

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Situation Analysis

It is over one month since the inception of the Government of National Unity on the 11th of February 2009. The formation of the inclusive Government raised so much hope within the people of Zimbabwe who had suffered severely due to the twin crisis of governance and legitimacy bedevilling the nation. To date, no meaningful development has taken place in the education sector. ZINASU has a membership base of 43 institutions in Zimbabwe, of the 43, almost all have opened for the 2009 academic year except the University of Zimbabwe, but the turnout in most of the colleges is very low.[1] The dollarization of education continues to affect the poor. After series of demonstrations by ZINASU over the dollarization of education and the exorbitant fees charged by institutions, the Government announced on the 5th of March 2009[2] a reduction of the fee structures, but the fees demanded are still way beyond the reach of many students. College authorities at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) announced revised fees ranging between a minimum of USD150 to a maximum of USD600[3] which are still unreasonably exorbitant. The Government is still struggling to pay lecturers salaries in foreign currency. At Midlands State University, lecturers downed tools after the delay in the processing of salaries, resulting in disturbances in lecturers.[4] There is serious need for the Government to be sincere in addressing the problems facing the education sector.

The University Of Zimbabwe failed to open for the second time this year[5]. Students failed to pay the USD150 demanded by the institution, from a research carried out by ZINASU on the 15th of March 2009; only 10% of students had managed to pay the exorbitant fees resulting in the college failing to open. The Government introduced the cadetship programme in 2006 which was meant for students who could not afford to pay for their education. To date, students who have applied for the programme for 2009 have not received anything from the Government. College Authorities at Bindura University and Mutare Polytechnic College who wanted to submit the forms to the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education were forced to return with the forms, the Government was citing that the funds for the cadetship programme were not yet available[6]. This scenario has left many students stranded with no alternative but to drop out of college or to go abroad and explore other options.

The National University of Science and Technology (NUST) administration on the 12th of March barred students from campus for failure to produce proof of paying the exorbitant fees. Students in the commerce fraternity were forced to pay USD512 and USD600 for engineering students. The institution also demanded that students pay USD200 by the 16th of March 2009 and the remainder by month end. Many students failed to meet the deadline resulting in many students deferring their studies to next semester. Clearly, this scenario is without doubt creating a whole generation of dropouts forced out of school by economic situations. Education in Zimbabwe is now for the elite and out of reach for the poor.

1.2 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 six sections.

2.0 Monitoring Framework

2.1 University Governance, Autonomy and Academic freedoms

a) Situation Analysis

The Government of National Unity should pave a way for transparency and accountability in institutions of higher learning. There is need for a complete overhaul in the structure of college authorities. University

authorities should be impartial, apolitical and transparent. At Great Zimbabwe University in March 2009, college authorities barred students from conducting Student Representative Council elections, they claimed that elections would incite violence at the college, a move that shows that the Authorities are still to grasp the fact that the political environment in the country has improved.

There has been a slight development in academic freedoms in most tertiary institutions. Successful Student Representative Council elections were held at Midlands State University on the 27th of March 2009. The elections were generally peaceful and for the first time the administration did not interfere in selection of candidates. There were discrepancies in the conduct of elections at Great Zimbabwe University. The college authorities did not give students an opportunity to select their own representatives. They just nominated leaders without conducting any elections, a move that suppresses the student's right to freedom of expression enshrined in the constitution of Zimbabwe.

.At Masvingo Polytechnic, college authorities postponed elections indefinitely citing insufficient funds to sponsor the elections. They also cited that elections will trigger violence at the institution. Students are left with no representative body through which to channel their grievances to the relevant authorities. There have been continued reports of student arrests in institutions of higher learning. On the 5th of March 2009, three Bindura University of Science Education students were arrested for allegedly inciting violence after they protested against the new fee structure announced by the Minister of Higher Education[7]. The three are Respect Ndanga, Innocent Kapoya and Kelvin Veremu. They were detained at Bindura Central Police Station and later released after paying USD20 as admission of guilt charge.

b) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- The unlawful arrest of student leaders as this violates their freedom of expression inciting fear in students
- Failure by some institutions, for example, Masvingo Polytechnic to hold students representative council elections in time leading to students operating with no student representations and demeaning their role in the management of affairs of institutions of higher learning

c) Policy Options

- To repeal or democratise the University Act of 1990
- Pass legislation which address all fundamental points in connection with Universities and colleges governance and autonomy
- The Government should come up with separate funds for SRC elections when allocating Budget for Higher and Tertiary Institutions.

