

# Exploring the Role of the Zambia Institute of Public Relations and Communication (ZIPRC) in Influencing Professional Practice of Public Relations in Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

The Zambia Institute of Public Relations and Communication (ZIPRC) was established in 2022 under Act No. 11 to regulate and professionalize public relations (PR) practice in Zambia. However, its influence, challenges, and compliance levels remain empirically underexplored. This study explored ZIPRC's role in shaping PR professionalism during its formative years, employing a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data from 121 practitioners and qualitative insights from 10 key informants reveal that 84.3% rate ZIPRC's performance as "acceptable" or "good," citing successes in membership registration (33.1%) and training programs (35.5%). However, challenges persist, including limited resources (16.5%), low stakeholder recognition (39.7%), and ambiguous membership requirements (20.7%). Regression analysis ( $R = 0.1316$ ) indicates weak correlation between ZIPRC recognition and perceived effectiveness, suggesting stakeholder engagement and enforcement are critical gaps. The study contributes the first systematic empirical exploration of the Zambia Institute of Public Relations and Communication's implementation progress, offering original insight into its institutional milestones and operational barriers during the early enforcement phase of the Act. Recommendations include stronger enforcement mechanisms, affordable continuous professional development (CPD), and nationwide advocacy to enhance compliance. These findings hold serious implications for ZIPRC's governance, PR practitioners, and policymakers seeking to elevate the profession's legitimacy and strategic value in Zambia.

**Keywords:** Zambia Institute of Public Relations and Communication (ZIPRC) Act, public relations, professionalization, regulatory compliance, Professional body

## INTRODUCTION

Unprofessionalism and lack of recognition for the profession have been the most eminent challenges facing Public Relations in Zambia. The profession had been for a long time subjected to haphazard practices and practitioners in the country had not been compelled to adhere to any Code of Conduct (Chipili,2022). In some instances, Public Relations had been relegated to the lowest realms of institutional hierarchies and sometimes totally disregarded (Msasa:2023).

Despite having a regulatory professional body in place established by an Act of Parliament, some recent events in the local Public Relations space suggest that the field may still be facing challenges it had been trying to wane itself from. For instance, the government on 16th December 2024 appointed Principal Public Relations Officers in provinces and Ministries in a bid to improve communication on developmental projects (Ministry of Information and Media). ZIPRC expressed concern on a manner in which some appointments were made, citing a lack of consultative process resulting to employing questionable practitioners among other queries (ZIPRC).

ZIPRC was established with the purpose of thwarting many challenges affecting the profession in the country. 2024 marked ZIPRC's second anniversary, however, its influence in its formative stages on the professional practice especially in response to several highlighted challenges remain unexplored. A formative exploration on its role and influence is important because if the situation remains as it was, there may be no self-introspect

and growth for the profession, oversights may be common-place and professional development espoused in the Act risks being impeded.

In public relations, professionalization is partly fostered by professional associations (Yang and Taylor, 2014). However, that has not been the case in Zambia because there had been a lack of an established professional body until recently. In the recent years, the practice had grown from having a mere self-regulatory association to a level of having a legal framework for regulating the practice through an Act of Parliament.

This study was backed by primary literature on the role and influence of Public Relations Associations on the professional practice in Zambia. Secondary sources in form of articles that discussed public relations in Zambia, books on global public relations trends and also interviews from practitioners across the country were utilized. The main body of this study involved detailed discussion of the topic at hand including literature reviews.

In recognition of the growth of Public Relations in Zambia, practitioners in 2008 established Zambia Public Relations Association (ZAPRA) to act as a professional body (Chipili:2022). ZAPRA was officially launched in Lusaka on the 19th May 2010. The association was partly founded on the principle that it will enhance educational standards among members and also promote ethics (Kasoma,2010). Even though it was not backed by any statutory instrument, ZAPRA was established to promote professionalism, knowledge sharing and ethical conduct among practitioners in the country (Chipili:2022).

One step towards greater societal respect and recognition of a field is the creation of strong professional associations (Young and Taylor, 2014). Public Relations professionals in Zambia have had for a long time believed that a professional association would give their practice the decency it deserved (Mwila, 2025). The purpose of establishing ZAPRA was to eventually have the practice regulated through an act of parliament, to help raise its profile and enhance integrity among practitioners (Kasoma, 2010).

ZAPRA did not garner massive support and recognition from its membership and other stakeholders, and that precluded its effectiveness in terms of regulating and professionalizing the practice (Chileshe, 2025: Personal Communication). The kind of agreement that ZAPRA had with its members was tacit. That kind of agreement was not easy to enforce because there was nothing legal and written, and adherence was on voluntary basis. That meant no one was disciplined for misconduct, and that was part of the reason ZAPRA was not effective in terms of regulating and professionalizing the practice. However, it is ZAPRA which established a firm foundation on which the professional practice of public relations supported by now ZIPRC stand on (Phiri,2025: Personal Communication).

## **Research objectives**

General Objective: To explore the influence, success, challenges, and compliance levels of the ZIPRC Act in the professional practice of public relations in Zambia

## **Specific Objectives**

1. To establish the perceived influence of ZIPRC on the professional practice of public relations in its first two years
2. To identify successes and challenges faced by ZIPRC in implementing the Act
3. To establish the levels of compliance to the Act among practitioners and stakeholders

The findings and conclusion of this study will help the profession in understanding how the institute is currently doing and also highlight its executional pain-points in terms of enforcing the act. The research may also help to prevent many governance and regulation oversights that may occur in the course of ZIPRC's exercise of its mandate.

ZIPRC as an institution is likely to draw more insights on challenges and how best to improve not only the practice but also its management of membership and its council. This could be a foundational research where future researchers could refer to in order to avoid narrow considerations on matters to do with professionalization of the field. This study may also turn out to be an invaluable tool for those preparing to teach the evolution of PR and communication in Zambia. The rest of the article is structured as follows: Literature review, Methodology, Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the growing recognition of public relations (PR) as a strategic communication function globally, literature on the Zambia Institute of Public Relations and Communication (ZIPRC) Act and its influence on PR practice in Zambia remains notably limited. While extensive research exists on the professionalization of PR in various contexts (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2014; Yang & Taylor, 2014), the regulatory role and practical influence of the ZIPRC within Zambia's communication landscape remain largely unexplored. In contrast to fields such as journalism and media studies which have garnered significant scholarly attention in Zambia (Sampa, 2022) PR continues to suffer from academic neglect, resulting in an insufficiently documented professionalization trajectory.

This review seeks to bridge that gap by synthesizing global scholarship on the roles of professional bodies in PR, particularly in regulating ethical conduct, promoting accreditation, and facilitating continuous professional development (CPD). It critically juxtaposes these global models with the under-researched and evolving functions of ZIPRC. Through this lens, the review interrogates whether ZIPRC is effectively institutionalizing PR in Zambia or merely functioning as a symbolic regulatory entity.

### Defining a Profession and PR's Pursuit of Legitimacy

Professions are typically defined by specialized knowledge, formalized training pathways, autonomy through self-regulation, and societal endorsement (Evetts, 2023). Public relations, however, has historically struggled to secure recognition as a standalone profession, often being conflated with adjacent fields such as journalism and marketing (Wise, 2005). The establishment of ZIPRC through legislative means marks a significant institutional development aimed at rectifying this ambiguity in Zambia. Nevertheless, without critical scholarly evaluation, the effectiveness of this statutory framework remains questionable. While international literature emphasizes the necessity of enforceable ethical standards, accredited educational programs, and licensing systems (Grunig, 2003), it is unclear whether ZIPRC possesses the institutional capacity or authority to translate these benchmarks into actionable frameworks. This raises a fundamental concern: can the ZIPRC Act alone substantively transform PR into a recognized and respected profession within the Zambian context?

### The Role of Professional Associations in Public Relations

Globally, professional associations play a pivotal role in legitimizing PR as a discipline by setting standards, advocating ethical practice, and supporting practitioner development (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2014). Organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) have contributed significantly to shaping the profession through accreditation systems, research dissemination, and the institutionalization of ethical codes (IPRA, 2024; PRSA, 2024). On the African continent, the Public Relations Institute of South Africa (PRISA) stands out as an example of effective self-regulation, even achieving ISO certification to reinforce its professional standards (Rensburg, 2002).

While ZIPRC has taken steps to affiliate with global PR bodies such as the Global Alliance, there remains no empirical research assessing its efficacy in the Zambian context. Initial alignment with international models suggests a commitment to best practices, but structural challenges such as weak enforcement mechanisms, low practitioner engagement, and resistance to mandatory registration undermine its potential impact (Meintjes & Niemann-Struweg, 2009). A critical gap persists in understanding whether ZIPRC is merely replicating frameworks from the Global North without adequate localization to Zambia's socio-economic and institutional realities.

## Ethics and Compliance: From Theory to Practice

A defining role of professional bodies is the enforcement of ethical standards through formalized codes of conduct, disciplinary procedures, and sanctioning mechanisms (Frankel, 1989). Prominent examples include the IPRA's Code of Athens and PRSA's ethical guidelines, which have been instrumental in establishing normative boundaries within the profession (Watson, 2014). Although ZIPRC has adopted a comparable ethics code, the level of compliance among practitioners and the enforcement mechanisms available remain unstudied.

Unlike institutions such as PRISA which is known to revoke memberships or licenses in cases of ethical violations (Skinner & Von Essen, 1995). ZIPRC's capacity to monitor and penalize non-compliance has not been empirically explored. Furthermore, it remains uncertain whether Zambian PR practitioners are even aware of the ethics framework established by ZIPRC. This concern echoes Sampa's (2022) observation that PR discourse in Zambia remains "underpronounced" and under-theorized. A critical research imperative, therefore, lies in examining whether ZIPRC's ethical architecture is operational or exists merely in principle.

## Education and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Professionalization is deeply intertwined with standardized education and mechanisms for lifelong learning through CPD (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2009). In South Africa, for example, PRISA's alignment with the Skills Development Act has facilitated robust CPD programs that aim to continually enhance the competence of practitioners (Motion & Leitch, 2001). While ZIPRC has introduced CPD activities in Zambia, no studies have assessed their reach, relevance, or impact.

Key concerns include the extent of participation among PR professionals, the alignment of ZIPRC's CPD offerings with PR curricula in Zambian higher education institutions, and whether these initiatives contribute meaningfully to skills development. Without comparative data, it is unclear whether ZIPRC's CPD model constitutes genuine capacity building or functions as a superficial compliance mechanism. Comparative benchmarks, such as PRISA's ISO 9002 certification for its training programs, may offer valuable insights for future evaluations of ZIPRC's educational strategies.

