

**Zim Education:  
Accessibility  
remains a  
pipedream**



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**Zim Education: Accessibility remains a pipedream**

Harare – THE education sector of Zimbabwe has been deemed among the best in Africa even before independence, and reports say the country continues to have the best literacy rate on the continent, but the challenge of limited access for pupils from poor families persists.

Before independence, education in the then Rhodesia was flaunted as the best on the continent especially in the 1960's though the sector was tainted by racial segregation that limited Africans' access to education.



*File Photo: Children coming from school in Victoria Falls*

Three decades later, and with a Zimbabwe National African Union Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) led government in control, Zimbabwe is still deemed to have the best literacy rate in Africa; at the same

time, the challenge of inaccessibility of education continues unabated

During the colonial era, local economist, Dr. John Robertson, in a survey report of 1973, aptly captured the exclusive nature of the sector.

Robertson revealed that only less than one third of African children in the range of 18 and 19 years of age completed the first three years of primary education.

In 1967, the dropout rate in the first year of secondary education (Form 1) of African children was 94.1% due to lack of government support, fueled by racial segregation.

Some of the dropouts included Josiah Tongogara, Mayor Urimbo and George Rutanhire, who became liberation war fighters, putting the inaccessibility of education as one of the African grievances against the government.

*"So you find most of them (liberation war recruits) came up ... because they are deprived of education,"* Tongogara, a renowned Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) commander, once said.

*"Those are of some of the reasons that compelled them to come and join the fight."*

To its credit, the Zanu-PF government widely expanded the reach of educational infrastructure with more government schools and

state universities being built over the past three decades, while gender disparities have been curtailed.

The new Constitution of Zimbabwe (Section 27) says that, *“The state must take practical steps to promote free and compulsory basic education for children; and higher and tertiary education.”*

Further the Constitution states that girls should be afforded the same opportunities as boys.

But the question of accessibility of education still nags for attention, and remains a sore thumb in Zimbabwe.

After the presentation of the national budget statement by Finance Minister Hon. Patrick Chinamasa on December 19, 2013, it has emerged that about one million pupils risk dropping out of school due to inadequate funds to finance the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), a government driven support scheme for primary and secondary school children from vulnerable backgrounds.

Various analysts have argued that the education sector in Zimbabwe is beset with financial bottlenecks due to unaffordable tuition fees and little government support, putting the attainment of education out of the reach of many.



File Photo : University of Zimbabwe

Douglas Tigere, Director of the Student Christian Movement of Zimbabwe (SCMZ), said government was not showing real commitment on supporting vulnerable pupils.

*“We are not seeing any serious commitment from the government,”* Tigere said.

*“Very soon the ruling party will be holding the expensive 21<sup>st</sup> February Movement event.*

*“If they were serious about education they would not even spend millions of dollars on the celebrations, while one million pupils are facing the prospect of dropping out of school.”*

For his defense, President Robert Mugabe has consistently said the 21<sup>st</sup> February Movement which celebrates his birthday with lavish parties is funded by well-wishers, not government coffers though the President’s Office has always been awarded big budgetary allocations annually under his rule.

The challenges of inadequate funding have also stalked the Cadetship Scheme, which finances the education of tertiary students from vulnerable backgrounds, leading to more dropouts since the government scrapped the Student Grant and Loan Scheme in February 2006.

In late 2013, Zimbabwe National Students Union (Zinasu) President Gilbert Mutubuki, speaking to the *Crisis Report*, reminded the government that: *“The right to education was one of the reasons why the liberation struggle was fought.”*

The lack of adequate funding has also been blamed for poor grades due to low moral among educators at all levels, and poor performance of the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Councils (ZIMSEC), especially over the past decade where the country witnessed serious economic challenges.

Further, with the country facing serious food shortages that the World Food Programme (WFP) said will affect about 2, 2 million Zimbabweans mainly in the dry southern provinces, it may be expected that lack of food and malnutrition will either keep more pupils away from schools, or affect their studies.

## ADZT discusses water rights with communities

THE Artists for Democracy in Zimbabwe Trust (ADZT) has taken the initiative to help rural communities highlight their challenges in relation to access to clean and safe water.

The efforts are part of a broader campaign by the organisation to spread awareness of the new Constitution of Zimbabwe called Artists Constitutional Awareness Raising among Under-served Groups (ACARMUG).

