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A paradigm shift: Effect of government proposed policy on cost sharing for university staff salaries on Open & Distance Learning: A case study of the Zimbabwe Open University

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Abstract*: The government of Zimbabwe has for the past 20 months been facing challenges of paying employees in state universities. Payment has been so erratic that at times it stretches to two weeks into the following/next month. Government has since been contemplating putting a new policy to have cost sharing of the huge salary bill with state universities like Zimbabwe Open University(ZOU) and 8 others. The policy was still a hot debatable issue since around April 2015 when it was mooted. Universities are supposed to pay about a third(33%) of their staff salary bill while government should pay the remaining two thirds (67%) initially. Government intended later to totally wean off all state universities so that they become ''standalones'' The study was qualitative based on a case study of ZOU. Comments from senior management, academic and ancillary staff showed that ZOU did not have the capacity to meet the new policy requirements as its fees and student enrolment figures fell well below the break even point. Government's mandate should be to continue supporting all state aided institutions. If the policy was to be implemented, it was going to adversely affect ZOU's Open and Distance Learning mode of delivery***.**

Definition Of Key Terms

Cost sharing*- apportioning of salary costs so that government pays two thirds and state universities contribute the other third towards the monthly salary of each state university staff.*

Open & Distance Learning*-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.*

Paradigm shift*- Total change of focus and expected outcomes i.e. changing the modality of paying university salaries. Changing the current mode where state university staff salaries are paid by government only but to also have the relevant state university paying part of that salary as a way forward*

Policy shift *-Change on the guiding framework on how to pay university salaries i.e. salaries cost to be shared between government and state universities.*

Salary*- monthly total earnings accorded to an employee/worker by the employer for services rendered i.e. university staff being paid by government at the end of each month*

I. Introduction

A remuneration or salary issue is one of the most sensitive issues concerning worker emotions, motivation and welfare. Changes in salary payment policy bring in lots of changes which can be well received or viewed as detrimental to the smooth running of an organisation. The intended policy shift by the Zimbabwe government on payment of state universities staff has irked workers and has been receiving wide condemnation by various key stakeholders with regard to university education. In this study, definition of key terms pertaining to the subject matter have already been given. The background to the study has been presented to enlighten the reader about how the new salary policy at the centre of this study came into play. The real problem underlying this study has been covered under the statement of the problem. Other key sub-topics covered include; the Literature review, Methodology, Research findings, Conclusions and Recommendations. List of references used in this paper has been given as the final part of this paper.

II. Background to the Study

The government of Zimbabwe has been facing serious challenges towards payment of civil servants salaries as well as state aided institutions like universities. For state universities like ZOU, payment of salaries has been so inconsistent that it stretches up to the second week of the coming month. In addition government failed to honour its earlier promise to pay state universities staff bonuses for 2014 by 6 February 2015 which culminated in universities going on strike after that period.

Even the bonuses had only been paid half at the middle of April 2015 and the other half was only paid mid July 2015.

The above facts are a testimony of how the government of Zimbabwe has been struggling to meet salaries for state universities staff. In early April 2015, senior ministry officials from the Ministry of finance including the Minister of higher and tertiary education, science and technology development, Oppah Muchinguri met Vice chancellors of all State universities and ‘’dropped a bombshell’’. Government wanted to do cost sharing with state universities on staff salaries and then finally wean them so that they would in future be ‘’stand alones’’. Universities were being urged to embark on vibrant projects to augment their revenue or income base.

According to the *Zimbabwean*, a local newspaper, it had an article on 14 April 2015, which said that the government financial support to state universities, such as sponsoring of key projects and providing other finances was to come to end in the next six months from the month of April 2015..

Such a paradigm shift has been creating a lot of anxiety and uncertainly about the future of state universities as that could spell disaster and signal their collapse according to www.myzimbabwe.co.zw (25 May 2015). According to the *Zimbabwean (14 April 2015)*, government was struggling to pay university staff salaries which for over 6 months had been paid late.

Such a move of implementing that new salary policy would definitely affect ZOU’s service delivery. Its mode of delivery and its unique set up as an Open and Distance learning state university would make it difficult for it to venture into viable projects like other conventional universities which have infrastructure of their own and those can also afford massive recruitments particularly for their Block release programmes.

According to the *Chronicle* newspaper edition of 6 June 2015, there were fears that state universities could raise tuition fees in order to meet their own wage/salary bill if government were to wean them. This could result in high students drop out rate. The likely failure to meet highly qualified academic staff like doctors and professors salaries and fringe benefits, would result in deteriorating university education standards due to possibility of a high brain drain scenario.

