

THE STUDENT SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS



DECEMBER 2020



LUVATSI
SWAZILAND YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT ORGANISATION



SAIH



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT) would like to extend its gratitude to its Student Academic Freedom Regional Advocacy Program (SAFRAP) partners, the Swaziland Youth Empowerment Organization (LUVATSI) and the Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC) for their support in coordinating this study. Appreciation is also extended to the team of consultants who led this research process. The study was only a success because of students who took their time to participate in the survey as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that provided critical insights into the way they are surviving in the institutions of higher learning. The perspectives of various stakeholders that were engaged as key informants are also appreciated because they enriched the research and provided a more balanced look at the issues of concern, the opportunities and the challenges that lay ahead for students in the three countries. The technical and financial support from Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH) for the SAFRAP and this study is greatly appreciated.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
KII	Key Informant Interview
ICT	Information Communication Technology
SRC	Student Representative Council
SAFRAP	Student Academic Freedom Regional Advocacy Program
SAFRAC	Student Academic Freedom Regional Advocacy Conference
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SNUS	Swaziland National Union of Students
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UNZA	University of Zambia
YETT	Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust
ZACOSU	Zambia Association of Colleges Students Union
ZANEC	Zambia National Education Coalition
ZICOSU	Zimbabwe Congress of Students Union
ZINASU	Zimbabwe National Students' Union

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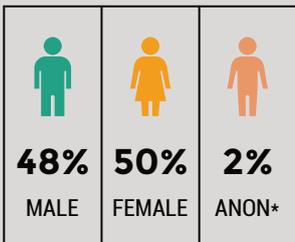
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DEMOGRAPHICS

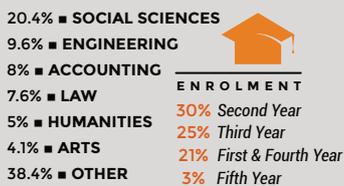
respondents

457



* ANONYMOUS | Chose not to say

AGE RANGE	1% ■ Under 18 yrs
	74% ■ 18-24 yrs
	25% ■ 25-40 yrs



DEMOGRAPHICS BY TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS



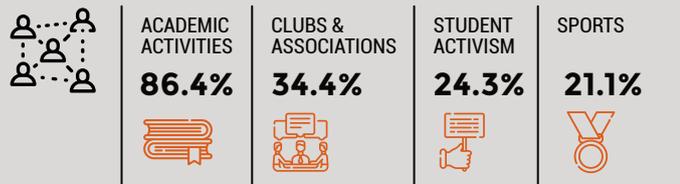
17.6% STUDENTS WHO BELONG TO A STUDENT COUNCIL OR REPRESENTATIVE BODY

FOCUS COUNTRIES



STUDENTS SURVEYED FROM
Eswatini | Zambia | Zimbabwe

KEY INFLUENCES ON STUDENTS IN THE THREE COUNTRIES



65%

of respondents named these root causes of dissatisfaction as students:

LIVING CONDITIONS

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE

EFFECTS OF COVID-19

STUDENT Aspirations



To complete their Higher/Tertiary Education

Affordable accommodation

Tuition support Mechanisms & better infrastructure

Better opportunities for employment & entrepreneurship

Modern learning spaces & tools

Challenges to these aspirations



66.3% HIGH COSTS OF BASIC NEEDS

62.1% HIGH TUITION FEES

51.2% LIMITED ACCESS TO ACCOMMODATION

33.5% POOR QUALITY EDUCATION

NO SPECIFIC OR DEDICATED POLICIES THAT REGULATE TERTIARY EDUCATION IN ANY OF THE THREE COUNTRIES



feel there is no academic freedom in their institutions.

STUDENT ROLES

in voicing their needs and desire for Academic Freedom

58.4% of students prefer engagement

56.9% of students prefer petitioning

48.4% of students prefer peaceful demonstration

39.2% of students prefer other

STUDENT ROLES

in student civic engagement and awareness of engagement platforms available

% NOT AWARE OF PLATFORMS TO ENGAGE WITH DECISION MAKERS

57.8%

% AWARE OF ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS ON NATIONAL LEVELS

11.2%

% AWARE OF ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS ON INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS

36.3%

% AWARE OF ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS ON REGIONAL LEVELS

5.3%

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The YETT carried out a Student Situational Analysis (SSA) whose overall objective was to provide information that empowers higher and tertiary education students and stakeholders to drive change, strengthen student activism, advocacy and oversight at multiple levels, and to empower student led and focused organizations to advance student rights. Specifically, through this research, YETT and its SAFRA partners seek to develop a comprehensive understanding of the context in which higher and tertiary students in Eswatini, Zambia and Zimbabwe are thriving and struggling in tertiary institutions, including identifying the key issues affecting students, their priorities in life and for the future, and the ways in which they participate in (or do not participate in) the pursuit of quality education.

Research for this study was conducted using a multi-method approach which included secondary data analysis of available survey and administrative data. Primary data was gathered through a survey as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with various stakeholders and experts. The analysis therefore was based on both the primary and secondary data sources. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic with its associated travel restrictions, which meant data collection for the survey could not be conducted in the different parts of the 3 countries. Only an online survey was possible in the context of the COVID-19 restrictions.

Findings

Demographics



Of the 457 survey respondents, half (50 percent) were females, followed by 48 percent males and 2 percent that chose not to say. The study maintained a similar gender balance in the distribution of respondents in the FGDs with 57.5 percent of the respondents being males whilst 42.5 percent were females. More than half (74 percent) of the respondents were aged between 18-24 followed by 25 percent aged between 25-40 years with only 1 percent being those aged younger than 18.

The majority of the study respondents (20.4 percent) were studying social sciences, followed by 9.6 percent in engineering, 8 percent accounting, 7.6 percent law, 6.9 percent medicine, 5 percent humanities, 4.1 percent arts and the rest (38.4 percent) in other departments such as ICTs, other health sciences etc.

In terms of the year of enrolment for the students, the majority (30 percent) were in their second year followed by 25 percent in third year, 21 percent in first and fourth year and 3 percent in the fifth. A statistically insignificant number were doing their masters or sitting for the BAR exams. The majority of the study's respondents (66 percent) stay off campus whilst 34 percent have accommodation on campus.

The majority of the students that responded to the survey (84 percent) were from universities followed with 7 percent from polytechnical colleges and 4 percent from teacher training colleges with the rest (5 percent) from colleges such as vocational training centres, nursing institutions and other forms of tertiary institutions.

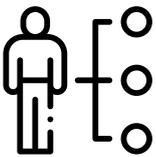
The study assessed whether the respondents belonged to any student representative body, council or organisation and noted that the majority of student respondents, 68.5 percent, did not belong to any of such bodies followed by 17.6 percent who are members of student representative organisations that operate in campuses and 10.2 percent who are in the Student Representative Council and 7.9 percent that belong to some student representative body.

Key Influences on Students in the Three Countries



The majority of students (86.4 percent) spend their time engaged in academic activities which includes attending lecturers or discussions. This was followed by participation in Clubs and associations (34.4 percent), Sports (21.1 percent) and Student activism (24.3 percent). Students are generally viewed as an opportunity, challenge or threat by various stakeholders and community members and this has a bearing on how their student career is influenced.

Root Causes of Student Dissatisfaction



The majority of the students (65 percent) are not satisfied with their living conditions and their status in the tertiary institutions. The study observed that economic hardships or financial constraints both at the individual and institutional level are causing challenges in the way that students are living at the institutions. The other root cause that was noted by the students is the inability to engage and act on students' concerns by the college administration. Although new ICT based learning methods were introduced to counter the impacts of COVID-19, the majority of students feel that this was ill-planned and ill-considered because of the extra cost burden that fell on the shoulders of the students to ensure that they access data and therefore, learning resources and content. The lack of adequate infrastructure including recreational facilities has been noted as another root cause to the challenges that students face in the tertiary institutions.

Student Aspirations and Challenges



The most common challenges that are faced by over half of the students are the high costs of basic needs (66.3 percent); high tuition fees (62.1 percent); and limited accommodation (51.2 percent). The other challenges include limited space to express views and opinions (45.7 percent), poor quality of education (33.5 percent) and limited opportunities to partake in social clubs and associations (25.4 percent), amongst others.

Some of the key aspirations that students have include the ability and means to finish their higher and tertiary education. The students also aspire for an improved learning and teaching environment in the tertiary institutions with improved infrastructure to support their accommodation and provide for modern learning spaces. Another basic aspiration is affordable education that has various supporting mechanisms for those that are unable to afford paying tuition fees whilst at the same time creating opportunities for students to work or have entrepreneurial ventures that can help them to achieve a decent living in the institutions without them becoming vulnerable.

Generally, COVID-19 accentuated pre-existing inequalities in, and challenges to the higher and tertiary education sector. Although some of the institutions introduced e-learning following the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, students continued to face challenges in accessing these platforms due to high costs associated with data, equipment and at times the network infrastructure which does not have the adequate coverage to cater for students in all areas.

The COVID-19 crisis poses an opportunity for improving the three countries' digital and health infrastructures. One opportunity that needs to be enhanced is the introduction of online based learning for many institutions that have failed to adopt these new modalities for learning. The pandemic should also be taken as a key opportunity for learning and strengthening of the institutions in delivering better services and educational products to the students.

State of Academic Freedom



Overall, there is restricted academic freedom across the tertiary institutions in the three countries. Averaging the different elements of measuring academic freedom, the study established that below half (43 percent) of the students feel that there is academic freedom in their institutions, whilst 36 percent feels that this exists sometimes and on some issues. Two in ten students (21 percent) feel absolute that there is no academic freedom in their institutions.

Student Civic Engagement



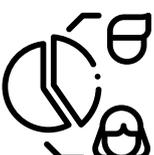
Over half (57.8 percent) of the students are not aware of any platforms to engage with decision makers whilst 36.3 percent are aware of such platforms at the institutional level while 11.2 percent know of national level platforms and processes and 5.3 percent are aware of these platforms and processes at the regional level. Among those that indicated awareness of platforms and opportunities to engage decision makers, they noted SRCs, student unions, the Parliament and parliamentary public hearings, student affairs departments including the dean of students, as well as demonstrations as some of the available ways of ensuring that decision makers give attention to their issues.

Role of Students and Student Activists in Academic Freedom



The study showed that the majority of the students (58.4 percent) use engagement as a way or action on issues affecting students, followed by petitioning which is preferred by 56.9 percent of the respondents, while 48.4 percent of respondents say they have used peaceful demonstrations as a strategy of taking action on issues affecting students. 39.2 percent opt for other forms of action.

Policies Affecting Students



Generally, the study noted that there are no specific and dedicated overarching policies that regulate tertiary education in the three countries. The policies that regulate tertiary education are found in various national legislative pieces. In the three countries the issue of affordable and quality education is a Constitutional issue which brings credence to the way that issues of education are managed and coordinated.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Policy Recommendations

