STUDENT SPRING

13h45, October 23: The moment all hell broke loose on the grounds of the Union Buildings, in Pretoria. Students hurl a volley of stones, bottles and even a wrench to break the police barrier after hours of pushing, shoving and screaming.

I was in a fortunate position to get this shot. There was a small gap under the fence, just wide enough to stick my camera through. I lay with my face in the dirt and strained through the viewfinder.

It had been a sweaty and bad-tempered few hours to the crash of stun grenades and taunts of students toward police lines. This 50-strong group — nobody knew who they were — ran riot, burning everything from toilets to tyres.

It could have turned very nasty. Three students siphoned off the fuel from an abandoned generator to make petrol bombs. They were foiled only by police shooting tear gas, which sent thousands running into the streets of Pretoria, with their eyes streaming.

Most of the 8,000 students on the lawns were peaceful. In the hours after the tear gas flew, the authorities agreed to the 0% increase.

PHOTO BY JAY-CABOZ
FOCUS
STUDENT PROTESTS

‘THEY KEEP ON EXPECTING TO GET THINGS FOR FREE’

Higher education is a question of economics as much as learning. With students taking to the streets demonstrating for free education, the question is who should pay?

BY ANCILLAR MANGENA

“"We need R51 billion over three years to fund the students.”

W
hatever way you look at it, higher education in South Africa is expensive. A Bachelor of Science first-year student at the University of Cape Town paid between $3,700 and $4,700 in fees this year. Science students at the University of the Witwatersrand paid between $3,000 and $4,200, while Stellenbosch University students paid between $2,750 and $3,000 and the University of Johannesburg students paid between $2,200 and $3,700.

On top of this, parents pay for accommodation, books and food. The approximate total cost for living in a self-catering single-room residence at the University of Cape Town is $3,600 per year.

“I use about R120,000 ($8,700) on my daughter per year to study and live in Cape Town. Things are expensive and there is just not enough money. My other daughter is starting university next year and I worry about how I will pay for them both,” says single mother, Noxolo Dwaba, from Johannesburg.

This is why students and parents want cheaper education in a country where you pay income tax of up to 41%. It led to mass protests at universities around the country.

At the passionate student demonstrations was a veteran campaigner who spent more than a third of his life behind bars for his beliefs. Ahmed Kathrada, who went to prison with Nelson Mandela, says high university fees will force the poor to drop out.

“While one is well aware that the economy is already under pressure, we believe that government can cut wasteful expenditure and reprioritize
Hundreds of students at the University of the Witwatersrand gather at the Great Hall steps, at 5PM on October 22, to demand a 0% fee increase - they got it education, which itself is essential to addressing inequality in South Africa in the long term,” he says.

Kathrada believes the government can afford it, especially with help.

“ Universities can make the necessary changes in terms of expenditure to reprioritize and focus on the essentials. The private sector can also look at its financial commitments and find ways of increasing its contribution to higher education. These three sectors can work together on long term as sustainable solutions to ensure greater access to education, particularly for poor students,” says Kathrada.
FOCUS – STUDENT PROTESTS

The Deputy Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Kuben Naidoo, agrees with Kathrada and says an African girl in a township school has a 4% chance of getting a university degree as the odds are stacked against her.

"Of course skills are the major challenge in South Africa. Most people focus on quality school education, without underestimating the value of that, most of the things I learned in my career, I learned at work. The workplace is the best generator of skills. It is the best generator of ideas. Global development policy puts too much emphasis on quality education and too little emphasis on employment... In South Africa there are few people working and there are few people learning the skills on the job. Indeed, the fees must fall, the skills must rise," says Naidoo.

Xolile Mange, a professor at the University of Cape Town involved in the campaign to do away with the Cecil John Rhodes statue, says it’s time for the government to get its priorities right.

