

KNOWLEDGE ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTION STUDY ON COVID -19 FUNDING IN ZIMBABWE

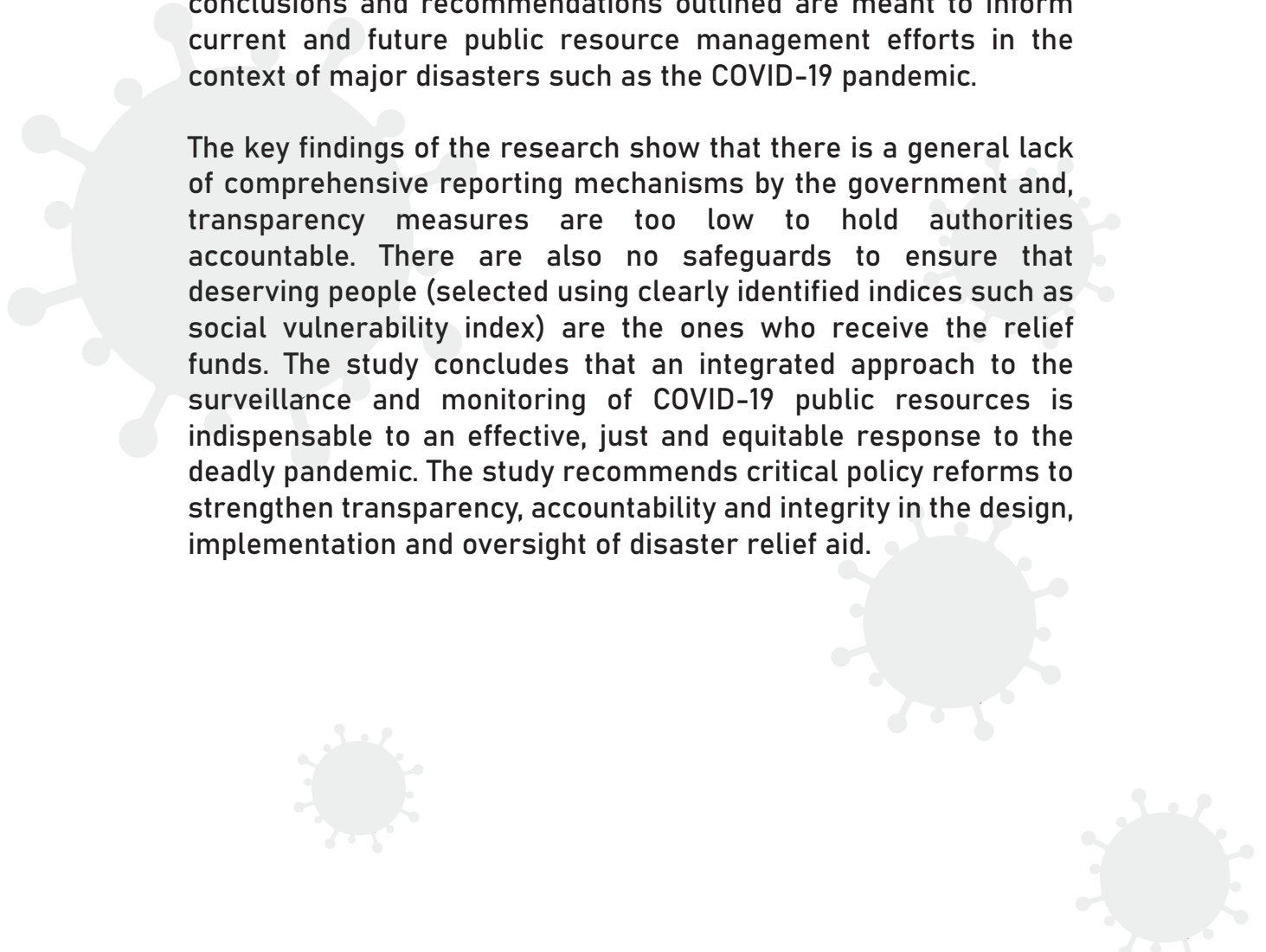


“Celebrating 20 years of People driven Social and Economic Justice in Zimbabwe”

Executive Summary

This situational report objectively analyses citizens Knowledge, Perceptions and Attitudes towards COVID-19 public resources. COVID-19 public resources are broadly understood as the resources formally allocated for the purposes of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on various sectors of business and society. The study utilized a mixed method approach to survey a purposively sampled group of 31 respondents. The findings, conclusions and recommendations outlined are meant to inform current and future public resource management efforts in the context of major disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The key findings of the research show that there is a general lack of comprehensive reporting mechanisms by the government and, transparency measures are too low to hold authorities accountable. There are also no safeguards to ensure that deserving people (selected using clearly identified indices such as social vulnerability index) are the ones who receive the relief funds. The study concludes that an integrated approach to the surveillance and monitoring of COVID-19 public resources is indispensable to an effective, just and equitable response to the deadly pandemic. The study recommends critical policy reforms to strengthen transparency, accountability and integrity in the design, implementation and oversight of disaster relief aid.

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Background and context of the Study

The COVID-19 global pandemic is posing a human tragedy in both developing and developed countries. However, the effects of the pandemic are disproportionately felt by developing countries such as Zimbabwe, which are already struggling with multiple socio-economic challenges such as high unemployment and worsening extreme poverty, a dented health sector, crippling domestic and external public debt, and heavy economic reliance on the rain-fed agricultural sector and mining.

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has instituted a handful of institutional, policy and operational measures to ameliorate the impacts of the pandemic to the ailing economy as well as to the vulnerable members of the society. The Zimbabwe Preparedness and Response Plan – COVID-19¹ informs the Government of Zimbabwe's operational policy and operational measures to ameliorate the impacts of the pandemic. The Plan premises the response on the following principles: 'limiting human-to-human transmission, including to health personnel; early identification, isolation and care for patients; risk communication and community engagement; narrowing knowledge gaps in disease transmission, prevention and treatment; and minimizing social and economic impact.'