## Global PR Bodies & ZIPRC Institutional Capacity

Prominent global PR bodies, including the PRCA and IPRA, derive influence from well-established membership networks, advocacy platforms, and international collaborations (Yang & Taylor, 2014). ZIPRC's affiliation with the Global Alliance is a promising step toward global integration; however, its domestic effectiveness remains largely underexplored. It is critical to investigate whether such affiliations translate into localized institutional capacity, improved service delivery, and professional advancement for practitioners in Zambia.

Given the resource limitations common in emerging economies, ZIPRC's institutional development should be explored against comparable African organizations such as the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) and the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK). Currently, there is no scholarly exploration of ZIPRC's performance since its inception leaving a void in understanding its formative strengths, limitations, and opportunities for reform.

## CONCLUSION IDENTIFYING RESEARCH IMPERATIVES

This review has identified three central gaps that underscore the urgent need for empirical inquiry. First, there is a lack of clarity regarding ZIPRC's regulatory efficacy: is the implementation of the ZIPRC Act yielding substantive compliance, or is it largely symbolic? Second, the absence of evidence on ethical enforcement raises concerns about the practical application of ZIPRC's code of conduct. Third, questions remain about the effectiveness of ZIPRC's CPD initiatives in enhancing professional competence among practitioners.

This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring ZIPRC's role in shaping the professional practice of public relations in Zambia. Through its analysis of compliance, operational challenges, and comparative global



benchmarks, the study contributes to broader discourses on the professionalization of PR in emerging economies and provides a foundation for policy and institutional reforms.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an exploratory mixed-method research design that integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the role of the Zambia Institute of Public Relations and Communication (ZIPRC) in professionalizing public relations in Zambia. This approach provided a broader understanding of ZIPRC's effects by enabling triangulation of data sources, thereby increasing validity and depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires distributed to a sample of 121 public relations practitioners drawn from a population of 466 using Slovin's formula (Tejada & Punzalan, 2012). These questionnaires included both closed and open-ended items to gather data on practitioners' awareness, perceptions, and compliance with the ZIPRC Act. Complementing this, qualitative data were obtained through ten semi-structured interviews with purposively selected key informants from ZIPRC's Council, Secretariat, and Special Interest Committees individuals deemed knowledgeable and experienced in the subject matter (Patton, 2002).

Data collection took place both digitally and physically. Structured questionnaires were circulated via the ZIPRC Notice Board WhatsApp platform, which includes all PR professionals regardless of ZIPRC membership status, offering a practical and inclusive method of access. Simple random sampling was employed for selecting questionnaire participants, while purposive sampling guided the selection of interviewees, following the logic of information-rich case selection (Merriam, 2009). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel to perform descriptive and inferential statistical tests, including frequency distributions and regression analysis. For qualitative data, a thematic analysis approach was used, involving transcription, coding, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thus ensuring that subjective experiences and expert views were systematically captured.

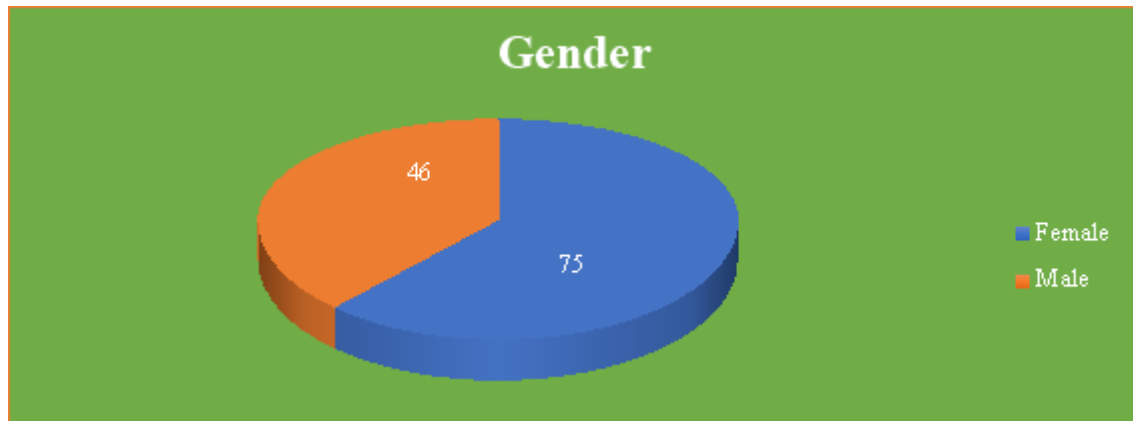
Ethical approval was secured from the University of Zambia's Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies (DRGS), and all research procedures adhered to standard ethical protocols. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and given the option to withdraw at any stage without consequence (Israel & Hay, 2006). Informed consent was obtained verbally and in writing, and assistance was provided where clarification was necessary. The study maintained transparency, academic rigor, and compliance with ethical standards throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting, thereby ensuring credible and trustworthy outcomes.

## FINDINGS

This chapter gives a hierarchical structure of the findings. Before delivering the data in the form of statistical summaries, the study first assesses respondents' demographic characteristics. Thereafter, the researcher employs descriptive statistics to show the findings to the research questions and objectives. Further cross tabulation and regression statistical tests were used to assess variable correlations and identify causal relationships.

In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative insights were obtained from ten key informant interviews and open-ended responses in the questionnaire. These qualitative components were analyzed using thematic analysis, which enabled the researcher to identify recurring patterns, themes, and contextual insights related to ZIPRC's influence, successes, challenges, and compliance levels. The inclusion of qualitative data provided a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives, enriching the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

## Demographic Characteristics Of The Respondents



**Figure 1.6 Genders of Respondents**

Figure 4.1.1 depicts the number of study participants for each gender cohort. The survey included 75 female participants, who accounted for 61.98% of the total of 121 respondents. These numbers outnumbered male participants, who accounted for 38.02%, or 46, of total respondents.

From this finding, it can be deduced that, Women account for a sizable proportion of PR and communications specialists in Zambia, reflecting cultural trends in the sector. The large number of female participants indicates a rising tendency in women entering the sector, which is consistent with global identification of public relations as predominantly female dominated. The research findings could be attributed to either profession member activity patterns that drew women to engage in studies or the fundamental characteristics of ZIPRC registered member populations.

This gender distribution of practitioners could potentially determine professional opinions, regulatory compliance, and workplace behaviors of Public Relations in Zambia. Future investigations should look into how both genders perceive regulatory performance, as well as their job hurdles and compliance with ZIPRC Act.

## Age Distribution of Respondents

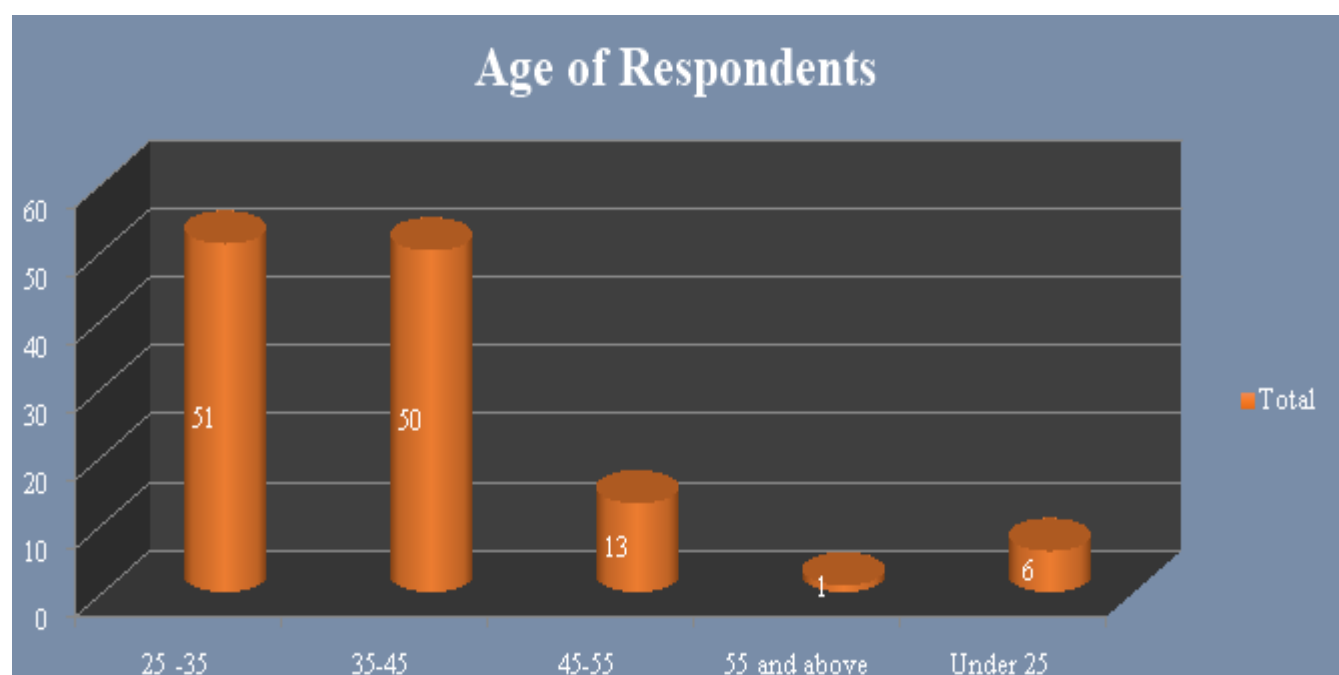
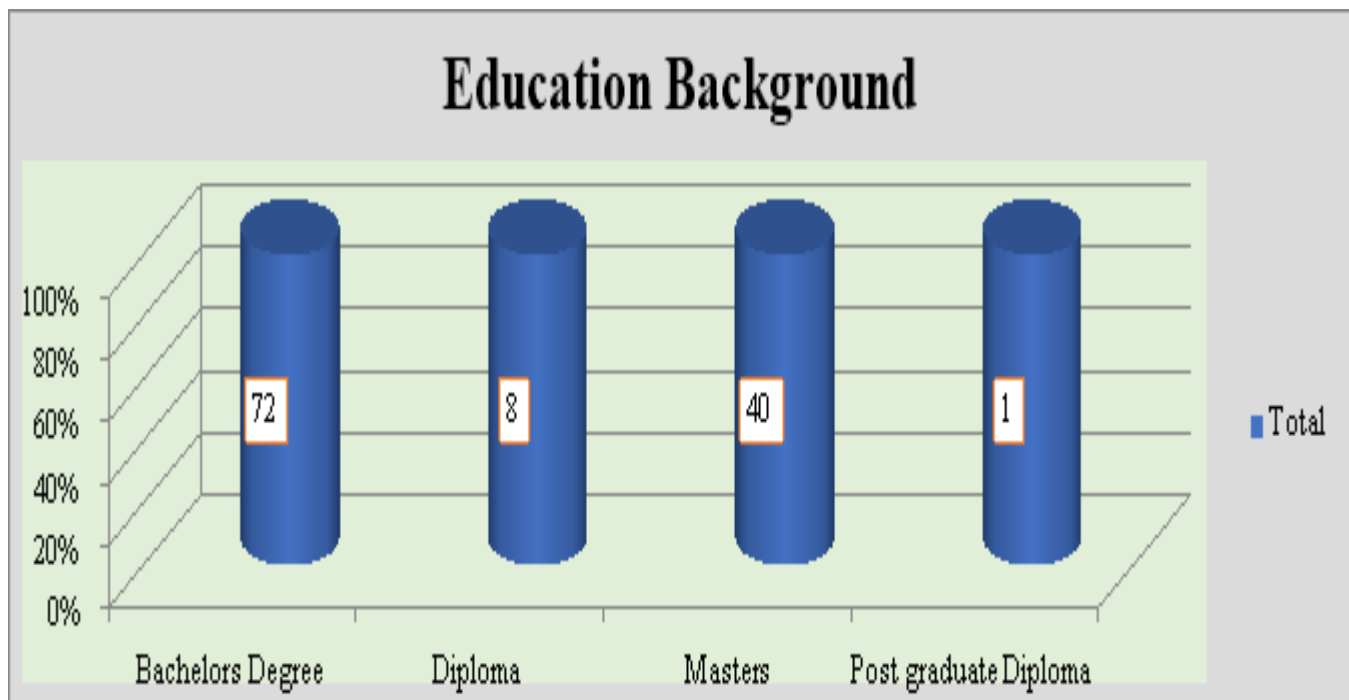


