

# EDUCATION IN CRISIS REPORT

#Teacherscantbreathe

## ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe's education is trapped in a multifaceted crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Government has cut spending on education; parents are severely incapacitated in funding their children's education; teachers are underpaid and face unprecedented repression when they demand better salaries. Government's response to resolve the crisis in education is inadequate, lacks strategy and is badly underfunded.

Amalgamated Rural Teachers  
Union, ARTUZ Research  
Department.

Education in Crisis

## **Foreword**

The Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, ARTUZ research department undertook this research to assess the state of the education sector ahead of schools opening. Union members volunteered to conduct this survey in line with our value of selfless service.

ARTUZ fights for pro-poor education, and our research focused on how access to education for the poor and the vulnerable has been affected by COVID-19 disruptions, economic meltdown, austerity measures and state repression.

The research findings captured here can be used by anyone for advocacy meant to improve the state of our education. Partners who seek to support the people of Zimbabwe can freely use these findings to explore windows of opportunity.

The research was conducted using a very stringent budget but the facts captured have been verified. We present this report as a true record of the state of Zimbabwe's education system from our findings.

Gerald Tavengwa. ARTUZ Secretary for Education and Research.

## **Executive Summary**

This report is divided into five chapters which all give a detailed factual description of the multifaceted crisis confronting Zimbabwe's education system in the face of COVID-19, state repression and an imploding economy.

Chapter 1 describes the curriculum expectations of Zimbabwe's education system from Early Childhood Development, ECD to Upper Secondary education. The chapter explores the learning gaps that were created by the COVID-19 induced schools' closure.

Teacher preparedness for schools opening is explored in great detail in Chapter 2. A total of 560 members of ARTUZ, drawn from the 10 education provinces, participated in the survey. 50% of the teachers were female. A sample of 469 teachers also participated in an online survey. Teacher preparedness is assessed with respect to safety concerns and the salary crisis. The overall outcome is that teachers are not ready for schools opening.

In Chapter 3, the report focuses on the experiences of the learner during the prolonged schools' closure. A sample of 1 200 Learners of 15 to 18 years of age, 50% of which were female, 10% of the interviews live with disabilities, 10% were orphaned and vulnerable children, OVC and 70% were from rural areas. Consent was sought from the parents and guardians of the learners. The 360 learners from urban areas were sampled from unregularized settlements, high density suburbs and low-density suburbs. 120 learners were interviewed in each category maintaining the 50% female component, 10% disabilities and 10% OVC. Learners revealed traumatic experiences such as child labour and child prostitution during lockdown. The chapter further explores the deplorable state of supporting pillars of education.

Chapter 4 evaluates government's intervention strategy to resolve the ensuing crisis in the education sector. A desktop survey was conducted to gather information on government's intervention strategies. From the survey, a report made by the Permanent Secretary of MoPSE to Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on education in June, stood out as the most comprehensive source of information from the government. Reports from state media were used to track progress. The National Associations of Heads were informants on implementation of government resolutions. Education statistics reports from MoPSE were used to evaluate the impact of proposed interventions. Follow up interviews were done with

unions, Ministry officials, parliament and school heads. Government's response strategy is inadequate and is not being fully implemented.

Chapter 5 captures conclusions, and recommendations to government, teacher unions and School Development Associations.

## **Background**

Zimbabwe's education system was already troubled before the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of multiple crises, including the impact of Cyclone Idai in 2019, the economic crisis, the austerity measures under the Transitional Stabilization Program, corruption and persistent droughts. According to the Zimbabwean education cluster report, Before the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic, more than 3.4 million children of school going age (3 to 12 years), at least 1.2 million (35 per cent), would need emergency and specialized education services in 2020. This includes more than 853,000 children in acute need, such as: children not enrolled in school; orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC), including children with disabilities and children living with HIV; and those in need of school feeding.

Zimbabwe closed schools on March 24, 2020 as a precautionary measure to curb the spread of COVID-19 both within schools and in communities. The closing of schools disrupted learning for almost 5 million learners. Learner welfare was negatively impacted by the schools' closure as some were reliant on the school system for food supplies and protection.

Access to education was severely compromised since Zimbabwe has no remote learning policy, no supporting infrastructure and teachers are incapacitated to deliver remote learning. According to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education 2018 education statistics report, 20.02% of primary schools have internet connectivity, with a higher percentage of 39.67% for secondary schools. The unavailability of the internet has made internet-based learning impossible. Internet Data Costs are beyond the reach of the majority of our poverty-stricken populace. Only learners in the P1 and S1 elite schools, have access to effective internet-based remote learning. These disparities in access to education further entrench inequality and exacerbate poverty in the long term. There is a great risk for some learners to permanently drop out of schools if schools remain closed for long.

Teachers have a long standing labour dispute with their employer. Teacher salaries were unilaterally slashed from USD 520 to USD 30 beginning October 2018. Teachers insist that the salary slash was unlawful. Teachers are currently earning ZWL 3 500 at a time when the

Total Consumption Poverty line now stands at ZWL 17 244. As such, teachers have not been willing to commit themselves to remote teaching and are severely incapacitated to go back to work when schools open.

The government announced that exam classes for 2020, Grade 7, Form 4 and Form 6, should resume learning on 14 September and 28 September for Cambridge and ZIMSEC candidates respectively. The declaration of dates was not coupled with addressing safety and salary grievances.

The education sector is locked in a dilemma, continued closure of schools will severely compromise access to education and further harm learner wellbeing. Schools opening, on the other hand, will heighten the hitherto latent labour dispute between government and teachers, as incapacitated teachers will employ different tactics to push for a salary review. The safety of learners and teachers from the Coronavirus is also a major concern in our fragile school system.

## **Chapter 1: Curriculum expectations and learning gaps.**

The Zimbabwean government ordered all schools to close on 24 March 2020, as a measure to curb the spread of the Coronavirus. The move severely curtailed access to education. Section 75 of Zimbabwe's constitution addresses the right to education. Unfortunately millions of learners have been denied this right due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown.

Zimbabwe's education system heavily relies on the physical classroom as the means of delivering learning instruction. We do not have a remote learning policy, nor are we teachers skilled to deliver remote learning and we also do not have supporting infrastructure.

