

Poverty ravages Zimbabwe, Christian students report: Power-sharing government brings scant relief

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Poverty is so bad in Zimbabwe that students sometimes resort to prostitution to survive, says a new report by women in the country's Student Christian Movement. A power-sharing government of Zimbabwe's two main political parties and a small splinter group in 2009 brought scant relief for young people who battle to survive economically, Christian students have documented in a booklet.

President Robert Mugabe has ruled Zimbabwe since 1980, but his ruling ZANU-PF party lost parliamentary elections in 2008 to Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change. Mugabe also lost the first round of a presidential poll, but later convincingly won a second-round presidential election after Tsvangirai refused to take part due to intimidation of his supporters.

Under Mugabe, what was once a strong African economy has descended into an economic crisis, where many are starving and millions are fleeing to South Africa and other countries in the wake of skyrocketing inflation that hit 231 million percent at one point.

Many in Zimbabwe say they have yet to enjoy the fruits of the government of national unity brokered by South Africa and other African nations.

"The only thing I can say is that there is food on the shelves and we can have our workshops as the Student Christian Movement of Zimbabwe without being intimidated," says Matsiliso Moyo, who recently graduated from teacher training college. "But to those students who are still at college, things are not so rosy. They are expected to pay tuition fees which are six times their parents' salaries."

Moyo's testimony is part of a collection published recently by the SCMZ. The booklet titled *Students' Experiences in Times of Governance Crisis* contains descriptions of

arrests by state security agents and stories of students struggling through their studies on a meager budget.

Melissa Green describes how she and her peers turned to sex for money with older men in order to supplement their limited funds. "It's quite a painful experience to see beautiful girls selling their bodies as a means of survival," Green laments in her contribution.

"That's the only way we can survive because most of us come from disadvantaged backgrounds. I used to do it myself, but thank God for SCMZ and my Christian background, I can't do that anymore," she said.

Another student describes how she was detained together with her five-month-old son after attending a workshop organized by the SCMZ, while another tells of her escape from her home after a raid by militant members of Mugabe's party. –

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