

BreakFree

BreakFree

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ZIMCODD
ZIMBABWE COALITION ON DEBT & DEVELOPMENT

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From the Director's Desk

We have titled this edition of the Break Free newsletter "Community Voices on the Current Socio-Economic Status" to capture our thrust of ensuring that the voices of ordinary citizens that we work with is prominent. The edition provides space primarily for ZIMCODD Social and Economic Justice Ambassadors (SEJAs) and Community Resource Monitoring Agents (CORAs) to share perspectives and experiences around social and economic realities that they are currently facing. To differentiate itself from other ZIMCODD publications, the edition will be presented from the voices of the community members because of their centrality to the work that we do.

Our SEJAs and CORAs responded to our call from the last edition of having more focus on the community voices rather than dominate with our "expert" lenses as development practitioners and this edition is testimony that the communities know best how to tell their own stories.

Although the edition opens with a look at a snap survey done on debt burden affecting local authorities, four themes dominate this edition. The themes reflect the status of the socio-economic and political status of our country. Most of the articles explore the issue of COVID-19 with a sharp focus on vaccines both from the vaccine diplomacy angle, access challenges as well as the ongoing challenges that affect uptake. Discussed and debated from different angles, the issue of vaccines is adequately covered and presents one with a key snippet of how the situation looks like. It is our hope that policy makers and civil society

players will find time to read this edition and pick some of the important issues for policy and practice reform.

The SEJAs and CORAs also took time to review the progress or lack thereof in the implementation of the National Development Strategy (NDS) 1. These articles had a specific focus on youth and employment creation as one of the promises made in this country's development blueprint. Although the authors acknowledge the significance of the COVID-19 to the implementation of NDS1, they don't run short in pointing to further challenges that are causing the stagnation and redundancy of the policy.

The third issue that dominates this edition is the unjust demolitions of vendors' stalls and houses by the council of Harare. This emotive issue is presented in multiple dimensions to tackle both the illegality of the action as well as the inhumane nature of its execution. Calls are made for the council and government to put people at the centre of their policy making and policy implementation.

Coinciding with the belated release of the 2019 Auditor general's report, this edition also features prominently citizens' perspectives on the findings from the report and their implications on how the country manages its public resources. Lastly, the edition profiles some of the work that we are doing under our regional work under the SAPSN where focus is on a Market Access Campaign that seeks to improve smallholder farmers' livelihoods.

We hope you will enjoy the read and as always, we are open to your feedback and suggestions so that we continue to improve and produce a publication that you find utility in.

Sincerely, 

Zimbabwe is in debt distress which is worsened by how the debt status has remained opaque. While international best practices promote sharing of public debt information with taxpayers, Zimbabwe has not been transparently declaring public debt to its citizens at both the central government and local government levels.

The scale and magnitude of Zimbabwe's debt stock is largely unknown with Ministry of Finance presenting figures that have been highly contested by civil society and the academia. However, what is clear is that Zimbabwe's debt situation has been compounded by violation of Constitutional, Public Finance Management and Public Debt Management Act provisions, secrecy, massive debt arrears in external debt, and a lack of an inclusive debt management framework among other factors. Previous research has demonstrated that the combination of a huge public debt stock and the declining national fiscal space has led to the contraction of Zimbabwe's public sector in general and local government service delivery.

Service delivery has been sacrificed to service public debt be it at central or local government level and this has increased vulnerabilities, and further entrenched citizens into abject poverty. This debt crisis has underscored the significance of sound debt management practices.

Against this background, the writers conducted a snapshot survey on local authority debt in Zimbabwe. While there has been growing concern on

the public debt at the national level, local authorities in Zimbabwe have also accumulated unsustainable debt much to the detriment of public service delivery in various local government jurisdictions. In this article, the authors seek to:

- Alert readers on the emergency and growing local government debt.
- Activate and strengthen citizen agency in public financial management at local government level; and
- Recommend measures for sustainable debt management framework in local governments.

Important to note is that over the years and across the 92 local authorities in Zimbabwe, residents have been kept in the dark concerning local authority debt on who the local authorities owe and who owes the local authorities. That notwithstanding, the burden of repaying the debt is shouldered by the ratepayers and the taxpayers, who are the ordinary citizens.

A snapshot survey of 20 local authorities shows creditors of local authorities and what is owed to each creditor, the amount owed versus the amount borrowed, the key drivers of local authority debt and implications of local authority debt on service delivery from a socioeconomic justice perspective.

Table 1: Estimated Local Authority Debt Stock as of 31 May 2021

Local Authority	Creditors
Chirumanzi RDC	ZEDTC, ZINARA, ZINWA, ZIMRA
Hwange local Board	ZIMRA, TELONE, ZINWA, ZETDC, NRZ, Workers
Gweru	Nyaradzo, Cimas etc.
Kwekwe	Government, commerce, industry
Insiza	providers
Epworth	-
Kariba	ZESA, TELONE, ZINWA, C IMAS, Z NFPC, NSSA, ZIMRA, LAPF, salaries
Marondera	ZESA
Chinhoyi	NSSA, ZIMRA, ZESA, TelOne, Champlex, salaries
Gutu	ZESA, ZIMRA, TelOne, salaries
Mutare City	ZESA, salaries
Bulawayo City	-
Harare	ZESA, ZIMRA, China debt, chemicals, statutory
Chitungwiza	ZESA, ZIMRA, Pensions
Chipinge town	ZESA, ZIMRA, N SSA, L APF, Z IMDEF, O ld M utual, Z IMRA (PAYE & VAT)
Gwanda	ZESA, ZINWA
Victoria Falls	ZESA
Rusape	ZETDC, C BZ, ZINWA, T ELONE, E MMA, N SSA, C imas, Workers
Mutasa Rural	City of Mutare, ZESA, Standard Bank
Chimanimani Rural	Forestry Commission, Agritex, EMA, ZINWA, National Parks, Public Works
Total	

Source: Author's compilation (based on research)¹

One key finding is that all the 20 local authorities sampled, have a huge and unsustainable debt. Evidence also show that the major creditors owed by the local authorities are state owned enterprises mainly ZESA Holdings, Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA), Zimbabwe Power Company (ZPC), TELONE, Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (ZETDC), Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA), Zimbabwe National Roads. Administration (ZINARA), National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) and National Social Security Authority (NSSA).

Many governments and quasi-government institutions are not paying rates to local authorities for services rendered particularly water, roads, land development and refuse collection among others. Local authorities fear a political backlash in taking punitive measures against such entities. This explains the service delivery

1. Disclaimer: the data presented in this table are estimates informed by information provided by public officials in the local authorities in question, the councils financial statements and/or media reports accessed by CORAs. Any local authority whose data is misrepresented reserves the right to provide information.

challenges experienced by residents as the capacity of local authorities is heavily hamstrung by alarming debt levels. However, the paradox is that parastatals like ZETDC and ZINWA have been ruthless to local authorities in their debt recovery efforts. Cities like Harare and Gweru have experienced service withdrawal due to non-payment.

Ivan Zhakata Herald Correspondent

Harare City Council is struggling to service its \$ 1.99 billion electricity debt largely coming from water purification from Morton Jaffray Water Works.

This was revealed during a virtual Budget Performance Review meeting held on Wednesday which was attended by various stakeholders and city officials from various departments.

City of Harare budgets manager Mrs Takatadzeyi Musere said the situation has become unsustainable.

He said due to non-payment of bills by ratepayers, the city council was now struggling to clear its debt to service providers, particularly its three major creditors, Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (Zimra), Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission Distribution Company (ZETDC) and the Local Authorities Pension Fund (LAPF).

"As at May 31, 2021, the Council owed a total of ZWL\$210 941 113 to these three (Zimra, ZETDC and LAPF) creditors out of a total creditor figure of ZWL\$222,728,811.

"Residents might be interested to know that on the 17th of May 2021, ZETDC switched us off at our water treatment plants over a debt of ZWL\$143 249 129 and only restored supplies after we had committed ourselves to a monthly payment plan of ZWL\$13m," Makombe said.