Figure 4.2.2 illustrates the age distribution of the study participants. According to the findings, Majority (51) of the participants were between 25–35. Accounting for 42.15% of the entire study population (N=121). This

is followed closely with respondents aged 35-45 representing 41.32% of the participants with 50 total respondents. The participants under 25 were 6 participants accounting for 15.73% The least represented group was 55 and above with only one respondent accounting for 0.83% of the 121 study participants.

The dominance of young professionals aged 25 to 45 in the field of public relations and communications industry in Zambia suggest that the field is largely driven by practitioners who are in their early to mid-careers. This trend may represent the evolving dynamics of modern professional communication practice change where young professionals are given strategic critical communication roles. This could be a result of digital upper hand the youths have in the current digital environment. The small number of professionals above the age of 55 shows that the industry currently has fewer senior public relations practitioners. This may be due to potential career transfers or retirement practices, as well as other modern dynamic factors influencing workforce composition.

These demographic data insights are crucial for evaluating ZIPRC Act in that they can determine how people of various ages respond to regulatory rules and compliance requirements, as well as their professional development needs. Further research should look into how age disparities affect perceptions of the ZIPRC's impact on public relations practice, as well as whether specialized support programs should address the individual needs of different generational groups.



**Figure 4.2.3 Education Backgrounds of Respondents**

Figure 4.2.3 illustrates participants with varying educational backgrounds. According to the study, respondents with bachelor's degrees are the majority accounting for 72 individuals (59.50 percent of the total 121 participants). Further, the study also found that, there are 40 participants with Master's degrees, accounting for 33.06% of study population. Additionally, out of 121 survey participants, just one had a Postgraduate Diploma, accounting for 0.83% of the total respondent group and 8 participants had diplomas accounting for 6.61%.

The majority of PR and communications professionals in Zambia holding Bachelor's degrees and Master's degrees indicate a widespread formal education within this field. The growing trend reflects professional advancement within the field since advanced academic degrees serve as prerequisites for managerial roles combined with the requirement to follow industry standards including the ZIPRC Act. Postgraduate diploma holders demonstrate limited presence in the Zambia's PR and communications sector implying professionals in this category choose to study complete degrees rather than diploma programs for their advanced education needs.

In addition, educational percentages matter for studying the ZIPRC Act implementation because practitioners with higher degrees demonstrate different approaches to dealing with the regulation. Future investigations need to examine if the level of academic achievements impacts their perspectives about professional development and ZIPRC regulatory implementation and standards compliance in this sector.

### To establish the perceived influence of ZIPRC on the professional practice of public relations in its first two years

In order to establish the perceived influence of ZIPRC on the professional practice of public relations in its first two years, the following questions were asked and analyzed:

Questionnaire	Q13	Has ZIPRC influenced your practice?
Questionnaire	Q28	How relevant and impactful are ZIPRC's Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to you? Briefly explain your answer
Interview Guide	I3	Has ZIPRC influenced your practice?

### Theme 1: Professionalization and Ethical Standards

#### Category A: Guidance through standards and ethics

*"ZIPRC has established clear professional standards, codes of ethics, and best practices that guide my work..." (Respondent 2). Similarly, another participant noted, "ZIPRC has positively impacted my practice by setting clear professional standards and providing a framework for accountability." (Respondent 9). Echoing these sentiments, a third respondent stated, "ZIPRC has impacted my practice by setting professional standards that guide my work, ensuring ethical conduct..." (Respondent 78).*

### Theme 2: Capacity Building and Training

#### Category B: Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

*"Continuous professional development workshops are like refresher courses... These help to work in a more strategic way." (Respondent 3). In a similar vein, another respondent shared, "I have attended 3 CPD's in 2024 and these have been very helpful..." (Respondent 48). Likewise, Respondent 87 added, "I've attended a few workshops and they have been insightful."*

#### Category C: Accessibility challenges

*"ZIPRC trainings are very expensive. This means most PR practitioners cannot afford them." (Respondent 51). In addition, Respondent 4 highlighted, "I have had a challenge attending meetings/workshops... because my employer wouldn't permit me."*

### Theme 3: Networking and Professional Identity

#### Category D: Opportunities for interaction and exposure

*"Through the annual conference, it has allowed me to network with a large group of professionals." (Respondent 6). Similarly, Respondent 35 mentioned, "It has provided networking opportunities for me with other colleagues in the industry that have been supportive."*

#### Category E: Recognition and identity

*"Being recognized as their member gives me confidence for protection in case of anything." (Respondent 20). In a similar manner, Respondent 75 noted, "I am now recognized by my employers and other stakeholders as a compliant professional, especially since my practicing license is clearly hung in my office."*



**Theme 4: Limited or No Impact****Category F: Minimal effect on practice**

*"I don't benefit anything from it. I can still find a job without being affiliated." (Respondent 41). In a similar vein, Respondent 43 added, "My work/practice has remained the same." Additionally, Respondent 80 shared, "No, ZIPRC has not impacted my practice because I am not a registered member."*

**Category G: Disillusionment or Critique**

*"They haven't impacted me at all. CPD trainings at high cost... they think using experienced people in that body makes them know PR." (Respondent 92). Similarly, Respondent 84 remarked, "ZIPRC has focused more on raising funds than looking at the critical aspect of the PR profession."*

**Theme 5: Regulation and Licensing****Category H: Importance of registration/licensing**

*"Through licensing" (Respondent 47), Respondent 50 highlighted, "ZIPRC has brought importance to the profession... helps the professional get recognition and respect." Furthermore, Respondent 77 shared, "In my last posting, my employer required a ZIPRC certificate to employ me."*

**Category I: Regulatory enforcement doubts**

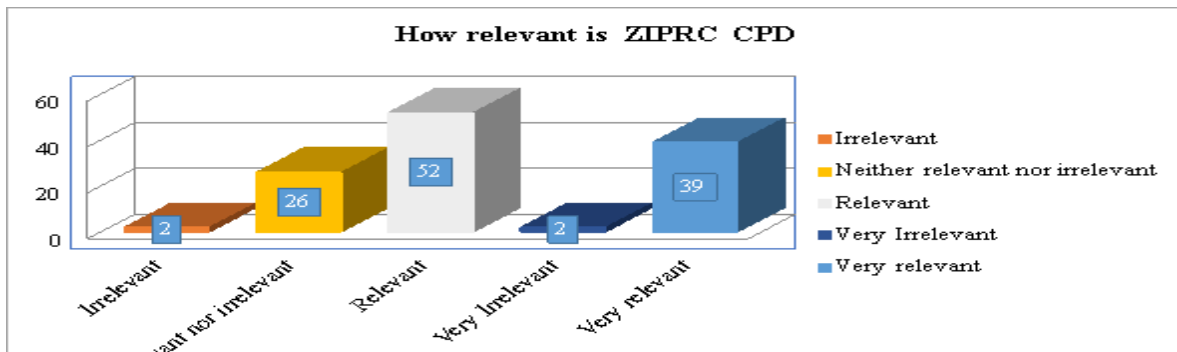
*"Because it's just on paper with no real enforcement" (Respondent 89)... "ZIPRC has not impacted my practice... implementation of its mandate has been limited in scope and visibility." (Respondent 90)*

**Theme 6: Inclusion and Accessibility****Category J: Membership and geographical gaps**

*"I am based in Malawi." (Respondent 16)... "I work for an international organization." (Respondent 54)... "Am not a member." (Respondent 82)*

A summary of the findings indicates that the ZIPRC Act has had mixed influence on the professional practice of public relations in Zambia. While it introduced a regulatory framework meant to enhance standards, promote professionalism, and ensure ethical conduct, many practitioners feel the Act lacks visibility and does not adequately support their professional growth. Complaints center on limited engagement opportunities, high registration fees, and a perceived lack of benefits for members. These findings align with a real study conducted by Ikosa (2013) on PRISA in Namibia, which revealed that while some practitioners acknowledged the value of the regulatory body, many found it inaccessible and not effectively engaging with professionals. In contrast, a study by Theunissen and Wan Noordien (2012) examining public relations in Malaysia found that a strong regulatory environment, coupled with active involvement of practitioners and continuous professional development, led to greater credibility and a stronger professional identity. From a critical perspective, ZIPRC's potential impact is undermined by poor implementation and low visibility. To be effective, the institution must shift from merely existing as a regulatory body to becoming an active partner in career development by offering practical support, regular engagement, and digital learning platforms to ensure inclusivity and relevance in today's communication landscape.

