

“I” Stories

**Students Experiences in Times of
Governance Crisis**

“Had we stayed in a closet”



**Student Christian
Movement of Zimbabwe**



**"I" Stories - Students Experiences in Times of Governance Crisis:
"Had we stayed in a closet"**

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The Student Christian Movement of Zimbabwe (SCMZ) is a registered non-profit making welfare organization with an interest in students and young people aiming at addressing their changing needs.

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WHAT IT TAKES TO LEAD AN ECUMENICAL YOUTH ORGANISATION IN ZIMBABWE



My name is Innocent Kasiyano. I am currently working as the National Coordinator of the Student Christian Movement of Zimbabwe (SCMZ). My marriage with SCMZ dates back to 2003 when I joined as member during my first year at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ). In 2005 I was elected the National Secretary General, a position I held for a year and subsequently I became the National Coordinator in 2007.

Why me?

As a young person I am so passionate about student rights and rights of young people. Coming from a background of a society which has been looking down upon young people(as people without seriousness), I had the zeal and passion to fight for young people's rights so that is why I was part of the youth movement and the student movement. But surprisingly my parents like any other parents, wanted me to pursue a white collar profession, where I would have my own spacious office. They never imagined me working in the ecumenical movement. In fact it shocked them to learn that I was actively involved in activism, because I grew up a very reserved person. Even myself there are some sacrifices I have made for other young people's rights which are quite shocking. That is the sole reason I believe that the work I am doing is a calling from God. The passion inherent in me as a young person has moved me to consider myself as the sacrificial lamb. All this is hinged on my strong belief in the word of God which has kept me going for it says that the "Righteous shall never labor in vain". I believe that one day we shall have a Zimbabwe where everyone regardless of age or color shall enjoy God given rights. I remember when I joined the UZ, educational standards were getting so low, that every student was forced to stand up and defend one's rights. This has resulted in a series of demonstrations, with some culminating in violence.

Of SCMZ and Politics

SCMZ is not affiliated to any political party. It is a non partisan ecumenical, student and welfare organization. We do not subscribe to any ideologies of any political party, we subscribe to the principles which are imbedded in the Bible since we are a Christian organization. We also subscribe to the principle of justice, peace and love; so mostly our actions resonate with those principles. We try to resolve political issues through working with people from different backgrounds obviously this means that we get involved in political issues, but that does not mean we are partisan, we just stand and defend what is right and just as said in the word of God.

For instance there is one program we undertook which was focusing on mobilizing and conscientising young Christians to participate in electoral processes. The background to this program was that it was seen through the other programs which SCMZ was undertaking in communities and branches that young Christians tend to fear participating in national processes. Coming from the background of the teachings of the Bible found in Romans where



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it says that Christians are not of the world. The interpretation which some people give of that verse is that since we are not of the world we should not participate in worldly things because they are not Godly. But ourselves as a Christian organization and as young people who are concerned about our welfare, about the way and manner in which processes are run in the country we found it so fit to institute a program which was meant to mobilize young Christians to participate in electoral processes because we believe that we should have a voice in choosing the people who govern us. The only way we can get a good person to govern us is by choosing and taking part in the process which elects that individual.

However, it is so disheartening that some forces of the state would view our work as subversive and anti-government. For instance during the election period (2008) we produced a number of information materials to encourage young people to go and vote, but our material was confiscated by some state agents after they raided our offices and even arrested some of our personnel. So in my view the state saw the materials as a way in which they were being attacked because the verses which we had put on the t-shirts and pamphlets did not resonate with what the state was doing during that particular time. The verse was Esther 4:8 and the second verse was from proverbs which said, *"When the righteous are in rule the people are happy but when the wicked rules the people groan."*



EXPELLED BECAUSE OF MY STANCE ON STUDENTS RIGHTS



My name is Fortune Nyasha Nyamande. I am 25 years old. I enrolled with the University of Zimbabwe in 2003 for a Bachelors Degree in Medicine and a Bachelors Degree in Surgery, (MBCHB). In October 2007 I was suspended from college by the University authorities because of my strong belief in students' rights. Currently I am working with a youth organization that works with young people from marginalized communities in Zimbabwe known as the Youth Agenda Trust. When I was still at college I joined the SCMZ in my first year in 2003 and I was subsequently elected to be the chairperson of the medical school branch

of SCMZ in 2005 when I was about to start my third year.

My history and involvement in student activism and politics took shape in 2005 when I was elected to be the chairperson of SCMZ branch chairperson; I was also subsequently elected to be the president of the Zimbabwe Medical Students Association which is an umbrella body of all medical students in Zimbabwe. Coincidentally that was the time when the education crisis together with the health crisis was at its pinnacle so my involvement as the president of ZIMSA and chairperson of SCMZ in championing the rights and interests of students led me to have maybe several clashes with the University administration which I believe then even now is a bit more aligned to ZANU-PF party. This confrontation when you are a student leader when championing for student interests you will not be having good relations with the administration if it is pro state. For instance in 2007 January, there was a communiqué that was released by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education that all students in tertiary institutions were supposed to start paying school fees. Since we had enrolled at college we were not used to paying school fees, the government used to fund our education and the government actually used to give us grants and loans so that those coming from poor backgrounds would be able to also access education regardless of their economic background.