"This country spends enormous amounts of money on shady deals that are hidden from public scrutiny. We saw that with the arms deal, and we see it now with talk of nuclear energy. In addition, we have a bloated government with 74 ministers and deputy ministers, and nine provincial legislatures that serve no useful purpose other than to balkanize us," he says.

Economist, Mike Schüssler, says: "Students should pay and we can help them do that, but they should have a responsibility to pay back the money that would have been made available to them by government so that it can be used to educate others."

TICK TOCK – GOES THE TIME BOMB

BY TRUST MATSILELE

Moeletsi Mbeki is with the students and the radicals. He says the government must pay for university fees because it can afford it.

In April, Mbeki warned of a ticking time bomb, and an Arab Spring-style uprising in South Africa.

"South Africa is a bomb waiting to explode, all it needs is a little match to spark it and it will go up in flames," he said.

"The recent student demonstrations were one of the many small bombs that would ultimately lead to an ultimate explosion if government’s approach didn’t change."

Mbeki, the brother of former South African president Thabo Mbeki, is a political economist and deputy chair of the South African Institute of International Affairs. He says most people can’t afford rising college fees in gloomy economic times.

"There are about 19 million people in the credit system in South Africa, with half that number failing to service their debt," he says.

"We have a 40 percent unemployment rate among Africans and 30 percent unemployment rate among colored [people] which are the two largest populations in this country."

He also warned that the underperformance of the economy was part of the reason why most South African families could not meet the education costs.

"To create a competitive economy, everybody should be educated and there should be the right investment into skills that grows the economy."

Mbeki says the African National Congress-led government needs to spend on education instead of the Holy Grail of building the black middle class.

He does not believe in student loans as he says this would overburden people with debt. Mbeki dismissed suggestions from the higher education minister, Blade Nzimande, that the private sector had the money to fund tertiary education.

"It is within the domain of the state to fund public education. Nzimande seems not to acknowledge that the private sector in South Africa is becoming thinner as companies are exiting for other African countries like Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Nigeria."

Nzimande, in the aftermath of the protests, conceded that the government would meet the deficit resulting from a 0% increase for 2016.

["While] wealthier universities will make a contribution towards the shortfall, the rest of the money will have to come from the departments of higher education and finance or through reprioritization of other departments," says Nzimande.

South Africa’s weak student loan system also seems to have failed. South Africa is not alone; the United States (US) is heading towards a bubble that will threaten the financial system with unpaid student loans. According to reports, unpaid loans in the US sit at around $1.2 trillion.

In South Africa, most students who struggle to pay their fees receive a cushion from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). But the body has also failed the needy by not providing the funding.

Musawu Daca, CEO of NSFAS, in January 2014, said his organization needed at least $1.45 billion a year for poor students in South Africa. This leaves Vice Chancellors with a huge burden that Mbeki thinks the government should pay for.
"We put R9 billion ($650 million) in one year towards education, we have the private sector and universities also giving bursaries, yet we can't fund everybody because students are not paying back the money they are supposed to. In a free education system, sometimes people will take the easy route and study things that don't require that much effort and those things don't get rewarded well. If they know they have to pay it back, they will study something where they would get a good salary."

According to Schüssler, other countries have student loans but are more successful in collecting them. "If we can't do it properly, we can get the South African Revenue Services (SARS) to...

"My other daughter is starting university next year and I worry about how I will pay for them both."

GOVERNMENT SHOULD PAY

BY ANCILLAR MANGENA

It may be rewarding, but it's still expensive to be an African studying stateside. Yale University student, Mandlenkoski Dube (21), says students have a right to complain because the ANC government hasn't delivered on its promises, two decades into democracy. "It's unfair that state education which should serve everyone, especially those who have been historically disadvantaged, should become instead a vehicle to reinforce the privilege of certain racial groups in South Africa who historically have been better off than most black South Africans. And it's especially ironic that it is an act of government cutting funds to state universities that prompted universities to seek fee increases, and thereby setting off the FeesMustFall campaign," says Dube.