Figure 1: Excerpt from The Herald, 5 August 2021

Figure 2: An Excerpt from The Business Times – <https://businessetimes.co.zw/gweru-city-council-chokes-under-zwl760m-debt/>

The reluctance by most local authorities to share debt related information served to confirm the secrecy and opaqueness surrounding public debt in Zimbabwe. This presented challenges in trying to make an analysis of what is owed vis-à-vis what is borrowed at local authority level. At Chirumanzu Rural District Councils, it was revealed that the RDC which is reported to be owing approximately \$6 million to ZEDTC, ZINARA, and ZINWA, was failing to pay its workers including its lower division workers due to the

debt burden. However, it is disturbing to note that the same RDC which is saddled with a debt burden has allegedly been misappropriating funds buying cars and iPhones for its heads of departments as well as financing unjustifiable allowances at the expense of service delivery.

Insiza RDC's debt largely constitute pension for staff and former workers amounting to over ZWL\$2 million dollars. However, Insiza RDC is owed over \$65 million comprising approximately ZWL \$36 million from

stands allocated on a loan basis and tax from mines and farms estimated at approximately ZWL23 million which is due to the local authority. This speaks to weak revenue collection strategies and should be addressed in view of the ballooning debt. When councils fail to recover from their debtors, they consequently fail to pay their creditors and service delivery plunges.

Several service delivery failures have been experienced in different communities resulting from mismanaged local government finances. For Hwange, issues such as uneven water distribution, lack of fire and ambulance, un-serviced roads, land or houses, poor sanitation and poorly resourced clinics have been registered. In Harare most suburbs including Budiriro, Kuwadzana, Glen View have potholed roads, erratic water supplies and no refuse collection.

This is worrying given that in the recent past Budiriro recorded the highest typhoid cases in the country. For Insiza, local authority debt has contributed to the local authority's failure to deliver on its mandate for instance the rehabilitation of roads, clinics and schools which are in bad shape. Refuse collection is also a challenge in Filabusi centre with the council not able to deliver on some of its key responsibilities. As a result of the debt burden in Chirumanzu, there has been sporadic refuse collection, poor servicing of stands and partial road maintenance among other failures by the local authority.

The snapshot survey established that the key drivers of local authority debt

include:

- a shrinking revenue base in local authorities.
- failure by central government to finance local authority budgets and depleting central government grants to local authorities.
- lack of diversified revenue streams.
- failure by residents to offset their rates bills (Harare, Gweru, Kwekwe).
- companies not remitting their dues to local authorities.
- high administrative costs such as staff salaries and pensions.
- corruption and mismanagement of available resources by public officials.

The failure by residents to offset their rates was attributed to unjustifiable tariff hikes introduced by local authorities. Residents also suggested that there is no motivation to pay rates when there is no service delivery. Interviewed residents highlighted that they are willing to pay rates if councils spend their money efficiently and economically not on consumptive purposes such as luxury and expensive vehicles for council officials and hefty salaries.

This is in-spite of the economic meltdown which was further aggravated by COVID-19 induced lockdowns which eroded the capacity of residents, majority of which rely on informal trading for livelihoods and income generation, to honour their obligations to councils. For the Hwange local board, the Concession area which harbours 8 wards is not remitting to Hwange local board and that is a major drawback to the local authority. Local authorities are also

getting into dubious relationships with service providers without conducting the necessary due diligence. Such service providers often disappear without completing their contractual obligations and this includes services such as servicing of stands, housing services and clearing of roads and the burden remains with local authorities.

Although local authorities play a critical role in delivery of fundamental public services, Zimbabwe's political and socioeconomic environment has presented a myriad of challenges which has further widened the gap between available fiscal space and local authority spending needs. It is high time government develops a framework for sustainable debt management specifically for local authorities. Such a framework should provide guidelines and limits for debt contraction as well as funding mechanisms for local authorities to keep them functional and efficient.

Some of the specific recommendations that can be considered to address the challenges confronted by local authorities include:

(1) Strengthening Revenue Collection systems from all debtors — Local authorities should come up with a deliberate strategy to collect revenue from all its debtors to address service delivery issues and service its own debts.

- However, considering revenue collection of rates from the residents, the council should conduct a socioeconomic impact analysis to understand the implications of COVID-19 induced

debt on poverty, inequality, and social development.

- There is also need for striking a delicate balance between the debt repayment, demand for services, their provision, and economic capacities of residents to service their bills. This will provide solutions for the poor budget performance currently witnessed through poor revenue collection.

(2) Resource Mobilization at local authority level — outside borrowing, local authorities should explore innovative ways of engaging the private sector in municipal service provision. Practically this means:

- Exploring ways of engaging the private sector in municipal service provision such as Public Private Partnerships. To this effect, a cost benefit analysis is necessary to factor in social and economic costs vis-à-vis benefits to the local authority.
- Exploring municipal bonds as an alternative avenue of financing strategic investments in local authorities. Local authorities should not borrow on the open market where cash is expensive. Instead, leverage on land, which is one of the strategic assets local authorities have, sell, and use those municipal bonds to develop the land and sell it as developed land.

(3) Resource Allocation — it is of paramount importance to investigate how the government allocates its finances amidst competing and multi-layered social, economic and political challenges including debt repayment:

- Zimbabwe Local Government

Association (ZILGA) and Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ) as a representative body of local authorities should engage the government about ballooning local government debt to find a workable solution. As government implements the devolution exercise, there must be sufficient mechanisms for debt management at the local government level. As it stands, there is risk of over borrowing by local authorities against anticipated devolution funds from central government. Government must set limits of borrowing by local authorities and set conditions for debt contraction.

- Intra-governmental agencies debt should be reported and settled with mediation of central government to maintain uninterrupted flow of public service provision.



The NDSI: Where are we on Employment Creation?

by Takudzwa Tafura



EMPLOYMENT

As a developing country, we can focus on national security, political reform, implementing reforms in education, science, and health care but one of the most important aspects to consider is Employment. Creation of employment is a macroeconomic fundamental factor which controls national income and growth. The low the employment rate, the more people ask the question “Where are we on employment”.

Low levels of employment reflect the economy’s structural weaknesses which often results in inequality, social problems and poverty. In Zimbabwe, there has been structural unemployment which is permanent and happens as structures in industries changes, for example closing of some industries. With low level of employment, drug abuse by youths and violence and crime have been on the rise.

Furthermore, factors such as inequitable distribution of land, Infrastructure inadequacy, lack of capital and high interest rates are some of the factors that have crippled the country’s ability to create employment.

The distribution of land as a factor of production has been unbalanced that some economically active Zimbabweans do not have access to land agriculture for both subsistence as well as commercial farming. Debates have ragged on about how there has been partisan and corrupt distribution of land which has resulted in a few political and economic elites accessing the resource at the expense of the poor majority.

Taxation is also indirectly affecting the employment rate. Although taxation can be used to redistribute wealth specially to marginalized citizens, higher rates of tax associated with running businesses affects companies’ profit margins and in

some cases results them in downsizing or eventually closing.

Furthermore, Cost to, and cost of finance also results in low employment levels. The cost of borrowing is high in the country, and this makes it difficult for those who want to borrow loans to start their own businesses. So, if the interest rates are low, more people will tend to borrow and spend the money in the economy on entrepreneurial activities, buying of houses and cars. As a result, other people will earn that money as salary, hence demand increases, and the economy gets stimulated.

The Banking sector also needs to lend more on reasonable rates to productive sectors such as Agriculture, which is also the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy to boost output as well as productive employment.

Inflation is also affecting employment. The increase in the general level of prices and in cost of living also tends to devalue the currency. Types of inflation such as Hyperinflation which happened in 2008, characterised by skyrocketing cost of oil and led to dollarization can also impede the “Zimbabwe is open for business” mantra and the government’s vision of a middle-income economy by 2030. Potential investors are not attracted to a high inflationary economy with currency instability. Ultimately, the less the investors, the lower the employment levels for locals. Inflation and currency instability do not only

affect potential investors, but they can also force some companies out of business.

To address the employment issue and empowerment factor, in the 2021 budget, the government set aside US\$37.5 million for women and US\$37.5 million worth of resources for youths, especially women since they have low employment rate as compared to their male counterparts. If adequately distributed and effectively monitored, these resources can be key in spurring entrepreneurship ventures that can curtail the ever-rising unemployment rate.