When schools closed, an estimated 5% of our around 5 million learners were able to receive effective formal instruction through internet-based remote learning. The government's intervention of using radio and television was not fully effective because it was centralized. The intervention never provided for feedback from learners and was not systematic.

It is apparent that 95% of our learners lost six months of learning. This time has to be compensated for, if learners are going to be adequately prepared for examinations.

### **Zimbabwe's education system and learning gaps**

#### **1.1 Primary Level**

The primary school system encompasses nine years of schooling which are divided into infant education and junior education.

#### **1.2 Infant Education**

Infant education consists of 4 years of schooling from ECD A to Grade 2. At ECD level, learners are taught through play. Pre-formal skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening are also expected to be mastered by ECD learners. At Grade 1 and Grade 2 there is formal teaching of all subjects in the school curriculum.

This category of learners has significantly lost out on developing reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Some parents might have instituted home-schooling interventions but they are difficult to account for.

ECD B learners are in an even more difficult situation as they need to master skills as a requisite for smooth transition to Grade 1. If the gap is not bridged, it will be difficult for these learners to transition to Grade 1.

The government schools opening strategy should capture how this gap of access can be mitigated. Grade transition strategy must be communicated in advance and a plan of action rolled out.

### **1.3 Junior Education**

Junior education consists of 5 years of schooling from Grade 3 to Grade 7. At the end of Grade 7, learners sit for national public examinations to mark the end of the primary cycle. There is a policy of automatic promotion to the next level, from Grade 1 to Form 4 (ie. passing or failing does not prohibit learners from progressing to the next level).

The transition from Grade 7 to Form 1 is said to be automatic but schools select learners for Form 1 based on the quality of grades produced at Grade 7.

Forcing Grade 7 learners to sit for public examinations in December 2020 may disadvantage learners who have not had access to remote learning.

Government should thus allocate more learning to these learners before they sit for public examinations.

### **1.4 Secondary Level**

The secondary school system encompasses six years of schooling encompassing lower secondary education and upper secondary education.

### **1.5 Lower Secondary Education**

The lower secondary school level is a four-year program culminating in the Ordinary Level Certificate. In the first two years, learners are exposed to varied experiences and are afforded an opportunity to discover their own intellectual abilities, aptitudes and interests. They are offered the full curriculum viz, the Sciences, Humanities, Languages, and must do at least one of Business/Commercial subjects, Computer Studies and Technical/Vocational Education

subjects. This enables learners to pursue subjects they are good at during their last two years of secondary education. Upon completion of this cycle, learners can join the world of work, apply for professional training at tertiary colleges, or proceed to do a further two years at high school.

Learners who sit for Ordinary Level Public examinations are expected to undergo evaluation of practical skills in the natural sciences and other practical subjects, such as Building and Agriculture.

Learners need time to prepare for the practical examinations before being evaluated on their skills. The curriculum content of these various learning areas can, therefore, only be covered by compensating for the 6 months of lost learning during lockdown.

Government should not frog march Ordinary Level candidates into examinations without bridging the education access gap. This is particularly important as results produced at this level are an entry requirement to the next learning level or career path of choice.

### **1.6 Upper Secondary Education**

The two-year upper secondary level offers Advanced Level studies in preparation for tertiary and university education. For learners to enter this level they have to have passed their Ordinary Level Examinations (5 subjects or more with Grade C or better).

Learners at this level have to consolidate curriculum content and practical skills. A third of learning time has been lost and must be compensated for.



## 1.7 Conclusion.

Teachers trying to complete the syllabus  
when schools reopen



A third of learning time has been lost at all levels of learning. Our interventions going forward should focus on plugging the learning gaps. A grade transition plan should be well articulated to deal with uncertainties of the future of learners who are due for level transition. Learners should not be rushed to take public examinations without completing standard preparations.

## **Chapter 2: Teacher Preparedness for schools opening.**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union commissioned a survey to gather the opinions of teachers on the proposed opening of schools. Zimbabwean schools closed on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March as a precautionary measure to curb the wholesale spread of the Coronavirus. Schools have been resorting to different forms of remote learning but access to education for over 90% of the almost 5 million learners has been limited. The government announced that schools should open for 2020 examination classes on 14 and 28 September for Cambridge and ZIMSEC examinations respectively.



The economic meltdown which saw inflation shooting over 800% has eroded teacher salaries. Teachers are now earning less than USD 30, which is a significant salary slash from the USD 520 they used to earn before the formal re-introduction of local currency. Finance Minister, Professor Mthuli Ncube, recently announced that government is celebrating a reduction of the civil service wage bill, at a time when teachers are wallowing in poverty. Teachers' salaries are now at less than 50% of the salaries of other civil servants in the security sector.

Salary negotiations have been undermined by government parties who have no respect for workers' representation. In addition, workers' negotiating bodies are heavily compromised as they no longer have the mandate of the workers they purport to represent. Trust between government and teachers has completely broken down.

Teachers have raised safety concerns regarding the spread and potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but government has failed to address these concerns.

Recommendations made to government by teacher unions have been ignored.