Various COVID-19 resource streams targeting various sectors of the economy and society as part of the National COVID-19 Response and Recovery Strategy have been announced. As at January 2021, a total of US\$639,021,159 had been pledged from various sources to fund Zimbabwe's COVID-19 response and recovery. Of this amount, US\$349,361,492 (55%) was honoured and US\$247,061,438 (71%) has been spent.

Amongst the funds committed, the government unveiled a RTGS\$ 18 billion Economic Recovery and Stimulus Package aimed at revitalizing the economy and providing relief to individuals, families, small businesses and industries impacted by the economic slowdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The main aim was to provide liquidity support to all the productive sectors of the economy and protect employment through prevention and minimization of COVID-19 effects.

However, past experiences in Zimbabwe point to rampant abuse of public funds and resources as well as flouting of regulations during

¹ Ministry of Health and Child Care (2020): Zimbabwe Preparedness and Response Plan– COVID -2019



disaster contexts. Already, there are cases before the courts in which public officials are accused of embezzling COVID-19 funds or fraudulently enriching themselves. This precipitates the need to enhance transparency and accountability in COVID-19 public resourcing. It is against this background that ZIMCODD commissioned a Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices survey to evaluate social and economic justice discharged in managing COVID-19 stimulus packages availed to cushion the industry and the vulnerable. The overall goal of the study is to inform future efforts to safeguard public resources disbursed for disaster relief.

The study is one of a series of researches ZIMCODD is doing on monitoring and tracking COVID-19 resource management in Zimbabwe.

Methodology

Documents

The study used a cross-sectional design that incorporated a mix of both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data on COVID-19 resourcing in the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe (Harare, Masvingo, Bulawayo, Manicaland, Mashonaland-East, Mashonaland West, and Matabeleland South). The quantitative data was collected through a cross-sectional survey. Due to time and resource constraints, a structured questionnaire with both open and closed questions was administered to respondents. The respondents, by virtue of their unique lockdown experiences and involvement in the COVID-19 stimulus package activities within a given sector (informal sector or the society in general), possess experiences and information on specific areas of enquiry.

The questionnaire comprised of five parts: (1) Demographic data of the surveyed participants; (2) Knowledge and conceptions about COVID-19 relief aid; (3) Attitudes towards COVID-19 resourcing; and (4) Practices pertinent to COVID-19 resourcing and (5) Recommendations

The qualitative data for the study was collected through reviewing the contents of selected documents. The purpose of the review was to place its analysis into the appropriate programmatic context.

The following are some key documents that were reviewed as part of this study;

1. Media reports on COVID-19
2. Other local, regional and global publications on COVID-19 resourcing and policing.
3. Government publications on COVID 19 relief funds



Survey Sampling Procedure

Based on the objectives of the study, the survey population inferred from an extensive range of stakeholders including duty bearers, oversight bodies, and implementing agencies. The following selected Key Informants' were asked to share their Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices on the issues of COVID-19 public resources. The general classification of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Sectors	Key Informants
Informal Sector	-Head of associations representing vendors e.g. Glenview's Tagarika, Gazaland, Mbare Musika, Sakubva, Bulawayo, Muccheke, Kudzanai, etc
	-Informal miners
	-Transport operators
	-Informal retailers and street vendors
SME Sector	-Associations of SMEs
Health Sector	Leadership at Covid treatment and quarantine centres
Vulnerable Groups	Head of institutions representing Persons with Disability
Parliament	MPs representing different constituencies, Public Accounts Committee
Churches	Zimbabwe Council of Churches, UDACIZA, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference

Recruitment procedure

All participants were recruited through an email invitation. The email invitation to participate in the study contained information detailing the title and purpose of study, the criteria for qualifying to participate, the nature of participation expected of them, benefits of the research, participants rights as well as the contact information they can use if they needed any clarification before consenting to participate.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected using Kobo Toolbox, an Open Data Kit platform and synchronized for analysis in Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS) version 23. A link with the questionnaire was sent to the research participants via email or WhatsApp. Kobo Toolbox was selected because of its ability to do a preliminary analysis of the data and to filter data and perform consistency checks, thereby

producing a quality dataset. SPSS was used for further analysis of quantitative data generated through the checklists and questionnaires. Relevant tables, graphs and charts were constructed to illustrate statistical findings that responded to research questions implied or stated.

Qualitative data solicited through the structured questionnaires was analysed using the Thematic Content Analysis Technique. In this respect, the study employed the convergence of opinion approach to the qualitative groups. *Ceteris paribus*, recurring themes pointed to a common phenomenon, while other non-recurring themes were put to further analysis as they pointed to new and emerging features of the research.

Characterization of Respondents

Location of the respondents

The study made a deliberate effort to draw the respondents from across all the provinces to get a balanced view on the management of COVID-19 resources. However, despite the efforts to get representation across the country, 33% respondents were from Harare, followed by 28% from Masvingo and 17% from Manicaland, with the remainder 22% of the respondents coming from other remaining provinces.

