ZINASU Monthly Briefing Paper: April 2009
ZINASU
May 18, 2009

1.0 Introduction

This paper seeks to outline the state of the education sector in Zimbabwe in the month of April. There is still no significant development in the education sector since the formation of the inclusive government. Many tertiary institutions closed for the Easter vacation, after a long term characterised by serious financial problems. It is now an undisputable fact that higher education in Zimbabwe is no longer a right of every citizen rich or poor but a preserve for the elite. Affordability is a key element of college opportunity; ZINASU has always been committed to the idea that talent and motivation rather than financial resources should govern higher education accessibility. Government slashed the fees in March, although the move was welcome, students called for a further reduction because the fees were still beyond the reach of the majority. An assessment made by the Bindura University of Science Education showed that only 392 students out of a population of 1838 students managed to pay the revised fees in full[1].

There is a transitional government in Zimbabwe, but the benefits of political stability have not yet been felt in the socio-economic field, mainly because the economy is in dire need of massive financial injection to begin the road to recovery. The harsh reality that students and Zimbabweans at large have to accept is that the inclusive government has not yet managed to mobilise the resources needed to resuscitate / or stimulate the economy.

The problems that have rocked institutions in April all emanate from the issue of affordability of education. Applicants for the cadetship scheme continue to hit a brick wall, in their bid to secure funding to continue their studies. Prospective cadets at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) were informed that they had to pay tuition fees and will be reimbursed once funding had come from the Government[2]. At National University of Science and Technology (NUST), students who failed to pay tuition fees were barred from writing examinations. The biggest and oldest institution of higher education in Zimbabwe, which has a population of around 12000 students, is still closed mainly due to financial constraints, further depriving the right to education for the poor who are the majority of students at University of Zimbabwe.

Suspensions and arrests of students' activists and leaders that characterised the month of April also emanated from the issue of economic accessibility of education. Students were demonstrating against de-registration and barring of students who had failed to pay from writing examinations, leading to their arrests[3] and suspensions from college.

1.1 Structure of the paper

The monthly briefing paper focuses on six priority areas in the education sector. After this introduction, Chapter 2 outlines a monitoring framework divided into five sections.

2.0 Monitoring Framework

2.1 University Governance, Autonomy and Academic freedoms

a) Situation Analysis

There is no doubt that a university/college needs autonomy and a measure of freedom for its academics if it has to play its role of generating and disseminating knowledge effectively. The autonomy of Zimbabwean institutions is still compromised as there hasn't been any repeal of provisions that limit institutional autonomy in the laws.[4] The spirit of inclusiveness is not being wholly exhibited in some institutions, where they are still hostile to students' exercise of academic freedoms. Government is still continuing with the pre- GNU practice of making education reforms without consulting students, the Minister of Higher Education announced that a Zimbabwe Qualifications Authority Bill was being drafted, the process flies in the face of inclusivity as it is being done without including all relevant stakeholders, in particular students. This Bill further limits institutional autonomy, as it will provide for the appointment of a board by the Minister of Higher Education in consultation with the President and in accordance with any directions the President may give[5]. These provisions grant so much power in the hands of the President ignoring the input by institutions and students.

Ten students at NUST were suspended following the staging of peaceful protests over the de-registration of students who had failed to pay tuition fees. The students were served with letters suspending them with immediate effect pending a disciplinary hearing; they were also barred from entering the college campus and sitting for examinations. The suspended students are Kurai Hoyi, Samson Nxumalo, Vivid Gwede, Mukai Chigumo, Christopher Hwacha, Tawanda Saiti, Fortune Kariminzira, Degray Ziramba, Michael Zimamba, Taurai Chimwanza.The institution denied these students their right to education, by suspending them, they failed to sit for their end of semester examinations, and thus they are already behind with their studies. Suspensions of student activists has been used in the past by the then ruling ZANU PF government, through the powers of the Vice Chancellors[6] to deter student leaders from activism and standing up against violation of human rights. It is shocking that Vice Chancellors are still using these archaic powers during this transitional era.

On 22 April 2009, 22 students at GZU were arrested following a peaceful protest over the exorbitant fees demanded by the institution. The students were detained at Rujeko Police Station and released on the 24th of April. The ZINASU Secretary for Legal Affairs, Courage Ngwarai however remained in custody for seven days; the police were accusing him of leading the demonstrations at GZU and for leading demonstrations at the same institution in 2007.

There however has been a slight improvement in college authorities' respect of students' academic freedoms, as evidenced by the successful holding of Student Representatives Council (SRC) elections at NUST and GZU. College authorities used to impose leaders on students, or defer the holding of elections, leaving students with no representative body to fearlessly air their grievances to the institutions and government.

