

Narrative report to CIVICUS, Youth Action Lab (YAL)

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1. Introduction

The project was initiated by Takemore Mhlanga in partnership with CIVICUS to realize the following objectives:

- To raise awareness on labour justices issues and legal framework protecting workers' rights among young teachers.
- To build the consciousness of young teachers on issues that relating to their freedom of and association
- To amplify the voices of young teachers in advocating for labour justice

These objectives were meant to address labour justice and Freedom of Association for young teachers in Zimbabwe. The country is a highly militarized state with limited freedom Of assembly and association and civic space continues to shrink significantly with crackdown on dissenting voices. Workers have not been spared this repression despite that the Constitution provide for freedom of assembly and association and labour justice these provisions have completely been disregarded by the current administration. Workers are frequently victimised for petitioning the government for better working condition and a living wage.

Young teachers face double jeopardy of youth underrepresentation as well as working for repressive state. They face oppression during their training where they were being arrested for expressing any form of discontent. The allowances students teachers receive are paltry and cannot even cover transport to their teaching stations. When they join the workforce the exploitation continues, salaries are not enough to cover living expenses. Any form of protest is met with heavy handed responses from the state. These young teachers are even exploited by their superiors at their work stations because they are not aware of their rights and they also do not belong to any unions. Their voices continue to be silenced they cannot amplify their issues and therefore they continue to be ignored.

Young teachers who have not secured employment are also used as pawns by the government. When disputes arise with teachers, instead of negotiating with disgruntled teachers they use these unemployed teachers to threaten their positions. During the Youth Action Lab program met with unemployed teachers and build their consciousness enough to realise that when they join the workforce they will be confronted with the same victimization therefor it is on their best interest to support the rights of their counterparts.

2. Activities implemented

The above objectives were successfully achieved through conducting a series of activities listed in table below. Results, outcomes and verification is also captured.

Table 1: *breakdown of activities implemented under the project*

Activities	Results	Outcome	Verification
Trainings on Freedom of Association and Assembly and labor rights	4 trainings for 88 members conducted	Enhanced understanding of labour rights and freedom of association and assembly.	Pre and post training surveys to ascertain new knowledge gained.

Online dialogues with teachers, unemployed teachers and young teachers.	9 Online dialogues on state of labour justice for teachers. 180 people were reached from the targeted groups.	Increased awareness of labour justice and improved capacity to organize online.	Survey of member social media presence on labour justice pre and post dialogues.
School visits	4 trips covering a total of 24 schools interacting with a total of 192 teachers.	Strengthened young teachers network, increased Union membership,(62 new members recruited).	Existence of interactive whatsapp groups amd regular meetings. New members added to database.
Online advocacy campaign	Created a trending #saveoureducationZw which has now been adopted by all education stakeholders in Zimbabwe. Salaries of teachers reviewed. 29 new solidarity partners identified. Establishment of a united advocacy front for teachers.	Increased pressure on duty bearers to address the education crisis. Improved participation of parents in the advocacy for the resolution of the education crisis. Improved welfare of teachers. Strengthened solidarity network. United advocacy front.	Press statements issued by government Ministries and convening dialoguing meetings. Physical meetings by parents discussing education. Messages from parents on social media. Parents whatsapp groups. New teacher salaries. Database of solidarity partners. Establishment of the Federation of all teacher Unions.
Creating an online database	Online database created and updated	Improved communication with members.	Existence of the database
Producing a training manual for young teachers	Training manual produced	Enhanced training capacity of the Union.	Existence of the training manual.

3. Lessons learnt

1. Leveraging digital tools and skills in advocacy

During the implementation of this program we have learnt that digital spaces are the new way of doing things in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the meetings were being held online due to lockdown measures by the government. Most of the participants have shown that they have appreciated working, organizing and influencing people using digital tools and spaces. This was witnessed by most of our participants became active in social media accounts such as twitter, facebook, instagram and etc. my Union, ARTUZ ran an online campaign called burn the fraud which was widely spread https://twitter.com/artuz_teachers/status/1407621879687528452?s=24

and <https://www.facebook.com/100002572621315/posts/4029697143792667/?d=n> I was part of those organising a social media campaign called #SaveOurEducationZw which has been trending on Zimbabwe social media platforms since its inception.

