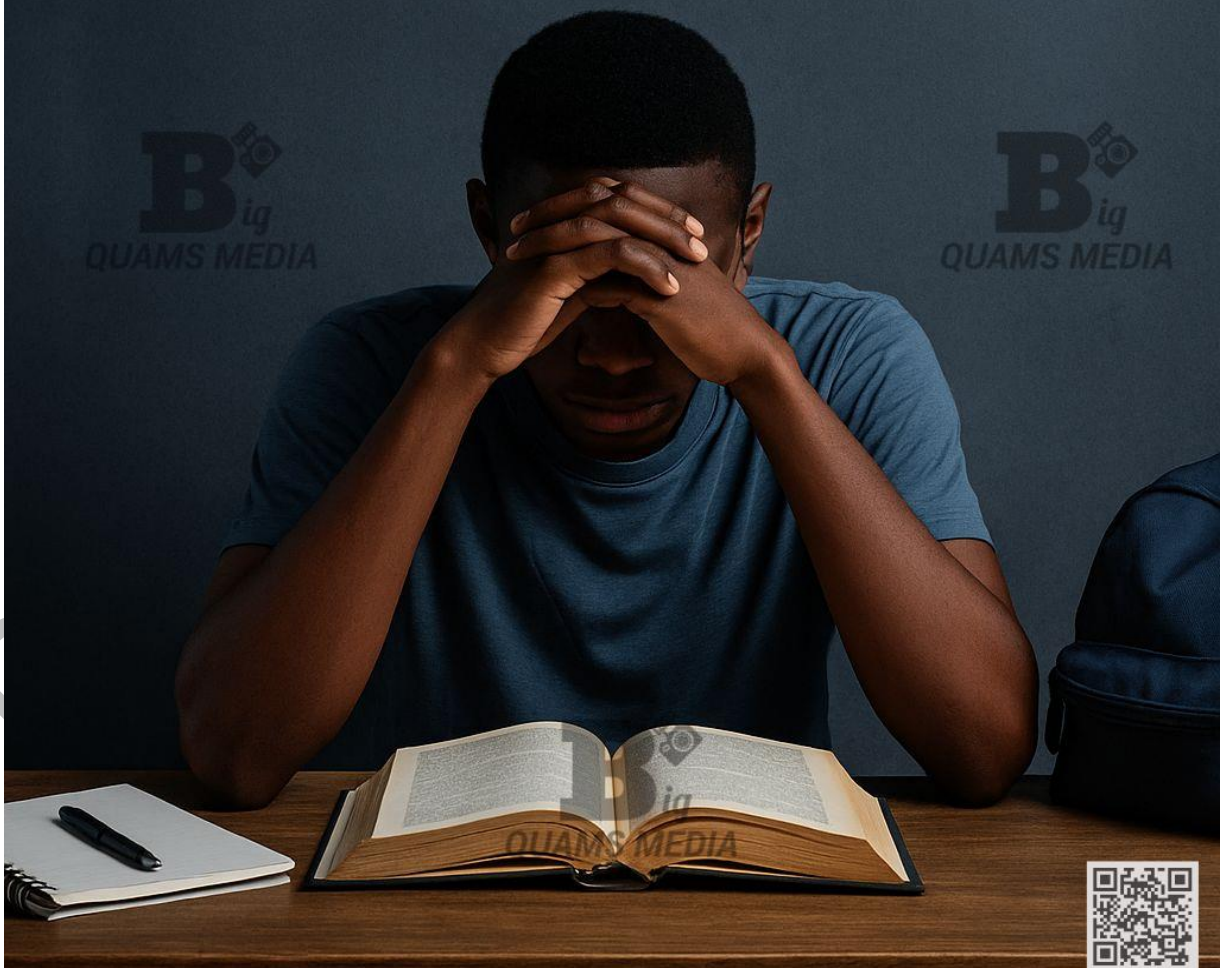
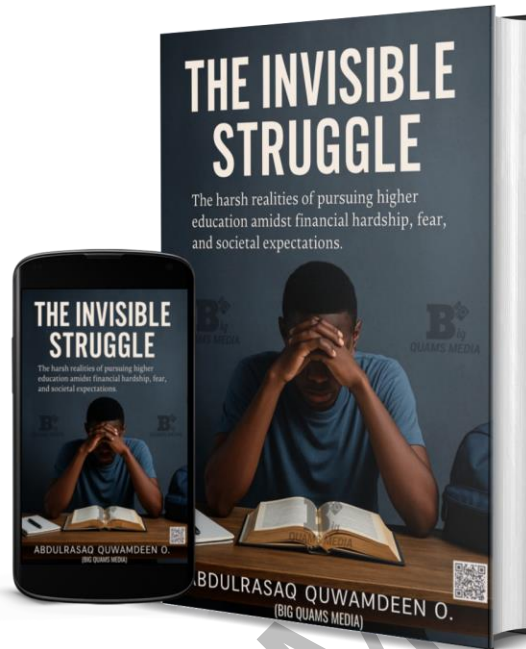


# THE INVISIBLE STRUGGLE

The harsh realities of pursuing higher education amidst financial hardship, fear, and societal expectations.



ABDULRASAQ QUWAMDEEN O.  
(BIG QUAMS MEDIA)



# THE INVISIBLE STRUGGLE

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## DEDICATION

To my younger self and to every student walking a similar path. May these words remind you that every mistake is a chance to grow, every struggle hides a lesson, and every step forward, no matter how small, means you're still in the fight.

This is for every young person fighting silent battles no one sees, for the nights you lie awake wondering if you're enough, for the days when you show up even when your heart feels too heavy to carry.

This is for the students studying on empty stomachs, for the hustlers balancing books and bills, for the sons and daughters who carry the hopes of entire families on tired shoulders.

This is for you, the dreamer, the survivor, the fighter. May you never forget "you are more than your struggles". You are worthy of rest, help, healing, and hope. You are not alone and you are not weak for feeling weary.

This book is yours. May its pages remind you to keep going, to speak up, to ask for help, and to know "surviving is brave but living fully is the goal."

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Alhamdulillah. All praise and deepest gratitude belong to Allah (SWT) for granting me the strength, courage, and inspiration to bring this book to life. Without His mercy and guidance, none of these words would exist on these pages.

To my family, you are my foundation and my constant support. Your love, sacrifice, and endless patience have carried me through every doubt and every late night spent writing. May Allah reward you abundantly.

To my lecturers at **Kwara State Polytechnic**, especially within the **Civil Engineering Department**, thank you for your dedication, mentorship, and encouragement, which continue to shape not only my academic journey but also my growth as a writer and thinker.

To my fellow students, who wake up every day to fight the invisible struggles this book speaks of, this work is dedicated to you. May it remind you that your story matters, your voice is valid, and your dreams are worth the fight.

To my **Muslim community**, your spiritual guidance and shared faith keep me anchored. Thank you for reminding me that true success lies in sincerity, resilience, and trust in Allah's plan.

To the quiet moments of solitude, where ideas were born and raw thoughts found their way into words, thank you for teaching me that even silence can be fertile ground for something meaningful.

And to every friend, teacher, mentor, and kind stranger who pushed me forward, prayed for me, offered an encouraging word, or simply believed in what I carry in my heart, may Allah bless you richly and reward you with goodness in this life and the next.

**Jazakumullahu khairan.**

**Abdulrasaq Quwamdeen O.**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Abdulrasaq Quwamdeen** is a thoughtful writer and a dedicated **Civil Engineering student**

at **Kwara State Polytechnic**. A quiet observer by nature, he finds inspiration in moments of solitude, reflection, and deep conversation. His passion lies in giving voice to stories that are often left unheard, especially those of young people navigating the hidden struggles behind their education and daily survival.

Through ***The Invisible Struggle***, Abdulrasaq shines a light on the silent battles faced by students like himself across Nigeria and beyond. With honest storytelling and a deep sense of empathy, he hopes to spark real conversations, break harmful stigmas, and remind every reader that no struggle is truly invisible when we choose to see one another with compassion.

When he's not writing or studying, Abdulrasaq enjoys quiet walks, meaningful discussions, and exploring new ideas that help him grow in faith and purpose. He believes in the power of words to heal, uplift, and connect and hopes his work will continue to do just that.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE UNSEEN BATTLE

What if the biggest obstacles holding you back in school weren't just grades or textbooks, but silent enemies that no one wants to talk about? The fear of disappointing the parents who sold land and borrowed money to send you to school. The constant juggling of lectures and side hustles just to afford your next meal. The quiet breakdowns behind hostel doors while your classmates scroll through your smiling Instagram posts.

In Nigeria, higher education is treated like a ticket out of poverty, a dream every family chases. From the moment you get your admission letter, people celebrate like you've already

"made it." But step onto campus, and the real story begins: cracked walls, overcrowded lecture halls where your voice is lost among hundreds. Lecturers who sometimes forget your name but remember to remind you about missing dues. Strikes that steal months of your life with no apology.