Respondents by Sector

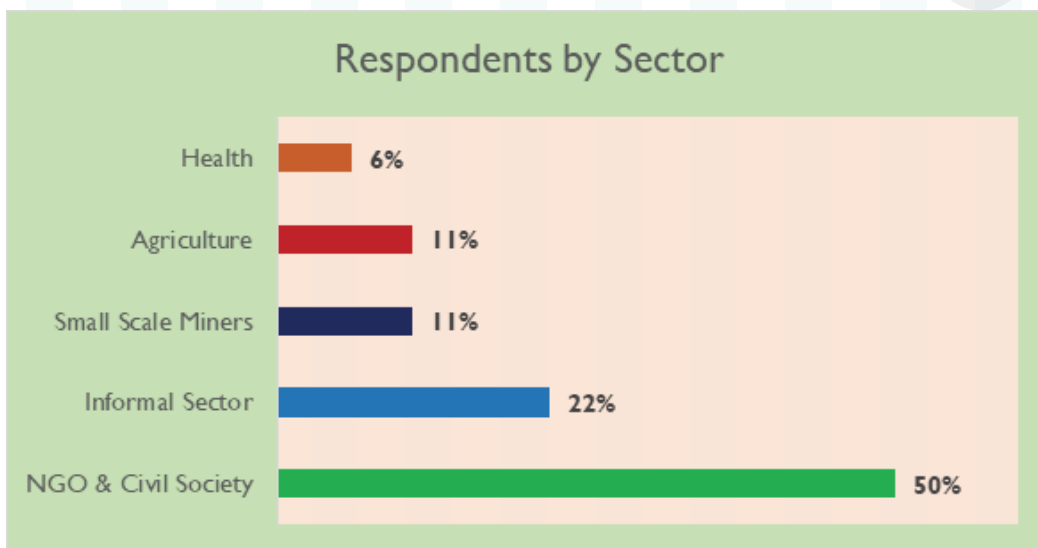


Figure 1: Distribution of respondents by sector

The Key Informants who participated in this study were drawn from various sectors of the economy. The majority, 50% of the respondents came from the NGOs and Civil Society, followed by those in the informal sector (22%), Small Scale Miners (11%), Agriculture (11%) and Health (6%).



Research Findings

COVID-19 is not Zimbabwe's first disaster. It trailed in the wake of other man-made, natural and health disasters including droughts, cholera outbreaks, typhoid, floods, road traffic accidents, disease outbreaks, mining and other industrial accidents, forest fires and stadia stampedes². Although literature is afloat with studies on the COVID-19 pandemic³, most of these researches conducted so far are silent on the governance of COVID-19 public resources. This has made it difficult, if not impossible, for citizens, economic players, and other relevant stakeholders to understand both the impact of the Government's rescue packages and the actions advanced by authorities to ensure that the distribution and utilisation of COVID-19 resources are both transparent and public-spirited.

In the case of Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Health and Child Care has made great strides to give daily updates on COVID-19 cases and news but there exists data paucity with regards to the administration, utilisation, and management of Government-oriented COVID-19 relief. To this end, this research provides cardinal insights on COVID-19 public resource management in Zimbabwe.

1. Respondents' Knowledge of COVID-19 Relief Funds

Knowledge has a vital role to play in transforming societies by encouraging critical conversations and developing responsible and engaged citizens⁴. The study noted that a significant percentage (61%) of the respondents demonstrated the knowledge of the various COVID-19 relief funds released by the government. The most common and known relief fund was the COVID-19 Cash Relief Fund (78%), National Disaster Fund (50%), Parliament of Zimbabwe-Sanitizer Donations (44%),

² Oxfam International November 2019

³ Bates et al. 2020; van Daalen et al. 2020; Tamang et al. 2020; Lee et al. 2021

⁴ <https://www.nrf.ac.za/media-room/news/projects-announced-covid-19-africa-rapid-grant-fund>

Government fund on PPE for schools (33%) and the least known being the Government Fund on Industry stimulus (22%).

The study results indicate that a 39% of respondents were in total darkness pertaining to the release of various COVID-19 relief funds by the Government. Taking a leaf from other countries, for example in South Africa, the government has provided clear information on the stimulus packaged and various provisions for accessing such funds⁵. Additionally, developed countries like USA, have developed systems to enable the citizens to gather as much information on where and which government COVID-19 rescue package to access⁶.

Not all of the respondents (61%) who claimed knowledge of the disbursed COVID-19 relief funds could precisely identify various streams of the same. Due to high levels of poverty in the economy, especially in the urban areas⁷, the cash relief fund appeared to be the most prominent as many people aimed to benefit from it. This lack of awareness points toward the absence of effective communication mechanisms by the Government to keep the tax payers in the vital loop of COVID-19 public resourcing. Government is also capitalizing on the paucity of information on various COVID-19 funds to the extent that it is lessening claims from the widest of the population who remain in the dark about the availability of the same. The government faced with the limited resources, serving a few might be the recipe for its inadequate resources.

1. Citizens priorities for COVID-19 relief

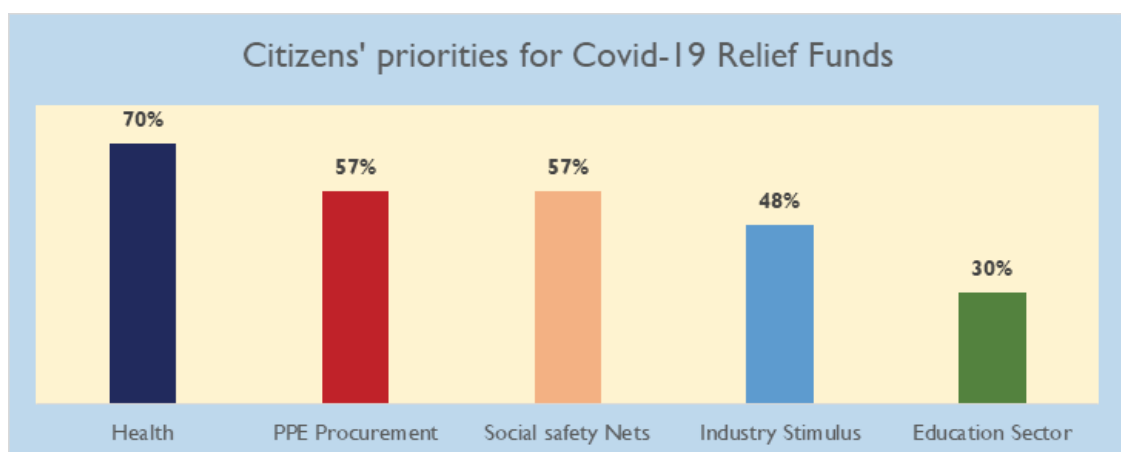


Figure 2: Respondents' perceptions on key priorities for COVID-19 relief funds

⁵ <https://www.whitecase.com/publications/alert/covid-19-south-african-government-financial-assistance-measures>

