



# WOMEN OF ZIMBABWE ARISE (WOZA)

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Women for Women and with Women, across Race, Colour, Creed, Class or Political  
Persuasion. Empowering Women to be Courageous, Caring, Committed and in  
Communication with their Communities.

## **The State of Education in Zimbabwe - a Dream Shattered A Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) perspective February 2009**

### **Background**

Last week, the political parties proceeded to implement their power-sharing deal. This is the first step in the formation of a transitional government that is to oversee reforms, come up with a new constitution and then conduct an election. Zimbabweans have had to stand by and observe this process without being given the opportunity to participate, and perhaps they will feel that they have no choice but to continue to watch and wait for these developments to lessen their hardships. Many promises were made in the Global Political Agreement that have been ignored, so we should not be surprised if the trend continues.

But what should Zimbabweans do? Our role is to put maximum pressure on all the parties to this agreement to address our issues and our priorities. We must not wait for 100 days to pass and complain that nothing is happening. Every day matters and every day we should be speaking out and demanding change. Especially as most schools in the country have still not opened.

### **Education – a dream shattered**

We as a people have always valued the education of our children more than anything else. For that we sell our precious beasts, work two jobs, travel across borders, go into exile, buy less food and once joined the liberation struggle. We hang the hard-earned certificates on the unpainted walls of our small homes, and ululate at the graduations. An educated son or daughter is our pride and joy, the fulfilment of years of struggle.

After Independence ZANU PF seemed to understand this burning desire of Zimbabweans, resources were allocated to the ministries of education and an expansion of schooling followed in the 1980's. Although there was still more that could have been done, by the mid-1990's we could boast of teachers' colleges training qualified teachers by the thousands, universities producing graduates to teach A-level, graduates obtaining further degrees to become college and university lecturers. We were the envy of Africa, with 90% adult literacy by 2002 and 98% youth literacy. Our school leavers could obtain places for tertiary education anywhere in the world, but they did not need to leave Zimbabwe, because our universities were developing and providing training in almost any field.

Teaching was a respected profession at one time, a teacher the most educated person in a rural community, a resource of knowledge to be shared. Teachers were never highly paid, but they could buy the necessities and some luxuries. Many even retired on a decent pension.

Who could have believed that we could sink so low as to reach the situation we are in today? Only private tertiary institutions function, government universities, colleges and schools are closed. The rot began many years ago; by 2001 the number of school-aged children not in school was already higher than in 1991, literacy rates had started to fall by 2002 and qualified teachers had begun leaving Zimbabwe by 2003. But the worst devastation has come in the past four years. Schools are closed because there are no teachers; teachers are not there because they have been chased away from their classrooms by the meagre wage offered by government. Large numbers of them have opted to swim across the crocodile-infested Limpopo River to seek a living wage in South Africa.

WOZA believe that a once vibrant education system, along with our children's lives, has been destroyed by political interference. The Mugabe regime stole from the education budget to fund political campaigns and pay an overstuffed intelligence department. They could not provide funding for schools, classrooms, textbooks and teachers salaries, and so today, in 2009 we have no education except for those few rich people who send their children to private schools. Even the defence forces, whose activities were resourced at the sacrifice of the education system, cannot afford to send their children to school.

Those teachers who remain in Zimbabwe have been forced to supplement their salaries by trading, by selling sweets, by turning their classrooms into market places. Some have survived by charging fees for teaching children after hours. Where is the valued teacher of old, the community leader to whom everyone showed respect? That teacher cannot survive without a salary, the teacher cannot survive when being threatened and insulted instead of valued and encouraged for the work being done. The work that teacher was doing cannot not be done by school leavers or uneducated war veterans who think teaching is a matter of shouting and punishing. The knowledge and skill that teachers possess has been scorned and devalued by people who seem not to care about the future of our families, our communities and our nation. They don't understand the many years of work by so many thousands of educators, which went gone into building what was once such a respected education system. And now all that is destroyed. Our teachers are all over the world, the lucky ones teaching, the less lucky working in factories, in construction, as domestics, and the most unfortunate starving on street corners in the cities of every continent.

An education system also needs school buildings, furniture, stationery and textbooks. All of these need money. Money comes from a functioning economy and the willingness of a government to allocate funds. These funds should not be expected to come from parents. We fought for the right to free education, and thought we had gained that right. Now it has been taken away; now there is no education in Zimbabwe; now our children are starving for food and starving for the learning, which will enable them to become productive adults.

