ZIMBABWE

TRANSPARENCY ASSESSMENT 2018

The Citizens' Analysis of Government Openness

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe has been attempting to chart a new way forward under the mantra of the 'new dispensation' geared towards respecting the Constitution and the rights of its citizens.

Since the military-assisted transition in November 2017, the governing party Zanu PF and the government, particularly the Office of the President, has been on a new trajectory of projecting an image of transparency by issuing out frequent press statements on some issues of national importance.

The new president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, is active on social media, which was unheard of under the former Zimbabwean leader Robert Mugabe. During the election period, the government did not switch off the internet even at the height of gross human rights abuses, when six people were shot by the military during the violent demonstrations that rocked Harare on 1 August 2018.

While these might appear as good indicators for the enjoyment of access to information in the country, does this in reality mean the access to information environment has improved? Is the image of an open environment constructed or real?

This might not be the case as requests for information from various public institutions by the Media Institute of Southern Africa, Zimbabwe Chapter (MISA Zimbabwe) pointed to a culture of inefficiency and entrenched secrecy in public institutions.

At the point of finalising this report, President Mnangagwa had filed papers against MISA Zimbabwe's application to allow broadcasters to live-stream the hearing of the 2018 Election Constitutional Court challenge by opposition MDC-Alliance leader Nelson Chamisa. President Mnangagwa and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), opposed MISA-Zimbabwe's efforts. This points towards an administration that is still trying to stifle access to information and transparency.

It is poignant to note that the pre-30 July 2018 election period increased demand for information, notably from institutions such as the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) who were supposed to release information that citizens needed to be able to exercise their rights.

Political parties were not happy with the ZEC's low levels of transparency; for example, there were delays in making the voters' roll public. The elections body also delayed publishing names of election officers as well as availing other information such as who would be responsible for printing the ballot papers.

The ZEC also refused to release a voters' roll that had photographs of citizens. However, the body did eventually release the voters' roll in electronic form at a fee of $2. However, there were complaints that the information was not easily accessible nor usable, especially for people with disabilities, such as blind citizens, who also have a right to access to information.

Meanwhile, while a substantial amount of the information requests sought by MISA Zimbabwe during the period under review were not denied, these requests were not fully met. Requests for information were referred to other offices in the respective institutions. The trend seemed to be that information deemed as not being 'sensitive,' was not granted. Determining what is deemed 'sensitive' information is often the arbitrary prerogative of the officials involved.

The election also saw foreign journalists being allowed to operate in the country. There were, however, reports of attacks on journalists by the military as well as the disruption of an MDC-Alliance press conference by the police. Police interference with the press conference only stopped with the intervention of the Acting Minister of Information Khaya Moyo. Generally, however, the environment was safe for journalists.

There were price reductions for online data, which is a positive step towards improving access to information on the internet. Despite increasing connectivity among Zimbabweans, especially in urban areas, public institutions still have poorly managed websites as well as inefficient mechanisms to provide information online.

The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act 2002 (AIPPA), which also outlines a lengthy period in which public officials may respond to information requests, has become outdated and does not reflect the current reality and context of high connectivity. The AIPPA must be reviewed to reflect the realities of evolving information communities.

Under the veil of 'good soundbites' and 'change' in the new dispensation, very little has changed in terms of how public institutions process information requests. While the attitudes of some public officials have improved compared to previous years, websites remain poorly managed. Almost all public institutions that were studied remain inefficient; none of them were able to provide the requested information.

MISA was involved in campaigns and advocacy efforts with the Parliament of Zimbabwe (PoZ) and the ZRP, which yielded fruits as the ZRP in particular, improved its operations by establishing a WhatsApp group (ZRP Media Desk) with local journalists as well as opening a Twitter account. The ZRP also has a television programme that provides updates on the state of policing in the country.

Access to information was also tested during the election campaign period as opposition parties demanded that the ZEC release photographs of registered voters on the voters' roll. The political parties contented that provision of the voters' roll in such a format would enhance transparency, which had been a fiercely contested issue in previous elections, thereby undermining the credibility of the outcome of past elections.

However, the High Court ruled that there was no need to release the photographs to people who did not need them. In another case yet to be decided, a citizen took the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), Zanu PF and the ZEC to court after he received

unsolicited text messages from Zanu PF asking him to vote for the party.