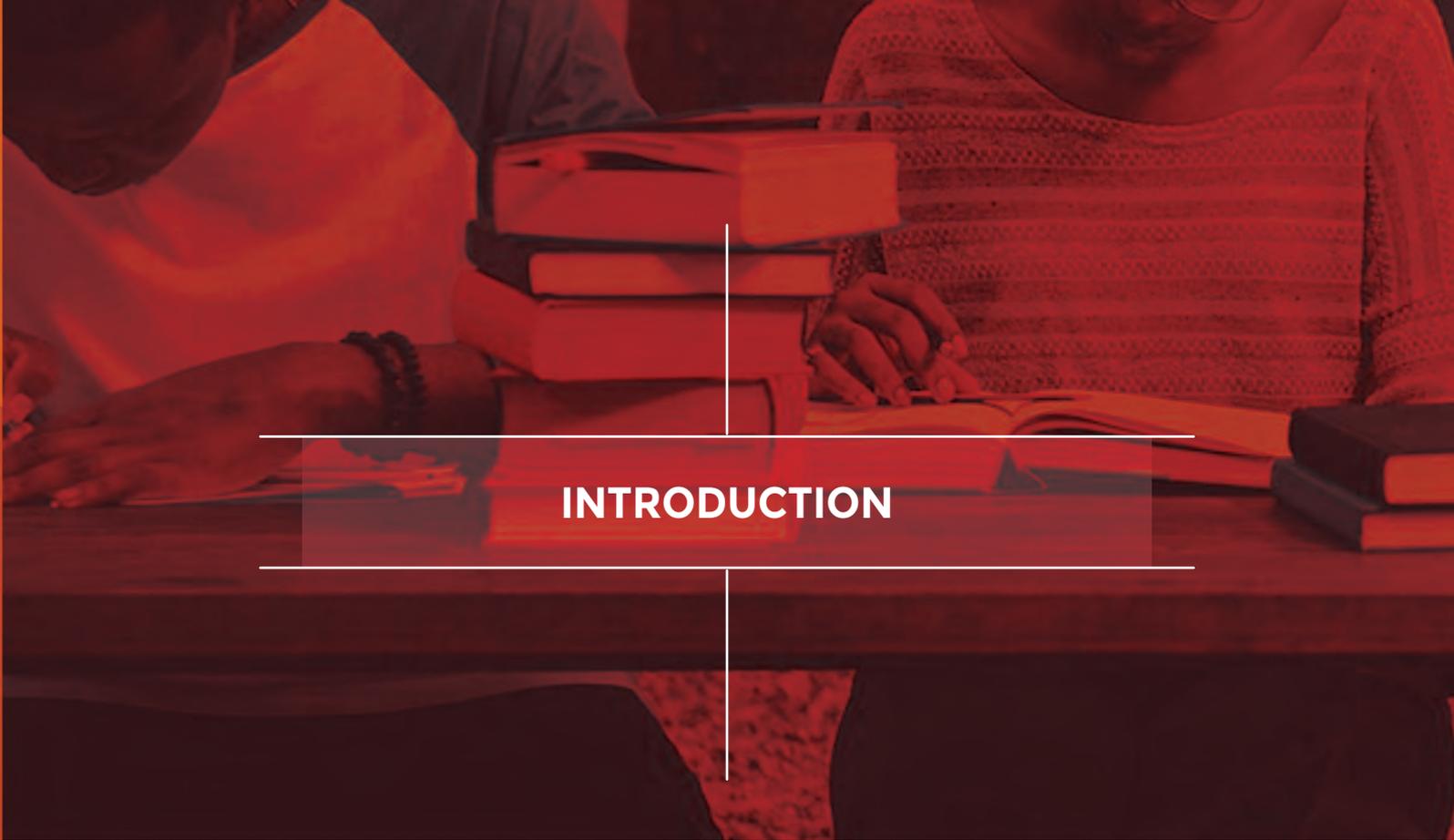
KEY CONCLUSION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
<p><i>Generally, students in the three countries are not happy with their living conditions in tertiary institutions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In the three countries there is need for the introduction of a holistic student focused policy or plan that will ensure that the challenges that confront students in institutions are given adequate focus and priority. Furthermore, there is need for policies and laws to be reviewed or enacted to encourage the effective participation of students in governance issues and decision-making processes and to express themselves in the context of academic freedom. ■ The three countries need to enact legislation that facilitates the establishment of a Students' Council and a National Students' Policy that speaks to respective national development plans and gives a direct linkage between what the nation is trying to achieve in a product of a student beyond campus, in addition addressing the national skills database in the context of the relevance of some of the qualifications that are being offered to students in order to mitigate the challenge of "graduate unemployment."
<p><i>COVID 19 ushered in new learning modes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is an urgent need for new policies and regulation guidelines to support the new demands for online learning so as to ensure that the quality of education is protected or even further enhanced. ■ The governments in the three countries should make substantial investments in the digital economy and ensure that it supports programs that empowers or capacitates both the students and lecturers on using the online platforms. Financial resources should also be allocated to support infrastructure development as well as support the reintroduction or scaling up of the grants which will allow the disadvantaged students a chance to earn an education. ■ Furthermore, the e-learning modality requires government and tertiary institutions to enter into partnerships with telecommunications companies to ensure data is affordable as well as subsidise ICT equipment such as computers, tablets and smart phones, for students that cannot afford. ■ To facilitate access to e-learning for more students, there is need for decentralised centres that can support access to internet amongst students.
<p><i>Although there are persisting threats from COVID-19, students are recommending that it is better that institutions reopen</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The government should develop a comprehensive policy that allows for institutional specific strategies to manage and contain COVID-19 including strict adherence to safety measures, considerations of rotational classes to decongest the institutions whilst at the same time strengthen the capacity to deliver online learning. ■ With the advent of a vaccine, institutions of higher learning should take lead in promoting uptake and ensure that students get vaccinated as a way of promoting the herd immunity.

Program Recommendations

KEY CONCLUSION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
<i>Students want their curriculums to focus more on soft skills and life skill training</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tertiary institutions should introduce comprehensive programs on leadership, career building and activism as well as develop internship and mentorship programs to give the learners an opportunity to grow, build and enhance their skills and capabilities before they join the professional world.
<i>SRCs' scope and level of influence is limited</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CSOs should develop and support capacity building programs that seek to ensure SRCs deliver effectively on their mandate and create strategic convening for advocacy and lobbying.
<i>Restricted academic freedom in the three countries and students are unable to fully express themselves without fear</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CSOs should strengthen the role of institutions such as SNUS, ZANASU, ZACOSU, ZICOSU, and ZINASU to ensure that they give an alternative platform for students' issues to be represented outside the campus, where they are compromised politically. ■ CSOs can consider providing election monitoring for tertiary institutions so as to further enhance internal democracy within the institutions.
<i>Parliament is a key structure for advancing advocacy issues for students, but students are afraid to engage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CSOs should continue to petition Parliament to bring issues to the attention of policy makers through the relevant committees and submitting policy briefs and alternatives policy documents. CSOs should also lobby the Parliament to continue strengthening its relationships with them as strategic partners. ■ CSOs should also convene common spaces that students can engage with Parliament in an environment that does not risk intimidation.
<i>There is dilapidated infrastructure and recreational facilities in most of the institutions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Institutions should invest in recreational facilities that ensure that students have activities that allows them to spend their free time in colleges meaningfully.

Recommendations on Partnerships

KEY CONCLUSION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
<i>Academic Freedom and other freedoms for students remain constrained in the three countries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional partnerships, lobbying and advocacy remain critical in building momentum on the issue of academic freedom which in isolation results in victimisation of activists.
<i>Shrinking space for activism targeted at academic freedom and student welfare</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil society should continue to provide strategic convening space to ensure that there is engagement between college authorities and students including student representative unions.
<i>Challenges of high costs of basic commodities, unaffordable tuition fees and accommodation challenges persists</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governments in the three countries should enter strategic Public Private Sector Partnerships that are designed to mobilise for resources that go on to support infrastructural development as well as provide financial aid to some of the needy students. Former students are an important entry point to mobilising for support from the private as well as public sector.



INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings from a student's situational analysis. The report captures and establishes the general student profile for students in Eswatini, Zambia and Zimbabwe which helps deepen the understanding of this demographic group. Through accurate and current information, this study seeks to assist higher and tertiary education students and stakeholders to create opportunities and interventions that are tailored to address their lived experiences and realities.





RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The overall objective of the research was to provide information that empowers higher and tertiary education students and stakeholders to drive change, strengthen student activism, advocacy and oversight at multiple levels, and to empower student led and focused organizations to advance student rights. Specifically, through this research, YETT and its SAFRA partners would like to develop a comprehensive understanding of the context in which higher and tertiary students in Eswatini, Zambia and Zimbabwe are thriving and struggling in tertiary institutions, including identifying the key issues affecting students, their priorities in life and for the future, and the ways in which they participate in (or do not participate in) the pursuit of quality education.

The Study outlines a representative profile of students in the three countries within the domains of social, economic and political realities. Particularly, the analysis looks at the impacts and implications of COVID-19 on students' welfare, academic freedom and their ability to enjoy their rights. The research also explored areas that students and stakeholders in higher and tertiary education should drive change towards, the status of student activism and areas that need strengthening as well as defines issues and identifies opportunities for advocacy and strategic engagement that seeks to drive student led and focused advancement of rights.

The findings of this situational analysis enhances understanding and ensures evidence-based recommendations through the in-depth understanding of the existing economic and political context in tertiary education in the three countries, the impact of COVID-19 on higher and tertiary learning, and the key issues and struggles as well as opportunities and threats to student participation for quality education and academic freedom. The study further points to additional areas of enquiry that will be instrumental in shaping a regional research agenda that SAFRAP can build on. Findings and recommendations from the research will feed directly into policy dialogues and further advocacy initiatives under the SAFRA project.



RESEARCH DESIGN / METHODOLOGY

Research for this study was conducted using a multi-method approach which included secondary data analysis of available survey and administrative data. Primary data was gathered through a survey as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with various stakeholders and experts. The analysis therefore was based on both primary and secondary data sources.

Primary data collection:

The overall objective of primary data collection was to understand how the situation of students in the three countries changed within the COVID-19 context. It also sought to tap into students' perceptions of social change and their current and anticipated living situations. The enquiry was made along the lines of students' observations and concerns about employment, health, education, participation in community development and civic engagement, and the challenges they face, as well as their potential involvement in development.

Online Survey:

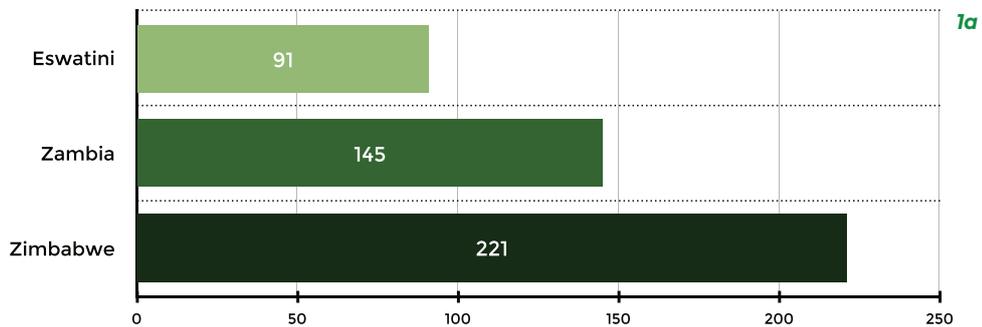
To gather primary data, the situational analysis carried out an online survey that targeted different students from the three countries. The sample design for quantitative data collection was done at two stages, with Eswatini, Zambia and Zimbabwe being the primary sampling units and students as secondary sampling units. A sample was calculated and allocated proportionally to the countries using probability proportional to size (PPS). The sample size was calculated from a population of 149,500 students. Using a 95 percent confidence interval, 5 percent margin of error and 50% response distribution, the minimum acceptable sample size was determined as 384 respondents. With an

Online Survey
continued

added 10 percent for contingency and possible non-response, the sample size was 422 respondents. Since Eswatini contributed 3 percent of the sample, the country sample was multiplied by a factor of 9 to boost it to 117 which brought the total sample size to 526.

Due to COVID-19, an online survey was carried out. A total of 457 students participated in the survey with 48.4 percent being students from Zimbabwe, 31.7 percent from Zambia and 19.9 percent being students from Eswatini. **Figure 1** below outlines the distribution of the survey respondents across the three countries.

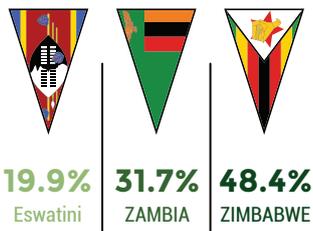
Figures 1a and 1b: Reach out of the Situational Analysis Survey



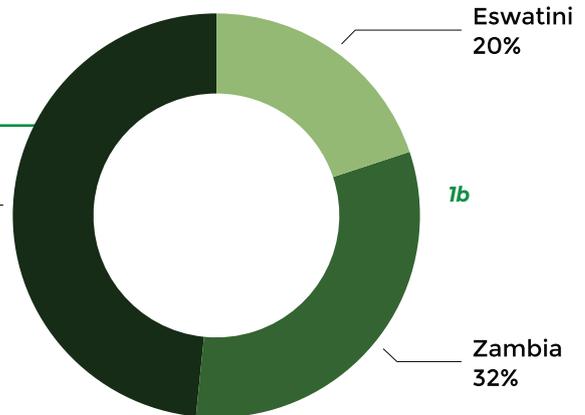
% CONTRIBUTION BY COUNTRY

total student respondents who participated in the survey

457 from three countries



Zimbabwe 48%



Focus Group Discussions:

20 FGDs were facilitated in selected tertiary colleges in the three countries as case studies to ground discussions. The FGDs reached to a total of 273 participants with 57.5 percent being males and 42.5 percent being females. The key themes that were explored in the FGDs include academic freedom, challenges in the current context, right to participation and civic engagement, changing values and attitudes, and expectations for the future. *Table 1* provides a summary of the FGD reach out in the three countries:

20 FGDs | **273** PARTICIPANTS | **57.5%** MALES | **42.5%** FEMALES

Table 1: FGD Reach Out

COUNTRY	TARGETED INSTITUTION	# OF FGD PARTICIPANTS	
		MALES	FEMALES
Eswatini	Southern Africa Nazarene University	15	13
	Limkokwing University of Creative Technology	22	15
	William Pitcher Teachers Training College	13	8
	Eswatini College of Technology	6	4
	University of Eswatini	21	15
	Ngwane Teacher Training College	9	3
Zambia	University of Zambia	6	6
	Lusaka University	5	7
	Cavendish University Zambia	9	3
	Copperbelt University	6	6
	Victoria Falls University of Technology	8	4
Zimbabwe	Africa University	8	4
	Midlands State University	6	7
	Harare Polytechnic	7	4
	University of Zimbabwe	4	7
	National University of Science & Technology	8	5
	SRC members from polytechnical colleges	4	5
Reach out per gender		157	116
Combined reach out		273	

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):

To triangulate the information gathered from the students through the FGDs, the study used KIIs with strategic level respondents. Key Informant Interviews were held with stakeholders who spoke authoritatively or in their representative capacity on the issues that the research explored. In each country key informants were selected through expert case sampling to ensure that all those selected provided information that added value to the analysis.