2. Community is the answer

Community engagement is the answer to solve our day to day problems, during implementation of the project I did a lot of community engagement through young teachers and parents. Using both online and offline engagements I managed to set-up Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) which are collaborative platforms solve Zimbabwean Education crises. I also engaged with other young workers as part of solidarity in the struggle for a living wage. In this link myself and others was invited by Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition to speak on behalf of young teachers in a platform called Citizens Solidarity on Zimbabwe Teachers' Wages Struggle, <https://twitter.com/i/spaces/1yoJMWrrDWOqKQ> . I also addressed Young workers at Adam Bede Furniture when they have engaged into job action, www.facebook.com/100002572621315/posts/46953653892676/?d=n and www.facebook.com/100002572621315/posts/4697134103715631/?d=n in all these engagement it I have realised that community engagement encourages unity among workers and ordinary citizens.

3. Young workers are critical for movement building

I have realise that young workers are very critical in the movement building through most of the programs I took time to engage young workers, discussing their role in building strong unions. In Manicaland Province where I visited Buhera District for school visits I met a young teacher who was so passionate to the extent of mobilizing some parents whom I addressed on the topic Education Crises in Zimbabwe. After this powerful meeting with parents and teachers I assisted them to set up a PTA committee for Buhera District and a traditional leader, chief Nyashanu is the part of the committee.

4. Workers' struggles should be internationalized through cultural exchange and embracing diversity.

Through my project work, I was invited the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) Congress which gave to network with different workers from different sectors. I learnt and appreciated other struggles which young workers in these sectors are involved in which created a platform for future coordination. I also had an opportunity to engage with some Regional young workers from Swaziland, Malawi, Tanzania and Namibia through my mentors. Engagements like these made me appreciate the intersectionality and similarity of workers issues across the SADC region and the need for a strong regional and international solidarity network. Internationalizing the workers struggle also helps us in cultural exchange as well as embracing people from different backgrounds.

5. I learnt to better organise my work and creating effective schedules.

Through my experiences in Youth Action Lab (YAL) program I am now able to create my online diaries which guide my schedule weekly and this has improved my performance as leader and professional because I am now good at time management.

6. Improved communication skills.

YAL program also taught me how to communicate with other people from different groups as well as listening to them. I also learn to think carefully before responding or contributing to a conversation..I also learn to keep records of whatever you do for reference purpose and also recording of whatever you do. Communication with people from diverse backgrounds both online and offline is now my strength since I joined the YAL program

4. Challenges

1. COVID19 induced lockdowns

The outbreak of COVID19 became as a limit to some of the planned activities because of government restrictions which banned public gatherings and intercity travel. The ban of inter province travel also limited this project to reach out to all province doing some physical engagement with students, unemployed teachers and young teachers.

2. Network challenges and Data costs

Network challenges in Zimbabwe due to power cuts also became as a challenge because sometimes I would be forced to cancel scheduled meetings because of poor network; including missing some YAL sessions. High cost of data also limited some of the participants who wish to join online discussions I had organized under the project.

3. Administration barriers to access schools and persecution.

During my school visits some of the administrators were barring me from entering into their school to address teachers because of political labeling by the government that unions are political. In some school were they allowed me to enter, teachers whom I addressed the end up being victimized by both school administrator and ruling party (ZANU PF) supporters after the programme. I have also been constantly harassed for my union work by both school administrators and State security apparatus.

5. Impact Stories.

“These Parent Teacher Association is of paramount important to both teachers and parents because now we are informed about the crises in our education systems and as parents we have to support teachers in your fight for the restoration of your salaries so that our education is get restored. We want to thank you for the good work you’re doing hope you’re to set up these PTA in different districts in Zimbabwe so that parent gets involved in education dialogue” **Parent in Buhera**

“Thank you for coming up with this program of educating us as student teachers on freedom of association and assembly the program was so informative and we are hoping to educate some of our colleagues who are not here present the program was so impotent to us thank you once again” **Student teacher in Manicaland**

“Surely we have learnt that unemployed teachers are not a reserve army for the replacing serving teachers. Government of Zimbabwe must address teachers’ grievance issue first before they threaten to fire you from work. Teachers’ rights are human rights they must be respected too. Thank you for enlightening us my brother” **Unemployed Teacher in Mashonaland East**

“Thank you for teaching us the new way of organising without meeting physical now as a province we can organise whenever we want because we now know that organising online is must safer than physical because no one will get harm especially during these times of pandemics such as COVID19” **Young Teacher in Bulawayo**

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ANNEXURE 1: The Project in Pictures



Figure 1 attending ZCTU Young workers annual conference



Figure 2 Discussing about digital tools and activism



Figure 3 School visit in Manicaland



Figure 4 Kandenga Primary School in Buhera



Figure 5 Student Teachers and Unemployed Teachers Freedom of Association and Assembly