



*Investing in People for Social & Economic Justice*

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **COVID-19 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY KEY IN THE PROCUREMENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE**

23 FEBRUARY 2021

The Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) is calling for improved transparency and accountability in the procurement and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. With continued uncertainty around vaccine safety, efficacy, and supply chain for the COVID-19 vaccine, the government's commitment, leadership and multi-stakeholder coordination remains essential.

The Zimbabwe government has reported through the Minister of Information Monica Mutsvangwa that it has purchased 600 000 COVID-19 vaccine doses from China's Sinopharm, in addition to the 200 000 China has donated. Although the purchase of the vaccines is a positive stride in the country's efforts to curb the pandemic, there are crucial issues that ZIMCODD wants to highlight to bolster government's efforts in the vaccine rollout as well as other responses to the pandemic.

#### ***I. Availability, Accessibility and Adequacy***

The most critical issue that government should concern itself over is to ensure how do the ensure that the vaccine is available and accessible for everyone that is illegible and willing to get the vaccine. The current 800 000 doses are way off the mark in a country that has 15 million people and urgent need to procure more drugs should remain a priority. Although the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting announced on their official twitter account of efforts to procure other COVID-19 vaccines such as Sputnik V (Victory) from Russia, among others being under way as well as that India, like China, has also offered a donation and an option to purchase commercially & modalities for this offer still being worked out. It remain crucial that the public follows closely these promises and demands that they come to finality so that more people can access the vaccines. Although the Government has reiterated that the vaccine will be free, we fully know of the challenges as well as other bottlenecks such as existing shortages and inefficient distribution that exists in Zimbabwe's health delivery system which will deny access to the majority poor and this includes the fact that a majority of the health facilities are not functioning and for some there is still need for out of pocket expenses to be able to access these facilities. In the current lockdown restrictions, movement has been suppressed for the majority of the citizens and this means the effective distribution of the vaccine can only mean having the vaccine reach everyone from the different parts of the country and this has always been a challenge considering that some communities remain hard to reach and these include communities from areas that have recently been hit by floods and whose road network has not been fully repaired.

#### ***II. Effective public education***

With the high mortality that the COVID-19 has claimed, there is general fear and stigma amongst the populace of anything related to the pandemic including testing and as witnessed recently- the vaccine as well. Just as how quick the spread of COVID-19 is, misinformation on the vaccine has also been awash especially through social media. Efforts should be put to ensure that both mainstream and

alternative media covers the COVID-19 vaccine credibly and using official and trusted sources of information.

### **III. Effective Public Management**

The Zimbabwean government has run multiple programmes and through its bureaucratic nature some of these have faced a snag and multiple delays that have compromised programme delivery. The COVID-19 vaccine roll out requires effective public management which includes well knit partnerships between government and its various arms as well as the private sector and NGOs so that all efforts are targeted in one direction. Without a strong digital infrastructure supporting our health system, appointment scheduling and registration for the vaccine is going to be a critical factor and government might need urgent partnerships with the private sector to create an effective system that can manage this. When developing its vaccine deployment strategy, Zimbabwe needs to be mindful that as long as the virus is not under control in all regions of the country the benefits will be at best short lived. The need for equitable national distribution should be the foundations of the country's vaccination programme. The other essential thing to do is for the government to desist from the temptation of political rhetoric and share more realistic expectations of the number of people they will vaccinate quickly but with consideration of global and national access.

### **IV. Procurement transparency**

The procurement of COVID-19 equipment has been marred by corruption which culminated in the COVIDgate also known as Draxgate where the former Minister of Health Moyo and top executives from the government-owned National Pharmaceutical Company (NatPharm) handpicked companies not on the procurement register to supply drugs worth millions of dollars during the COVID-19 national emergency. With such a background, the government has to put in mechanisms of ensuring there is transparency in the procurement of these vaccines. All the information should be provided openly and with public especially the media and parliament accessing information that empowers them to play their oversight role in how these public resources are managed.

### **V. Distribution transparency**

With scarce supplies, prioritisation is important. The government should account for the choices that it takes in the distribution of the Vaccine and these should be based on a clearly defined criteria that is also adequately communicated with the general public. Given that the COVID-19 Vaccine has more than 1 dose distribution has to be done in an effective and transparent way. The government has to set up a clear system that openly shows how very clear estimate of how many doses clinics will receive and how much they will be sent each week for the next few weeks to manage supply variability. Such a system will also build confidence in the system as people are very aware of information about supply and inventory across the different levels of government. This will also become a critical measure of whether there is equity in the way the vaccines are distributed across the country. Overall, the government should ensure peer-reviewed profiles based on needs and vulnerability so as to create an equitable, ethical, and uniform process for distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Overall, a successful COVID-19 vaccination roll out is one grounded in integrity, transparency, and trust which will improve the public's faith in the competence and intentions of the government.

**For more information contact us:**

9 Bargate Road, Mount Pleasant, Harare Email: [zimcodd@zimcodd.co.zw](mailto:zimcodd@zimcodd.co.zw) Tel/Fax: +263-242-776830 Website: [www.zimcodd.org](http://www.zimcodd.org) Facebook Page: Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development Twitter @zimcodd1