


E-Governance, E-Participation, and E-Service Delivery in the Parliament of Zimbabwe Amid COVID-19 Exigencies

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ABSTRACT

This article explored how the Parliament of Zimbabwe (PoZ) leveraged e-governance, e-participation, and e-service delivery within COVID-19 pressures. The study used the qualitative research methodology. An assortment of parliamentary reports, hansards, press statements, newspaper articles, documents, and other relevant literature on e-governance, e-participation, e-service delivery and COVID-19 were also used. The findings indicated that following the lockdowns in Zimbabwe which restricted the physical conduct in the transaction of business, the PoZ was quick to suspend business temporarily, so as to come up with measures to cope with the situation. It was found that parliamentarians adopted a hybrid strategy in their meetings, either physical or virtual. The adoption of e-governance closed the gap resulting from the restrictive measures brought about by COVID-19, thus enabling its members to continue with their constitutionally mandated functions. The findings suggest that e-governance, e-participation, and e-service delivery can help organisations cope with disruptions like COVID-19.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, E-Governance, E-Participation, Parliament Zimbabwe, Service Delivery

From a global perspective, Covid-19 has caused immense disturbances in everyday life, human-social relations (Chirisa et al., 2021), education systems (Basera et al., 2022), government operations (Rockey et al., 2020), and normal parliamentary work (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020a), due to preventive lockdowns and social distancing measures.

The World Health Organisation (2021) revealed that COVID-19 had happened in a wide range of workplaces outside of healthcare facilities. This showed how extensive the pandemic had been. The WHO encouraged employers to provide safe workplaces to prevent community transmission of Covid-19. New Zealand was among countries that quickly responded to the scare of the pandemic by ordering a complete lockdown in March 2020 using powers under the Health Act of 1956 (Melbourne

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Forum's Constitutional Insights, 2021). However, these measures were challenged in court on the basis that they were ultra vires (Baigent & McKechnie, 2020).

The discovery of the first case of Covid-19 in Zimbabwe on 20 March 2020 was confirmed by the then Minister of Health and Child Care, Obadiah Moyo (Crisis24, 2020). The Government of Zimbabwe seriously considered the detection of the first human cases of Covid-19 in China, in December 2019 (World Health Organisation, 2020), and its pronouncement as a public health emergency of international concern by the WHO on 30 January 2020 (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2021). This resulted in it taking pre-emptive measures by declaring Covid-19 a national disaster on 17 March 2020, with attendant lockdown measures put into place (Chokuda, 2021). Chokuda, the Clerk of the PoZ, in a presentation to SADC PF remarked that lockdown measures had disrupted businesses, including that of PoZ (Chokuda, 2021).

It is evident that there is scarcity of literature on how public institutions like PoZ have leveraged on e-governance, e-participation, and e-service to provide uninterrupted services within Covid-19 pressures. This study, therefore, is significant in that it sought to close this gap in knowledge on how public institutions can utilize digital technologies to cope with disruptions and uncertainty. In addition, findings from this study will help similar institutions to craft their strategies accordingly when faced with disruptions caused by disasters such as Covid-19. At a practical level, the recommendations presented at the end of the study can assist the PoZ to improve its e-governance, e-participation, and e-service delivery in its operations.

Based on the purpose of this research, the following objectives were pursued:

1. Determine whether PoZ uses e-governance, e-participation, and e-service delivery in its operations.
2. Assess how PoZ leveraged on e-governance, e-participation, and e-service during the Covid-19 disruptions.

Based on these objectives, the following research questions were proposed:

1. Does PoZ incorporate e-governance, e-participation, and e-service delivery in its operations?
2. What role, if any, did e-governance, e-participation, and e-service delivery play at the PoZ amid Covid-19 exigencies?

This research is structured as follows: In the second Section the background of the study is presented, thus setting the scene for further discussions. The third Section highlights the roles and functions of PoZ while the fourth Section gives the theoretical framework that underpins the study. This is followed by the research methodology used in the fifth Section. The sixth Section presents and discusses the empirical evidence, with recommendations developed based on a comparison between the proposed objectives and the results obtained in Section seven; and, finally, the conclusion to the study is in the eighth Section.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Digital technologies have revolutionised the way organisations operate, as they allow physical or remote speedy processing of data and production of quality information that can be used for effective and efficient decision making.

Digital technologies include e-governance, e-participation, and e-service delivery. E-governance, which started around 2003, was conceived as a universal transformation of government operations and government services using technology (Siceloff, 2012). According to Dhaoui (2019), E-governance provides five interconnected benefits as follows: provision of higher quality and economical

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