So since I was the president of the medical students at that moment I was then morally and ethically obliged to lead protest, to lead students to demonstrate around this move which to us we thought was unjustified because the government was spending money from the treasury for other issues for example they were buying things such as tractors, fertilizers, they were buying a lot of other inputs but they were not funding education and so we felt that even though the country was going through so many challenges the government had an obligation to pay fees for us and even to give us grants so that everyone would be able to access education. We then grouped around the medical school at the other compass that is at Parirenyatwa Hospital, we managed to gather around 300 students and we also invited some members of the student representative council from the main compass then the deliberations that came out of that gathering was that students were supposed to march from Parirenyatwa Hospital to the Ministry of Higher education offices. The protest was met with some brutality from the police and the college authorities on one hand do not take it lightly so I think that was the beginning of a strained relationship between me and the college administration because eventually we managed to get the medical school closed. This is just one of the many examples I can give that



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resulted in the strained relationship between myself as a student leader and the college administration in our endeavor to have the right to education being respected by the ZANU-PF government.

Arrested and tortured by state agents several times

I have been arrested several times. The first time was in 2005. We had a protest at the main campus whereby as medical students it has been a history at the university that we all get accommodation at the campus, whether they stay locally or they stay outside of Harare they must stay on campus considering the challenging nature of their degree. So the university released a directive that the medical students were only going to get their accommodation if they are in their first year and in their final year so we also had a protest around that and we marched to the vice chancellor's office at the main campus and when we got to the vice chancellor's office we do not know how the information that we were having a demonstration had leaked. Hordes of trucks with armed policemen with teargas canisters and some vicious dogs then surrounded us. We do not know where they came from but we believe they came from the local Avondale police station. We were then surrounded and they took us the leaders, we were six of us in the students committee, so they took the six of us and we were temporarily detained at the campus security room, then later taken to Avondale police station. It was on a Thursday and we were then later released on a Monday morning without any charges.

One incident I will never forget is when I was also arrested with other student leaders during the Save Zimbabwe campaign on the 11th of March 2007. People had gathered from across Zimbabwe at the Gwanzura stadium, whereby we had the student leaders, the political parties, we had everyone, the churches, SCMZ was also involved in the Save Zimbabwe campaign whereby people wanted to meet and pray for the nation on that day, and the government perceived it as an opposition rally which was meant to destabilize government. Thousands of people were arrested on that day and I was also arrested together with Lawrence Mashungu, who was the vice-chairperson of SCMZ then. I was taken to Highfields police station and then later came to the central police station and was later released without any charges, but after a torturous ordeal.

My involvement in violent protest

I have been involved in quite a number of violent protests at college. I am not proud to be associated with violence but it has always been a principle to us as students that if you respond violently to violence you are not doing violence. You are just defending yourself. Some of the protests would start as peaceful protest but obviously when the security and police came and try to disrupt the clashes you find that most of them turned violent. In some cases you could say cars could be burnt, even the college windows, the buildings could be shattered as students tried to defend themselves. But am not proud of this at all, in fact I regret ever involved.

My lowest moments as a student activist

There was one time soon after my expulsion from college; it was a difficult and challenging moment especially considering at family level where most every family member would label me as a radical, as someone who is not interested in learning. So the family support and people



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around me started to desert me, my brothers, my sister could not relate and want to associate with me. I felt that I no longer had my education and I was now starting to lose my family and some of my friends. They could not really understand why I could not continue with my studies. It was a challenging time for me and it took a lot of courage for me to talk to them and make them understand why I am in this difficult situation. I am glad that most of them now understand what I am doing and what I want to achieve in my life.

It is also disheartening to leave your studies particularly when you are studying medicine, because when you are studying medicine you have a passion to assist the sick and the needy and it would be a lifetime dream or ambition that when I grow up I want to be at a certain level. It was also painful to see some of my colleagues I used to learn graduating as doctors and specializing in other different fields of medicine. But I took time to explore why I am in this situation, and have realized that it is because of my deep belief in championing the interests of others, promoting and protecting human rights, I then find solace in that. I am being victimized for what I deeply believe in and that gives me some strength to move on. I strongly believe that one day I shall eventually achieve my ambition both to be a doctor and to probably see a Zimbabwe where democracy and human rights are upheld.

SCMZ changed my life

My involvement with SCMZ has assisted me in a number of ways, particularly on the issue of violence. SCMZ has a project focusing on nurturing a culture of peace among Christian youth in Zimbabwe; this has taught us other ways of advocacy that are nonviolent, for instance petitions and other issues. It has also managed to change perceptions on how we can champion our rights and the rights of others without necessarily engaging in violent activities. My involvement with SCMZ has also managed to help me network with other civic organizations that are in the human rights field for example; when I was expelled from college they managed to connect me with Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights for instance so that I would have legal representation and also through their relationship with Zimbabwe Doctors for Human Rights they also managed to get me some temporary internship after I left college. SCMZ has helped me even to grow spiritually through continuous reading of the scriptures and sticking to the word of God in what ever I do, so it has really been a pillar of strength in my life.

Was the sacrifice worth it?

The sacrifice was worth it to me because what we did by then it might seem like a small thing but I think that these are the events that culminated in the political dispensation that we have. If it wasn't for our involvement at colleges, not only at our college but at a national level in politics and in these issues, there would not have been a Government of National Unity and I am glad that there is such a Government. It would be really hard for them to block me from being readmitted at the college because they are trying to create a new perception about this Government. Also there are some progressive elements within this Government whom we can approach and probably assist me to go back to school. Also over the years I have managed to groom a critical mass of other students at the medical school who share the same values and beliefs as mine. I will also leave the baton stick for others to carry forward and champion the rights of students as I will be concentrating on my academic issues.



