

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) In the Context of ZIMASSET Policy Framework. A Case Study of The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) (2013-2015)

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Abstract: The study was aimed at establishing how Zimbabwe's economic blueprint, Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable, Social and Economic transformation [ZIMASSET (2013-2018)] was affecting ZOU operations in its endeavor to play a proactive role in it (ZIMASSET). The study which was qualitative used the interview technique to collect data from ZOU senior officials, officials from parent Ministry of Higher and Tertiary education, Science & Technology development and the Ministry of Finance. Some of the major results were that, a lot of influential senior officials were not very conversant with what ZIMASSET entailed, that government support to ZOU had drastically gone down since inception of ZIMASSET, the policy lacked adequate budget provision and that had a negative bearing on the performance of its clusters. The macro economic factors such as massive employee dismissals and retrenchments countrywide in July and August 2015 were likely to worsen ZOU's financial plight since a number of its students are usually gainfully employed, thereby making its contribution to ZIMASSET in jeopardy. The study found that ZIMASSET had got widespread condemnation about its failure to turn around the country's economy.

The study recommended that government should continue to fund state universities like ZOU and the institute should expedite the introduction of IT degrees, initiate research activities that could contribute to value addition particularly in areas of agriculture and sciences and to consult widely rather than use of imposition.

Definition of Key terms

Clusters- Closely related economic drivers to realise ZIMASSET as an economic turnaround strategy. These are four namely; Food security and nutrition, Value addition & beneficiation, Infrastructure & utilities and Poverty reduction.

Context- the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, programme or situation in which something exists or occurs

Open & Distance Learning(ODL)- Mode of imparting knowledge and skills which is flexible in terms of delivery mode used, as contact between student and tutor is minimal. In most instances, the student could be pursuing studies whilst at the same time being employed and with lots of other family and social obligations to perform.

Turnaround strategy- means to convert, change or transform an underperforming economy into a vibrant, growing and self sustaining economy, in this case, the Zimbabwe economy.

Zimasset- The Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable, Social and Economic transformation (ZIMASSET-October 2013- December 2018) is the economic blue print which is supposed to create a conducive framework to resuscitate Zimbabwe's ailing economy.

I. Introduction

This paper begins by giving an overview of the background of the study pertaining to how ODL at ZOU has impacted on the ZIMASSET policy framework and vice versa. Methods and techniques used to facilitate data collection and analysis have been presented. A lot of literature reviewed has been included to enlighten the reader on the study as well as the major findings and subsequent recommendations. The presentation has been made in such a manner that makes this paper exciting to anyone who reads it.

II. Background To The Study

The Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable, Social and Economic transformation (ZIMASSET-October 2013- December 2018) is the economic blue print which is supposed to create a conducive framework to resuscitate Zimbabwe's ailing economy. ZIMASSET is hinged on four clusters which are Food security and nutrition, Value addition and beneficiation, Infrastructure and utilities and Poverty reduction.

In his foreword in the ZIMASSET document when it was launched in 2013, the State president, Cde Robert Mugabe stated that ZIMASSET was crafted to achieve sustainable development and social equity anchored on indigenization, empowerment and employment creation that shall be largely propelled by the judicial exploitation of the country's abundant human and natural resources.

Every sector in the economy is affected by this government policy thrust of ZIMASSET and universities are not spared, including Open distance learning institutions like the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU). The birth of the ZIMASSET blueprint in Zimbabwe could be understood from the socio, political and economic atmosphere of the country in the period towards the 2013 harmonised elections. It is alleged that the policy was crafted by ZANU PF senior leaders and enshrined into the party' campaign manifesto which promised among other things; empowerment of the youths, rehabilitation of roads, schools, provision of health services to all the citizens, shelter and creation of employment especially for the youths

The policy was subsequently endorsed by the cabinet in October 2013 a few months after the elections. Mr Patrick Chinamasa who was the newly appointed head of the steering committee, was on the fore-front of campaigning for the adoption of the policy by the cabinet soon after the elections. It was because of his relentless campaign that the document was formally adopted by government (www.newsday.co.zw, 12/03/15).

2.1 Purpose of the ZIMASSET Initiative

The purpose of the ZIM ASSET document can be understood from its meaning (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013); the need to attain sustainable socio-economic transformation in the four key clusters which are:

- Food security and nutrition;
- Social services and poverty reduction;
- Infrastructure and utilities; and
- Value addition and beneficiation.