He left his home country, Zimbabwe, to study in the United States (US) as a means to explore different fields so he can decide on what to study. "I wouldn't have been able to do that in Zimbabwe because universities there require undergraduates to choose a major before starting university. Dube is currently taking philosophy, literature, historical and political thought, and microeconomics. In the US they are only required to choose majors in their second year of study.

"Education here prepares people for the demands of not only performing well in jobs in the area they eventually major in but also for navigating their way through the more nuanced aspects of life and the world in general," he says.

Dube relies on a bursary to afford the $45,000 annual fees.
FOCUS - STUDENT PROTESTS

do that so that there is always money to fund others after people graduate and get jobs.”

It may be a long wait for the free education students are campaigning for.

Minister of Higher Education and Training, Blade Nzimande, says government is looking into community service for graduates.

“We are also looking into the private sector because their contributions are not in line with the benefits that they get. They are the single largest absorbers of university graduates.”

Although it is not his decision, Nzimande believes the cabinet must consider a wealth tax to fund education.

“We should be careful about raiding the skills levy money all the time as that could amount to robbing the poor to pay the poor,” he says.

South Africa’s Finance Minister, Nhlanhla Nene, counters education is one of the best endowed departments. Spending on basic education over 2015/16 is estimated at $14.5 billion.

Over the next three years, about $46 billion will go towards basic education.

The government, through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), provides financial aid for poor students.

NSFAS increased the number of students they assist substantially from $32 million, assisting 29,176 students in 1999, to $650 million, assisting 414,802 students in 2014.

“Despite the considerable investment in financial aid, we are still unable to fully meet the needs of all qualifying and deserving students. Insufficient student financial aid is a contributing factor that impedes equitable access to university education and undermines government’s effort to respond to the socio-economic inequalities and challenges our country faces. We also have to look at university fees (tuition, accommodation and living expenses) as it is increasing at a higher rate than NSFAS funds,” says Nzimande.

NSFAS Executive Officer, Msulwa Daca, says the scheme helped more than 400,000 students last year.

“We need R51 billion ($3.7 billion) over three years to fund the students,” he says.

“There are a number of people affected but we don’t have enough money to fund students who are in the lower income bands. We are looking to partner with banks and development finance institutions to create and design a product that can be able to intervene and assist students in the medium income bands,” says Daca.

NSFAS now has a project team working on how to get money back to help current students.

“We are making a plea to former students who were assisted by the scheme and are now employed to start making payments.”

President Jacob Zuma approved a 0% increase for the 2016 academic year; the government is left with a $188-million hole.

“ar to the immediate shortfall we are working out exactly what different sectors will contribute, together with the minister of finance.”

According to Nzimande, in the future, an additional $1.4 billion per year is needed for university subsidies.

In a statement, Linda Jarvis, Chief Financial Officer of the University of the Witwatersrand, says the 5% subsidy from the government is not enough to cover costs.

‘WE STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO’

BY PEACE HYDE

“I don’t care what you know, show me what you can do,” says a pioneer of the formal education system in Ghana, Dr. J.E. Kwегiy Aggrey during a lecture in South Africa many years ago.

Rather than push out knowledge for students to regurgitate, Aggrey pushed for students to be able to use their knowledge to help develop the nation.

For the millions of impoverished people in Africa, education is a step towards prosperity. Education, however, is expensive. The cost of providing 12 years of education for impoverished countries was estimated at $39 billion by UNESCO. Despite the expense, current figures from the World Bank show significant growth in the number of universities in Ghana.

“When we started about 10 years ago, there were not a lot of options for students. You either go to the University of Ghana, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, or the University of Cape Coast. Today, we have several educational institutions offering a number of options to suit each student,” says John Prentis, the Founder of Liberty International College, one of many private universities shooting up in the country’s capital, Accra.