2.2 University Funding

a) Situation Analysis

The budget realignment of USD40 million allocated to Higher and Tertiary Institutions by the Minister of Finance Mr T. Biti is insufficient for the sector. Students have been made to heavily subsidise their own education, an obligation of the Government. Higher Education is still very expensive in Zimbabwe, even after the Government announced fees reduction on the 5th of March 2009[8]. The old fee structures were ranging from USD200 to USD1.600. The new stipulated fees are ranging between USD100 to USD 400 which is still far beyond the reach of many.

The Minister also announced a budget allocation of USD5 million meant for National Education Training fund and the cadetship programme[9] but to date, the funds are still not available for students. The government needs to fully subsidise education in order to avoid unnecessary college drop outs.

The infrastructure in most colleges has dilapidated and need serious attention. At Mkoba Teachers College, college staff is not turning up for duty as the authorities are failing to pay them in foreign currency, resulting in the deterioration of the college environment. There is tall grass everywhere posing a health hazard to students[10].

b) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- The budget allocation for Higher and Tertiary education is not available for disbursement
- Some University Authorities are failing to pay staff salaries

c) Policy Options

- The government should make sure the budget allocation for education is available in time to allow the underprivileged to attain education
- Allow independent donors and organizations to assist in university funding

2.3 Lecturer Attrition/Flight

a) Situation Analysis

Teachers and lectures still fall among the lowest paid workers in Zimbabwe. Teachers are getting a paltry salary of USD100 and \$800 Zimbabwe dollars revalued. Universities and Polytechnic colleges are charging a minimum of between USD100 to USD150 per semester excluding accommodation. An ordinary teacher or lecturer cannot afford to send his or her child for tertiary education and at the same time managing to cater for the day to day basic needs needed in any family set up. This erodes teacher confidence in his or her on work resulting in teachers and lecturers opting for other professions or exploring other means of living. The University of Zimbabwe reports a 40% non turnout of lecturers for duty[11], this has serious implications on the quality of education at the institution.

Poor sanitation and accommodation facilities in most remote areas in Zimbabwe have resulted in many teachers failing to turn up for duty. Schools in Tsholoshu have reported the lowest staff turnout with teachers citing poor road networks, shortage of clean water and poor housing facilities[12]. This has led to teachers in the rural areas migrating to other suitable areas leaving a vacuum in the remote areas.

a) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- Insufficient remuneration for teachers and lectures to sustain a meaningful leaving
- Lack of housing in rural areas for teachers

b) Policy Options

- Introduction of clear cut remuneration policies for teachers and lecturers that are periodically reviewed in line with the economy
- Provide housing and sanitation for teachers in rural areas
- Government must conduct a best practise survey on remuneration within the SADC region and endeavour to comply with these standards in order to retain personnel
- The 100 day plan of action which is an offshoot of STERP must target civil service (teacher) remuneration as a priority in order to restore sanity in institutions of learning.

2.4 Education Accessibility and Affordability

a) Situation Analysis

Education has become a privilege rather than a right as the majority of the students cannot afford to pay. Although the government revised the tuition fee from the USD200 – USD1.600 to USD100 – USD400 it

is still beyond the reach of many. The government ceased to subsidize education in 2006, this came as a heavy blow to many underprivileged students who cannot afford to pay the exorbitant fees. With the introduction of the dollarization of education in February 2009, many colleges including the biggest institution of higher learning the University of Zimbabwe have failed to open as very few students have paid the stipulated fees.