Furthermore, respondents were asked How relevant and impactful are ZIPRC's Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to you? Briefly explain your answer. The following were there responses:



**Figure 4.2.5 how relevant is ZIPRC Continuous Professional Development?**

Figure 4.2.5 presents findings on the relevance of ZIPRC’s Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs. The data reveals that a majority of the respondents find the CPD programs either relevant (52 respondents) or very relevant (39 respondents), with only two indicating that the programs are not relevant. This implies that over 90% of the participants perceive ZIPRC’s CPD as relevant, demonstrating broad support for its value within the public relations and communications field. From the open-ended responses, several key themes emerged:

### Theme 1: CPD Enhances Professionalism and Relevance

*“CPD is relevant in the sense that it reinforces professionalism in PR. It also provides an opportunity to share experiences and learn from one another. In this fast-changing environment, CPD is important to keep up with the ever-changing trends and remain relevant in the practice” (Respondent 1). Similarly, Respondent 2 emphasized, “They enhance professionalism and provide a platform for knowledge sharing in relation to public relations and communications.” Moreover, Respondent 3 noted, “Every professional needs continuous training to stay on top of the game.” As Respondent 4 shared, “The training keeps reminding us what needs to be done, also keeping us updated with new current trends in PR.” Respondent 5 further added, “Training equips professionals with the latest knowledge about the field and technological advancements necessary for the practice.” Respondent 6 also agreed, stating, “Continuous professional development will improve professionalism in the industry.” Additionally, Respondent 7 mentioned, “They reinforce knowledge about PR and best practices.” Respondent 8 highlighted, “It shapes us to become better PR professionals and communicators in our day-to-day practice.” Respondent 9 noted, “They help equip members with the necessary knowledge.” As stated by Respondent 10, “They serve as good refresher courses as well as good for keeping up with new standards of practice in the profession.” Finally, Respondent 11 concluded, “Continuous learning is important if one has to thrive in this practice, just like any other profession.”*

### Theme 2: Accessibility, Affordability, and Frequency Challenges

*“Too many frequent training programmes. Need to invest in solid training of trainers” (Respondent 12). However, Respondent 13 acknowledged, “ZIPRC's training programs are relevant and beneficial... However, I acknowledge that the costs associated with these programs can be prohibitive... creating a barrier to access.” In contrast, Respondent 14 suggested, “But they need to have limited CPDs per year, with enough points to qualify for renewal.” Additionally, Respondent 15 expressed, “Some of the trainings are industry relevant; some are just ticking the box relevant. No different from what’s taught in class.” Respondent 16 also raised concerns, stating, “In my view, they are shallow. We need to move with time. E.g., Let us look at the impact of AI in our profession.” Respondent 17 emphasized, “Professional development is important. However, ZIPRC should consider having CPD points for trainings done outside of ZIPRC.” Respondent 18 shared, “Relevant yes, but we should get to a level where we can have these done online... For example, someone practicing for 5 or 10 years should not have to attend the same number of CPDs as a new entrant.” Respondent 19 suggested, “Should improve by being flexible and not rigid on physical attendance.” Despite these concerns, Respondent 20 concluded, “It's helpful to shape and build there is need to stop repeating the same topics.” Finally, Respondent 21 raised an issue, noting, “The fact that we need to pay every time.”*

### Theme 3: Knowledge Gain and Skills Enhancement

*"The trainings are relevant and resourceful" (Respondent 22). Similarly, Respondent 23 emphasized, "Helping in refreshing to enhance work." Respondent 24 also highlighted, "I learn something new every time." Additionally, Respondent 25 noted, "The CPDs usually have professional people." Respondent 26 further explained, "The training needs were generated from the membership and appropriate training courses facilitated to meet those identified needs." Respondent 27 added, "They provide structured learning pathways that align with industry needs while fostering personal empowerment and confidence." Respondent 28 echoed this, stating, "The courses are timely and in line with the changing communications landscape." Respondent 29 pointed out, "Practical and relevant topics in the industry are picked and discussed." Furthermore, Respondent 30 shared, "They are very helpful. They expose you to a good network with industry experts... This one I highly recommend." Finally, Respondent 31 concluded, "I have greatly benefited from the trainings."*

### Theme 4: Lack of Awareness and Participation

*Respondents expressed a lack of knowledge or involvement with ZIPRC. For instance, Respondent 32 stated, "I know nothing about the ZIPRC." Similarly, Respondent 33 mentioned, "Not sure because I'm not an active member." Respondent 34 also stated, "I'm yet to find out." Respondent 35 added, "I have not interacted very much... the institute has not effectively communicated their relevance to my career." Further, Respondent 36 shared, "I don't even know about it," while Respondent 37 wrote "N/A." Respondent 38 remarked, "I am not knowledgeable about the Act," and Respondent 39 said, "I am not familiar with them." Respondent 40 explained, "I have not participated enough to make a judgment," while Respondent 41 noted, "I have not yet attended any so far." Respondent 42 shared, "I haven't experienced it yet," and Respondent 43 mentioned, "I have no affiliation with ZIPRC." Respondent 44 said, "I would need more information on the CPD," while Respondent 45 stated, "I have not attended any." Respondents 46 and 47 both provided "N/A" and "Na," respectively. Respondent 48 remarked, "I'm assuming," and Respondent 49 noted, "Not participated in any."*

### Theme 5: Contribution to Industry Standards and Growth

*Respondents consistently emphasized the importance of CPD programs in enhancing professional growth and adapting to industry trends. Respondent 50 noted, "Helps practitioners adapt to the best and latest industry practices and sharpen our skills." Similarly, Respondent 51 stated, "They are important for the betterment of the Public Relations profession." According to Respondent 52, "The CPD Programme is very relevant... electronic polls are conducted to establish the training needs of members." Respondent 53 added, "They tackle real industry needs," while Respondent 54 remarked, "They are important for the professional growth of members." Respondent 55 emphasized, "Provide continuous development and relevance in my field," and Respondent 56 highlighted, "The CPD offered by ZIPRC is highly relevant... essential for growth and development." Respondent 57 noted, "PR practitioners need continuous training," and Respondent 58 pointed out, "They help in sharing and exchange of knowledge and experiences among members and help members keep up with the current and changing media landscape." Respondent 59 acknowledged, "Relevant as they relate to the practice but they could do more." Respondent 60 stated, "They are very beneficial and timely," and Respondent 61 emphasized, "It helps improve the communication field." Respondent 62 added, "For one's growth and that of the organization," while Respondent 63 remarked, "With a diverse range of topics covered, practitioners are able to learn different aspects of journalism ethics and professional conduct."*

### Theme 6: Perceptions on Improvements and Suggestions

*Respondents provided varying perspectives on the current state and potential of CPD programs. Respondent 64 suggested, "Could be better, but expecting to see an improvement with time." In contrast, Respondent 65 highlighted, "Some of the courses are not relevant to the audience." Respondent 66 raised concerns, stating, "The CPD programs offered by ZIPRC are currently not very impactful as they do not address the real-world challenges faced by PR practitioners." However, Respondent 67 expressed optimism, noting, "If consistently done, will enhance professionalism." Respondent 68 emphasized, "It's a way of keeping the PR skill active," while Respondent 69 recognized, "The continuous professional development is addressing the industry needs,"*

*the professional gap and regulatory requirements.” Finally, Respondent 70 added, “So much can be achieved from the body if the agenda is in full force with achieving its goals.”*

The findings show that ZIPRC’s CPD programs are generally viewed as valuable for enhancing professionalism and relevance in public relations. However, concerns about cost, content repetition, and accessibility were noted. Similar patterns appear in other regional studies Ng’andu (2023) found that Zambian teachers value CPD but seek more practical, context-specific content, while Mtetwa and Ndemo (2022) emphasized the need for sustainable models in under-resourced areas. In contrast, Chinhara and Sotuku (2020) highlighted serious implementation challenges due to lack of support and resources.

Critically, while ZIPRC’s efforts are commendable, improvements are needed. Addressing structural issues and offering flexible, updated, and diverse CPD formats would ensure the programs remain relevant and effective.

### To identify successes and challenges faced by ZIPRC in implementing the Act

In order to identify successes and challenges faced by ZIPRC in implementing the Act in its first two years, the following questions were asked and analyzed:

	Question Number	Question
Questionnaire	Q21	On the options below, what success would you attribute to ZIPRC in the last two years? Q 22 Briefly Explain
Questionnaire	Q20	How would you rate its performance as a professional body?
Questionnaire	Q25	What challenges do you think ZIPRC is facing in terms of enforcing the Act?

The following were the findings:

**Table 4.1 what success would you attribute to ZIPRC in the last two years?**

Row Labels	Count of 21. On the options below, what success would you attribute to ZIPRC in the last two years?
All of the above	12
Increase in membership registration and licensing	40
Increase in training programs	43
Increased adherence to professional practice	9
None of the above	10
Others	7
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>121</b>

Table 4.1 summarizes the Zambia Institute of Public Relations and Communication (ZIPRC)'s key successes as reported by respondents since its foundation year. According to the data, 43 persons identified "Increase in training programs" as the key ZIPRC success, accounting for 35.54% of the total 121 respondents. ZIPRC



continues to make significant progress by upgrading professional development programs in public relations and communication.

Membership registration and licensing exhibited the second greatest improvement, according to 40 respondents, or 33.06 percent of the entire sample. As PR professionals become increasingly involved with ZIPRC's regulatory framework, they receive deeper formal recognition. ZIPRC has proven beneficial in boosting professional practice, according to data from 9 participants (7.44%) in the study.

Multiple survey respondents did not regard ZIPRC's efforts in a positive light. Based on ten responses from 8.26% of participants, ZIPRC did not appear to have any meaningful impacts. Professional development programs and a rising membership base are among the most confirmed benefits given by ZIPRC. The low number of successful interventions reported by participants highlights the need for ZIPRC to develop solutions for both its execution methodologies and communication with stakeholders. ZIPRC must expand its standards enforcement and regulatory reach across Zambia's whole public relations sphere.