Liberty International College has 2,000 students and specializes in business and entrepreneurship courses. Prentis says the increase in enrolled students is due to the partnership with the Students Loan Trust Fund (SLTF). The fund, established in 2005, pays for a significant portion of the students’ tuition. When the students find jobs, they repay the fund through deductions from their salaries.

“At the time of my application to university, my dad had just been made redundant and we did not have enough money to pay the tuition fees. The SLTF is the reason I have my degree,” says Frederick Ofiorn, a graduate from Zenith University College.

“Education specific projects with the World Bank have increased significantly. Global partnership for education grants total $7.5 million between 2012 and 2016,” says Eunice Ackwah, Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank.

Despite money being pumped into the education sector, challenges still exist.

“I did not receive enough from the SLTF for my tuition and as a result I had to rely on a scholarship from the university to enrol in my course,” says Steven Adej, a second-year student at Jayee University College.

There is growing concern over fees across West Africa. Public universities are significantly more affordable than private institutions. “Nigeria’s private universities charge some of the highest fees in the region,” says Olufemi Adebayo, senior consultant at Ignite Africa, an education think tank in Lagos. “Babcock University and the American University of Nigeria charge the most... with average prices ranging from about $4,000 to $16,000 all-inclusive annual fees.”

These universities are generally only accessible to the wealthy. For those who cannot afford it, there are around 36 state-run universities. Tuition fees for first-year students at the University of Lagos are around N55,000 ($276), while students at Obafemi Awolowo University pay around N60,000 ($300).

One of the top private colleges in Ghana, Ashesi University, charges around $4,600. The University of Ghana charges around $400 for its most expensive courses.

“We still have a long way to go to the point where education is free or for the most part easily affordable for students in the country,” says Adebayo.

For most, a degree is still just a dream.
FOCUS - STUDENT PROTESTS

“We have to make up our income to cover our expenditure in order to remain sustainable. If we do not do so, we put the quality of our academic project at risk,” she says.

“The government’s policy at the moment is not free higher education for everyone. Students who come from relatively wealthy families and very wealthy families must pay for the system but for the working class, poor and lower middle class, like teachers and nurses who are battling, it is possible that they are catered for,” he says.

For free education to be a reality, Schüssler says we need better economic growth and better efficiency.

“The problem when students get things for free is they keep on expecting to get things for free. In Germany, when students do the equivalent of a master’s here that should take five years, many take more than seven years to complete. So we need to define what is free and for how long.”

Nzimande says a presidential task team has been formed to look at short-term financial issues for 2016. The task team will also look at students who are already in university but have debt from previous years and risk financial exclusion.

‘SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE FOR THE POOR’

BY AVIWE MTLILA

How hard can it be to pay for an education?
You have a single mother, who works as a domestic worker, supporting you and two other children with $218 a month?

For 20-year-old University of Johannesburg (UJ) student, Christopher Tsole, this is reality. The second-year BA Psychology student from Vereeniging, in Gauteng, works part time at the university’s Centre for Psychology, earning $67 a month, to make ends meet. Outside school, Tsole seeks whatever work he can.

Like many South African students, Tsole has a loan from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which he’ll have to pay off once he starts working. The loan only covers tuition and student accommodation. He survives on $50 for groceries every month, which he gets from his mother.

“My course is a five-year course and NSFAS only pays for five years. If I were to fail one semester, NSFAS wouldn’t be able to pay for that semester. That means I would have to study for nothing, seeing as I wouldn’t afford the fees. That makes me work even harder,” he says.

Tsole sees lots of value in the #FeesMustFall protests. Although he wants free education, Tsole accepts that it’s not going to happen overnight.

In his family, Tsole is the only person who has gone to university.

“When I start working, not only will I have to take care of my mother and siblings, I will be responsible for my extended family as a whole. On top of that, I still have to pay back my own NSFAS loan. Education is key and something has to be done for easier access to it for the poor,” says Tsole.

