a large majority of Zimbabwean children and youth; **B (61-80%)**: succeeding with well over half of children and youth; **C (41-60%)**: succeeding with about half of children and youth; **D (21-40%)**: succeeding with less than half, but some, children and youth; **F (0-20%)**: succeeding with very few children and youth; **Incomplete**: not enough information available for grading.



Indicator	Grade	Key Findings
Overall physical activity	C+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Self-reported survey data of 4000 participants revealed that 59% of 8-16 year old children and youth met the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day<sup>23</sup></li> <li>□ A greater proportion of the children attending rural schools met the recommended daily physical activity guidelines than those attending urban schools<sup>23</sup></li> <li>□ A study of 320 pre-schoolers in the capital city of Harare showed that 67% participated in 'unquantified' average to high physical activity<sup>24</sup></li> </ul>
Organized sport participation	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ A survey of 8-16 year olds showed that approximately 67% of them participated in organized sports such as tennis, soccer or swimming<sup>23</sup></li> <li>□ Another smaller study reported that a group of healthy 6-14 year olds spent an average of 2.5 hours playing sports<sup>25</sup></li> <li>□ More boys (75%) than girls (59%) reported having participated in sports<sup>23</sup></li> </ul>
Active outdoor Play	D+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Approximately 35% of the Zimbabwean children reported spending at least an hour playing outside<sup>23</sup></li> <li>□ Only 29% of girls compared to 41% of boys reported spending at least 1 hour per day playing outside<sup>23</sup></li> <li>□ Almost half (49%) of the children and youth reported that they spend less than 1 hour per day playing outside<sup>23</sup></li> </ul>
Active transportation	A-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ A little over 80% of Zimbabwean children and youth used active transport to and from school<sup>23</sup></li> <li>□ Active transport use was highest (83%) in Manicaland, and lowest (77%) in Harare province<sup>26</sup>, while more rural school children used active transportation than their urban counterparts<sup>23</sup></li> <li>□ A study of preschoolers in Harare showed that a greater proportion (57%) used motorized transport compared to 43% who were reported to walk to preschool<sup>24</sup></li> </ul>
Sedentary behaviours	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ A substantial proportion (75%) of children and youth spend 2 or less hours in sedentary behaviours per day<sup>23</sup></li> <li>□ The most commonly reported sedentary behaviours were watching television and playing electronic video games<sup>23</sup></li> <li>□ A greater proportion (45%) of children attending rural</li> </ul>



		<p>schools did not watch television at all compared to only 17% attending urban schools<sup>23</sup></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Almost a quarter of 3-5 year old pre-schoolers watched between 2-3 hours of television the previous day<sup>24</sup></p>
School	D	<p><input type="checkbox"/> This indicator was graded mostly based on expert opinion and consensus</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Physical education (PE) is mandated and examinable in schools<sup>29-31</sup>, but there is no systematic surveillance or enforcement mechanism for adherence to PE syllabi</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> There are neither data on types and serviceability of infrastructure nor PE teacher to student ratios</p>
Family and peers	INC	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Although anecdotal evidence seem to suggest family and peer influence on key indicators of children's physical activity, there were insufficient data to accurately grade this indicator</p>
Community and built environment	F	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Largely graded based on expert opinion and consensus</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Recreational parks are only available in some major urban centres, the majority of them are in derelict and unsafe conditions</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No policies or procedures exist to deal with the parks' state of disrepair</p>
Government strategies and investments	D	<p><input type="checkbox"/> The government has a national policy<sup>32</sup> which mandates inter-ministerial collaboration for the promotion of mass participation in physical activity</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The Sports and Recreation Commission<sup>33</sup> established by a government statute, is charged with establishing and maintain recreational facilities etc.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> At present, there is no evidence of direct resource allocation for practical implementation of the policies</p>
Non-governmental strategies and investments	INC	<p><input type="checkbox"/> There were insufficient data to accurately grade this indicator</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Only one corporation, Nestle Zimbabwe<sup>34</sup>, partners with the National Association of Primary School Headmasters in the Nestle Kids Athletics Physical Activity Program to promote active healthy living among primary school-children</p>

Note: Full citation details are provided in the long form Report Card



## CONCLUSIONS

Evidence from the limited data gathered for this report card illustrate that although most Zimbabwean children are using active transport (e.g., walking or cycling) to get to and from school, are engaged in organized sports, and do not spend too much time in sedentary behaviours; their levels of physical activity are generally lower than desired. It is concerning that only few children are engaging in active outdoor play, an inexpensive and perhaps the best and only way for children from low income families to be adequately physically active. Due to lack of

opportunities, safe areas, programs, and investments, Zimbabwean children may be at risk of becoming increasingly physically inactive and sedentary, putting them at a higher risk for non-communicable diseases early in their adulthood. Overall, the results suggest a need for robust research, strong advocacy and stakeholder engagement. Zimbabwe needs simple public health messages encouraging active outdoor play as well as policies that prioritize overall healthy active living among Zimbabwean children and youth.

## NEXT STEPS

This inaugural Report Card provides important data that are intended to generate interest and conversations around physical activity among children and youth in Zimbabwe. It lays a firm foundation from which to build a strong case for research and policy initiatives that will promote physical activity among children. Specifically, the report card provides evidence supporting the need for:

- ☐ Conducting robust research using representative samples, which will provide accurate estimates on levels of key indicators of physical activity among Zimbabwean children and youth.
- ☐ Creating and disseminating simple and accessible public health messages reinforcing and encouraging active transportation and active outdoor play as important contributors to overall physical activity among children and youth.
- ☐ Establishing an independent advocacy organization (Active Healthy Kids Zimbabwe) to develop strong, long lasting and mutually beneficial relationships/partnerships with key stakeholders (e.g. relevant government ministries; not-for-profit organizations; funders etc.).
- ☐ Partnering the relevant ministries of: Health and Child Welfare; Sports and Recreation; Primary and Secondary Education to develop and implement an evidence-informed national physical activity promotion strategy.
- ☐ Partnerships with like-minded corporations (e.g., Nestle Zimbabwe) to evaluate or enhance programs already implemented to encourage mass participation in physical activity among children and youth.







