

FREE  
EDUCATION  
FOR OUR  
TOTAL  
LIBERATION

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SUBMISSION TO THE  
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## **Freed Education for a total liberation; Transformation of our Society; In Pursuit of Economic Freedom**

### **Theoretical Overview of South African Higher Education Since 1994**

The South African higher education landscape has undergone significant changes since the advent of the democratic dispensation. Chief among these has been the phenomenon of mergers and incorporations, changes in state funding formula for higher education, a reconfiguration of relations and rules of engagement between the state and institutions of higher learning as well as new the neoliberal delineation between 'core' and 'noncore' academic activities resulting in widespread outsourcing and privatisation in higher learning.

These changes have been national in nature. Coupled with this has been a change in the country on the role and conceptualisation of higher education. Terms such as marketization, commodification, commercialisation and 'entrepreneurial universities', have become common jargon and part and parcel, though with fierce contestation from other organisation in the sphere of higher learning.

This commercialization of higher education, which essentially advocates for the management and governing of institutions of higher learning in ways identical to the manner in which business corporations are managed, has reversed some of the tactical victories we have made in the post 1994 period.

"The most rational way to deal with the financing of higher education is to have fees which are uncontrolled, with no cap, but in return [universities] have to make adequate provision for looking after students who can't afford to pay that fee.'

**Sir Howard Newby, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool (quoted in Times Higher Education, 19/06/14)**

## Introduction

The free education debate must be revisited, and not as an academic or just intellectual excises, rather to provide a way forward for the future. Following the FessMustFall movement, the debates tempo has risen, and brought to its rightful place, beyond it been an academic excise between students and institutional managers in our colleges and universities, as it has traditionally been the case, at least in recent years.

The leadership of the movement, government leaders, media, business, and parents have been forced to put the agenda on the table by student activist of 2015, to deliberate on raising and unaffordable fees in our institutions, to deliberate about lack of transformation in our institutions, from language policies, student activities, curriculum, and institutional cultures.

For more than 90 years of student struggles, and 24 years of SASCO, great perspectives on this questions have been develop over time, submissions made to various ministerial committees and task teams, debates held in various forums, including organizational platforms in the whole mass democratic movement.

Resolutions have been passed, recommendations secured, all in effort to remind the ruling ANC of its revolutionary Freedom Charter and its struggle commitment, all in afford to demand the state/government to implement commitment made in the country's constitution on education for the people.

2016 and beyond, must be about actions and less of theorising solutions, for we have done that sufficiently, we must secure political actions over implementation of free education for the poor and working class, the motive forces of the revolution , from the state. We must secure transformation of our sector from our institutions, it's now or never.

As we celebrate 40 years on student uprising in SOWETO 1976, we must be that generation that delivered Free, Quality, Accessible and Relevant Education for this and the generation's afters us, that generation that liberated our parents from exploitation, and labour brokers slavery in our institutions and beyond.

We must be that generation that dismantled colonial and apartheid philosophy, institutional cultures, and symbols, replaced them with our liberation and democratic order, the generation that promotes unity, social cohesion and diversity. We must be that generation that advanced economic freedom in our life time.

## Our basis for Action

a. The Freedom Charter states:

***“ The doors of learning and culture shall be open, it further states” Education shall be Free, Compulsory, Universal, and Equal for all children; Higher Education and Technical Training shall be open to All, by means of state allowance and scholarship awarded on the basis of merit”***

b. South Africa Constitution on Education, notes the following:

Section 29 enshrines the Right to education, and defines the positive responsibilities of the state in this respect; it states ***“Everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult education, and to further education, which the state through reasonable measure must make progressively available and accessible”***.

c. ANC 53 National congress Resolution

***Academically capable students from poor families should not be expected to pay up-front fees in order to access higher education. Academically capable students from working class and lower middle class families should also be subsidised with their families providing a household contribution to their studies in proportion to their ability to pay. The fees that must be covered include tuition, accommodation, food, books, other essential study materials or learning resources and travel that are the full cost of study fees.***

d. The ministerial report on free education and NSFAS Review

***“ Free university education for the poor, in principle, can be considered to be a materially-significant additional step in government's ongoing efforts to both address some of the legacies of the past and deepen the scope and quality of democratic life in South African society”***.

Furthermore it notes ***“It carries the potential to lift members of communities out of poverty and unemployment, by simultaneously increasing access to, and improving the quality of outcomes in, higher education. Free university education for the poor can directly assist in tackling the problem of the growing numbers of youth who are not in education, employment or training, and reducing the high levels of dropout from universities, thus strengthening the higher education system as a whole.”***

This view is also supported by another work commissioned by DHET been the NSFAS review, which established and recommended the ***following “the state should provide free higher education for***

***poor students and students from working class backgrounds. Its investigations show that insufficient finance represents a formidable barrier to academic success for poor students. It is therefore essential to ensure their higher education studies are fully subsidised”.***

### **Negative effects of commodification of Higher education**

Free, accessible and relevant education is a means for social development, personal empowerment and the advancement of well being, as well as economic development of nations. It provides for teaching, learning, research and community engagement which leads to production and reproduction of knowledge and cultural capital. It is for these bases that commodification of education should be criminalised; as it steal the true and correct purpose of the very existence of institutions of leaning and undermine our birth right.