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Had I kept quite

I feel quite excited to share my experiences with other young people because it will also give some young people out there a chance to get a feel of the experiences that I went through as a student in Zimbabwe. Being able to share my experiences with other youth is very important considering the political path that I have gone through in life; very few young people would want to sacrifice what they are doing in life to pursue what they believe in. So it means quite a lot and I hope it will also inspire other young people out there who are in difficult circumstances to soldier on and continue with what they really believe in. It is quite critical for young people to share experiences, both at a national level and internationally because you never know maybe next time a young person in Iran or any other country would be facing similar challenges and will be able to chronicle that at such a date and time there is this young person who also went through this and he managed to pursue his dreams and he is at this level and he also managed to correct things in their country.

My hope "I see light at the end of the tunnel"

For the coming year (2010) I think I have got more hope as compared to the previous years that I will be able to go back to school, because previously they would not even allow me to be at the campus, if they would see me on campus they would just call campus security and say: you are not allowed here, you are not a student here and not allowed here. But now I can even go to the college and mix with my former class mates, mix with other students for now. The chances are really high that they will allow me to finish my school, but on the off chance that they do not allow me, I am trying to finish my degree with another university that is not within Zimbabwe so that I will just carry forward from the clinicals part that I was now doing and be able to finish my degree. I think we have had other students that have gone to Malawi and Zambia who were transferred from our school during the time of the education crisis so probably that is another route I am trying to pursue that is if I get the necessary funds that are needed to be an international student I will probably go and finish somewhere if they do not readmit me this year.

I also hope that the recruitment and appointments that are done at the universities are done independently from politics. Because I have realized so many students who expressed dissenting views of how the state is run were subjected to victimization, because over the years the ZANU-PF led government has managed to put in place people who are related or who are aligned to their political party in positions of authority mainly at the colleges, so that they would crash any dissenting views from the students. So I would say that in this new political dispensation these are some of the issues people should be looking at in terms of depoliticizing the administration of the university, depoliticizing most of the state institutions so that they do their business, their conduct in a professional and non-partisan manner.

I would also want to raise my family in my home country Zimbabwe and the most important things that I would want for my son's life (Nyasha Jnr) would be obviously, access to proper education facilities from pre-school up to university and he should also be able to access good health facilities. I would also want to see him being able to pursue the career that he would have managed to get from the education system and living his own life that is independent from me and from anyone. And also maybe if he can be involved in terms of representing others; I would want him to be a leader, like what his father is doing.



FALLING PREGNANT AT COLLEGE; "a self inflicted injury"



My name is Matsiliso Moyo I am 28 years old, I am a mother of one. My husband works in Harare as an English teacher so we are not living together. I am also a teacher by profession but I am not currently teaching because I specialized in Physical Education and Sports and I was deployed to rural areas where there is no physical education and I have got passion for sports so I did not go there.

I joined Hillside Teachers College in 2006 and finished 2007. I got married during my second year term and I fell pregnant and it was hard because I was majoring in Physical Education and Sports. So I was doing a lot of exercises, a lot of sports but the lecturers didn't sympathize with me, they were saying it is a self inflicted injury. I had to jump hurdles, do rugby, swimming even when I was heavily pregnant. I remember this other time, my scan was saying I was supposed to deliver on the 16th of October and on that day I did not experience any labor pains, I was forced to get into a pool and swim. The lecturers were like, it was my own choice, I chose to fall pregnant so I had to do that. And I wasn't given any maternity leave, I gave birth on Friday and I had some stitches. On the following Monday I was forced to jump hurdles because I had a practical test. I confronted them and told them that I had given birth three days ago and asked for postponement of my group test, but they stubbornly refused, because it was a self-inflicted injury. At one point I was tasked to jump hurdles, I failed to jump and collapsed then the lecturer gave me fifteen minutes to recover. They could not accept that I failed to jump because I was pregnant; they said I failed to jump because I was not physically fit. So I had to do physical training which is called circuit training to improve my fitness. I told them that it was because I am heavily pregnant, that is the reason I failed to jump and they said no you are unfit so you have to improve your fitness, so go and do circuit training and some fitness programme to improve your fitness.

So I told myself that if I fail, they would have to defer me and I would have to join the other group the following year, so I said the ball is in my court I have to do this. I need this course, I have to pass it. I wanted to prove a point to them because of the way they were treating me; I had to prove to them that we female students can do as well as the male. I can with stand the pressure. I can overcome these challenges.

It was a painful ordeal for me because, they were supposed to give me my maternity leave, say two weeks and after my maternity leave I can come and proceed with my examination. But they didn't give me my maternity leave; it is supposed to be there, because even if I am at college I have the right to give birth, I have the right to fall pregnant. I am a woman they are supposed to expect that from us and try to help us.

This is not a peculiar experience to me only, a lot of girls fall pregnant during their college days. I remember this other girl; she gave birth on her second exam. I was the vice president of the Students Representative Committee at my college and so I went to the principal's office and pleaded on her behalf if she could write her examination in hospital but they refused. And she had no option but to defer to the next academic year.



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It is really difficult to fall pregnant whilst you are still at college because there would be no one to look after your child, some have the privilege of leaving their kids with their parents, but as for me my parents are late, so in such a situation it is hard to burden the extended family, they have their own challenges. Some will tell you to wait and take care of your baby until she is grown up and then go back to college. It's hard, it's really a challenge. Due to my situation my mother-in-law had to come from Harare and stay with us in Bulawayo. I was compelled to look for accommodation close to college which was another expense. So my mother-in-law was taking care of my baby and during breaks I would go back home and breastfeed my child. This also forced me to introduce my son to solids at an early age; at three weeks we started giving him porridge made of mealie-meal because baby milk was not easily found in the shelves and was very expensive. 2007 things were really difficult in Zimbabwe. Worse more, the majority of the students were coming from peasant families or their parents were civil servants. This meant that their salaries were not enough to pay for their children's school fees, like the girl child for example, so most female students ended up dating married men so that they get money to pay their fees. As a result some of them fell pregnant and these people as usual have got their wives and denied responsibility or they just disappeared when they realized that the girl had fallen pregnant. Thank God I wasn't one of them.