In a case in which the applicant wanted the ZEC to be ordered to release the voters' roll, the court ruled in favour of the Election Resource Centre, stating that the elections management body must make the voters' roll available to anyone who pays the stipulated fee in a reasonable amount of time and in the preferred format. All these cases have the potential to shape the access to information environment in the country.

Under the Constitution, the following rights are explicitly guaranteed:

61 Freedom of expression and freedom of the media

(1) Every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes—

(a) freedom to seek, receive and communicate ideas and other information;

(b) freedom of artistic expression and scientific research and creativity; and

(c) academic freedom.

(2) Every person is entitled to freedom of the media, which freedom includes protection of the confidentiality of journalists' sources of information.

(3) Broadcasting and other electronic media of communication have freedom of establishment, subject only to State licensing procedures that—

(a) are necessary to regulate the airwaves and other forms of signal distribution; and

(b) are independent of control by government or by political or commercial interests.

(4) All State-owned media of communication must—

(a) be free to determine independently the editorial content of their broadcasts or other communications;

(b) be impartial; and

(c) afford fair opportunity for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinions.

(5) Freedom of expression and freedom of the media do not include—

(a) incitement to violence;

(b) advocacy of hatred or hate speech;

(c) malicious injury to a person's reputation or dignity; or

(d) malicious or unwarranted breach of a person's right to privacy.

62 Access to information

(1) Every Zimbabwean citizen or permanent resident, including the Zimbabwean media, has the right of access to any information held by the State or by any institution or agency of government at every level, in so far as the information is required in the interests of public accountability.

(2) Every person, including the Zimbabwean media, has the right of access to any information held by any person, including the State, in so far as the information is required for the exercise or protection of a right.

(3) Every person has a right to the correction of information, or the deletion of untrue, erroneous or misleading information, which is held by the State or any institution or agency of the government at any level, and which relates to that person.

(4) Legislation must be enacted to give effect to this right, but may restrict access to information in the interests of defence, public security or professional confidentiality, to the extent that the restriction is fair, reasonable, necessary and justifiable in a democratic society based on openness, justice, human dignity, equality and freedom.

Subsidiary legislation that is clearly inconsistent with these provisions still exists. Notable among such laws is the Official Secrets Act 1970, which makes it difficult for citizens and media to access some information held by government and public institutions. Another law is the Public Order and Security Act 2002 (POSA), which restricts freedom of association and freedom of assembly. The law was recently invoked by government and used to prevent public gatherings.

In the face of changing digital trends, questions remain about the relevance of the AIPPA legislation. In its pre-amble, the Act states that it will provide members of the public with the right to access to records and information held by public bodies. It further pledges to make public bodies accountable by allowing the public the right to request correction of misrepresented personal information.

However, in effect the opposite is true, as the law takes away more than it gives. Under the AIPPA, applicants seeking records or information held by a public body should request the information in writing and, where possible, pay a reasonable fee. The head of the public body is given up to 30 days to respond. He/she is allowed to refuse the granting of the requested information if deemed to not be in the public's interest. What is in the public's interest has been left for the official to arbitrarily decide. If the information involves a third party, the head of the public institution is allowed 30 more days to consult the third party before responding to the request. However, the head of a public body may also refuse all or part of a request for access to information, in which case he/she has to give the applicant reasons for such refusal.

In the event the applicant feels aggrieved by the decision not to grant information, he/she may ask the Zimbabwe Media Commission to review the public body's decision. In essence, this constitutes a mere review process that does not guarantee the applicant access to information. In fact, it actually makes the process of accessing information more cumbersome and complex. The process is unnecessarily bureaucratised, as it may take more than 60 days before a final decision is made on whether an applicant can have access to a record or requested information. This is a typical scenario in which the AIPPA begins to act as an impediment to access to information rather than foster the spirit of openness and transparency within public bodies. The process contradicts the law's intended principle of encouraging openness and accountability in public institutions.