22 KEY INFORMANTS

A total of 22 key informants were engaged from the three countries and **Table 2** outlines the key informants that were engaged under the study. The names and Title/Role of Key Informants have been omitted to protect the identity of the key stakeholders who partook in the study.

Table 2: Key Informants

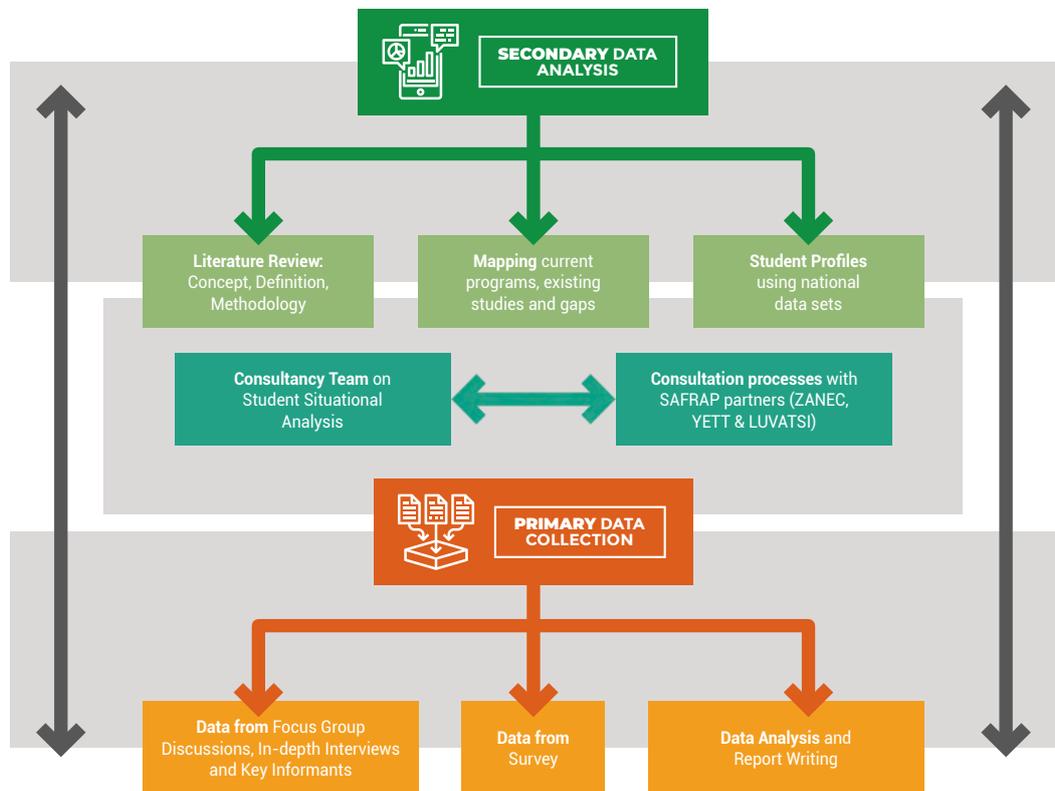
COUNTRY		INSTITUTION / ORGANISATION
Eswatini	Representative	Ministry of Labour and Social Security
	Representative	Ministry of Education and Training
	Representative	Eswatini Medical Christian University
	Representative	William Pitcher College
	Representative	University of Eswatini-Luyengo Campus
	Representative	University of Eswatini-Mbabane Campus
	Representative	Eswatini Youth Empowerment Organisation – Luvatsi
	Representative	Eswatini National Union of Students
Zambia	Representative	Community Development Staff Training College
	Representative	University of Zambia
	Representative	University of Zambia
	Representative	Ministry of General Education
	Representative	Ministry of Higher Education
Zimbabwe	Representative	Parliament of Zimbabwe
	Representative	Manicaland State University for Applied Sciences
	Representative	Harare Polytechnic
	Representative	ZINASU
	Representative	Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology
	Representative	Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology

Secondary Data:

To further corroborate findings and consolidate the data that was gathered through the primary sources, the study reviewed available survey and administrative data to specifically look for socioeconomic and demographic surveys that profiles students. Project and program reports, materials and studies by the partner organisations in the SAFRAP as well as national policies and strategies that relate to students in tertiary institutions were reviewed. A secondary data extraction tool was used to guide documentation of secondary literature specifically categorizing the students, understanding the economic, social and political challenges and opportunities that exists in their reality.

The multi-method approach is illustrated in the *Figure 2* which shows how the different methods and approaches interacted with each other to produce the findings that are presented in this situational analysis.

Figure 2: Data Collection Framework



LIMITATIONS

The study was conducted during the **COVID-19 pandemic** and its associated travel restrictions meant data collection for the survey could not be conducted in the different parts of the 3 countries. Only an online survey was possible in the context of the COVID-19 restrictions. An online survey meant that some students from remote parts with challenges of internet connectivity and access might have faced challenges in participating in the survey. To mitigate this, the study conducted key informant interviews, triangulated with secondary literature and included FGDs with a diverse and representative group of students. The FGDs and Key Informant Interviews ensured that perspectives from diverse groups of students as well as stakeholder groups were considered. Furthermore, the report was validated by 59 stakeholders from Eswatini, 89 stakeholders from Zambia and 46 from Zimbabwe. These stakeholders included representatives of student unions, college administrators and ministry departments. Data costs for participating in the online survey was another limitation which was however addressed by the provision of data to some student categories that faced challenges in accessing internet.

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE STUDY

	 <p>ONLINE SURVEY</p>	<p>THE STUDY WAS VALIDATED BY STAKEHOLDERS FROM ALL 3 PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES</p> <p>Key Informant Interviews Focus Group Discussions Secondary Literature, etc</p>	<p>59 Stakeholders from Eswatini</p>
	<p>STUDENTS SURVEYED FROM</p> 	<p>89 Stakeholders from ZAMBIA</p>	<p>46 Stakeholders from ZIMBABWE</p>

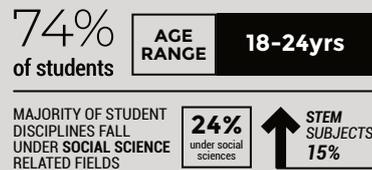
STAKEHOLDERS MADE UP OF: STUDENT UNION REPS ■ COLLEGE ADMINS ■ MINISTRY DEPTS

THE SITUATION OF STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS



STUDENT PROFILE:

The majority of students (74 percent) are within the age group of 18-24. The majority of the respondents (24 percent) are in disciplines under social sciences, with about 15 percent in STEM related fields which indicates an increase in enrolment in STEM subjects against earlier studies such as Fowler C. J. H. (2019). Depending on who is profiling them, students are generally perceived as an opportunity, a challenge or a threat.



LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH LIVING CONDITIONS:

The majority of the students (65 percent) are not satisfied with their daily lives in tertiary institutions and depression was cited as a looming scourge. Students with disabilities struggle on the campuses where services and infrastructure are not disability sensitive whilst sexual minorities live in fear and silence as they are often stigmatised.



KEY ASPIRATIONS OF STUDENTS:

In terms of key aspirations, most of the students simply aspire for improved and affordable education and services on campus, to graduate alive (because of COVID-19 and other vulnerabilities) and to be gainfully employed upon completing their studies.



KEY CHALLENGES

The three most pressing challenges mentioned by over half of the students that responded to the survey are: the high costs of basic needs (67.2 percent); high tuition fees (63 percent); and limited accommodation (51.9 percent).



ACCOMMODATION STATUS:

On campus accommodation remains one of the challenges that students face with the majority of students (66 percent) staying at off campus accommodation. The living conditions associated with the off-campus accommodation are most undesirable as the majority (65 percent) share a room with at most five other people whilst only 29 percent stay alone with 6 percent staying with more than 5 people.



LIVING STANDARDS:

The study confirms that the majority of students (51 percent) are only affording 2 meals a day whilst a significant number (20 percent) are surviving on 1 meal a day with 20 percent that can afford 3 meals a day and only 9 percent that affords 3 meals a day with some snacks in between.



This section provides a summary of the situation of students in tertiary institutions in Eswatini, Zambia and Zimbabwe based on the findings of this situational analysis.



QUALITY OF EDUCATION:

The majority of the students (66 percent) consider that the education that they are receiving is adequate in preparing them to get ahead. Those that dispute this consider ICT based learning, practice-based learning, innovation and entrepreneurship as well as exposure to changing trends as some of the areas that should be improved.



KEY ACTIVITIES

Attending lectures and other academic activities such as group discussions remain the key activity most students (86.4 percent) spend their time on.



MEMBERSHIP OF STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE COUNCILS, BODIES AND ORGANISATIONS

Almost 7 in 10 students (68.5 percent) do not belong to any student representative council, body or organisation.



STATE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM:

Only 23.4 percent of the students felt that they were generally free to express their views in their tertiary institutions. However, the majority (63.5 percent) felt safe in discussing, inquiring and expressing their views on academic issues in the classroom with 49.7 percent expressing confidence that they have the freedom to research on whatever issue. What limits the academic freedom however is that a significant number (23.6 percent) of students are aware of cases of harassment after one has expressed themselves on an issue.



CIVIC PARTICIPATION:

Almost 4 in 10 students (36.3 percent) expressed knowledge of platforms for engagement at the institutional level, with 11.2 percent identifying that there are such platforms for engagement at the national level and 5.3 percent saying these exist at the regional level. The most common forms of civic participation cited by students are engagement, petitions and peaceful demonstrations.



COVID-19:

Almost all respondents noted that they have been affected by COVID-19 with the most cited challenges being disruption of learning, limited access to online based learning mostly due to high data costs and unpreparedness to adjust by both lecturers and students. Regardless of the persisting challenges of COVID-19, 65 percent of the students recommend that institutions should open and practice social distancing and other protective measures as there is no adequate capacity to support any other alternative learning approaches.





FINDINGS

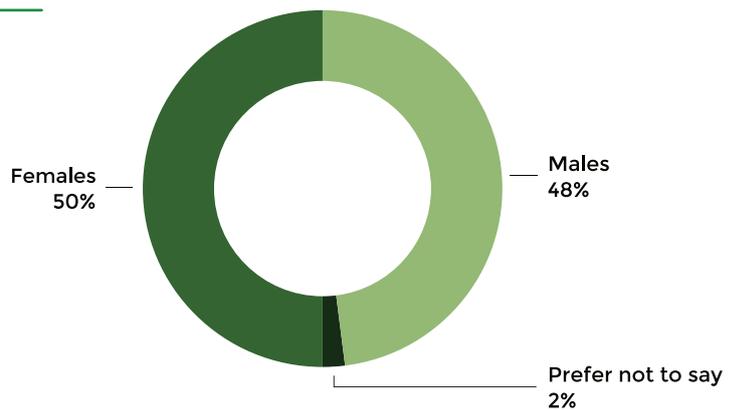
Demographics

Of the 457 survey respondents, half (50 percent) were females, followed by 48 percent males and 2 percent that chose not to say.

The study maintained a similar gender balance in the distribution of respondents in the FGDs with 57.5 percent of the respondents being males whilst 42.5 percent were females. This consideration of equal participation of female and males was crucial in allowing the research to outline issues that concerns both genders. Though it's a small percentage and issues remain under explored, the 2 percent that preferred not to disclose their gender could be indicative of sexual minorities in the institutions who live in silence and are not willing to have their sexual orientation known because of stigma. Some of the key informants indicated that there are students such as sexual minorities and those with disabilities that are almost invisible in the tertiary institutions.

Figure 3:
Genders of respondents

- Females
- Males
- Prefer not to say



More than half (74 percent) of the respondents were aged between 18-24 followed by 25 percent aged between 25-40 years with only 1 percent being those aged younger than 18. The majority of students in tertiary institutions in the three countries therefore are within the economically active age group and they are mostly youth who are reported to have multiple challenges. Although the youth in the three countries constitute the majority of the populations, they are often marginalised from political processes, vulnerable to SRHR challenges and are mostly unemployed.