ADZT held two community meetings in Manicaland Province at Terera business centre in Mutasa on January 17, 2013, and in Matebeleland at Matshiya in Lupane on January 18, where villagers mostly women highlighted their challenges in accessing water for domestic use.

In Mutasa, women revealed their disappointment with the District Development Fund (DDF) for failing to repair boreholes in time, which has resulted in residents travelling long distances in search of safe and clean water.



*Lupane community receiving constitution copies*

According to ADZT, the men in the community ended up vandalising other boreholes in an effort to fix boreholes in their neighbourhood.

One man testified saying, *“Takupedzesera takunoba mamwe maparts ezvimwe zvibhorani kuti tigadzire*

*zvedu tega. (We end up stealing borehole parts from other communities to fix our own boreholes).”*

*“The District Development Fund (DDF) is taking long to address the water shortage issue that is why the community has resorted to vandalising other boreholes to fix their own,”* ADZT Director Mehluli Dube said.

At Matshiya in Lupane, participants especially women called on the government to uphold socio-economic rights such as water rights in line with the new Constitution (Amendment 20) and highlighted how children are affected by the scarcity of water.

An unidentified woman said, *“We cannot access water yet our children have to travel long distances to fetch water and then go to school, which is affecting children as they will be tired when they go to school. This obviously affects their concentration rate in class”*

Meanwhile, ADZT also distributed 200 copies of the constitution and 30 branded water buckets during the two meetings held in Lupane and Mutasa.

ADZT launched the campaign for water rights on International Human Rights Day on December 10, 2013 in Harare, where 33 women marched with empty water buckets labelled “Water is a Right”, marking 33 years of failure by many communities to access safe and clean water after independence.

The march also sought to highlight how the water scarcity weighs heavily on the shoulders of women, who culturally have to bear the brunt of fetching the precious liquid for domestic use.



## COTRAD helps Zaka community focus on development

Zaka, Masvingo – THE Community Tolerance Reconciliation and Development Trust (COTRAD) has set its eyes on helping local communities in the province to focus on development matters as the country moves away from the harmonised elections held in July 2013.

The grassroots based organisation on January 17, 2014 conducted a community forum in Zaka District in the southern province of Masvingo, which was attended by 208 people who included local leaders, youths, women, Chief Rangarirai Nhema, the local councillor Rangarirai Vangirayi and Zaka North Member of Parliament Hon. Robson Mavhenyengwa.

*“Young people and other citizens encouraged more of these platforms as they help to create an environment for constructive thinking,”* COTRAD Director Gamuchirai Mukura said.

*“The number of women attending such activities has increased as most women are concerned about livelihood issues and community development which they highlighted as violent free compared to elections which are often marred by violence.”*

According to Mukura, participants noted the need for self help projects as they stem interdependence and help mitigate future cases of violence since young people can be economically independent.

Zaka in the past has experienced numbing cases of political violence, including petrol bombings during the infamous 2008 election although the 2013 recent harmonised elections were relatively calm with few reported cases of intimidation fueled by past community traumas.

The Masvingo province is notable for incessant droughts caused by high temperatures, poor soils and low rainfall, and the communities form a significant part of the 2.2 million people in Zimbabwe, whom the World Food Programme (WFP) says will need food aid as hunger escalates before the next harvest.

Almost two thirds, 162 of the people who attended were fe-

males, while overall youths constituted the greater part of the attendants, with elderly people also being present, at the meeting held at Padare Township, in Ward 10 of Zaka North Constituency.



*Member of Parliament Mavhenyengwa stresses a point to the participants*

COTRAD said the community dialogue, which was also used as an accountability forum between villagers and political leaders was “non partisan, inclusive of all in terms of the political divide.”

*“The community engagement was aimed at creating interface between the electorate and the elected leadership of Zaka North, which comprised of the Member of Parliament for Zaka North and councillor of Ward 10,”* Mukura said.

*“The meeting got an overwhelming response as young people felt motivated and inspired to participate in community development issues.*

*“Elderly people participated in the dialogue meeting as they said they are in full support of the younger generation in propelling development in the area.*

*“The community got an opportunity to have a first interface meeting targeting young people, and introducing the concepts of good governance and accountability of elected officials to the electorate.”*

Development, service delivery and accountability continue to be of relevance as the country moves away from national elections held last year.