You survive on noodles and garri. You take up side gigs, graphic design, tutoring, selling thrift clothes online, just to scrape by. You hide your struggles from home because you don't want to be the child who adds more worries to parents already weighed down by bills. So you laugh with your friends. You pose for pictures in borrowed clothes. You post motivational quotes, hoping they'll save you too.

Yet, every night, the truth visits: the fear of failing, the shame of not having enough, the pressure to be strong when you feel so weak. And while society praises your "hustle" and calls you "resilient," it often forgets that behind that strength is a heart fighting not to give up.



This book is your mirror. The Invisible Struggle reveals what so many students carry but cannot say out loud, the secret hunger, the quiet panic attacks, the nights of wondering “Am I enough?” It shines light on what happens when poverty sits beside you in class, when mental health is treated like an afterthought, when your dreams feel like a burden instead of hope.

In **Chapter 1**, we’ll start with the truth about the cracks in our education system, the big, broken parts we pretend don’t matter: underfunded schools, unpaid lecturers, unsafe hostels.

In **Chapter 2**, we see how students wear invisible masks, performing strength while silently sinking.

**Chapter 3** takes us deeper into the ways they “hustle”, the side businesses, the shortcuts, the loans, the sacrifices that keep them afloat but cost them peace.

**Chapter 4** shines light on the mental battles, the sleepless nights, the silent tears, the bottled-up pain that our culture often labels as “weakness.”

**Chapter 5** introduces us to real students like Halimat and Femi, faces behind the grades, whose stories remind us that resilience is not just about pushing through but surviving daily storms.

**Chapter 6** calls us to reflect, to admit that students need more than praise for their

strength; they need help, care, policies that don't fail them.

**Chapter 7** shows how small acts, an open letter, a food shelf, a photo series, begin to break the silence and spark change on campuses.

**Chapter 8** proves that real change starts small but grows when people share, speak up, and refuse to stay quiet.

**Chapter 9** dreams forward, imagining what campuses can look like when students, staff, and society choose compassion and courage over shame and silence.

And in **Chapter 10**, we close with hope: a reminder that no student should have to be superhuman to survive school and that the future depends on the small lights we carry for each other.

This is not just a book, it's a mirror, a confession, and a movement. If you're a student, may you find yourself in these pages and remember you're not alone. If you're a parent, lecturer, policymaker, or leader, may you see the hidden cracks and choose to fill them with kindness,

funding, empathy, and real action.

Because in the end, grades and certificates will always matter but the sanity and survival of those who carry them matter more.

You are not weak for feeling tired. You are not alone for feeling overwhelmed. You are powerful because you're still here, still trying, still dreaming. And together, one shelf, one

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safe space, one honest story at a time, we can build an education system that heals, not just demands.

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Welcome to The Invisible Struggle. May it break the silence, open hearts, and light the path for change.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE DREAM - A TICKET TO A BETTER LIFE

In many Nigerian homes, the day an admission letter arrives is more than just another day, it is a day when entire families breathe a collective sigh of relief and dare to dream a little bigger. For households where every naira is stretched thin and every meal is planned with care, that single sheet of paper represents far more than entry into a school; it is a fragile bridge out of poverty, a possible ticket to freedom from generations of struggle.

Mothers fall to their knees in gratitude. Fathers stand a little taller when they walk through the village square. Neighbors come by with warm hugs and hopeful prayers. An uncle might bring a bag of rice. An aunt might slip a ₦500 note into the new student's pocket, whispering, "For small things, my dear just manage."

In that moment, the student becomes more than a child they become the family's living investment. A hope wrapped in secondhand textbooks and tight budgets. The father might quietly pawn a piece of land or an old generator. The mother might sell her wrapper or her jewelry, small sacrifices for a big dream: that one day, this child will wear a gown and mortarboard, collect a degree, and lift everyone left behind.

#### THE DREAM IN THE STUDENT'S MIND

The student, meanwhile, clutches that admission letter like gold. In their mind, they paint bright pictures: inspiring lecturers who speak wisdom and encouragement; a campus buzzing with possibilities, friendships that feel like family, quiet moments under mango trees where big ideas bloom; late-night group discussions in hostel rooms echoing with

laughter and half-whispered secrets.

Some dare to dream of love too, that somewhere in the middle of practicals and tutorials,

they might find someone who sees past the torn shoes and empty pockets to the raw potential inside.

They see themselves walking proudly across a graduation stage years later, mother crying, father clapping, siblings bragging to neighbors, "That's my brother. That's my sister." This is the dream, simple, clear, powerful.

### WHEN REALITY KNOCKS

But once the excitement fades and the student steps through the school gates, reality begins to peel away the pretty layers. Lecture halls packed with bodies, some students sitting on windowsills, some standing at the back, straining to hear a lecturer whose microphone barely works.

The hostel, if they're lucky to get a bed space at all, might have cracked walls, leaky roofs, bathrooms with broken pipes, and no reliable power supply. Study at night? Only if the generator rumbles to life or you can afford torchlight batteries.

Then come the strikes, endless meetings between staff unions and government officials that drag on for weeks, sometimes months, freezing dreams mid-semester. Parents back home can do nothing but wait, counting lost months alongside the lost money they borrowed.

And so the student adjusts. They learn to read by candlelight. To sleep in overcrowded rooms where privacy is a luxury. To hustle on the side, selling thrift clothes, tutoring younger students, writing assignments for others just to scrape together enough for garri and bread.

### THE WEIGHT OF THE FAMILY'S DREAM

Yet every holiday, when they travel home, they wear borrowed pride. They tell uncles and aunties, "School is fine. We are trying." They hide their cracked phone screens and torn bags,

careful not to show the weight pressing on their chest every night. Because failure is not an option, not when the entire family's tomorrow is tied to your today.

They smile for photos. They pose in front of dusty lecture halls, making campus life look beautiful for cousins still in secondary school who look at them and say, "One day, I'll be like you." And so they carry the dream. Through postponed exams. Through unpaid allowances. Through hunger and exhaustion. They carry it stubbornly because they have no other choice.

### A SILENT PROMISE

No matter how cracked the system, the Nigerian student's resolve stays whole. Because every day they show up for lectures, for side hustles, for late-night reading under flickering bulbs, they renew a silent promise: *One day, I'll make it. One day, I'll be the pride of this family. One day, this struggle will be worth it.*

This chapter is not just about the pain, it is about the hope that refuses to die, the fierce belief that education, no matter how battered, is still a ladder to a better life.

*So the dream lives on, battered but burning, in every overcrowded hostel, every crowded lecture hall, every heart that whispers: "One day, we will rise."*

## CHAPTER 2

### REALITY CHECK - THE TRUTH HITS HARD

The first week on campus feels like a festival. New faces, shiny admission tags swinging from lanyards, freshers wandering through endless blocks in search of lecture halls and registration offices. Halimat remembers her own first week, how she walked under the blazing sun, clutching a small polythene bag with her documents, eyes wide at the sheer size of the campus she'd dreamed about for years.

Students pose for photos beside welcome banners. They join group chats with names like Freshers 101 and Campus Vibes. They imagine late-night reading marathons in the library, heated debates under shady trees, professors whose words will open their minds to the world.

For a moment, it feels like anything is possible. But in Nigeria's universities and polytechnics, the dream often collides with reality and reality hits hard.

#### A HALL PACKED BEYOND MEASURE

By the second week, the illusion begins to slip. Halimat squeezes into her first Biochemistry lecture hall only to find over 500 students stuffed into a space meant for half that number. Some are perched on windowsills, some sit cross-legged on the tiled floor, and some hover outside the door, straining to hear a lecturer who doesn't bother with a microphone.

The noise of side conversations mixes with the hum of tired ceiling fans that barely spin. If you're not early, you stand. If you're unlucky, you don't even get the chance to hear anything at all.

And this overcrowding is not an exception — it's the norm. For every student who dreams of

understanding the world, there are three others who must compete for a seat first.

### THE LIBRARY OF BROKEN PROMISES

In the brochures, the campus library is a beacon of learning, air-conditioned halls, rows of fresh books, quiet study corners. But when students push open the heavy doors, they're greeted by old, outdated shelves. The few textbooks that matter most are either missing, torn, or hoarded by those who got there first.

Late nights, students photocopy pages of books older than their parents. Many download poorly scanned PDFs when the internet even works, squinting at blurry pages under flickering hostel bulbs.

The dream of devouring knowledge is quickly replaced by the reality of scraping together bits and pieces, just enough to pass the next test.

### STRIKE AFTER STRIKE

Then comes the silence that roars the loudest, the strike announcement. A missed salary. An unresolved allowance. A promise broken by those in power. Lecturers walk out. Classes stop.

Hostels empty or swell with restless students stuck in limbo.

What was supposed to be a four-year course stretches to five, six, sometimes seven. Dreams are paused while students drift between side hustles and unpaid internships just to keep busy. Parents wait, helpless, as savings run dry. And when the strike ends? Everyone returns,

pretending the lost months don't sting.



