




An evaluation of RBM implementation in not-for-profit sector of Zimbabwe during COVID-19



Authors:

Wellington Mushayi¹ 
Javaid Dar² 
Mubanga Mpundu³ 

Affiliations:

¹Graduate School of Business,
University of Zambia, Lusaka,
Zambia

²Government Degree College,
Kokernag, India

³Department of Economics,
University of the Western
Cape, Cape Town,
South Africa

Corresponding author:

Wellington Mushayi
mushayiwellington@gmail.
com

Dates:

Received: 09 July 2024
Accepted: 27 Nov. 2024
Published: 16 Jan. 2025

How to cite this article:

Mushayi, W., Dar, J. &
Mpundu, M., 2025, 'An
evaluation of RBM
implementation in not-for-
profit sector of Zimbabwe
during COVID-19', *African
Evaluation Journal* 13(1),
a771. [https://doi.
org/10.4102/aej.v13i1.771](https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v13i1.771)

Copyright:

© 2025. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work
is licensed under the
Creative Commons
Attribution License.

Read online:



Scan this QR
code with your
smart phone or
mobile device
to read online.

Background: Results-based management (RBM) aims to enhance accountability, transparency and effectiveness in the allocation and utilisation of resources. In the not-for-profit sector, particularly among non-governmental organisations (NGOs), RBM has been pivotal in ensuring interventions are aligned with organisational goals and community needs, thereby maximising impact. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has significantly impacted the not-for-profit sector in Zimbabwe by causing unprecedented challenges such as restrictions on movement, supply chain disruptions and economic downturns.

Objectives: This study examines the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of RBM within the not-for-profit sector in Zimbabwe.

Method: A concurrent mixed methods approach was employed, using a survey of 190 not-for-profit organisations (NPOs), in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with NPO staff.

Results: The findings reveal essential influences of COVID-19 on NPOs' ability to implement RBM, identifying key factors influencing effectiveness during the pandemic, including organisational flexibility, donor support and communication strategies. Additionally, it highlights the need for strengthened capacities, such as data analysis skills and potentially adjusted incentive structures to support effective RBM.

Conclusion: The study underscores the inherent challenges of RBM during a crisis, including uncertainty, competing priorities and the potential focus on short-term relief.

Contribution: This research contributes to a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities for NPOs implementing RBM during a global crisis. The findings offer valuable insights for NPOs, donors and policymakers to strengthen RBM practices and ensure continued effectiveness in achieving impactful results.

Keywords: results-based management; performance management; outcome-based approach; results-oriented planning; COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

As of December 2019, a pneumonia-like illness of unknown origin was detected in Wuhan, China (Mushayi & Qutieshat 2023). By February 2020, the causative agent, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), had been identified and named (World Health Organization [WHO, 2020b). The rapid global spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by March 2020 brought the world to an almost standstill. In just over a year, over 122 million confirmed infections and nearly 3 million deaths were reported globally. Within the same period, although with concerns of underreporting (Chitungo et al. 2020 & Dzinamarira et al. 2020), Africa reported over three million confirmed cases with over 109 000 deaths (WHO, 2020a). In sub-Saharan Africa, COVID-19 resulted in additional pressure on already strained health systems characterised by poor health outcomes with high mortality rates linked to a triple burden of disease (human immunodeficiency virus [HIV], tuberculosis and non-communicable diseases) (Mhango, Chitungo & Dzinamarira 2020). To curb COVID-19 transmission, most African countries imposed lockdowns, restricting movement (Dzobo, Chitungo & Dzinamarira 2020). While these lockdowns were necessary, they had unintended consequences such as widened economic inequality, increased mental health issues and exacerbated poor medical outcomes that were COVID-19 related (Makombe 2021 & Mhango et. al. 2020). The overwhelmed health systems disrupted services and the economic impact of lockdowns in the region complicated COVID-19 responses in the region. This significant shift necessitated an investigation into its impact on

United Nations (UN) approaches, including results-based management (RBM). This significant shift called for investigating its impact on the varied approaches that have been adopted by the UN, including the RBM approach (Mushayi & Qutieshat 2023). The United Nations system adopted RBM as its management approach in the late 1990s, in a bid to enhance coherence, effectiveness and accountability.

The not-for-profit sector in Zimbabwe, crucial to addressing social and economic challenges for vulnerable populations, was severely impacted by COVID-19 (Mushayi & Qutieshat 2023). Disruptions in service delivery, fundraising and organisational sustainability ensued. In response to these challenges, implementing RBM emerged as a potential solution to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of not-for-profit organisations (NPOs).

The roots of RBM can be traced back to the mid-20th century, with the emergence of management by objectives. However, it gained significant prominence in the 1990s with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, which emphasised the importance of results-oriented approaches to development assistance (UNICEF 2017). Results-based management is a management strategy that focusses on achieving specific, measurable results. It involves a systematic process of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes and projects to ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively to achieve tangible results (Ba 2021). Results-based management emphasises clear, measurable objectives, regular monitoring and accountability. It promotes evidence-based decision-making and continuous learning. While RBM offers benefits like improved efficiency and impact, challenges include complexity, data limitations and potential overemphasis on quantitative measures. Despite these challenges, RBM remains a valuable tool for organisations seeking to improve their performance and achieve their goals. By carefully considering its strengths and weaknesses, organisations can effectively implement RBM to achieve positive results.

The implementation of RBM in Zimbabwe's not-for-profit sector, like in many other developing countries, remained a donor-driven requirement for funding. Irrespective of the size, the focus area of the non-profit organisations' RBM is implemented with varying fidelity. Regardless of size or focus, NPOs funded by bilateral and multilateral agencies such as the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund (GF) were expected to work using RBM matrices, templates and approaches approved apriori by the funding organisation (Mushayi & Qutieshat 2023). Zimbabwean NPOs had limited say in the development and design of the RBM system, as these were based on global standards utilised in many other countries (PEPFAR 2022). Not-for-profit organisations funded by smaller funders had a greater opportunity to negotiate the RBM framework they utilised for their projects with their funders.