(i) Food Security and Nutrition

According to the blueprint, Food Security and Nutrition revolved around the country's food producing and processing capabilities. There was also emphasis on the importance of expanding the country's agriculture through a number of ways such as provision of adequate inputs and value addition of agricultural products such as cotton and tobacco. Value addition involved processing of primary agricultural products into secondary consumable products in order to increase the standard and quality of the product which would ultimately fetch a higher price on the international market. The ultimate goal of the ZIMASSET in that regard was to restore Zimbabwe's bread basket status producing food enough to sustain not only the country but the whole region of Southern Africa as was the case in the 1980s.

(ii) Social Services and Poverty Reduction

The main thrust of the Social Services and Poverty Eradication cluster was to enable the Government of Zimbabwe to improve the living standards of the citizenry for an empowered society and a growing economy. It also endeavoured to reduce poverty by creating employment opportunities for the youths in particular through its various initiatives. This cluster incorporated the following ministries; Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. This cluster has the following key areas;

- Access to basic health services
- Indigenisation and economic empowerment;
- Access to water and sanitation;
- Infrastructure;
- Access to land and agricultural inputs;
- Employment creation;
- Gender mainstreaming;
- Information communication technology;
- Resource mobilization

(iii) Infrastructure and Utilities

The Infrastructure and Utilities cluster focused on plans to restore sanity in the country's key assets as well as the recovery of the key utility services. Under this category, the ZIM ASSET blueprint gave precedence to restoration of the following aspects;

- Water and Sanitation infrastructure;
- Public Amenities;
- Information Communication Technology (ICT);

- Energy and Power Supply;
- Transport (road, rail, marine and air).

(iv) Value addition and beneficiation

This chapter under the ZIM ASSET initiative attended to the need to re-establish the country's manufacturing industry in areas of energy production, agriculture and industry. There was also emphasis on value addition in the country's minerals such as gold, diamonds and platinum. This, according to ZIM ASSET, would be done through establishment of diamond polishing centres, establishment of agro-processing plants and strengthening the implementation of bio-fuels.

ZIMASSET was created after the collapse of the Government of national unity (GNU) whose four year life came to an end with the harmonized general elections in July 2013. The new government of ZANU PF crafted the economic blue print as it wanted to improve the country's economic performance by trying to accommodate its political manifesto during election campaigns held prior to the election dates. ZIMASSET was supposed to promote business performance and economic growth of 7,2% as well as the welfare of all Zimbabweans according to www.zimtreasury.gov.zw (19 March 2014).

III. Problem Statement

The ZIMASSET economic blue print has failed to live to its promise and falls far short of attaining the 7,2% economic growth as per its target. There is generally poor economic performance by almost all sectors including higher and tertiary education institutions like ZOU.

The general economic malaise (downturn) has culminated in ZOU facing financial constraints as financial assistance from the parent Ministry (government) of Higher and Tertiary education ,Science and Technology has reduced drastically with its future hanging in the balance if government ceases to pay full salaries of state universities staff in its yet to be finalised policy on weaning state universities from government financial support. . Such moves indicate how ZIMASSET may have failed as a policy that is supposed to drive the economy towards strong economic performance. During ZIMASSET, unemployment is on the rise with majority of those losing their jobs due to companies downsizing or being liquidated, joining the informal sector (85% now employed by this sector).

Such economic conditions may affect potential students to pay for their tuition fees which in turn affects ZOU's revenue base.

It is against this background that this study wants to find out under cross examination how ZIMASSET has been affecting ZOU'S operations and what then relevant authorities can learn from that in order to devise strategies for survival.

IV. Research Questions (Sub-problems)

This study which was qualitative, wanted to find out the impact of ZIMASSET on ZOU's operations as well as how the institution was contributing towards the realisation of its (ZIMASSET) goals. The major research questions were:

- i) What was the level of understanding of the ZIMASSET policy document fully and its thrust by key ZOU members and ministry officials?
- ii) What progress to date had been made by ZOU as its contribution towards realisation of ZIMASSET's four clusters?
- iii) Which are the major challenges facing ZOU in its quest to effectively participate in ZIMASSET's operational framework(goals)?
- iv) How could ZOU have effective operations in order to effectively contribute towards ZIMASSET goals?

V. Literature Review

A lot of literature on ZIMASSET continues to be in existence particularly in the media since the programme is still work in progress up to 2018.