Further when respondents were asked to briefly explain their attributions of the success of ZIPRC so far the following themes emerged from the open ended questions:

### **Theme 1: Increase in Training and CPD Programs**

*Participants widely acknowledged the presence and impact of training programs organized by ZIPRC. Respondent 3 noted, "The training workshops have also worked very well in fostering professionalism in the membership." Similarly, Respondent 5 shared, "I have personally received invitations to nearly all the CPD training programmes," while Respondent 6 simply stated, "They help with training." According to Respondent 7, "There has been consistent training each month in the last year," and Respondent 8 remarked, "The introduction of training Programme has added to the relevance of the institution. Members get to add new skills." Furthermore, Respondent 9 observed, "The introduction of training and CPD points has helped to elevate the caliber of professionals," and Respondent 10 mentioned, "Short trainings provided are impactful."*

*Training frequency was also emphasized, with Respondent 20 stating, "There's been a lot of training programs in the recent past," and Respondent 22 adding, "I have seen many training programs in the group." According to Respondent 23, "They have greatly improved with continuous professional development," and Respondent 18 remarked, "I think it has done a bit better trainings." Respondent 30 also supported this, saying, "I think there has been a lot of trainings." Meanwhile, Respondent 36 commented, "There has been good training in the past despite having missed some of them due to limited resources." Echoing this trend, Respondent 40 observed, "The number of training programmes and participants have significantly increased over the past few years."*

*Awareness was also noted, as Respondent 45 shared, "I am aware of the trainings being conducted through my colleagues," and Respondent 60 added, "I received a few emails about training." Respondent 64 confirmed, "ZIPRC often holds trainings," while Respondent 68 emphasized, "Because training programs are the most popular and most advertised ZIPRC activities I know." From a developmental perspective, Respondent 69 highlighted, "CPD trainings not only give you a good network, they enhance your skills as a practitioner. They build your confidence in your practice and add more skills." Further support was seen in Respondent 73's comment: "I have seen a number of PR practitioners getting licensed with ZIPRC," and Respondent 78 added, "I've seen some training programs being sponsored by ZIPRC." Respondent 79 noted, "It has undertaken a few training programs and hosted the continental PR annual conference," while Respondent 80 observed, "More training has been added despite almost all being at a fee." However, Respondent 85 pointed out, "I have seen a lot of training programs which in most cases are not adequately attended."*

*Finally, Respondent 89 succinctly noted, "Introduction of CPD programmes," and Respondent 91 added, "We have seen a lot of people attending the CPD programmes and conference." Respondent 94 emphasized the quality, stating, "The training programs have been well coordinated and communicated well in advance. Also,*



ZIPRC members have offered training to those that have requested the service,” while Respondent 95 concluded, “The institute has a good number of trainings.”

## **Theme 2: Increase in Membership Registration and Licensing**

A recurring theme among respondents is the notable increase in membership registration and licensing by ZIPRC, which is viewed as a significant success. Respondent 1 noted, “They recently enrolled more members from public utilities through engagements with Government,” while Respondent 21 elaborated, “ZIPRC has registered a number of practitioners because if a person is not a member of ZIPRC, they find it difficult to work for any institution or organization. As of now, institutions are looking for ZIPRC members to work for them because of its professionalism.” Similarly, Respondent 22 observed, “One cannot argue with its efforts to increase membership and licensing of said professionals because it’s become pretty much mandatory, further demonstrating why it seems to be its main and sometimes only mandate.”

Adding to this sentiment, Respondent 27 stated, “Increase in membership registration, licensing, ethics and other programme trainings,” while Respondent 31 confirmed, “More PR practitioners are aware of ZIPRC and its mandate, so they are registered.” Respondent 37 echoed this, saying, “Increase in membership registration and licensing,” and Respondent 38 pointed out, “Members are registering albeit at a less than satisfactory rate.” From a regulatory angle, Respondent 42 commented, “Looking at job adverts and requirements, I can say that it has done a good job in enforcing the Act on employers.” This was reinforced by Respondent 43, who remarked, “More people who have trained in PR and communication have registered with ZIPRC.”

Awareness has also been key, as Respondent 52 shared, “All practitioners are now informed about ZIPRC,” while Respondent 53 noted, “Increased membership.” From an administrative perspective, Respondent 58 explained, “From the records at the ZIPRC secretariat, membership registration and licensing has increased following the enactment into law of the Institute in 2022.” This trend is highlighted by Respondent 72, who shared, “One of ZIPRC’s notable successes in the last two years is the increase in membership registration and licensing,” and Respondent 74 added, “Numbers of member PR practitioners have increased.” The requirement for ZIPRC membership in professional contexts was repeatedly emphasized. Respondent 75 observed, “It has become a requirement to be a member of ZIPRC for any job application,” and Respondent 76 added, “More people I know have paid to join.” Echoing this, Respondent 63 shared, “The membership has increased,” and Respondent 71 pointed out, “An increase in membership registration and licensing is a notable success for ZIPRC in the last two years, as it reflects growing recognition of the institute and its efforts to regulate and professionalize the industry.”

Moreover, Respondent 80 stated, “Most registration can be attributed to listed requirement for hire,” while Respondent 81 noted, “Membership keeps growing on the platform for registered members.” Finally, Respondent 93 concluded, “There has been a lot of membership registration, which is good.”

## **Theme 3: Enhanced Professional Standards and Regulatory Compliance**

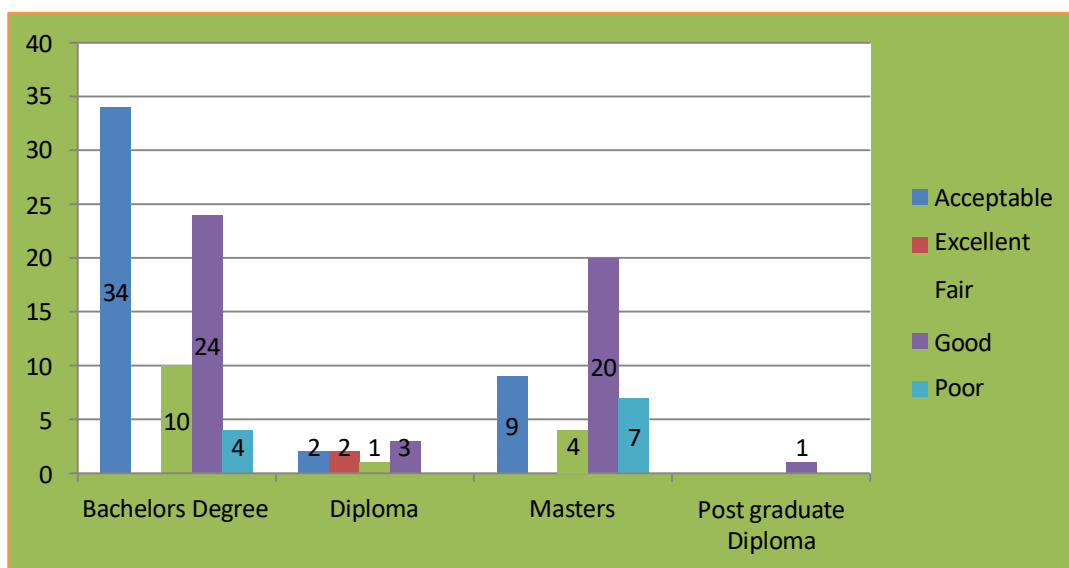
A number of respondents expressed appreciation for ZIPRC’s regulatory efforts and its impact on professional standards within Zambia’s public relations and communication sector. Respondent 2 highlighted the proactive role ZIPRC has played, stating, “ZIPRC has been consistent in its proactive approach the past two years. The wide publicity and sensitization has achieved good results in bringing in more practitioners to register. This has led to an improvement in standards of PR practice.” Similarly, Respondent 11 affirmed, “ZIPRC has contributed to growth and improvement within the industry over the last two years.”

This positive trend is also reflected in perceptions of increased compliance and accountability. Respondent 24 observed, “There is a seemingly increase in adherence to the Act in professional practice,” while Respondent 88 added, “There has been an increase in compliance levels among practitioners.” Reinforcing this notion, Respondent 41 commented, “Because everyone is more aware that they are being watched, there is careful consideration of one’s doings.” However, some concerns remain, as noted by Respondent 42: “Non-compliant members are yet to be penalized.”

*Institutional recognition and structural development have also been key achievements. Respondent 51 noted, “ZIPRC is asserting its dominance, in particular the acknowledgement by Government by appointing Principal PROs to be a part of Management is a key development and commendable for an institution that is still in its infancy.” In line with this, Respondent 54 pointed out, “ZIPRC has achieved significant milestones in the last two years, primarily focused on establishing a regulatory framework for the public relations and communication profession in Zambia.”*

*Additionally, awareness and respect for the profession appear to be growing. Respondent 23 stated, “The Act has ensured that PR/Communication experts...”, while Respondent 90 emphasized, “Communicators are educated on the need for membership registration and licensing.” Respondent 67 also commented on the rising stature of the profession, saying, “The profession is becoming respected and more lucrative.”*

*Lastly, the credibility and legitimacy of ZIPRC as a regulatory body were endorsed by Respondent 84, who stated, “The Body is very organized and is recognized by the Government.”*



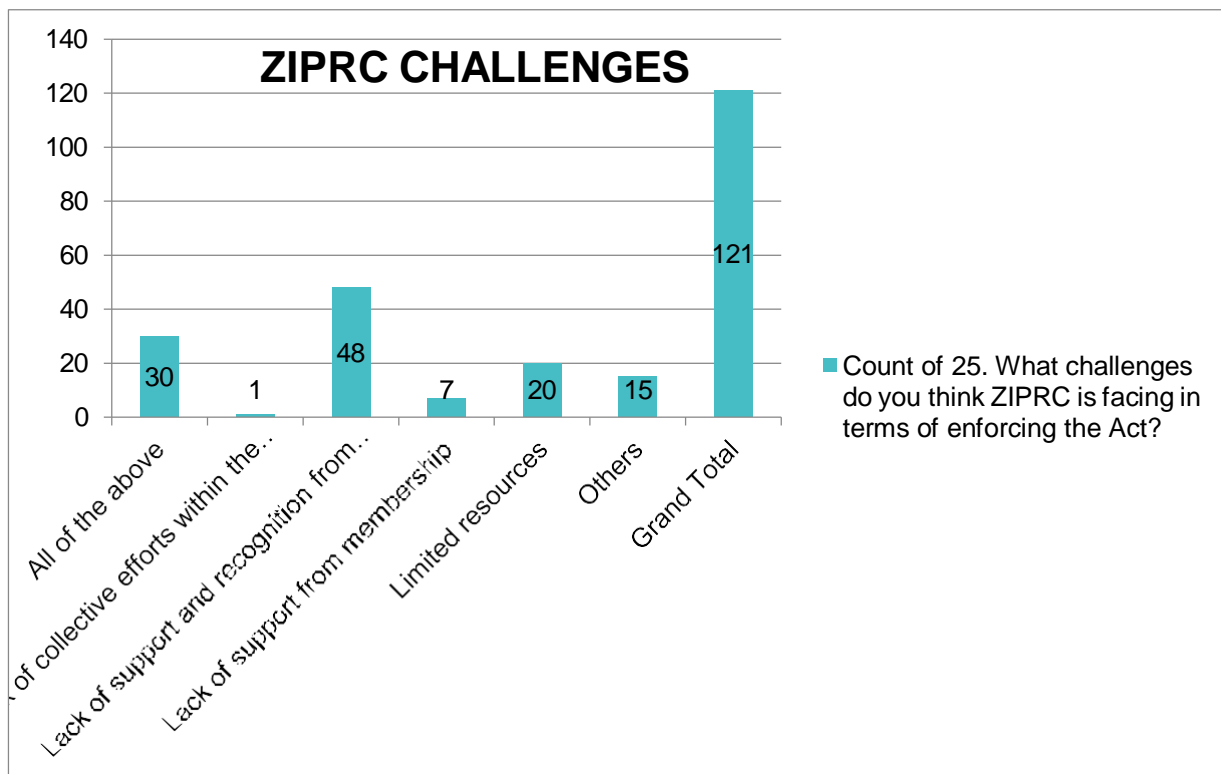
**Figure 4.2.6 Cross tab: What is your highest level of education? How do you rate ZIPRC performance as a body?**

Figure 4.3.1 demonstrates how respondents rated ZIPRC’s performance so far through a cross-tabulation analysis that separates answers by educational attainment. The research shows that individuals with advanced education levels tend to evaluate ZIPRC's service delivery differently since they give predominantly positive ratings.