"OfSCMZ and Female capacity building"

My involvement with SCMZ dates back to 2005, and in 2007 I became the National Gender Secretary, before that I was the Hillside branch chairperson. I became the National Gender Secretary because I have a passion, and also they realized that I was gender sensitive and I believed in the emancipation of female students. SCMZ really helped us a lot mostly through capacity building workshops I remember vividly the one we had on Leadership and Life Skills. This helped me to get bold and get prepared to face college hardships and challenges.

I would want to applaud SCMZ for their work in equipping female students with relevant skills to cope with college life, like the female students capacity building workshops whereby they educate the female students about the consequences associated with falling pregnant at colleges. They also equip students with the right information on HIV and AIDS. This is one thing I am really grateful for. They educate female students and their male counterparts about HIV and AIDS because I tell you there is a high percentage of HIV and AIDS at these high learning institutions but SCMZ is proactive, they do a lot of workshops to educate all students in general at high learning institutions so I really praise them for that. And the levels of behavioral change I realized were quite shocking, information is power for real. If you would visit our college at night you would think there is a function because there would be a lot of cars parked to see the female students but because SCMZ was constantly visiting our college and making these HIV and AIDS campaigns; I tell you the students then realized it is their lives which is important. At the end of the day they used to tell us that it is better to finish your college when you are HIV free then you become productive to the country and enjoy the fruits of your labor and pain endured during college times. So they made people realize that HIV is there and also to be responsible of their lives.

"They are just concerned about fees, they do not care about students` welfare"..

It is so painful that the college authorities and the university authorities are not even concerned about the social welfare of the students, one thing they are concerned about are



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our fees. When they want the fees they demand with no mercy what so ever. It is wrong they are supposed to protect and support us. Like for us female students, they need to support us, give us maternity leave, make sure that the college clinics are always open the nurse in charge always attend to pregnant females because there is a college clinic, instead of us getting expenses going to private clinics or outside clinics, we are supposed to be taken care of by the college clinic.

"Being a female activist" - In the hands of a merciless police force.

My life as a female activist and human rights defender has not been that easy. I remember towards the June Presidential runoff I went to Harare to organize an SCMZ female students' workshop, when we got there we were raided by the members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police, and State Secret Agents and I was arrested. I was arrested together with other members of SCMZ Secretariat, Programmes Officer, Finance Officer, National Secretary General, National Vice Chairperson and one intern. By then Bradley (my son) was 5 months old, and we were taken to Harare Central Police Station. I stayed in the cells for two nights with Bradley and I was released the next day midnight. It was hard for Bradley and me.

I tried to explain to them that my baby is 5 months old and that I was not involved in any political activities as they accused us of, but they insisted that SCMZ was an arm of the opposition party, the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) and they would charge us with treason. They told me that I affiliated to the opposition party (MDC) and they said we want to teach you a lesson, you are going to go to the cells with your baby and the conditions there were harsh. I was not allowed to get into the cell with baby towels. Then SCMZ looked for a lawyer for us, who then bought pampers for my baby. But I was allowed one pampers at a time, from 6am to 1pm, he would be using one pampers. He ended up having sores because of that. It was hard. As if it was not torturous enough the weather changed on the second day and it was extremely cold and then the lawyer spoke to the police if I could be given a baby blanket but they refused. So I had to use the cell blankets, filthy blankets to warm a five month old baby. We were so crowded in the cell, we were around 15. SCMZ organized food for us, and sanitary for us.

When I was still in the cells I had a lot of fear for my son, that people were being killed, people just disappeared; I thought that was going to happen to us and my son and people were being beaten up. Those people were cruel, I thought they were going to do anything to my son and get away with it.

Hope for my son - Has anything changed?

The only thing I can say is that there is food in the shelves and now we can have our workshops as SCMZ without being intimidated. But to those students who are still at college things are not that rosy, they are expected to pay exorbitant fees, they cannot afford those fees because the fees are like six times the salary of their parents. Education is still expensive. The inclusive government is supposed to do something with the fees structures, because the students have a right to education, education is a right but they are not realizing that.

One thing I am sure of is that if they had the will they could make things easier for the students. Long back students used to get loans at colleges which were supposed to help them, like female



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students would use them to buy their sanitary and other students in general to buy their books and other materials to use at college but now they are not giving even that. They are not supposed to say free education of course but they are supposed to have reasonable fees.

I hope that things will be different when my son is in his 20s; my hope is that things will have changed in Zimbabwe, because change is inevitable. I can smell that change is coming. I need my son to have the right to education, not that it is supposed to be free but it is supposed to be affordable. For this year (2009) those who were supposed to sit for 'O' level, few students have registered, they have extended the registration dates, but students are supposed to be sitting for their first exams in a month's time but still they have extended the registration because parents do not have the money to pay for their exam fees. I believe that every child has the right to education, so education is supposed to be affordable. I really hope that education will be affordable and my son will be able to go to school without any struggles to go to university, without me stretching, struggling to pay his fees and also there is the right to health. Hospitals are now expensive, that even when people get sick they just sit at home. For you to have education you are supposed to be healthy but if you are not healthy and you cannot even access just painkillers at the end of the day that will affect you're your productivity as well as addition value to the nation.



