



Healing the Zimbabwe Tertiary Education

Paper presented by SST (not for profit and non-partisan civil society organization) to Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Technology.

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1. Case for a Multi-donor Fund: Government can not go it alone

To realize the developmental benefits of tertiary education, the challenges faced in the provision of higher education in Zimbabwe need to be addressed through collective efforts from stakeholders. These collective efforts must be located in the context that both governance and planning of higher education are a national responsibility with the government expected to play a leading role. Government through the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture (MoESAC) working together with the United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) have already set up a framework or model for a stakeholder collective approach in the mould of the Education Transition Fund (ETF).

The tertiary education sector in Zimbabwe faces daunting challenges that has compromised the calibre of its produce as a result of the cumulative impact of a decade of political and economic crisis. The challenges are diverse and far reaching to an extent that government can not address them effectively alone. **Government of Zimbabwe can not go it alone** neither through highly contested Cadetship Scheme and Presidential Scholarship. Universities and colleges face inadequate financial, material, human and other support resources. The brain drain of senior lecturers and academics exerts an enormous constraint on the capacity of the system to reproduce itself. Physical facilities necessary to undertake quality teaching, learning and research are in short supply

and in many cases where such facilities are available they are run down, and grossly inadequate.

Zimbabwe's political and economic problems are far from being over. Political developments such as elections always pose a threat to political and economic stability. Stakeholders in tertiary education must not anticipate a complete political and economic stability before they decide to bring their heads together for collaborative relationships. There is no country in the world that does not have its fair share of periods of political crisis. However service delivery can not be stalled so as to put the house in order first. Some stakeholders are of the view that elections should come and go before a collaborative stakeholder approach.

The case for a multi-donor fund for the recovery of tertiary education sector is inspired by a similar fund in pre-tertiary education recovery. On September 14th 2009, the Zimbabwe's Minister of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture launched the multi-million United States Dollar ETF; a partnership between the government of Zimbabwe, UNICEF and UNESCO, donor governments and civil society, aimed at achieving national impact in the pre-tertiary education sector. This far the initiative received favourable support from the International Community in particular the European Union (EU) which made significant contributions. ETF is meant to ensure that every child in Zimbabwe has access to textbooks, as well as learning materials and stationary and so far 13 million textbooks have been printed and distributed. This is expected to reduce textbook student ratio from 1:20 to 1:1.

The Student Solidarity Trust urges the Portfolio Committee on Education and Members of Parliament (MPs) to call upon the Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education to initiate platforms for all stakeholder engagement in addressing challenges faced by the tertiary education sector. The ministry can initiate meetings with civil society organizations and international donors to initiate the process of coming up with the Fund. The committee must also extract an express commitment from the Minister in attending to Higher Education short term priority needs.

SST also calls on the parliamentarians to:

- Familiarize themselves, in particular those MPs whom institutions of higher learning are located within their constituencies, with the

problems faced by these institutions; lecturers and students especially female and disabled students;

- Create legislation that provide for specific funding for tertiary students' welfare through student loans or grants and to facilitate that the infamous cadetship scheme is done away with;
- Remove legislative barriers that constrain student and academic staff mobility, hinder the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for education, and prevent lower customs duties on research and ICT equipment;
- Guard against violation of Acts of Parliament that provide for the existence of Student Representative bodies currently being effectively restricted in their operations by university authorities;
- Affirm the crucial role and impact of higher education in national reconstruction and development;
- During Question and Answer segment we urge the committee members to take responsible ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education to task on the afore mentioned issues;
- To facilitate that the Presidential Scholarship's administration including selection of beneficiaries is either brought under the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education for it to continue receiving funding from treasury or continue being run by the Executive Director but exclusively being funded privately or by the President;

- To hold public hearings with students.

2. Restriction of Operations of SRCs at tertiary universities

Student Representative Councils (SRCs) are an essential and critical link between students and authorities. In many tertiary institutions, these representative councils serve the purpose of transmitting students' needs, requirements and grievances to college and university authorities. On the other hand, they also communicate the various plans universities and colleges might have in improving the quality of education provided. As part of the college or university governance structure, they straddle the balance of both the students and authorities and try to work out the usually rocky relations.

However, in Zimbabwe's colleges the representative councils have been perceived and or presented themselves as pariahs only bent on causing trouble, disharmony and sleepless nights for university authorities. Despite the fact that the nation's public and private sectors boast of several former student leaders of their time, current college and university authorities have stifled the natural succession of these representative councils through lack of logistical and moral support for holding of successive elections. UZ and NUST have gone for years without elected representative councils. Principals and vice chancellors have often abused the immense powers they have courtesy of various acts of parliament to muzzle and gag students by infringing on holding of elections.