The findings revealed that 34 people with Bachelor's degrees provided an "acceptable" rating to ZIPRC's work, indicating that this educational category had the most positive moderate ratings of institutional performance. The majority of 20 respondents with master's degrees rated ZIPRC's performance as "good," indicating higher approval of the institution among those with advanced education.

PR practitioners' perceptions of ZIPRC's performance are influenced by their educational background. Higher Education levels increase professionals' awareness of professional standards and institutional governance, resulting in varying views of ZIPRC performance. Advanced education may keep professionals more engaged with ZIPRC activities such as training programs and licensing processes, resulting in varying appraisals of its success.

According to the survey, ZIPRC has better credibility among professionals with advanced degrees, who also see the institution as more successful, whereas professionals with lower education have different expectations of ZIPRC. ZIPRC must design inclusive policies, effective training programs, and communication methods for professionals at all levels of education in order to promote widespread compliance and institutional support.



**Figure 4.2.7 ZPRC Challenges: What challenges do you think ZIPRC is facing?**

According to the survey respondents, Figure 4.4.3 depicts the major challenges confronting ZIPRC. Among all the significant issues that ZIPRC faces, the lack of recognition from employers and the government remains the most pressing issue, according to 48 respondents, or 39.67% of the whole pool (N=121). ZIPRC has low external validation and weak institutional support, which prohibits it from efficiently implementing its regulatory responsibilities.

A total of 30 respondents (24.79%) stated that ZIPRC faces issues from all possible challenges, demonstrating the need of stakeholder recognition and resource allocation, as well as good organizational governance processes that affect operations. According to the data, 20 respondents (16.53%) identified limited resources as ZIPRC's primary issue in upholding professional standards, most likely owing to funding or staffing.

The survey results indicated additional impediments that respondents cited as "other reasons" in 15 situations (12.40%), despite the offered possibilities. Seven respondents (5.79%) reported difficulty in obtaining appropriate support from their professional members, despite the fact that this data may indicate that PR professionals do not follow ZIPRC regulations. According to 0.83% of participants, a lack of collaborative effort among governing council members hampered professional policy enforcement and decision-making.

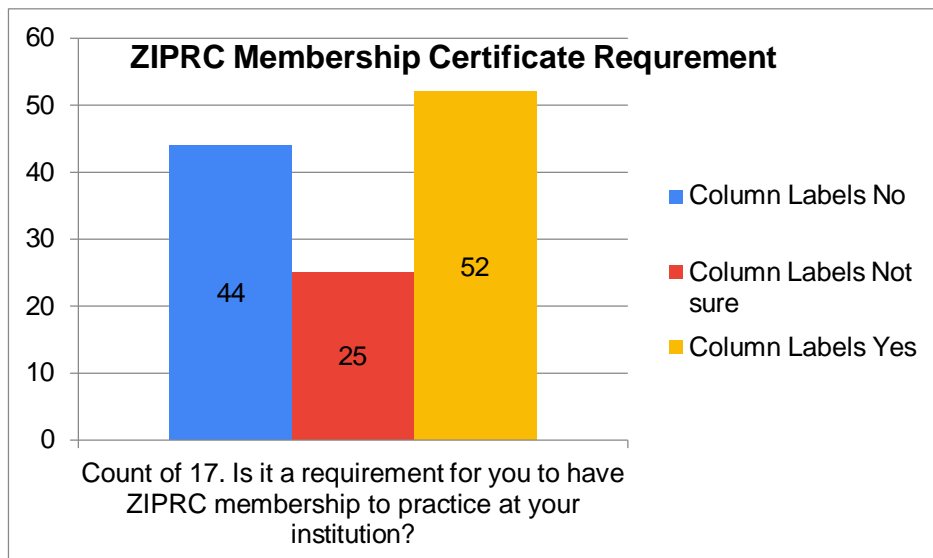
These findings show that ZIPRC has to strengthen stakeholder relationships, boost fundraising ability, and develop strong leadership to improve governance processes. The success of the ZIPRC Act, as well as the advancement of the public relations profession, requires the removal of these identified barriers.

#### 4.5 To establish the level of compliance to the Act among practitioners and stakeholders

To determine the level of compliance with the Act among practitioners and stakeholders, a cross-tabulation was conducted to determine whether organizations recognizes ZIPRC's mandate as a professional body. The following questions were analyzed:

Source	Question Number	Question
Questionnaire	Q17	Is it a requirement for you to have ZIPRC membership to practice at your

		institution?
Questionnaire	Q15	Does your organization recognize the mandate of ZIPRC as a professional body?



**Figure 4.4.2 ZIPRC Membership Certificate Requirement: Are you required to have a ZIPRC Membership and Practicing Certificate at your place of work.**

Figure 4.4.2 shows the results of the Perceptions of the mandate to hold a ZIPRC Membership Certificate at Work. Participants in the study held opposing views on whether workplace staff feels compelled to have a ZIPRC Membership Certificate. According to the poll results, ZIPRC membership certification is obligatory in work places for 52 participants, accounting for 42.98% of the total of 121 respondents. Among the 121 respondents, 42 claimed the ZIPRC Membership Certificate was not required, accounting for 34.71% of the total participants. A large fraction of the 25 participants, or 20.66%, were uncertain regarding whether a ZIPRC Membership Certificate was required for work.

According to the study results, while many respondents believe ZIPRC certification is a career need, a sizable proportion are unsure about this professional obligation. 20.66% of workers are still uncertain about ZIPRC's position as a workplace regulatory authority, indicating possible communication or enforcement issues.

The findings indicate that ZIPRC should increase their promotional operations to improve understanding of membership standards among public relations and communications professional groups. Better enforcement tactics, increased employer engagement, and improved communication with stakeholders would result in greater acceptability of ZIPRC's work laws by workers in all professional fields.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to briefly explain their answers and the following themes emerged from open ended question:

### Theme 1: Strong Institutional Recognition and Support for ZIPRC

*Many respondents indicated that their organizations fully recognize ZIPRC as a professional body and actively support their affiliation, including payment of fees, time off for CPDs, and mandatory membership for employment.*

*A consistent theme emerging from respondents is the strong institutional support for ZIPRC's regulatory framework and its professional development activities. Respondent 2 affirmed, "My organization ensures all communication personnel adhere to the institute's regulations and requirements," indicating full compliance with ZIPRC guidelines. This was echoed by Respondent 4, who noted, "All PR practitioners must be registered with ZIPRC," underscoring the mandatory nature of registration in some institutions.*



Organizations are not only enforcing compliance but are also facilitating participation through financial and logistical support. Respondent 3 shared, "It pays for our CPD and gives us time to attend meetings," while Respondent 9 confirmed, "The institution I work for assists me in paying for all ZIPRC activities." Respondent 10 similarly stated, "It supports my involvement by financially paying for the institutional and membership of myself and colleagues." Additionally, Respondent 11 added, "They help in paying some fees for ZIPRC activities." These responses highlight a clear pattern of organizations investing in the continuous professional development of their communication personnel.

The importance of ZIPRC as a professional body is well recognized across multiple organizations. For instance, Respondent 5 stated, "Yes, our organization recognizes ZIPRC's mandate as a professional body. We acknowledge its role in regulating standards, ensuring accountability, and promoting professionalism within the industry." This was elaborated further by Respondent 6, who emphasized, "We acknowledge its role in setting standards, regulating the practice of public relations, and promoting ethical conduct among practitioners. ZIPRC's efforts to professionalize the industry and support continuous development are vital to maintaining credibility and fostering growth in the field." Similarly, Respondent 7 affirmed recognition of ZIPRC by their organization, MultiChoice, citing its role in "regulating and upholding standards in public relations and communication."

Several respondents also highlighted the proactive involvement of organizations in facilitating ZIPRC engagement. Respondent 8 stated, "All PR personnel in the organizations are paid up members. The organizations also give them time off duty to attend ZIPRC workshops, conferences and other activities." Likewise, Respondent 12 noted, "The organization values the role communication plays in achieving its vision and has elevated the position into decision-making positions," suggesting a broader institutional appreciation for professional communication and its strategic role.

Altogether, these accounts demonstrate a growing alignment between organizational practices and ZIPRC's mission, reflecting an increasingly supportive environment for the regulation, ethical practice, and professional growth of public relations practitioners in Zambia.

## **Theme 2: Recognition Mandated by Employment Requirements**

Some respondents reported that ZIPRC membership or certification is a prerequisite for employment, indicating formal institutional recognition.

"You have to be a member of ZIPRC for one to be employed as a PR practitioner." respondent 14... "Producing the ZIPRC certificate was a requirement before being employed." respondent 15... "Under job descriptions for communications...applicant must be a member of ZIPRC." respondent 16... "Yes, my organization recognizes the mandate of ZIPRC as a professional body. In my current job, I was among those recommended for interviews by ZIPRC, and I got hired thanks to their recommendation." respondent 17... "The organization I work for recognizes the mandate of ZIPRC as a professional body. It understands that public relations are a profession that needs a license to practice. HR ensures that registration is done and gives a deadline as to when this registration/license is obtained." respondent 18... "It was a requirement for the job role of Communications Officer." respondent 19... "All PR practitioners employed are required to be ZIPRC practitioners." respondent 20... "Yes and it ensures that Communications officer is registered and has a ZIPRC practicing certificate." respondent 21... "Every practitioner is required to be part of a professional body at my organisation." respondent 22... "Our organization mandates us to be part of ZIPRC." respondent 23...