4. MELISSA GREENS *(Not her real name) "Sex for survival"

My name is Melissa Greens and I am 24 years old. I am a student at Hillside Teacher's College studying towards a Diploma in Education majoring in Mathematics. I was first involved with SCMZ in 2007 when I came to Hillside Teacher's College. Since then I have been working with SCMZ and this has helped me a lot. SCMZ opened my mind to see what was happening even politically; socially even academically it helped me to have hope and vision in my life. With the situation obtaining in Zimbabwe I had lost hope; I used to ask myself where am I going? If I study what am I going to do later and when I joined SCMZ in 2007 it opened up my mind and right now I have got a vision and I know where I am going. I am the vice chairperson of SCMZ Hillside branch.

Lost hope rekindled

I first lost hope with my future when I finished my 'A' levels in 2004, I found myself stuck at home with nothing to do, because I could not go to college. I didn't have enough money to go to university and I couldn't secure a place to advance my education. So I had no option but to enroll at a teachers' College because it is a bit lower, but when I came here I didn't want to be a teacher. I only came here because I didn't have anything else to do. To go to the university is a lot more expensive than coming here. Though I have managed to secure a place at this institution life is still tough for me as a female student, at times I even feel helpless to an extent that I can do anything to survive. Like now (November 2009) I haven't paid my examination fees and I don't know whether I am going to be able to pay the fees, because my father is late and my mother is not working and so with the situation in Zimbabwe with your parent or guardian not working and you do not have anyone else to depend on it is very difficult. Apart from that as a girl I have monthly periods (menstrual cycle) and I struggle because I can not afford to buy the required sanitary wear for myself. We have financial problems really. Most of the girls are at risk of getting some vaginal infections because most of us have been using pieces of cloth and cotton from the mattresses from our beds. We have got problems. Through my involvement with SCMZ I have realized that my vision for the future is to be involved in helping the youth of Zimbabwe even if it is not financially but can be through counseling or just the same in the same way I got involved with SCMZ. I have realized that good advice is constructive and builds a person. I want to be a source of inspiration, hope and direction to young people, especially young women.

Transactional sex as a means of survival

It is quite a painful experience, to see beautiful young girls resorting to using their bodies as a means of survival. That is the only way we can survive because most of us we come from disadvantaged families and here at college you are supposed to pay fees, buy books, research and even for upkeep. And you know your parents can not afford all that even if you tell them you know they won't do anything. Apart from that I have siblings at home who also need school fees. I got no option but to be entrepreneurial (transactional sex). Some even engage in sexual relationships with married men (known as sugar daddies) but in turn they know they get some financial support, but some even go to the extent of commercial sex work. Honestly this



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kind of thinking comes into every girl, I used to do that myself, but thank God for SCMZ and my Christian background I cannot do that anymore, but the pressure is there. Imagine if you think of not writing exams because you cannot afford and there comes someone who offers to pay for you in exchange of a sexual stint, it really needs strong will to resist such temptation. Those men even know that we are desperately in need of money so they take advantage of our situation.

Unwanted pregnancies and STIs is the reward

We indulge in those things (transactional sex) but the consequences are just too much. I have witnessed a number of girls getting pregnant ill timely and the people responsible deny responsibility because they have their own wives back home. So the girl is left on her own with the pregnancy. Some even get so unlucky to an extent of getting STIs not talking of HIV and AIDS. We have heard of some who failed to even graduate because of AIDS while some succumb to the disease few months after graduation. The situation is so pathetic and painful but honestly there is nothing we can do.



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**"IF YOU KEEP SILENT AT SUCH A TIME AS THIS..." ,
ESTHER 4 V 14**



My name is Lawrence Mashungu I am a Post Graduate student, studying Renewable Energy with the University of Zimbabwe. I did my first degree in Chemical Engineering with the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Bulawayo. Currently I am the National Chairperson of SCMZ. I started being involved in activism just after I finished my A' Levels, but I became more serious when I went to NUST.

I was and I am still concerned with the plight of the students and not just students but the plight of other people. When you stand up for the rights of students you will basically be standing for the rights of other people and maybe yourself but I am more concerned about the general welfare of the students and I feel that the leaders have to be responsible for the welfare of the citizens.

Defend the rights of the weak?

Most of the people in Zimbabwe have a peasantry background and as such it might be difficult for them to access some other services especially tertiary education which has proved to be expensive. So there used to be a revolving fund where students would access some funds, use it to learn and then after that they would return it to the government with some interest. We do not know what happened with the revolving fund whether the revolving fund became a leaking fund or we don't know; because something which is revolving should revolve and not leak but you would be surprised to hear that it is no longer there, those are some of the things I questioned. That the government should be transparent in their dealings, they should be responsible after all they are still taking taxes and what then are their priorities and at the same time they are using that same money to train the youth militias under the name of the National Youth Services. They would provide everything for these youth militias but surprisingly these militias do not have any value addition, they are only visible when ZANU-PF is addressing a rally, or are terrorizing people to vote for ZANU-PF. Then I would question why then do they fund such a bogus program at the expense of proper education system. But the Government and its political appointees at universities do not want to hear that. If you question that you are labeled anti-government and pro-west and consequently you are unlawfully arrested, detained and tortured for no apparent reason.

