



*Investing in People for Social and Economic Justice*

## **CSOs & Academia Call on Parliament to Adhere to Constitutional Mandate**

*“Parliament should occupy its Constitutional space without necessarily waiting for the Executive”*

The outbreak of novel coronavirus has created unique challenges for the continuity of parliamentary functions especially in countries where lockdowns have been enforced. However, most countries have employed mitigation and adaptation measures to limit transmission, while allowing parliamentarians to fulfill their triple roles of representation, legislation, and oversight. Parliamentarians are supposed to be at the forefront of the response to this unprecedented health crisis, passing exceptional measures and emergency bills to address it (World Bank, 2020). In the case of Zimbabwe, Parliament immediately adjourned after the President’s declaration of COVID-19 a State of National Disaster on 17 March 2020.

A month later, still the parliament has not issued even a statement on how the institution is contributing to the fight against the pandemic whilst maintaining their oversight role on the use of public resources. **MP’s attending a ZIMCODD Indaba confessed that they are only learning of what is happening in the country “through social media and grapevine”**. Several decisions have been made without the involvement of Parliament, let alone the Portfolio Committees on Health and Child Care, Budget and Finance and the Public Accounts. In essence, there is no legislative effort from the Parliament of Zimbabwe to limit the negative social and economic impacts on the most vulnerable. The conspicuous silence on the part of Parliament leaves a lot to be desired considering that parliamentarians have a crucial function to oversee this response, as well as evaluate and swiftly pass emergency legislation to approve funds needed to meet the needs of the populations they serve. This guarantees transparency and accountability which is crucial in building public trust in government’s response to the pandemic. Without such, citizens tend to speculate, especially when all important decisions are left in the hands of the executive. In other words, the Parliament of Zimbabwe is doing the nation a disservice.

The effects of decisions being made today by functional arms of the State will affect citizens now and post-covid-19 crisis. Citizens have expressed concern and trust issues with government, memories are still fresh of the Zimbabwe Power Company scandal in which a payment of US\$4.9 million was paid to Pito Investments for transformers never delivered dating as far back as 2010 as revealed in the [2018 Auditor General’s Report](#) and the country is suffering from power shortages. Of interest to note in the same report is the case of Air Zimbabwe which was implicated in gross financial malpractices which included failure to account for 3 MA60 air crafts, unsupported expenditure amounting to US\$1.8 billion, no supporting documents to support the use of US\$655 thousand, no supporting documentation for operating expenses amounting to \$13.7 million and unexplained variances of \$87 million from amounts confirmed by suppliers.

The redeployment of resources has to be done transparently and following clearly defined procedures to maintain citizen's trust. Already the President has hinted about the review of the 2020 Budget to allow for a timely and flexible response to COVID-19. This entails supplementing and or reallocation of approved appropriations across and within the budgets of government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) in response to a disaster. COVID-19 has however presented challenges especially on the approval processes and procedures in the wake of the lockdown, limiting the role of Parliament in exercising their oversight, legislative and representative roles. However, the government must put in place mechanisms for ensuring that the management of public resources in response to disasters should ensure that stakeholders are held accountable for the way they use public resources and exercise authority. Contributing to the Public Finance Management Reform Indaba held virtually by ZIMCODD on 23 April 2020, the President of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union Peter Mutasa opined that,

*“Accountability systems in Zimbabwe have always been ignored even before the outbreak of COVID-19 and what the pandemic did was simply to exacerbate challenges of transparency and accountability. The challenge we have is that the lockdown did not only inactivate Parliament but rather fragmented the voice of citizens who have the right to demand for transparency and accountability in the management of resources.”*

In the same vein, the role of Parliament has always been elusive with the people accused of abusing public resources going scot free highlighting the lack of political will to ‘arrest’ corruption. In the case of public debt in Zimbabwe, government continued borrowing against clear debt thresholds specified in Section 300 of the Constitution together with Section 61 of the Public Finance Management Act which provides that the aggregate of the amounts that may be borrowed in any financial year by way of loans raised within Zimbabwe shall not exceed 30% of the general revenues of Zimbabwe in the previous financial year.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) representatives, academics and Members of Parliament that attended a Public Finance Management Indaba hosted by ZIMCODD on 23 April 2020 made the following recommendations:

- **Members of Parliament and staff must be designated as essential service providers.** The Speaker of Parliament must as a matter of urgency come up with modalities for Parliament, (*through its various structures Committees*) to reconvene and resume sittings where decisions of national importance are made. If it is feasible for the Executive and Judiciary to conduct business, arrangements should also be made to allow Parliament to conduct business. Portfolio Committees can meet on virtual platforms.
- In line with the above, Members of Parliament must also be allowed to conduct business in their constituencies in line with their representation and oversight mandate.

To ensure continued transparency and accountability of public resources the following actions are also crucial:

- Coordination with local authorities is important in understanding the needs at the grassroot level
- Devise ways of ensuring timely relief disbursement with an acceptable degree of risk.
- fiscal stimulus measures to support economic activity.
- Track and report emergency response expenditure to facilitate informed decision-making
- Feedback to citizens on the utilization on funds.
- Where separate budget lines are created for COVID-19 response, they need to follow the standard financial reporting system.

## **In the media...**

### **1. Domestic Resource Mobilisation in the context of COVID-19**

Domestic Resource Mobilisation is considered to be the most reliable and sustainable means of raising revenue for development and it was raised that illicit financial flows through corruption, tax evasion and money laundering hinder the ability of the state to generate own resources. [Click here](#) for more

### **2. Calls for transparent use of COVID-19 funds**

Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) has called on government to put in place mechanisms to ensure transparent and accountable use of funds donated towards the fight against coronavirus. [READ MORE](#)

### **3. 'Covid-19 donations will be accounted for'**

All donations being made by corporates and individuals towards the fight against Covid-19 will be put to good use and accounted for, President Mnangagwa has said. [READ MORE](#)

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