## **Theme 3: Partial or Informal Recognition without Full Support**

Some institutions acknowledge ZIPRC but do not fully support practitioners especially financially in attending ZIPRC activities or paying subscriptions.

While ZIPRC's mandate is broadly recognized in principle, several practitioners report a significant gap between recognition and institutional support, particularly in public and resource-constrained settings.



Respondent 24 noted, "Public institutions now no longer pay for staff for membership or activities, thus making it doubtful if my organisation still considers the mandate of ZIPRC," expressing concern over waning institutional commitment. This sentiment is further reinforced by Respondent 25, who shared, "The organisation refused to provide leave and pay for the annual conference. I have to take days off my leave and found other means to attend the conference," illustrating how lack of logistical and financial support can hinder active participation.

Respondent 26 similarly highlighted a critical gap, stating, "The organisation does not pay for the mandatory trainings of the professional bodies," despite these trainings being essential for compliance and professional development. Financial barriers appear to be a recurring issue, as Respondent 25 added, "Employees (PR practitioners) are expected to pay professional fees from their own pocket. Also employees are expected to pay for any trainings conducted by ZIPRC, this is a big challenge." These insights suggest that individual practitioners are often left to bear the burden of professional compliance alone, potentially undermining the goals of standardized, institution-supported development.

A related issue is the lack of awareness or prioritization within organizations. Respondent 27 remarked, "They do but have little knowledge about it that's why they don't pay attention whether I have a license or not," indicating that even where ZIPRC is nominally recognized, actual enforcement or support is minimal. This reflects a disconnect between the regulatory intent of ZIPRC and its practical uptake within certain workplaces.

Collectively, these responses paint a picture of institutional inconsistency in supporting ZIPRC's mandate ranging from financial non-support, to low prioritization, to outright neglect. This highlights a critical barrier to ZIPRC's vision of a fully professionalized public relations sector, especially in contexts where organizational policies and budgets do not align with national regulatory expectations.

#### **Theme 4: Lack of Recognition or Awareness**

A number of respondents stated that their organizations do not recognize ZIPRC or are unaware of its existence and mandate. That was also reflected on a number of occasions when respondents declined to respond because they did not have the right qualifications and their organizations are not concerned about ZIPRC or the Act. Others stated that their organizations affiliate to institutes such as Zambia Institute of Marketing (ZIM) because of its viability and the value it brings. They state that ZIM is enough and no need for ZIPRC.

"They don't even know them, unfortunately." respondent 29... "No, my organization does not recognize the mandate of ZIPRC." respondent 30... "I'm not sure if the organization recognizes ZIPRC." respondent 31... "The organization I work for is not aware of it." respondent 32... "I am not pretty sure if the organization recognizes ZIPRC." respondent 33... "They have no time to look at ZIPRC mandate." respondent 34. No one bothers me about ZIPRC certificate or membership but maybe they may recognize if they are aware of ZIPRC. 35. Different staff belong to different professional bodies at my organization and those professional bodies have their mandate recognized. Perhaps ZIPRC has not overcome the challenge of low awareness levels among employers. For instance, no body asks me whether I belong or not.

#### **Theme 5: Individual Support in Absence of Organizational Backing**

In some cases, respondents independently support ZIPRC initiatives or advocate for recognition within their organizations.

"I have made my institution aware of ZIPRC and I receive support to attend activities." respondent 35... "Through few members in the organization talking about it, they are aware...but membership is still a challenge." respondent 36... "They have signed up for corporate certification but it was requested for by us the practitioners." respondent 37... "Sometimes it's hard to convince management that I should take part in capacity building workshops provided by ZIPRC." respondent 38...

## Theme 6: Recognition Depends on Sector or Institutional Type

Recognition and support vary by sector government institutions generally support ZIPRC, while private and international organizations show mixed or limited recognition.

*"All government institutions recognize the mandate of ZIPRC." respondent 39... "It's an American government agency I work for...mandated by American laws and so we follow its system and we do not belong to ZIPRC ." respondent 40... "In private sector such things are given very little if any regard." Respondent 41... "As a UN Agency, some local labour laws do not apply." respondent 42... "It's an International NGO is not obligated to recognize local professional organizations." respondent 43*

## Theme 7: ZIPRC's Limited Visibility or Influence in Some Institutions

Some responses highlight ZIPRC's limited reach or impact, especially in newer institutions, international organizations operating in Zambia or organizations outside PR-specific roles.

*"It's never been a big concern." respondent 44... "No impact from ZIPRC—more of a workshop body." respondent 45... "As a new establishment...just recently started work as a graduate." respondent 46... "ZIPRC has not made itself visible enough to employers' especially international organisations." respondent 47...*

The findings reveal that while ZIPRC is increasingly recognized across organizations, institutional support for its mandate remains inconsistent. Some employers encourage membership and regulatory compliance, while others exhibit low awareness or minimal engagement. This trend mirrors Sampa's (2022) Zambian study, which observed that many PR practitioners remain confined to operational roles, with limited strategic input and organizational support for regulation. In contrast, a study by Bartlett, Tywoniak, and Hatcher (2007) in Australia examined the role of public relations practice in achieving longer-term changes for organizations and society. The study found that public relations practice contributes to organizational success and societal change, highlighting the importance of professional practice in the Australian context. This contrast underscores the need for ZIPRC to strengthen advocacy, build institutional partnerships, and effectively communicate its value proposition to ensure deeper integration of professional standards within Zambia's PR landscape.

Furthermore, Regression Analysis was used to determine whether respondents' recognition had an effect on their perception of ZIPRC's effectiveness. The respondents were asked the following questions: Do you believe ZIPRC is effectively administering the Act? Does your organization acknowledge ZIPRC's mandate as a professional body? Below are the findings:

SUMMARY OUTPUT								
<i>Regression Statistics</i>								
Multiple R	0.131608154							
R Square	0.017320706							
Adjusted R Square	0.009062897							
Standard Error	0.498414225							
Observations	121							

ANOVA								
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>			
Regression	1	0.521053	0.521053	2.097494	0.15017			
Residual	119	29.56159	0.248417					
Total	120	30.08264						
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	1.403110293	0.103072	13.61286	5.09E-26	1.199017	1.607204	1.199017	1.607204
Section E: Recognition of ZIPRC  15. Does your organization recognize the mandate of ZIPRC as a professional body?	0.080315122	0.055456	1.448273	0.15017	-0.02949	0.190123	-0.02949	0.190123

### ANOVA Table (F-test)

The independent variable (ZIPRC recognition) is tested against the dependent variable (ZIPRC efficacy) with an F-Statistic value of 2.0975.

The p-value for the full model is 0.1502, according to Significance F. The obtained F value (0.1502) is more than 0.05, indicating that ZIPRC recognition has no significant impact on ZIPRC effectiveness.

### Regression coefficients

At zero ZIPRC recognition, the model predicts that the effectiveness score will be 1.403 (which is statistically significant).

ZIPRC Recognition Coefficient (0.0803,  $p = 0.1502$ ): An increase of one unit in recognition value results in a value of 0.0803.

The result of  $p = 0.1502$  exceeds 0.05, indicating that this effect is statistically insignificant. ZIPRC efficiency has a slight but favorable statistical association with ZIPRC recognition ( $R = 0.1316$ ). ZIPRC recognition has no statistical link to ZIPRC effectiveness because the p-value is 0.1502. As a result, we cannot conclude that

these two factors are inextricably linked. ZIPRC recognition accounts for only 1.73% of the parameters that influence ZIPRC effectiveness evaluations, whereas other variables appear to have a larger role.

### Confidence Intervals

The confidence interval (-0.0295 to 0.1901) indicates that the effect of ZIPRC identification on effectiveness is minimal, as zero falls within this range.

## CONCLUSION

ZIPRC efficiency has a slight but favorable statistical association with ZIPRC recognition ( $R = 0.1316$ ). ZIPRC recognition has no statistical link to ZIPRC effectiveness because the p-value is 0.1502. As a result, we cannot conclude that these two factors are inextricably linked. ZIPRC recognition accounts for only 1.73% of the parameters that influence ZIPRC effectiveness evaluations, whereas other variables appear to have a larger role.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and the preceding discussions, the several recommendations are proposed to enhance ZIPRC's effectiveness and promote greater compliance with the Act. While some could be implemented immediately, When participants were asked to recommend future course of actions, the following were the results;

### Short Term recommendations

1. ***ZIPRC must strengthen Act enforcement*** through inspections by aggressively examining practitioner credentials, as well as imposing sanctions on institutions and people who fail to comply with the Act's requirement that both practitioner and institutional positions be occupied by qualified professionals. The institute should work with institutions to ensure that they engage experienced public relations practitioners while adhering to the Act's guidelines. To ensure Act compliance, almost immediate inspections should be combined with more severe punishment techniques. ZIPRC should implement a system of regular inspections of public relations and communication departments across various organizations to verify compliance with the Act regarding the qualifications of practitioners. That will bring utmost sanity to the profession and make it stand on equal footing like other reputable professions in the country.
2. ***CPD programs must strengthen their offerings*** by including practical training approaches such as case studies from real-world circumstances. CPD training must continue to broaden its topic base to cover emerging specializations such as digital PR and crisis communication. Online self-paced CPD programs should equally be introduced and participants should receive certificates of attendance upon completion. Virtue attendance should also be embraced and promoted.
3. ***ZIPRC should spearhead national publicity initiatives to educate*** the public about the benefits of public relations and organizational roles by designating PR Day as an official recognition occasion. PR advocacy will succeed by proving its strategic organizational role and emphasizing the value of professional license holders. The Act mandates that both employers and employees get a better knowledge of its contents through straightforward explanations. For instance, many organizations still think journalism is public relations and conversely. Many still think a popular journalist or newscaster without any public relations or communication training would make the right fit for their communication department.
4. ***ZIPRC must cultivate closer links*** with its constituents; they should improve member communications, provide virtual networking opportunities, and increase its newsletter service and online resources. The organization should develop a feedback system to address the concerns of its members. Improve member communication through more frequent newsletters, dedicated online platforms for resource

sharing, and active engagement on social media. Furthermore, ID card distribution should occur, and various ways should be adopted to maintain high member retention rates. ZIPRC should hold two annual member events preferably in chapters centered on interactive meetings.