Zimbabwe's experience with RBM systems, like many other African countries exposed more negative than positive results (Mushayi & Qutieshat 2023). While RBM is a valuable tool for improving public sector performance and managing government programmes and projects (Dandira et al. 2020; Mutambatuwisi et al. 2016), its implementation in Zimbabwe's not-for-profit sector during the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging. This review sought to examine the implementation of RBM in the not-for-profit sector in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring the challenges, opportunities and potential impacts on practice.

There is extensive literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the social, health, education and economic systems across nations. However, while there are studies conducted on the implementation and effectiveness of RBM, these were all carried out prior to the global pandemic. Such studies have been largely guided by Millmore et al. (2007)'s performance management system model and RBM training manuals. David et al. (2016) define that RBM involves deliberately gathering empirical evidence in order to know the extent to which intended results are being achieved so that modifications to the design and delivery of activities can be made to improve and account for performance in achieving the intended outcome. Rynes and Bartunek (2017) support the definition by David et al. (2016) and add that organisations successfully adopting RBM need to have appropriate systems and procedures in place that collectively constitute an RBM regime.

In a study carried out by Mutambatuwisi et al. (2016) on the effectiveness of RBM as a performance management tool, the effectiveness of RBM in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) was hampered by various challenges such as inadequate resources and poor remuneration among others. The study recommended that small and medium enterprises should observe critical success factors that enhance the proper implementation of the RBM system. However, while the effectiveness of RBM is anticipated to support the achievement of the sustainable developmental goals (SDGs), within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on stretching the available resources, there remains a knowledge gap on the extent to which this has impacted the implementation of RBM, particularly within the UN system.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2017) indicated that:

Beyond the inherent importance of the results themselves, improving management for results is all the more crucial in the context of resource constraints and amid strong calls from key stakeholders to better demonstrate value for money. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will require even stronger RBM capabilities from UNICEF and partners to demonstrate a contribution to national results while adhering to United Nations principles of coherence. p. 2

Against this background, there was a need to investigate how the implementation of RBM within the not-for-profit sector has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research objectives

This study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To determine the extent to which RBM implementation was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To identify barriers to RBM implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To evaluate the preparedness of the not-for-profit sector for RBM implementation in times of a global crisis period.
4. To analyse challenges faced in implementing RBM within a global crisis and explore the implications.

Methodology

This study adopted a pragmatist research philosophy, recognising the necessity of addressing real-world challenges within the not-for-profit sector in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pragmatism emphasises practical solutions and actionable outcomes, which are essential for evaluating and improving the implementation of RBM in a context marked by heightened demands and constrained resources. Unlike purely theoretical approaches, pragmatism focusses on the tangible impacts of research findings, aligning to enhance organisational performance and effectiveness in a time of crisis (Kaushik & Walsh 2019).

This research was conducted using a mixed methods approach, aligned to the nature and focus of the research questions. The researcher adopted the mixed methods research approach using a concurrent design which gave strengths that made up for the drawbacks of both quantitative and qualitative research, striking a balance in the technical knowledge interest which quantifies information, to define the research target objectively (Creswell 2019 & Peltonen 2016) and emancipatory knowledge interest which aimed to detect the undesirable structures influencing the organisations' processes reflected in its social relationships (Peltonen 2016). The design allowed for the simultaneous collection and analysis of both types of data, enhancing the richness and depth of the findings, and providing a comprehensive understanding of RBM implementation in the not-for-profit sector in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri 2021). This dual approach enabled the collection and analysis of diverse types of data, thereby offering a more holistic perspective on the complexities and nuances of RBM practices and their outcomes.

In this research, quantitative data were collected through conducting surveys to collect data for assessing the extent of RBM integration and its measurable outcomes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Quantitative data were collected through a survey of 190 randomly selected NPOs in Zimbabwe. Quantitative data collected from the survey measured the extent of RBM implementation, the challenges faced and factors contributing to the implementation of RBM and the perceived impact of COVID-19. This data provided a numerical overview of the situation, enabling statistical analysis and identification of trends.

Merriam (2022) suggests that qualitative inquiry requires the researcher to describe, explore and interpret phenomena in their natural setting in order to produce data which are credible and verifiable. Qualitative data were gathered through key informant interviews and focus group discussions with NPO staff. This provided in-depth insights into the experiences of NPO staff and beneficiaries. This data helped to understand the nuances of RBM implementation, the specific challenges encountered and the strategies adopted to adapt to the pandemic. By combining the quantitative and qualitative methods, the study was able to triangulate findings, increasing the validity and reliability of the results. The quantitative data provided a broader picture, while the qualitative data offered a more nuanced understanding of the context. Ultimately, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data enabled a comprehensive analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected RBM implementation within the not-for-profit sector. This holistic approach led to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by NPOs during this unprecedented time.

To be eligible for this study, NPOs had to have been operational in Zimbabwe before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, should have been either a UN Agency, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or a donor organisation and willing to participate in the study by providing necessary information and data. For the quantitative approach, 190 organisations were randomly selected through stratified random selection. The researcher achieved a multi-stage sampling approach by stratification based on the type of organisation, location of the organisation and size of the organisation. Within each selected organisation, survey participants were those individuals involved in RBM implementation, such as programme managers and monitoring and evaluation personnel. For the qualitative approach, once permissions were granted, the purposive selection of research participants was made considering the functional level of participants, that is supervisory or non-supervisory levels. These were drawn from organisations with a high number of employees and organisations with a low number of employees.