### **WOZA research**

In August 2008 WOZA undertook a survey of our membership. We interviewed a sample of more than 1,000 members in Bulawayo, Harare and Chitungwiza. We asked them about how they are living, and we asked them about the education of their children. In February 2009, WOZA conducted further research on a sample of 377 members to determine the current status of their children's education and our members' ability to access food.<sup>1</sup>

### **Results**

Below is an analysis of the education aspects of the research, both from August 2008 and the current situation in February 2009.

#### **The State of Education in the First and Second Terms - 2008**

- 15% said they have school-age children who are not going to school.
- Only 37% said their children were able to attend classes regularly.
- Only 5% said there were enough teachers, and 3% said there were enough textbooks.
- Less than 10% had a chair and a desk for each child at the school.
- 70% said their children had been sent away from school because they had not paid fees on time, or paid the levy, or paid a fees top-up.
- 66% had failed to buy uniforms when they were needed and 60% had had their children sent away from school for not having correct uniform.
- 47% had had their children sent away from school because there were no teachers.

This survey was conducted in urban areas. Rural schools were by and large in worse conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Members were asked how many children of school-going age they have in their care, including orphans they look after. Of the sample of 377, 12 families (3.2%) had six children and one family had seven children. 244 parents had only one child of school-going age in their care (64.7%). Amongst the sample of 377 parents questioned, they were responsible for 1,016 children of school-going age. 667 of these children attend primary school and 349 children attend secondary school.

### **Experiences of Third Term – 2008**

When asked about their experiences of the last term in 2008, the following responses were given:

- Not a single parent amongst the sample of 377 confirmed regular lessons and attendance during the third term of 2008.
- 99.7% stated that there were absolutely no teachers teaching their children during this term.
- 105 parents (27.9%) answered that their children had written a Grade 7, 'O' or 'A' Level exam during the last term. None of the parents were happy with the manner in which the children were prepared for the exam. Only 9 out of the 105 parents (8.6%) did not want their children to rewrite. This is despite the fact that no results have been released by the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (Zimsec).
- 97.3% of parents (367 of 377) indicated that they were willing to allow their children to repeat 2008 if government withdrew the school fees.
- Only 10 parents whose children did not have regular lessons stated that they would not allow their children to repeat the year. This indicates that the level of desperation for a meaningful education has overcome the perceived stigma of repeating. It cannot be assumed however that the same response would have been obtained if respondents had been asked whether they would want their children to repeat if they had to pay fees for the repeat year.
- In Bulawayo, there were five cases of children who were not in school because they had no birth certificates.

### **Experiences of First Term - 2009**

Government had postponed the opening of schools from 13<sup>th</sup> January to 27<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Government schools remain closed however as the teachers are on strike and collective bargaining continues with teachers' unions. In responding to questions about the first term of 2009:

- 99.6% of parents said there were no teachers in school in 2009 because of industrial action by teachers. Many cited that even if there were teachers they had no access to foreign currency to pay fees. One parent said there were teachers in the private school but they had failed to pay fees in the currency requested.
- Only 3.8% of parents in Bulawayo were able to mention the fees requested by their school. All these parents said they could not afford these fees. Only one parent was able to quote the fees requested for the levy for School Development Association (SDA). The converse was true in Harare where 98.9% of parents were able to mention the school fees and SDA levy. All these parents said they could not afford these fees.

What is clear from this research is that the current state of education in Zimbabwe is dire. Children hardly learnt in 2008 and many will need to repeat the year. Many parents are prepared to see their children repeat rather than remain substandard due to the time missed. But are the schools in a position to offer anything at all to our children?

It is also of concern to WOZA that in the case of families who say they could not afford to pay school fees, it is probable that the girl child will not be educated with meagre resources being prioritised towards the education of boy children.

The dilemma for teachers will be how to teach children who missed three or possibly four terms of lessons. We could also argue that children regress when they are away from learning for a long period of time. Will teachers be capable of coping with this situation? It is this scenario that led one parent to suggest children go to school on Saturdays, presumably as a way to catch up.

### **The Way Forward**

Many children will need to repeat 2008 not because they are dull or did not do well but because the government did not care enough about them. Now the government wants to charge fees in foreign currency of up to US \$200. WOZA members are starving and cannot buy food because they cannot get foreign currency – how will they afford these fees? Why must parents suffer when they did not kill schooling? We demand our children get a decent quality education and demand free schooling and free levies in 2009. Our children cannot be made to suffer for the politics and mismanagement.