Figure 4:
Age groups of the respondents

- Younger than 18
- 18-24 years
- 25-40 years
- 41-54 years

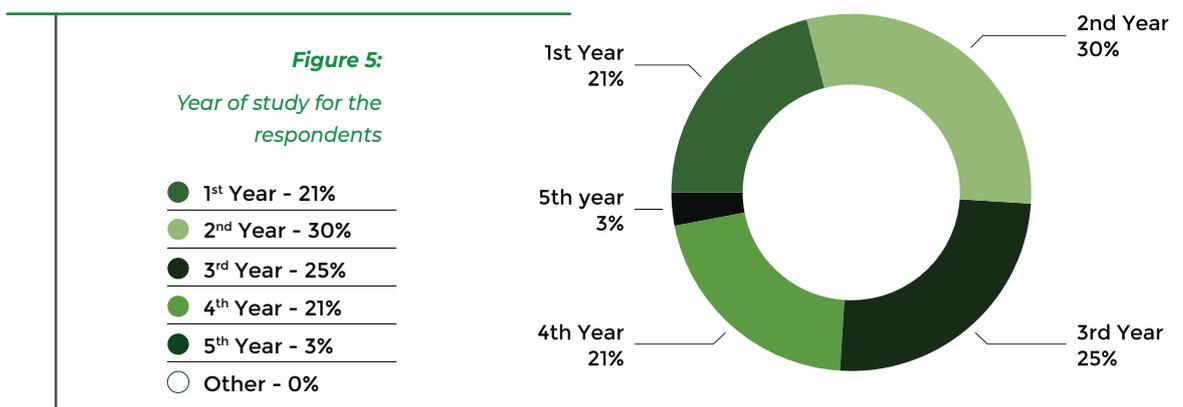




The majority of the study respondents (20.4 percent) were studying social sciences, followed by 9.6 percent in engineering, 8 percent accounting, 7.6 percent law, 6.9 percent medicine, 5 percent humanities, 4.1 percent arts and the rest (38.4 percent) in other departments such as ICTs, other health sciences etc. This distribution is reflective of the concerns that key informants in the study revealed; that there are few students that are taking up science subjects which are required to spark the innovation required to boost industrial growth and manufacturing. However, it is important to note that the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) interventions have yielded some results. Comparing with earlier studies which have noted that Southern African countries are struggling with a lack of graduates in the STEM disciplines, and a poorly developed culture of innovation and entrepreneurship¹ one can see a positive increase. In a 2010 study it was noted that only 9 percent of graduates in sub-Saharan countries are engineers whereas 50 percent are from Humanities and Social Sciences and 22 percent from Education².

Although the increased attention and enrolment on STEM subjects is important, the study established from key informants, especially in civil society organisations, that humanities and social sciences remain critical in delivering a more democratic society, through the creation of more open and critical thinkers willing to engage in public dialogue from a more informed position.

In terms of the year of enrolment for the students, the majority (30 percent) were in their second year followed by 25 percent in third year, 21 percent in first and fourth year and 3 percent in the fifth. A statistically insignificant number were doing their masters or sitting for the BAR exams. The distribution of the survey was therefore generally even considering that the only year of study that had a low number was the fifth year at 3 percent and this was the case because there are few college courses that stretch to the 5th year and beyond. In most cases only medical training and a few engineering courses go beyond four years.



¹ Fowler C. J. H. (2019). *Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Eswatini (Swaziland)* Springer Nature B.V. 2019
J. C. Shin, P. Teixeira (eds.), *Encyclopedia of International Higher Education Systems and Institutions*

² Marope, M. 2010. *The education system in Swaziland. Training and skills development for shared growth and competitiveness.* World Bank working paper, no 188, Washington, DC.



The majority of the study's respondents (66 percent) stay off campus whilst 34 percent have accommodation on campus. This is consistent with the fact that accommodation has been established as one of the main challenges that students face in tertiary institutions in all the three countries.

Figure 6:
Accommodation status of the respondents

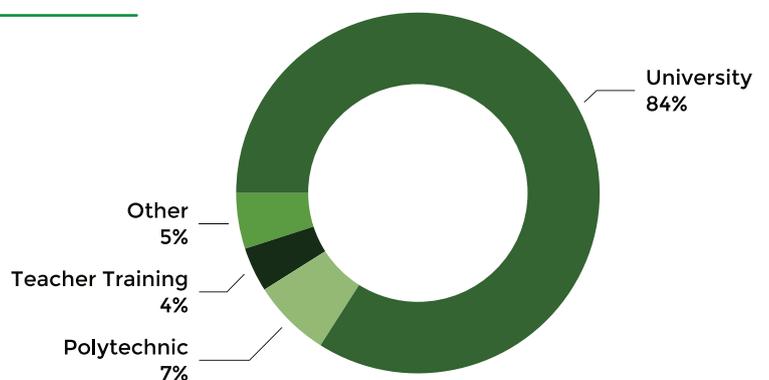
- Off-Campus
- On-Campus



The majority of the students that responded to the survey (84 percent) were from universities followed with 7 percent from polytechnical colleges and 4 percent from teacher training colleges with the rest (5 percent) from colleges such as vocational training centres, nursing institutions and other forms of tertiary institutions. The main reason why the majority of the respondents for this study were from universities is based on the SAFRA member's mobilisation of students from university. Lessons from the implementation of the project have shown that universities have the size and scope of issues that can be better generalised. The centrality of academic freedom in the SAFRAP also resonates more with students in universities. Students in universities also have more access to internet and they participated more in the online survey as compared to students from the other type of colleges.

Figure 7:
Type of college the respondents came from

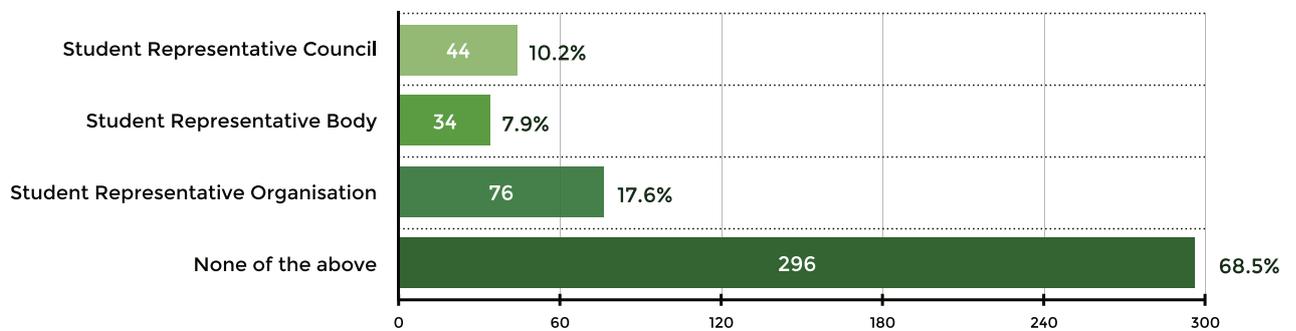
- University
- Polytechnic
- Teacher Training
- Other





The study further assessed whether the respondents belonged to any student representative body, council or organisation and noted that the majority, 68.5 percent, did not belong to any of such bodies followed by 17.6 percent who were members of student representative organisations that operate in campuses and 10.2 percent who are in the student representative councils and 7.9 percent that belonged to some other student representative body. FGDs revealed that the representative council, bodies and organisations do not have the participation of the wider student population but rather a few individuals who represent students. The discussions further indicated that some students feel that they are adequately represented by these representative unions or associations whilst others consider these platforms exclusive to a few students and not consultative and inclusive enough to ensure effective representation of the plight of the entire student body. *Figure 8* depicts membership of students in the various representative unions, bodies and organisations.

Figure 8: Membership in student representative bodies, councils or organisations



Key Influences on Students in the three countries

To establish and understand what the key influences for students in the tertiary institutions in the three countries, the study enquired on what students mostly spend their time engaged in.

The majority of students (86.4 percent) spend their time engaged in academic activities which include attending lecturers or discussions. This was followed by Clubs and associations (34.4 percent), Sports (21.1 percent) and Student activism (24.3 percent).

It is important to note that learning, teaching and other academic activities such as public lectures and symposiums remain key activities that most students have an inclination to participate in. Another dimension that was observed during the study that has a bearing on the activities that students are involved in is the unavailability of adequate recreational facilities that support the participation of students in various non-academic activities. Most students simply resort to spend their time on "the only meaningful" thing to do which is engaging in academic activities because of limited options that are offered by the existing recreational facilities.

Discussions on why most students are not participating in student activism noted three main reasons which include:

- i. Fear of being expelled from college and failing to graduate with many students sharing stories of students that have been expelled because of student activism as well as threats that are often made by college authorities on how students that engage in activism face an imminent risk of expulsion;
- ii. Some students complained that student activism has become the preserve of a few students "Who are dominant and talkative" and more reserved students fail to find space to also participate and influence the agenda of student activism; and
- iii. Partisan national politics have polarised student activism resulting in labelling, being castigated and at times attacked for supporting the "wrong" political party or college camp of the same party.

With COVID-19 and the need for social distancing, the way students interact and participate in group activities to de-stress has been affected. In some FGDs it was noted that with an intense program to catch up and the absence of social interactions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students are failing to cope with the pressure and now there are increased cases of depression which also link to drug and substance abuse as well as isolated cases of suicide. This was also rehashed with some key informants who noted that there has not been enough investment in understanding the psycho-social challenges that COVID-19, social distancing and new learning approaches have on students and what college administrations should have done to manage these new issues more effectively.

Another way in which the study sought to understand what influences students was to consider how they are perceived by institutional authorities, the general community as well as other key stakeholders. This analysis depicted that there is a tri-focal lens in which students are viewed and the elements of this are students as an opportunity, students as a challenge and students as a threat.



**Students
as an
opportunity**

*One of the
dimensions in
which students
are viewed is as
an opportunity.*

One of the dimensions in which students are viewed is as an opportunity. As an academic in Zambia shared, students are regarded generally as an important part of the population as they have “brains,” “can work” and will have “opportunities” that could help to develop families, communities and the nation as a whole. Another key informant shared that parents and the community at large see students as an investment for the future of the country.

To further buttress this, a key informant from Eswatini noted that businesspeople, companies, the academic world and even government view students as an opportunity because they will add value to the economy of the country. From Zimbabwe, one of the key informants also noted that political parties see students as opportunities to further their own agendas while CSOs see them as opportunities for their programs and interventions. Government in the three countries said that they view students as an opportunity and shared that in cases where the state does not have much money to allocate to the various social needs of the community, they have always invested in education because they understand that without education there will be no progress in the country.

Although generally key informants that represented government expressed the view that they consider students as an opportunity, there were some underlying perceptions that they feel that students feel entitled and that they are no longer behaving as what the government expects. One key informant in Eswatini summarised this perception of students in institutions:

“I want to say though that these days sometimes one wonders if students are actually interested in turning around their situation and the situation of their countries when they take to the street in strikes and start vandalising property. The question then becomes- what kind of leaders will they make? How will all the destroyed property be replaced? Have they not learnt negotiation skills and patience in tertiary education? Going through tough and tight schedules is a way of instilling something in the student, do they not understand that?”





Students as a challenge

In direct opposite of viewing students as an opportunity, this view was mostly shared by students as what they perceive to be the perception of them held by other stakeholders. Student leaders in Eswatini feel that students are viewed as a challenge because the government is not interested in investing adequate financial resources on the students. They went further to argue that the government does not really support education because they are afraid that once a huge number of 'Swatis' are educated, they will start questioning how the government is running affairs and the political system of the country. Perspectives from key informants from Zimbabwe indicated that the general society are somehow irritated by students and see them as wasting resources and time as they do not stand a chance at employment after the completion of their studies.

Students as a threat

A key informant in Zambia shared that politicians, especially the ruling party, see students as a threat because they tend to be better informed and more politically engaged than an ordinary citizen. They are viewed as a threat because they are students, after all, they are capable of being political and go on strikes which sometimes vandalizes property³. In Zimbabwe one respondent further highlighted that the government of Zimbabwe is a bit irritated about the students, hence they struggle to relate with them which makes the consultations with students superficial. Civil society in Eswatini argued that generally, students are viewed as a threat because the trend has been that every time tertiary institutions open the students go on strike. They are viewed as a threat because the state feels that there is political influence coming from Political Parties⁴. This support is seen during demonstrations by students as t-shirts of different Political Parties are observed.