The government should support sectors which are capable of employment creation such as Clothing and Textile sectors. Despite the significant decrease in employment rate in this industry, with a decline from 51 000 people in 1994 to 4 748 in 2012, this industry has the potential to employ significant numbers of people including the semi-skilled and mainly youths if government offers it financial help.

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The cost of borrowing is high in the country, and this makes it difficult for those who want to borrow loans to start their own businesses.

Street Hustling, The Way to Go for Youth Under the Context of NDS1.

Matilda Nehohwa



Even with the National Development Strategy 1, Zimbabwean youth continually float and flood the streets and it seems hustling is the way to go for their survival. Vending, gold panning and money changing are now the order of the day for graduate youth in Zimbabwe. Self employment is what is keeping many youth going. The upsurge of COVID 19 has further strained the NDS1's ability to create a stable economy and revamping viable industries. The rate of unemployment continues to rise and the country is far far from reaching the targeted 80% employment rate by the NDS1.

The country is suffering from an unstable macro-economic environment. The introduction of Monetary statutory instrument NO21 yielded opposite results where exchange rates on black markets

actually increased and the price of goods increased in USD. The NDS1 was put in place at a time the country is suffering economic crisis with an unstable currency. This led to the shrinking and closing of many businesses especially in the informal sector. The formal sector is also operating at low marginal returns whereby their success lay in the hands of debatable exchange rates. The industrial situation is suffering limited expansion and there are less chances of hiring workers. This industrial failure proves that there is still a high rate of unemployment. This corresponds with increased poverty which was supposed to be curbed below 25% but now has escalated above 25% under the NDS1.

There has been low production in industries with an indication that industries and factories are not in a

position to employ. This points to the fact that most industries and factories are facing an increase in production costs thereby forced to reduce the number of workers instead of increasing. This is witnessed in sectors such as manufacturing, commerce and agriculture whereby they are



downsizing and retrenching instead of employing. The cost of doing business is now high and this will mainly affect workers.

There were demolitions of flea markets such as Chitungwiza Zengeza 4, Mupedzanhamo to mention but a few in Harare, vegetable markets (including street vendors in streets of Masvingo) among other that disturbed businesses. This increased the number of people who are unemployed and not earning a living through other informal ventures. The same case applies to Gweru Kudzanai market where more than 2000 people are now victims of unemployment since the market area is taking too long to reopen under the pretext of renovations. Such activities are being done in many cities leaving many unemployed.

The introduction of NDS1 came at a time when lockdowns affected informal sector business as well as small to medium enterprises businesses which retrenched thousands of people to join the unemployment pool. The issue of youth flooding into illegal mining in Shurungwi, Zvishavane and Masvingo indicates how the blue print policy is far from addressing the issues of employment especially targeting the youth in Zimbabwe. The issue of high rate of illegal cross-border traders indicates that unemployment remains one of the key challenges in the country.

University statistics indicate that more than 33 255 (2019 statistics) graduates are being produced every year whilst the rate of employment indicates that an average of 21% are being absorbed by private and public sector. This excludes graduates from polytechnic colleges and vocational training centres. This indication questions the 5.73% unemployment rate which is said to be in Zimbabwe (ZIMSTAT 2020). The indication of high rate of unemployment is evident in many streets of many locations which are flooded with tuck shops as well as corner and street vending mainly being run by youth.

As a nation there is need for capacity building, youth empowerment, suitable monetary and economic policies which will pave a way for employment creation. The policies should be citizen driven and being able to adequately address the needs of the citizens.

Demolitions and Social- Economic Justice

Mufaro Mpofu —SEJA



There has been a long-drawn public outcry concerning a Chinese shopping mall, Long Cheng Plaza, built on a wetland near Zimbabwe National Sports Stadium. As of the time of publication of this write-up, the anomaly has not been rectified and the mall stands tall on a wetland grounding.

However late June 2021, the Local Government and the City of Harare Council descended on a radical move to demolish houses and trading spaces using the Road Act without sound public consultations, proposed and prepared relocations of the affected. A closer look at these demolitions indicate that these demolitions targeted high density communities such as Mbare, Glen View and Chitungwiza among other areas where the majority of the poor live and earn an honest living through informal trading.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020, the informal sector, has been grappling with the effects

of lockdown and most are still struggling to cope with the status quo. Demolitions have exacerbated the dire effects of COVID-19, leading to possible loss of lives and lack of shelter. Families with the elderly, young children, those living with disabilities have been rendered homeless by this man-made disaster. The right to shelter guaranteed by section 26 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe has been flagrantly disregarded in the middle of a heartless winter season.

At the center of this crisis are Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs) whose greedy, insensitive corrupt conduct has led to the allocation of land in a manner that violates Council by Laws. The average man's/woman's dream of owning property, again a right enshrined in the supreme law of the land (Section 71) and Article 14 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights was violated with total disregard for the welfare of the people.

Sadly, the government continues to undermine the scale of the crisis precipitated by the demolitions, but the demolitions have created

a humanitarian crisis of immense proportion. The lack of basic services for some households who resorted to sleeping in the open has increased social ills such as drug abuse and prostitution. Further to that, there has been an erosion of the moral fabric whereby desperate families have resorted to sharing a room in make-shift apartments in areas such as Seke, Caledonia and Hoplea.

The move to demolish the houses can be seen as a move to debilitate the urban poor and force them to migrate to rural areas. This is in clear violation of Article 12(1) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights that guarantees the right to freedom of movement and residence. It can be deduced from the government's conduct that the move has been necessitated more by the need to score political goals than a concern for the observance of urban planning laws.

This however is not new since, in 2005, the government, then led by the ruling party ZANU-PF under the late Robert Mugabe partook in a demolition spree in a bid to slash the opposition-sympathetic urban population. According to a shadow report made by Human Rights Watch and submitted to the African Commission in accordance with the Banjul Charter for Human Rights, around 800000 urban dwellers were left homeless during the so-called Operation Murambatsvina. The current obtaining events have proved that the government is bent on making hard the life of the average urban dweller, thereby consistently impugning fundamental human rights.

The breakdown of the rule of law and the widespread disregard for economic and social rights by the government of Zimbabwe especially during the COVID-19 era has again been exposed by these demolitions. The government must proffer viable alternatives to informal traders. It must visit the root of the problem and arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of the illegal selling of land, give warning to the affected innocent victims and cater for their welfare as well as looking for alternatives and sticking to national and international human rights standards.

As we approach the 2023 elections, land will be used again as an election tool, and it is up to the government to protect the most vulnerable and desperate home seekers. Land barons being chief perpetrators in most cases and being PEPs, the Anti-Corruption Commission must weigh in and prosecute these perpetrators. Furthermore, the government must update its urbanization policies. The use of registered cooperatives whose functionality is monitored by the Ministry of Local Government can be a sustainable solution. This may call for a Statutory Instrument. The Council should revive the Council Housing Scheme in a fair and transparent manner, for the benefit of everyone. Any demolition has the potential to violate human rights; it should be exercised within the confines of the Constitution and other international legal instruments must not be politicized and must promote local economic development and lastly those in the corridors of power must not abuse their authority.

The Socio-Economic Weeps from the June 2021 Harare Demolitions

By Evernice Tayisepi



Early in June 2021, the Harare City Council with the support of armed police left the populace in desperation as they ruthlessly demolished hundreds of vending stalls belonging to informal traders. The demolitions were most concentrated at the famous Mupedzanhamo Flea Market in Mbare where hundreds of informal traders operate from selling mostly second-hand clothes smuggled from Mozambique.

The demolitions stretched to many high-density suburbs around the capital city such as Budiro, Highfields (Magaba Home Industry) and Glen View among other suburbs where houses, vending malls and unused parked vehicles were demolished. Chitungwiza is also recovering losses from the demolitions. This has resulted in dire implications to most Zimbabweans, considering the informal sector holds more than 60% of the Zimbabwean economy and population.