**THE HUSTLE NOBODY TALKS ABOUT**

Faced with rising rent and skyrocketing food prices, students learn to juggle books in one hand and hustle in the other. Some drive ride-hailing bikes late at night. Some design flyers and logos between lectures. Some tutor secondary school kids for spare change. Some sell thrift clothes from their backpacks, slipping into lecture halls still smelling faintly of market dust. It's noble, this hustle, but it's heavy too. What time is left for deep learning when your brain is always calculating how to pay for lunch tomorrow?

**AN UNSEEN ENEMY — THE COST OF LIVING**

Each semester, the cost of survival climbs higher. Bread that cost ₦300 last year now costs ₦600. A bowl of rice and beans at the campus canteen empties pockets faster than it fills stomachs. Transportation fares spike at will. Students skip meals. Some ration garri like medicine. Some hide empty pockets behind forced smiles, telling friends, "I'm fasting today," when hunger is really the only thing on the timetable.

**THE MIND IN A QUIET BATTLE**

And beneath it all, a quieter struggle brews, the one no one wants to talk about. The anxiety of maybe failing. The guilt of asking parents for money they don't have. The weight of comparing yourself to classmates who always look like they have it all together.

When night comes and the hostel lights flicker off, many students lie awake. They scroll through motivational quotes and joke about "depression" in group chats, masking real panic with laughter because "talking about it is embarrassing."

Counseling offices? Rarely funded. Mental health workshops? Maybe once a year, if ever. So the mind bends alone, hoping not to break.

**THE INVISIBLE STRUGGLE**

Behind every fresh face on matriculation day lies a hidden struggle. The photo by the welcome banner does not show the cracked ceilings in the hostel room. The graduation post on Instagram does not show the nights spent hungry. The smiling group selfie does not reveal the tearful prayers whispered when everyone else is asleep.

Yet, somehow, students keep showing up. They write exams under stress. They share food when they barely have enough. They encourage each other with late-night calls and “we move” slogans.

Their resilience is beautiful, but it should not be romanticized. Because when a system relies

on students being superhuman just to survive, the system is broken.

**A BRIDGE TO THE NEXT CHAPTER**

The reality hits hard. It cracks the pretty dream built in Chapter 1 wide open. But the story does not stop here. The same halls that fail students also hold their hidden courage and in the next chapters, we will see how they fight back, cope, and carve small pockets of hope out of brokenness.

In the face of overcrowded lecture halls, empty wallets, and weary minds, students stand tall. Not because they are unbreakable but because they refuse to be buried by what tries to break them.

**THIS IS THE TRUTH. AND THIS IS WHERE THE REAL STORY BEGINS.**

I love this piece, it's vibrant, relatable, and shows the raw reality \*and\* humor of what so many students go through! Let me rephrase it slightly to fit your book's polished but authentic tone, then suggest exactly where it belongs.

**THE CHRONICLES OF A STUDENT AND THE EXAM THAT ALMOST DIDN'T  
HAPPEN**

This morning, I woke up with fire in my bones and destiny shining in my eyes. Why? Because today was the day, 3:30 PM sharp. I dressed up like someone going to claim their future with full confidence, thinking I had enough time. But oh... how naïve I was.

Let me tell you something about Lagos, or any city where the hustle never sleeps, buses and passengers sometimes form secret cults against punctual people. You might see a bus early enough, but for that bus to “complete”? Forget it. It's like we're auditioning for Big Brother Bus Stop Edition. Passengers vanish into thin air once the sun is up, like they're suddenly allergic to transport.

I hit the road by 12 PM, chest out, mind focused, confidence intact. I found my bus, sat down like royalty... and the bus? It refused to move. It was me and three other confused souls staring at each other like, “Are we the sacrifice today?”

I sat. I waited. Then I waited some more. Time was sprinting like Usain Bolt on a good day, but this bus crawled like a wounded tortoise.

After what felt like twelve years wandering the wilderness, I finally reached campus at some vague time I can only describe as “after 1.” I'd lost track of exact minutes, my sense of time had abandoned me for someone more organized.

I walked into school like a war survivor. Found a chair under an AC, pretending the breeze was washing away all my suffering. People thought I was chilling... if only they knew I'd just survived a transportation horror movie.

Eventually, reality snapped me out of my daydream. The exam clock was ticking like a bomb strapped to my GPA. I got up and started walking like the lead character in a dramatic soap opera, the imaginary background music playing just for me and then boom, Life happened. Again.

*Today's life lesson from your dearly stressed narrator.*

If your exam is at 3:30 PM, don't fool yourself by showing up at the bus stop by 12 thinking you're early. My dear, you'll sit there and age gracefully. Even if your exam is at midnight, get to the bus station long before midnight or risk starring in your own tragic comedy.

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## CHAPTER 3

### WHEN SURVIVAL BECOMES THE SYLLABUS

For many students, school is far from just lectures, exams, and carefree campus strolls. It is a relentless balancing act, a daily negotiation between hunger and hope, textbooks and side hustles, the weight of family dreams and the brutal demands of reality. You can see the cracks in the walls of old classrooms, smell the musty scent of dusty libraries, and hear the same recycled complaints about unpaid lecturers and abandoned hostels. But the deeper damage, the silent bruises, live inside the students themselves. They show up every day carrying battles most never see.

#### OLAMILEKAN'S CANDLELIGHT CLASSROOM

Take Olamilekan, for instance, a quiet young man from a family that counts every naira twice

before spending it. From childhood, he knew the road was narrow: his only ticket out was his mind and a sheet of paper with passing grades on it.

When it came time for his WAEC registration, the ₦20,000 fee felt like climbing a mountain barefoot. He stared at his only phone, a small, battered device that connected him to classmates, past questions, and the outside world. In the end, he sold it. With the money, he registered but he paid a different price, isolation.

At night, when others in his class were sharing notes on WhatsApp or researching with Google, Olamilekan bent over borrowed textbooks by the dim light of a single candle, fighting sleep, hunger, and doubt. He refused to pay for “runs”, the whispered deals that promise guaranteed answers for a bribe. His grades suffered, but he told himself that dignity

was worth more than perfect scores built on lies.

People saw him in his uniform and thought, "There's a serious student." What they didn't see

was the emptiness in his stomach, the loneliness in his long walks home from school, or the quiet promise he made each night: I will not give up.

### **MRS. JOHNSON'S SILENT PRAYERS**

And then there is Mrs. Johnson, a small-framed widow with calloused hands and eyes that never stop searching for a better tomorrow. Each morning before sunrise, she sets up her mat by the roadside, arranging pineapples, oranges, and bananas under a faded umbrella that offers little protection from the scorching sun or sudden rain.

She earns less than ₦50,000 a month, barely enough for food, rent, and school fees. Often, when her children come back with lists for new textbooks or exam levies, she hides her tears behind forced smiles. Sometimes she borrows from neighbors, sometimes she pleads with the school principal for an extension.

Her children miss classes when there's no money for fees or new uniforms. Sometimes, the neighbors gossip: "She should pull them out and put them to work." But Mrs. Johnson refuses.

She grips her hope tightly, like the apron she ties around her waist every dawn. She dreams of the day her first son will stand tall at convocation while she watches from the back row, her face bright with tears no one will understand.

For her, school fees are not numbers on paper, they are seeds she plants in faith.

### **CHINEDU — THE BUS CONDUCTOR WITH A BACKPACK**

Then there is Chinedu, another face in the crowd, another name on a lecture attendance sheet. Chinedu's father fell sick one rainy season, and the family's small business collapsed

under medical bills. One day, Chinedu dropped his pen, picked up a conductor's whistle, and started hopping on buses in Lagos traffic.

He shouts "Ojuelegba! Oshodi!" all day, collecting sweaty naira notes, dodging insults from drivers and impatient passengers. By night, he changes into a faded T-shirt, grabs his

backpack, and sits on the back row of the lecture hall, fighting to stay awake.

He misses classes when there are too few buses to conduct. He misses assignments when

the exhaustion hits too hard. But he keeps coming back, notebook in hand, because he refuses to surrender his dream to Lagos traffic.

People see him hanging off the back of a danfo bus and think he's just another hustler. They don't know that inside that rough voice is a mind hungry for more than fares and coins, a mind still determined to graduate, no matter how long it takes.

### STORIES WE DON'T SEE

These stories are not rare. They're everywhere:

- The girl who skips breakfast for weeks just to save money for a lab coat.
- The boy who sells phone accessories by the roadside between lectures.
- The student who stays up all night freelancing on cheap gigs online, so he can pay rent and still buy handouts.

They sit beside you in class. They smile on group projects. They clap when results are released. Behind the bright "Congratulations" are late nights of panic, hunger that rattles the stomach during exams, and the constant fear that one unexpected bill, an illness, an unpaid fee, could knock everything down like dominoes.

### **MORE THAN JUST SYSTEM FAILURE**

It's easy to blame underfunded schools, unpaid lecturers, or outdated curricula and yes, the system is broken. But the heartbreak lies deeper: in the daily sacrifices no one talks about. In the students who sell their phones, skip meals, or stand in the rain hawking just to buy a textbook.