EXPERIENCES FROM THE RESEARCH

Public officials, who in past years had been hostile to citizens when they requested information, have become friendlier but still place barriers to citizens trying to access information. For example, in some instances, there were no public relations departments to deal with information request; citizens are referred from one department to another before they are handled by the appropriate department. In the past, however, they would even refuse to entertain letters or telephone calls requesting for information. At present, letters are accepted and sent to the Registry Department, which will forward requests to the permanent secretary or CEO for consideration.

Public institutions were characterised by inefficiencies and were therefore unable to respond timeously to handwritten letters. This is unacceptable considering that most of the Zimbabwean population is rural and not necessarily connected to the internet. Some institutions did not even see the handwritten letters, which were submitted to their offices, and only responded to questions after follow-up phone calls. The institutions then requested an electronic letter with the same questions before they referred us to other departments to receive the information.

In some instances, public institutions made requests to citizens that are not provided for by the AIPPA. These were arbitrary requests whose effect was to frustrate the citizen. The Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services for example, requested for the citizen's background information before they would respond to the letter. The law does not provide for such questioning before an information request is granted.

The information request process was therefore characterised by inefficiency and frustrating tactics. However, there was no hostility.

RATIONALE AND RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to assess the state of access to information in the country. Citizens require information to make choices and decisions and this study sought to determine whether such information held by public institutions is available to citizens in a usable format upon request.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine which public institutions provide information to citizens upon request timeously and with relative ease.
2. To determine which institutions are utilising online platforms to promote access to information.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, while evaluating the level of public access to information held by government and public institutions. Each MISA Chapter conducts research by evaluating the websites of government and public institutions along with responses to submitted requests for information. This method seeks to establish the transparency and efficiency of government and public institutions in providing information to the public.

The following public institutions were surveyed:
1. The Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC)
2. The Public Service Commission (PSC)
3. The Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ)
4. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)
5. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)
6. The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)
7. The Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ)
8. The Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services (MIMBS)
9. The Harare City Council (HCC)
10. The Parliament of Zimbabwe (PoZ)

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Category 1: Website analysis
- Most websites were poorly managed.
- The content was not regularly updated.
- Critical information, such as explanations of procedures on how to obtain information, was not available.
- Some websites generated error messages at times (BAZ, POTRAZ).
- Some websites were not mobile-friendly.
- Messages sent through the websites were not replied to.

Category 2: Requests for information
- Most institutions failed to provide written responses.
- The BAZ moved from their premises but the address left at the Media Commission of Zimbabwe is not valid.
- The MIMBS made demands that are not provided for in the AIPPA.
- Entry to the OPC was restricted.
- Most institutions responded only to telephone questions after failing to respond to letters.
- Researchers were asked by both the PSC and the PoZ to rewrite letters or to seek the information elsewhere.
- Departments are ill-equipped to receive hard copies of information requests. The ZEC asked the researcher to email the request.
- None of the institutions responded to electronic messages submitted via their websites.
- In several instances, the lack of clear structures of responsibility led to the researcher being referred from one office to another in some instances. At the ZRP and the PoZ, the researcher was asked to address the letter to other offices in order to obtain the information.

DETAILED FINDINGS

1. Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE
www.theopc.gov.zw

The OPC has an updated website and the President is active on social media, particularly on Facebook and Twitter, where he regularly interacts with citizens.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?	•			
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?		•		
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?		•		
c) Reports, policies, programmes?			•	
d) Budget and expenditure?		•		
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?		•		
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?		•		
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?	•			
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?	•			Feedback form

Total Score: 7/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to the OPC:
1. What is the budget allocation for the OPC for the current year?
2. Can I have more details on the economic deals secured by the OPC?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?		•		
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?		•		
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		•		
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?		•		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		•		

Total Score: 2/20

2. The Public Service Commission (PSC)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE
www.psc.gov.zw

The website is poorly managed and has no up-to-date information. The institution is not present on social media.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?			•	Some information is up to date, while some is from years back.
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?		•		
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?			•	
c) Reports, policies, programmes?		•		
d) Budget and expenditure?		•		
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?		•		
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?			•	
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?	•			
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?	•			Live-chat mechanism

Total Score: 7/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to the PSC:
1. What is the budget allocation for the PSC for the current year?
2. What is the current number of civil servants in service?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			Public Relations Department
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?			•	The institution referred the citizen to where they can obtain information.
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?		•		
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		•		
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?		•		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		•		