## **2.1 Objectives.**

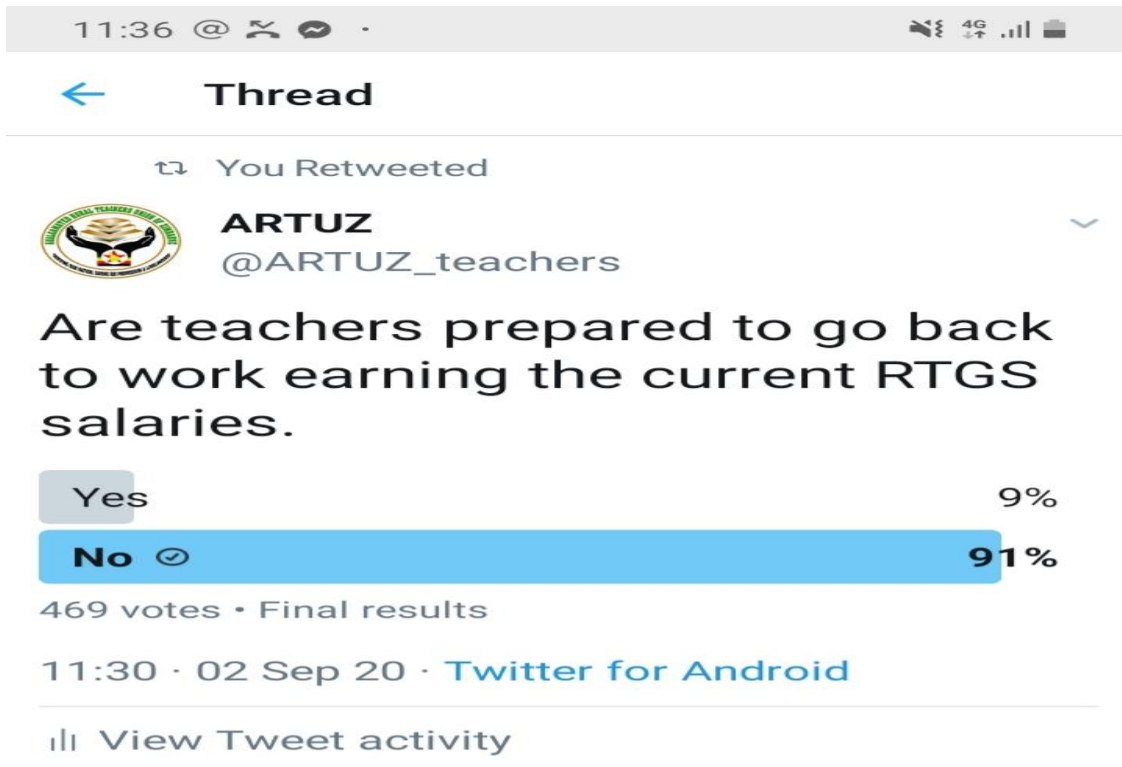
- To assess teacher preparedness and attitudes towards schools opening in light of COVID19 and eroded salaries.
- To evaluate teacher attitudes towards the National Joint Negotiating Council, NJNC as a platform for negotiations.
- To assess the impact of underpayment of teachers on our education system.

## **2.2 Methodology and findings.**

ARTUZ undertook a survey to harvest teachers' opinions through Twitter. 469 teachers responded to survey. Internally, the union interviewed 10% of its membership, drawn from the 10 provinces. A total of 560 members were interviewed. 50% of the interviewees who participated in the survey were female. The Twitter survey was, however, compromised as some non-teachers also voted. It was nonetheless important to get an appreciation of public opinion.

Desktop research was then conducted to assess the impact of both the COVID-19 pandemic and underpayment of teachers on the education system.

The question posted on Twitter was “Are teachers ready to go back to work earning the current salaries.” Results showed that 91% of voters were against schools opening without



addressing the salary crisis.

The interviews were more comprehensive as interview questions covered the following:

Q1 Are you prepared to resume duty on 28 September 2020.

Yes No

Q 2 If not what are your reasons?

Safety Salaries Both Other

Q3 What course of action do you recommend as a response to the declared opening dates.

Strike Resignation Compliance

Q4 Do you trust the National Joint Negotiating Council to effectively negotiate for a salary review.

Yes No

Q5 In your view is government committed to addressing the welfare of teachers?

Yes No

Q1

	Yes	No
Males	6	274
Females	5	275

Q2

	Safety	Salaries	Both	Other
Females	10	120	150	0
Males	8	110	162	0

Q3

	Strike	Resignation	Compliance
Females	265	10	5
Males	260	16	4

Q4

	Yes	No
Male	0	280
Female	0	280

Q5

	No	Yes

Male	280	0
Female	280	0

Results show that teachers are strongly opposed to schools opening under the prevailing conditions. Teachers are citing safety and salary grievances as the main reasons for refusing to go back to work.

### **2.3 Safety.**

On 26 May 2020, Teachers Unions produced a joint statement imploring government to constitute a task force to undertake research on the quantum of resources needed for the safe re-opening of schools. The Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, (ARTUZ) still subscribes to the statement below. The government is yet to respond to the statement.

#### **Joint statement by Teachers' Unions in Zimbabwe on the reopening of schools and state of preparedness.**

- Appreciating the spirit of engagement between government and teacher unions as evidenced by the meeting held on the 20th of May 2020;
- Determined to have a safe teaching and learning environment;
- Concerned with the increasing number of covid19 cases in our country;
- Aware of some reckless bravery being exhibited by some ill-informed sections of society bent on opening schools for expediency and primitive accumulation of wealth and;
- Desiring to open learning institutions as soon as it is practicable,

We, the undersigned Teacher Unions in Zimbabwe, now therefore, urge the Government of Zimbabwe to:

1. Desist from an impulse opening of schools without ensuring that it is very safe to do so,
2. Open churches, bars and weddings first before schools to assess the contagious effect of gatherings of 50 plus people,
3. Ensure that the Coronavirus epidemic is totally under control before taking the steps of opening of schools.

4. Ensure the verifiable fumigation of all schools before they open as well as at regular intervals thereafter. Schools that are currently used as quarantine zones should go through rigorous fumigation and confirmed safe by competent personnel in the Ministry of Health and Childcare,
5. Ensure the rapid testing of all pupils and teachers before schools open for business and provision of the same at regular intervals,
6. Pay an acceptable risk allowance to teachers as in essence they are frontline workers in the education system.
7. Capacitate teachers in identifying and handling covid-19 in case of infections or reinfections in schools,
8. Postpone ZIMSEC June examinations until it's verifiably safer to write them;
9. Consider and assess the impact of returnees from high risk countries flocking back at the moment, both through official and illegal means
10. Enable the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to establish a task force comprising teacher unions, health and education officials to carry out covid19 risk assessment in schools,
11. Take cognisance of the effects of the cold season we are entering as it quickens infection rates of this type of epidemic,
12. Reduce teacher-pupil ratio to 1:20 through employing more teachers urgently,
13. Supply PPEs, test kits, thermometers and sanitizers to all 10 000 schools. These should be adequate enough for 4.6 million students, 136 000 teachers, and ancillary staff,
14. Ensure uninterrupted provision of safe running water for all schools,
15. Ensure through the line Ministry that every pupil has at least 3 washable and safe masks,
16. Stop the use of teaching and learning facilities for political gatherings or any unnecessary congregations in order to minimize the risk of infection of teachers, ancillary staff and learners,

17. Test samples of masks and sanitisers produced for use by teachers and learners to ascertain if they meet the standard requirements as stipulated by WHO or the Ministry of Health and Childcare.