Data analysis

The process of quantitative data analysis included organising the collected data, performing necessary modifications, removing any errors or inconsistencies and assigning codes to the data. Subsequently, the data were input into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, specifically version 29.0, for further analysis. Statistical Package for Social Sciences is preferred because of its systematic approach and comprehensive range of commonly used graphical and statistical data analysis tools. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The descriptive analysis encompassed calculations of central tendency measures, including mean, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistics using the Chi-square test was employed to identify factors associated

with successful RBM implementation. The inferential analysis encompassed a data reduction technique utilising factor analysis, correlation analysis to assess the magnitude of the association between the independent and dependent variables and Chi-square to evaluate associations. Furthermore, the data analysis results were presented in various ways such as tables, graphs (including bar graphs, pie charts and tabulation) and statistical computations. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data. Thematic analysis facilitates the categorization of interviewees' real-life experiences into several subjects, hence enabling the development of a thorough comprehension of the investigated issue (McLeod & Balamout, 2001). Interview and focus group transcripts were coded for key themes related to challenges, strategies and impact. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings was performed to develop a comprehensive understanding of RBM implementation in the not-for-profit sector in Zimbabwe. Data were compared and contrasted to identify areas of convergence and divergence.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Zambia Biomedical Research Ethics Committee (reference no: 4646-2023) and the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe (reference no: MRCZ/A/3163). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement. This process ensured that participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits. Participants were given ample time to consider their participation and were free to withdraw at any point without negative consequences. Respondents' right to confidentiality was strictly acknowledged and respected during the management of the questionnaires and the interviews. Questions involving private matters were avoided including avoiding any details connected to identification comprising respondent names, addresses and phone numbers on the research instruments. Collected data were also analysed in a manner that ensured the privacy of individuals. Additionally, appropriate measures were taken to minimise the risk of harm to participants. These measures included ensuring that the research questions were sensitive to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and avoiding any questions that could cause distress or discomfort.

Results

The demographic details explored in this study are gender, marital status, level of education, duration of work experience with current employer, type of organisation worked for and number of staff in the organisation. All these biographical data of respondents are shown in Table 1.

In addition, the researcher also sought to establish the extent to which the NPOs have adopted and integrated the RBM approach into their organisation. Figure 1 is an illustration of the responses given to this effect by the respondents.

TABLE 1: Characteristics of the respondents.

Characteristic	Count	%
Gender		
Female	87	55.0
Male	72	45.0
Highest level of education		
Secondary	7	4.2
University/Higher	152	95.8
Marital status		
Married	106	66.7
Never married	26	16.7
Widowed	13	8.3
Divorced	7	4.2
Separated	7	4.2
Position in organisation		
Manager	99	62.5
Planning and/or M&E	60	37.5
Years of experience in organisation		
Less than 5	73	45.8
6–10	53	33.3
11–15	33	20.8
Type of organisation		
UN agency	9	5.7
International NGO	46	28.9
Local NGO	102	64.2
Donor agency	2	1.3
Location of organisation's main office		
Harare	139	87.4
Gweru	10	6.3
Masvingo	10	6.3

NGO, non-governmental organisation; UN, United Nations.

The data presented in Figure 1 demonstrates that a significant proportion (more than 70%) of NPOs in Zimbabwe adopted and integrated RBM principles into their operations. Specifically, the figure reveals that 54.2% of the respondents reported full integration of RBM principles within their organisations. This indicated that more than half of the NPOs embraced RBM comprehensively, aligning their operations with these management practices. Additionally, another 16.7% of the respondents indicated that RBM principles were somehow integrated into their operations. This suggested that, while not fully implemented, these organisations made considerable efforts to incorporate RBM principles to a noticeable extent. When combining these two categories – full integration and partial integration – it is evident that over 70% of the NPOs have integrated RBM principles to some extent. This majority showed a strong inclination towards adopting RBM practices, reflecting a positive trend in the sector's management approaches. However, the data also highlighted areas for improvement. Notably, 16.7% of NPOs had not integrated RBM principles at all. This indicated that a significant minority of organisations have yet to adopt these management practices, which could be because of various barriers such as a lack of resources, awareness or training. Additionally, 4.2% of respondents acknowledged that some aspects of RBM were not integrated into their operations. This partial integration suggested that while there may be awareness and initial efforts to adopt RBM, these efforts were incomplete and required further development. Moreover, 8.3% of the respondents were uncertain about their level of RBM integration. This uncertainty may have

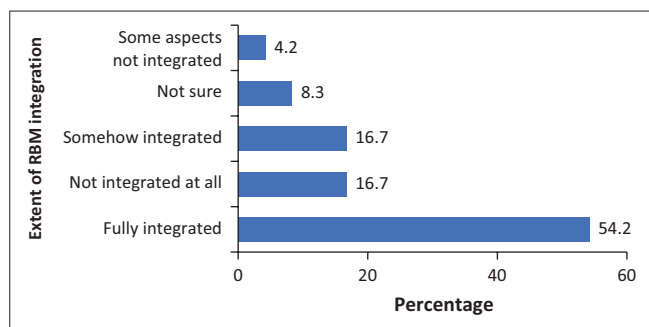


FIGURE 1: Distribution of ratings of the extent to which results-based management principles are integrated into not-for-profit organisation's operations.

stemmed from a lack of clarity or understanding of RBM principles within these organisations, pointing to a need for better communication and education on the benefits and implementation strategies of RBM. Overall, while the majority of NPOs in Zimbabwe have made significant strides in integrating RBM principles, there remained a notable portion that had either not started or only partially adopted these practices. This indicated an opportunity for targeted interventions to support these organisations in fully embracing RBM, thereby enhancing their operational effectiveness and impact.

Primary motivations for adopting results-based management in an organisation

Results-based management can be beneficial but much depends on the level of adoption by the NPOs. This study aimed to examine the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of RBM within the NPO sector in Zimbabwe. It was prudent to establish what motivated the organisations to adopt the RBM strategy. In this light, it is important to note that this particular type of management was first developed by the federal government which wanted a better way to measure programme performance. It focusses mainly on causal factors and cause-effect relationships. This shift in management improved to a more effective way of planning and implementing programmes by use of a monitoring system. It is a management practice that has been around for a long time with various different methods being used. But regardless of the method used, the ultimate goal would always be to get the desired results. In questionnaires that were administered, mean values in the Likert scale questionnaire were obtained to indicate the central tendency of responses in the Likert scale where the mean values were obtained in order to ascertain the central tendency of responses in the questionnaire and results are presented in Figure 2. Each bar shows the average response to each 5-point Likert scale. Above each bar, there are vertical lines representing the standard deviation error bars indicating the variability of the Likert scale responses around the mean.

