



**How records management can contribute to economic revival and gaining investor confidence in Zimbabwe's new dispensation.**

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**1.1 Introduction and background**

African countries' economies in general have been characterised by corruption and poor governance. This has resulted in the depletion of financial resources and an increase in taxpayer's contributions hence making it difficult to grow economically. While international organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary fund have over and over again stressed the need for African countries to ensure the prevalence of good governance coupled by transparency, accountability and responsibility in order to improve the standard of living and ensure that there is good governance, little has been done to kick start such initiatives. This then has resulted in increased corruption and hindering development in these countries. Cases highlighted by Herald (2021) show the case involves the Zimbabwe National Road Administration (Zinara), central hospitals and the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC). It further states that there are traces of corruption which were identified following the Auditor General reports where all ministries, Government departments, state

enterprises and parastatals are implicated in the report. The Auditor General's Report of 2015-date has highlighted government losses due to missing records for fuel, receipts, unaccounted payments and missing asset registers which have resulted in loss to potential revenue and assets.

The management of records in public enterprises on the contrary, result in good performance indicators. Authors such as Roper and Miller (1999) recognize that Record keeping is a fundamental activity of public administration. They further state that without records there can be no rule of law and no accountability. Relevant and accurate public records must exist if governments are to preserve the rule of law and to demonstrate fair, equal and consistent treatment of citizens. As such, Records are vital to virtually every aspect of the governance process. Such sentiments show the important role that can be played by records management in contributing towards an accountable and responsible public sector that in turn can lure investors in the country hence the thrust of this paper. This paper therefore provides a rundown of the current state of public records, showing the contribution of records management to good governance and as such, investor confidence.

**1.2 Key words:** records management, investor confidence, new dispensation

**Records management** is a field of management responsible for the efficient and systematic control of the creation, receipt, maintenance, use and disposition of records, including processes for capturing and maintaining evidence of and information about business activities and transactions in the form of records (ISO 15489:2016)

**Investor confidence** is defined as the investors' willingness to engage in the investment opportunities and associated intermediation channels available to them based on their perception of risk and return. It consists of two aspects, "investor optimism," involving investors' perception of "fundamental" risk and expected return and investor confidence which includes "investor trust," meaning investors' perception of the risk and potential losses from possible expropriations by other market participants. Specifically, investor trust reflects perception of exposure to harm from theft, fraud, and other violations of legal protections by issuers and intermediaries (for example, accounting manipulations, insider trading, and security price manipulations). (Ko 2017). The main thrust of this write-up focuses on the second aspect of investor trust.

**New Dispensation** – in this context, it refers to when President Emerson Mnangagwa was sworn in as the new leader of Zimbabwe on 24 November 2017 and it was expected that his government demonstrate a commitment to accountability, justice for human rights abuses, ensure rule of law and bring stability to the economy of Zimbabwe through ensuring that corruption is uprooted amongst other things.

### **1.3 The status quo regarding the management of public records in Zimbabwe**

The management of public records in Zimbabwe dates to the colonial era under the supervision and administration structures of the British South Africa Company (BSA). Records are managed throughout their life cycle with supporting structures being established. While current records are managed by creating agencies or respective ministries, semi-current records are managed in different strategically positioned records centres. Records centres are found in areas such as Bulawayo, Masvingo, Midlands, Harare and Mutare to serve different provinces of Zimbabwe (Matangira 2016). On the other hand, those records deemed to have evidential value are housed in the Archival institutions, with Zimbabwe having their Archival repositories in Bulawayo and Harare. As such, the management of records in Zimbabwe is supported by structure that is rooted in the life-cycle principle, henceforth making it possible to manage public records guided this concept.

Besides the infrastructure, there are several pieces of legislations and regulations that govern and guide the management of public records in Zimbabwe. These include, the National Archives Act of Zimbabwe, 1986, solely responsible for providing the general framework for management records in Zimbabwe though it is to a greater extent more focused on those records with enduring value, the Public Finance Management Act [Chapter 11:19], 2009 which places legal responsibilities on government bodies to systematically create, maintain, use and dispose records in such a manner that they retain authenticity and integrity for legal admissibility and evidential weight. In addition, legislations such as the Interception of Communications Act [Chapter 11:20], 2007, Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act [Chapter 26:05], 2003, Copyright and Neighbouring Rights Act [Chapter 26:05], 2009 and Official Secrecy Act [Chapter 11:09] also require that public records be managed consistently within regulatory frameworks. In addition to these, the National Archives Act of Zimbabwe, 1986, attributes to adherence to the best standards in the management of records and as such bringing into perspective the ISO 15489:2016 standard which provides a benchmark on how records should be managed, and the benefits obtained thereafter.