In *www.myzimbabwe.co.zw* (25May 2015), there were indicators that government wanted to wean off universities or pay a certain percentage beginning , July 2015 although that was subject to cabinet approval.

The issue of new salary policy for state universities has been met by other stakeholders with scepticism as they felt that state universities like ZOU do not have the capacity to be self sufficient. Such a move would adversely affect the Zimbabwe Open University which at the moment does not have the capacity to comply with that policy given its already financial constraints which have seen part tutor tutors taking long to be paid. In some instances their payment is done after 8 months after submitting payment claims.

However government seemed determined to implement this paradigm shift. This interesting scenario motivated this researcher to undertake this study taking cognisance of the fact that he was also an interested party because of being employed by a state university.

III. Aims

The study was meant to find out the impact of the proposed government policy on cost sharing with state universities on staff salaries if implemented, but for this study, focus was largely on ZOU which offered Open and Distance Learning.

IV. Research questions (Sub-problems)

The study intended to come up with results to address the following sub-headings:

i) What was the level of current government financial support towards ZOU’s operations?
ii) What was the capacity of ZOU at the moment to fulfil this policy shift on staff salaries payments?
iii) Which problems could emanate if the intended government policy was implemented?
iv) What recommendations should be made on how ZOU could improve its revenue base in light of this government policy thrust?

V. Literature review

Newspapers and websites (media) extracts

The following media articles have been included to provide better insight about the magnitude of the problem under investigation.

Salary strikes rocks state universities (source, harare24.com, 10 February 2015)

The article said that workers at the countries state universities were downing tools with immediate effect, citing non-payment of the 2014 bonuses and the delay in paying their January salaries. The national president of the Zimbabwe State Universities Union of Academics, Alois Muzvuwe told reporters that university workers could no longer afford to go to work, adding that they also wanted the government to come up with fixed salary dates and let them know in advance if the dates were to be changed.

State universities lecturers strike over no pay (source, ewco.za 11 February 2015)

The article said that lecturers at the country's nine state universities had gone on strike because they had not been paid their salaries and bonuses since the previous year, 2014. They were being said to have been borrowing money to send their own children to school, but they were not going back to work until they received overdue payments.

State university lecturers from the likes of the University of Zimbabwe, in the capital city , Harare and the National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo, said that other civil servants had been paid their salaries but they hadn't received anything in 2015.

After a week of threats, Union of Academics for state universities, President Alois Muzvuwe told the media that lecturers just couldn't afford to go to work anymore. Workers (academics and support staff) at the countries state universities said that they were downing tools with immediate effect, citing non-payment of the 2014 bonuses and the delay in paying their January salaries.

The article also stated that State universities workers could no longer afford to go to work at that time, adding that they also wanted the government to come up with fixed salary dates and to let them know in advance if the dates were to be changed.

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

The report mentioned that Government support to state universities should include sponsoring key projects and expansion programmes, 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 and Tertiary education, Science and Technology, (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.

The government was struggling to pay university teaching and non-teaching staff salaries, which for many months had been arriving late. The report also said that staff at most state universities briefly withdrew their services over delayed payment of salaries. They only resumed work after government paid them. Pay days had been shifting for the rest of the civil service and other state aided institutions like state universities, except the army and central intelligence services, as treasury was struggling to raise money.
In the same report, the following sub-headings were covered

Survival strategies

The report said that Minister Muchinguri, 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 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 said.

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.

Recalling teachers and other civil servants on staff development

In the same report, 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 had 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 workstations. 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 over 80 percent of the total revenue collected by government. In the report, the minister hinted at trimming the country's bloated civil service through retrenchments in order to reduce the huge wage bill.

Deputy Minister speaks out on cutting state universities funding(source, www.voazzimbabwe.com, 25 May 2015)

The report stated that government was considering weaning off State universities or make them meet a certain percentage of salaries for their staff, The Higher and Tertiary education, 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.

In the report some sources claimed that Government intended to implement the measure as early as July 2015.As from July, universities would no longer be receiving any funds from Government. Government wanted the institutions to stand on their own. Government funded State universities through grants and paid salaries for lecturers. According to the report, 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."

In that report, Mr. Muchemwa urged the Government to focus on meeting fiscal savings from parastatals where money was being misappropriated and then subsidise the education sector.

Government must fund state universities (Bulawayo24news.com, 1 July 2015)

In this report the Member of Parliament (MP) for Harare West constituency, 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 withdraw 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 if the new policy were to be implemented .