These are not just "poor students." They are living proof that beneath the statistics are human souls with courage that textbooks alone cannot teach.

### **WHEN SURVIVAL BECOMES THE REAL LESSON**

So what happens when survival becomes the unspoken syllabus? Students learn resilience the hard way. They master resourcefulness. They become entrepreneurs, caregivers, night workers, and dreamers all at once.

But the truth is, they shouldn't have to be this strong just to stay in school. Education should be a ladder, not a fight for daily survival. Progress begins when we listen, really listen to these silent sacrifices. When we stop romanticizing resilience and start demanding fairness, compassion, and real investment.

### **A CALL FORWARD**

If we want a better future, we must do more than clap for students like Olamilekan, Mrs. Johnson's children, and Chinedu. We must fight for them:

- Better funding.
- Honest scholarships.
- Safety nets for emergencies.
- Counseling and mental health support.
- A system that rewards integrity, not shortcuts.

Behind every bright graduation photo is a storm survived. May we never forget what it costs and may we build a society where students thrive, not just survive.



Because education is more than exams, it's the human spirit, daring to dream against all odds.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING - THE BATTLE INSIDE**

We praise students for working hard. We applaud the long nights they spend buried in textbooks, the side hustles they juggle, the sacrifices they make for family and self. But beneath this praise lies an uncomfortable truth: we rarely talk about the cost of this constant push.

Because while everyone sees the grades, the certificates, and the bright photos on convocation day, few see the hidden scars, the silent battles that rage inside lecture halls, hostels, and young minds trying desperately not to break under the weight.

#### **QUESTIONS THAT ECHO IN THE DARK**

Ask Halimat, who lies awake on her narrow bunk in her crowded hostel. The fluorescent bulb flickers above her as her roommates sleep. On paper, she's thriving, top of her class, loved by her church fellowship, quick to help classmates with assignments.

But inside, her mind runs in circles: "What if I fail this semester? What if my parents find out I'm struggling? What if all their sacrifices are wasted on me?" These questions echo in the dark long after her books are closed.

Sometimes she skips dinner, not just because there's no money, but because the anxiety knots her stomach until food feels like a burden too.

**THE MASKS WE WEAR**

Ask Femi, the bright-eyed 100-level student who once loved photography. His first week on campus, he carried his camera everywhere, capturing friends laughing in front of faculty buildings, taking portraits of freshers who wanted profile pictures.

But as weeks turned into months, the excitement dimmed. Rent was due, his pocket money vanished in days, and every course group chat ping felt like a reminder of how far behind he was falling. The camera gathered dust in a corner while Femi pulled his bedsheet over his head, telling his roommate he just needed sleep.

Outside, he laughs at jokes, posts memes, and says, "I dey alright." Inside, he wonders if disappearing for a week would make any difference to anyone at all.

**SILENT CRIES FOR HELP**

These stories are not rare. Many students wear smiles like armor. They become masters of disguise, attending parties, taking selfies, using slang and sarcasm to hide the panic attacks that come at 2 a.m. They tell their parents, "I'm fine," because they know how much it would break them to hear otherwise.

And when the mental burden spills over, when a student snaps or withdraws completely, the

same society that called them "strong" asks: "Why didn't they say something?"

But the truth is, many did, just not with words. The friend who suddenly ghosts group chats.

The bright student who starts missing lectures. The loud one who suddenly goes quiet.

These are all signals, silent SOS calls we must learn to hear.

### **THE HIDDEN TABOO**

In many Nigerian homes, mental health is a whispered topic. Depression is explained away as laziness. Anxiety is dismissed as overthinking. Panic attacks are spiritualized.

When a student tries to speak up, they're told to "be strong," "pray it away," or "stop making excuses." So they swallow their fears and force another smile.

### **WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE**

If there's one lesson here, it's that resilience shouldn't mean silent suffering. We cannot keep

pretending that only grades matter. A student's mind needs as much care as their GPAs.

Schools must do better, counselling centers shouldn't be hidden, underfunded, or treated like punishment rooms for "troubled students." Every campus should have safe spaces where students can talk without fear of stigma or mockery.

Lecturers need training to notice the quiet signs, the student who suddenly disengages, the brilliant mind that goes blank under stress. Peer groups and student bodies must normalize asking, "Are you really okay?"

Friends must check on friends, not just during exam week but always. It's braver to say, "I'm not okay," than to pretend and break in silence.

### **THE PERMISSION TO BE HUMAN**

Students must hear this truth again and again: it's okay to pause. It's okay to rest. It's okay to

say, "I need help." Your worth is not your CGPA alone. Your life matters more than any certificate. You are more

than the weight of your family's dreams. You do not fail your parents by seeking help, you honor them by staying alive and whole enough to see those dreams come true.

**A NEW CULTURE OF CARE**

Mental health is not a luxury. It is as crucial as lecture halls and textbooks. If we want students to thrive, not just survive, we must make room for healing, not just hustling. A simple question asked at the right time, "How are you, really?" can save a life. A single safe space can protect hundreds from silent despair. One trained counselor can change a thousand destinies.

**LET THIS BE OUR BATTLE CRY**

This chapter is a mirror, but also a call. Enough of the fake strength. Enough of the toxic silence. It's time to break the stigma and make help normal, not hidden.

If you are a student reading this, let this be your permission slip, You are allowed to feel tired. You are allowed to cry. You are allowed to ask for help and you deserve to get it.

Because your mind is your greatest asset. Protect it. Heal it. Talk. Rest. Stay.

*May this generation of students learn that it's not weak to say, "I'm not okay." It's brave and sometimes, it's the strongest thing you'll ever do.*

## CHAPTER 5

### THE STRUGGLE IS REAL - WHEN POVERTY MEETS EDUCATION

Halimat lay on the top bunk, staring at the cracks in the ceiling. The fan above her creaked with every slow turn, pushing warm, stale air around the cramped hostel room. Outside, voices drifted through the window: laughter, someone hawking snacks, the faint beat of music from the next block.

She turned to the side and glanced at her phone. It was 2:14 a.m. Her roommates were asleep, curled under thin wrappers, breathing softly. Halimat's stomach growled, but the thought of food only made her throat tighten. She had a few sachets of noodles left but she needed them to last till Sunday. Besides, she doubted she could force anything down tonight.

She pulled her knees closer to her chest, as if they could shield her from the thoughts crowding her mind.

What if I fail this semester? What if Dad can't borrow more money? What if I lose the scholarship?

A single mosquito buzzed near her ear. She slapped it away, blinked back tears, and whispered into the darkness, "I can't disappoint them. I can't."

The next morning, in the Biochemistry lab, Halimat was the perfect picture of who everyone thought she was.

"Good morning, ma!" She greeted the lecturer with a bright smile, balancing a stack of notes against her hip. Her classmates called her "professor" always ready to help with an assignment, always the first to raise her hand.

Only Aisha, her closest friend, noticed how her sleeves hung looser than they used to, how her laughter was forced.

"Have you eaten today?" Aisha whispered when they leaned over the same microscope. Halimat shot her a look that said, Don't start. "I'm fine. Focus on your slide," she said, forcing a grin.

Across campus, in Room 5 of Block F, Femi sat cross-legged on his thin mattress, staring at his camera.

The lens cover was dusty. He hadn't touched it in weeks. Once, he would roam campus, capturing sunsets behind the faculty building, laughing as he edited shots late into the night. Now, he barely opened his curtains.

His phone vibrated beside him. Another group chat message, "Group meeting by 6 p.m. Please come with ₦500 for printing."

He turned the phone over so he wouldn't see the rest.

₦500. He didn't even have ₦200 left in his wallet.

A knock on the door made him flinch. It was Tunji, his roommate, back from class, sweaty and grinning.

"Guy, you dey inside since morning?" Tunji asked, tossing his bag aside. "No class?"

"Lecture cancelled," Femi lied.

Tunji pulled out a box of meat pie from his bag. The aroma made Femi's empty stomach twist painfully.

"You go chop?" Tunji asked, already unwrapping one for himself.

Femi forced a laugh. "No worry. I dey okay."

He turned his face to the wall so Tunji wouldn't see the tears welling in his eyes.

That evening, while students gathered under the big mango tree outside the library, Halimat sat with Aisha on a bench. The sunset threw orange shadows on their faces.

"You look tired," Aisha said gently.

Halimat shrugged. "I'm fine."

"You're not fine. You haven't eaten since yesterday, have you?"

Halimat's mask cracked, just a little. "Do you think they'll be proud of me if I fail? After everything they sold to pay my fees? I can't let them down. I can't."

Aisha reached for her hand. "Being strong doesn't mean starving yourself, Hali. It doesn't mean losing sleep every night. You can tell your parents you're tired, you know."

"No," Halimat snapped, her voice sharper than she meant. "They have enough to worry about."

They sat in silence, listening to the breeze rustle the dry mango leaves. Nearby, a group of boys laughed loudly, sharing suya. The smell drifted towards them.