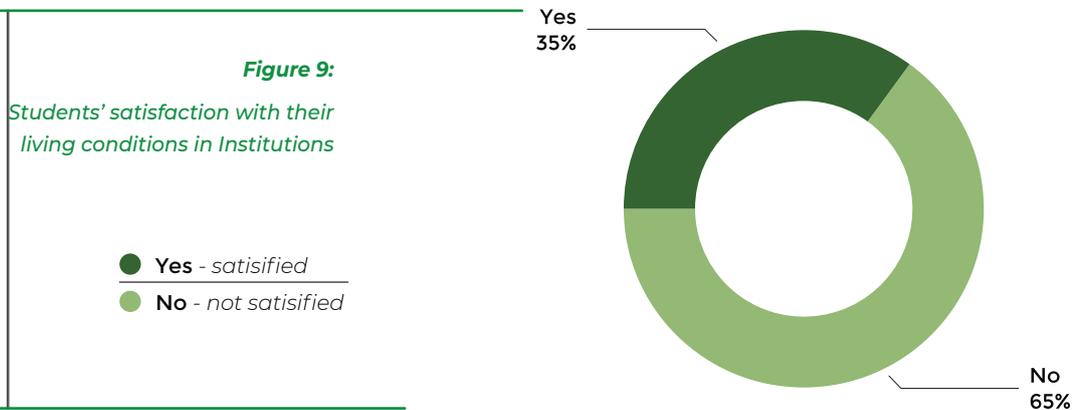
As a result of students and student unions being perceived as a threat, unions continue to be unrecognised by the governments in the three countries. The unions engaged expressed concerns that they are often castigated by authorities as pushing an anti-establishment agenda. Although in some cases they are unions that have the support of the main ruling party, however their popularity, legitimacy and representative capacity is constricted to the political affiliations that they belong.

3 KII Eswatini

4 Political Parties are banned in Eswatini and operate illegally

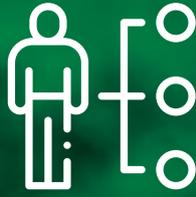
Root Causes of Student Dissatisfaction

The study explored whether students are satisfied with their living conditions in the tertiary institutions and it established that the majority of the students (65 percent) are not satisfied by their living conditions and their state in the tertiary institutions.



The study further explored some of the root causes to this dissatisfaction amongst students and, what was observed, is that economic hardships or financial constraints both at the individual and institutional level is causing challenges to the way that students are living in the institutions. At an individual level the financial constraints affect the payment of tuition fees amongst the students, the standard of accommodation, meals and general living of the students whilst at an institutional level this challenge has meant lack of funding for grants and low salaries for lecturers which have a bearing on the delivery of quality education. The students also linked this challenge to the ongoing socio-economic and political challenges that are being confronted at a national level which have resulted in economic stagnation and the inability of the citizens meeting their own livelihoods. In Zimbabwe, the students challenged the budget allocation for education which they think is hugely inadequate given the challenges that their institutions are facing especially at the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The other root cause that was noted by the students is the inability to engage and act on students' concerns by the institution's administration. There are high levels of mistrust between most institutional administrations and organised groups of students. This concern over administration also stretched to the inability of institutions to protect and promote students' rights and freedoms especially around demonstrations against decisions that are made by the institutional administrations. Some key informants also indicated that there is a high level of maladministration in the colleges and this has affected the way that these colleges are run; without addressing this there is a risk that student's dissatisfaction will persist.



Although a number of students indicated that they are happy with their learning curriculum, a significant number still feel that one of the root causes to the challenges that they are facing as students in tertiary institutions are traditional and outdated learning methods coupled with an irrelevant curriculum that does not address some of the contemporary challenges that students have to address.

Although new ICT based learning modalities were introduced to counter the impacts of COVID-19, the majority of students feel that this was ill-planned and ill-considered because of the extra cost burden that fell on the shoulders of the students to ensure that they access data. In the three countries, the costs, coverage and network quality are key hindrances to effective teaching and learning of students in the tertiary institutions. Some key informants presented a different dimension to this, they noted that although there are challenges with online education, generally there is resistance to the digital transition or blended learning amongst the students who do not want to learn online and are finding every excuse not to accept this transition.

The lack of adequate infrastructure including recreational facilities has been noted as another root cause to the challenges that students face in the tertiary institutions. This has resulted in students failing to access adequate accommodation facilities as well as engage in various recreational facilities which are key in ensuring students live a balanced life in the tertiary institutions. This challenge has also had a different dimension especially for students with a disability who fail to access many spaces in the institutions because the infrastructure is not disability friendly.

Given the general assumption that students in tertiary institutions are not pleased with the content of the programs that are offered in their institutions, the study enquired on whether students are satisfied with the curriculum that they are currently offered and the majority (66 percent) affirmed that they were happy with what is offered and that they consider that they are being adequately prepared to get ahead.

The remaining 34 percent who are not satisfied with what is covered in the curriculum indicated leadership skills, entrepreneurship, emotional intelligence, ICT based learning and practice based learning as some of the key considerations that should be put in place to ensure that they are satisfied with what is being currently offered in the institutions.

Figure 10:
Students' satisfaction with college curriculum

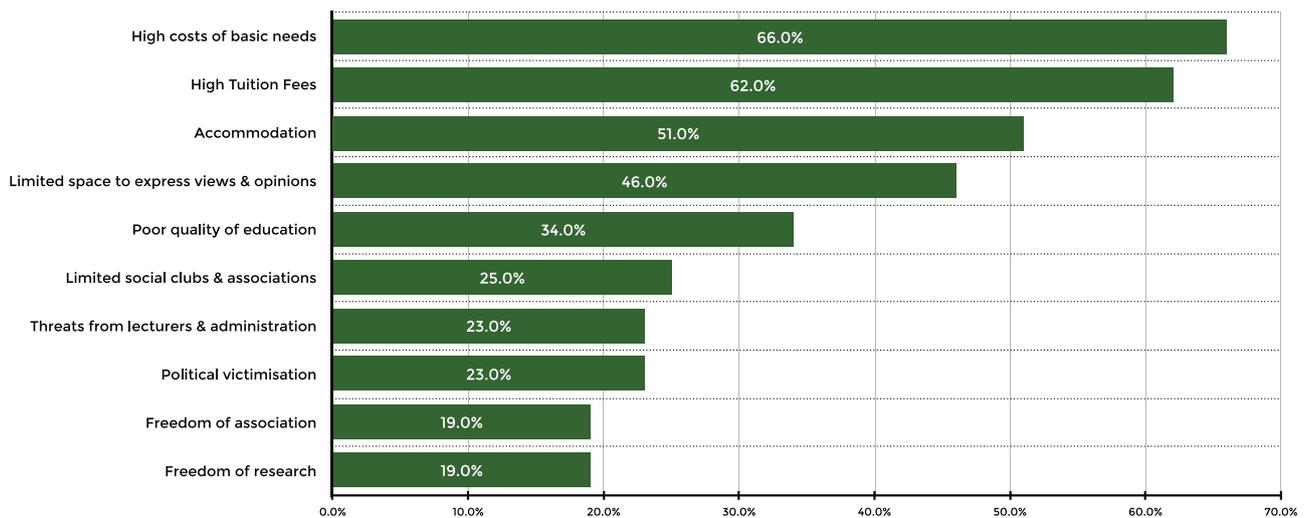
- Yes - satisfied
- No - not satisfied



Student Aspirations and Challenges

The study sought to establish the key challenges that students are facing in tertiary institutions as well as their aspirations in the colleges and for the future. Before exploring the aspirations, it is important to note the key challenges that students face.

Figure 11: Key challenges faced by students in tertiary institutions



The most common challenges that are faced by over half of the students are high costs of basic needs (66.3 percent); high tuition fees (62.1 percent); and accommodation (51.2 percent). The other challenges include limited space to express views and opinions (45.7 percent), poor quality of education (33.5 percent) and limited social clubs and associations (25.4 percent) amongst others. *Figure 11* outlines the challenges that students are facing in the tertiary institutions of the three countries.

On the key challenge of freedom of expression, a key informant noted that institutions are also censored as to what they lecture. Lecturers are not allowed to publish political work in most of the institutions. The system does not seem to want people to exercise their thinking faculties on social and political issues. They are expected to concentrate on learning and passing modules without generation of critical thought on socio-political issues including challenging the status quo.

Gender issues were noted as persisting challenges by the key informants. They noted that some females have to sleep with lecturers to pass or get better marks. Sadly, it was noted that these cases are normally not prosecuted as institutional administration and management seek to



protect their own. Moreover, it is difficult to take cases to court since these are normally not supported. To respond to this persistent challenge of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions, the ministry in Zimbabwe is in the process of finalising a consolidated and universal sexual harassment policy that will be utilised by all the tertiary institutions in the country following an uncoordinated approach to sexual harassment which was often guided by localised and institution based policies, which were largely inadequate.

In Zimbabwe, some of the challenges that were identified by key informants include institutions claiming to have policies that protect people with disabilities and minorities. A key informant indicated that most of these institutions that claim the existence of these policies do not have anything to show for it. An identified best practice is the University of Zimbabwe which the key informant said has been progressive in terms of having a disabilities resource centres to accommodate a number of disabilities of students.

A closer look at the challenge of accommodation revealed that the problem is not just on students failing to access accommodation at the colleges, but it is also about the type of accommodation and conditions of stay that are concerning. Only 29 percent of the students live alone whilst 65 percent of the students share a room with at least one other person and up to five people. Those in even more dire conditions of sharing a room with 5-10 people constituted 6 percent of the respondents. *Figure 12* outlines the number of students that share accommodation.

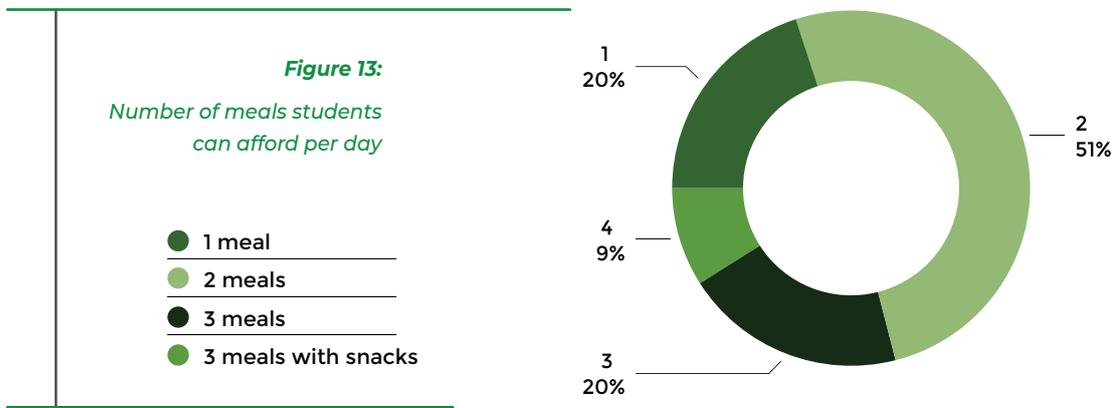
Figure 12:
Number of roommates in shared accommodation among students

- None - Live alone
- Less than 5 roommates
- 5-10 roommates





To further understand the living conditions of students, the study enquired on the number of meals that each student is affording per day. Evidence from the study shows that the majority (51 percent) of the students survive on two meals a day with 20 percent affording only 1 meal a day and the same number affording 3 meals a day and just 9 percent affording 3 meals a day with some snacks in between. *Figure 13* shows the number of meals in a day that students in three countries can afford.



PER DAY 20% |

PER DAY 9% | + snacks in between

PER DAY 51% |

PER DAY 20% |



From the perspective of key informants engaged during the study, students are facing many challenges and some of the key challenges include poor quality of services especially learning services, inadequate learning materials, a poor learning environment with dilapidated accommodation, dining and sanitation facilities. There are also low levels of financing, for example in Eswatini and Zimbabwe most of the students are self-sponsored and are not receiving government assistance through scholarship or grants mechanisms. These students struggle to pay their school fees which results in some of them taking many years to complete their courses. Furthermore, key informants also identified low levels of professional/career guidance which makes students unable to pursue programs that inspire and fulfil them.



Another peculiar challenge that was identified by the key informants relates to the passing and failing of students. Once a student is identified as someone political, they are normally victimized.

In Eswatini there is a popular activist Mphandlana Shongwe who spent 10 years at the William Pitcher College and the former President of SNUS, who was only mentioned as Brian who spent about 8 years at the Eswatini University (Kwaluseni) trying to complete his degree. If you are seen as opinionated, political and influential, you are viewed as a threat and are victimized for it.

Photograph Insert

<https://twitter.com/PUDEMO/status/1280105731182792704/photo/1>



Although students are facing the myriad of challenges outlined above, some of the key aspirations that they have include just the ability and means to finish college with some going on to wish that their hope is to "graduate alive" because of the continued risks posed by COVID-19 and challenges such as SRH challenges that continue to escalate their vulnerability. This aspiration shows the deep-seated fear, anxiety and uncertainty that students in tertiary institutions are facing. It is more aggravated within the context where there are no support services to assist students to cope with such stress. Some expressed that there are increased cases of depression amongst students which require urgent attention. Linked to this is also the aspiration for more safety and security in college campuses as well as in the communities that students stay. A significant number of students expressed concerns over their safety given how they remain exposed to potential risks especially given the time they move around especially at night as they sometimes have evening classes or other discussions. On this issue, a key informant in Eswatini shared that due to accommodation challenges students end up staying in places where they get raped and sometimes even killed or get mugged and lose their possessions.