#### ***a. Commodifying Education as a market orientated Product.***

This negative effect reduces the role education, to a tradable product in the market, governed by market rules of Demand and Supply, with our institutions as suppliers of services and students seen as client’s consumers and capital for the labour market and thus exposed to consumerism.

The market has no place in our education system, and the main driver for all of the most harmful aspects of market competition has been the creation and extension of the fees system in higher education.

We believe that tuition fees should be completely removed from education in order to begin dismantling the market. Fees are used purely as a way of creating a sticker price for a degree, constructing the fantasy of a market transaction to turn students into consumers and force universities into competition.

South African higher education policy agenda has been ideologically driven by their commitment to marketisation and privatisation. Yet we have seen very little evidence that a market in higher education produces positive outcomes for students. In fact, the evidence seems to suggest that marketisation is hugely damaging to our education system, at all levels.

Student and institutions of learning can achieve greater results through collaboration, yet commodification of education promotes competition, amongst students and institutions, hence the growing number of institutional ranking to deepen the working of free market fundamentals.

Removing the fee is, however, the first major step in changing the discourse of higher education, ending the transactional relationship between students and their institutions that is simulated by the tuition fee. The next step will be to generate a funding system that provides universities with financial security and autonomy without generating unhealthy competition for funding.

Freedom charter teaches us that ***“the aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour brotherhood, liberty and peace”***.

We can all agree that education role must be to advance these goals of the freedom charter, and in addition promote intellectual inquiry, promote engagement and problem solving skills, expand the mind, find creative expression and innovative ways to meet emerging challenges of the day.

#### *b. Obsession of Value for Money in HE*

Commodification of HE intensify the obsession of value for money in education and subject students to be have sticker price attached to them. We do not, for instance, enter this debate concerned about value for money for students, because we do not believe that the quality of the student experience should be dependent on the sticker price attached to it.

The obsession with value for money is counter-productive as any answer to this question will be subjective and dependent on comparisons and value-judgements that students are not in the position to effectively make without being able to fully realise the overall cost and benefits of their study over the course of their life.

#### *c. Deregulation of HE in cost of provision*

Commodification of HE equates knowledge production, scientific enquiries as communicates that can be measured for by cost of provision, the tube of qualification and value of job secured.

Education subjected by these rules is likely to lose its value as the ultimate objective will end up been that which pleases the consumer and not challenge the participants to be better.

#### *d. Classifying Institutions as suppliers of labour force.*

It reduces the role of institutions to be suppliers of labour force to the market, and thus measured mainly by its ability to meet labour market requirements, as observed by Noam Klein (1999).

Bemoaned the creeping consumerism within higher education characterised by disengaged student who adopt a "mall mentality" of casually "cruising" curricular and concurricular offering.

#### *e. Prioritization of education as a means for external benefits.*

Commodification of education informed by institutional administrators, who run universities as Cooperation's with intend to producers numbers and make additional income through tuition fees , international fees and get rewarded performance bonuses for doing that, as seen by Vice Chancellors salary packages and bonuses.

This is compounded by other external bodies with role and interest in the sector such as business, professional bodies, "this mentality is encouraged by administrators who conceive and conduct university operation as first there were vocational centres for finding jobs, overlooking or suppressing a view of universities as a developmental centre for finding self, connecting with others and discovering new ideas (Ginsberg, 2011).

#### *f. Downgrading of Education as a lifelong learning process*

Commodification of education reduces the role of education to be short term activity instead of lifelong learning process; it limits the role of student to a worker as an end product, and not contributor of scholarly work, knowledge production.

In a free Market world, the buyer and seller relationship usually terminates at the point of payment, and institutions of higher learning have a culture of engaged alumni, whom is expected to consciously contribute to the institution.

#### *g. Compromising Institutional autonomy and academic freedom*

Commodification of HE has over year's compromised institutional autonomy and academic freedom, institutions bow-down to pressures of investors, who dictates programs, sports and cultural activities.

These also include regulatory bodies that determine entry into various professional occupations in our country.

Compromised councils and management due to strong presence of business people in council structures and universities bodies.

### **View Point On Funding For HE**

In order to understand how we might go about creating a fairer system of higher education funding, we need to be clear on the beneficiaries of higher education and their investment in the system. Higher education summit hosted by DHET in 2015, resolved that Higher Education is a public good, and thus the responsibility of providing higher education lies with the state/government.

Much of the debate has been around the idea that there is a public and a private value to higher education, and that this justifies a system in which the individual contributes and the State also contributes as a proxy for the public interest, in which case society contributes to the funding of higher education through general taxation.

