

Policy Brief

The Implementation of the Cadetship Scheme Policy for Funding Higher Education in Zimbabwe

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1. Context of the Cadetship Support Scheme Policy for Funding Higher Education in Zimbabwe

In this new millennium, Zimbabwe has come up with a model of funding higher education that is known as the Cadetship Support Scheme (CSS). This policy brief presents the major findings from the study that was conducted by these authors on the scheme and explores the policy implications evolving from the study.

The Cadetship Scheme is a contract that is signed between an undergraduate scholar and the government of Zimbabwe. The scheme was introduced in Zimbabwe when both the public and private sectors were experiencing high brain drain. It is a cadetship programme introduced as a welfare scheme to cover tuition fees, food and accommodation requirements that students from poor backgrounds need in the institutions of higher learning. Under the contract, the student's fees are paid by the government and in return the student is bonded for a period equivalent to the number of years the student spent in training.

The CSS programme was introduced in 2006 after the funding policy which was characterized by grants and loans ceased and only catered for the undergraduate students. The removal of grants and loans was seen as a blow on the poor to the extent that the government introduced this programme to cater for them. Thus, the cadetship programme was seen as bringing equity in higher education financing by helping those from poor backgrounds. However, the scheme appears to be discriminatory as it does not cater for the postgraduate students and that not all students with problems of finance have access to it— for example those on Open Distance learning institutions.

The policy framework within which the CSS must operate states that an applicant must be prepared to train on the special Cadetship Scheme at training institutions recognized by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, be a citizen of Zimbabwe, must show that he/she lacks the capacity to pay the required fees and may be an orphan or someone with physical challenges. On receiving the applications and lists, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education then vets the forms: looking at the citizenship status, relevant attachments, and completeness of the forms and the academic results for those already under study. A list of those who qualify is then compiled.

However, the vetting for cadetship is not thorough such that also students from well-to-do backgrounds have found their way as beneficiaries of the scheme. Such policy loopholes need to be closed if the policy is to be useful to the nation.

The money of those who qualified is sent to the institution as a lump sum and students are required to sign for the receipt of that money. After the necessary documentation, a bulk payment is made to the institutions by the Ministry of Finance. The current levels of support per semester for university students are US\$300 for arts and humanities, US\$350 for engineering and sciences and US\$400 for those studying medicine and veterinary sciences. All students in polytechnic and teacher education colleges receive US\$385 per term. However, in 2013, Zimbabwe's state universities semester fees were more than US\$500.00. The money may be inadequate for the welfare and expenses of the student within the university.

Reconciliation of payments and acquittals is done at the institution and sent to the Ministry

for double-checking. The money which is not collected is returned to the Ministry together with the list of the names of those students who did not collect their money. Names of students who repeat are sent to the Ministry and are not paid for that semester. Those whose fees are paid for by the government through the CSS agree under the Memorandum of Agreement they sign to be bonded for a period equal to the period of education they were engaged as cadets and may not know how much has been paid to the institution by the Government. Students have complained about the lack of transparency of the whole scheme with regard to how they benefit from it. The funds that were used to pay for their fees are not repaid but covered by serving the country through any form of employment in Zimbabwe during the bonding period. During that period, the certificate and transcript of results are held by the institution.

2. Critique of the Cadetship Scheme Policy

The Discriminatory Nature of the Funding Scheme: The scheme does not cater for students pursuing their degrees through open and distance learning (ODL). The assumption is that students who enrol in ODL are in full employment and can afford to pay for their education. Yet, in this study we found out that a significant percentage of students enrolled at the Zimbabwe Open University were unemployed school leavers. With the majority of students' parents or guardians earning less than US\$500.00 per month, students in ODL programmes deserve to be included in the Cadetship Scheme.

The Cadetship Scheme's Lack of Capacity: Funding levels discussed above versus the semester tuition fees indicate that the scheme lacks capacity. In addition, the Government of Zimbabwe does not give a positive response to all the students who will have applied for sponsorship.