⁶ <https://learning.candid.org/resources/knowledge-base/covid-19-emergency-financial-resources/>

⁷ United Nations Human Development Report 2019. *Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century Briefing note for countries on the 2019 Human Development Report*

As presented in Figure 2, the respondents highlighted that, Health (70%), PPE procurement (57%) and Social Safety nets (57%) should be prioritized ahead of Industry Stimulus (48%) and Education (30%) on the COVID-19 relief funds. This is in line with a UN strategy on COVID 19 which prioritizes the need to protect the front line first by availing PPE and cushioning the vulnerable⁸.

However, the state of the government hospitals and the conditions of service for the Front-line workers requires urgent attention. The working conditions for health care workers are already dire, with a shortage of resources and medicinal supplies. Health facilities are understaffed, have low standards of occupational health and safety, and do not all have constant access to water . Furthermore, health workers are paid shockingly low wages. All this demonstrates the government misplaced priorities in such a time of a crisis evidenced by the neglect of critical sectors such the health and social welfare. Similar sentiments emerged from documentary findings that highlighted general neglect of critical sectors that needed urgent government attention (CITE 2020; Markworth et al. 2020).

While there is an appreciation of the Government's focus on food aid and stimulating economic production, concerns were raised over underfunding and non-prioritization of critical healthcare issues as well as neglect of vulnerable groups (Markworth et al. 2020). Though the Treasury (GoZ) set aside resources to cover 1 million vulnerable households under the Cash Transfer Programme this cushioned the vulnerable communities only to the extent of being able to buy a 10 kg bag of mealie meal (Nhapi and Dhemba, 2020). Concerning the Industrial stimulus packages, Gukumure and Oosterom (2020) observe that the informal businesses were largely neglected and left out without any coping strategy as they continued to face macro-economic missteps compounded with the effects of the COVID-19.

The informal sector was neglected from being eligible for the stimulus package due to registration concerns regardless of the point that it constitutes more than 60% of the economic activities in the country (CITE 2020) and government has moved to tax the very same informal sector that it doesn't support. It is not clear which businesses benefited from the package and how those businesses qualified for relief funds as no report

⁸ United Nations, 2020. United Nations Comprehensive Response to Covid19: Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better. United Nations Publications.

⁹ <https://publicservices.international/resources/news/zimbabwehealth-workers-demand-ppe-and-water?id=10676&lang=en>



was availed by the government.

The implication of these results is the lack of transparency in the selection and allocation of the stimulus relief packages. Limited fiscal transparency is also manifested through the alleged utilization of sophisticated algorithms by the Minister of Finance in the allocation of funds which was not clear and transparent to the general populace¹⁰. The absence of a data base of beneficiaries of the COVID-19 rescue packages invokes enquiries on whether the government disbursed resources to the rightful purpose or not.

2. Selection Criteria of the Beneficiaries

The selection criteria of the intended beneficiaries for the COVID-19 relief funds remained murky, with the government having indicated using a sophisticated algorithm to select vulnerable members of the community to benefit from the cash relief funds. The same goes for other funds, like the industry stimulus package, the selection criteria were not made public for scrutiny.

72% of the respondents indicated that, they were not sure about the selection criteria of the COVID-19 relief funds.

Political manipulation was evident, with 44% of the respondents indicating the selection criteria being done along the political parties. This is not the first time; the government has been pointed on partisan distribution of public resources. The case of Zaka villagers claiming that they are being denied access to free agricultural inputs under the Pfumvudza programme on the basis that they are opposition¹¹. Similar trends were also noted during Cyclone Idai aid distribution in Chimanimani.

The study shows that the Social Welfare Department (33%), District Development Coordinator (28%) and Associations (28%) were involved in the selection of the beneficiaries.

These results entail a lot of underhand and corrupt dealings around the selection of the beneficiaries of such government programs. Lack of openness and unclear parameters and guidelines on beneficiary selection promotes corruption and abuse of the public funds. The study results show

¹⁰ Nhapi, T.G and Dhemba, J .2020. The conundrum of old age and COVID -19 responses in Eswatini and Zimbabwe. *International Social Work*, 63(6), 842-846.

¹¹ <http://www.tellzim.com/2020/10/pfumvudza-inputs-being-politicized-in.html>

¹² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/29/zimbabwe-should-investigate-allegations-aid-abuse#>

¹³ 2007 The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank

the existence of a huge knowledge gap with regards to the criteria deployed by the Government for the selection of beneficiaries for COVID-19 relief. The majority of the respondents (72%) demonstrated a lack of awareness of how the COVID-19 funds were allocated to the general public. Notably, the Government did not clarify key nationally-defined standards to be employed in targeting deserving beneficiaries.

This is in contrast with what other countries for example South Africa are managing such health disasters. The South African government stimulus packaged was clear and beneficiary selection criteria was also made available to the citizens .