On 22 April 2009, 22 students at GZU were arrested following a peaceful protest over the exorbitant fees demanded by the institution. The students were detained at Rujeko Police Station and released on the 24th of April.

b) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- The arrests, detention and suspension of student leaders and activist
- Government is not consulting students when initiating educational reforms

c) Policy Options

- Reforming laws such as the University of Zimbabwe Act
- Introducing new procedures that make it mandatory to consult all relevant stakeholders when implementing educational reforms

2.2 Higher Education Funding

a) Situation Analysis

The University of Zimbabwe (UZ) failed to open when among other reasons only 68 out of 12000 students paid tuition fees[7] The UZ Vice Chancellor Professor Levy Nyagura expected to rectify some of the problems facing the institutions through fees received from students[8].

Government took steps to intervene and tried to make education affordable through the cadetship scheme and slashing the fees. This was in vain because the cadetship scheme has no funds, whilst the revised fees[9] are still unaffordable. Despite calls from ZINASU, for government to further slash the fees which were still beyond the reach of many, there was no further reduction and institutions continued to demand that students pay the fees. At NUST students who failed to pay their tuition fees were barred from sitting for examinations, triggering demonstrations which resulted in the suspension of ten students. Great Zimbabwe University added examinations fees of USD$50 to the fees structure approved by government, which ranged from USD 150-USD 400. Students who did not afford to pay the examination fees were not allowed to sit for examinations.

This is a sad development amidst an environment that is already closing the educational doors for the poor; instead of introducing measures that will lighten the financial burden on students, institutions continue making the burden heavier. The students who were barred from writing their examinations are now behind with their academic studies, delaying the completion of their education, thus impacting on their future and the future of the nation which will be full of unschooled youths.

The cadetship scheme could not rescue the desperate students as those who applied were told to pay first then get re-imbursements from government later. Such a demand by authorities from Great Zimbabwe University is an insult of prospective cadets, who cannot afford the money to pay first. Students are being forced to drop out of school, following failure by government to find concrete ways of making education affordable by all. At Bindura University of Science Education there has been a 12% student drop out[10], due to unaffordability of education. Students at Mutare Poly are still waiting for their examination results; they wrote in January 2009, results are not yet out as there is no money to pay lecturers. These students' future is not certain as they cannot proceed without results, those who had written their final examinations cannot seek for employment without the full results.

Without adequate funding from government and other sources education in Zimbabwe will remain inaccessible to the majority. BUSE needs a total amount US$4.5 million to properly function for the Semester set to begin on the 4th of May 2009[11], whilst the University of Zimbabwe requires $4.6 million to resuscitate its crippled infrastructure and operations[12]. Government needs to continue vigorously sourcing for money to fund the Ministry and to urgently come up with alternative practical pro-student ways of funding tertiary institutions.

b) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- Government has failed to fund the Ministry of Higher Education, thus the non-availability of funds under the cadetship scheme.
- Failure by institutions to get funds from other sources, resulting in over-reliance on fees paid by students to continue operating.
- Barring of students who cannot afford the tuition fees from writing examinations

c) Policy Options

- The creation of strong higher education- business enterprise partnerships at institutional level will provide a source of funding through scholarships, research and consultancy contracts.
- The urgent creation of a fully dedicated national student funding scheme that will raise and disburse funds to eligible students.

2.3 Lecturer Attrition/Flight

a) Situation Analysis

Lecturers are among the lowest paid in the country, they are getting USD 100 per month, irregardless of qualifications or experience. State tertiary institutions are facing a serious shortage of teaching personnel. Lecturers have been leaving the profession at an alarming rate, in search for better working conditions. Institutions such as Harare Poly-tech have resorted to employing under- qualified lecturers[13], whilst at MSU very few lectures are taking place since most lecturers are not reporting for duty. Mutare Poly-technic remains closed, since results from the previous term are not yet out, lecturers have not marked the examinations, as there is no motivation to do so in light of their conditions of service. One of the reasons for the continued closure of the UZ, is the shortage of lecturers and the refusal by lecturers to return to work until their conditions of service are improved[14].The lecturer exodus has left behind a vacuum for skilled and professional teaching personnel, thus affecting the quality of education.

b) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- Inadequate remuneration for teachers and lecturers to live a decent life
- Absence of personal development incentives for teachers and lecturers to advance their qualifications

c) Policy Options

- Need to come up with competitive incentives for teachers to minimise the mass exodus of staff in search for greener pastures.
- Government should work on retaining donor and investor confidence as a way of attracting more funding for lecturers salaries

2.4 Quality Control Mechanisms

a) Situation Analysis

Managing quality in the face of gross under- funding is very difficult. Each tertiary institution has a body called a Senate, which is a creation of its establishing Act. The Senate is charged with the regulation and superintendence of the teaching and quality of academic work of an institution[15]. In light of the financial problems affecting institutions it is trite that the quality of education received significantly dropped and continued to decline in the month of April. The lecturer exodus and the unavailability of teaching materials created a scenario where so many teacher dependant students are relying on very few underpaid lecturers. Councils can be appointed, Senates can be tasked and held responsible but the present scenario captured above cannot guarantee quality assurance. A Zimbabwe Qualifications Authority bill is being drafted, the new legislation will create a Zimbabwe Qualifications Authority that will oversee the development and administration of a Zimbabwe qualifications framework, whose objective will among other things, be to improve educational quality. This process was done without consultation of students. The President of ZINASU Mr Clever Bere[16], condemned the proposed bill on the basis that there was no consultation with students, and that this reflected on government's insensitivity towards students' aspirations.