As outlined in Figure 2, respondents agreed that the major motivations for adopting RBM were improved accountability (mean = 4.50), enhanced decision-making (mean = 4.25), better resource allocation (mean = 4.21) and demonstrating impact

to funders (mean = 4.21). Respondents were largely uncertain whether the response to the COVID-19 pandemic was a major motivation for adopting RBM (mean = 3.00). Additionally, the Chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between performance improvements and the drivers of RBM ($p < 0.05$). This implied that the way in which these motivators drive the adoption of RBM in terms of resource allocation and prioritisation and measuring the projected against the actual output significantly affects the manner in which services are provided to beneficiaries.

Various authors found that the lack of clarity of RBM principles was a stumbling block to its implementation. Using a case study approach, Besteman found that although practitioners have used the term results-based management for over 20 years, there is a wide divergence of understanding as to what it actually means. The belief that RBM is just a way of restructuring work to focus on higher-risk trials that do not require monitoring is one common misunderstanding which is not in line with current regulatory guidelines. Figure 3 shows the average Likert scale responses to challenges encountered by NPOs in implementing RBM.

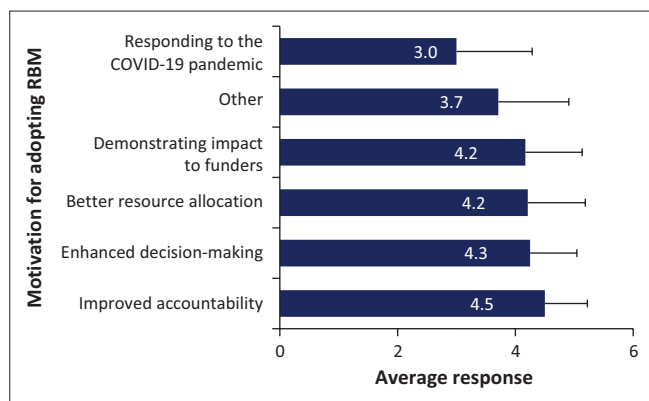
Chi-square test was used to evaluate the association between the performance improvement and the challenges faced towards the adoption of RBM. The Chi-square statistic of 70.955 with 11 degrees of freedom and a p -value of 0.000 were found. A p -value less than 0.05 is considered statistically significant. This means that there was a statistically significant association between the performance improvements and challenges faced towards the adoption of RBM.

The study identified five key performance measures that were pillars of successful RBM: financial stability, programme effectiveness, organisational capacity, stakeholder engagement and impact assessment. By integrating them into the management framework, valuable insights were gained that can optimise programme delivery, enhance stakeholder engagement, and ultimately, achieve the lasting results envisioned by RBM. Each of these pillars is discussed in the section 'Financial stability'.

Financial stability

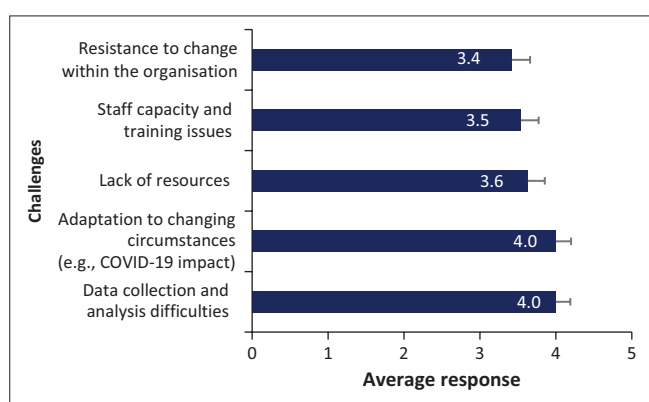
The financial sustainability of an organisation has been identified as an important indicator of its likely effectiveness and impact. It was indicated that by tracking financial performance, NPOs identified potential risks linked to budget shortfalls and took corrective measures before they could derail progress. Additionally, strong financial management demonstrated responsible use of funds to stakeholders, fostering trust and support. Organisational effectiveness is described as its ability to deliver the mission in an accountable, appropriate and sustainable manner. As highlighted by one of the study respondents, the impact is a long-term effect produced by an organisation on its beneficiaries and society:

'Since the mission of most Zimbabwean NGOs is poverty alleviation, the impact to be made would be on reducing the poverty level within Zimbabwe. The more sustainable an organisation is, the more likely that they will achieve their



COVID-19, coronavirus disease 2019; RBM, results-based management.

FIGURE 2: Average Likert scale responses to reasons for adopting results-based management.



COVID-19, coronavirus disease 2019.

FIGURE 3: Average Likert scale responses to challenges encountered by organisations in implementing results-based management.

desired impact. This is due to the fact that sustainability is a preventative measure to avoid mission drift and a loss of project focus incurred through resource shortages brings instability to the entire operations [of the organisation].’ (Male, Manager, Donor Agency)

Programme effectiveness

Programme effectiveness involves assessing the programme outcomes in relation to the initial objectives. This involves comparing what the programme has actually achieved with what it intended. Participants indicated that this can be carried out through outcome evaluation and is useful in pinpointing areas of the programme that have been successful and those that have been less successful. Outcome evaluation is an ongoing process that is often used to improve the programme while it is being implemented. It compares the present outcome with standard criteria of what was initially expected.

One of the participants said:

‘Measuring the change is important in knowing whether the programme has had any effect, be it negative or positive, and the extent of that effect. This can be assessed by comparing information and data that is relevant to the situation at the beginning of the programme with the situation at present. This

can often be done through impact evaluation involving specific impact evaluation indicators.’ (Female, Planning Officer, NGO)

Organisational capacity

Findings showed that by measuring organisational capacity, NPOs identified areas where they need to strengthen their expertise or resources. This ensured that the organisations were well-equipped to navigate the complexities of RBM and deliver results, even in the midst of a crisis.