¹⁴ Borat et al.2021, Social Assistance Amidst the COVID 19 Epidemic in South Africa: A Policy Assessment, South Africa Journal of Economics, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sajc.12277>

3. Targeting of COVID-19 Relief Beneficiaries

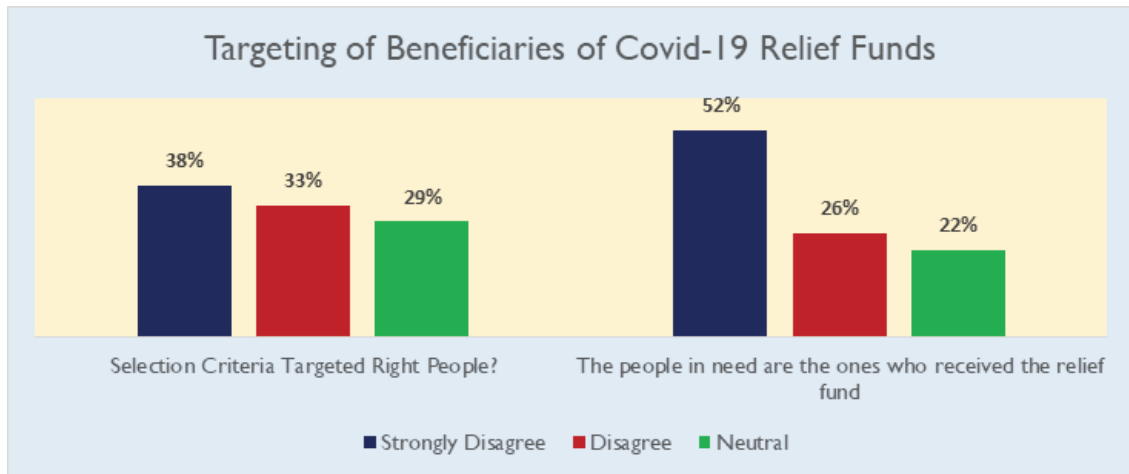


Figure 3: Targeting of Beneficiaries of COVID-19 Relief Funds

The respondents indicated that the targeting of the COVID-19 Relief funds had loopholes including partisan identification of beneficiaries, lack of an objective social vulnerability assessment framework, lack of a comprehensive database of the recipients, as well as the absence of proper declaration of the proceeds received by the beneficiaries. Seventy-one percent of the respondents disagreed to the notion that the relief funds targeted the right people. In addition, 78% of the respondents also disagreed to the notion that those who benefitted from the COVID-19 relief funds were the ones who deserved it. This points to the fact that; the government did not do a thorough job in reaching the deserving beneficiaries for the relief fund.

The study alludes to a commonly held view amongst respondents that the targeting of COVID-19 beneficiaries was heavily influenced by political partisanship and corruption. The research findings dovetail with documentary evidence that unraveled allegations peddled against high profile politicians for high-jacking COVID-19 aid which was meant to cushion those disadvantaged by the COVID-19 pandemic (Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa (ACT-SA) 2020).

Even though the Government devoted some rescue packages to support food-related interventions and ensure that the vulnerable are food secure (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development; Ramabhai 2020), many citizens continued struggling to cope with the hard times of the COVID-19 pandemic as food aid was allegedly distributed on 'party card'¹⁵. This

¹⁵ Mavhunga, C. 2020. *Amnesty: Zimbabwe Playing Politics with Food Aid Distribution*. Voice of America (VOA) Blogs.



A group of beneficiaries in the Goromonzi Circuit in Harare, Zimbabwe, celebrates after receiving food hampers provided through a United Methodist Committee on Relief Sheltering in Love grant. Photo by Kudzai Chingwe, UM News.

partisan culture not only undermines the accessibility of food to the vulnerable but also undermines public accountability and institutional legitimacy in the handling of public resources.

Consistent with our findings, a study by Mavhunga (2020) revealed that in most rural areas, local leaders denied access to food aid to members who did not belong to the ruling party yet the food aid was supposed to be given to every citizen in need of food assistance. Likewise, a survey by ALAC-SA (2020) reported that some government officials have been diverting COVID-19 related food aid to the black market where the food was sold at twice the official

subsidized price.

The ALAC-SA (2020) further revealed that despite the purported distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for frontline health workers, there is still shortage of PPE and most of Frontline workers are forced to work without PPEs while some political elites would be seen walking in public with the PPE.

Against this backdrop, the integrity of public officials and implementing agents in the distribution of the COVID-19 aid is questionable.

4. Transparency in the management of COVID-19 Relief Funds

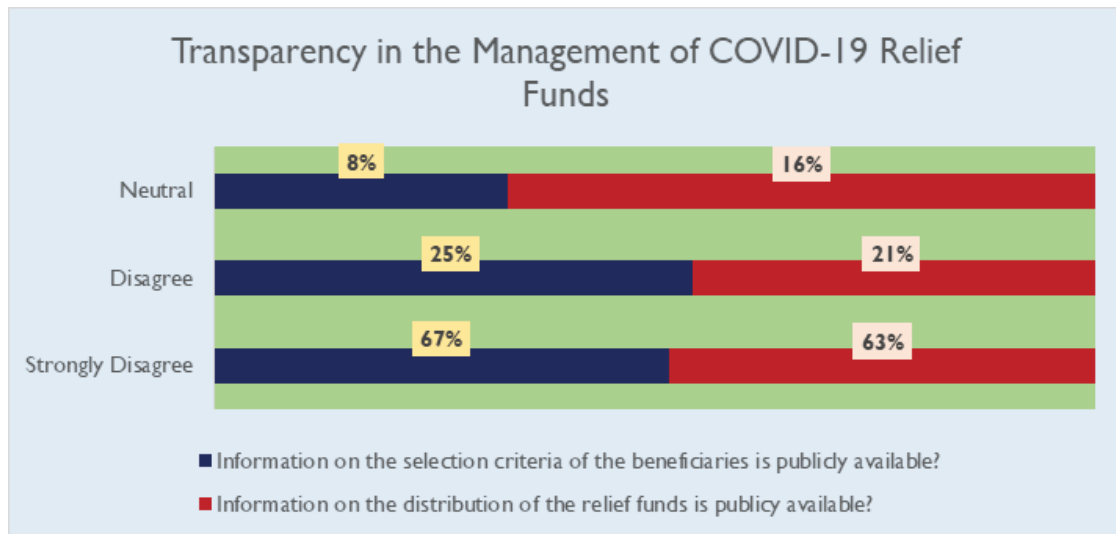


Figure 4: Transparency in the Management of COVID-19 Relief Funds

The findings from the study depict that, the majority of the respondents are of the view that, the information on the quantum of resources distributed as relief funds (84%) was not available for public scrutiny. The same can be observed on the information about the selection of the beneficiaries, with 92% of the respondents alluding to the fact that the information is not available for public consumption. This discredits the way the COVID-19 relief funds were managed. Lack of transparency gives prominence to mismanagement, exploitation, and corruption of public resources.