The students also aspire for an improved learning and teaching environment in the tertiary institutions with improved infrastructure to support their accommodation and provide for modern learning spaces. This aspiration is driven by the desire in the students to have well equipped and conducive facilities that can support modern day learning that is hinged on strong ICTs. The students hope for a more inclusive and diverse education that equips them with the necessary



and relevant skills that help them in solving their daily struggles as well as struggles that bedevil their communities and the country at large.

Another basic aspiration is affordable education that has various supporting mechanisms for those that are unable to afford paying tuition fees whilst at the same time creating opportunities for students to work or have entrepreneurial ventures that can help them to achieve a decent living in the institutions without them becoming vulnerable.

With increased threats on their freedom of expression and ability to engage and discuss in certain political issues without feeling threatened, students aspire for an environment that allows for improved freedom of expression without fear of victimisation after one would have shared their views and opinions. The students consider themselves as the “generational vanguard” in providing various political perspectives that improves any country’s democracy and as such they want their rights and freedoms on expression and association to be protected so that they remain active in generating new thinking and perspectives.

COVID-19 specific challenges

The study established that all students have been directly or indirectly affected by COVID-19 and some of the key challenges have been the disruption of campus-based teaching and learning as the countries examined went under complete or partial lockdown. This has further resulted in some of the students sitting for their exams without finishing course content or after a few weeks of intensive lectures which overall, has caused concern over the quality of exams and graduates. Generally, COVID-19 accentuated pre-existing inequalities in and challenges to the higher and tertiary education sector.

One of the issues that this study sought to explore in detail was how COVID-19 has affected students in their individual and collective lives in tertiary institutions.





COVID-19 specific challenges ... cont'd

Although some of the institutions introduced e-learning following the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, students continued to face challenges in accessing these platforms due to high costs associated with data, equipment and at times the network infrastructure which does not have the adequate coverage to cater for students in all areas.

The study also established capacity gaps in lecturers' ability to deliver online learning to students. Additionally, some of the students simply struggled with managing responsibility at home and attending to online learning. A number of students were forced to bear some domestic responsibilities, and this caused a challenge to them managing to handle the demands of online education. Simply, the study identified that there was a culture shift into a new learning modality that both the students and the teaching staff did not fully comprehend, receive capacity on and proof test on how best it would work.

In addition to network and data challenges is the limited availability of power. In most cities and towns, students face network challenges and power cuts that limit their possible academic working hours. As students often only have power during the night, they have to work on their submissions then and sometimes face the challenge of submitting assignments on time. Therefore, the limited access to power risks students failing their courses and they are unable to keep up with their academic workloads⁵.

Stress and anxiety are the other key negative offshoots that resulted from the COVID-19 amongst the students. Both students and key informants indicated that there was not enough investment in understanding let alone managing the stress that is associated with COVID-19 and its disruption of learning and teaching in institutions. Simply, students did not have any support mechanisms that helped them to adjust to the new reality posed by COVID-19 or transition to the new modes of learning that were introduced as part of responding to the pandemic. The pandemic shifted completely the social life of students and without investment on helping them understand the implications and ways of managing these changes, students remain vulnerable to stress and anxiety which have other additional consequences.

It is important to note that for some students, college campuses are not just a place for learning but also a place for business as they run various entrepreneurial interventions that allow them to afford to pay tuition fees and also meet some of their livelihood needs. With the advent of COVID-19 these small ventures on campus have been affected and the students have had some of their income generating activities



⁵ Student Academic Freedom Regional Advocacy Program Virtual Dialogue on "The impact of lockdown on students: Engaging government on the recovery of the education sector in the context of COVID-19" 5 June 2020



COVID-19 specific challenges ... cont'd

disrupted, hence their livelihoods suffered. Linked to this is also the disruption to family income that resulted from the impacts of COVID-19. Some students have been affected as their parents have lost their jobs or means of surviving due to COVID-19 and now they are unable to finance the education of their children.

Although the challenges of COVID-19 persist, the majority of student respondents (65.2 percent) recommended that government should reopen the learning institutions and enforce social distancing and hand and respiratory hygiene, this was followed by 44.6 percent who felt that with rotational calendars institutions should be able to function throughout the year and with better chances of managing the pandemic, 35.4 percent felt that institutions should focus only on ICT based learning, 29.5 percent felt that institutions should be opened but only for limited number of people, 25.9 percent were not confident that institutions are in a state adequately prepared for reopening but instead there should be continued planning for the reopening. Lastly 5.3 percent felt that the institutions should simply continue being closed until the pandemic is contained.

The issue of not opening colleges until the pandemic is addressed also came through key informant interviews with some suggesting that by keeping colleges closed for some time, the government will have adequate time to modernise the learning and teaching as well as fully orient the students and staff to the new ways of learning so that the quality of education is restored within the new realities of online learning. The same suggestions were pinned on the need for the government to expand infrastructure so as to meet the demands of social distancing and hygiene which are critical in containing the spread of COVID-19.

From the perspective of key informants COVID-19 has resulted in most of the students losing learning time. The change towards technological means of learning has also put pressure on the learners in terms of affordability and accessibility. This is particularly the case with students in the rural areas. The students have also been compelled to minimise interaction among themselves hence their support base has been weakened. They have also been victims or potential victims of the epidemic given that most live in vulnerable conditions both at learning institutions or home. A key informant from Eswatini also indicated that the students are also resisting to transition to new e-learning culture that has been introduced due to COVID-19.





Identifying opportunity under the COVID-19 crisis

The study also sought to establish some of the opportunities that might result from the crisis that has been presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This section looks at some of these isolated but relevant opportunities within the context of the pandemic.

The crisis poses an opportunity for improving the three country's digital and health infrastructure, something that is already happening, particularly in the health sector of remote areas. At the same time, improving the education sector entails the chance for a general upgrading besides e-learning. As was shared by most students, the current education is too theoretical, based on knowledge that is now irrelevant as well as offering unnecessary programs. The tertiary institutions in the three countries therefore should take this as an opportunity to upgrade and improve the education that they offer to students.

One opportunity that needs to be enhanced is the introduction of online based learning for many institutions that have failed to adopt these modern ways of learning. Instead of dismissing the introduction of online based learning as an outright challenge, there is need for multiple stakeholders to determine how this approach can be consolidated for the betterment of the education systems in the three countries. Another opportunity lays in supporting innovations that can better assist the rolling out and consolidation of e-learning in the tertiary institutions.

The impact of this pandemic reveals the lack of academic freedom in institutions; a lack of empathy in the struggles students face in continuing to access education, lack of institutional resource pooling to secure student safety and the inability of the respective ministries to rally behind global initiatives to provide education to all students. This should then be taken as a key opportunity for learning and strengthening of the institutions in delivering to the students. Some key informants stated that this should be taken as a time to press the "Reset" button and ensure that the institutions improve on their delivery of students' rights and aspirations.



State of Academic Freedom

The study sought to establish the key challenges that students are facing in tertiary institutions as well as their aspirations in the colleges and for the future. Before exploring the aspirations, it is important to note the key challenges that students face.

One of the key issues that this study sought to establish is the state of academic freedom in the three focus countries. Understanding academic freedom in these institutions is important in that knowledge has become more important than information; tertiary institutions have become centres for the transmission and the production of new knowledge. In order for new knowledge to be produced, it must be possible to critically examine old ideas and paradigms without fear, and with the search for truth as the only condition. Confrontation of ideas is thus fundamental for the creation of new ideas.

In the context of this study, academic freedom is the freedom of teachers and students to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure. For students, the basic elements of academic freedom include the freedom to study subjects that concern them and to form conclusions for themselves and express their opinions⁷.

Based on the above definition and key elements, the study explored academic freedom from the dimension of freedom to express views, freedom to discuss in class, freedom of research and harassment after expressing one's views. The study established that overall in terms of freedom to express one's views, only 23.4 percent of the students felt that they had the freedom to freely express their views with 49.7 percent considering such is possible sometimes whilst 26.0 percent feel that there is no freedom to express one's views.



1 O Helen (undated) Academic Freedom: Foundations, Limitations And Delimitations

2 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/academic-freedom>

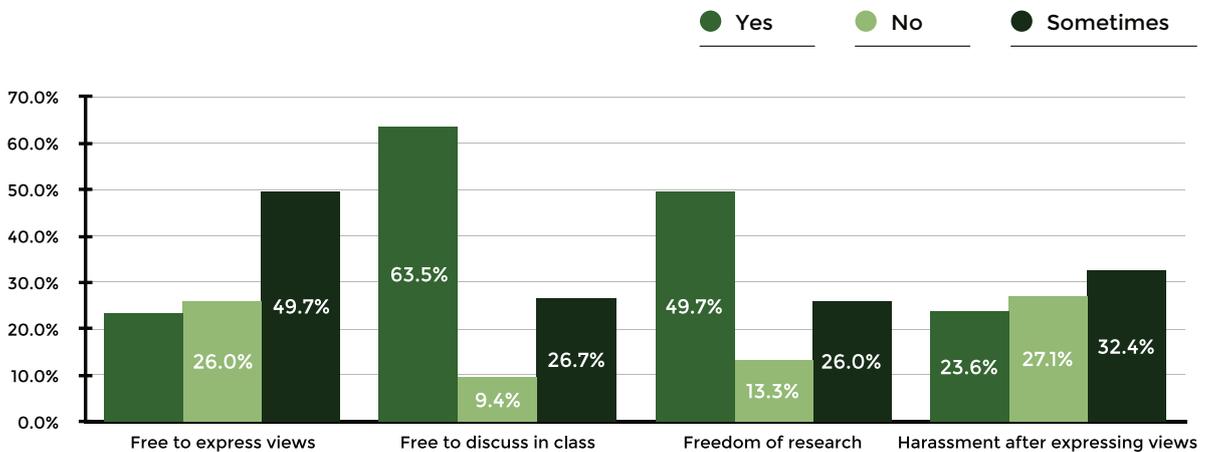


In terms of freedom to discuss in class and engage in debates on any theme including political issues, the majority of the students (63.5 percent) felt confident to do so whilst 26.7 percent felt this was possible sometimes and 9.4 percent stating that there is no such freedom. Discussions in FGDs indicated that this freedom is really dependent on the lecturers and what they are sensitive to and the students have understood the issues that they have to self-sensor on for some lecturers that they know will not take well some of the issues.

Almost half (49.7 percent) of the students expressed confidence that they have freedom to research whatever topic that they consider as important and relevant to them, with 13.3 percent stating that there is no such freedom whilst 26.0 percent said that such freedom is sometimes guaranteed. Some of the issues that were gleaned during the FGDs indicated that one might have the freedom to choose a research area or topic but the supervisors act as gatekeepers and they then determine how issues in the research are argued and shaped and at time they even suggest that someone refocuses. With the students' awareness that their supervisors have the power to fail them if they choose to go against them, students are left with no choice but to change their research focus. A key informant in Zimbabwe also indicated that due to various economic challenges many students are failing to carry out proper research but rather they are simply doing desk top research that does not strengthen their expressions and ensure the development of new knowledge.

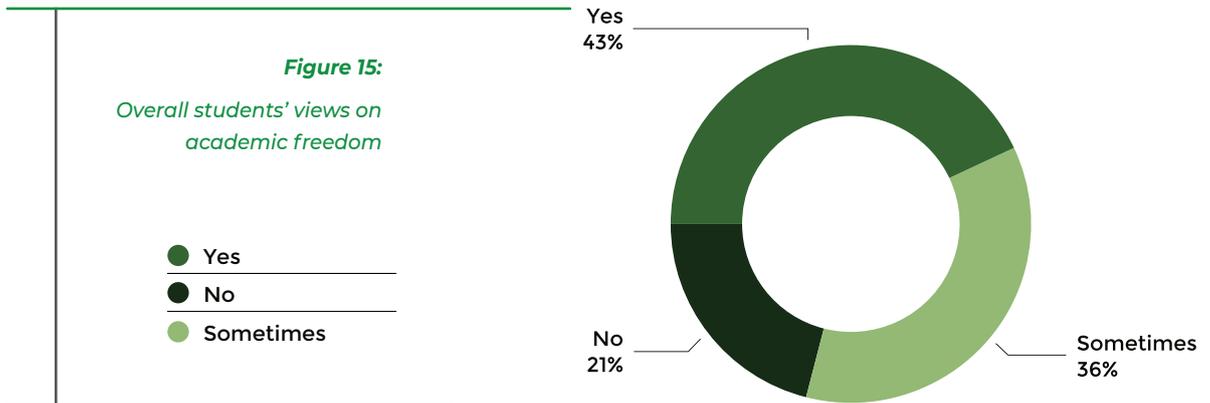
A critical element that was explored by the study was whether students feel safe not only in expressing themselves or researching in areas of their interest but whether they do not face any harassment after they would have expressed themselves. The majority (32.4 percent) feels that sometimes there is harassment after one would have expressed their view whilst 23.6 percent said yes there are some levels of harassment that happens after one would have expressed their view with 27.1 percent stating that there is no such harassment. *Figure 14* outlines the ranking of students' state of academic freedom on the various elements.