5.1 Aim/Purpose of ZIMASSET .

“ZIMASSET was crafted to achieve sustainable development and social equity anchored on indigenisation, empowerment and employment creation which will be largely propelled by the judicious exploitation of the country's abundant human and natural resources,” reads part of the foreword by President Mugabe in the *ZIMASSET document (2013)*.

ZIMASSET has drawn a lot of interest among all key stakeholders although apart from the ruling party ZANU PF officials, a lot of neutrals and economists have seemed to be sceptical and critical of this economic blue print (www.newsdezimbabwe.co.uk, 15/08/14).

5.2 Criticism of ZIMASSET

The ZIMASSET has been described as a flawed policy by both economists and politicians. (www.newsдзеzimbabwe.co.uk, 15/08/14).

Economists and academics criticized the very foundations of the ZIMASSET policy by arguing that it was crafted at a time when political tension was very high and thus there was need to win the support of the electorate in the face of the Movement for Democratic Change political party. Hence the crafting of the policy did not involve the relevant stakeholders such as health service providers, multi-national companies, farmers and the commercial services providers such as financial institutions. Thus it has been rubbished as just a ZANU PF document which was sneaked into government.

According to www.newsдзеzimbabwe.co.uk, (15/08/14), analysts also condemned the blueprint arguing that companies had continued to close, the government was threatening retrenching civil servants, increase in unemployment rates and increase in poverty especially among the rural peasants. Thus by 2014, only a year after the document was adopted, some critics had already dismissed the blueprint as a flawed policy.

One of the analyst according to www.newsday.co.zw (12/03/14) was convinced that the policy formulation was not up to scratch, was not because the technocrats were not good enough, but it was because ,a national policy must naturally have public buy-in so that the citizens could identify the policy as theirs ,and not for certain individuals or State or certain political party.

In order for this to happen, the analyst said that there should be a deliberate process by the leadership where citizens are made to appreciate policy rationale so that they appreciate the problem that needed to be addressed. For this to happen there must be platforms where citizens could access information freely and easily.

The analyst felt that citizens must be given an opportunity to contribute so that their views find expression in the proposed policy and they feel it was theirs.

In his view , ZIMASSET did not go through that process above, and there was a divide between the State and citizens, with the later just looking up to the State to make things happen and waiting to blame when positive change does not come.

The analyst also noted that the other problem was budgetary constraints which affected many developing countries to fund even wonderful policies. In the last budget (2012-2013), Zimbabwe recorded a huge deficit and one wondered what miracles could be expected to be able to support the ZIMASSET policy. He said it would look like, there was no intention for it to be successful beyond having it as a document on paper, because there must have been resources to support successful implementation of such a big national policy.

He noted other points which worked against good policy implementation and formulation as political instability and polarization. He said, “ While our country is not at war physically, we seem so divided that we cannot agree on anything even a small matter as long as it is coming from the left or right side.”

According to him, this political polarization had blinded the nation from appreciating virtues of those perceived to be against Zimbabwe. He also reiterated that the ZIMASSET policy was being viewed by the opposition, mainly Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as a Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) policy and true to it; the policy did not come about after a comprehensive consultative process. He also noted that there was lack of a vibrant free media which should assist in making sure that the views of the people were articulated and included both in rural and urban communities.

The analyst cited the results of the last census in 2013, that about 60% of the population was in the rural communities and they were deprived of access to information and free expression, that meant that 60% of the population was not involved in a policy which they should support and assist in formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

The analyst according to www.newsday.co.zw (12/03/14) summarized the following as major obstacles to the success of ZIMASSET namely,

- (i) lack of budgetary support for these policies
- (ii) corruption
- (iii) political polarization
- (iv) lack of independence of Zimbabwe technocrats
- (v) lack of a vibrant free media and
- (vi) general lack of trust among Zimbabweans.

5.3 Review of Literature Related to State universities including ZOU

The following selected newspaper reports are indicative of the challenges being experienced by the under-funding of ZIMASSET on state universities which include ZOU

5.3.1 Deputy Minister speaks out on cutting state universities funding(source, www.voazimbabwe.com, 25/05/15)

Government was considering weaning off State universities or make them meet a certain percentage of salaries for their staff. Higher and Tertiary, Science and Technology Development Deputy Minister Dr Godfrey Gandawa had confirmed the development in an interview held that week.