A glaring example of corruption in COVID-19 resource management is the Covid-gate scandal (the 2020 medical supply scandal)¹⁶ which saw the manipulation of the tendering process and inflating of the price of PPE by senior government officials thereby prejudicing a huge chunk of taxpayers who are already burdened with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This raises concern over the credibility of the government in the handling of public funds and confirms the sentiments by Transparency International (2020) that Zimbabwe has been struggling with the localised dual pandemics which are the COVID-19 pandemic and the 'corruption pandemic'.

The findings raise red flags on the availability of monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure that COVID-19 aid reaches the vulnerable and

¹⁶ Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa (ACT-Southern Africa). 2020. *President Mnangagwa Should also Suspend all Individuals Implicated in the Covid-gate Scandal*. Anti-Corruption Trust of Southern Africa (ACT-Southern Africa).

deserving citizens rather than benefiting well-placed and politically-correct individuals.

Corruption continues to thrive and no arrests have been made to date regardless of the existence of oversight institutions such as the parliament, office of the Auditor General, and Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) which are constitutionally and statutorily mandated to safeguard public resources in the country. Evidence from media show that the Government did not take the necessary steps to allow the Office of the Auditor-General to operate in full capacity during the first lockdown period¹⁷. The office was not classified as an essential service and hence delayed in publishing audit reports for the year ending 2020 (Zimbabwe COVID-19 Weekly Monitoring Report, 2-19 October 2020).

To this end, the respondents proposed the involvement of the Auditor General's Office in the distribution of the COVID-19 relief funds to make public all processes of distribution and the timely release of documents by the responsible authorities, showing the benefactors and how the benefactors were chosen as alternative ways of modeling transparency in the management of COVID-19 public resources.

¹⁷ Auditor General rues Covid-19. *The Sunday Mail*. 13 September 2020. Available at <https://www.sundaymail.co.zw>.

5. Transparency and Accountability of COVID-19 Relief Funds

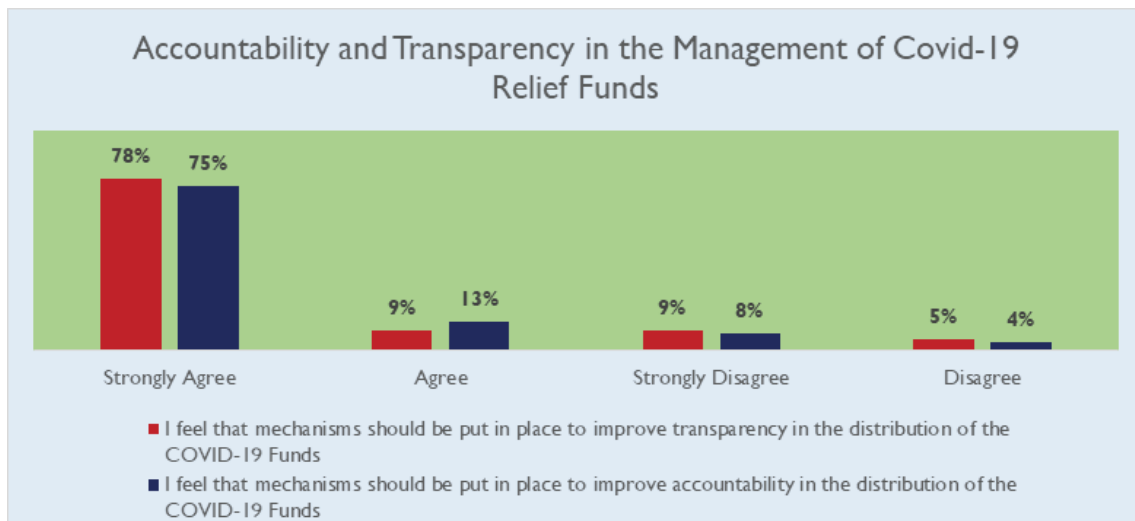


Figure 5: Need for Accountability and Transparency in the Management of COVID-19 Relief Funds

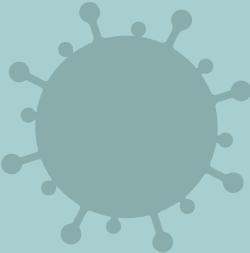
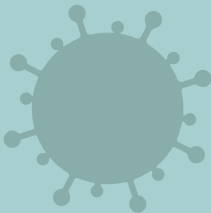
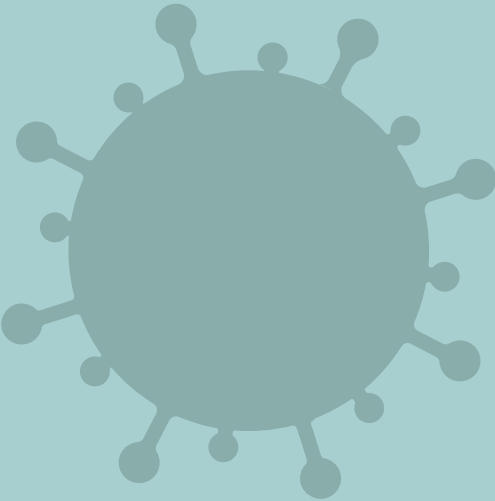
The study noted a great need for accountability and transparency in the management of COVID-19 funds, with respondents strongly feeling the need to improve accountability (75%) and transparency (78%). These survey results, by far, indicate the lack of transparency and accountability in the handling and management of COVID-19 relief aid. This can be gleaned from the bulk of respondents who were in agreement that neither information on the distribution of the relief funds nor information about the selected beneficiaries had been availed to the public domain.