Aisha squeezed her hand again. "At least talk to someone. The counselor"

Halimat let out a hollow laugh. "Counselor? The last time I went, they said, 'Pray about it.' I've prayed, Aisha. I'm still here."

Elsewhere that same night, Femi sat alone in the campus café, nursing a bottle of water he'd bought so he wouldn't be chased away. He scrolled through old pictures on his camera. His favorite was one of a bird perched on a window ledge, taken on his first week on campus, when he still believed he could do anything.

His phone buzzed. It was his mother, a voice note. He plugged in his earphones and listened.

"Femi, how are you? I hope you're reading well. Remember, your father and I are praying for

you. Don't disgrace us, okay? We trust you, my son."

Femi rested his head on the table. The tears came hot and fast.

Somewhere on campus, laughter echoed. A lecturer's car honked. A hostel generator hummed to life. And under all that noise, students like Halimat and Femi carried burdens no one saw, burdens hidden behind greetings like "How far?" and "I dey alright."

If you looked closely, you'd see it: the missed meals, the faded clothes, the empty seats at

morning lectures. If you listened closely, you'd hear it: the silence after forced laughter, the

unspoken "I'm not okay."

But most people didn't look closely. Didn't listen carefully. And so the suffering stayed hidden, tucked between class schedules and group projects, disguised as strength. But what if someone did listen?

What if, instead of a quick "How far?", they asked, "Are you really okay?" and waited for the real answer?

What if the school had a counselor who did more than hand out pamphlets? What if lecturers paused before mocking a late student, and asked why?

What if friends paid attention when someone stopped coming to meetings, when laughter turned to silence, when the bright ones grew dull overnight?

Maybe then, students like Halimat wouldn't have to choose between food and pride. Maybe Femi wouldn't have to cry alone behind locked doors.

In a perfect world, mental health would matter as much as grades. Counselors would be trained, trusted, and everywhere. Hostels would have spaces for students to talk really talk and be heard. Lecturers would be kind, not just strict. And friends would be lifelines, not just seatmates.

But until that world exists, maybe it starts with one thing: noticing.

One evening, as the hostel lights flickered off for the night, Halimat lay awake again. But this time, when her phone buzzed, she saw Aisha's message:

"Are you awake? I got you bread and egg. Open your door."

Halimat stared at the message for a moment, then wiped her eyes and climbed down from



the bunk. Maybe tonight, she wouldn't have to be strong alone.

And maybe, just maybe, that's how the struggle begins to heal.

## CHAPTER 6

### REFLECTIONS & TAKEAWAYS - A MESSAGE OF HOPE

The next morning, the sun rose lazy and soft over the campus rooftops. The air smelled of dust and bread from the vendor near the hostel gate. Inside Room 12, Halimat sat cross-legged on her bunk, half of Aisha's bread and egg still on her lap. It tasted better than anything she'd eaten all week, not because it was fancy, but because someone thought she mattered enough to knock on her door at midnight.

Aisha was still snoring on the lower bunk, her phone buzzing every few minutes with fellowship group chats and departmental updates. Halimat watched her friend sleep, the quiet rise and fall of her chest.

For the first time in weeks, the knot in Halimat's chest felt looser. She knew the fear hadn't vanished, the overdue fees, the empty wallet, the thoughts that kept her awake would return. But maybe she didn't have to face them alone anymore. Maybe being "strong" could mean allowing someone else to share the load.

Across campus, Femi was awake too. He sat on the cold steps behind the faculty building, camera in hand. He hadn't slept much, after crying in the café, he'd walked for hours around campus, remembering how he used to chase light and angles and shadows, not deadlines and dues.

He lifted the camera and peered through the viewfinder. The morning sun caught on the cracked walls of the lecture hall, turning them gold. Click.

He turned the lens toward the path leading to the library, where a girl carried a stack of books almost taller than her. Click.

Femi checked the photos on the tiny screen and, for the first time in what felt like forever, he

smiled, a real smile that reached his tired eyes. Maybe he didn't have all the answers yet.

Maybe ₦500 was still a lot of money. But the camera reminded him he still had a piece of

himself untouched by fear or shame. Later that day, the faculty hall was buzzing. A notice had gone up on the departmental board:

**"Open Forum: Students & Lecturers, Discussing Mental Health on Campus."**

Aisha dragged Halimat along. "They might not listen," she said, "but maybe they will."

They sat at the back, near the windows, where they could slip out unnoticed if it turned into another hollow talk show. But it didn't.

A final-year student, small voice, shaking hands, stood up and talked about how she'd almost dropped out during her second year because she couldn't afford textbooks and was too ashamed to ask for help. Another boy, in a faded hoodie, spoke about spending nights on the faculty steps because he couldn't pay hostel fees on time.

When Halimat raised her hand, her palms were damp with sweat. She stood, cleared her throat. "Sometimes, we don't need motivational quotes. We just need someone to ask, Are you hungry? Sometimes, we need lecturers to understand when we can't print an assignment on time. Or parents to know that our silence doesn't mean we're lazy. We are tired. We are trying."

A hush fell over the hall. For a heartbeat, she felt naked under the eyes of people who'd only ever seen her smile. But then someone started clapping, slow, then louder.

After the forum, Halimat and Aisha sat on the library steps, the same spot where Femi lingered with his camera. He hovered nearby, unsure if he should join them. Aisha noticed him first.

"Hey, you're the guy from the photography club, right?" she asked, waving him over.

"Used to be," Femi said, half-smiling as he sat down.

Aisha pointed at his camera. "Still looks alive to me."

Femi lifted it, showing them the shot he'd just taken, the sun on the cracked wall. Halimat leaned closer, a soft grin spreading across her face. "That's beautiful," she said.

For a moment, three tired students sat together, their burdens still heavy but their shoulders

touching. In that fragile closeness, there was a quiet promise: We're still here. We're still trying. We can dream bigger than our struggles.

### HOPE WOVEN IN SMALL ACTS

Somewhere on campus that evening, a young lecturer sat in the staff room, replaying the forum in his mind. He'd seen the tremor in Halimat's voice, the emptiness in the boy's hoodie, the weariness behind brave words.

He pulled out his phone and typed a short email to the department head:

**"Request: Can we create a small student relief fund? For emergency meals, print fees, urgent hostel problems. I'll volunteer to coordinate. We can start small. But we must start."**

He hit send before fear could stop him.

One small act.

At home, a mother listened to her son's shaky voice over the phone, Feemi, telling her he was tired, really tired, and needed more than prayers. He needed her to hear him, not just remind him to be strong. She didn't have much money to offer, but that night she promised, "We'll find a way. You're not alone."

One small act.

In the hostel corridor, Aisha sat on her bunk, replying to messages in a new group chat she'd

just created: Campus Safe Space. Just a handful of students for now, a place to rant, share links to free counseling, split bread and egg in the middle of the night.

One small act

### A PROMISE BIGGER THAN THE STRUGGLE

Tertiary education holds so much promise. It can lift entire families out of poverty. It can reshape communities, build nations. But for that promise to stay alive, we must admit its cracks and fill them, one honest conversation, one policy, one small act at a time. Better funding is not a luxury. Updated courses are not a luxury. Fair pay for lecturers is not a luxury. Mental health support, real scholarships, safe hostels, none of these are optional if we truly believe that education changes lives.

### TO THE STUDENT STILL STRUGGLING

If you are Halimat. If you are Femi. If you are Aisha, carrying burdens no one claps for, keep going. Rest when you must. Breathe when you must. Speak when the silence feels too loud. You are not alone. You deserve help, love, rest, and a chance to dream beyond mere survival.

### TO THE LECTURER, THE POLICYMAKER, THE PARENT

Be the one who lifts the load, not adds to it. A little kindness is cheaper than another broken student. One small yes, a fair deadline, a meal, a listening ear, can be the difference between a student who finishes strong and one who drops out quietly.

One day, may every graduation gown cover not just exhausted shoulders but shoulders that stand tall, unbowed by hunger, fear, and secret tears. May no student have to choose between food and school fees. May no bright dream be dimmed because someone thought resilience alone was enough.

**Because this struggle is real, but so is your resilience. So is your hope. So is our**

**chance to do better.**

And may that be enough to build a future where students don't just survive, they thrive.

## CHAPTER 7

### RISING VOICES - FROM SILENCE TO CHANGE

Two weeks had passed since the open forum. Life on campus carried on, lectures, assignments, the hum of generators at night, laughter echoing through hostel corridors. But for some, something subtle had shifted.

Halimat now ate her breakfast with Aisha most mornings, even if it was just bread and tea.

She still checked her bank app obsessively, still saw the same cold, empty balance, but at least she didn't pretend anymore. She didn't tell herself she was "fine" when she wasn't.

One afternoon, as they sat under the big mango tree near the library, Halimat opened her phone and pulled up a draft message she'd been rewriting for days. It was a letter to the Faculty Dean, an idea sparked by the forum.

\*Aisha,\* she typed, \*what do you think?\*

Aisha read over her shoulder:

"Dear Sir,

We know you care about academic excellence. We also know that many students are drowning in silent struggles. Please, we need real mental health support. Not just posters. Not just slogans. We need a counselor who stays, who listens, who is trained. We need a small emergency food bank. We need to feel safe asking for help.