One of the research participants said:

‘We faced major difficulties in setting realistic targets amidst the pandemic’s uncertainty and this was worsened by us having lost the skilled personnel [due to funding constraints]. Additionally, there was increased workload for staff juggling RBM tasks with crisis response efforts. There is value in organisations considering flexible and adaptable RBM frameworks that accommodates unforeseen situations, aligned with critical skills base in M & E and other resources.’ (Female, M&E Specialist, NGO)

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders were regarded as key on the RBM journey. Measuring stakeholder engagement was regarded as informative in detailing how involved and satisfied the stakeholders were with the projects or programmes and determining how they actively participated. Additionally, assessing their level of understanding of the desired goals. By understanding stakeholder perspectives, NPOs identified areas where communication or collaboration needed to be strengthened. This fostered trust and built a sense of ownership, leading to a more successful programme.

One of the research participants said:

‘It is critical to track the level of participation and satisfaction of stakeholders involved in our programmes. This is the only way of identifying potential areas for improvement in communication and collaboration. How can we build trust and garner support for results attainment if we do not engage our stakeholders?’ (Female, Program Manager, NGO)

Impact assessment

Participants concurred that impact assessment as one of the key performance measures looks beyond the immediate results and focusses on the long-term consequences of the programme. More importantly, findings suggested that this should look at whether the programme achieved lasting change for beneficiaries and for society as a whole. Impact assessment helped determine the programme’s contribution to broader goals and it also helps in identifying any unintended consequences, allowing for course correction and ensuring sustainability.

One of the research participants said:

‘Organisations should do impact assessments to concretely define their contributions to goals and identify unintended consequences and areas for future programme improvement.’ (Female, M&E Manager, NGO)

Discussion

Investigating whether the capacities and incentives necessary for RBM implementation have changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic was the focus of the third research question. This involved analysing how organisational needs and capabilities evolved in response to the crisis, including shifts in skill requirements, technological adoption and motivational factors. The study explored whether these changes necessitated new strategies or adaptations in RBM practices to maintain or enhance effectiveness. Understanding these shifts was essential for ensuring that not-for-profits were equipped to continue delivering impactful results despite the challenges presented by the pandemic. The findings regarding the adoption and integration of RBM principles among NPOs in Zimbabwe resonated with existing literature in several key areas.

The findings emphasised the value of RBM in enhancing organisational effectiveness and performance within the NPO sector. Results-based management offers a structured approach for NPOs to articulate their goals, measure outcomes and adapt strategies accordingly, thereby improving accountability, transparency and impact (Lainjo 2021). The substantial proportion of NPOs in Zimbabwe embracing RBM principles reflects a broader trend observed in the literature, where organisations recognise the value of outcome-oriented management practices in achieving their missions and fulfilling stakeholder expectations. Additionally, the data highlighting variations in the extent of RBM integration among NPOs mirrors existing research on the complexities and challenges associated with RBM implementation. Ba (2021) has identified barriers such as resource constraints, limited capacity, resistance to change and insufficient understanding of RBM concepts as hindrances to full adoption.

The presence of organisations that have only partially integrated RBM or have not started at all underscores the need for targeted interventions and capacity-building initiatives tailored to address these specific challenges. This aligned with the literature's emphasis on the importance of providing support and resources to facilitate RBM adoption, particularly for smaller or less-resourced organisations. Furthermore, the findings regarding uncertainty about RBM integration levels among some respondents highlighted the importance of communication, training and knowledge dissemination in promoting understanding and buy-in for RBM principles. Existing literature by Pratolo, Mukti and Anwar (2020) emphasises the role of leadership, organisational culture and staff engagement in driving successful RBM implementation. Efforts to clarify RBM concepts, provide training opportunities, and foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement are essential for overcoming uncertainty and promoting a shared understanding of RBM's benefits and applications within NPOs. Comparative studies across different regions or sectors could provide valuable insights into the contextual factors shaping RBM implementation and effectiveness, thereby enriching the existing literature on RBM in the non-profit sector.

Barriers to results-based management implementation

Resource constraints and skills gaps

The research findings aligned well with the observations made by Lainjo (2021) and Morris (2006) regarding the challenges and requirements of implementing RBM systems. These findings provided a comprehensive understanding of why certain obstacles exist in the adoption and integration of RBM principles, especially in developing countries. Lainjo (2021) noted that RBM shifts the focus of management from merely completing activities to achieving specific results, which necessitates a significant change in skills and knowledge. This aligns with the research findings indicating that the lack of resources, staff capacity and training issues are major challenges for organisations. When organisations lack the necessary resources and skills, it becomes difficult for them to effectively transition to an RBM framework where emphasis is placed on outcome-oriented management practices. Moreover, in many developing countries, existing management systems are often fragmented or inadequate, with organisations frequently relying on donor funding for strategy and planning (Charlson 2021). This dependency exacerbates the difficulty of acquiring and developing the necessary skills for effective RBM implementation. Organisations may find themselves constrained by external funding requirements or limited by the scope of donor-driven initiatives, making it challenging to invest in building internal capacities for RBM adoption.

The insights from Lainjo (2021) and Morris (2006) shed light on the intricate dynamics at play in RBM implementation, particularly in resource-constrained environments. These findings underscore the importance of addressing skills gaps and investing in capacity-building efforts to facilitate successful RBM adoption. By understanding the barriers identified in the literature, organisations and policymakers can develop targeted interventions and support mechanisms to overcome these challenges and promote more effective implementation of RBM practices, ultimately enhancing organisational performance and impact.

Resistance to change and staff turnover

The resistance to change within organisations, highlighted in the research findings (mean = 3.42), echoes Huggins (2023), who emphasised the challenge of convincing managers to alter their current practices or to hire new staff with specific skills in results management. This resistance to change can manifest in various forms, including reluctance to adopt new processes or methodologies, scepticism about the benefits of RBM or fear of disruption to established routines and workflows. Huggins (2023) underscores the importance of addressing this resistance through effective change management strategies that involve clear communication, stakeholder engagement and leadership support.