1.5 Research design and methodology

The design for this study was a **survey research design**. The survey was chosen as a research technique for this study to investigate the impact of a policy government intended to implement in order to reduce its wage bill as a cost cutting measure on state universities. The argument for choosing survey was based on the fact that a survey provides a quick, efficient and accurate means of assessing information about the population (Dr Choga and Dr Njaya, 2011). Also it is more appropriate where there is lack of secondary data (Kothari, 2004) like for this research study where the issue under investigating was still being debated even up to the time of finalising this report (19 October 2015). Surveys can be divided into two broad categories, the questionnaire and the interview (www.socialresearchmethods.net)

Population

- The population of the study consisted of ZOU Senior management, Faculty deans , Lecturers and Regional directors and some support staff members based at the National centre (head office), Faculties and Harare regional centre.

Sample and sampling procedure

Quota sampling technique, a non probability technique was used to identify subjects on the basis of their convenient accessibility and representativeness of the various key stakeholders (Cresswell, 2003 supported by Kothari, 2004 and www.explorable.com. This helped this researcher to identify the research subjects. There was also the advantage of reducing time, costs and removal of possible logistical problems(Bless and Higson-Smith, 1999).

Instrumentation and procedure

The research tool used was the unstructured interview guide. It was important to draw attention to the danger of interviews, whose major risk is being subjective and this researcher avoid prejudices, bias and halo effect in order to capture correct sentiments (Kothari, 2004). The use of interviews was meant to allow this research leverage and flexibility to probe subjects respondents or interviews) on areas that needed further scrutiny or clarification (Kennedy, 2009).

The interview guide was crafted based on Research questions (Sub-problems) so that it became easier for this researcher after data collection, to fully address the research questions based on empirical data.

Data presentation, analysis and interpretation procedure

The Results after collecting data, were arrived at after using content analysis as a procedure for the categorisation of verbal data (from interviews) for purposes of classification, summarisation and tabulation involving coding of data so as to highlight the important messages, features and results. (Cresswell, 2003, Makore-Rukuni, 2001 and Oppenhein, 1992).

VI. Results and discussions (Findings)

These were arrived at after conducting interviews and having analysed the qualitative data. These results were based on the research questions shown on 1.3

1.6.1 Level of Current Government Financial Support towards ZOU Operations

The study found out that it was very difficult to quantity the exact amount of state funding on ZOU operations but the following were being met by the state/government.

(i) Salaries of full time staff and those who had their contracts extended after retirement.
(ii) Payment of annual bonuses up to July 2015 although this had become an uncertainty, given the stance made particularly by the Ministry of Finance and Treasury including Zimbabwe Revenue Authority

(ZIMRA) and the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) that government should not pay bonuses under the prevailing economic hardships.

(iii) Payment of rentals for a number of buildings rented by ZOU covering the National Centre (Head Office), faculties, regional centres and other units or departments.

(iv) Payment of allowances such as insurance, medical aid, etc.

The study established that government was not:

i) Paying part time tutors for payments for services rendered such as tutoring, marking, setting assignments and examinations, student research supervision, invigilation and module writers. ZOU was actually doing that

ii) Government plans to acquire "***Home for ZOU Harare regional centre***" through the recommendation of the parent Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development appeared to be in jeopardy due to government financial constraints.

- Grants for research were almost cut completely and other support aid such as procurement of vehicles, stationery, office furniture and equipment or machinery was not forthcoming.

The results are indicative of government dwindling financial support to ZOU despite it being a state institution.

1.6.2 ZOU's Capacity to Fulfil the Salary Policy Shift should it be Implemented

It became apparent that ZOU did not have the capacity to pay a third or a quarter of the wage or salary bill in line with the proposed policy. The study found that because of following collated results:

i) Salaries had been pegged high since 2012 as government through the State universities Chancellor; President Robert Gabriel Mugabe tried to align especially academics salaries in State Universities with regional rates e.g. Botswana, South Africa etc.

ii) A turbulent and free falling economy which was likely to affect students enrolment in the near future given that a lot of ZOU students were employed (working class) and there had been a lot of company liquidation, downsizing and retrenchments, more so after the "landmark" Supreme Court ruling of 17 July 2015 which allowed employers to terminate one's employment or job by giving a 3 months notice with alternative to dismiss the employee forthwith and then settle 3 months salary payments later without negotiations e.g. within 4 weeks up to 18th August, reports indicated that at least 20 000 workers had fallen victim to that court ruling.