At the University of Zimbabwe, the last legitimate election for a Student Representative Council was in 2007. The vice chancellor, Professor Levi Nyagura stand accused by students of having covertly barred the

conducting of elections making usurious demands to students to bring exorbitant amounts in registration. This has caused a communication break-down between authorities and students for the last few years. In those few years, the University has experienced numerous shut-downs, completely closed the halls of residence and a significant deterioration in the quality of education offered at the institution. Acknowledging the fact that it is not only the inactive SRC that has brought about this decline, the situation has certainly been worsened by the unavailability of communication channels between University of Zimbabwe authorities and students via a students' body.

The introduction of the multi-currency system has also come with its own problems as principals in some colleges now demand that students who want to be part of the SRC should be fully paid up. This has seriously restricted the number of students who can take part as not many students are able to afford the often astronomic fees charged at these tertiary institutions. In some instances, administration is appointing the SRC, diluting its legitimacy as some of the SRC's legitimacy derives from it being an elected body of students and not administration appointees.

The Students Solidarity Trust calls on the Committee:

- To foster adherence to acts of parliament e.g. UZ Act recognising the role and importance of SRCs in tertiary institutions and to amend any restrictions to their smooth operation and restrictive provisions that give vice chancellors too much powers.
- Moderation of college authority powers that allow them to wantonly expel and suspend students especially those in the SRCs in institutions of higher learning.

- An inspection of governance structures in tertiary institutions by the portfolio committee to ascertain problems they may be facing.
- Advocate for funding for tertiary institutions to improve the quality of education.
- Initiate hearings to ascertain the state of higher education from the minister, permanent secretary, vice chancellors and college principals
- Hold public hearings for students for tertiary institution clusters.

3. Closed UZ halls of residence

University of Zimbabwe student activists have in the recent past staged class boycotts and demonstration demanding that halls of residence that were shut down in July 2007 be re-opened. Re-opening of the halls of residence was supposed to take place beginning of last semester that come to end on December 24, 2010; however poor funding stalled the process. The prospects of opening of the halls have however received a major boost from the 2011 national budget. The most recent class boycott was led by the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) on October 18, 2010. The halls of residence were closed following 3 day demonstrations at campus over poor catering services by the Department of Accommodation and Catering Services (DACs).

Finance Minister Biti on November 25 2010 in his budget statement noted the chronic lack of accommodation at colleges and universities. He allocated a total of 78.6 million dollars to state universities to build renovate and reopen halls of residence. This was broken down into two, 48.6 million dollars for rehabilitation and face-lifting of current infrastructure and 30 million dollars for construction of new halls of residence in state institutions including teacher accommodation and

water reticulation facilities. In addition the student grant/loan scheme scrapped off in February 2006 was revived by the Finance Minister.

The University of Zimbabwe has 9 halls of residence; New Complex one to five, Manfred Hudson Hall, Swinton, New Hall and Carr Saunders with capacity to accommodate over 4500 students of its over 12000 students. Over 8000 students are expected to look for self-accommodation. The University also has off-campus hostels for Social Work Students which are Montrose and Georgette and Mount Royal a hostel for medical students located in the city centre of Harare. The university has other housing facilities located in different areas through out the country for its visiting students.

The Student Solidarity Trust will be urging the university to prioritise accommodating the disabled and female students when halls of residence re-open. Further SST hopes that the individual allocations to students of the availed 15 million from the 2011 national budget and ZB bank anticipated contributions for student grants shall be adequate to cover accommodation fees and ancillary costs without need for topping up by students.

4. The case for Victimization of Students Activists

The rate at which student activists are being victimized in their struggle for academic freedom has been noted as continuously increasing in Zimbabwe's Institutions of Higher Learning with particular reference to the year 2010. This calls for concern as it has become one of the major challenges faced within these institutions which has resulted in terrible effects to the education sector. This victimization comes in the form of suspensions, expulsions and arrests. It is every child's right to access affordable education in an environment that is conducive to learning but because the responsible authorities are not responding positively to their needs, students then resort to more violent and to them seemingly more effective ways of expressing themselves like demonstrations, boycotts

etc. Student activists have been arrested on many occasions for participating in illegal gatherings following demonstrations across the country.

Reference is made to the June's Solidarity of the Students Solidarity Trust (SST), where students from the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) were arrested after they had participated in a demonstration against NUST officials' decision to bar students who had not paid fees from writing examinations.

It seems Zimbabwe's political problems are far from being over as every attempt made by the students to be heard will ever be politicized which then results in more and more victimization of students.

The SST calls on the committee to:

- Ensure that students are given enough ground to air out their views beginning from those in institutions of Higher learning which are within their constituencies.
- Ensure there is urgent response to the concerns of the student body with regular consultations as to what they require, what is missing and their expectations concerning service delivery within the education sector.
- Allow student representations within institutions of Higher learning as they are currently barred by college authorities for example a UZ case whereby a student Tinashe Chisaire was hauled before a disciplinary hearing for calling for elections.
- To reinstate unconditionally student leaders/activists expelled on political grounds during the period between the year 2000 and 2008.