### **Collaborate with Regulatory Bodies**

Explore partnerships with other relevant government bodies and professional associations to strengthen enforcement capabilities and ensure a unified approach to professional standards. Conduct benchmarking reviews of successful public relations regulatory bodies in other African countries and internationally to identify and adopt best practices in governance, enforcement, and member engagement.

#### **5. Diversification of Delivery Methods**

Increase the availability of online, self-paced learning modules and virtual attendance options to improve accessibility for practitioners in different geographical locations and with varying schedules.

#### **6. Elevate Public Awareness and Advocate for the Profession:**

**Targeted Communication on the Act:** Develop clear and concise communication materials explaining the requirements and benefits of the Act for both employers and employees, addressing the current ambiguity surrounding membership.

#### **7. Virtual Networking Opportunities:** Facilitate virtual networking events and online forums to connect members across geographical boundaries.

### **Long term recommendations**

- 8. Address Cost related concerns:** Cost-related concerns should be investigated in order to provide subsidized training choices for low-income practitioners such as those in municipal and city councils, as well as perform a pricing review for CPD training and professional licensing. Employers should also be encouraged to get annual training plans from their firms. That can only happen if ZIPRC continues to aggressively engage them and sensitize them on moral obligations they have towards staff capacity building programs. ZIPRC should educate employers about the importance of hiring credentialed public relations specialists. Advocacy efforts should focus on the benefits of PR professionalism for organizational performance. Tailored seminars to engage boards and management of Public Relations as a management function could accelerate acceptance and credibility of public relations in organizations.
- 9. Strengthen ZIPRC Resource base and operation capacity** The institute should actively pursue various fundraising avenues, including grants, sponsorships, and partnerships, to increase ZIPRC's financial resources. The group will be able to recruit inspectors, purchase vehicles, and create a new complex. ZIPRC should perform benchmarking reviews of other professional bodies to identify best practices. The secretariat should be more successful at communicating with ZIPRC members. ZIPRC requires a new system for assessing organizational performance as whole. The organization should consider charge reductions for its member subscriptions and memberships. With many cooperating partners coming on board to support ZIPRC's AGM, support could be lobbied specifically for resource mobilization and member capacity building.
- 10. Invest in Infrastructure:** Prioritize investments in essential infrastructure, such as transportation for inspections and the development of a dedicated ZIPRC complex, to enhance operational efficiency. However, that could only be possible if ZIPRC strengthens its resource base.
- 11. Develop Organizational Performance Metrics:** Implement a comprehensive system for assessing ZIPRC's overall performance against its strategic objectives and regularly communicate these metrics to stakeholders.



## Implications of the Findings

The findings have several implications for ZIPRC, public relations practitioners, and policymakers:

**I. The recent analysis shows that ZIPRC needs to address the issue of enforcement gaps while communicating effectively with its stakeholders and engaging in stronger advocacy to gain recognition from employers and the government. This will necessitate enhancing CPD programs and drawing additional resources.**

**II. For PR practitioners:** The findings support the importance of ongoing professional growth and ethical conduct. Practitioners should work more closely with ZIPRC to influence the growth and professionalization of Zambia's public relations business.

**III. For Policymakers:** As a result, this study advocates for additional government support for ZIPRC through consultative engagements especially during government recruitment drives for PR and communication, consultation on policy changes that will improve regulatory capacity and ensure the ZIPRC Act is implemented effectively. The Ministry of Media and Information could play a strategic role in this.

**I. Strengthen Act Enforcement:** The ZIPRC should undertake regular inspections of public relations practitioners and organizations to guarantee compliance with the Act. Noncompliant practitioners and institutions should face fines to emphasize the necessity of compliance.

**II. Improve CPD Programs:** ZIPRC's training programs should be expanded to embrace developing areas such as digital public relations and crisis communication. Training could be made more affordable by waiving fees and providing online instruction.

**III. Improve Stakeholder Engagement:** ZIPRC should improve contact with members by sending out regular newsletters, offering virtual networking opportunities, and providing feedback tools. Regularly organized events and forums can serve to foster a sense of community and cooperation.

## Limitations of the Study

- 1. Declined responses:** Several potential participants especially those actively practicing public relations in big organizations, but do not have the right qualifications, and do not affiliate with ZIPRC declined to participate in the research. Despite being assured of confidentiality and anonymity, the most common reason given for not participating was that ZIPRC could easily identify them and conduct a crack-down. Therefore, it may be concluded that the challenge of job mismatches in the PR field is alive and real but it was not adequately captured. That calls for a more investigative research and it is a challenge to ZIPRC to intensify inspections and strictly implement the Act.
- 2. ZIPRC competing for membership with Zambia Institute of Marketing (ZIM):** A good number of Public Relations and Communication practitioners willingly choose to belong to ZIM despite them having qualifications for PR. According to most, their senior executives affiliate to ZIM and ZIM has demonstrated real value as compared to ZIPRC. At times there seems to be a blurred line between PR, Advertising and marketing and professionals think they may belong anywhere. The Acts need to be well pronounced on such.
- 3. Registered but Non-practicing ZIPRC members:** In some instances, some responses were given by registered ZIPRC members who did not have the right qualifications, and were not up to date with PR trends and history. Some questions were not convincingly answered in the survey.
- 4. Uncaptured pool of bonafide practitioners:** Some practitioners had brilliant qualifications and they had been practicing PR in Zambia for a long time. However, they declined to participate because they have never been members of ZIPRC or its predecessor ZAPRA. They could not discuss something that had not affected them in any way is what they said.

5. **Biased responses:** For some especially former members of the ZIPRC Council, they could not afford being objective about ZIPRC challenges. In fact some submitted defensive answers while some sounded like ZIPRC Spokespersons. That means, in some instances, a clear picture of a true situation may not have been fully captured.

### Future Research Directions

Although this study gives useful insights into the impact of the ZIPRC Act, a number of areas require more investigation:

**I. Longitudinal Studies:** Future study should include longitudinal studies to evaluate ZIPRC's impact over a longer time period. This would allow for a more thorough assessment of its effectiveness and the evolving issues it encounters.

**II. Comparative Studies:** Comparing ZIPRC to other PR regulatory agencies on the African continent, such as PRISA in South Africa, may reveal best practices and lessons that can be used to strengthen PR regulation and professionalism.

**III. Qualitative Research:** In-depth qualitative research, such as interviews and focus group discussions, would provide detailed insights on how practitioners perceive ZIPRC and the obstacles they experience when complying with the Act.

**IV. Employer Perceptions:** Future research might look into employers' perceptions of the ZIPRC Act and the added value that a certified PR professional provides. This would indicate strategies to boost employer recognition and support.

**V. Influence of Digital Transformation:** Research into the influence of digital transformation on Zambian public relations practice could aid ZIPRC's attempts to update its training programs and regulatory framework in response to evolving trends.

**VI. Ethics in Practice:** Future research should look into ZIPRC's function in fostering ethical public relations methods and addressing issues like spin doctoring and propaganda. This would contribute to the greater discussion of PR ethics and professionalism.

### CONCLUSION

The final chapter synthesizes the overall findings of the study, "Exploring the role of the ZIPRC on the Professional Practice of Public Relations," and discusses their effects for the Zambia Institute of Public Relations and Communication (ZIPRC), public relations practitioners, stakeholders, and future research. By going back to the research objectives and synching the rich lessons derived from both quantitative and qualitative data, this chapter attempts to provide actionable recommendations for how to improve the regulatory framework and advance the professionalization of public relations in Zambia.

This research provides significant initial assessment of the impact of the ZIPRC on the practice of public relations in Zambia for its first two years of operations. The findings paint a picture of an organization making significant strides in some respects, but faced with serious problems that impede its full potential as a regulatory body.

The demographic profile shows a young and expanding female public relations professional with high levels of formal education. The demographic profile influences how ZIPRC organizes its CPD program and engagement mechanisms, considering the digital literacy and career aspirations of this generation.

The study records ZIPRC's success in growing training and CPD provision and membership enrollment. Practitioners tend to view CPD schemes positively for enhancing professional development and maintaining themselves abreast of market trends. The increasing presence of ZIPRC membership in job postings reflects greater recognition of the institute's role as a professional gatekeeper.

However, the study also uncovers significant challenges to the implementation of the ZIPRC Act. A high percentage of employers, particularly those in the private and international sectors, have no recognition or value for ZIPRC's mandate. This absence of mass acceptance, coupled with concerns regarding resource scarcity at ZIPRC and ambiguity concerning the obligatory nature of membership, undermines the Act's intended impact.

Most importantly, the weak positive relationship between organizational acknowledgment of ZIPRC and perceived effectiveness highlights that official acknowledgment by itself is not enough to ensure a belief in the effective management of ZIPRC. The qualitative findings indicate that this weak link is likely due to inconsistencies in translating recognition into tangible support for practitioners (Theme 3), a latent lack of awareness within some organizations (Theme 4), and a perception of ZIPRC's lack of visibility or impact (Theme 7). Where organizations are actively engaged in supporting ZIPRC membership and participation (Themes 1 and 2), there is a more consistent alignment with perceived effectiveness.

Overall, although ZIPRC has built up a base for professionalization in terms of training and membership growth, its capability is currently undermined by patchy recognition and support across sectors, availability of resources against robust enforcement, and communication and stakeholder interface discontinuities among its heterogeneous membership. In order to serve its mandate satisfactorily, ZIPRC will have to strategically overcome these challenges to become a more cohesive and compliant professional framework. The study investigated the explored the role of the ZIPRC on the professional practice of public relations in Zambia and how the professional body is implementing the Act in order to combat unprofessionalism, which mostly result to lack of recognition and misperceptions of the profession. Even the profession has improved in areas of trainings and attracting qualified staff for positions, it still grapples with a number of issues such as lack of recognition and low levels of compliance among others. The findings emphasize ZIPRC's efforts in developing professionalism while also identifying some important issues arising from resource restrictions and lack of stakeholder recognition. By addressing these difficulties and implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, ZIPRC will improve its efficacy in contributing to the expansion of public relations as a recognized profession in Zambia. These distinct contributions highlight the importance of ongoing research into public relations regulation and professionalization in Zambia and around the world. Thus, much as the public relations profession evolves in response to shifting trends and challenges, ZIPRC must continue to strive to meet its mandate--the high call of professionalism.

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