- ZOU did not own properties except for few instances e.g. Mutare, Masvingo and Bulawayo regional centres. The majority of its infrastructure(buildings) were rented and mostly in the Central Business Districts, where rentals were very high. Even if government were to continue paying for office rentals, ZOU still paid a lot to schools and colleges for classroom hire for weekend tutorials and exam hall venues for examinations.
- ZOU had a lot of part time teaching staff which it was struggling to pay on time. The situation would be exacerbated if the new salary policy was implemented as there was need to pay an extra 33% of full time staff wage bill.
- ZOU used the module as the major delivery mode and that had huge printing costs especially taking into account that a number of modules were being reviewed or being written "afresh". Also a number of new programmes had been coming aboard which required more modules. These had to be put in place first, as a requirement by the parent ministry's quality assurance unit, Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE).
- Exams processing which was one of the key service deliverables, has been very expensive and if ZOU had to maintain the integrity and credibility of its results it had still to continue meeting those costs. Exams processing begins with registration, assignments and exams setting, marking of assignments and compilation of coursework, marking of examinations, moderation of examination papers, printing of checklists, development of departments and Faculty boards meetings, Senate deliberations, compilation of list of graduates, printing exam results (individual slips) and publication of results including on the ZOU website. All these processes required a lot of resources in addition to other day to day operational and recurring costs.
- **Some of the comments** made by those interviewed were

  '' The new policy will see us closing in the next six months as ZOU operational costs are so much yet revenue flows were only better at the beginning of the semester but that was only two or three months, until the next semester '' one member of senior management said

  ''My office has been flooded with calls as staff members are asking if these were mere rumours as that would mean that the university would either be liquidated or otherwise salaries would have to be pegged at the amount contributed by the government , that is one will have to earn 67% of current salary'' said one in middle management position

"As ZOU, our major handicap is that we do not have our own resources , so we don't have much leverage in having to embark on viable projects unlike other conventional universities with their own facilities and they do not have to think of rentals or hiring facilities but they can even afford to sub let"

1.6.3 Challenges arising from the Implementation of the New Salary / Wage Policy on ZOU

The study was also able to establish the following serious challenges/problems:

- **Reduced salaries**

  This could arise due to the incapacity of ZOU to meet its quota (33% initially). This could have an effect of possible brain drain as senior staff members like professors and other lecturers would leave for ' greener pastures' in better paying neighbouring countries like Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. The low salaries would demotivate staff members which would adversely affect their job performance.

- **Restructuring / Downsizing (Retrenchments)**

  This would have to be done if ZOU was to break even. The operations would then have to be determined by the vision to break-even at the expense of taking university education to all corners of Zimbabwe. Some regions might have to be closed and there would be attrition of staff with those retrenched becoming jobless and facing an uncertain future. That could call for a lot of legal suits over breach of contracts of employment, etc. from contracted staff.

- **Poor Service delivery**

  Brain drain would see experienced and competent staff in ZOU seeking "greener pastures" elsewhere as suggested above . This would affect even the quality assurance that ZOU had been prioritising. Teaching standards, assessment of students work, exams processing and even other administrative processes would become less efficient leading to key stakeholders' like students and staff being dissatisfied. Student enrolment would decrease and that in turn would affect the revenue base of ZOU. This could lead to failure; to pay part time tutors, rentals, printing modules, full time staff salaries and other overheads etc.

- **Dropping some programmes which could be critical for economic development**

  Since ZOU would be forced to operate guided by commercial goals in the wake of that new policy thrust, some programmes deemed to be "loss making" would be struck off e.g. low enrolment in sciences yet such programmes are vital to the resuscitation of Zimbabwe's ailing economy as they are an integral part of the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable and Social Transformation (ZIMASSET), the country's current economic blueprint (2013-2018)

- ❑ **Failure by employees to meet certain obligations**

A number of ZOU staff obtained bank loans particularly in 2015 ranging from 1 to 3 years settlement period, others had mortgage payments to make which might not be fulfilled due to reduced salaries, yet commitments had been made in anticipation of the continuation of the status quo. This could lead to call for more legal suites as banks and other creditors would seek to recover their monies.

On a social note, the family set up would be affected such as the welfare of school children who might have to drop from certain schools, colleges, universities etc.

Other likely affected areas could be inability to honour monthly instalments or premiums including medical aids, funeral policies and pension contributions.