The quality of graduates to be produced by institutions in the country is questionable, since most institutions are engaging the services of under qualified lecturers, students are being denied access to lecturer rooms after failing to pay tuition fees and libraries have outdated books, the list is long.

A Council for Higher Education that will be responsible for the registration and accreditation of universities was appointed[17]. The Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education Minister Dr Stan Mudenge said that the council was established by an Act of Parliament with the mandate to sustain and guarantee quality assurance in university by accrediting, monitoring and advancing quality at all universities in Zimbabwe[18] . Although it is a welcome development, the move won't do much to improve the quality of education, as the decline in educational standards is due to lack of funds.

Quality assurance and financial capacity of institutions are inseparable, government has to seriously look into the issue of capacitating state institutions so as to restore academic standards and ensure that our institutions become competitive regionally and internationally. In Africa's top 100 Universities, the University of Zimbabwe is the only Zimbabwean university in the top 100 and is ranked 47th[19].Institutions are ranked based on , quality of education, availability of modern and adequate teaching and learning material, quantity and quality of research, size and quality of internet presence, amongst others. These rankings are a valid indicator of the educational standards of institutions; the fact that only one institution made it in the top 100 indicates that higher education in Zimbabwe is way below regional and far from international standards.

b) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- Quality control has been greatly compromised by the lack of funds in all state institutions
- Appointments of boards and implementation of quality control mechanisms without consulting students, and without availing funds to ensure effective implementation.

c) Policy Options

- Colleges ought to fund raise independently of the Government for the development of their institutions
- Introducing new procedures that make it mandatory to consult all relevant stakeholders when implementing educational reforms

2.5 Research and Development Infrastructure

a) Situation Analysis

The current environment in all state institutions does not foster research productivity or innovation by both students and academic staff. Lecturers are underpaid therefore have no motivation to produce quality and innovative research. Inadequate equipment and testing facilities, limited funds allocated to research by the institution, absence of remuneration and the deficiency in the relationship between industrial or business enterprises and institutions to support research and development are among other factors that have affected the quality and quantity of research. The Midlands State University is facing serious shortages in learning materials such as computers and laboratory equipment and insufficient access to the internet, this impairs students' research work.

b) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- Research and development infrastructure in institutions have been left in the doldrums due to lack of funds, whilst government has taken a backseat in promoting research

c) Policy Options

- Higher education institutions can partner with the corporate world to provide a source of funding through scholarships, research and consultancy contracts

3.0 Conclusion

This transitional period is a time for the inclusive government, ZINASU and educationalists to transform the education in order to save the future of the nation as education is a vital tool for development. There is need for all three parties in the inclusive government to fully uphold the GPA and act in good faith, as this will retain donor and investor confidence in the country. ZINASU will not tire in playing its role of defending the right to education in Zimbabwe.

NOTES

[1] Interview with Chiedza Gadzirayi the ZINASU Secretary for Legal Affairs, she seats in the BUSE Senate and attended an emergency Senate meeting on 30 April

[2] Interviews with students from GZU carried out on 27 April 2009 by ZINASU information department

[4] The University of Zimbabwe Act (to which all university acts are modelled) and SI 81 of 1999, which governs teachers and poly-technic colleges

[5] Article by Clemence Manyukwe, The Zimbabwe situation

[6] Section 10 of the University of Zimbabwe Act allows the VC to suspend or expel a student

[7] The Sunday Mail of May 3 2009

[8] The Sunday Mail of May 3 2009

[9] The fees range from USD 100- USD 650

[10] Interview with Chiedza Gadzirayi, ZINASU Secretary for International Relations who sits in the BUSE Senate

[11] Interview with Chiedza Gadzirayi

[12] UZ Vice Chancellor Professor Levy Nyagura in an interview with the Sunday Mail-03 May 2009

[13] Findings of a survey carried out by ZINASU Information department

[14] Announcement by Levy Nyagura on national television on 7 April 2009

[15] For example The University of Zimbabwe Act, section 15(1)

[16] In an interview with Radio Voice of the People on 20 April 2009

[17] Friday 24 April 2009

[18] The Herald Friday 24 April 2009

[19] According to 4universities and colleges-www.4icu.org