18. Pay teachers' salaries that resonate with their 2018 salaries of US\$520 or its inter-bank rate equivalent in order to restore salaries' purchasing power parity that has been eroded by conversion to local currency, together with the attendant inflation,

19. Provide a workable plan for teachers with pre-existing medical conditions in order to reduce or eliminate their possible exposure to Covid19.

As teacher unions we reiterate our preparedness to guard our members and working areas jealously against the seasons of folly reckless courage and outright ignorance.

We will not accept anything less than the reopening of schools under a safe and healthy environment.

We are indeed arbiters of a nation's destiny whose health and safety must be prioritised. As such, we will not be frog-marched into opening schools before the country has met the conditions set by WHO.

Any premature opening of schools without conditionalities echoed by WHO would be suicidal and genocidal.

As such, we trust and hope the government, let alone the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, will put reason before choler and avoid unnecessary antagonization of teachers, pupils and even parents.

Jointly signed by

ARTUZ - Chere R. (0775643192)

PTUZ - Zunde L. (0772198868)

TUZ - Kanyongo G. (0775914024)

ZDTU - Mushipe G. k. (0772918732)

ZINATU - Nyawo M. (0774013500)

ZINEU - Chinosengwa C. (0715815347)



ZRTU - Mushangu G. (0773967412)

The government has repeatedly failed to respond to the issues raised by teacher unions. June examinations were forced upon schools without attending to recommendations by teachers. In some instances, villagers were engaged to invigilate as teachers boycotted invigilation.

It is against this background that teachers are rejecting the proposed opening of schools.

#### **2.4.0 Salaries.**

The Minister of Finance was quoted recently celebrating the slashing of the wage bill to below 50%. The workers are wallowing in poverty as government pursues cruel austerity measures. Zimbabwean teachers were among the highest paid teachers in Southern Africa in 2016, now our teachers are among the worst paid teachers in the region. Teachers are currently earning 5% of the salary of a South African teacher while the cost of living in Zimbabwe is 44% higher than that in South Africa. Indeed, Zimbabwean teachers are earning less than the welfare grant provided for one dependent in South Africa. The salary slash from USD520 to USD30 has angered teachers who feel they have been reduced to paupers.



#### **2.4.1 Brain drain.**

Teachers are now quitting the profession to pursue entrepreneurship initiatives, while some teachers are opting to migrate to South Africa to find better paying manual jobs.

A mass exodus of science teachers in particular has been recorded. ARTUZ has received notification of resignation by 220 science teachers from January 2020 to date. These teachers are mainly moving to the Middle East where they are set to receive better wages.

Zimbabwe is already under-staffed in the area of natural sciences. The government, in partnership with donor agencies, was, for a time, sponsoring teacher training for science teachers, in a bid to ease staff shortages. The recently trained teachers are now leaving the service, protesting against underpayment.

## **2.5 Teacher learner ratio**

In line with enforcing social distancing in classes, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary education agreed to the need to recruit more teachers to take on newly created classes formed as a result of splitting bigger classes. To that end, Treasury authorised the recruitment of 2300 teachers in June, with a target of 6000 by year end. This is well below the number of teachers needed in our schools. To achieve a teacher: learner ratio of 1:20, Zimbabwe will have to recruit 90 000 more teachers, in addition to the existing 136 000.

## **2.6 National Joint Negotiating Council, NJNC and salary negotiations.**

Teachers are now disillusioned by NJNC as a platform for collective bargaining. The APEX council, which represents workers at the NJNC, has failed to meet the expectations of workers, and in fact, the current leadership's term of office expired at the beginning of 2020. Regardless, the Cecilia Alexander Council remains at the helm through the benevolence of government and suffice to say, it seems that Council now represents the interests of the employer ahead of the workers.

In addition, the statutory instrument which established the NJNC in 1997 is now an illegal piece of law as it is ultra vires to section 65 of Zimbabwe's constitution. The NJNC does not provide for collective bargaining, but begging.

The education sector is not well represented in the hybrid APEX council which brings together civil servants from diverse backgrounds. Education sector specific issues are ignored in negotiations.

Teachers are, therefore, justified in dismissing the NJNC as a vehicle for negotiating better remuneration

## **2.7 Trust between government and workers.**

Government unilaterally slashed salaries from USD520 to USD30 with no consultations ever made with the workers, although some union leaders were invited to rubber stamp the move

at State house. The salary slash was introduced through systematic currency reforms. The few union leaders who celebrated the move now realise their mistake and are now calling for the restoration of USD salaries.

Presidential Spokesperson, George Charamba, was quoted in the media mocking underpaid teachers for failing to negotiate for better. Such arrogance has further strained the relationship.

Trade Union leaders who have been leading the fight for a living wage have faced unprecedented state repression. ARTUZ has recorded 70 arbitrary arrests from 2019 to date; 6 abductions and a torture; 12 incidences of salary cessations; and 12 evictions from school residence, among other rights violations.

It is going to be extremely difficult for government to convince teachers to go back to work through promises as the relationship between the two parties has broken down.

## **2.8 Preferred tactic for fighting back.**

While teachers still prefer strikes as a means of pushing for better wages, previous strike actions have not been very successful as teachers have been driven by fear. The disruption of the school calendar has, however, exposed teachers to other means of getting an income. Teachers now realise they can still earn a living even if they were to be fired.

The right to engage in strike action is provided for in section 65 of Zimbabwe's constitution. Teachers should demand that right and enjoy it as they push for better working conditions.

A major driver in strike apathy has been the fact that only around 60 000 of the 136 000 Zimbabwean teachers are Unionised. Unions should, therefore, recruit more teachers if strike action is to be effective.

In addition, unions should explore other inclusive and innovative tactics of advocating for better working conditions.



## **2.9 Conclusion.**

Zimbabwean teachers are not ready to go back to work until safety and salary grievances are addressed. Teachers do not trust the NJNC as a legitimate platform for collective bargaining. Trust has completely collapsed between government and employees. Teachers are still determined to fight for a living wage using strike as a tactic of choice.

## **Chapter 3: Learner preparedness and State of supporting pillars**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This section explores the preparedness of learners for the opening of schools. The chapter will focus on psychological preparedness, learner compatibility with prescribed learning level and availability of relevant materials needed for learning.