"I can confirm that Government has come up with a proposal to either have State universities meeting a certain percentage of their salaries or to wean them off completely," he said. However, the issue was still going to be deliberated in Cabinet. Some sources claimed that Government intended to implement the measure as early as July 2015. As from July, universities will no longer be receiving any funds from Government. Government wants the institutions to stand on their own," said a source.

Government funded State universities through grants and paid salaries for lecturers. Analysts said that the move, if implemented, was likely to cause an increase in fees with universities passing on the burden to students. Mr Joseph Sagwati, an analyst said that the move was imprudent. "It is an ill-advised move as universities are already poor. It will be difficult for them to sustain a wage bill for lecturers' salaries as well as administration staff," he said. "In the event that they consider adopting this policy, it will compel universities to increase fees, which will affect many parents."

Mr. Brains Muchemwa another commentator, said the decision would literally close the door on most rural students. "The move, in as much as it is going to conserve cash for the Government, is very unfortunate from the perspective that it is going to make university education a privilege and a preserve for the very few elite at a time when most households are facing challenges due to the high unemployment rate," he said.

"It is important for policy makers to understand that they themselves are beneficiaries of a free university education system without which — because some were raised in very poor families — they would not be sitting in the very public offices that allow them to make such retrogressive decisions." Mr Muchemwa urged the Government to focus on meeting fiscal savings from parastatals where money was being misappropriated and then subsidise the education sector.

5.3.2 State universities in danger of collapse(source-www.zimbabweelection.com, 15 April 2015)

Government support to state universities included sponsoring key projects and expansion, salaries, equipment, acquisition of properties and providing student grants and loans. University sources said they had been given six months' notice before they start fending for themselves.

"Minister of Higher & Tertiary Education, Science & Technology Development, Oppah Muchinguri recently summoned all state university vice chancellors and informed them of government's plan to wean universities off all state support. There is now a lot of uncertainty about the future of these universities because that could signal their collapse," said a University of Zimbabwe (UZ) informant.

President Robert Mugabe had by then accused the institutions of diverting financial support from government to fund personal interests. The government was struggling to pay university teaching and non-teaching staff salaries, which for many months have been arriving late.

Recently, staff at most state universities briefly withdrew their services over delayed payment of salaries. They only resumed work after government paid them. Pay days kept shifting for the rest of the civil service, except the army and central intelligence services, as treasury was struggling to raise money.

Survival Strategies

Minister Muchinguri, the higher education minister, reportedly told the universities that they must establish their own resource mobilisation strategies for survival.

"The VCs (vice chancellors) were told that they must consider using the farms and other resources they have to fend for themselves. What she seems to have missed is that the macro-economic situation is dire and this is a bad time to start business on our own.

"If the given notice carries through, which institution would have generated sufficient income within six months? Even if a project is good, there is no guarantee that it will sustain itself within such a short period of time," said a lecturer from National University of Science and Technology (NUST).

For the universities to engage in sustainable income-generating projects, there was need to fund them, but government had not given resources for the initiation of the business ventures. It was not clear if cabinet had already approved the plan to withdraw financial support to universities.

Govt Must Stop

The chairperson of the higher education parliamentary portfolio, Peter Mataruse, urged government to halt the plan.

"Government must stop this plan. In as much as we are aware that it is struggling to raise revenue, completely withdrawing would be disastrous. Withdrawal has many negative implications for university operations and students.

“The universities are most likely to fail to raise sufficient income on their own and this will force teaching staff to relocate to other countries. That would leave students with no teachers and they might just decide to drop their studies,” Mataruse told The Zimbabwean.

Students Drop Out

Universities were likely to be forced to hike fees so as to improve revenue collection but, added Mr Mataruse, this would boomerang because most struggling students would drop out and enrolment would suffer. He urged the universities to use available resources to generate income so as to aid the cash-strapped government. Meanwhile, government had reportedly withdrawn full-time university students from the civil service, mostly teachers, arguing that treasury had no money to pay relief staff due to the then current economic hardships.

Hundreds of teachers and other civil servants who had enrolled at different universities during the first semester of 2015 had since been ordered to report back to their workstations. The move riled most civil servants, especially those who had paid the full amount of their fees as the institutions refused to give them refunds. Some of the civil servants said they had received phone calls from the government ordering them to report back to their work stations. At Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) in Masvingo at least 100 civil servants who had enrolled for different degree programmes were reportedly ordered to withdraw.

