



THE Weekend Reader

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Social & Economic Justice"

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ZWL 600 MILLION SCHOOLS RE-OPENING BUDGET

This week's reader is focused on public financing of education in Zimbabwe especially the more recent allocation of ZWL600 Million Schools Re-Opening Budget. The 2013 National Constitution provides the National vision and goal for education. Section 27 (i) specifically outlines that the State must take all practical measures to promote (a) free and compulsory basic education for children; and (b) higher and tertiary education. Although education is constitutionally guaranteed, millions of Zimbabwean children, particularly girls and children from rural and resource poor backgrounds have been adversely affected by the yearlong disruption to education.

Based on the outcome of a recently held Indaba on public finance management and ZIMCODD's own analysis, the following key issues are essential in ensuring that government improves the welfare of learners and teachers within the current context.



Government has perennially been underspending on education. This has reduced the capacity of our education system to withstand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ZWL600 million schools reopening budget is vastly inadequate to address the back to school needs of Zimbabwean learners and ensure adequate preparation for exam classes. Government is urged to consider a supplementary budget to strengthen schools' ability to comply with WHO guidelines. A Parliament-led inquiry into the use and distribution of the ZWL600 million schools reopening budget is vital to restore public confidence.



Most schools and teaching staff were inadequately prepared for schools reopening. In the absence of clear guidelines and set standards different schools in different areas have adopted different strategies. These strategies combining face to face, remote and virtual learning according to each School's capacity. Most will end at the two day learning week minimum authorised by Government. There is need for the Government to issue clear standard guidelines to protect children and ensure their access to education in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Teachers Unions' legitimate concerns for improved remuneration and conditions of service demand urgent attention and political will from Government. Clear funding mechanisms to support Government's commitments to raise Teachers basic salaries to US\$540 minimum salaries need to be explored. Teachers Unions are to be commended for prioritising children's welfare and forestalling planned stayaways. Negotiations between Government and Teachers Unions must be finalised in good faith.



Many schools are not in a position to offer the proposed virtual, remote and face to face schools reopening package remains impractical for schools already contending with structural barriers such as lack of electricity and digital gadgets. Improved access to the internet and digital devices for school children. Public financing towards education should include clear and systematic focus on addressing inequalities that arise out of household wealth quintiles, geographical location along with other key factors that sustain and reproduce inequalities in access to education.



Reduced access to education for children from resource poor and marginalised backgrounds will worsen poverty and inequality. Reducing child poverty is central to the realisation of the right to education for children. Government must consider the expansion of the Basic Education Assistance Model into a Universal Basic Income Grant for all Zimbabwean Children under 18. The Sovereign Wealth Fund funded by proceeds from the 12 Billion dollar mining industry can be ringfenced to support a Universal Basic Income Grant.



The burden of educating the children of Zimbabwe falls on the working poor as the State continues to defund education through austerity measures and corruption. Government must do more to reduce the burden on parents. Possible measures including a moratorium on impending presumptive taxes on the informal economy and measures against extended tax exemptions for some private companies enjoying political patronage.

Now that schools have reopened, we are monitoring the situation and we shall also be making further evaluations on the adequacy of the financing. Government needs to be mindful to avoid what happened last year when schools reopened which included a spike in COVID-19 outbreaks in schools¹.

¹ <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/mixed-feelings-over-schools-shutdown-after-covid-19-outbreak/> (2020)

The COVID-19 outbreaks in schools have been linked to community transmission with most communities reported to be no longer adhering to standard COVID-19 preventative guidelines due to fatigue.

Our call for improved resource allocation to the education sector is based on the realisation that potential COVID-19 outbreaks in schools are an important public health problem given children can be asymptomatic carriers² with the capacity to infect their older family members resulting in severe disease and possibly death. Furthermore, we note that Zimbabwe has enough resources to meet the needs of the education sector if resources leaking through illicit financial flows, corruption, tax evasion and unjustifiable tax exemptions are recovered and reinvested in the declining education system.

² https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/key-messages-and-actions-for-covid-19-prevention-and-control-in-schools-march-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=ba81d52_4