Regarding supporting infrastructure for learning, we focus on state healthcare facilities, public transport, water and sanitation, classroom space and furniture.

### **3.2 Objectives.**

- To evaluate learners' preparedness to learn in the context of COVID-19 and learning disruptions.
- To assess the state of supporting pillars of learning ahead of proposed schools opening.

### **3.3 Methodology**

Desktop research was conducted to gather facts on the state of our different service providers. Oral evidence was also gathered from some service providers and stakeholders. Of the participating sample of 1 200 learners aged 15 to 18 years old, 50% were female, 10% are young people with disabilities, 10% were orphaned and vulnerable children, and 70% were from rural areas. Consent for participation was sought from the parents and guardians of the learners. The 360 learners from urban areas were sampled from unregularized settlements, high density suburbs and low-density suburbs. 120 learners were interviewed in each category maintaining the 50% female component, 10% learners with disabilities and 10% OVC. The interviews were designed to elicit what has happened in learning during the extended schools' closure. The interview questions were designed to appreciate the lived realities of learners and whether they had access to remote learning.

### 3.4 Learner preparedness: Experiences during schools' closure

The impact of schools' closure has been considerable on learners in general, while learners with disabilities, orphaned and vulnerable children, female learners and those in rural areas have been the worst affected. Learners in "illegal settlements" in urban areas are also among the worst affected.

**Table 1 A gender analysis of impact of schools' closure on learners**

	<b>Child prostitution</b>	<b>Child labour</b>	<b>Substance abuse</b>	<b>Any abuse at home</b>	<b>Effective Access to remote learning or home schooling</b>	<b>Safe learners</b>
<b>Male</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>80</b>

**Table 2 The rural urban divide**

	<b>Child prostitution</b>	<b>Child labour</b>	<b>Substance abuse</b>	<b>Any abuse at home</b>	<b>Effective Access to remote learning or home schooling</b>	<b>Safe learners</b>
<b>Rural Female</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Rural Male</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Urban Male</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Urban Female</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>32</b>

**Table 3 The disproportionate impact in urban areas**

	<b>Child prostitution</b>	<b>Child labour</b>	<b>Substance abuse</b>	<b>Any abuse at home</b>	<b>Effective Access to remote learning or home schooling</b>	<b>Safe learners</b>
<b>Unregularized settlement females</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Unregularized settlement males</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Low density females</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Low density males</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>High density females</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>High density males</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>

**Table 4 An analysis of impact on learners with disabilities**

	<b>Child prostitution</b>	<b>Child labour</b>	<b>Substance abuse</b>	<b>Any abuse at home</b>	<b>Effective Access to remote learning or home schooling</b>	<b>Safe learners</b>
<b>Disabled males</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Disabled females</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

The statistics from the surveyed sample of 1200 participants has affirmatively shown that in this period of COVID-19 and continued school closure, learners have been exposed to abuse and hardship that have negatively impacted their learning. These activities include child labour, child prostitution, substance abuse, and abuse at homes. These are fully shown in the tables above.

Table 1 shows the statistical findings on the impact of gender analysis that has been witnessed in the findings. It shows that female learners have been most affected by child prostitution activities as compared to their male counterparts. Most of the female learners affected in this way are from urban areas. Table 2 illustrates the urban findings, grouped into three sampled categories of low density, high density and unregularized settlement. Among these categories, learners from unregularized settlements are the learners whose learning has been most jeopardised, followed by high density learners. Learners from these categories are subjected to dire poverty and the extended exposure to the unfriendly environment that they live in has made it worse. Table 3 illustrates the analysis of disabled learners, a significant number of whom, if female, have been affected by child prostitution.

A large proportion of learners have been exposed to child labour and according to gender statistics in Table 1, the most affected have been males. 450 male learners said they had been made to work while 320 females said the same. The statistics are very alarming for both males and females. In Table 2, among the 450 males, 270 of the learners are from rural areas and 180 are from urban areas.



Substance abuse has not spared learners during this time. The gender analysis in Table 1 shows that the most affected by substance abuse are males with 350 affirmative responses to 70 female affirmative responses. The substance abuse includes drug and alcohol abuse. The findings in Table 2 showed that the majority of male learners who have been abusing substances are in town where they have easy access to drugs. 280 learners who said they were using drugs or alcohol were in town, as compared to 70 from the rural areas. 67 female learners from urban areas said they were affected by substance abuse whereas only 5 from the rural areas said they used drugs or alcohol. Table 3 shows that urban learners and those that live in unregularized settlements are the worst affected by substance abuse.

Learners have been exposed to abuse at homes during the long stay at home. Table 1 shows that on gender analysis, females are the worst affected with a statistical record of 420 over their male counterparts of 380. Table 2 shows that most of the females affected by domestic abuse are from rural areas (294) while 126 are from urban areas. The majority of males affected by domestic abuse are from the rural areas (266) with 114 urban learners reporting abuse. Table 3 shows the urban findings. Females from unregularized settlement are the worst affected (89) followed by high density learners (32) and low-density learners (5). Among male learners, those living in unregularized settlements were most affected (60) followed by high density (47) and low density (7). Disabled learners also recorded domestic abuse. Table 4 shows that 24 females with disabilities were the affected, compared with 20 males with disabilities.

Effective access to remote learning and home schooling has been a challenge to many due to financial and economic constraints and lack of resources. Table 1 shows that more males than females managed to access remote learning, with a statistical record of 30 over 24 females. Table 2 shows that males from urban areas were more likely (25) to access remote education compared to male learners from the rural areas (5). Females in urban areas also had more access to remote education, with a record of 20 compared to 4 from rural areas. Urban statistics in Table 3 showed that the majority of learners in town who were able to access remote learning were those living in low density areas with a few from high density areas also able to access some learning. Learners from unregularized settlements have totally failed to access education at all due to poverty. Learners with disabilities also faced challenges of access to education with only 9 males and 6 females accessing any kind of education during lockdown. It is clear that these learners are not ready to either sit for public examinations or transition to the next learning level.