Figure 14: Students' ranking of academic freedom by various elements





Overall, there is restricted academic freedom across the tertiary institutions in the three countries. Averaging the different elements of measuring academic freedom the study established that below half (43 percent) of the students feels that there is academic freedom in their institutions, whilst 36 percent feels that this exists sometimes and on some issues. Two in ten students (21 percent) feel absolute that there is no academic freedom in their institutions. Key Informants in Zimbabwe indicated that there has been a continued shrinking of the student activism space which is characterised by a number of abductions and torture of student activists. *Figure 15* shows the overall students' view on the existence of academic freedom in the three countries.



There is need for the institutions in the three countries to improve the overall state of academic freedom as it has been established that the lack of academic freedom is an enormous liability in terms of the advancement of education and knowledge and the development of critical thinking and sound judgement. Time and again competent students are intimidated or expelled from college for presenting views which might make peers, lecturers or the administration feel uncomfortable which compromises the edge that institutions of higher learning should have.

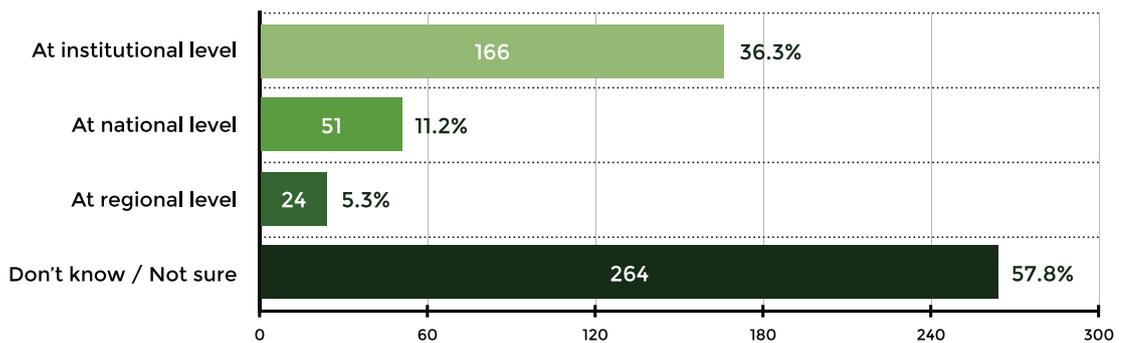
When commenting about academic freedom, key informants representing governments were confident that such freedoms exist in the institutions. In Zambia, an academic in the university felt that generally there are no specific programs aimed at promoting academic freedom but instead institutions rely on the official provisions such as the Constitution and policies or procedures. They further outlined that academic freedom is thwarted by strongly encouraging the learners to replicate and support already existing perspectives. Fundamentally, one of the challenges on why academic freedom is not upheld is that the learning curriculum are not tailored to encourage analytical thinking and writing but instead academic success is largely based on the learner's ability to replicate or memorise what is taught. In Eswatini it was noted that there is only some encouragement for students to explore any research topic they want and also that there are exchange programs in place with other countries to allow students to get exposed to other ideas and ways of thinking.

Student Civic Engagement

The SAFRA program firmly believes that students' education should involve more than just classroom instruction but also include civic engagement.

Students benefit from active participation in and awareness of their own communities, beginning at the college level and expanding outward to encompass their hometowns and national issues. Informed by this thinking, the study sought to explore the level of civic engagement amongst the students in tertiary institutions and established that over half (57.8 percent) of the students are not aware of any platforms to engage with decision makers whilst 36.3 percent are aware of such platforms at the institutional level while 11.2 percent know of national level platforms and processes with 5.3 percent aware of these platforms and processes at the regional level. The low levels of awareness of platforms for engagement with decision makers amongst students is indicative that they are not participating actively in civic engagement and decision-making processes. *Figure 16* outlines levels of awareness of platforms and opportunities to engage with decision makers by students.

Figure 16: Awareness of platforms and opportunities to engage with decision makers

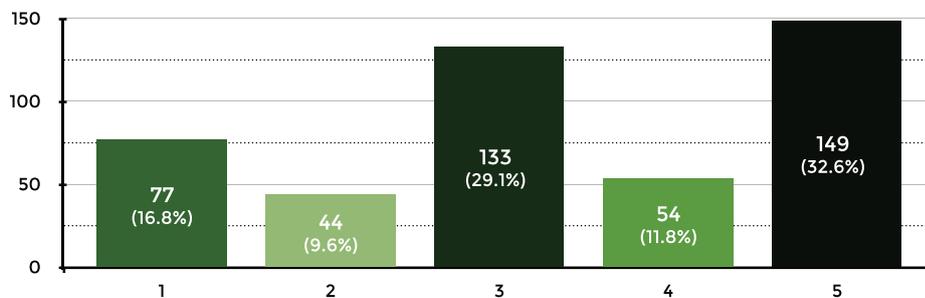


Among those that indicated awareness of platforms and opportunities to engage decision makers, they noted SRCs, student unions, the Parliament and parliamentary public hearings, student affairs departments including the dean of students, as well as demonstrations as the available ways of ensuring that decision makers give attention to their issues. Students also mentioned some civil society organisations that assist them with convening spaces where they engage with decision makers in the colleges and outside. Social media was also identified as a platform that is now being used to engage with decision makers through discussions as well as through raising issues that require their urgent attention. There are also other ad-hoc engagements which include meetings with lecturers, department heads or faculty chairpersons that often include reviewing academic and student welfare related issues.



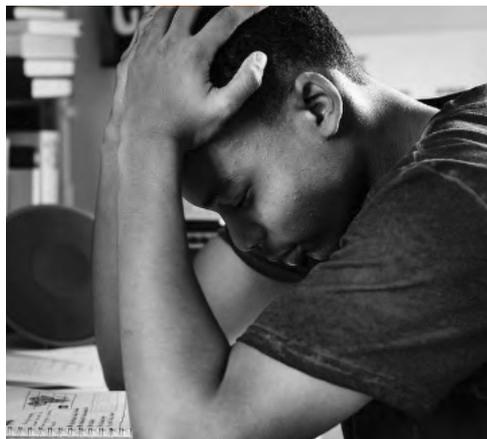
The study went further to determine whether the students were engaging with decision makers using a scale of ranking their engagement with decision makers from 1 (effectively engaging) to 5 (not engaging), *Figure 17* illustrates that 32.6 percent of the students are not engaging with decision makers whilst 16.8 percent are the ones that scored their levels of engagement highest.

Figure 17: Ranking of engagement with decision makers by students



Amongst those that stated that they engage with decision makers, the issues that they have raised with these decision makers include questioning them on the protection of rights such as the right to better quality education which is in line with the constitution and the SDGs. Other issues raised include academic affairs on the quality and affordability of education delivered in the institutions, civic participation issues such as student representation in decision making, policies that affect students including budgetary allocations that are made by the college, student welfare issues such as accommodation challenges and concerns over poor meals that are provided for students.

Another topical issue in these discussions pertains to issues of gender, SRHR and sexual harassment which seem to be common in most of the institutions. Sexual harassment has a significant bearing on the performance of especially female students who are the mostly affected and at times taken advantage by lecturers.

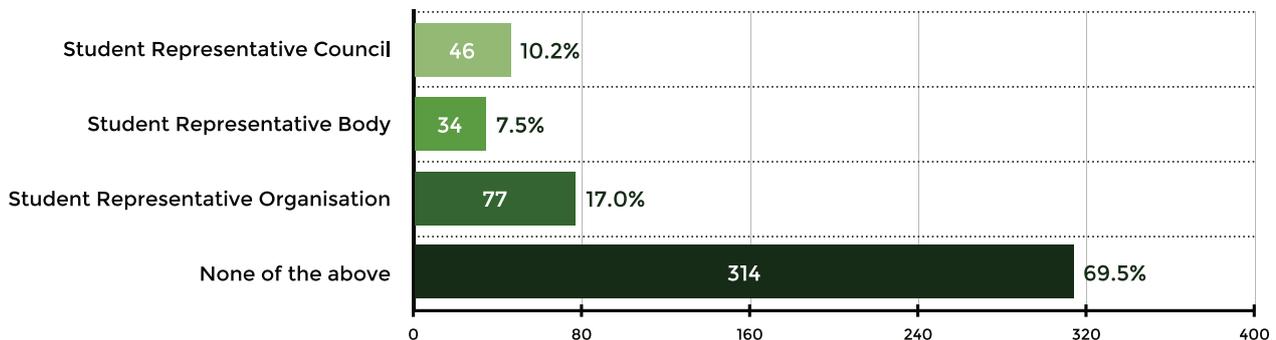


Role of Students and Student Activists in Academic Freedom

In situating the role and significance of students and student activists in promoting academic freedom in the tertiary institutions the study did an assessment of how many students participate in organised institutions or associations as part of their civic responsibility as students.

The study established that the majority of students (69.5 percent) are not members of such associations and unions that seek to promote academic freedom.

Figure 18: Student Representative Organisations



One Key Informant in Eswatini noted that it is important to look at various structures that represent students beyond just the SRCs and they indicated the following as some of the important platforms for representation: class representation; course associations/clubs; Faculty representation (which students rarely use or find useful); Institution representations- Student Representative Councils (which the students themselves nominate into office); Student Unions (which includes local and students outside the country); Dean of Students Affairs; and the Student Nurse. All these structures and offices have a critical role to play in representing the issues of students as well as providing a platform for student activists.

Although SRCs remain a key structure for student representation, one of the main criticisms that the SRCs receive is that they are often not democratic and representatives of some student groups such as female students and students with disability are often left out in key leadership positions. Some key informants cautioned that student politics seem to be dominated by a few vocal individuals and suppress divergent opinions from the less revolutionary segments of the student population by threats of violence and targeted labelling as sell-outs.

College administrators in Eswatini noted that the main challenge is that the SRC is supposed to act as an extension of the administration, but they do not do that. Ideally, they are supposed to warn the administration if there is an upcoming strike so that the administration can prepare itself but the SRC does not do that. That is where the fallout starts between the administration and the SRC.



In Zimbabwe the existing student movements and unions that is ZICOSU and ZINASU among others are not recognised as legitimate by the institutions of Higher learning and other authorities hence they cannot attend some of the formal meetings such as senate, council meetings, and student affairs committee meetings as stakeholders. However, in the spaces provided by the CSOs, and in some instances by private sectors and government ZICOSU or ZINASU are regarded as legitimate stakeholders. The authorities recognise the Student Representative Council in place; however, most of them are highly compromised due to lack of independence in the electoral system. The participation of the students is through SRCs which the majority of the respondents perceived as ineffective hence, there is a need to balance between the elected student representative council and elected student leaders who are outside the campus politics.

To measure student activism, the study asked students about whether they have taken any form of action on issues that are affecting students. Contrary to the common notion that students are inclined to have demonstrations as a way of expressing their discontent on issues, the study showed that the majority of the students (58.4 percent) use engagement as a way or action on issues affecting students, followed by petitioning which is preferred by 56.9 percent of the respondents and by 48.4 percent saying they have used peaceful demonstrations as a strategy of taking action on issues affecting students and then 39.2 percent opting for other forms of action.

This finding is important in demonstrating that students are willing to utilise the different form of expression and the majority actually use engagement and petitioning before using more confrontational approaches such as peaceful demonstrations. During the FGDs some student leaders shared that their preferred approach is engagement, but the administration is never keen to engage and at times to get the needed attention they end up resorting to peaceful demonstrations which has a guaranteed reaction from the college authorities. *Figure 19* shows the methods students use when taking action on students' concerns.

Figure 19: Methods students utilise to take action on student concerns





The study further explored the reasons of why some students do not take action on issues of concern and established that one of the main reasons is the fear of victimisation and possible suspension from the learning institution. The students have this fear because they have witnessed some students who have experienced negative repercussions due to their involvement in student activism. In some extreme cases some of the student activists have been singled out and faced arrests, abductions and torture all in an attempt to silence them and stop them from participating in student activism. The students are further concerned by the fact that even when they are wrongfully incarcerated, their issues are not given fair trial as rule of law and equality under the law often does not apply to students. A number of students also mentioned that the fact that they are not on campus has also compromised their ability to take the necessary action in advocating on some of the student concerns. Given how student activism is often politicised, some of the students have not taken any action because they consider themselves apolitical and uninterested in being labelled as supporters of specific political parties. For some, taking action is a mere waste of time because it does not result in any meaningful change as they think the authorities never consider the concerns and contributions of students.

