



Investing In People for Social and Economic Justice

WEEKEND READER

Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development

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COVID-19 not just a health issue



Whilst coronavirus can be regarded entirely as a health issue, it is also critical for us to look at the financial implications that comes along fighting the virus. The fight against coronavirus involves mobilisation and utilisation of huge sums of money drawn from the “national purse”.

On 17 March 2020, the President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson D. Mnangagwa declared coronavirus a national disaster to allow for the government to mobilise resources and take necessary measures in dealing with the pandemic. The President indicated that resources originally earmarked for the postponed national events and celebrations including the National Independence Day and the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) will be redirected towards strengthening defences against coronavirus.

Acknowledging the huge contribution from development partners and private sector in augmenting government efforts, the stewardship over such resources is as important as the resources themselves. It is therefore imperative that during this planning and preparatory phase that a clear Disaster Risk

Reduction (DRR) Management Framework underpinned on transparency and accountability is put in place to ensure effective and prudent use of public funds in the fight against the pandemic corona virus.

Transparency and accountability key in the fight against coronavirus

In the face of a looming life-threatening coronavirus, transparency and accountability forms the basis upon which this “war” can be won. This involves public disclosure of the ultimate sources of revenue (including tax and non-tax revenue and funds from local, bilateral, international and multilateral partners), allocations and expenditures to allow for checks and balances. This comes at the backdrop of the rampant abuse, diversion and misuse of public funds in Zimbabwe as highlighted in the 2018 Auditor General’s Report.

The fight against coronavirus will of course involve immense procurement of testing kits and other accessories for screening, handling, testing and treatment of the virus. The bulk of the resource leakages from the public coffers are evident in public procurement due to noncompliance of public procurement procedures, and rules.

Precautionary measures must be taken to guard against ‘tenderpreneurship’ in which some individuals and companies win government tenders without going through the open contracting processes as provided for in Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act of 2017. ‘Tenderpreneurship’ has become a conduit of siphoning resources from the public purse as with repeated cases of unsupported expenditures and payment of goods not delivered. Vivid memories 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.

Recommendations

ZIMCODD is therefore recommending that the government of Zimbabwe undertake the following;

1. Develop a standardized approach and methodology for tracking expenditures for COVID-19 including for Research and Development.
2. Develop and implement a systematic monitoring framework for development assistance and domestic resources spent on the fight against coronavirus.
3. Respect and implement the provisions of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act of 2017.
4. Disclose sources of revenue (tax and non-tax revenue and funds from local, bilateral, international and multilateral partners), allocations and expenditures to the public on a weekly basis.
5. Beneficial ownership disclosure as an integral process of the tendering and procurement process is also important.

As we continue hoping for the best for all our partners and families, we advise that you take all the necessary caution and measures to protect yourselves, colleagues and loved ones from the virus. Remember to wash your hands, avoid public gatherings and avoid unnecessary travels within and beyond the country.

Let us remain resolute and united in these difficult times. At the end of it all, this reminds us of the importance of the Right to Health, which we all must fight for and realise in our life time.