From the total sample of 1200 learners, the total number of safe learners, who have not been victim to any form of abuse, is 200. This is a cause for concern. As shown in Table 1, most of these safe learners are males, with a number of 120 over females of 80. Table 2 shows that most male safe learners are in rural areas with a representation of 72 learners over 48 from urban. Female learners in rural areas are safer than their urban counterparts, with 48 recorded safe learners compared to 32 in urban areas. Table 3 shows that most of the safe male learners live in low density areas (25), followed by high density learners (18) and unregularized settlements (5). As for females, 19 safe learners are from low density areas, 10 are from high density areas and 3 are from unregularized settlements. Table 4 shows that among disabled learners, 12 safe learners are males and 8 are females.

### **3.5 Supporting pillars**

#### **3.5.1 Public Transport**

The State-owned Zimbabwe United Passengers Company, ZUPCO, still has monopoly on public transport. The operator is however unable to handle the volumes of commuters needing this service. According to the Passengers Association of Zimbabwe, PAZ, waiting times for public transport is at an average of 3 hours per commuter. Opening of schools will lead to an upsurge in the number of commuters. Waiting time could, therefore, shoot above 6 hours.

#### **3.5.2 Healthcare system**

Government has failed to reach an amicable agreement with healthcare workers. Our hospitals remain understaffed. Hospitals are severely under resourced and they will not be able to meet demand if an upsurge of Coronavirus infections is to be experienced.



### **3.5.3 Water and Sanitation**

Interviews conducted with school heads reveal that most schools are struggling to provide clean and safe water, and thus, a number of schools cannot meet the required hygiene standards. To prevent the spread of the Coronavirus, each school should at least have access to clean and safe water and functional ablution facilities. There is also need for hand washing liquid soaps, detergents, sanitisers and handwashing stations to enable frequent hand washing by the learners and teachers.

### **3.5.4 Classroom space**

The education statistics report of 2018 reveals that there is a huge infrastructure gap in the education sector with about 5900 schools in Zimbabwe and a shortfall of over 2000 schools. It is extremely difficult to enforce social distancing in line with WHO standards given the number of schools. Teacher: pupil ratios currently range between 1: 45 and 1:120 because of limited numbers of teachers and classrooms available. Class size should be reduced to 1:20. There is need for rehabilitation of most school infrastructure to ensure that the school environment is conducive to learning during this pandemic.

### **3.5.5 Furniture**

Interviews with school heads revealed that there is an acute shortage of furniture in many schools and, therefore, enforcing social distancing will be a mammoth task. Most schools have children sharing tables and desks, which is not ideal for the current environment of Covid-19 and, therefore, there is need for schools to ensure that proper furniture is procured for learners.

### **3.5.6 Education funding**

Zimbabwe's education is now heavily reliant on parents for funding. Government has taken a back seat after introducing a cost sharing structure in the early 90s. Government's support to education is limited to paying teacher salaries and availing funds for the Basic Education Access Model for vulnerable learners. Section 75, however, provides for the right to state funded education, but little progress has been made. Around 13% of the 2020 budget was allocated to education - way below the benchmark of 20% set by the Dakar declaration.

In addition, the economic meltdown has rendered many citizens jobless. 200 parents were interviewed on whether they were prepared to fund the safe learning of their children. Only 5 parents from leafy suburbs were positive that they would be able to pay fees and procure personal protective equipment for their learners.

According to the education statistics report of 2018: *The percentages of learners who are OVCs increases with the level of education. At ECD level, there are 107 134 children who are orphaned and vulnerable and they constitute 17.04% of the learners, with gender parity. At primary school level, there are 584 114 learners who are orphaned and vulnerable and they constitute 21.43% of the learners, with gender parity. At secondary school level, there are 318 695 learners who are orphaned and vulnerable and they constitute 29.35% of the learners, with gender parity in favour of males. There are 61 946 learners with impairments,*

*of whom 48 851 (78.86%) are at primary school level and 13 095 at secondary school level. At both primary and secondary school levels, the most common type of learning impairment is intellectual challenges and the least common is albinism.*

*A total of 384 057 primary school learners are either under the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) (353 879) or other assistance (30 178). Overall, 10.55% of all primary school learners are on BEAM, whilst more than half (51.19%) of all primary school OVC are on BEAM. BEAM claim is still outstanding for 71.92% (254 516) of the primary school learners. A total of 170 636 secondary school learners are either under the BEAM (120 022) or other assistance (50 614). Overall, 11.05 percent of all secondary school learners are on BEAM, whilst 37.66% of all secondary school OVC are on BEAM. BEAM claim is still outstanding for 73.39% (88 085) of the secondary school learners. Unlike at primary school level, at secondary level, there are more males than females on BEAM at national level.*

The parents are not ready to pay for education, more learners are already vulnerable and government's support is very minimal. BEAM funds are not being disbursed.

### **3.5.6 Conclusion**

Learners are unprepared psychologically to go back to school. The supporting pillars of education are in bad shape. Government is not availing enough resources towards education and the parents are severely incapacitated to fund education.

## **Chapter 4**

### **4.0 Government's response strategy**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This Chapter seeks to highlight government's response strategy to the multiple crises raised in the previous chapters. The chapter evaluates the adequacy of government interventions and tracks the success of implementing promised interventions.

#### **4.2 Objectives.**

- To highlight government's strategy for resolving the multifaceted crisis in education.
- To evaluate the adequacy of proposed interventions.
- To track the progress of implementation of promised interventions.

#### **4.3 Methodology.**

A desktop survey was conducted to gather information on government's intervention strategies. From the survey, a report made by the Permanent Secretary of MoPSE to Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on education in June stood out as the most comprehensive source of information from the government. Reports from state media were used to track progress. The National Associations of Heads were informants on implementation of government resolutions. Education statistics reports from MoPSE were used to evaluate the impact of proposed interventions. Follow up interviews were done with Unions, Ministry officials, parliament and school heads.