The availability of the right structures demonstrates the country's efforts in the management of records. More so, one can attribute to the importance the Zimbabwean government attaches with regards to information management. The impression that one can deduce from the above, is that public sector records are being managed following agreed records management standards. It must however be noted that the contrary is happening with regards to the management of public sector records. There have been records management irregularities in the Zimbabwean public sector resulting in loss of accountability, transparency and corruption. Barata et al (2000) states that the records management system is weak, referring to the accounting department. The Auditor general report (2015, 2016) highlighted irregularities in the management of financial records whereby ledgers for recording expenditure and revenue, reconciliation statements, debtors' records, investment records amongst other records were either missing or were incomplete. In addition, asset registers of vehicles, computers, construction amongst other government assets as also incomplete and in some cases missing.

The reports further revealed the mismanagement of records in Health institutions whereby tender records and stock records were either incomplete or missing. In the education sector, it was revealed that allowance registers were not managed accordingly. Matangira (2016) also revealed that the records keeping systems were overwhelmed as a result of the addition of new ministerial portfolios. This, as is pointed by the Auditor General's reports (2015, 2016) can result in fraudulent activities, corruption and makes it difficult to ensure accountability of state resources. On a similar note, Barata et al (2000) pointed that accountability in the country's fiscal sector becoming risky.

#### **1.4 Implications of a weak records management system**

Zimbabwe has topped the charts in Africa with regards to corruption. The situation has escalated to such a point that there has been misappropriation of public funds and state resources. Aspects of accountability, responsibility, transparency and ultimately good governance have been compromised. Unconfirmed reports by the World Bank's Doing Business 2017 index revealed that Zimbabwe being ranked 159 out of 190, while the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index ranked Zimbabwe 124 out of 137 and lastly the Investment Attractiveness Index 2016 for mining ranked Zimbabwe number 96 out of 104 (World bank 2017). More so, the issue of the missing 15 billion dollars further points to failure to account for public funds. The economy is today struggling due to closure of several companies, failure to borrow from the international Monetary Fund as the country is failing to service its debt, failure

to attract foreign direct investment due to lack of investor confidence and a daunted national image.

While there have been widespread consultative meetings on what can be done to turn around the fortunes of Zimbabwe, and of course countless tours by respective ministries to meet potential investors the aim being to convince them to invest capital to save the ailing economy, it must be noted that all this cannot bring about any positives if the environment is not conducive. Besides, the 2015 & 2016 reports of the Auditor General are a further reflection of the country's corrupt environment affecting accountability issues, due largely to poor management of documentary evidence amongst other factors. This has seen several companies shunning investing in Zimbabwe. Good records management can be instrumental in creating an environment that is characterized by transparency, accountability and good governance hence attract foreign direct investment. How so? This is addressed in the next session of the role played by records management.

### **1.5 The role of records management in setting up a conducive investment environment.**

The contribution of records management in bringing about sanity should not be overlooked. According to the World Bank (2000), record keeping is a fundamental activity of public administration. Records contain information that is in effect the cornerstone of government accountability and good governance (Ngulube and Tufor 2006). The foundation of good governance is anchored on good records management (Roper and Miller 1999). It facilitates effective, transparent decision-making, development planning and governments accountable to citizens (IMF 2005). This shows that there is a relationship between records keeping and good governance as good record keeping promotes accountability, responsibility and transparency (Graf 2002). Besides, information sources are the evidence which exhibit governance commitments, both to citizens and the global community (World Bank 2002).