Bonding Problems: Administrators of universities and colleges observed that some students were reluctant to complete the Cadetship forms because of the bonding clause. Some students believe that the "grass is greener" elsewhere and are keen to relocate to countries such as South Africa and Botswana, soon after graduation. Hence, they

feel that being bonded by the government would be inconvenient. During graduation, students who are bonded are not given their certificates as a precautionary measure to discourage them from breaching the contract.

Delays by the Ministry of Finance in Disbursing Cadetship Funds: University and college administrators unanimously agreed that Cadetship funds from the Ministry of Finance are not always disbursed on time. As a result, universities and colleges are administered on shoestring budgets, compromising service in institutions of higher learning.

Omission of Postgraduate Programs from the Cadetship Scheme: The Cadetship Scheme only caters for undergraduates. This means that postgraduate courses are not funded by the State, thus affecting the quality of these courses. The repercussions of poorly-funded postgraduate programs will be even more dramatic in the future. Students will be unable to pursue further study because there are no funding mechanisms to support them and no quality courses and teaching staff to maintain higher-level programs. Poor funding will consistently diminish the incentive for high-level staff to remain in the academic or research field when other sectors are more profitable.

The Non-Revolving Nature of the Cadetship Fund: The Cadetship Scheme is not a revolving fund; therefore, it is not self-sustaining. Over time the funds for the scheme will become exhausted.

Infrastructure Constraints: There is shortage of accommodation for students, lecture rooms and office space for lecturers. Students end up renting. This has resulted in, to mention some of the problems, instances of co-habiting where boys share accommodation with their girlfriends, rampant prostitution among female students, and high risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Non Availability of Internet Facilities: Lack of access to Internet is an impediment to research and scholarly work; as a result, work quality is compromised.

Reduced Quality of Lectures and Tutorials: This is a combined effect of reasons such as

shortage of teaching/learning resources, brain drain, inexperienced lecturers, unmotivated staff and poor remuneration.

Under-resourced Libraries: The cadetship scheme has failed to provide the assistance required in acquiring books and other reading materials essential in students' education.

3. Policy Recommendations

- In funding higher education there is need for a clear policy. The government should consider designing a student loan grant system that benefits all deserving students. There is an urgent need for the creation of a fully-dedicated national student funding scheme that is non-discriminatory in nature and which considers both demand and supply. Effective loan repayment schemes should be set up so as to ensure the establishment of a revolving fund to be used as loans and grants for other students. Loans should be disbursed in such a way that students should be aware of the obligation to repay the loan after their studies. If the student fails to repay, his/her guarantor should be obligated to repay the loan. Legal systems should be put in place to oblige students to repay their loans.

- Business enterprises need to partner with the Ministry of Higher Education in the provision of tertiary level education scholarships. In Zimbabwe, Econet Wireless serves as a good benchmark for such partnerships. Through its Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo and Capernaum Trust Scholarships, the company has been able to contribute to workforce development as well as discharge its corporate social responsibility through the provision of these scholarships.

- The government needs to disburse funds to tertiary institutions for recurrent expenditure in time so as to ensure that administrators manage their budgets effectively and administer institutions efficiently.

- There is need for adequate funding to be allocated to research so that universities can contribute to the generation of new knowledge.

- ODL education is developing rapidly in all regions of the world. Under certain conditions, distance education also makes it possible to respond to steep increases in the number of students at a cost significantly lower than that of face-to-face teaching. This being the case, students enrolled in ODL programmes should also have access to funding through the revised Cadetship Scheme.

4. Conclusion

From the analysis above it can be seen that the current financing of higher education, the Cadetship Support System, does not bring a solution to the issue of equity and access that arises due to the abolishment of student loans. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are failing to enter universities while those better-off students are increasing their demand for higher education. When enrolments in universities increase, the tendency is to glorify Zimbabwe when in fact elite is being created.

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