The Minister of Higher Education Dr Mudenge when announcing the new fees structures on 5 March 2009, he made reference to Fort Hare University stating that the new fees structure are at par with other fees from other colleges in Africa, but the Minister should be aware that at Fort Hare University students are paying 2 000 rands for a full academic year that is USD200 which is reasonable.

b) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- The Government has ceased offering loans to students resulting in an increase in college drop outs
- Number of learning institutions not at par with the number of students willing to go for higher education.

c) Policy Options

- Introduction of concrete Government loan policies to fully fund tertiary education
- Reintroducing the “learn now and pay later” incentive in colleges and universities.
- Introduce policies that stimulate the participation of the business sector in skills development so that they may unveil loans and grants for tertiary students.

2.5 Quality Control Mechanisms

a) Situation Analysis

There has been a decline in the quality of education in Zimbabwe. The results for HEXCO examinations written in November- December 2009 are still to be released. Students from polytechnic colleges expected the results in January 2009 but to date the results have not yet been released resulting in part one students from Mutare Polytechnic College failing to proceed to part two[13]. The delay in the release of results compromises the quality of education in polytechnic colleges and this has also serious implications on the quality of graduates produced.

The Herald Newspaper of 23 March 2009 reported that the Ministry of Higher and tertiary Education are working on a draft bill that seeks to repeal the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council Act and the Higher Education Examinations Council in a bid to enhance the quality of education and training in the country. Higher and Tertiary education Minister Stan Mudenge confirmed the drafting of the Zimbabwe Qualifications Authority Bill which is intended to oversee the development and administration of the Zimbabwe Qualifications framework which is meant to create good, sound quality education.

b) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- Delay in the release of results for both A level and polytechnic colleges.

c) Policy Options

- Implementation of the Zimbabwe Qualifications Authority bill to oversee on the quality of education
- The examination boards should be timely in the release of results
- Ministry of Higher education must propose and implement a new alternative Higher education Act.

2.6 Research and Development Infrastructure

a) Situation Analysis

There is insufficient funding for research and development infrastructure in tertiary institutions. The issue of corruption and lack of accountability has compromised research in many institutions. At Africa University it is reported that the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe in March 2009 allegedly withdrew funds from the college accounts and misused the money that was meant for research and development infrastructure compromising the quality of education at the college.[14]

At the University of Zimbabwe students from the Science department reports absence of chemicals in most laboratories, no electricity, no generators and there are also no lab technicians in the department. This compromise the quality of graduates produced at the institution. The medical school at the institution does not have adequate medical facilities for medical students to carry out experiments. The only available machines are outdated and do not tally with the change in technology globally.

Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

- Misuse of college funds by the Government
- Use of outdated machines in most colleges and universities

b) Policy Options

- Introduce a higher education act that will effectively deal with issues of research and quality control.
- Availability of clear cut regulations on the use of college funds
- Need to look for external funding for research and development from developed countries

3.0 Conclusion

The state of the education sector in the country is slowly showing signs of improving. There is still need for the Transitional Government to be sincere in restoring the once prestigious system. ZINASU will continue lobbying for an alternative education policy as a way of normalising the education sector.

Notes

[1] Survey by ZINASU National Executive Council members who embarked on a national tour (college visits) from the 23rd to the 27th of March 2009

2The Herald, 05 March 2009

[3] University of Zimbabwe Communiqué March 2009

[4] Zimdaily, 28 March 2009

[5] Zimbabwe independent Newspaper, 03 April 2009

[6] Student Solidarity Trust: Monthly State of the Education Sector Report, March 2009

[7] Student Solidarity Trust alert 5 march 2009

[8] The Herald, 05 March 2009

[9] The Herald Newspaper, 19 March 2009

[10] ZINASU National Executive Council National Tour to colleges

[11] University of Zimbabwe Internal Communiqué dated 03 March 2009

[12] A Statement issued by the Minister of education, David Coltalt on the state of the education sector, March 2009

[13] Survey by ZINASU National Executive Council members who went on a national college visits in march 2009

[14] The Saturday Herald, 4 April 2009