**Sections in italics were extracted from the report produced by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee, PPC on Primary and Secondary Education, PSE in June. The evidence was presented by Permanent secretary Mrs Thabela.**

#### **4.4 On learning gaps**

The government of Zimbabwe introduced radio lessons and promised to institute open distance learning initiatives to plug the learning gap. In a report produced by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on education, the permanent Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education, Mrs Thabela made the following submission on behalf of the Ministry:

*The Ministry is considering the short, medium and long term learning approaches for the learners to avoid regression during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Online learning has been identified as the best alternative during this era but internet connectivity challenges and data bundles pricing might militate against this mode of learning. The second alternative identified is Television and Radio Programming, which the Ministry is currently considering against accessibility. The third alternative is the provision of hard copy textbooks and modules to learners residing in communities where there is no internet, television and radio access. Thus, the Ministry in collaboration with printers is having more story books and modules printed, especially for the infant learners. The Ministry has also been working on adopting Open and Distance Learning as another alternative mode of learning, in particular for the Non-Formal Sector. She further highlighted that modules and materials for 7 subjects are being printed to assist during this pandemic.*

The online learning medium is only accessible to around 5% of our learner population. The television and radio programs are centralised and have no feedback mechanism. The limited number of radio and television stations limit the effectiveness of this model of delivering instruction. The third alternative of delivering hard copies was only heard in parliament but never materialised on the ground. In short, government plans for providing education during this lockdown were a disaster. No effective learning took place during the schools' closure and measures have to be instituted to bridge the learning gap.

To address the learning gap, government has resolved on a phased opening of schools with the exam classes of 2020 being the first to open. The phased reopening is planned to start with classes scheduled to take their final year national examinations in 2020, that is Grade 7, Form 4 and Form 6. Current Grade 6, Forms 3 and 5 classes will open in the second phase, followed by those in Grades 3, 4, and 5 as well as Forms 1 and 2. In phase four, Grades 1 and 2 classes will reopen. Early Childhood Development (ECD) pupils will be last to return to school in phase five.

Information Minister Mrs Monica Mutsvangwa told a post-cabinet media briefing on Tuesday 1 September that schools for Cambridge examination classes will open first on September 14, followed by classes for local Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) examinations on September 28. Mutsvangwa said ZIMSEC examinations will begin on December 1, 2020. ZIMSEC June examinations were written in July, amid precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the viral disease. These examinations were

highly chaotic with villagers assisting with invigilation after teachers withdrew their services. Learners were ill prepared as they did not have enough learning time.

The learners who lost six months of learning are now expected to prepare for examinations in two months, compressing 8 months of learning into 2 months learning program. This is going to compromise the quality of work produced by the learners. Surprisingly there is no plan to incentivise teachers to teach for longer hours, or plans to compliment classroom learning with out of classroom learning. The impossible task of compressing the 8 months learning program will not deliver the expected outcome.

In addition, the government is still to come up with a grade/form transition plan. Some phases of schools opening are likely to spill over to 2021, and there is need to articulate a transition plan in advance. Are learners going to progress to the next learning level and cover outstanding learning gaps, parallel to the new learning areas, or they will remain in their 2020 grade and transition after covering outstanding learning areas?

#### **4.5 On safe and effective opening of schools.**

##### **4.5.1 Teacher Capacitation**

The MoPSE permanent Secretary Mrs Thabela presented before the PPC on Primary and Secondary Education advising that, *The Ministry is working on capacitating the teachers in preparation for the pandemic as learners return to school. The Secretary noted that there was urgent need to educate the teachers in light of the pandemic so that they also get used to alternative modes of learning. She noted also the urgent need for the teachers to adapt to the new forms of learning and standards required in a classroom once schools open. For example, how the teacher will have to receive children in class, monitoring the children, cleaning and sanitising the classroom and enforcing social distancing among others. Thus the Ministry is currently working with the Ministry of Health and Child Care in developing the guidelines for Covid 19 in schools. She highlighted that teacher capacitation was therefore urgent given that the phased approach for schools opening is set to start soon.*

This presentation was made in June 2020, before learners sat for June examinations in July. Our research team interviewed 560 teachers from the 10 administration provinces of



Zimbabwe. None of them were aware of this promised training. Mrs Thabela's promise was never fulfilled. Workshops were, however, haphazardly conducted in some districts to serve as training platforms. We requested the guidelines for COVID-19 in schools from the Ministry but failed to get a copy. If the guidelines were produced, they remain inaccessible. Teachers remain incapacitated.

#### **4.5.2 Teacher recruitment for social distancing.**

Zimbabwe currently has a staff compliment of 136 000 teachers attending to 4,6 million learners. There is a shortage of over 90 000 teachers if we are to achieve a 1:20 teacher learner ratio. Teacher recruitment was frozen under the TSP, and teacher vacancies were not being filled.

Mrs Thabela advised parliament that, *there is urgent need to recruit more teachers to take the newly created classes as a result of splitting bigger classes. She noted that Treasury has authorised recruitment of 2300 teachers in June with a target of 6000 by year end.*

The list of these newly recruited teachers was not available online and was not availed when requested. If government manages to achieve its set target, we will still have a staff shortage of around 84 000 teachers. Effective learning and social distancing will not be achievable in our schools.

#### **4.5.3 Provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Disinfectants for Schools**

Mrs Thabela , *bemoaned the huge budgetary requirement to be able to provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to all its learners and staff once schools open. She stated that the phased approach would go a long way in ensuring that the Ministry meets these requirements gradually. She noted that at Phase One, about 667 476 learners and 66 748 staff would require masks at opening of schools. The total number of masks would reach 4 552 436 for learners and 290 382 for staff at Phase Five of schools opening. Each school is also expected to have at least 1 infrared thermometer for every 500 learners. In addition to that, the Ministry is also considering procuring gloves and special gowns for the Health Coordinators at each school for handling of any suspected cases. Ms Thabela also noted that there was also need for all schools, especially those that have been used as Isolation Centres to be disinfected before schools opens.*

The Manica Post of 18 to 24 September reported a case of a School Head in Chipinge who sold roofing material to procure personal protective equipment. Investigations from our team



revealed that the school head stripped three classroom blocks of roofing material and sold the sheets at 100 Rands each. This case highlights the plight of our schools as they battle to meet government's guidelines. No budgetary support has been received in our schools.

The Ministry has directed schools to produce their own personal protective equipment and related materials for safety. Elite schools have quickly stepped in to procure material but the S3 and P3 schools are trapped in want.