An estimated 50 000 population has

been directly affected in Harare and Chitungwiza alone. The demolitions therefore meant that the livelihood and survival of most of the capital city is threatened. Thousands of Harare traders were left with no source of income as they depend on vending for survival, due to the high unemployment rate in the country.

In as much as vendors should operate in designated places and the formal sector should grow, the ruthless demolitions are not justified. The economic environment is not so encouraging hence the poor and vulnerable end up operating in the undesignated places which they are now destroying. Vendors are some of the poorest people in Zimbabwe.

When jobs are created through national policies, vendor stalls will disappear. The city council should have given a clear and adequate notice period at least to avoid catching the vendors unaware. Vendors have a right to economic opportunity in an environment where opportunities to

do so in the formal sector are scarce. As much as safety and order are important, the livelihoods of hundreds of people who are relying on selling their wares and the livelihoods of their immediate and extended family are equally important or else people are relegated to extreme poverty.

The destruction of vending markets was a huge blow on vendors, condemning thousands who are surviving on a hand to mouth basis. Such actions by the government continues to widen the gap between the rich and the poor, especially in the context of COVID-19, where differences between the rich and poor continue to show with the effects of lockdowns.

These markets that were demolished have been in existence for years, under the very watch of police and the City Council, hence demolishing the vending stalls was just a dark surprise. If the markets were to be barred, it should have been done with alternative survival strategies for the public and that should have been considered way back on the onset or establishment of the markets, not watching people establish their businesses for years then destroy their future without good notice to allow vendors to vacate.

The destruction of both market stalls and houses for the poor and vulnerable groups is also a violation of their Right to Social Protection, which the Government itself is failing to provide. This is so because the increase of vending stalls is a clear sign of the high rate of unemployment in the country. The city council should

have been sensitive and considerate enough and provide acceptable alternatives to the vendors and all relying on the informal sector, before demolishing the vending stalls.

The demolitions will also promote an increase in crime especially amongst the youths whose source of income through the market stalls has been destroyed. Now they have nothing to do and to deal with the stresses, some are resorting to drug abuse. Theft cases will also increase as all the poor who have been relying on the vending stalls no longer have a source of income to sustain their families and dependencies. The likely surge in vices such as prostitution is likely to be experienced due to the loss of income.

Mental health is an important aspect for humanity. The other negative implication of the demolitions is the psychological trauma that this experience brought to traders. The loss of materials of the structures that were vandalized, the wares, and loss of future earnings obviously left the victims traumatised. Many of the victims were also left to sustain injuries.

The Harare demolitions worsened the plight of vulnerable children. This is so because the parents were robbed of their little income for family sustenance and other household priorities. This obviously has a reflex and relay effect to the kids and any other dependencies of the victims. Some children are now failing to get virtual lessons during lockdowns where virtual learning is the new normal. Digital learning requires one to have data, so the future of the victims'

children now lies in a dire situation. Even the standard of living is now compromised as an indirect impact of the demolitions of the sources of livelihood

It should be noted that the victimised are customers who are also patrons of other businesses that are even in the formal sector which will equally be affected.

Summing up, the City Council should prepare and provided space for vendors before they demolish structures with no alternative solutions to the vendors, who are only but trying to make an honest living out of their vending markets. The City Council should engage with vendors to come up with immediate solutions whilst working on permanent and

sustainable plans.

Governance structures in local authorities should be strengthened with transparency and accountability improved to enhance revenue collection which the Local Authorities need. Losses from the demolitions should be compensated while also pushing for reform of laws such as the recently abused Road Services Act, along with the Town Planning Act as well as reform of by-laws from the colonial era that are not progressive and accommodative of the current reality of the informal economy. Properly planned and maintained vending sites should be done in areas that have a lucrative market for the vendors not in outskirts were no one goes.



The Socio-economic impacts of June 2021 Harare Demolitions



Bulldozer destroying illegal structures in Mbare and other parts of Harare.

The June 2021 Harare Demolitions was a story to tell and caused a lot of burden to residents of Harare. The government embarked on an exercise to demolish illegal structures in the high-density suburbs including Chitungwiza and Harare which left hundreds of Informal traders without a source of income and other citizens homeless.

The Demolitions impacted heavily on Informal workers who survive from hand to mouth through Informal trading, these form of disruptions badly affected the way of life for the vendors. This exercise also affected children, whose parents depend on being Informal traders. Vendors Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation (VISET)

Executive Director Samuel Wadzai told Newsday that clean up exercise had condemned thousands of Informal traders to poverty as they no longer have alternative sources of livelihoods. It is very unfortunate that these so-called Demolitions seem to have other motives beyond development control as it targets high density areas where the urban poor reside.

Recent studies by UNICEF revealed that children suffer more during disasters and socio-economic conflicts and other instabilities within countries. In addition, a local child rights activist said by destroying homes or sources of livelihoods, government had violated the right of children enshrined in the constitution under section 19. This Demolition

exercise brought effects which include loss of future earnings, increase in robberies, prostitution, alcohol, and drug abuse. However, to avoid these disruptions in future, the council needs to adapt zone specific trading areas in keeping with most modern cities and this can easily assist it in taking traffic congestion that has now become a permanent feature in the central business district (CBD). Furthermore, the country needs to deal with the formalization of the informal sector and ensure that the revenue that is being collected by municipalities is channelled towards the growth and development of the sector rather than benefit a few politically connected individuals.



Citizens Perspective on the 2019 Auditor General's Report

By Gracia Mundandi



The more things change, the more they remain the same. Prudent Public Finance Management remains a pipedream as 2019 Audit report is released in 2021. Zimbabwe Government accounts audit continue to expose continued rot and weaknesses in the system. This clearly shows that our laws have loopholes that erode the fight against corruption and abuse of the national purse.

Several malpractices have been exposed, with some bordering on corruption, misappropriation of funds, theft, and abuse of power. The report also shows incompetence on the part of some officers in the public sector. Some local authorities are not cooperating with the AG's Office, and they do not avail financial statements in time. The 2019 Auditor General's report paints a bleak picture of financial management within government departments generally and state-owned enterprises.

Public trust is a vital part of effective governance. We are in a dire situation where it has become ritual for the auditor general to conduct their audit and present their recommendations. Impunity of politically exposed people has resulted in state capture. The state must be loyal to its citizens in respect to public resource management because it derives its authority from the citizens through the social contract.

The report exposes scintillating revelations of grand and systematic corruption.

According to Transparency International Corruption Index, Zimbabwe remained unchanged at 24 points in 2020 from 24 points in 2019. To buttress this, the audit reveals public sector mismanagement and deep-seated corruption and resource leakages. If mismanagement is a "virus" that harms economic

security and social harmony, then the government auditing system is supposed to be the “immune system” that detects, resist, and weeds out the virus. The report is incisive but does not incriminate. Abuse of public funds is an offense that attracts litigation. The report exposes without pointing fingers, which is one grey area that needs to be addressed.

The report shows institutional dysfunction

Accountability and oversight institutions are either non-existent or not properly resourced. Or some of them may not know that they have a task. For example, we have our media and information commission which is very famous for regulating the media and stocking them while failing to play its other roles of making sure that everyone has access to information with even the Auditor general having difficulty in accessing information from public entities.

The office of the ombudsmen was made insignificant for years, with its task handed over to human rights commission. This is a very crucial office in any democracy where the citizens should be able to report their dissatisfaction with the public officers or government departments and find actions being undertaken. We have offices that are either emasculated or deliberately made not to perform their oversight or accountability role.

Weak Internal Auditing Systems in Public Entities

It is taking the effort of the Auditor General to unearth and investigate the issues than audit, which shows lack of vibrant audit committees in public

entities especially local authorities. Therefore, it is important that we create effective internal auditing systems in public entities. Establishment of committees that are responsible for the following up of the recommendations from audits is key. In the cases where these committees are there, they seem not to perform their duties properly. Maybe because of the shortage of people with financing auditing skills and technical expertise with respect to the internal controls. It could also be the recruitment of these audit committees and political interference in the selection processes, which needs to be addressed.

