

Open Letter to President Mnangagwa on a Covid-19 Response and Recovery driven by Openness to build TRUST

Dear President Mnangagwa,

We commend you and your government for the public health measures you have taken this far to respond to the global Covid-19 pandemic. We also welcome measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on people's livelihood. If these measures are implemented with full government support and in an open and accountable manner, they have the potential to protect lives and protect livelihoods for millions of Zimbabweans.

Protecting lives and protecting livelihoods are the twin pillars of the global response to Covid-19. The response requires large-scale social and economic interventions that place citizens at the center. The ***Fiscal Mitigation Measures*** announced by the Treasury require transparency to bolster trust between all levels of government, business and citizens. It has the potential to usher structural reforms to the economy and society that can strengthen Zimbabwe's resilience to Covid-19 for the long-term. To achieve openness and accountability here are some thoughts:

Fiscal Resource Mobilization and Spending: The pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on Zimbabwe's health system, which requires massive injection of resources. The financial resources from the fiscus including the ZWL\$500 million for response, ZWL\$50 million to PSMAS announced by Treasury will be effective if implemented through transparent processes to citizens and the international community using open budget principles. Transparent implementation will ensure resources go to their intended beneficiaries, minimize inefficiency, corruption and the huge administrative costs that usually gobble funds at the expense of the beneficiaries. As Treasury plans to reprioritize the budget to respond to Covid-19 it is vital that the process responds to the social relief of citizens and encourages civic oversight of these funds. Lessons from countries like Brazil and South Africa prove that transparency and tracking expenditures ensures that essential public services are delivered to the people that need it the most. Brazil created a page on its transparency portal to show resource mobilization, track planned and actual government spending on coronavirus relief efforts. **Zimbabwe could follow such examples to publish in real-time all resources mobilized for Covid-19 and share all expenditures within three weeks of disbursement in easily readable formats.**

Procurement of Medical Supplies: The pandemic has shown that rapid response is critical as also highlighted by Treasury and the PRAZ regulatory arrangement. However, there is evidence that countries are struggling with over-pricing, collapsing supply chains and corruption in health procurement and other needed supplies. Zimbabwe is not immune to these challenges and this risks trust in government efforts. The PRAZ regulatory arrangement needs to be embedded in transparency, monitoring and accountability to ensure that individuals and/or organizations do not take advantage of the emergency and consequent relaxation of procurement rules. For example, in Ukraine the government is publishing all emergency contracts in open data formats. This has empowered civil society to develop a business intelligence tool to monitor medical procurement and emergency spending. Ukraine's open contracting reforms have saved the



government US\$1 billion in two years. **PRAZ could follow such an example to make all emergency contracts public, building on the procurement portal and publishing them in a single, online registry.**

Development Aid Support: Zimbabwe is working with development partners to complement the government's efforts to respond to Covid-19. According to the IMF, Zimbabwe is looking to raise US\$220 million to respond to the pandemic and for humanitarian assistance through engagement with development partners. It is vital for the government to put in place transparency and accountability measures to ensure that this assistance truly reaches the intended beneficiaries. Enhancing openness, oversight and accountability can help in building trust with development partners and citizens alike. **We encourage the government to publish in real-time budget and non-budget support from development partners, as well as debt relief savings such as that provided by G20 countries.** In Kaduna, Nigeria, the state government partnered with citizens to become the eyes and ears. Using a mobile app, citizens upload photos and provide feedback on projects like schools and health clinics. In just two years, Kaduna reported a record completion of 450 schools, 250 health clinics, and a 20 percent reduction in maternal mortality.

Stimulus for Local Companies: We applaud the government's commitment to assist local SMEs through programmes such as the Youth Relief Support. To make this effective, internal controls must be observed by keeping audit trails and ensure the Auditor General's office has real-time oversight. This requires transparency over who gets the bailouts and subsidies, how the decisions were made, and whether the money is fairly distributed, including to women and informal businesses. A clearly defined criterion for beneficiaries should be developed and widely published; the application and adjudication process should be made public. The Treasury - working with the Financial Intelligence Centre - will need to collect information on the ultimate beneficial owners of companies receiving bailouts to guard against the funds being used to reward political networks. For instance, countries like Nigeria and Ghana are opening up who really owns and controls companies - allowing journalists and civil society to follow the money, report political and illicit dealings. **For the stimulus to be effective it is vital for the government using the new Companies Act to collect and publish in open formats company ownership/beneficial ownership information to guard against political influence.**

Providing Citizens with timely and accurate Information: Access to information is central to achieve effective response and recovery from Covid-19. Lessons from the early stages of the virus' global spread have shown the devastating effects of disinformation and limiting information to citizens. Some governments downplayed or hid the seriousness of the pandemic, delayed disclosure of risks and threats to citizens, jeopardizing citizens' lives that could have been saved with proactive disclosure. **Access to timely and accurate information enables citizens to trust the government's measures to respond to Covid-19, encouraging citizens to be active participants in supporting government efforts.** For instance, Taiwan managed to maintain remarkably low levels of infections and deaths not through top-down control, but through government transparency, which built public trust and empowered social coordination. Through the Face Mask Map, the government disseminated real-time, location-specific data to the public on mask availability, empowering citizens to collaborate and reallocate rations through trades and donations to those who most needed them.



Mr President, there is an opportunity for Zimbabwe to become one of the regional leaders with a post-Covid recovery approach that is driven by openness and accountability, which has dividends for government, business and citizens. At the core of government's response and recovery approach should be citizens in order to gain their trust and that of the international community. This is the opportunity Mr, President to harness and deploy all social accountability tools at all levels of government and build one Zimbabwe based on trust and collective action. It is citizens that are being affected by the pandemic, it is the same citizens that should become central to the government's response and recovery measures.

Signed

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