Convincing managers and staff to embrace RBM requires not only highlighting its potential benefits but also addressing

concerns and uncertainties that may arise during the transition. This may involve providing training and professional development opportunities to build confidence and competence in using RBM tools and techniques. Moreover, the high staff turnover in some countries further complicates this transition. Staff turnover can disrupt the continuity and effectiveness of RBM practices, as new employees may lack the necessary skills or experience to effectively engage with the system. This highlights the importance of investing in ongoing training and knowledge transfer mechanisms to ensure that all staff members are adequately trained and familiar with RBM principles and practices. Additionally, organisations may need to implement strategies to mitigate the impact of staff turnover, such as creating comprehensive documentation, establishing mentorship programmes, or fostering a supportive organisational culture that values learning and development. By addressing resistance to change and managing staff turnover effectively, organisations can facilitate a smoother transition to RBM and maximise its potential benefits in enhancing organisational performance and outcomes.

Adaptation to changing circumstances

The research findings indicating a high mean score of 4.00 for adaptation to changing circumstances reflect the significant challenges organisations faced in responding to dynamic environments, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other evolving circumstances. This resonates with the observations made by Morris (2006), who highlighted the difficulties organisations encounter when transitioning from traditional management approaches to a results-focussed framework like RBM. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has necessitated rapid adaptation from organisations across sectors, requiring them to re-evaluate their strategies, operations and service delivery models in response to unprecedented challenges. This adaptation involves not only addressing immediate needs and concerns but also reorienting organisational priorities and practices to align with evolving circumstances.

When transitioning to a results-focussed approach like RBM, a significant shift is needed. Such a change often involves a fundamental rethinking of organisational culture, processes and mindset. Organisations may need to invest in building new skills, capacities and systems to effectively implement and sustain RBM practices in the face of changing circumstances. Moreover, external factors such as changes in government priorities, policy shifts and economic fluctuations can further complicate the adaptation process. Organisations must remain agile and responsive to these external forces, adjusting their strategies and approaches accordingly to remain relevant and effective. Successfully navigating these challenges requires strong leadership, strategic foresight and organisational agility. Leaders must foster a culture of innovation and adaptability within their organisations, empowering staff to experiment, learn from failures and continuously improve. Additionally, organisations may benefit from establishing robust monitoring and evaluation

mechanisms to track progress, identify emerging trends and make informed decisions in real time. By acknowledging the complexities of adaptation to changing circumstances and leveraging insights from the literature, organisations can better prepare themselves to navigate uncertainty, embrace change and thrive in dynamic environments.

Data collection and analysis

The research findings indicating a high mean score of 4.00 for the challenge of data collection and analysis difficulties underscore the critical role of robust data systems and analytical capabilities in effective RBM implementation. This aligns with Lainjo's (2021) assertion that specific skills in results management are crucial, yet often lacking in those managing programmes. Effective RBM relies heavily on the ability to collect, analyse and interpret data to track progress, measure outcomes and make informed decisions. However, organisations often face various challenges in this regard, including inadequate data infrastructure, limited technical capacity and insufficient expertise in data analysis and interpretation.

Establishing robust data systems involves not only collecting relevant data but also ensuring its quality, reliability and accessibility. Organisations may need to invest in upgrading their data infrastructure, implementing standardised data collection methodologies and adopting technologies that facilitate data management and analysis. Moreover, the challenge extends beyond mere data collection to include the ability to analyse and derive insights from the collected data. This requires specific skills and expertise in data analysis techniques, statistical methods and data visualisation tools. Unfortunately, as noted by Lainjo (2021), many individuals tasked with managing programmes may lack these specialised skills, further exacerbating the challenge of data collection and analysis. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions aimed at building organisational capacity in data management and analysis. This may involve providing training and professional development opportunities to staff, hiring specialised personnel with expertise in data analytics and fostering collaborations with external partners such as research institutions or consulting firms. Furthermore, organisations can leverage advancements in technology, such as data analytics software and artificial intelligence tools to streamline data collection and analysis processes and generate actionable insights more efficiently. By recognising the importance of data collection and analysis in RBM implementation and investing in the necessary resources and capacities, organisations can enhance their ability to effectively monitor progress, evaluate impact and ultimately achieve their desired outcomes.

Broader implications and need for leadership

Morris (2006) highlighted a crucial aspect of successful RBM implementation: it is not just about technical skills but also about fostering widespread understanding and conviction of its value within an organisation. This underscores the need

for effective leadership and persuasive communication to overcome criticism and doubt. Implementing RBM often requires significant organisational change, which can be met with resistance from stakeholders accustomed to traditional management approaches. Leaders play a pivotal role in addressing this resistance by articulating a compelling vision for RBM, emphasising its benefits and actively engaging with stakeholders to build buy-in and support. Furthermore, the findings that many organisations struggle with resistance to change and staff capacity issues underscore the importance of strong leadership in driving these changes forward. Leaders must not only champion RBM initiatives but also provide guidance, support and resources to enable staff to acquire the necessary skills and adapt to new ways of working. In addition to technical expertise, leadership qualities such as vision, communication and strategic thinking are essential for navigating the complexities of RBM implementation. Leaders must be able to inspire and motivate their teams, foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement and effectively manage change processes to ensure the successful adoption and integration of RBM principles. Moreover, leadership is crucial for sustaining momentum and ensuring long-term commitment to RBM.

Results-based management is not a one-time initiative but a continuous process of learning, adaptation and improvement. To keep the organisation on track towards achieving its goals and delivering meaningful results, leaders must evaluate progress, offer continuous support and direction, and make necessary course corrections. In conclusion, effective leadership is essential for successful RBM implementation, as it helps overcome resistance to change, build capacity and foster a culture that embraces RBM principles. By recognising the broader implications of RBM and the need for strong leadership, organisations can enhance their ability to harness the full potential of RBM to drive organisational performance and achieve meaningful impact.

In summary, the research findings reinforce the views of Lainjo (2021) and Morris (2006) regarding the significant challenges in implementing RBM, particularly in developing countries. The consistent challenges identified – such as the lack of resources, difficulties in data collection and analysis, resistance to change and the need for specific skills and training – highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of adopting RBM. Addressing these challenges requires not only technical solutions but also strategic leadership and sustained commitment to building capacity and fostering a results-oriented culture.

This comprehensive understanding underscores the need for targeted interventions to support organisations in overcoming these challenges and achieving effective RBM integration. Leadership, adequate resources and capacity-building are crucial elements for the successful implementation of RBM, ensuring that organisations can achieve their intended outcomes and make a meaningful impact.