Noncompliance

Where the law is adequate and carries penalties for violating it, there has been laxity by duty bearers, to mete out punishments and penalties. Public entities including local authorities are not producing books of accounts and issues are recurring. The issue of capacity is an excuse given that the treasury department being manned by qualified personnel with degrees in accounting from reputable universities and other professional qualifications. So, what it means is that those people maybe complicit in some form of graft where they are benefiting from the non-production of these reports. Unless we have stiff consequences, adherence will remain a challenge, the increases in cases of unsupported payment vouchers might be a sign of continued or perpetuated Cashgate style of misappropriation of government funds. This is a worrisome trend that needs to be discouraged.

Failure to implement these recommendations can be caused

by many factors, which include the availability of financial resources, human resources, and time. According to Cohen and Savag (2010;) ‘The foundation of the implementation of audit recommendations is the availability of resources and time to adopt the recommendations.’”

Recommendations

- To function properly, government audits need to be able to identify corrupt behaviours and allow citizens and the justice system to appropriately punish the culprit responsible for the wrongdoing. Auditors also are responsible for responding to allegations of corruption in the public sector organizations they serve through detection and deterrence.
- Stiffer penalties must be legislated in an act of parliament. Not in a statutory instrument. It must be explicit. What level of penalty is should be matted against an accountant who fails to produce books of accounts? The constitution in terms of the principles of Public Finance Management, the Public Finance Management Act, Both the Urban and Rural District Councils Acts are clear that these accounts must be produced within the period in which the transaction was made.
- Avoiding running an overview of things. There is need for comprehensive capacity assessment which looks at the existing levels of capacity in our public entities, the missing gaps in capacity and the possible interventions needed to build that capacity. This must be given a fair share of attention. Such that where capacity is not there, we do capacity building. Knowledge and skills of accounting personnel should be regularly enhanced through continuing professional development for the qualified accounts and the rest through generic training, including refresher courses and workshops.



Auditor General Red Flags Social Protection systems

Darlington Madzonga

Citizens have high expectations from the Auditor General Ms Mildred Chiri because of the way she undertook her constitutional role in as far as public funds are used. Notwithstanding the fact that her office continues to lose qualified and experienced staff year in year out, the Auditor General continues to report on glaring lack of systems in many government departments and parastatals.

That in the 2019 report treasury incurred excess expenditure amounting to ZWL\$6 806 340 654 without parliamentary approval speaks more on the lack of parliamentary oversight over the consolidated revenue fund. Eyebrows are raised on the reluctance by ministries to implement recommendations on proper public finance management. This is supported by the fact that 356 of the 2018 recommendations, 94 were fully implemented, 88 were partly implemented with 174 not implemented at all.

The Auditor General's office continues to track the rot in government procurement. This is something that is clearly affecting service delivery to citizens. The non-delivery of motor vehicles paid for by the Ministry of Sports Arts and Recreation is one case where public funds pay for something that will never be delivered. This reminds citizens of the undelivered transformer from Pito Investment which the Auditor General reported in

2018.

The Auditor General further reports that most government departments are not taking seriously the issue of gender equality and mainstreaming. Most governments departments do not have gender policies. The 2019 Audit report flagged the county's healthcare system. The Ministry of Health and Child Care failed to procure ambulances, provide water at referral centres, and procure medical equipment and refurbishment of health institutions even though the budget has allocated funds.

An area that needs serious attention and has been red flagged in the 2019 report is the issue of government social safety nets. The 2019 Auditor General's Report indicated that most of the funds meant to cushion the disadvantaged and the marginalised are not properly managed. Most of these social safety nets fall under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. It is the mandate of the ministry to ensure that the government runs a comprehensive social protection system.

One of the social safety nets is the Children on the Streets Fund. Its purpose is to protect and rehabilitate children living or working in the streets. The administrators of the fund failed to produce key documents of the fund like an annual budget. All this indicate to the failure of the fund to save its intended purpose and beneficiaries.

Another fund is the Community Recovery Fund (CRF) which is also administered by the Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social

Welfare. The purpose of the fund is to rebuild livelihoods of disadvantaged communities in rural and peri-urban parts of Zimbabwe as part of recovery process. The Auditor General noted that the fund is operating without a constitution. This is in violation with section 18 (2) of the Public Finance management Act (Chapter 22:19) which makes it a requirement that a Statutory fund should draw up a constitution to guide and regulate its affairs. By operating without a constitution, it impacted on accountability of the Fund. Indeed, the report noted that by operating without a constitution, the fund may fail to fulfil its intended mandate and could easily be manipulated because of lack of guidelines. Of the ZWL\$50 000 allocated to the fund nothing was done save for bank charges without any evidence that the Ministry had initiated appropriate measures to ensure that the funds were channelled towards their intended purpose, resulting in non-fulfilment of the Funds' objective.

Yvonne Eustasie Parfitt Homes for the Aged is a fund whose purpose is to provide funds for establishing a home for the aged African people and to provide interest-free loans to assist voluntary organisations in establishing or maintaining home for the aged Africans. The Auditor General noted that since 2010 the fund has not received any dividends on investment of 30 000 shares held in Windmill (Pvt) Ltd. This is happening at the expense of the fund's target to offer its services to homes of the aged Africans. The fund is also operating without guidelines or Accounting Officer's Instruction. This means there

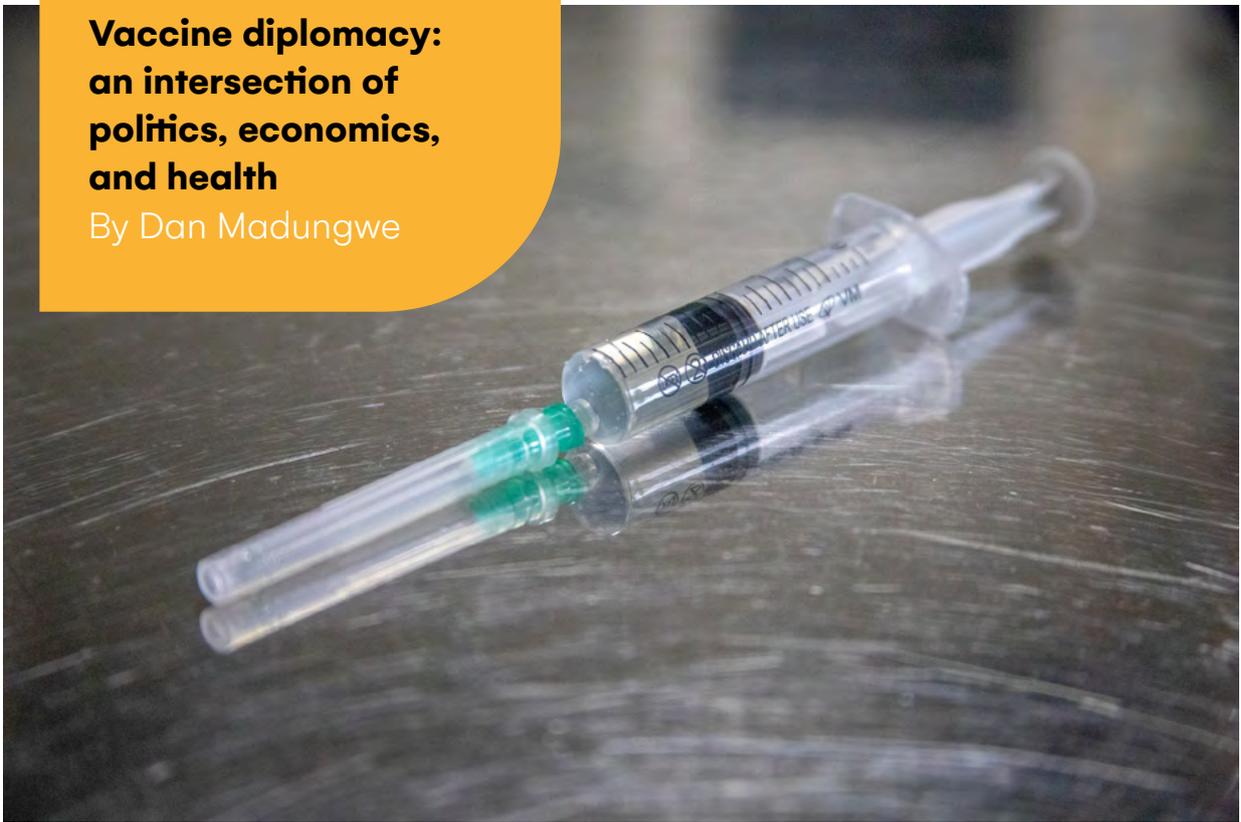
is no guidance on how the Fund's operations would be managed. This is another case of a government cushioning mechanism not meeting its objective.