As public departments conduct their day-to-day activities to fulfil their mandates, the different types of records are produced should be managed effectively. The reasons, as is pointed out by the International Standard Organisation instrument ISO 15489 (2016) include conducting business in an orderly, efficient and accountable manner, protecting the interest of the organisations and rights of the clients, employees and present and future stakeholders, provide consistency continuity and productivity in administration and productivity and the delivery of service in an efficient and equitable manner. In addition, the Professional Records and Information Services Management (up) states that it results in the reduction of operating costs

through active management and intelligent outsourcing decisions and offers a variety of asset-management benefits :protection (for example of privacy, data ownership, intellectual property); monitoring (for example auditing, due diligence, compliance); maintenance(for example storage, preservation, retention according to policy); and documenting (for example past decisions and actions). More so, Blake (2005) adds that efficient records management improves services delivery, supports efficient information exchange, supports the administration of data protection, encourages accountability, and improves decision making and knowledge management across sectors of government. As such, the management of public records is of paramount importance in public administration as it ensures aspects of accountability and responsibility amongst the civil service.

Important to note here is the fact that well managed records are the cornerstone for operations, be it for an organisation or country. In addition, the aspect of good governance comes into play as good records management enhances organizational performance, thereby ensuring efficiency and effectiveness. In effect, aspects of accountability, transparency, rule of law, the protection of rights amongst others becomes the order of the day. These factors, helps organisations and in this case countries to fight issues to do with corruption, negative image, and fraud while at the same time promoting transparency and accountability. These concepts were identified by international organisations as essential components which, provided they were upheld by responsive and accountable political and administrative systems, would enable impoverished countries to develop, manage and sustain conducive economic development as well as satisfy the basic social needs of all its citizens (IMF 2005). The resultant of these are strong, effective and stable governments; constitutionally established institutions, well managed justice systems; and unbiased accountable electoral systems. It is therefore important to note, that all these fundamentals are dependent on accurate, accessible and reliable information sources and the infrastructure, policies and procedures creating, managing and protecting these sources (World Bank 2002). As such, information sources are the evidence which exhibit governance commitments, both to citizens and the global community.

In addition, managing information sources, in the form of records will reveal government expenditure; activities in the health, education, mining, tourism, finance and other sectors hence afford the citizens the democratic right to question and make public servants account for their actions. More so, the management of records as argued by Meijer (2003), will ensure the traceability of funds landing up in the coffers of corrupt government officials and ensure the preservation of reliable, prosecutable evidence which will facilitate the narrative for perpetrators

to be brought to justice (Meijer 2001, 2003). Furthermore, good record-keeping system considers all users, be they legal practitioners, auditors or medical practitioners, thus ensuring efficient access to information and the provision of better service delivery (Harris 2007:138, 140). As such, Okumn (2002) and Ilorah (2004) posits that good record keeping practices may lead to the attainment of new partnerships for Africa to solve its economic problems. In support, Kemoni and Ngulube (2007) also mentions that well-managed information is critical for the socio-economic development and is critical to sound decision making. Thus, the contribution of records management should be considered if Zimbabwe is to lure investment as the atmosphere of trust created and the authentic information found in well managed records are special ingredients for successful businesses.

### **1.6 What then?**

While some scholars might attribute the Zimbabwean situation to political factors and as such solutions to be political, the success of luring investment is also pinned on good records management as it breeds the right environment and creates the 'trust' element to investors. The reliance of potential investors on information found in records calls for the Government in power to improve the management of records as it has a bearing on the authenticity and reliability of the information provided. Having said that, there is need to embark on a Business Systems Analysis (BSA), to determine the different business functions within the public sector, all this being done to establish the different types of records produced. The choice of the BSA is justified by Roper and Miller (1999) as a tool which records managers can use to understand the different organizational functions. In addition, they further state that the BSA reveals the different types of records, their state and the functions not covered by the existing record keeping system. It might as well be a bedrock for ensuring the design of a new record keeping system that will cater for electronic records.

Besides, Qualified personnel should be employed in government creating agencies for the management of records from the time they are created. In addition, the National Archives of Zimbabwe should play an active role in ensuring that records management systems are operating according to plan. Resource allocation should also be also reviewed with the Records management unit in Zimbabwe being allocated independent powers to be solely responsible for records care and have its own budget to work efficiently. Being under the Ministry of Home Affairs overshadows the department and as such resulting in priority clashes.

## 1.7 Conclusion

While political factors play a significant role in economic turnaround, the contribution of records management should not be overlooked as it is the cornerstone for good governance. Having a well governed public sector can set the ball rolling for investor trust as the environment is suitable for accountability and responsibility which is ensured by documentary evidence in records. Thus records management activities must be taken seriously as they have a bearing on accountability and good governance.

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