Recommendations

In light of the evaluation findings on RBM implementation within Zimbabwe's not-for-profit sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, several recommendations emerged to strengthen RBM practices in developing countries amid the crisis.

Invest in remote capacity-building

All NPOs should prioritise remote training sessions, and digital tools to enhance staff proficiency in RBM principles and ensure continuity in RBM implementation.

Prioritise staff well-being

Support staff through mental health programmes, flexible work arrangements and clear communication.

Strengthen technological infrastructure

The UN and NGOs must bolster their technological infrastructure and digital capabilities by investing in cloud-based data management systems, digital platforms for remote monitoring and evaluation, and secure communication tools for virtual collaboration.

Foster strong partnerships and diversify funding sources

Collaborate with other organisations to share resources, expertise and best practices and also explore alternative funding sources, such as social impact investing and corporate partnerships, to enhance resilience.

Facilitate stakeholder engagement

To build consensus and commitment, all NPOs should proactively involve stakeholders in the RBM implementation process, seeking feedback, addressing concerns and emphasising the benefits of RBM practices.

Promote flexibility and adaptability

The UN and NGOs should adopt agile approaches to programme design, implementation and evaluation, allowing for swift adjustments in response to evolving and changing circumstances.

Advocate for resource mobilisation

To mitigate resource constraints, the UN and other NGOs utilising donor-funding should advocate for increased resource mobilisation and support from donors, governments and other stakeholders. This entails demonstrating the value and impact of RBM practices, showcasing accountability and transparency in resource utilisation and aligning RBM goals with donor priorities and funding opportunities. Securing adequate resources and investments strengthens organisations' capacity to implement RBM effectively.

By implementing these recommendations, organisations in Zimbabwe's not-for-profit sector and other developing countries can bolster their preparedness for RBM implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic and

beyond. By leveraging technology, fostering stakeholder engagement, promoting flexibility and advocating for resources, organisations can navigate challenges effectively and maximise their impact in achieving their mission and goals in crisis periods. Through this study, the need for continuous learning and adaptation in RBM was evident. We gained valuable insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on RBM within the not-for-profit sector. More importantly, we learned that while the crisis forced NPOs to become more adaptable and innovative in their approach to RBM, by understanding the challenges and opportunities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, NPOs can strengthen their RBM practices and better prepare for future crises.

Conclusions

For the current author and other evaluators, the experience of evaluating RBM during COVID-19 gave us practical new learning. It has enriched our understanding of RBM by forcing us to consider at a deeper level what we mean by changes to results, what needs to happen for them to become real, and how specific and feasible they need to be at various points in the programme or hierarchy. There were two main findings. Firstly, it was clear that the shift to virtual RBM created new demands for supporting monitoring, which RBM has not adequately addressed. Given the budget cuts and staff reductions at all levels within NPOs, many RBM activities were halted and resources were reallocated. In the case of larger programmes, one might hope that this was based on a careful analysis of expected results and trade-offs. However, it primarily led to updates of logical frameworks to redefine expectations more realistically and a suspension of monitoring until a new version of business as usual could be established. This was an important lesson in itself. It was also common to hear an implicit argument that RBM was a luxury that could be reconsidered when circumstances improved, along with a plan to restart by adapting the existing framework.

Secondly, the pandemic forced NPOs to re-evaluate their RBM approach, particularly in managing risk and uncertainty. While RBM traditionally emphasised clear objectives and detailed planning, the pandemic highlighted the need for flexibility and adaptability. Not-for-profit organisations learned to embrace a more emergent strategy, recognising the importance of learning from failure and adjusting plans as needed. This shift has led to a more nuanced understanding of risk and uncertainty and a greater appreciation for the value of flexibility and iterative approaches. They have found it both liberating and anxiety-provoking to consider what this means for expectations. During their implementation of RBM over the last two decades, NPOs have had varied success in securing political commitments and other entries and exits in less rigid ways than a formal change to the logical framework.

Not-for-profit organisations have faced resource constraints exacerbated by the economic impact of the pandemic. Limited funding and budget cuts have restricted investments in RBM infrastructure, capacity-building initiatives and technology upgrades necessary for effective implementation. Additionally,

competing priorities for financial resources, such as COVID-19 response efforts, have diverted funding away from RBM-related activities. The shift to remote work and changes in job roles because of the pandemic have highlighted existing skills gaps and training needs among staff. Organisations may lack the expertise and technical knowledge required to develop and implement RBM systems and processes remotely. Also, resistance to change within organisations emerged as a significant barrier to RBM implementation during the pandemic. The uncertainty and upheaval caused by the crisis exacerbated stakeholders' hesitancy to adopt management practices like RBM. Overcoming resistance to change requires effective leadership, clear communication and stakeholder engagement to build buy-in and support for RBM implementation efforts.

Overall, the study underscores the inherent challenges of RBM implementation during a crisis, including uncertainty, competing priorities and the potential focus on short-term relief. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the effectiveness of RBM in NPOs. Lockdowns, social distancing measures and restrictions on gatherings forced organisations to adapt their programmes, leading to delays or cancellations of planned initiatives. This hindered the ability to collect data, monitor progress and measure outcomes, impacting RBM implementation. Despite these challenges, some NPOs found opportunities to strengthen resilience and adaptability in their RBM practices. They embraced remote data collection methods, virtual monitoring and digital tools to overcome logistical barriers and continue monitoring programme outcomes. This adaptation highlights the importance of flexibility and innovation in maintaining RBM implementation during times of crisis. Moving forward, organisations must build on these lessons, strengthen their resilience, and invest in capacity-building and support mechanisms to ensure the continued effectiveness of RBM practices in an evolving crisis.