Total Score: 3/20

3. The Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE
www.baz.co.zw

The website is not up to date and the BAZ is not on social media.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?			•	Reports are outdated but vacancies and projects underway are updated.
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?	•			
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?			•	
c) Reports, policies, programmes?			•	
d) Budget and expenditure?		•		
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?	•			
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?			•	
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?	•			
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?	•			Contact form

Total Score: 12/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to the BAZ:

1. What is the budget allocation for the BAZ for the current year?
2. I would also like to request for the Authority's policy on community radios.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			Public Relations Department
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?		•		
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?		•		
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		•		
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?		•		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		•		

Total Score: 2/20

4. The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.zrp.gov.zw

The website is relatively up to date. The ZRP is on the social media platform Twitter and runs a WhatsApp group with local journalists.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?			•	Not all the information is updated.
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?			•	
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?			•	
c) Reports, policies, programmes?			•	
d) Budget and expenditure?		•		
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?		•		
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?		•		
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?	•			
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?	•			

Total Score: 8/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to the ZRP:
1. What is the budget allocation for the ZRP for the current year?
2. What are the current crime statistics?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			Public Relations and National Police Spokesperson
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?			•	The institution responded with further instructions to obtain the requested information.
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?		•		
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		•		
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?		•		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		•		

Total Score: 3/20

5. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.zec.org.zw

The ZEC has an updated website and the Commission is also active on Twitter.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?	•			
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?	•			
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?			•	
c) Reports, policies, programmes?			•	
d) Budget and expenditure?		•		
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?			•	
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?			•	
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?	•			
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?	•			Email form

Total Score: 12/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to the ZEC:
1. What was the budget allocation for the ZEC for the current year?
2. Can I request a copy of the voters' roll?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			The name of a responsible person was provided.
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?			•	The institution explained how we can get the information.
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?	•			
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		•		
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?		•		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?			•	The official clearly explained the procedure to obtain the voters' roll.

Total Score: 6/20

6. The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE
www.zbc.co.zw

The institution's website is mainly populated with news and current affairs. The broadcaster is also active on Twitter and Facebook to convey the latest news.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?	•			
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?			•	
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?		•		
c) Reports, policies, programmes?			•	
d) Budget and expenditure?		•		
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?		•		
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?			•	
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?	•			
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?	•			Contact form

Total Score: 9/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to ZBC:

1. What was the revenue collected through radio and TV licences in 2017?
2. Why did the broadcaster only provide live coverage of the MDC Alliance and the Zanu PF rallies across the country?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			Registry and Public Relations Department
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?		•		
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?		•		
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		•		
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?		•		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		•		

Total Score: 2/20

7. The Postal and Telecommunications Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE
No functioning website

POTRAZ is on LinkedIn as well as on Twitter, although they do not regularly interact on that platform.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?		•		
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?		•		
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?		•		
c) Reports, policies, programmes?		•		
d) Budget and expenditure?		•		
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?		•		
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?		•		
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?		•		
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?		•		

Total Score: 0/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to POTRAZ:
1. How much money in the current budget did government allocate to POTRAZ?
2. How has the money collected from the Universal Fund been utilised so far?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			Registry Department
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?		•		
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?		•		
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		•		
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?		•		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		•		

Total Score: 2/20

8. The Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services (MIMBS)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.zim.gov.zw/government-ministries/ministry-media-information-and-broadcasting-services

The ZRA's website has up-to-date information with its last update made in July 2018. The Authority also has a Facebook page with over 29,000 followers. The Facebook page contains up-to-date information but has little interaction with its audience.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?		•		
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?		•		
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?		•		
c) Reports, policies, programmes?		•		
d) Budget and expenditure?		•		
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?		•		
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?		•		
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?	•			
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?		•		

Total Score: 2/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to the MIMBS:

1. What was the budget allocation for the MIMBS for the current year?
2. I would also like to request for the president's inauguration and the list of foreign currency externalisers.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			Permanent Secretary
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		The institution replied immediately by asking about the background of the requester, but did not share the requested information.
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?		•		The institution asked the requester to provide more information.
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?		•		
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?	•			They requested more information from the citizen.
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?	•			
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		•		

Total Score: 6/20

9. The Harare City Council (HCC)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.hararecity.co.zw

The institution's website is relatively up to date compared to most of the other sites analysed, although it is still lagging behind in some areas. It contains information about council meetings and budgets.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?			•	
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?			•	
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?		•		
c) Reports, policies, programmes?			•	
d) Budget and expenditure?	•			
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?		•		
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?	•			
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?	•			
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?	•			A message and a live chat mechanism is provided on the website, but no responses were received.