Shocked

“We were shocked to receive the directive to withdraw from the university despite the fact that we had been cleared to go on study leave,” said one of the affected civil servants, who declined to be named.

“We are going to continue engaging government over this issue because we feel our right to education is being infringed by the state,” said a teacher who had enrolled at the university.

Primary and secondary education minister Lazarus Dokora said the right people to comment on the development were at the Public Service Commission – the employer of civil servants. Public Service, Labour and Social Services Minister, Prisca Mupfumira confirmed that some civil servants had been withdrawn from the universities because they had not obtained study leave clearance.

The country’s wage bill, according to Finance Minister Patrick Chinamasa, consumed about 82 percent of the total revenue collected by government. He had hinted at trimming the country’s bloated civil service through retrenchments in order to reduce the huge wage bill.

5.3.3 Government Must Fund State Universities ([Bulawayo24news.Com, 1 July 2015](#))

Harare West Member of Parliament (MP) Jessie Fungayi Majome challenged the government to fully fund the running of state universities if it wanted to really call them state institutions. MP Majome said that in the National Assembly, when she debated in critical support of the Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology Bill, which if passed would then establish the university. The cash strapped government was planning to completely withdrew financial support to state universities, raising fears that this could lead to the collapse of higher learning.

All the above Literature reviewed, gives a gloomy picture about university education in Zimbabwe and more so for an ODL institution like ZOU under the ZIMASSET economic blue print.

It is against this background that this study should be able to bring out better insights on how ZOU could align its education and training to ZIMASSET’s four clusters including the tackling of challenges emanating from this policy.

VI. Research Design And Methodology

- **The Survey design** was used
- The **target population** consisted of ZOU Senior management, Faculty Deans, Regional Directors, lecturers, Government officials in the Ministries of Finance and Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology.
- The **final sample** was 20 based on purposive sampling drawn from the target population stated above. Initially the sample was supposed to be 35 but a lot of those targeted were so busy with a lot of other commitments and were out of office frequently. Some were not willing as they considered it a sensitive area.
- **The Interview technique** was used to get in depth information about the ZIMASSET issues and complimented by **Desk analysis** as reflected by Literature reviewed.

VII. Findings (Results) & Conclusions

These were made based on the study research questions (aims and objectives)

7.1 Thrust of ZIMASSET and its Comprehension by Stakeholders

The study established that a lot of those interviewed were not fully aware of the ZIMASSET blueprint (2013 – 2018). Majority could not clearly spell out the four pillars of ZIMASSET. They could only recall two or three on average.

Two officials in the Ministry of Higher & Tertiary Education, Science & Technology Development confessed that they did not really comprehend what the ‘animal ZIMASSET was’.

‘To be honest with you, this ZIMASSET was rubber stamped on us as there was not much consultation and even setting of targets for implementation. There was no concrete action plan to enable our ministry to follow suit.’ said one of the officials.

The reasons given by the subjects (interviewees) were that the document had been crafted without input of those involved in implementation. It was rather done at policy level. Furthermore, not much awareness campaigns or education and training were done which culminated in lack of knowledge about really its thrust. A lot of officials said that the document was kept with the respective secretary or had soft copy, and had not referred to it for sometime.

The study concluded that majority of ZOU staff including management were not very conversant with the ZIMASSET blueprint/document.

7.2 Progress Made To Date By ZOU On Implementation Of ZIMASSET Clusters

Not much progress had been made by ZOU taking cognisance of the four clusters.

- **Food Security and Nutrition**

ZOU has a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Management degree whose graduands can be farm managers, agricultural experts in the country but its farm is not productive and it was difficult to ascertain if the farm was still owned by ZOU.

One member of Senior management said, ‘Its not clear whether the so called ZOU farm is still ours or was given to land developers or influential politician(s) as part of the heavily politicised land resettlement’

Though short courses offered by ZOU have helped the communities (farmers) to be aware of certain aspects that could improve their agricultural produce but this is only on a small magnitude . The drought of 2014 – 2015 exacerbated food shortages in Zimbabwe as the country was importing grain from Zambia and has appealed to the donor community to assist.

The study concluded that ZOU had not done anything much towards ZIMASSET on this cluster since it was even a failure countrywide.