Lastly the 2019 report also flagged out the National Heroes Dependants Fund which was established to aid designated national heroes' dependants. The Fund is administered under the Ministry of Defence and War Veterans Affairs. Since 2006 the fund has been operating without a Board whose responsibilities include maintenance of a register for heroes and their dependents as well as examining claims made by registered dependants to determine the form and amount of assistance to be rendered. By operating without a register of national heroes and their dependents it was difficult for the Auditor General to determine if the Fund was fulfilling its objectives. The challenges also face the War Veterans Fund, an intervention that was established for purposes of rendering financial assistance to war veterans and their dependents under the War Veterans Act (Chapter 11:15)

In conclusion it is important that the office of the Auditor General should be supported by all citizens for it to continue playing its statutory obligation. Parliament must see to it that the office is financially stable to carry out audit tasks and return staff. The PFMA must set out deterrent punishment to those who do not submit their accounts for auditing and those who fail to implement the Auditor General's recommendations.

Vaccine diplomacy: an intersection of politics, economics, and health

By Dan Madungwe



When the first novel coronavirus case was confirmed in Wuhan, China on 31 December 2019 very few countries thought the virus would reach their shores. In less than 90 days almost all countries had confirmed cases of COVID-19. The initial reaction of most governments was to place their countries under varying degrees of stay-at-home orders. This led to the disruption of the world economy. The International Money Fund (IMF) estimates USD28 trillion in output has been lost due to COVID-19 induced disruptions. The unrelenting spread of the COVID-19 in its different mutations pushed the world to realise that only vaccination would cut its spread and the link between getting the virus and death was the only viable way to fight virus.

This realization created a vaccine race among the global superpowers. In next to no time the USA, China, Great Britain, and Russia all announced having successfully developed a vaccine to combat COVID-19. This sparked a

scramble for the vaccines with rich nations hoarding the vaccine with countries like Canada buying 150% of their vaccine requirements. This meant lower- and middle-income countries were left without access to vaccines and at the mercy of COVID-19. The rich nations took this opportunity to extend its soft power over the poorer countries in Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. The ages old fight for spheres of influence between the West, China and Russia extended into the COVID-19 vaccines and this gave birth to a new term, vaccine diplomacy.

In Africa whose biggest trading partner is China a fierce vaccine diplomacy battle has ensued between the Chinese and the West. China has donated its 2 vaccines, Sinovac and Sinopharm to numerous African countries among them Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. This has been viewed by some as the Chinese wanting to consolidate its stranglehold on Africa's extractives by painting itself as an all-weather friend. Further to this the insatiable appetite of Chinese industries

for Africa's raw material dictates that it is in China's interest that Africa's mines and ports remain open for the smooth flow of cobalt, rare earths, and chrome to China.

The G7 and its friendly countries like Portugal and Sweden using the COVAX vehicle administered by GAVI and WHO have pledged 2 billion vaccines worldwide. This move has largely been in reaction to the swift moves by China and Russia in donating vaccines to East European and Latin American countries. The Chinese have struck vaccine deals with EU member country Hungary and EU candidate nations like Turkey and Serbia. This seeming "invasion" by China of its sphere of influence has prompted the European Medicine Agency not to approve the use of the Chinese vaccines among its member states.

In Latin America where the diplomatic war has been at its peak between the world's largest 2 economies some countries have had to change their foreign policies to get the Chinese made vaccines. Honduras and Paraguay have had to cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan, a state China considers part of its territory, so that they get access to free vaccines from China. Even regional power Brazil had to backtrack on its earlier decision not to award a national 5G installation project to Huawei so that they can access the Chinese vaccines.

In addition to this some countries have been forced to pick sides in this full-blown diplomatic war over who gets who to use their vaccine. South Korea a nation geographically close to China and suffered COVID-19 devastation has tiptoed around the readily available Chinese vaccines and instead opting for the slow moving COVAX program

despite an urgent need for vaccines. This has been viewed as a move to want to show that it believes in the efficacy of vaccines made by its ally the USA as opposed to the vaccines of China an ally of its viral North Korea. Zimbabwe has also been accused of not wanting to send the "wrong signal" to the Chinese by initially rejecting a donation of the British made Johnson and Johnson vaccine by falsely claiming they lacked the equipment to maintain a cold chain needed for the vaccine. This is despite a shortage of vaccines and scepticism by some citizens over the efficacy of the Chinese vaccines.

Furthermore, the vaccine diplomacy has also been fought in the media with propaganda and misinformation being peddled by both sides. The war ranges from blaming China for manufacturing and letting the novel coronavirus spread globally an agenda pushed by former US President Donald Trump who as far as calling COVID-19 the "Chinese virus" and "kung-flue". The Western media and institutions have participated in this diplomatic offensively by casting aspersions on the efficacy and safety of Chinese and Russian vaccines.

The European Medicine Agency have not approved use of Chinese vaccine citing safety and effectiveness shortcomings. Chinese media outlets like Xinhua and China Daily have also been showing deaths of individuals who have been inoculated with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine as it pushes back against reports that Chinese vaccines are not effective.

In addition, the use of vaccines as a tool for diplomacy has spread to multilateral institutions. The World Health Organization's (WHO) late

approval of the Chinese and Russian vaccines meant the Western vaccines got a head start. The American made Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was approved in December 2020 and AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine was approved in February 2021.

The Sinopharm vaccine was only approved in May 2021 with the Sinovac being approved a month later despite them having been developed earlier than both Pfizer and AstraZeneca. The Russian Sputnik V is yet to get WHO approval.

To sum it up the use of COVID-19 vaccines as a tool for diplomacy and influence is just an extension of the tradition of food aid, and soft loans to poorer countries by the rich nations. It represents a coalescing of global rivalries, capitalism, and the ubiquitous nature of politics the sphere of healthcare. China and the USA are the biggest players in this game with countries of the global south being the theatre.



10. Covid-19 Vaccine Rollout: Where Did We Go Wrong?

By Yollander Millin



The rapid development of the COVID-19 vaccine is internationally celebrated and flagged as an extraordinary achievement. Successful procurement of 12 million doses by July 2021 on the part of Zimbabwe should not be overlooked as there were access struggles that saw 75% of the vaccines being taken up by only 10 elite countries. While we take note of this milestone and hail it, it is important to however acknowledge that the rollout program from the onset failed to gain and maintain public trust in the vaccines and encourage the process which is essential in ensuring that the targeted 60% required for herd immunity is reached. The question that should be answered is where did we miss it, where did the vaccination rollout program go wrong?

To begin with, there should have been a government led investment

into building the citizens confidence in the effectiveness and safety of the vaccines. The citizens were supposed to be given information on the vaccines prior to the first doze being administered. This information should have been translated into all the official languages and made easily accessible to all the communities in all corners of the country to ensure that all the people had a general understanding of the procedure and processes.

This ought to have been followed up by an overview of the level of competence and reliability of the institutions that would deliver these vaccines. The citizens' resistance levels would have been relaxed by availability of information and from knowing that there were deliberate efforts being put towards ensuring that even though the situation was desperate, they were not being put in

further health danger.

The vaccine procurement process on its own was supposed to have principles that would guide the Government's decisions and actions. This would guide the processes in procurement, distribution, prioritisation, and administration. These principles should have involved chief among others transparency and accountability. As it stands, the process of procurement remains vague as contradictions arise on the source of the procurement funds. Initially, the finance minister had announced that US\$ 100 million had been set aside for this cause, and yet as time went on, he would make statements to the effect of budget surplus funds being used to purchase vaccines. Without taking away any truths from him, the lack of clarity in the composition of the vaccine procurement funds should have been avoided by availing information to the taxpayers from the onset.