Total Score: 11/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to the HCC:

1. How much was set aside for the current budget?
2. How much money was allocated in the current budget for the Council's health facilities?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?		•		
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?	•			
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		•		
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?		•		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		•		

Total Score: 4/20

10. The Parliament of Zimbabwe (PoZ)

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE
www.parlzim.gov.zw

The PoZ has a website which is mostly updated and informative. Parliament is not active on social media.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Does this website contain up-to-date information?			•	
2. Does the website contain the following:				
a) A description of its powers, as well as data on the organisational structure, the functions and the responsibilities of the administration?	•			
b) A list of laws, Acts etc issued within the scope of its powers?	•			
c) Reports, policies, programmes?	•			
d) Budget and expenditure?			•	
e) Information about procurement procedures and/or signed contracts?		•		
f) Vacancy and employment procedures?	•			
g) The address, telephone numbers and working hours of the institution?	•			
h) The contact details of specific public officials?		•		
i) A mechanism to request and receive a response to electronic messages and requests for information?	•			Contact form to write to Parliament

Total Score: 14/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

The following questions were sent to the PoZ:
1. What was the budget allocation for the PoZ for the current year?
2. How much was spent on MP expenses in the year 2017?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional Information
1. Is there an official designated to take and respond to information requests?	•			All letters must be addressed to the Clerk of Parliament.
2. Did the institution reply within 21 days?		•		The institution claimed that they did not receive the letter.
3. Did the institution respond to the request for information?			•	The institution responded with an explanation as to what the researcher must do to obtain the information.
4. Does the authority publish their procedures for dealing with information requests?	•			
5. Did the institution provide all of the information requested?		•		
6. Does the institution provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		•		
7. Did the institution disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure etc?		•		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		•		
9. Did the institution acknowledge your request for information within 7 days?		•		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		•		Instructions on how to receive the information were clear.

Total Score: 5/20

SUMMARY

Institution	Website	Request for information	Total score
1. Office of the President and Cabinet	7	2	9
2. Public Service Commission	7	3	10
3. Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe	12	2	14
4. Zimbabwe Republic Police	8	3	11
5. Zimbabwe Electoral Commission	12	6	18
6. Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation	9	2	11
7. Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe	0	2	2
8. Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services	2	6	8
9. Harare City Council	11	4	15
10. Parliament of Zimbabwe	14	5	19

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

All the surveyed public institutions scored badly, which points towards a culture of secrecy. While suspicion against those requesting information was not evident, a culture of inefficiency in processing information requests remains. Handwritten information requests were not responded to, meaning that the majority of rural citizens are far from enjoying their right to access information. Generally, websites were badly run with little current information.

The AIPPA was enacted before public institutions were online and may no longer be relevant in the current context. The Act still places unnecessary burdens on the information request process, which results in delays even though some of the information is readily available and can be conveyed at the click of a button.

THE MOST SECRETIVE PUBLIC INSTITUTION IN ZIMBABWE

The most secretive public institution is POTRAZ which did not have a functioning website at the time the research was conducted. Despite receiving a letter with a phone number and email address to respond to, the institution failed to acknowledge the receipt of the information request.

Therefore, the 2018 Golden Padlock Award goes to the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe.

THE MOST OPEN PUBLIC INSTITUTION IN ZIMBABWE

The most open institution is the PoZ, which runs a current website and responded well to some parts of the information requests.

A lot still needs to be done in terms of removing unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles to make Parliament truly transparent, such as addressing all letters to the Clerk of Parliament.

The 2018 Golden Key Award goes to the Parliament of Zimbabwe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The establishment of a Department of Communications in Zimbabwe that coordinates and handles all communications on behalf of the government.
- More access to information movements and awareness campaigns to improve awareness in public institutions of their duty to provide the public with information.
- Repeal or review of AIPPA to align it with the new Constitution.