Acknowledgements

This article is partially based on the author, W.M.'s dissertation entitled 'An evaluation of Results-Based Management (RBM) implementation in the not-for-profit sector in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic' toward the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Business and Management in the Graduate School of Business, University of Zambia, Zambia, with supervisors Dr Javaid Dar and Dr Mubanga Mpundu completed in 2024.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

W.M. contributed to the design and implementation of the research, analysis of the results and writing of the manuscript, while J.D. and M.M. supervised the work.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

- Ba, A., 2021, 'How to measure monitoring and evaluation system effectiveness?', *African Evaluation Journal* 9(1), a553. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v9i1.553>
- Charlson, J., 2021, 'The introduction of brownfield land registers in England', *Planning Practice & Research* 36(2), 216–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2020.1859213>
- Chen, R., Xie, Y. & Liu, Y., 2021, 'Defining, conceptualizing, and measuring organizational resilience: A multiple case study', *Sustainability* 13(5), 2517. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052517>
- Chitungo, I., Dzobo, M., Hlongwa, M. & Dzinamarira, T., 2020, 'COVID-19: Unpacking the low number of cases in Africa', *Public Health in Practice* 1, 100038. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhip.2020.100038>
- Creswell, J.W., 2019, *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*, 2nd edn., Pearson Education, Hoboken, NJ.
- Dandira, M., Chikazhe, L., Mandere, T.S., Muchenje, K.C. & Munuhwa, S., 2020, 'Results based management in Zimbabwe: Benefits and challenges. A conceptual study', *International Journal of Business Management and Technology* 3(4), 391–403. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7664312>
- David, J.Y., Shin, H.C., Pérez, I., Anderies, J.M. & Janssen, M.A., 2016, 'Learning for resilience-based management: Generating hypotheses from a behavioral study', *Global Environmental Change* 37, 69–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2016.01.009>
- Dawadi, S., Shrestha, S. & Giri, R.A., 2021, 'Mixed-methods research: A discussion on its types, challenges, and criticisms', *Journal of Practical Studies in Education* 2(2), 25–36. <https://doi.org/10.46809/jpse.v2i2.20>
- Dzinamarira, T., Mukwenha, S., Eghtessadi, R., Cuadros, D.F., Mhlanga, G. & Musuka, G., 2020, 'Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) response in Zimbabwe: A call for urgent scale-up of testing to meet national capacity', *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 72(10), 667–674. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciaa1301>
- Dzobo, M., Chitungo, I. & Dzinamarira, T., 2020, 'COVID-19: A perspective for lifting lockdown in Zimbabwe', *Pan African Medical Journal* 35(2), 13. <https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2020.35.2.23059>
- Huggins, R., 2023, 'Human agency, network dynamics and regional development: the behavioural principles of new path creation', *Regional Studies* 57(8), 1469–1481.
- Kaushik, V. & Walsh, C.A., 2019, 'Pragmatism as a research paradigm and its implications for social work research', *Social Sciences* 8(9), 255. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8090255>
- Lainjo, B., 2021, 'Study of Results Based Management (RBM): An Antidote to Program Management', *Modern Perspectives in Economics, Business and Management* 3, 69–90. <https://doi.org/10.9734/bpi/mpebm/v3/3163F>
- Makombe, E.K., 2021, 'Between a rock and a hard place: The coronavirus, livelihoods, and socioeconomic upheaval in Harare's high-density areas of Zimbabwe', *Journal of Developing Science* 275–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X211030062>
- McLeod, J. & Balamoutsou, S., 2001, 'A method for qualitative narrative analysis of psychotherapy transcripts', *Psychological Test and Assessment Modeling* 43(3), 128.
- Merriam, S., 2022, *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, viewed 30 May 2021, from https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/48453_ch_1.pdf.
- Mhango, M., Chitungo, I. & Dzinamarira, T., 2020, 'COVID-19 lockdowns: Impact on facility-based HIV testing and the case for the scaling up of home-based testing services in Sub-Saharan Africa', *AIDS Behavior* 24, 3014–3016. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-020-02939-6>
- Millmore, M., Lewis, P., Saunders, M., Thornhill, A. & Morrow, T., 2007, *Strategic human resource management: Contemporary issues*, Pearson education, London.
- Morris, C., 2006, 'Results-based monitoring and evaluation system to support good public management', in *IST Africa Conference*, CSIR, Pretoria, South Africa, May 7–9, 2006, pp. 8.
- Mushayi, W. & Qutieshat, A., 2023, 'A literature review on Results-Based Management (RBM) in the not-for-profit sector in Zimbabwe during and after the COVID-19 pandemic', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 14(6), 1. <https://doi.org/10.36941/mjss-2023-0032>
- Mutambatuwisi, F., Mapira, N., Chakanaka, E.M. & Muzvidziwa, R.F., 2016, 'Effectiveness of results-based management as a performance management tool evidence from Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Zimbabwe', *International Journal of Trend in Research and Development* 3(1), 88–96, viewed 22 June 2021, from <http://www.ijtrd.com/papers/IJTRD1397.pdf>.
- Peltonen, T., 2016, *Organization theory: Critical and philosophical engagements*, Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley.
- PEPFAR, 2022, *PEPFAR fiscal year 2023 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (MER) indicators*, PEPFAR, viewed 27 September 2023, from <https://www.state.gov/pepfar-fy-2023-mer-indicators/>.
- Pratolo, S., Mukti, A.H. & Anwar, M., 2020, 'Result-based management implementation in higher education institution: Determinants and impact on performance', *Journal of Accounting and Investment* 21(3), 580–601. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jai.2103166>
- Rynes, S. & Bartunek, J., 2017, 'Evidence-based management: Foundations, development, controversies and future', *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 4, 235–261. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113306>
- UNICEF, 2017, *Results-Based Management handbook: Working together for children*, viewed 22 June 2021, from http://mosaic-net-intl.ca/resources/RBM_Handbook_Working_Together_for_Children_July_2017.pdf.
- WHO, 2020a, *COVID-19 in the WHO African region*, viewed 22 June 2021, from <https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/0c9b3a8b68d0437a8cf28581e9c063a9>.
- WHO, 2020b, *Novel coronavirus (COVID-19)*, viewed 22 June 2021, from <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.
- ZPP, 2021, *The impact of COVID 19 on socio-economic rights in Zimbabwe*, The Zimbabwe Peace Project, Harare, viewed 15 March 2023, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/impact-covid-19-socio-economic-rights-zimbabwe>.