I started my first year in 2000, and coincidentally that year there was an election, the general election. That time I had to divide my time between the campaigns and going to school. By that time the student body had seen that there was no hope in the current regime, whether people liked it or not still we had to make a choice so that we can see some change of sorts. Then 2002 towards the end of it I got into the SRC then we started to have some serious problems because some of the lecturers really pronounced that they were ZANU-PF supporters and they would do anything to defend the status quo. I and the other SRC members were perceived to be opposition members. So when I got into the SRC my first meeting was with the vice chancellor, which was not a meeting really but it was a gathering where I was given some



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threats: you are now in the SRC, you are part of the administration, you should not antagonize us, when you have some grievances you should just come to the office, no demonstrations, demonstrations you will be expelled! And truly instead of finishing my five year programme as according to plan I ended up finishing a year later because one of the lecturers who had declared that he was ZANU-PF openly said to me you will not pass and he made me fail one of the easiest courses that you could ever think of. Also when I wanted to submit my project they refused citing that I had issues. I encountered a lot of victimization. Some of my comrades in the SRC had to finish three four, five years later. In some other courses you would get some poor grades because this lecturer supports ZANU whether you do bad or you do good your mark is just 50 % whether you write anything good your mark is the same. Some were even expelled, sometimes they make sure that you technically fail three courses this semester and the next and then you are out of the university. It is not rosy especially to be involved in student activism in Zimbabwe because whether what you are doing is political or not political they just blanket everyone under the banner of the MDC because you are a student leader.

Though the road was tough I never considered quitting. Coming from a Christian background even Jesus faced a lot of obstacles but he persevered. When we were elected into the SRC there were 15 of us but as time went by there were a lot of drop outs, not formal resignations as such but you will just notice that people were no longer active, there remained five of us who were active. For me it is a calling, but there are times I really felt I needed to go into hiding especially during the June 27. I was moving around with my passport ready to cross to the neighboring Botswana because things were tough at that time. Personally there was a time when I was first visited at home by these guys from the central intelligence organization. I had come from Bulawayo and I was staying at my brother's place, when these guys visited they harassed everyone there and the feeling I got was that now I am putting everyone at risk, though no one said it I felt that I had put them at risk. Then after the June 27 they visited my mother in the rural areas, they took her to the ZANU-PF base and started asking her questions then after she had finished saying those things they would take her to some beating and I just felt bad and it was bad. I had no problem with me being tortured but now they were extending such harassment to people at home because what was happening was that if you hear that a person has been abducted the only other question would be where are we going to find that person dumped because that person would only be found dead. It was really bad. So sometimes you might get some thoughts that things are really tough but we never thought of leaving activism.

As Christians we are supposed to uphold the values of society and the Government has an obligation to take care of its people. The bible is also calling for us to do good for our people and so when we are subjecting our people to torture, we are rigging elections, obviously we are saying to the people they have made wrong choices and we beat them that is against the Christian teachings.

I have witnessed a lot of young people being used by those people who have some political muscle to achieve whatever they want to achieve, like during elections you could see a lot of youths being bought some opaque beer, because of poverty they would definitely accept that and then after that they would be sent out to beat people up, to terrorize people. Thanks to progressive organizations like SCMZ who sacrificed their lives to mobilize young people to actively participate in national processes and claim their role in politics. And I have witnessed a



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lot of change among young people. Some even contested as candidates in the elections and they won.

The universities have been turned into a battle front. When the Government introduced the privatization of education, SCMZ and other student bodies organized an anti-privatization campaign. So when we were launching the campaign at the Harare Polytechnical College the principal and his informants called the police and they came with trucks, teargas and guns and we were arrested. There were more than twenty of us arrested. I stayed for more than 5 days in the cells, but the law says you cannot stay for more than 48 hrs without being tried. We spent the first day together the 20 of us then we were screened and then we were left eight and the third day we were screened again and left the three of us, myself, a lady called Maureen Kademaunga and Promise Mkwanzani, the president of ZINASU at that time; and they were saying these are the culprits. Before that we had also been arrested in Bulawayo for the same cause and they were saying these people have some problems. For the five days they would come during the night around 2am and we would be taken to some rooms for beatings and on the very last day which was a Friday we were taken to court and the usual thing that happens is they take you to the cells and they harass you and they know that when you go to the courts you will be acquitted so they make sure that during the first days of arrest you are harassed because that is the only way you are punished. The conditions in the cells are inhumane; we were not given food, the water you cannot even drink it because the cell is the toilet, bedroom and everything.

Above all, whether you take part in the political activities or don't take part or whatever you do be it curriculum at the college, be it whatever you eat, the price of bread that you are buying in the shops all those things are determined by politicians. It is in fact the policies that are determined by the politicians that run the community. So for one to live the way e or she wants it is rather better and good for them to be involved at policy level and basically that is politics, so you cannot run away from participating in political activities because whatever will happen to you at the end of the day will be determined by the politicians. So the students as the vanguard or as the voice of the voiceless have to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak after all they are the ones who are studying and can do the research, they are better placed to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. So everyone basically has to be concerned with the running of one's country, one's community hence no one should be exempted from participating in political activities.



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POLITICAL INTOLERANCE NEARLY TOOK MY LIFE



My name is Nyaradzo Madzikura I am 29 years old and I live in Mkoba, Gweru. I became a member of SCMZ in 2003 after I was introduced by one of the members. Then, I was a student studying Hotel and Catering at Herentals College in Gweru. I tried to get a job in the hotels but the responses I got were not good so I just thought it won't work. I wanted to be a head chef in hotels, I still want to be and I will keep on trying because I know one day it will work out, but the current employment situation is not so favorable because the industry is down.

Being a member of SCMZ has come with a number of benefits, firstly through SCMZ I have interacted and networked with many influential people, particularly those involved in politics. This has helped me to broaden my network in politics because I do have a special interest in politics. I have a passion for politics because it helps me to think critically about my country and future as a young person. Politics also gives me a platform to equip other young people to take control of their own lives. Young people should know their rights and even students should know their rights.