Please hear us. We are more than our CGPA.

Yours faithfully,

Students who still believe in hope."

Aisha nudged her. "Send it. What's the worst that can happen? He ignores it? At least you'll know you spoke up."

Halimat stared at the SEND button for a long moment, then tapped it. Somewhere inside, the fear flickered, but this time it didn't win.

Meanwhile, Femi had found himself back in the old photography club. It felt awkward at first, walking into the dusty room where posters of past exhibitions hung crooked on faded walls. But the club president, Sandra, spotted him and practically tackled him with a hug. "Guy! You're alive o! We thought you ran away!"

Femi grinned, shy but genuine. "I just... needed time."

Sandra pulled him toward a cluttered desk piled with student ID headshots, cables, and a battered sign: Capture Campus, Capture Change.

"We're planning a new project," she said, excitement bubbling in her voice. "A photo series: \*Faces You Don't See.\* Real students. Real struggles. No filters. Want to help?"

Femi felt something light up in his chest, the same spark that used to wake him at dawn just to chase the perfect light. He nodded. "Yes. I'd like that."

The next day, they gathered under the mango tree, Femi, Sandra, Aisha, Halimat, and three others who joined after seeing Aisha's Campus Safe Space group online. They spread notebooks and phones across a plastic table, brushing aside crumbs from cheap meat pies.

"What if we make posters from the photos?" Sandra suggested. "Hang them in the faculty. Maybe people will actually see us, not just the grades, but the people."

"Let's add stories too," Aisha said, her eyes bright. "Like tiny confessions. Just enough to make people think before they judge."

Femi raised his camera. "Can I take yours?" he asked Halimat.

She hesitated, then nodded. She pushed her glasses up her nose, wiped the oil stain off her sleeve, and sat against the rough bark of the mango tree. Femi snapped the shutter.

Halimat's confession would read: "Sometimes I eat once a day. Sometimes I smile so my mother doesn't cry. Sometimes I wish someone would see me, really see me."

### **SEEDS OF A NEW CONVERSATION**

A week later, the posters went up: faded corridor walls, faculty notice boards, hostel stairwells. Passersby stopped. Some read and moved on. Some scoffed. Some took photos and whispered.

But some stayed. A boy tapped Femi on the shoulder one evening, his eyes shy but determined.

"Bro, that thing you wrote, the camera and the silence, I feel that too. How did you say it?"

Femi didn't have an answer. He just shrugged and offered the boy a seat next to him on the stone bench. Two strangers, sharing stories in the dusk, a bond woven from the courage to speak up.

### **RIPPLES REACHING FURTHER**

At a faculty meeting, the Dean, a man with a tired face and a tie that never sat straight, held "These children," he began, voice dry but steady, "they're telling us something. Maybe it's time we listen for once."

A few lecturers rolled their eyes. One asked about budget constraints. But another, the same young lecturer who'd sent that hesitant email, cleared his throat.

"Sir, we could start with volunteers. Peer listeners. A small pantry for emergency food. No budget needed, just permission."

The Dean looked at him for a long moment. Then he nodded. "Try. Show me it's possible."

### A MESSAGE BIGGER THAN ONE CAMPUS

One night, Aisha found Halimat in the hostel corridor, staring at her phone.

"You okay?" Aisha asked.

Halimat turned the screen around. It was a message from a student in another school, far away in another state.

\*"I saw your poster on Instagram. I thought I was the only one. Thank you for saying it. I don't feel so stupid for struggling anymore."\*

Halimat felt her eyes sting. She let herself cry — not out of fear this time, but relief.

### FROM SILENCE TO CHANGE

No one was pretending the problems had vanished. Tuition still loomed. Food still ran out. Exams still brought sleepless nights. But now there were cracks in the silence, enough for light to slip in.

A knock at midnight with bread and egg.

A camera lens capturing hidden truths.

A quiet talk on the library steps.

A letter sent to a Dean who finally read it.

Tiny seeds. Small acts. Loud voices rising from once-whispered thoughts.

### A PROMISE FOR TOMORROW

In the end, this chapter, like the struggle, does not wrap up neatly. It does not promise that every Halimat will never go hungry again, or that Femi's parents will never worry about fees. It does not say that Aisha's small group will fix what decades of neglect have broken. But it does promise this: the silence is breaking. The stories are being told. The burden is being shared. And sometimes, that is how revolutions begin, not with thunder, but with whispers that refuse to die.



So, to every student reading this:

Keep speaking. Keep asking. Keep building the tiny cracks where hope can grow. You are not

invisible. You are not alone. Your voice matters. Your dream matters.

And to every teacher, parent, or policymaker who ever wonders what difference they can make: listen. One question, one meal, one chance to be kind, it all counts.

Because when one voice rises, another finds the courage to stand beside it.

When enough voices rise, change must answer.

And when they change answers, maybe one day, no student will have to fight so hard just to stay alive in the place they came to learn how to live.

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## CHAPTER 8

### ACTIONS THAT MATTER - SMALL STEPS, BIG CHANGES

It started with one small shelf.

By the corner of the faculty building, near the worn-out bench where students usually waited for lectures to start, stood an old bookshelf — one the young lecturer had dragged from his office. He and a few other volunteers had cleaned it, sanded it down, and painted it a cheerful yellow. On the top shelf sat a box with a handwritten sign:

“Take what you need. Leave what you can. Student Food Corner.”

At first, people laughed at it. A shelf? What difference could a shelf make? But then someone dropped two packs of noodles on it. Someone else added sachets of tea. Another tucked in a ₦500 note in a small envelope, labelled: “For printing if you can’t afford.”

One morning, Halimat stood by the shelf, turning a sachet of garri over in her hand. A boy from her department hovered near her shoulder, pretending to scroll his phone.

“You can take it, you know,” Halimat said gently.

He looked up, startled. “You’re... you’re Halimat, right? From the poster?”

She nodded. He reached for the garri, voice so low she barely heard. “Thank you,” he whispered, clutching the sachet to his chest as if it were treasure.

#### LITTLE THINGS BECOME BIG

Across campus, the Faces You Don’t Seeposters kept appearing, new ones every week. Femi spent his nights editing photos on a borrowed laptop in the library, his bag of battered camera gear always beside him.

Sometimes, he snapped the pictures quietly: a girl sleeping on a library table, her bag as her pillow; a boy counting coins outside the tuck shop; a janitor's child playing on the dusty faculty steps. Each photo had a line scribbled beneath it: "See me." "I am trying." "We deserve

better."\*

One afternoon, Femi found himself standing outside the VC's office, Vice Chancellor, the big boss. In his hands was a slim file of printed photos, the best ones from the project. Sandra had insisted they submit them officially. "Let them hang them in the Senate building. Let them see us for real."

Femi had laughed at first "Like they'll care?" but here he was, heartbeat thumping, waiting his turn. When the secretary called his name, he walked in, palms sweaty, but his spine straight.

### MEANWHILE, IN SMALL CORNERS

Aisha's Campus Safe Space group grew. Slowly, awkwardly at first. It was just a WhatsApp chat, cheap data, lots of memes, occasional venting. But then someone dropped a link to a free therapy hotline. Someone else offered to lend a textbook for the semester. One girl typed a trembling message at 1:00 a.m.:

"I don't want to be here anymore. I feel like disappearing."

Twenty-five unread messages exploded in the group that night. Jokes, prayers, voice notes, links to free counseling. Aisha and two others took turns calling the girl until dawn. She was still tired the next day, but she was still here. And sometimes, that was the win.

### THE RIPPLES SPREAD

At home, Femi's mother pinned one of his photos on the wall beside her sewing machine,

the one of the cracked faculty wall painted gold by sunrise. She showed it to every neighbor who stopped by her stall.

"See my son's work," she'd say proudly, voice warm with a hope she hadn't felt in years. "One

day, he'll work for big companies. His name will be in books."

And when Femi called her at night to say he was tired again, she didn't just remind him to pray. She said, "Rest, my son. Rest. I'm proud of you."

### THE LITTLE LECTURER WHO COULD

The young lecturer, Mr. Dayo, the students now called him by name, kept going too. He set up a Google form where students could submit anonymous requests: "I need toothpaste." "I need ₦100 for transport." "I need someone to talk to."

He printed the requests out, dropped them in staff WhatsApp groups, tagged his colleagues. Some ignored him, but some slipped cash under office doors. Some left packs of bread and sardines in his office, with sticky notes: "For the shelf."

One morning, Halimat dropped by to thank him.

"Sir... I just wanted to say... thank you. For the shelf. For trying."

Mr. Dayo smiled, exhausted but stubborn. "Don't thank me yet. Just promise me when you graduate, you'll do the same for someone else."