- ❑ **Declining Reputation or Image of ZOU**

Loss of experienced and highly qualified staff, low enrolments, suspending or cancellation of certain "loss making" programmes though critical, would reduce the credibility of ZOU locally, regionally and internationally as an ODL institution. Some programmes could then be suspended by ZIMCHE because of failing to meet required standards (criteria).

Some comments made on the subject matter of possible challenges emanating from the new salary policy if implemented

"My friend, there would be chaos. Personally i just took a housing loan two months ago which i am supposed to settle in three years time. I had sacrificed even though the premium deducted from my salary is almost half of my earnings. I was now owning my own house which has been my dream, but with this madness (new salary policy, i will have to lose my invaluable asset. These are the ups and downs of life " said one support staff member.

''The government has failed to run this country because if it can not fund its own institutions, it means it is no longer concerned with its creation. This will not work as students will drop their studies and education would be a preserve of the elite only" said one female staff member who worked at the region

This proposed salary policy debate could be summed by the statements made upon by two members interviewed on what government should do.

One said " this move is like one step forward but two steps backwards". The other supported him and said 'its one foot into the grave" .

These two were implying that the status quo should prevail for progress as also even suggested by those interviewed by the media in reports under literature reviewed.

VII. Conclusion

The study established that the implementation of the new salary policy was going to severely affect service delivery at ZOU. A lot of staff movements(staff turnover) were likely to be experienced especially by those who were senior, experienced and well qualified. Student enrolment was likely to decrease, with a number of even economically strategic programmes likely to be 'dropped' on the pretext that they were not viable. This could lead to the demise of ZOU unless government had to have a change of heart on this policy.

VIII. Recommendations

Ways or means (Strategies) to help ZOU improve its revenue base to fulfil the new government salary policy thrust suggested by this study are;

- **Increasing Students enrolment drastically**

A lot of outreach programmes, marketing and public relations initiatives need to be done to hire prospective students, as a number of potential students are not aware of ZOU e.g. Majority of potential students especially in rural areas were not aware that 'Ordinary' level holders could embark on degree programmes through ZOU. The majority were accustomed to the traditional conventional university set up where Advanced level students could only enrol at a university. So there was need to remove that perception.

Another way was for ZOU to maintain its flexible payment system which could be extended to 4 months to lessen the student burden and that could entice some students to enrol.

There was also need for ZOU to enter into strategic alliances with industry and commerce, non governmental organisations e.g. Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education which partners UNICEF on most programmes by coming up with tailor made programmes for them. These programmes would mostly have guaranteed fees payments by these 'sponsors'(Ministry & UNICEF).

- **Income generating Initiatives/Projects**

There is need for a holistic approach to reinforce income-generating projects, which lack at the moment

- Fundraising campaigns e.g. dinner dances, raffle draws
- Strategic alliances with industry and commerce including memorandum of understanding through faculties and departments e.g. financing of research initiatives
- Short courses which can attract large numbers with correct realistic charges. These should be cascaded to regional centres, departments, faculties.
- Strategic alliances or partnership with reputable foreign universities e.g. UNISA whereby there can be exchange programmes and even lecturers "hired out" (secondment) and salaries paid into ZOU coffers with the other paid to the staff member.
- Also allowing private colleges and other institutions to teach ZOU courses but getting royalties.
- Vibrant research which can bring in a lot of funds like what other foreign universities do.
- Converting some modules into textbooks which can then be sold locally, regionally or internationally or producing modules en masse and then sale to other university students as ZOU modules are used everywhere especially by local conventional universities.
- Extra lessons to augment few contact hours currently 6 hours per course. It should be known that a lot of students for majority of courses engage private tutors whom they pay at very high fees. There is need for a well coordinated approach by ZOU to tap into this market albeit convincing the parent ministry, Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development.

- **Raising Fees**

This could be tricky as government might not accept that and also the timing given current economic hardships. However, ZOU fees are relatively low compared to conventional universities and a slight increase might improve financial position especially if the institution can be more efficient on availing a total registration package (modules, assignments, semester calendar of events or timetables) as students register for a new semester.

All state universities to revert to their mandates

ZOU should remind and persuade the parent ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and technology Development especially through its Quality assurance unit, ZIMCHE to ensure that all universities stick to their mandates as outlined in their Acts. At the moment there is no control and compliance and in actual fact, a lot of universities have encroached into ZOU's ODL delivery mode under the disguise of 'block release' programmes. If the government was to be assertive enough, then ZOU would be overwhelmed by a very large enrolment like in the early 2000s when it had closer to 20 000 students.

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