#### **4.6 School Infrastructure**

##### **4.6.1 Classrooms**

The PPC on PSE reported that, *The Secretary noted that there was a huge infrastructure gap in the education sector with about 5900 schools in Zimbabwe and a shortfall of over 200 schools. She, therefore highlighted the challenge they already face as a Ministry of enforcing social distancing in line with WHO standards given the number of schools. She also noted the challenge of teacher pupil ratio which currently ranges between 1: 45 and 1:120 and the number of classes available. The Secretary highlighted that the Ministry was currently working on modalities to trim all classes into a small number of about 30 learners per class. She noted that the challenge of classroom shortages would be felt as they start to approach Phase Three, Four and Five, such that some learners will be learning in tents due to shortage of proper infrastructure. She also noted the need for rehabilitation of most school infrastructure to ensure that the school environment is conducive for learners during this pandemic.*

The 200 reported regarding schools' shortages is not in line with education statistics reports from MoPSE. MoPSE notes that we need over 2000 schools to bridge our school deficit. No constructions have been sponsored nationwide and no tents have been delivered. This will not affect exam classes but the impact will be felt when other phases open.

Zimbabwe's social media platforms are awash with pictures of thatched mud houses which are serving as classrooms. These structures also need to be upgraded to meet safety standards.

The National Association of Secondary Heads, NASH meeting of 2 September 2020 resolved that schools are severely incapacitated and lobbied government to render schools with support to develop and complete existing infrastructure.

Zimbabwe is soon approaching a rainy season, and it will be difficult to have meaningful learning in make-shift structures.

#### **4.6.2 Furniture**

*Mrs. Thabela highlighted that the shortage of furniture in many schools will be another challenge the Ministry is seized with given that the learners must practice social distancing. Most schools have children sharing tables and desks, which is not ideal for the current environment of Covid 19 and, therefore, calls upon schools to ensure that proper furniture is procured for the learners.*

The case remains as dire as described. Nothing has been done.

#### **4.6.3 Water and Sanitation**

*Mrs. Thabela, acknowledged that most schools were struggling to provide clean and safe water, hence a number of school cannot meet the proper hygienic standards. The Ministry was, therefore, advocating for at least each school to have access to clean and safe water and functional ablution facilities. There is also need for hand washing liquid soaps, detergents, sanitisers and handwashing stations to enable frequent hand washing by the learners and teachers.*

Nothing has been done. Minister Matema is quoted in the Herald of 15 September saying they are working on drilling more boreholes. We will be monitoring the process.

#### **4.7 Overall Budgetary support.**

According to the PPC report Mrs Thabela highlighted that they made a request of \$21 billion from treasury to meet the costs of gaps raised in her report.

The Herald of 15 September 2020 made a sensational report that Treasury has disbursed \$600 million for safe schools opening. Minister Cain Mathema is quoted saying the money will be allocated to needy schools in all provinces.

The \$600 million will not address the budgetary deficit captured by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, MoPSE.

#### **4.8 On teacher salaries**

On 17 September the government convened the National Joint Negotiating Council, NJNC to dialogue around salaries. Government offered a 40% salary increment which was rejected by workers. The workers are demanding the restoration of October 2018 salaries.

All nine teacher unions have vowed that their members are not going back to work.

#### **4.9 Supporting pillars**

##### **4.9.1 On Public transport**

The State-owned Zimbabwe United Passengers Company, ZUPCO still has monopoly on public transport. The operator is however incapacitated to handle the volumes of commuters. Waiting time for public transport is at an average of 3 hours per commuter. Opening of schools will lead to an upsurge of number of commuters. Waiting time could shoot above 6 hours.

##### **4.9.2 On healthcare**

Government has failed to reach an amicable agreement with healthcare workers. Our hospitals remain understaffed. Hospitals are severely under resourced and they won't be able to meet demand if an upsurge of Coronavirus infections is to be experienced.

#### **Conclusion**

The MoPSE laid out an intervention strategy which was inadequate and still to be fully implemented. Budgetary constraints in an imploding economy and self-imposed austerity measures still hinder funding of education. The opening of schools opens doors to chaos, risk and compromise of quality of education.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Zimbabwe's education system was crisis ridden before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exposed fault lines and compounded the crisis. The schools' closure of 24 March robbed learners of six months of learning since Zimbabwe's education system is not compatible with remote learning. Teachers have a labour dispute with employer and are severely incapacitated to teach. Learners are not ready for learning after going through different traumatic experiences during the lockdown. Supporting pillars for education have collapsed due underfunding of education. Government's response plan has been inadequate and is not being implemented. Zimbabwe's education system is locked in a multi-layered crisis.

#### **1. Recommendations to government**

- a) Introduce an education equalisation fund as prescribed by the Nziramasanga report of 2000. The fund should receive funding from tax on our mineral wealth and other revenue flows. The fund will be dedicated towards infrastructure development in needy communities such as rural areas.
- b) Meet the Dakar Declaration minimum for education funding.
- c) Align labour laws to section 65 of Zimbabwe's constitution.
- d) Implement the section 75 on funding of basic education.
- e) Defer 2020 examinations up to March 2021 to afford learners more learning time.
- f) Prepare a grade transition plan from 2020 to 2021.
- g) Engage all Teacher Unions in genuine dialogue to resolve the salary crisis.
- h) Produce a funded education in emergencies response strategy to protect the right to education during emergencies.
- i) Recruit more teachers to address teacher learner ratios to realise social distancing and effective learning post the crisis.
- j) Support continuous development through awarding paid study leave to teachers.
- k) Fund the provision of PPEs, sanitiser and clean water in all public schools.
- l) Procure more ZUPCO buses to address public transport woes in future but allow private operators to operate in the interim.

m) Resolve the labour dispute in our healthcare system and allocate more resources towards healthcare.

**2. Recommendations to Teacher Unions**

- a.) Revive the Federation of Zimbabwe Educators Union to enhance unified advocacy on education and labour.
- b.) Unionise the over 70 000 Un-unionized teachers.
- c.) Advocate for an education specific collective bargaining platform set in line with dictates of section 65.
- d.) Adopt new innovative advocacy tactics to adapt to the repressive environment.
- e.) Produce and popularise an education in emergencies charter advising government response strategy during emergencies.
- f.) Upscale the fight for a living wage to restore teacher dignity.
- g.) Collaborate with parents to protect the right to education.

**3. Recommendations SDC/A**

- a) Create Parent Teacher Associations to partner in protecting the Right to Education.
- b) Hold government accountable on the release of Basic Education Access Model, BEAM funds.
- c) Institute strong systems to guard against looting of funds dedicated to education.
- d) Upscale collaboration through strengthening the National association for SDC/As.
- e) Mobilise resources for infrastructure development outside fees, levies and government support.