- **Social Services and Poverty Re**

ZOU has not done much especially over the past two years as the welfare through improved living standards of its graduates has not been realised as the economy continued to under-perform with hardly any employment opportunities. Contrary, a lot of employees in Zimbabwe including ZOU graduates have succumbed to the Supreme Court ruling of 17 July 2015 which has resulted in massive loss of employment. Even ZOU staff welfare is in jeopardy following its parent ministry’s proposal that state universities contribute a third of their staff salaries budget and possibly “weaned” completely in the future. However, ZOU intended to offer IT degrees possibly in 2006 if approved by ZIMCHE which could be a contributory part in line with ZIMASSET.

The study revealed that ZOU had not done much on poverty reduction due to macro economic factors which had caused lots of companies to be liquidated and making millions of people jobless since the hyperinflationary period of 2007/2008. This worsens even poverty fear and scepticism among ZOU graduates who can not be absorbed by the labour market. However the introduction of the Information Technology (IT) degrees in early 2016 was in-line with path of ZIMASSET of enhancing Information Communication Technology.

- **Infrastructure and Utilities**

On this cluster, ZOU could not help much as this was mainly the responsibility of government, industry and commerce to restore sanity in the country’s key utility services such as water and sanitation infrastructure, ICT, public utilities, energy and power supply. ZOU had not acquired a lot of its own buildings which if it had, could alleviate its high rental bills. Even the parent ministry’s effort to help in acquiring “Home for ZOU” (National centre) and Harare regional centre, had not materialised yet. During examination sessions, ZOU Harare regional centre, use Belvedere Teachers Technical College as its venue, and at times power supply

affected the smooth conducting of exams that finished a bit late and at times took a bit of time to have standby generator put in place.

Since Harare the capital city, was the hub of ZOU's activities and operations, the non ownership of infrastructure/buildings by ZOU was a major setback to make any meaningful contribution towards the realisation of this cluster. The study concluded that ZOU had not done any significant progress on this cluster save for a few buildings it had constructed in other few towns.

- **Value Addition and Beneficiat**

ZOU could have contributed on agriculture but as highlighted above, there has not been much due to lack of success story contributed by lack of agriculture machinery and inputs to kick start vibrant farming operations at its 'farm' whose ownership was surrounded by controversy. The absence of an engineering department/faculty made it difficult for ZOU to make any headway on this cluster.

The study concluded that ZOU had failed to make any significant contribution as it was more theoretical than practical without any manufacturing or engineering to talk about.

7.3 Challenges facing ZOU to effectively participate in ZIMASSET

In its endeavour to realise ZIMASSET goals as an education and training institution found in all the country's ten provinces, ZOU has faced the following challenges:

- (i) ever declining government financial support.
- (ii) lack of infrastructure, for example, ZOU does not own a lot of properties.
- (iii) farm operations affected by a lot of political interferences as well as lack of resources over the years to kick start fully fledged operations.
- (iv) Lack of knowledge among all key stakeholders, for example, management, academics, non-academics and even students on ZIMASSET.
- (v) a depressed national economy which was bringing uncertainty on the operations of ZOU, for example, government proposed policy for state universities to meet a third (33%) of their staff salaries created a lot of uncertainty on the future of its workers.
- (vi) declining business activities even in industry and commerce, for example, massive retrenchments after Supreme Court ruling of 17 July 2015 was likely to affect potential students enrolment which in turn affects ZOU revenue or income base.

VIII. Recommendations

The following are some of the suggestions that could enable ZOU to be proactive on ZIMASSET:

- i) **Massive awareness campaigns** (training workshops)

These are needed for all its key stakeholders, for example, senior management, academics, non academics and students to enable them to move with the same vision and culture. That needs to be done in all regional centres, units/departments, faculties and the National centre.

- ii) **Government support**

Government financial support especially on acquisition of property (buildings for offices) that should help the institution to save a lot on rentals and government to help with the ZOU farm 'ownership wrangle'.

- iii) **Expediting the approval of IT degree programmes**

In order to be relevant to two of ZIMASSET Clusters, ZOU needs to expedite the accreditation of its new IT degree programmes by the parent ministry's quality assurance unit, the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) so that a lot of students in the district/rural areas benefit in line with ZIMASSET.

- iv) **Funding for research activities**

Establishing strategic partnerships or collaborations with industry and commerce could result in ZOU coming up with new inventions through research that could enhance value addition and beneficiation initiatives. ZOU needs to come up with such strategic alliances to make this a success obviously with the support of the parent ministry.

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