In terms of distribution and prioritisation, a rollout plan was announced in February 2021, clearly stating the route the rollout process would take and who would access the vaccine at which phase. Though there were concerns around the funding aspect of all that needed to be done to raise awareness of the plan, the scheduled rollout plan on its own was clear and specific as to the stages that would be followed. Unfortunately, when the vaccine came, and distribution started, there was no longer clarity of information on the stages and phases, which contributed to the confusion that then manifested and caused frustration to the whole

process of vaccine administration in the different communities. People were simply not aware of what was happening. It was either information was late or simply unavailable.

The Government was supposed to give assurance and emphasise to the public that even though the vaccines were speedily developed, no developmental and regulatory corners were cut. The development of the vaccines was facilitated by extensive prior research, unprecedented levels of international collaboration among researchers and massive public investment in research and development, and this should have been communicated in community appropriate language that encourages awareness.

For the rollout process to be a success and have a smooth flow, Government should have formed partnerships and collaborations with community-based organizations to have extensive and well managed community engagements. A thorough understanding was needed of different people's concerns, prior experiences with health pandemic situations, the health care system, religious and political affiliation as well as social and economic status, as these were contributing factors to vaccine resistance.

Engaging multiple stakeholders at all levels would allow for processes to be scrutinized with the goal of having the best solutions derived. This would create room for public institutions to engage with the population to release timely information on the vaccination strategies, modalities, and accomplishments in acceptable,

user-friendly, and open two-way lines of communication. This is very important as it would avoid citizen unrest that is a high possibility where the population feels like they are pushed to accept foreign decisions. All stakeholders should have been part of the decision-making process from the onset. The “no jab no job” scenario and the discomfort around it could have easily been avoided.

Furthermore, such a stance would have been instrumental in enhancing transparent and coherent communication with the public. There was so much misinformation and fake information that was peddled around which citizens adopted as truth, and this could have been avoided had this approach been taken. At one point it was Government leaders who were leading the public into believing false information that would later manifest as resistance to the vaccine roll out process, for example in 2020 a Minister declared on national broadcast that Coronavirus was God’s revenge against countries that had put sanctions on Zimbabwe, which later caused people to doubt the existence of the virus in our black communities.

To top it all, the public had to believe beyond any measurable doubt that

the process was executed with honesty and fairness. Transparency in conduct is a huge factor when it comes to gaining social influence and public trust. This was not the case with the vaccine roll out process as a lot of people felt that the process became a tool for segregation and increased inequalities.

Access to public services was never supposed to be on conditionalities of having been vaccinated as this meant that important aspects were being ignored. For example, the vaccines themselves were said to be targeting 60% of the population, which meant there would be 40 % that would remain unvaccinated when the whole process was completed, and there was simply no possible way in which everyone would be vaccinated at the same time.

It is an honest SEJA view to therefore point out that the vaccine rollout program should have paid more attention to the raised issues for it to be smooth running and have reduced resistance because that is where we may have missed it. It is not too late to invest in the relations with the people going forward, so that the population feels protected rather than as though they are being held at ransom, with social service as reward for compliance rather than a constitutional right that it is.

COVID-19 Vaccine rollout and untold experiences in Zimbabwe

Excellence Shumba



The covid 19 vaccination program is not running as smooth as it is depicted in radios and on the television. The first challenge people faced was shortage of the vaccine itself, sometimes people would go to a vaccination centre to get vaccinated only to be told that the first dose has been exhausted and they must go back and come back to check some other day.

People had to move around to look for the vaccine and they end up violating the COVID-19 regulations by standing in long queues and ignoring social distance such that instead of preventing the spread of COVID-19, a vaccination centre becomes a place where people spread COVID-19 the most. Attached is a picture I took of the people lining up at Miekles park in Mutare to get vaccinated ignoring social distance thereby risking their lives.

The nurse who vaccinated the people also risks people's lives by not changing their gloves as they move from patient to patient without changing their gloves which means that if the nurse gets in contact with an infected person, the virus will spread even faster during the vaccination program.

As if that is not enough many people seem to be reacting to the COVID 19 vaccine as many people are complaining that they suffer from a terrible headache, while some complain that the whole side to which they have been injected will be painful for the next three days or for a week after they have been vaccinated. To some people the side effects of the vaccine are even worse and in Chigodora two nurses were vaccinated and after getting the second dose one of them died mysteriously while the other one was

put in intensive care unit. It then becomes difficult for people to make the decision of being vaccinated after witnessing such an experience and the fact that the issue was not addressed in the community so that people get to understand these isolated cases.

Also, the nurses who are supposed to be pioneers in the struggle against COVID-19 are the ones who are going against it by selling fake COVID-19 certificates for Twenty-Five United States dollars (USD 25). Instead of educating the people on how the vaccine benefits them some nurses have decided to make extra money by selling COVID-19 certificates to the people who do not wish to get vaccinated with the guarantee that they will enter the customers' details in the system and if the COVID-19 certificates were to be checked they would be regarded as valid because the person's details would have been documented in the system.

The fact that it is the trained health workers who are selling these certificates despite their knowledge of how deadly the virus is, means that it will be difficult for the country to contain the pandemic anytime soon, but this remains untold because people fear the vaccine, and no one is willing to talk about it.



Vaccine Slowly becoming mandatory while shortages hit

Mbewe Natalie



When the COVID-19 vaccine was introduced in Zimbabwe, people were so reluctant in getting it as there were myths that were regarded as true. For many, the worry was that the vaccine was quick to be developed and there were Africans who felt this was a way to reduce the population by making them a lab. The distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine had misinformation laced in it and this made it difficult for people to turn up. At one time people with chronic illnesses were told not to vaccinate as this put them at risk. As such many theories made people not to turn up for this vaccine. People were reluctant to get the jab.

Suddenly, Zimbabweans made a huge turn around regarding the vaccination sentiment they had earlier on. By the end of April, the vaccination numbers had increased to 414735,

in May the numbers went to 675678 and in June 777161. This shows an increased number of people that are volunteering for the vaccine. The 3rd wave delta variant made it possible for people to go in numbers and get vaccinated. According to the Ministry of Health, 1623874 have received their first dose while 751487 have received their second dose as of 30 July 2020. Active cases are 29438 as such no one is safe until everyone is safe.

During the COVID-19 vaccination programme, residents flock in numbers to get jabbed. During the vaccination rollout no one is bothered about the COVID-19 regulations including the health personnel. Masks are mostly worn for protocol. The queues are long and no social distancing whatsoever is done. People spend more hours on the queues and nurses are reluctant to serve those needing the vaccine. There are instances where the hospital

guards must be bribed so that one at the front of the queue. What about those that do not have the money to bribe? This on its own shows the corruption taking place in the health sector.

There is need to highlight on how some health sectors have personalized the vaccine. Take for instance at Hwange Colliery Company clinics or hospital where the vaccine was distributed, they gave priority to their workers. Residents were turned down. The vaccine was and is for the government and for everyone has access to it. Where then are we going as a country if donations are personalised? Food for thought.

The COVID rollout has seen nurses turning down patients and this has made patients to be reluctant in going for the jab. In some instances, these actions limit the number of people that show up. Someone walks several kilometres to be told they have reached a cut off number. The

COVID rollout has made it possible, for mobile clinics to be established so that people from all walks of life are reached. The target is to reach herd immunity, and this may be attained.

People were reluctant in getting the vaccine and now there are shortages of the vaccine. In some instances, one gets the first jab and the second one is not there. There has been shortages and irregular distribution of the vaccine. The allocation is less as compared to the number of people that requires the vaccine.

In some cases, the vaccine has become mandatory rather than being voluntary. It is being said that ZUPCO buses require a vaccination card for one to enter it whilst to sit in restaurants a proof of vaccine is now mandatory. Government workers require the vaccination card to be able to go to work. There are indications that show that COVID-19 vaccination is slowly but surely becoming mandatory.



Market Access Campaign seeks to improve smallholder farmers' livelihoods

Fambai Ngirande

The SADC region is in the middle of a hunger crisis. Unattended underlying chronic food insecurity caused by pressing climatic and market pressures already constituted a regional emergency before the onset of COVID-19.