**Options to consider for funding free education are the following:**

*a. Investing government employees pension fund managed by PIC*

Increasing university funding and university autonomy are seen as mutually reinforcing factors in achieving this. Since public budgets are overstressed in the country, the extra funding would have to come from private sources, we thus recommend that the state explore investing Pension fund money in funding free higher education.

We believe that it should be free for all, but might be implemented in phases, for the poor, and missing middle, and alter for all, given our understanding of decomodifying higher education, as well as considering the fiscals limitation in the beginning..

*b. Using unclaimed pension fund*

First, we would assume that savings from GEPF Government Employee Pension Funds would be made to government.

This savings that must be utilised to fund for free education, many South African are not claiming this funds and the state is seating with this savings.

This Savings must be directed or channelled to NSFAS or directly to the universities funding model for us to usher free education and to pay fees, and other services needed by the institutions for teaching, research and learning to prevail.

GEPF unclaimed funds as currently ring-fenced by the Treasury to account for it. Government should be able to consider the money saved from the removal of future loan subsidy as money available to spend on higher education. How this impacts on the budget deficit will depend on how such a move is accounted for.

*c. The role of public-private alternative provider to Higher education.*

It is becoming more and more apparent that any changes to higher education funding in public universities will also have address the issue of alternative providers, particularly those which are for-profit.

We do not believe that it is in any way beneficial to students or society for organisations to profit from education. There is certainly no justification whatsoever for public funds to be siphoned off by private companies to provide education.

There are several options of how to deal with private providers. The most obvious start would be to ensure that they are not entitled to any public funding. This removes much of the concern about their encroachment on public higher education.

The alternative sector should also be tightly regulated around cost, quality and student experience so that the margins become too low for anyone looking to make a quick profit, leaving only those committed to providing high quality education.

Another key issue with the public-private is that it reduces the private benefits of higher education to individual graduates, when there is a third party that makes private financial gains. Business and industry make money by turning the knowledge and skills of the graduates they employ into profit. They also gain from the research and development that goes on in educational institutions.

#### *d. Direct business contribution to Higher Education.*

We are serious about increasing business investment in higher education, and this doesn't all need to come from raising taxes.

Businesses can decide to invest directly into higher education as part of their corporate social responsibility, and incentives can be given to them if they do so, such as BEE points.

We believe that even a modest 1% increase on skill levy, reinforced for funding higher education from business, channelled into higher education could take a huge burden off of government and, ultimately the individual taxpayer, and go a long way in making business pay a fair share towards generating the skilled workforce that they tap in to, rather than continuing to free ride.

#### *e. Considering increases on weather tax*

There are various different ways in which a government could raise this money. Returning the additional rate of income tax, by increasing inheritance tax, this would affect only most of the richest estates.

Also a large amount of revenue could be generated just by cutting down on tax avoidance schemes that wealthy individuals use to get out of paying their fair share.

*f. Creating and education fund, R20 contribution by all working people and donations by those who can afford to*

One workable approach to replacing fees with public investment would be to fund universities through an independent public institution accounting to the president directly, instead of NSFAS, which contributions can be made by government (as proxy for the taxpayer), business, and individuals.

Measures should be locked in place to creation of a better resourced, and empowered institution to fund higher education, one which itself has significant autonomy from political tinkering and works in partnership with universities and colleges, national and local government to ensure funding is distributed most effectively.

SMME'S, and all working individuals should make a compulsory R20 contribution to higher education fund, to raise additional resources.

### **Conclusion**

The paper attempts to put practical measures in implementing our noble goals of free education for all, with the poor and working class as our primary focus, these options provided here are not cut in stones should be empowered, having consulted with student unions and progressive formations in SADC which include Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia and Swaziland comrades, we are encouraged by their wisdom and contribution.

Having participated in the International Solidarity Congress in Moscow Russia, hosted by the Student Ombudsman of Russia, the call is clear, education is a public good, and thus a public responsibility, it is our birth right/ human right, and thus the state must provide it for all, make sure is accessible, of great quality, and relevant to all students.

Greater considerations must be made with regard to the institutions that drive the introduction of free, accessible and relevant education for all. A number of African countries placed an organization like NSFAS into the presidency, while the Indians created a student bank. We believe that by placing the organization into DHET, its work and ability to reach its mandate are limited.

Lastly, the provision of student funding from the state must be centralised. All monies from local government, district government, provincial government, national government, state-owned companies, as well as international government/bodies should be centralised into one entity that funds students. Whether it is loans, bursaries, scholarships, grants, all must be centrally coordinated to ensure maximum use, consistent rule application and meeting our educational and skill needs.

The implementation of free education and options to consider must be coupled with the need to abolish application fees, increase in other indirect fees, which can be barriers to access for the poor. Thus, institutions must never undermine the efforts taken by the state. Instead of asking the question as to whether the country can afford the cost of free quality education, the question we ought to ask is whether the country can afford having youth that is not educated, skilled and empowered?