"I had to flee from home"

Just after the 29 March elections ZANU-PF youths started hunting for people who were purported to be Morgan Tsvangirai supporters and because of my involvement with SCMZ I was also labeled an opposition supporter. But this line of thinking is wrong, SCMZ does not subscribe to any political party. You can be ZANU-PF, ZAPU or what ever party and be a member of SCMZ. Fortunately, just before they raided our house one of ZANU-PF youths tipped me that they were planning to raid our home and beat me. At first I thought it was a joke, but the same person also came to my mother and told her the same story that I should flee and find refuge somewhere because ZANU-PF youths were after me. That is when it dawned at me that I was really in danger , so I had to flee from home and went to my aunt's place in Harare. Even though I had fled from home, they came to our house and toy-toyed at our gate, demanding to see me. But thank God nothing serious happened to my parents. I was afraid that they were going to hurt my family because I had seen them beating up other people. The most painful part was that I knew these people, they were my neighbors and some were my former school mates.

In Harare, things were not rosy. I was staying with my Aunt who was renting a small apartment. To worsen the situation, my other two friends from Gweru also faced the same threats and fled to Harare. And they had no where to stay, so I had to persuade my Aunt to take them in. But things got even worse, as my Aunt's landlord began to complain that we were overcrowded in his house, so we were stranded with no where to go. After about three weeks I then phoned home and decided to go back. I had no option because things in Harare were getting worse; I had no accommodation, no food, and no money. When we returned back home the atmosphere was better, they (ZANU-PF youth) were no longer beating up people. I met them at some occasions but they did not ask me or say anything, they pretended as if



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everything was normal, we are now talking and I have no problem with that. Young people are just victims of greedy politicians. They were used by some ZANU PF leaders to force people to vote for their party. It is so painful that as young people we are used by politicians as agents of violence for their personal gains and we gain nothing other than opaque beer. Some have been promised money, but they never got it, they were just empty promises. Some are even feeling sorry for themselves; they have realized that it does not pay in any way to go around beating and terrorizing people. Some have even come to me and apologized, and I have forgiven them. I strongly believe that my duty now is to help these young people unlearn their experiences and reintegrate into the normal society because some are now like outcasts. No one wants to associate with them anymore, even the same politicians who used them.

Being involved in politics as a young parent

I am a mother of one, and currently my daughter is still in primary school. Being involved in politics as a young single mother has not been an easy decision to make, because I am a single mother and as such am the only parent available for the child, to give her all the love, care and support she needs from parents. But my involvement in politics has left me with no choice but to leave my child in the custody of my parents. So my parents are playing a very big role in raising my daughter. Since I am not at home all the time to see her off to school my mother takes care of her. My mom is like her mother. It pains me sometimes to think that I can not be always there for my child. It makes me feel like I have failed her. But my consolation comes when I remind myself that the work I am doing is not just benefiting me only, but every Zimbabwean youth. I feel so good when I am doing SCMZ work because I get the chance to interact with other young people and we get a chance to discuss issues that affect us on a daily basis and how we can contribute to make our country a better country. I feel proud to be part of this movement. But this has come with its share of sorrows and regrets. I hate to see young people being used by politicians for wrong things. Politicians are taking advantage of the high unemployment rates in the country. Most young people got nothing to do, they are just idle and politicians use them. But surprisingly you find some refusing to participate in youth focused activities. This pains me most because I feel every youth must participate in shaping their own future. I thank my father for ever encouraging me. He gives me the courage to keep doing the work I do and stand for what is just and right.

My faith and strong belief in the Lord has also kept me going. At my church I am the girls' fellowship leader and this has helped me to influence other young girls to actively participate in determining their future. I value my time with God especially when things go wrong I know that God is the only one who can make my life better. I thank him for everything. I would be dead by now if it was not for Him.

My hope

I want a future that would be free from politically motivated violence. A Zimbabwe where young people would be free to support any political party they want, where elections are regulated by an independent body with young people being able to choose the leader they want, a leader that will lead us better than Robert Mugabe is doing.



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I SACRIFICED FOR STUDENTS RIGHTS



My name is Robson Chere, I am 25 years old. I come from Harare. I am a student teacher at Hillside Teachers College in Bulawayo. I was elected into the SRC in 2007 and currently I am the SRC President. I am also a member of SCMZ. I joined SCMZ when I was at high school. At this institution SCMZ has got more than 150 members. I started getting involved in politics when I joined the SRC because as a student leader you have to defend the rights of the students. When I was nominated to run for the SRC elections, I did not know that I was automatically entering into the political arena, I only realized later and there was no way out because I am also a human rights defender. It was also coincidental that SCMZ was running a campaign on promoting youth participation in civic advocacy which is basically hinged on standing for what is just and right. So I told myself that I will stick with the principles. I am in it and I should do it for the students and I will not betray them.

Who can be silent at such a time?

My source of inspiration is Ester 4 verse 7 which says that "if you keep silent at such a time as this you and your children will perish". So I told myself that I can no longer afford to be silent when I witness students rights being taken for granted. I should denounce any injustices. I said if I am to face any consequences then let me face and of course I faced so many consequences. I was arrested several times and beaten by the police, state security agents looking for me but up to now I am still on my position I will not go back I will speak the truth, I will speak for the students. No one should infringe our rights, our God given rights so by all means necessary we will go and tell the students their rights and we have the right to education and we cannot be denied our right to education. As students we were being given loans and grants before to support our education, to pay fees but for the past three years we were not being given those grants and loans so it was us the student leaders who would stand up and mobilize students to have a peace protest so that we would send a message that we are not happy we do not have the money to pay, we want to learn and serve the nation. So organizing those peace protests we ended up being taken to the police station and being prosecuted.