The study enquired on the areas that students think action is urgent and critical for improved status and welfare of students. Some felt that the current status of students in the tertiary institutions requires action on almost everything but some who were more pointed mentioned issues of academic freedom and student representation in key decision making processes and, access to and affordability to ICT infrastructure especially making data affordable so as to enable more students to participate online as significant issues of concern. Some of the students also felt that they have a role to play in influencing national policies and laws that have a bearing on their welfare as students. A significant number felt that everything else is a distraction and students should just have their primary focus on their studies. The issue of affordable and quality education was also ranked highly as an issue that students should increasingly concern themselves with, including lobbying for support for students that cannot afford to self-sponsor their studies.

Policies Affecting Students

Generally, the study noted that there are no specific and dedicated overall policies that regulate tertiary education in the three countries.

The policies that regulate tertiary education are found in various legislative pieces and the issue of affordable and quality education is predominantly a constitutional issue which brings credence to the way that issues of education are managed and coordinated. Both Eswatini and Zimbabwe have not had a National Students Policy developed to specifically focus on policy issues for students. Zambia has one which was adopted in 1996. The policy is premised on national, regional and global aspirations for education and global aspirations for education and skill development. These aspirations are espoused in the seventh national development plan (2017-2021), the Vision 2030, Africa Agenda 2064 and sustainable development goals (SDG4 on education). In measuring the success of the policy in Zambia one can note that it has not been effective because students in various institutions do not feel that they attain a quality of education that is effective.



Furthermore, Zambia has a policy of keeping girls in school which has been extended to vocational and training skills centres. Education has been reformed to integrate the “vocational” and ‘skills” aspect in order to promote skills and vocational interests at an early stage – and to provide tailor made tertiary interventions after secondary schooling. The country has also made efforts to increase the number of skills and vocational training centres although funding for this level of education has remained low. Provision of internship places in public institutions e.g. ministries and other government agencies has also been another policy identified to assist students in tertiary institutions to thrive. The government in Zambia has also focused on extending bursaries to more tertiary institutions beyond public universities.



In Eswatini, there are no policies at the moment that seek to promote academic freedom apart from the Scholarship Policy. Although, there is intimation that the youth policy and other governmental policies on supporting education financing cover issues of students in tertiary education, it was noted that there is no specific policy that is targeted at students in tertiary institutions. A key informant in the Ministry of Education in Eswatini noted that the Scholarships Order of 1977, and The Pre-Service Students Study Loans Policy and Operational Manual are notable policies that affect students. There are plans to develop a National Human Resource Development Policy and Plan which is expected to be a key policy in managing issues for students in tertiary institutions. A National Skills Audit project has been commissioned and is already underway. A study towards the development of a Sustainable Student Study Loans Management and Financing Model has also been commissioned and this is anticipated to have a huge bearing on financing for students in tertiary institutions. There is a fully-fledged department and a section within the Ministry of Labour and Social Security which looks into student skills development issues.



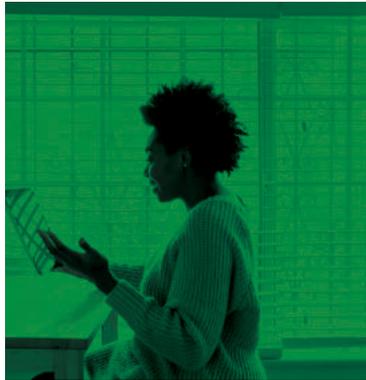
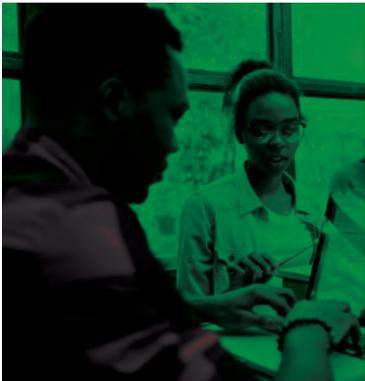
In Zimbabwe there is no clear policy that seek to promote academic freedom, however there are some other policies including some that are being crafted which have a strong relationship with students. Institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe are run by Acts, hence each institution has an Act which guides its operation. The education system is also guided by an Inclusivity Policy which caters to all students regardless of race, persons with disability, ethnicity, tribe in

terms of their demands and how the ministry can address their demands and needs. Some tertiary institutions also have individual sexual harassment policies however, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development (MHEISTD) are working on a holistic national sexual harassment policy to be adopted by all national institutions. The ministry indicated that the development of the policy was participatory, and students took part.

The Manpower Planning and Development Bill is another bill that was before the Parliament during the time of study and it sought to equip Zimbabwe' human capital with relevant skills and knowledge which will allow it to respond to the fast paced and dynamic modern world. It speaks to encourage people to be equipped, especially lecturers to get skills and knowledge that are current to enable them to address the challenges the nation is facing as well as the unforeseen challenges that the country may face.

The statutory instrument 81 of 1999 is also another key piece of legislation that is used in tertiary institutions with the focus on polytechnic, teacher training colleges and industrial training colleges. A National Development Strategy was introduced in Zimbabwe and one of the anchors is ICT Infrastructure investment with priority on the remote areas and this is an opportunity if it is taken as a roadmap to achieve ICT Development.

In Zimbabwe, during the time of the study, the Centre for Education, Innovation, Research and Development Bill was before the Parliament and it spoke to the creation of a technology hub to harness and coordinate research and innovation in universities and colleges to drive Zimbabwe's modernisation and industrialisation in public and private sectors. The proposed bill is progressive if it is to be passed into law. This bill will open the wealth of opportunities for students and youths in general to tap into their innovative minds and creative abilities to respond to arising issues in a sustainable manner.



Conclusions and Recommendations

KEY CONCLUSIONS



Students' state of academic and social welfare remains dire



Academic Freedom and other freedoms of students remain constrained



COVID 19 ushered in new challenges and few opportunities



There is need for robust policies that address the students' issues

Key Conclusions

Students' state of academic and social welfare remains dire

Generally, students in the three countries are not happy with their living conditions in tertiary institutions and the most pressing challenges are the high costs of basic commodities, unaffordable tuition fees and accommodation challenges. Students want the college curriculum to focus more on soft skills, life skill training and capacity building so as to enhance practice-based education and ensure that other non-theoretical components of education are fulfilled.



Generally, data costs are too expensive for students whilst the infrastructure (both internet connectivity and gadgets) and lecturers and learners' capacities to switch to the new ways of learning are unable to match the mounting requirements and the needs for e-learning.

Academic Freedom and other freedoms of students remain constrained

There is restricted academic freedom in the three countries and students are unable to fully express themselves without fear of facing negative and often dire consequences.

Student activism is often thwarted by the fear of consequences. In the three countries, it was observed that there is continued shrinking space for activism targeted at academic freedom and student welfare. Although SRCs are important structures for representing students, their scope and level of influence or pressing for answerability from college administrations and the government is limited because of a constant fear and regular threats from the authorities which risks most from completing their studies.



COVID-19 ushered in new challenges and few opportunities

The pandemic has resulted in new learning modalities which is basically virtual learning which has its immediate costs that were not anticipated and well planned for. The new learning method also comes with its psychological pressures for learners which must be studied to ascertain the impact on knowledge dissemination and retention. Psychological problems are an emerging threat in the new learning environment where social distance (which includes the inability of students to be involved in social activities) has taken away some coping mechanisms to mitigate stress amongst students.



Increased concerns regarding mental health and wellbeing are also associated with increased drug and substance abuse. Although there is persisting threats from COVID-19, students are recommending that it is better that institutions reopen than to continue with purely online learning which most of their institutions' infrastructure and technical capacities seems inadequate to cope with.

Furthermore, inequalities have been exacerbated as students from rural and hard to reach areas have more difficulty in accessing internet platforms for learning. The profile of students who constitute the majority in the technical colleges and teachers' colleges come from rural areas and this group was and is left behind as they do not have access and resources to participate in the virtual classrooms remotely.

There is need for robust policies that address the students' issues

In the three countries, there are grey areas around policies and laws that affect students, and there are no national strategic plans or policies that specifically focus on students, despite their strategic position.

Parliament is a key structure for advancing advocacy issues for students and other available options include writing petitions as well as presenting oral evidence in Parliament. However, in some cases, students fear engagement because this exposes them and makes them isolated.



Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendations

KEY CONCLUSION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
<p><i>Generally, students in the three countries are not happy with their living conditions in tertiary institutions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In the three countries there is need for the introduction of a holistic student focused policy or plan that will ensure that the challenges that confront students in institutions are given adequate focus and priority. Furthermore, there is need for policies and laws to be reviewed or enacted to encourage the effective participation of students in governance issues and decision-making processes and to express themselves in the context of academic freedom. ■ The three countries need to enact legislation that facilitates the establishment of a Students' Council and a National Students' Policy that speaks to respective national development plans and gives a direct linkage between what the nation is trying to achieve in a product of a student beyond campus, in addition addressing the national skills database in the context of the relevance of some of the qualifications that are being offered to students in order to mitigate the challenge of "graduate unemployment."
<p><i>COVID-19 ushered in new learning modes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There is an urgent need for new policies and regulation guidelines to support the new demands for online learning so as to ensure that the quality of education is protected or even further enhanced. ■ The governments in the three countries should make substantial investments in the digital economy and ensure that it supports programs that empowers or capacitates both the students and lecturers on using the online platforms. Financial resources should also be allocated to support infrastructure development as well as support the reintroduction or scaling up of the grants which will allow the disadvantaged students a chance to earn an education. ■ Furthermore, the e-learning modality requires government and tertiary institutions to enter into partnerships with telecommunications companies to ensure data is affordable as well as subsidise ICT equipment such as computers, tablets and smart phones, for students that cannot afford. ■ To facilitate access to e-learning for more students, there is need for decentralised centres that can support access to internet amongst students.
<p><i>Although there are persisting threats from COVID-19, students are recommending that it is better that institutions reopen</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The government should develop a comprehensive policy that allows for institutional specific strategies to manage and contain COVID-19 including strict adherence to safety measures, considerations of rotational classes to decongest the institutions whilst at the same time strengthen the capacity to deliver online learning. ■ With the advent of a vaccine, institutions of higher learning should take lead in promoting uptake and ensure that students get vaccinated as a way of promoting the herd immunity.

Program Recommendations

KEY CONCLUSION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
<i>Students want their curriculums to focus more on soft skills and life skill training</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tertiary institutions should introduce comprehensive programs on leadership, career building and activism as well as develop internship and mentorship programs to give the learners an opportunity to grow, build and enhance their skills and capabilities before they join the professional world.
<i>SRCs' scope and level of influence is limited</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CSOs should develop and support capacity building programs that seek to ensure SRCs deliver effectively on their mandate and create strategic convening for advocacy and lobbying.
<i>Restricted academic freedom in the three countries and students are unable to fully express themselves without fear</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CSOs should strengthen the role of institutions such as SNUS, ZANASU, ZACOSU, ZICOSU, and ZINASU to ensure that they give an alternative platform for students' issues to be represented outside the campus, where they are compromised politically. ■ CSOs can consider providing election monitoring for tertiary institutions so as to further enhance internal democracy within the institutions.
<i>Parliament is a key structure for advancing advocacy issues for students, but students are afraid to engage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ CSOs should continue to petition Parliament to bring issues to the attention of policy makers through the relevant committees and submitting policy briefs and alternatives policy documents. CSOs should also lobby the Parliament to continue strengthening its relationships with them as strategic partners. ■ CSOs should also convene common spaces that students can engage with Parliament in an environment that does not risk intimidation.
<i>There is dilapidated infrastructure and recreational facilities in most of the institutions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Institutions should invest in recreational facilities that ensure that students have activities that allows them to spend their free time in colleges meaningfully.

Recommendations on Partnerships

KEY CONCLUSION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
<i>Academic Freedom and other freedoms for students remain constrained in the three countries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional partnerships, lobbying and advocacy remain critical in building momentum on the issue of academic freedom which in isolation results in victimisation of activists.
<i>Shrinking space for activism targeted at academic freedom and student welfare</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil society should continue to provide strategic convening space to ensure that there is engagement between college authorities and students including student representative unions.
<i>Challenges of high costs of basic commodities, unaffordable tuition fees and accommodation challenges persists</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governments in the three countries should enter strategic Public Private Sector Partnerships that are designed to mobilise for resources that go on to support infrastructural development as well as provide financial aid to some of the needy students. Former students are an important entry point to mobilising for support from the private as well as public sector.



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