Halimat nodded. She meant it.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE DREAM FORWARD - BUILDING WHAT WE DESERVED

By mid-semester, the dusty shelf beside the faculty was no longer just a shelf, it had become a symbol. Students called it \*The Yellow Corner.\* Some came shyly, eyes darting left and right, pocketing a pack of noodles or a biscuit before slipping away. Others came boldly, dropping donations, an extra loaf of bread, a bag of sachet water, a ₦200 note folded twice and hidden under a can of milk.

Halimat sat near it sometimes, reading her Biochemistry textbook while keeping an eye out for anyone pretending they “weren’t hungry.” When she spotted them, she’d pat the shelf and say, “It’s here for you. Please, take.”

One Friday morning, a first-year girl approached her. Thin, her hijab a little frayed at the edges, eyes downcast.

“Please... are you the one who started this?” the girl asked.

Halimat laughed softly. “No. Many of us did.”

The girl nodded, tears gathering as she clutched a loaf of bread. “God bless you.”

#### A CAMERA, A CAMPUS, A CATALYST

Femi’s photos had begun to travel, pinned on digital noticeboards, shared on student WhatsApp groups across different schools, printed out and taped to hostels. He called the series “The Dream Forward.”

One afternoon, he was invited to speak at a student town hall, him, the boy who once hid from course group chats. He stood in front of rows of students and lecturers, his voice

trembling but clear.

“Photography won’t fix tuition fees,” he told them, “but stories make people see. And when people see, maybe they’ll care enough to fix what they can.”

Afterward, two shy students approached him, clutching cheap point-and-shoot cameras.

“Can you show us how to start?” they asked.

He grinned, heart swelling with something bigger than fear. “Let’s start today.”

### **SMALL SPARKS IN QUIET PLACES**

Aisha’s Campus Safe Space now had fifty members. Then eighty. Then a hundred. Some used it just to rant: about grades, about lecturers, about how they missed home. Others stayed silent for weeks, reading messages at 2:00 a.m., feeling a little less alone in their quiet rooms.

One day, Aisha opened the group and found a new message pinned at the top:

“Let’s meet in person. A picnic. Cheap snacks, no lectures, no fear.”

Aisha stared at it, smiling through tears she didn’t know were building up. Someone else had

become brave enough to say, “Let’s gather.”

### **BEYOND THE GATES**

News of the “Yellow Corner” and “Faces You Don’t See” reached the student union. At first, the big boys laughed, “Shelf and posters? Wetin be that?” But one of them, an older student with a limp from a motorcycle accident, pulled Halimat aside after a meeting.

“My sister almost dropped out last semester. No money for hostel. No one knew.” His voice cracked. “Let’s push this bigger. Let’s ask for a proper food pantry in every faculty.”

Halimat’s eyes widened. “You think they’ll listen?”

He shrugged. "If they don't, we'll make them listen."

So they drafted proposals. They shared stories. They collected photos, testimonies, letters.

They stood outside the Senate building with placards made of leftover cardboard, scrawled in permanent marker:

"WE DESERVE TO EAT AND LEARN."

"HUNGER KILLS DREAMS."

"NO SHAME IN ASKING FOR HELP."

Some lecturers scoffed. Some clapped quietly from office windows. One senior admin emerged, frowning at the noise, but paused when she read the words. Maybe she'd once been hungry too.

### **A DREAM BIGGER THAN ONE CAMPUS**

Sometimes at night, when the hostel generator hummed its tired song, Halimat would lie awake on her bunk, phone light blinking with new messages, new students joining the Safe Space, new photos from Femi, new rumors about other schools starting their own Yellow. She would close her eyes and see it: hundreds of shelves. Free counseling rooms in every block. Lecturers who stayed back after class to listen instead of lecture. A place where students didn't have to choose between staying fed and staying in school.

A dream so simple it almost seemed impossible, until now.

### **THE LITTLE LECTURER, STILL TRYING**

Mr. Dayo, the young lecturer, stayed long after the last class, cross-checking spreadsheets of donations, answering anonymous messages from students too shy to come forward.

He wasn't a hero, he knew that. But one night, as he turned off his office light, he passed the Yellow Corner and saw a sticky note pinned to the shelf:

"Thank you for seeing us."

He stood in the dark corridor for a moment, hand on the shelf, praying quietly: \*Let this outlive me. Let them keep building.\*

### **WHAT THIS MEANS**

In the textbooks, education is a straight line: enroll, learn, graduate, succeed. In reality, it's more like cracked cement, weeds growing through every fracture. Students don't just study. They hustle. They starve. They break. They bend. They get up again.

But sometimes, the weeds bloom — wild, stubborn flowers growing where no one thought they could.

### **A PROMISE ON PAPER**

One evening, Femi stood with Halimat and Aisha by the mango tree where it all began. He handed each of them a photo he'd printed: Halimat's portrait under the tree, Aisha laughing during the picnic, Femi himself, caught by Sandra when he wasn't looking, smiling at his camera like he'd just remembered who he was.

"Keep it," he said. "So we remember."

Aisha held hers to her chest. "What next?" she asked.

Halimat smiled at the soft night around them. "Next? We keep going. One shelf, one chat, one photo at a time."



**SO LET THIS BE THE DREAM FORWARD**

A dream where resilience is real, but suffering is not hidden. Where asking for help is not shameful. Where education doesn't mean hunger or quiet despair. Where institutions see students as people, hungry, brilliant, flawed, brave people, who deserve more than survival. "Because the struggle is real. The cracks are real. But so is the dream. So is the fight. So is the change. And it begins exactly where you are."

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## CHAPTER 10

### THE FUTURE IS US - A CLOSING WORD

Rain fell the night before final exams began, warm and sudden, hammering rooftops, drumming on the cracked hostel windows. Inside Room 12, Halimat sat cross-legged on her bunk, reading by torchlight because the power had gone out again.

Beside her, Aisha was sprawled on her stomach, half-asleep over a page of notes scribbled in

three different colors. Their phones buzzed every few minutes, last-minute voice notes from classmates, whispered prayers, reminders of chapters still unread.

Halimat paused her reading and watched Aisha's pen slip from her fingers. She gently covered her friend with a wrapper, then reached for her own phone. A new message blinked in the "Campus Safe Space" chat:

"I'm scared for tomorrow. What if I fail?"

Halimat typed back:

"Failing one exam does not make you a failure. You are bigger than your grades. Rest tonight.

We're still here for you tomorrow."

She hit \*Send\*. A tiny ripple in the dark. A small promise carried across screens and distance.

#### FEMI'S DAWN

Far across campus, Femi sat outside the studio where the photography club stored its battered tripods and borrowed backdrops. His camera rested in his lap. He hadn't slept

either, too busy editing the last shots for \*The Dream Forward\* exhibit they planned to hang

in the corridor during exam week.

He clicked through the photos on the tiny screen. His favorite was one he'd taken the night before: the Yellow Corner shelf, nearly empty again but still standing, a piece of paper taped

to its side in messy handwriting:

**TAKE. SHARE. REST. HOPE.**

Femi smiled to himself. He knew when the rains ended, students would refill it, biscuit here, noodles there, a sachet of Milo if someone was feeling generous. The shelf was more than food now. It was a symbol that said: \*We see each other. We lift each other.\*

He packed up his camera and walked back to his hostel through puddles that glowed gold under streetlights. The rain had washed the dust off the old walls. For a moment, the broken places didn't look broken, they just looked alive.

**AFTER THE TEST PAPERS**

The exams came like a storm, restless nights, scribbled notes, calculators borrowed at the last minute. For a few days, no one spoke about shelves or Safe Spaces or open letters. They just survived the test halls: sweat dripping, pens scratching, prayers whispered under breath.

But between papers, in the gaps where fear used to live alone, new rituals bloomed: a girl shared biscuits with a stranger she'd met online; a boy dropped ₦100 in the Yellow Corner before his 8 a.m. paper; Femi took a quick photo of the last student stumbling out of the hall, bag slung over one shoulder, relief written clear on his face.

**MR. DAYO'S NOTE**

On the last day of exams, a tired Mr. Dayo pinned a typed note to the Yellow Corner shelf. It read:

"When you see a crack, don't just talk about it, plant something there.

When you feel hungry, don't be ashamed to ask.

When you have enough, share.

When you graduate, remember: this shelf is you. This hope is you. This fight is you.

The future is us."

He signed it simply: "Mr. D."

No fancy stamp. No big speech. Just a teacher who knew that his biggest lesson was not in any textbook.

**HALIMAT'S DREAM**

That night, when the hostel finally fell quiet, Halimat lay awake one last time. She let the silence wrap around her, the type that used to choke her, but now felt softer somehow, like a blanket instead of a cage.

She thought about her parents, still sacrificing. She thought about the debt, the hunger, the fear. But she also thought about the shelf, the messages, the yellow paint that refused to fade.

She whispered to the dark: "One day, it won't be this hard for those who come after." And she

believed it, not because the world had suddenly changed, but because \*they\* had changed.

And they would not forget.

**AISHA'S PRAYER**

Aisha woke before dawn, turned her face to the cracked ceiling, and prayed: "Let us never go

back to silence. Let our stories stay loud. Let us be each other's bread, each other's rest, each other's safety net."