I was first arrested in February 2008 after we organized a peaceful demonstration in town. We had mobilized students from all institutions around town because we wanted to hand in a petition to the ministry of higher and tertiary education demanding the loans and grants back. When we were about to go the police from the Hillside Police Station came here and arrested me for violating POSA. I was beaten, tortured and all sorts of abuses. They also ordered the school authorities to bar me from participating in any SRC activities neither was I allowed to walk with more than three people. They knew that I was mobilizing students to go and vote because we were towards March elections. I was also denied accommodation at the college residents, they said I would incite other students to demand their rights. During that time state agency would visit the institution monitoring all my movements ensuring that I am not involved



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in any activities. But I remained resilient and went to the principal and told him frankly that students want me as their leader. As a student leader I should talk to the students, listen to the students' grievances, sit down with the students together make a way forward.

The withdrawal of grants and student loans has serious consequences on student lives. Students resorted to anything to raise funds to pay their fees. Some like the female students resorted to prostitution, even male students were also involved in other things like having sexual relationships with elder women, and some were being used by other political parties to spy on other political parties so that they can get money to pay for their school fees, which have proved to be so exorbitant.

They could not kill my spirit

After the historic demonstration over exorbitant fees, I was barred from contesting in any SRC elections they said because I had a pending case with the police. But this did not go down well with the students themselves because they wanted me to contest. They then wrote a petition to the administration demanding a rerun and according to the college constitution if a quarter of the students pass a vote of no confidence in the SRC then there should be a runoff and in that case the administration was left with no option but to call for a runoff and I won the elections. They had strong reasons to keep me out of the elections because they want leaders who are like prefects at high school. They want the kind of leaders that they can bully around and they knew I was not that kind of a person. They do not want leaders who stand for student rights, they think if one is vocal is anti government. The petition was signed by 250 students and I felt that students do have confidence in me and I pledged to them that I would never fail them as long as it involves students issues. I felt that after all the torture and abuses I have been through at the hands of the police I can not just quit student politics. I had to be strong and defend the rights of the students. They failed to kill my spirit.

They have tried to arrest and beat me several times, but I told myself that there is no reason for me to stop because I have already suffered and I have already faced the consequences so I cannot run away from this. If I try to run away they will still look for me so I am already in it and I have never decided to quit, it actually gives the strength and courage to move on. Thanks to SCMZ for their human rights workshops, they have also shown me the light that human rights are God given and no one should take them away.



SURVIVING ON THE BLOOD OF MY OWN PEOPLE

My name is Tungamirai Gumiso* (not real name), I am a student at Hillside Teachers' College and I am 23 years old. I come from a very humble background. Like any other student I am facing so many challenges. Sometimes I even go for the whole day on one meal. I had no option but to look for an alternative source of income.

My life as a informant

Before I joined SCMZ I used to work as a police informant. My job was to provide information updates to the police on political issues among students, planned demonstrations as well as selling out student leaders. Some of them have actually been taken, detained and beaten by the police and would appear after some days. There was this policeman at the local police station who would give me some money for my upkeep, but still it was very little to cater for my fees. But when I met one of the SCMZ members who introduced me to their programmes officer during one of their activities at our institution, I realized that what I was doing was not right at all because the challenges being faced by any student were also affecting me. The most critical principle that transformed me was the respect for human life. I used to think I was the cleverest one amongst all the students but now I hate it and never want to go back there. Since then my life has changed and now I am a full member of SCMZ and I regret whatever I was doing back there and I have opened a new chapter. I am the one who used to sellout on the SRC activities. I never felt terrible then. But the feelings have now changed; I respect Robson Chere (Hillside Teachers College SRC President) for the boldness that he took in my road to transformation. Despite the fact that I was strongly against him, he went off his way, swallowed hatred and worked for our reunion. Now I see SCMZ with a different eye, they are a unifying body among students. I no longer have any hard feelings towards him. We are now close to each other. We have traveled together, gone to all outreach meetings together and that has strengthened us. I never thought that he would forgive me after all I have put him through. I engineered most of his arrests. He only came to know it after I told him. That was the first step I had to take. I had to tell him. When I told him he just took it as it was, he showed a lot of understanding but I do not know how long the healing process took, but now I am actually convinced that he is a healed man. With the Christian values that are enshrined in the principles of SCMZ I feel that I have to do the right thing and not the other thing and I feel that SCMZ has been on the fore front in helping students especially at institutions like this to stay morally upright and have respect for human life. My message to other youths who are still involved in political violence is very simple; lets unite and fight against politically motivated violence because we the youth are the future and if we are to have a future which is violent it means we may destroy the whole nation. Remember people say an eye for an eye will make the whole nation blind and so we should learn that politics as it is should not be a violent thing that is why we talk of democracy, it simply allows everyone to express his or her own views and to vote for whoever he or she wishes. As young people we should always remember that politicians want to manipulate us to their own advantage but after they use us they dump us. Refuse to be used.



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About SCMZ

The Student Christian Movement of Zimbabwe (SCMZ) is a registered non-profit making welfare organization with an interest in students and young people aiming at addressing their changing needs.

Vision:

A just, peaceful and transparent society in which young people enjoy equitable resource allocation and equal opportunities in education, career guidance and employment.

Mission:

To conscientise and mobilize students and youth to be pro-active in society for positive change.

Overall goal:

To build a movement that is relevant and sensitive to the socio-economic and political issues affecting young people.