An estimated 45 million SADC citizens in 13 SADC countries are food insecure. COVID-19 has negatively impacted smallholder farmers capacities to produce, transport and market agricultural produce. Lockdown measures have limited the movement of food stocks between rural and urban areas and in some instances between communities on different sides of the same borders thus increasing the risks of malnutrition and food insecurity. Women who constitute most smallholder farmers in the Region have been disproportionately affected especially as they have been forced to rely on unfair and unpredictable markets.

Agriculture is central to Zimbabwe's economic growth, poverty reduction and climate adaptation ambitions. According to some estimates there are over 1.5 million smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe. Approximately 70% of the national population depends directly or indirectly on agriculture for livelihoods and food security. To this end, Zimbabweans have retained and maintained a strong tradition of agricultural productivity with most rural families participating in at least one agricultural season each year. By

some estimates smallholder farmers own close to 80% of small livestock in the country. However, the vast majority of SHF remain marginalized from lucrative and stable horticultural value chains due to factors such as lack of awareness; inability to meet quality standards; weak infrastructural base to facilitate storage, packaging, and distribution etc.

Broader efforts to transfer technology, insurance and financing to smallholder farmers are critical to increasing their market share in viable agricultural value chains. Vibrant farmer organisations and producer groups have also played a big part in helping farmers to make the transition to small to medium enterprises, however their efforts are self-limited without Government and private sector backing.

There also is an urgent need to strengthen the productive capacities, climate resilience and market access for smallholder food producers for the region to become food self-sufficient. As an agro-based economy and the reputed regional breadbasket, Zimbabwe has huge incentive to increase support towards Smallholder farmers. Likewise, the growing #zimagricising movement of typically young and innovative farmers presents a unique opportunity for the private sector to play a greater role by giving smallholder farmers fair and equitable access to viable value chains, markets, and opportunities.

Smallholder farmers, especially women and youths, in Zimbabwe are well positioned to undertake sustainable and profitable agriculture

ventures but only if they are supported by an enabling policy environment, reliable markets and inclusive support mechanisms. Evidence suggests that an increasing number of young people are turning to horticulture as a viable career option and lucrative investment option. This trend is informed by several factors including the opening of arable farmlands in communal and peri-urban areas; growing population food requirements; availability of highly skilled Agro-professionals; adoption of new technologies and farming methods etc. However, these 'pull factors' drawing young people into agriculture have not been sufficiently met by developed markets underpinned by effective regulation, predictable pricing, quality standards and fit-for-purpose trading facilities and market infrastructure. Also lagging has been the input supply chains; financing, insurance, business support services, processing, and distribution aspects critical to enable SHF and food producers translate farming into viable businesses.

14. Government role in the Market Access Campaign

The role of the Government in propping up horticultural market access and inclusive support mechanisms is indisputable. Transformative State-led intervention in the agricultural sector enjoys much public support. Low hanging fruit for State-led intervention identified by Smallholder

Farmers include measures such as upgrading traditional horticultural market infrastructure, increasing the reach of agricultural extension support service, facilitating access to agricultural financing mechanisms particularly through the Land Bank; funding public interest agricultural research and supporting the development of quality standards for horticultural produce in Zimbabwe.

Private Sector role in the Market Access Campaign

Horticultural value chains dominated by established farmers and agricultural companies have fared much better in Zimbabwe's agricultural sector. This is due to several factors that include established linkages to formal horticultural distribution mechanisms currently dominated by supermarket chains; easier access to restricted agro-financing and investment vehicles; ability to adopt value chain development approaches to optimize value from agro-processing and export. However, this is not to imply that agricultural value chains in Zimbabwe are at optimum. There is still a scope to strengthen the role of the private sector in stimulating inclusive and sustainable value agricultural chains. To this end, a progressive private sector could enhance the role of SHF in viable horticultural value chains by facilitating linkages to appropriate technology transfers, inclusive financing, marketing, and business skills etc.

MY COVID EXPERIENCE

A CHILD LAMENTS IN THE EAST
A BABY DIES IN THE WEST
AN INFANT IS ORPHANED IN THE SOUTH
CHILD HEADED FAMILIES ARE NOW THE WAY OF LIFE IN
THE NORTH
THE RICH, THE POOR, THE TALL THE SHORT YOU NAME IT
HAVE BECOME VICTIMS OF THIS PANDEMIC
THE FEARSOME GIGANTIC HUGE COVID 19 IS NOW RULING
THE WORLD AND HAS BROUGHT NOTHING BUT SORROW
AND MISERY

THIS HAS BEEN MY COVID EXPERIENCE SEEING THE
PEOPLE PERISH.

AS AFRICAN, I THOUGHT I WAS SAFE FROM THIS
PANDEMIC SINCE THEY SAY ITS ORIGINS EMANATE IN
CHINA

GEOGRAPHICALLY I KNOW AM VERY FAR FROM CHINA
AND THERE WAS NOWAY I COULD CATCH THE VIRUS
WE WERE MADE TO BELIEVE THAT BECAUSE OF OUR
BLACK DARK SKIN WE ARE IMMUNE TO THE VIRUS
LITTLE DID WE KNOW THAT BY VIRTUE OF IT BEING
CALLED A VIRUS IT HAD NO BOUNDARIES
WE SAT IDLE IN OUR CONTINENT THINKING THIS WAS A
PHASE OF THE WESTERN WORLD AND WOULD END SOON
THERE WAS A GLOBAL SHUTDOWN
I ASKED MYSELF 'AFRICA WHERE ARE WE GOING AND WHERE
ARE WE HEADING TO IN THIS PANDEMIC'
I SAW MY DREAMS SHATTER
THIS WAS MY COVID EXPERIENCE

WE THOUGHT THE SHUTDOWN WAS ONLY FOR A FEW
DAYS THEN BOOM, DAYS TURNED INTO WEEKS AND
WEEKS INTO MONTHS
THE FUTURE SEEMED BLEAK FOR US
THOSE THAT LIVED FROM HAND TO MOUTH WERE
FINDING IT HARD TO COPE
STARVATION AND HUNGER WERE THE ORDER OF THE DAY
WE HEARD OF CASES RISING AND WE WERE TOLD TO
SOCIALY DSTANCE OURSELVES

I ASK MY SELF HOW CAN I POSSIBLY SOCIALY DISTANCE
WHEN MY CHILD IS CRYING OF HUNGER
HOW CAN I SOCIALY DISTANCE WHEN AM ONLY A SINGLE
MOTHER?
I AM SUPPOSED TO BE BOTH A MOTHER AND A FATHER TO

MY CHILDREN
ITS EITHER I DIE OF STARVATION OR I DIE OF THIS
VIRUS
HOW CAN I SOCIALLY DISTANCE WHEN I HAVE TO
QUEUE FOR THAT ONE BUS TO GO TO WORK AND
QUEUE FOR THE MOST BASIC COMMODITIES
SKILLED PERSONNEL ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE
MEDICAL FIELD HAVE LEFT FOR GREENER PASTURES
AND THOSE AFFECTED BY THE VIRUS ARE MEANT TO
DIE
EVER COME TO A POINT WERE THE WHOLE WORLD
HAS NO CLUE ABOUT WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT
TO DO
THIS HAS BEEN MY COVID EXPERIENCE

THE FUTURE OF THE YOUTHS HAS BEEN PUT ON A
STANDSTILL
THEIR DREAMS WILL FOREVER BE DREAMS
WHERE IS THE WORLD REALY GOING TO?
YOUR LOVED ONE BEING HOSPITALISED AND YOU ARE
NOT ALLOWED TO VISIT
WHEN YOUR LOVED ONE DIES YOU CAN'T EVEN BURY
THEM
DEATH OF HUMAN BEINGS HAS NOW BECOME A
LIFESTYLE
EVERYONE HOPES FOR A COVID FREE WORLD
A WORLD WERE THERE IS NO ISOLATION AND NO
QUARANTINE
WE JUST WANT TO BE FREE LIKE BIRDS

COMPILED BY
MBEWE NATALIE NS