Limited transparency and disclosure of information on how aid beneficiaries were selected, how much was spent on them, and when the resources

were disbursed to them has caused great dissatisfaction among citizens concerning the handling of the COVID-19 aid (Mukeredzi 2020).

This view is supported by Chavhunduka (2020) who reports that there is widespread discontent by the citizens on the limited granular representation of the fiscal transactions that the government incurred with COVID-19 aid to the vulnerable communities. A strong case is therefore built for the Government to adopt stern measures to enhance transparency and accountability in the management of resources for disaster response. This demands total government commitment in both words and deeds.

Recommendations



Zimbabwe has experienced many natural and man-made disasters in recent years. These have included floods, droughts, road accidents, grassland fires and disease outbreaks, e.g. cholera in urban areas, reflect socio-economic and service delivery frailties. The following recommendations are premised to pose Zimbabwean Government to reflect on its Disaster and Risk Management Framework, Policies and Strategies in dealing with disasters, both at hand and those that may occur in future.

1. Strengthen social protection measures:

Stronger social protection mechanisms are required to ameliorate the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on poor and vulnerable groups particularly women, children, youth, people with disabilities and other groups. Universal Basic Income is a key redistributive instrument to provide social protection in an efficient and inclusive manner.

2. Reform the Welfare State:

The distribution of relief measures is still being done in accordance with colonial welfarist principles based on means testing. These mechanisms treat social protection as a burden to society and not a constitutional right. Hence the State's overall contribution to social welfare needs to be reoriented towards a rights-based approaches aimed at ensuring that the State has adequate resources and distributive mechanisms to facilitate the just and equitable distribution of welfare resources. This will also entail pulling together the different mechanisms of delivering aid into a well-coordinated and coherent system accountable to citizens through Parliamentary representatives.

3. Devolve Disaster Risk Reduction processes:

The centralization of the National Covid response and other Disaster Risk Reduction processes contributes to corruption and inefficiency. Centralisation has also resulted in 'one size fits all solution' without adequate attention to regional and sectoral disparities. This can be mitigated through the functional devolution of Civic Protection and Disaster Risk Reduction processes to include autonomous decision making, direct accountability to locally elected representatives, formal recognition of civic participation and budget controls up to reasonable levels.

4. Expand the scope of the Civic Protection fund.

The perennially under resourced Civil Protection Funds needs to be enlarged in terms of scope so that it can provide significant cover for a growing array of unforeseen and complex disasters both natural and man-made. Hence the ring-fencing of specific ribbons akin to the legislation of the transfer of mineral revenues to fund the Sovereign Wealth Fund is required to ensure that Zimbabwe has adequate cover to response to major disasters in a timely and effective manner.

5. Strengthen public feedback and complaints mechanisms:

The absence of a feedback loop enabling policy makers to interact with target groups and respond to emerging issues in real time weakens the overall response to COVID-19. In this regard the leveraging of digital tools to facilitate citizens' feedback on the National COVID response could help the overall responsiveness of response measures to citizens' needs. Likewise, an accessible complaints mechanism could be critical to reduce instances of corruption and partisan exclusion associated with the distribution of some humanitarian support streams.

6. Strengthen research and knowledge gathering on changing trends:

A robust knowledge base is vital to strengthen response mechanisms thus ensuring evidence based, targeted and inclusive interventions to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. Inclusion of research and knowledge gathering expertise in State Universities is an important pathway towards enhancing the knowledge base informing the public response. Additionally, public investment into a robust testing, tracking and tracing system is essential to ensuring that national responses are governed by accurate data disaggregated according to gender, class, region and other important variables.

7. Public disclosure of major procurements and COVID-19 contracts. The outsourcing of a vast array of public goods and services in the context of COVID-19 response gives ground to the entrenchment of corruption and rent-seeking behavior. This can be mitigated through the public disclosure of all contracts for the procurement of COVID related goods and services. A digital public register outlining contract values, services provided and state of delivery will help increase transparency and accountability whilst enhancing competitive bidding and fair pricing for public goods and services.

As evidenced by the study findings, there is a great need for the Government and all implementing agents to ensure timely publication and disclosure of information to all stakeholders to enhance the traceability of public resources. In this respect, section 62 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe gives the right to have access to information to individuals with the objective of enhancing transparency and public accountability. All information on the beneficiaries and how aid was distributed should be availed in the public domain to ensure that every dollar is accounted for and open to public scrutiny.

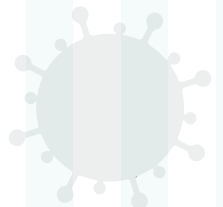
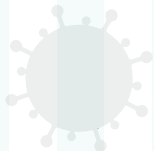
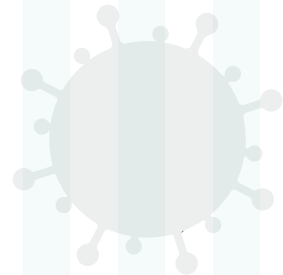
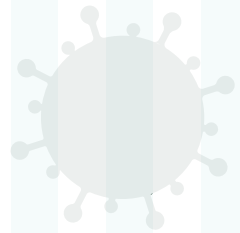
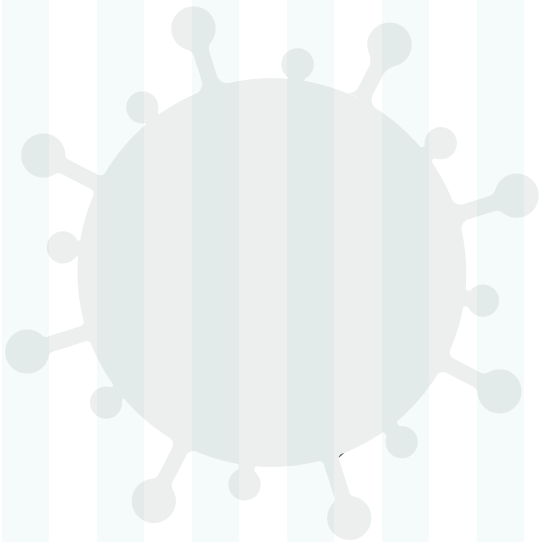
These efforts could be strengthened by further disclosure of information to target beneficiary groups like those living with disabilities, vulnerable communities, and informal sector entities on the frameworks or measures for relief as well as the eligibility criteria for deserving citizens in terms of the aid distribution.