She slipped back to sleep with a soft smile, knowing that faith was not just in books or fellowship halls, but in the hands that reached out at midnight with bread and egg.

**WHAT THIS ALL MEANS**

The struggle is not over. Some cracks are too deep to patch in a semester. Some broken systems won't bend overnight. Tuition fees still hurt. Poor funding still steals dreams. But inside these old walls and dusty streets, a small truth now lives louder than fear:

"When we see each other, truly see each other, we build what we deserve."

A shelf. A photo. A message at midnight. A friend who sits beside you until the crying stops. Small things. Big power.

**A MESSAGE TO YOU**

If you are reading this, maybe you are Halimat, Femi, Aisha, or the thousands like them in corners no one writes headlines about. Maybe you are hungry. Maybe you are tired. Maybe you are wondering if fighting makes sense.

This is your reminder: "It does."

One shelf will not change everything. One poster will not erase injustice. But each act stacks up like bricks. One day, they form walls strong enough to hold up a dream that doesn't collapse when it rains.

**THE FUTURE IS US**

So, keep speaking. Keep planting small seeds in the cracks. Keep sharing your noodles and your shoulders and your midnight prayers. Keep demanding better, from schools, from governments, from each other. Keep believing that when enough of us refuse to be silent, something shifts.

You are not just here to survive school. You are here to live. To grow. To heal. To build. The struggle is real. So is your resilience. So is the hope that tomorrow's students will read this and smile, because they won't have to fight this same fight alone.

"The future is us, hungry, brave, exhausted, loud. And we will build it together."

BIG QUAMS MEDIA

## CHAPTER 11

### CARRY THE LIGHT FORWARD - A CALL TO EVERY STUDENT AND YOUTH

The Invisible Struggle has shown us what too many students silently endure, hunger behind good grades, fear hidden behind fake smiles, dreams threatened by fees and sleepless nights. We met Halimat, Femi, Aisha, young people like millions of others who carry books in one hand and survival in the other.

But we also saw something bigger than the struggle: the cracks where hope grew. A shelf where bread and noodles meant more than food, they meant "You're not alone." A camera lens that captured truths no official report ever would. A small chat group where students spoke up at midnight and survived the dawn together.

This story reminds us that while systems fail, people don't have to. Small acts, a meal shared, a message sent, a voice raised, can stitch up the tears in a broken education system.

#### ADVICE FOR EVERY YOUTH AND STUDENT:

##### 1. Speak Up, Even If Your Voice Shakes:

Silence feeds suffering. If you are hurting, mentally, emotionally, financially, say so. Say it to your friend, your lecturer, your union, your family. You don't have to carry the burden alone.

##### 2. Share What You Can, Even If It's Small:

A loaf of bread. A shared textbook. A listening ear. These tiny gifts are the seeds of bigger change. Don't underestimate the power of little kindnesses.

**3. Build Safe Spaces:**

If there is no shelf in your school, build one. If there is no chat group to talk freely, start one.

If there is no counselor, be a caring peer. Safe spaces don't need fancy walls, they need brave people.

**4. Demand Better, Together:**

Fight for real scholarships, fair policies, mental health support, updated courses, fair pay for lecturers. One voice might get ignored. Hundreds can't. Be the generation that refuses to settle for "managing."

**5. Rest. Breathe. Celebrate Small Wins:**

You are not a machine. You are not your CGPA alone. Rest when you're tired. Cry when you must. Celebrate surviving the semester, the week, the day. Each survival is victory.

**6. Pass It On:**

When you graduate, don't forget who you were. Remember the shelf, the chat, the quiet prayers. Be the Mr. Dayo for someone else. Be the reason someone eats tomorrow. Be the one who listens when everyone else is too busy.

**CARRY THE LIGHT FORWARD**

Your dream is valid. Your struggle is real and so is your power to make tomorrow softer for someone else. May you build communities that stand, even when systems fail. May you never be too proud to ask, too busy to share, or too scared to speak.

And when you doubt, remember: the future is not waiting somewhere far away, "it is you."

*Keep pushing. Keep hoping. Keep building. Together, we are the future and the future deserves to thrive, not just survive*



## CHAPTER 12

### WHAT STUDENTS REALLY NEED — A MESSAGE FOR PARENTS, GUARDIANS, AND GOVERNMENT.

Behind every student's struggle is a bigger system and a family and community that can either lighten the burden or make it heavier. Many students are resilient, but resilience alone is not enough.

Here's what students truly need from the people and institutions meant to protect and empower them:

#### FROM PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

##### 1. Emotional Support, Not Just School Fees:

Sometimes your child needs more than money, they need your listening ear. Ask them "how they're really doing." Don't dismiss their stress as "laziness" or "excuses." Encourage them to rest, talk, and breathe.

##### 2. Less Pressure, More Understanding:

Your dreams for your child are beautiful, but don't become their burden. Remind them that failure is not final, and that their worth is not tied only to grades or degrees.

##### 3. Openness to New Conversations:

Times have changed. Students today face social, mental health, and digital pressures older generations didn't. Be willing to learn, adapt, and talk openly, about depression, addiction, or struggles they may be too afraid to say out loud.

##### 4. Help Them Dream Beyond School:

Encourage skills, talents, and passions too — not just certificates. Celebrate small wins.

Support side hustles, creative pursuits, and safe hobbies that give them hope for life beyond lectures and exams.

**FROM GOVERNMENT AND POLICYMAKERS**

**1. Proper Funding for Education:**

Fix dilapidated hostels, provide safe lecture halls, modern libraries, and well-equipped labs.

Good learning environments protect health and dignity.

**2. Real Scholarships and Grants:**

Not just flashy announcements, real, accessible financial help that reaches those who need it most, without corruption or endless bureaucracy.

**3. Mental Health Services:**

Fund professional counseling centers in every institution. Train staff to notice warning signs. Make sure no student has to choose between tuition and therapy.

**4. Fair Pay and Motivation for Lecturers:**

When lecturers are respected and paid fairly, they can teach well, mentor genuinely, and care more about students' growth.

**5. Relevant, Updated Curriculum:**

Stop teaching students outdated theories alone, equip them with modern skills, digital tools, and practical knowledge for today's job market.

**6. Safety and Security:**

Students need safe campuses, free from cultism, harassment, and violence. Enforce policies that protect them physically and emotionally.

**7. Youth Empowerment Beyond Graduation:**

Support job creation, entrepreneurship training, and easy access to start-up loans or grants so that young graduates don't remain stuck in endless cycles of "hustle and hope."

**THE PROMISE**

Students are not asking for luxuries. They are asking for fairness, dignity, and the freedom to

focus on learning without constant fear of hunger, harassment, or hopelessness.

When parents, guardians, and government stand with students, not just in words but in real action, a better future is not just possible. It is certain.

May we build a world where students do not have to be superhuman just to get an education. May they grow, thrive, and dream, with strong roots and open skies.

## CONCLUSION

### FROM SURVIVAL TO SUCCESS

As you close this book, I want you to pause for a moment and breathe. Breathe, because you've carried so much more than pages and words, you've carried hidden truths, quiet tears, and the echo of a million students' silent prayers.

*\*The Invisible Struggle\** is not just my story, it is yours too. It is the story of every student who has studied by candlelight when the lights failed, every young man or woman who missed meals to pay school fees, every parent who sold wrappers, land, goats, just so one child could sit in a crowded lecture hall with hope in their pocket.

To every student reading this: I see you. I know the strength it takes to wake up each day and choose your dream over your doubts. I know how heavy your backpack is when it's packed with more than books, when it's carrying the weight of your family's hopes, your community's future, and your own private fears.

I want you to know that you are not weak because you feel tired. You are not failing because you feel lost sometimes. You are human and your humanity is what makes you powerful.

When the system fails you and sometimes, it will, don't let it steal your mind. When you feel alone, remember this book, remember these words, remember that someone else has felt what you feel and survived.

One day, you will stand tall in your graduation gown. One day, you will look back and see that every hungry night, every candle burned to its end, every moment you almost gave up, made you unbreakable.

This story doesn't end with these pages. It lives on in the choices you make: to keep going, to lift someone else, to break the silence for the next student coming after you.

May your struggle lead you to success. May your success lift others up. May your dreams never die under the weight of the invisible, but instead rise, louder and clearer than ever.

And when you finally stand where you once dreamed to be, remember to reach back, and pull another up.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR & WHAT I DO

Beyond the pages of this book, I help people and brands stand out and grow:

- Graphic Design — From social media flyers to stunning brand visuals, I create designs that get you noticed.
- Content Creation — I craft words that connect, inform, and inspire.
- Brand Promotion — I help you build a unique identity online and offline.
- Digital Marketing — Strategy, planning, and execution to grow your audience and make real impact.
- Student Advocacy & Motivation — Through my writing, I inspire young people to find their voice and own their journey.
- Educational Consultant & Online Tutor — Guiding students to succeed academically and beyond.

Explore my work: [<https://bigquamsmedia-one.vercel.app/>]

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