These are our demands to the new government:

1. Declare the education system a national disaster and allow children to repeat 2008 at no cost. This includes the re-sitting of 2008 exams at no extra cost to parents.
2. WOZA members believe the liberation war promise of free primary education must be delivered. For secondary schooling, we are prepared to assist in designing an affordable fee structure. We request a non-politicized assistance programme for those children who cannot afford school fees.
3. WOZA will participate in asking the international community to support teacher's salaries and infrastructure in schools. We offer to assist in persuading teachers to come home.
4. As a show of good will for the wrong they have done to our children's education, we ask that the size of the armed forces and CIO be reduced and the savings allocated to the education system.
5. Sell the expensive cars allocated to government officials and use the money to buy textbooks.
6. Stop political interference in the administration of schools and allow professionals to run schools.

We call on teachers to do the following:

1. We understand that teachers are also parents, and as parents we need to unite in the need to educate our children.
2. Make reasonable demands for a living wage that can allow you to once again be the professional educator delivering a future to the country's youth. Once you get this living wage return to your classroom. Help to make sure children return to school and help them catch up.

We call on parents to do the following:

1. You will have to make sure children go to school as they have become used to playing in the streets or on the grounds and not studying in class. Teach your children to value education and learning.
2. Participate in community activities that can resurrect our schools as centres of excellence.
3. Be patient but vigilant as the new government reorganizes our schools, and ensure that the policies are in the interests of the majority of the people.
4. Do not remain silent at SDA meetings, speak out and be honest about what you can afford – do not allow the richer parents to dominate discussion about fees and levies.
5. Refuse to allow teachers to conduct their own businesses on school premises.

The main responsibility lies on this government to deliver on promises, to allocate funds and deliver an education system and educated children who can become future leaders. As WOZA conduct this update survey, they are going door to door asking parents to sign a petition calling on the new minister of education to declare please put our children's education first.

We are sending a petition to the new minister of education, Senator David Coltart. WOZA members are going door-to-door asking parents to sign a petition, please sign your support. Email WOZA to receive the petition form at [wozazimbabwe@yahoo.com](mailto:wozazimbabwe@yahoo.com) and post the completed petition to P.O. Box FM 701 Famona Bulawayo

## **Appendix 1: Excerpts on education from WOZA's People's Charter:**

Women and men of WOZA are conducting a non-violent campaign. Our aim is to mobilise Zimbabweans to demand social justice from their leaders. The time has come to put the past behind us and start building a better tomorrow. We will hold existing leaders accountable and mobilise people to the movement to demand leaders who will deliver all aspects of social justice and a genuinely people-driven constitution.

### **DREAMING OF A NEW ZIMBABWE - THE PEOPLE'S CHARTER**

*Zimbabweans, united and resolute, announce:*

- That after 27 years of independence, the freedoms and equal opportunities we were promised have not been fulfilled;
- The dreams we had of a good life – of dignity, comfort and security - have become nightmares. Zimbabweans must dream once again and turn their dreams into a living reality.
- We must keep in mind, however, that we deserve better and we must not be afraid to believe that we have the right to a brighter future and we have the right to contribute to building it.
- And therefore, we, the people of Zimbabwe, women, men and children, of all races, tribes and religions, come together with respect for each other and as equals to adopt this Charter, knowing that united we can deliver its possibilities;
- And we undertake to work together with strength, courage and hope, until all Zimbabweans can live in a genuinely democratic country in peace and with dignity.

#### **Educating the Nation**

- Every child shall have equal access to an education without any form of discrimination. Those who cannot afford it shall have access to financial assistance;
- Primary education shall be free and secondary education affordable as we were promised in 1980;
- All students shall have a good quality education, taught in classrooms with enough resources – books, desks and equipment;
- There shall be enough qualified teachers committed to educating the next generation. We must respect their contribution enough to give them a living wage.

#### **Appendix 2: In their words - concerns of parents from the February 2009 survey:**

- “Children need good education but the problem is that our leaders do not show concern about it. They need to take steps about education.”
- “May the new minister of education pay his attention and rebuild our schools and education.”
- “No foreign currency to pay school fees – we want Zimbabwe dollar fees.”
- “I did not go to school but I need my children to go to school.”
- “If the schools are to be opened the ministry of health must help cleaning schools to avoid cholera and those of food aid to feed them.”
- “Our education is under intensive care.”
- “We lost too much money last year and there were no teachers.”
- “Our children are becoming wild. Children who are slow learners have totally lost memory.”
- “I am heartbroken because in years back we used to go to school even if we failed but our children are failing to go to school. This will destroy our children's future.”
- “It is painful to have an uneducated child.”
- “Children should go back to school because we are breeding criminals at home.”
- “I want my grandchildren to learn so that they finish the poor life I am living.”
- “There are no resources in schools whilst they are charging what they want without consulting parents and at the end of the day demanding us to pay teachers salaries.”
- “Children fail to learn because of hunger.”
- “Children are sent back home if they do not have 1 US dollar for teacher's transport” (Makomo Primary, Harare)