‘THEY ARE OUR FUTURE, INVEST IN THEM’

BY MOTLABANA MONNAGOTLALA

Kgotsoo Mautola dropped out of university to start his business Green Robot Design. It wasn’t laziness or high fees that forced him to leave; it was his entrepreneurial spirit.

“I felt that I was in the wrong place and I didn’t identify with what school was teaching me back then. I would definitely go back,” says Mautola.

Although he didn’t need a degree to start his successful business, Mautola thinks a university education is valuable.

“I think that it’s vital for students to get education. It’s important for them to be able to learn from an early age.”

While he salutes the students for fighting against an increase in their fees, he doesn’t necessarily feel that university education should be free.

“I think that there’s a certain fulfillment and gratitude to studying and paying for your fees, because there is more entitlement, more effort that is put in to see your hard work pan out. On the other hand, I do understand that fees are really expensive and that some students and parents find it hard to pay them.”

Mautola says students need help from both the government and the corporate sector.

“IT’s going to be interesting to see what happens next year and the years to follow and how the government intends to solve this problem. I think the government and corporate South Africa needs to play its part, even small businesses. The youth is our future, if we don’t invest in them, then who will and if we don’t take the plights of these young, eager minds to heart, then we are lost.”
GOOD EDUCATION COMES AT A PRICE... BUT GOVERNMENT SHOULD PAY

BY JAY CABOZ

It’s not cheap in Britain either. For PhD student, Amy Kenyon, a bursary at Oxford University meant a chance of a lifetime. The 28-year-old South African, from Johannesburg, has spent the last four years in England researching melanomas.

“I study the molecular mechanisms by which these processes occur in an effort to gain an understanding of how the immune response can be targeted for cancer therapy,” says Kenyon.

Kenyon is only able to afford her £24,615-per-year fees thanks to two bursaries – the Wellcome Trust PhD program and the Clarendon Fund – that bridge her international student fees. I came to the UK having been through government high school education in South Africa followed by an undergraduate degree. Honours and Master’s at Rhodes. I think this is a very important point. I never for one second felt as though I had received a lesser education for studying in South Africa. Certain tertiary institutions in South Africa are providing world-class education and we should be really proud of this.”

“I think that tertiary education, at a standard that compares to the rest of the world, comes at a price. I don’t, however, believe that that price should be met by the students, but rather government funding. The danger, that an increase in fees prevents talented students from reaching their potential, is one that as a country will cost us.”

“International student fees for the course I am on are £17,690 per annum (for four years). In addition to this we pay £6,925 for college fees per annum. Fees for British students are £4,200. Undergraduate fees for British students are about £9,000.”

IRE ON THE RISE

BY JOSEPH BONYO

As students in South Africa pushed for university fees to fall, students in East Africa watched with a knowing look.

Only two weeks before, the Kenyan coastal city of Mombasa felt the heat. Students of technical University of Mombasa went on the rampage over what they called an unjustified increase in school fees. They destroyed and torched property before police intervened. Lectures at the institution remain suspended.

In March, students at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, had a similar run in with their administration. They were protesting a new policy where they had to settle their fees in full before being allowed back in class. Paying for higher education in East Africa is a huge burden on parents, students and governments.

Since 1952, Kenya has offered subsidies. The Higher Education Loans Board (HEL) lends money to students joining public universities. The repayment of the loans starts immediately after graduation.

But this has been controversial. The board has been accused of delaying disbursements, which led to many clashes with students. The rising cost of living in Kenya has also seen students demand more money.

The HELB, however, faces a shortage of money. After including students from private universities and other public tertiary institutions, government funding is not enough. The high level of unemployment in Kenya has seen the repayment of the loans dwindle.

The HELB sought a bill in parliament to redefine its mandate to focus only on students at public universities and allow unemployed students to opt out of payment. Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta rejected this, saying it will burden the state.

“Loanees will no longer feel pressured to complete their studies and enter into gainful employment so they can start servicing their loans,” says Kenyatta.

As in South Africa, the debate over who should pay for fees is strong.