8. Institute High Level Reporting mechanisms.

Adopting a High-Level Reporting Mechanism (HLRM) is one of the tools that can be implemented by the government to spot, report and reduce cases of corruption in the implementation of response initiatives in times of emergencies. The HLRM is a monitoring tool designed by the Basel Institute of Governance together with the Organisation of European Cooperation for Development (OECD) in 2020 (Hans 2020) to allow for stakeholders to detect anomalies in the management of aid. Under this mechanism, any suspicion of anomalies in the utilisation of the resources is communicated and investigated by all actors or stakeholders and addressed immediately. In Zimbabwe, this tool could be adopted in the form of a web-hosted platform where all stakeholders could provide feedback and reports on how public resources are being utilised in communities.



Conclusion



This study examined the Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices related to Government COVID-19 resource management in Zimbabwe. The key findings of the study attested to the lack of transparency in the design, implementation and oversight of Government-oriented COVID-19 relief aid as well as the absence of buy-in from citizens who are ideally the primary stakeholders of public resources. Seemingly, the COVID-19 rescue packages were distributed in a knee-jerk fashion without proper consideration and planning by authorities to enhance monitoring, tracking of the aid resources. The findings bring to the fore the critical need for policy reforms to inculcate transparency and accountability in management of aid resources in future contexts.

Emerging from this study is the observation that there are acute deficiencies in management of COVID-19 public resources. The COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe exposed again the deficiencies in the country's disaster management system¹⁸. A review of the experiences of and response to the COVID-19 shows the government's disaster response approaches in use are more reactive than proactive. Zimbabwe's Disaster Risk Management institutions were stretched by the emergency, exposing capacity and policy gaps in coordination of civil and social protection, humanitarian assistance and primary health care.

Key policies and agencies need urgent improvement to frame more proactive disaster risk management¹⁹. Stronger social protection systems, enhanced disaster risk management funding, as well as flushing out corruption are critical for Zimbabwe's ability to deal effectively with future health- induced disasters.

The Government must adopt high-level report mechanisms, ensure timely publication and disclosure of information to the public and all stakeholders, enact the whistleblower protection policy, strengthen oversight institutions, establish COVID-19 resource monitoring committees, include all stakeholders in the designing, and implementation of the mainstream interventions in the distribution and utilization of COVID-19 relief aid. An open government approach to disaster response will enable evidence-based targeting and inclusive distribution of public resource aid.

¹⁸ Chanza et al, 2020. Closing the Gaps in Disaster Management and Response: Drawing on Local Experiences with Cyclone Idai in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe, *Int J Disaster Risk Sci* (2020) 11:655–666, www.ijdrs.com
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¹⁹ Oxfam International November 2019

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About ZIMCODD

Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) is a social and economic justice coalition established in February 2000. It is dedicated to facilitating citizens' involvement, through their sectors and as activists in making public policy and practice pro-people and sustainable.

ZIMCODD views indebtedness, the unfair local and global trade regime, tax injustices, unsustainable natural resource exploitation and lack of democratic, people-centered social economic and political governance as root causes of the socio-economic crises in Zimbabwe and the world at large. Drawing from community-based livelihood experiences of its membership,

ZIMCODD implements programmes aimed at delivering the following objectives:

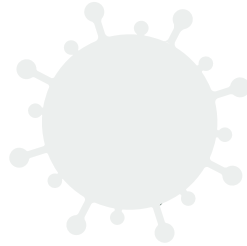
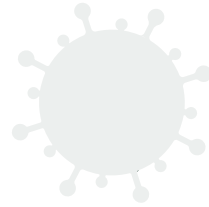
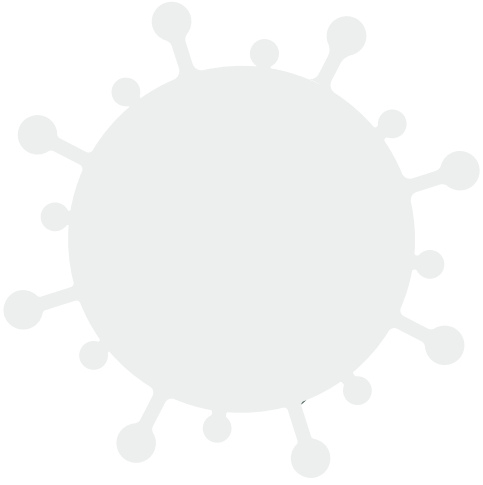
- To raise the level of economic literacy among ZIMCODD members and citizens to include views and participation of grassroots and marginalised communities.
- To facilitate research, lobbying and advocacy in order to raise the level of economic literacy of citizens.
- To formulate credible and sustainable economic and social policy alternatives.
- To develop a national coalition and facilitate the building of a vibrant movement for social and economic justice.

Vision

Sustainable socio-economic justice in Zimbabwe through a vibrant people-based movement.

Mission

To take action in redressing the debt burden and social and economic injustices through formulation and promotion of alternative policies to the neo-liberal agenda.



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