



Investing in People for Social and Economic Justice

COVID-19 Zimbabwe Lockdown - Humanitarian and Livelihoods Concern

As the global health crisis deepens with coronavirus continually ravaging the world, it is quite obvious that the crisis will spell short and long term impact on the global economy. COVID-19 poses an existential threat and its implications on developing countries are devastating. At the moment, the world's attention has all been shifted to fighting against the life-threatening virus and Zimbabwe is not an exception. With only 9 confirmed cases and one death in Zimbabwe as at 2 April 2020, the lockdown is necessary for Zimbabwe considering the country's state of health systems which are ill equipped to cope with the pandemic. Despite poor healthcare system, poor water and sanitation systems, food insecurity are also causes for concern.

Lockdown: What plans are in place to cater for the vulnerable?

At this critical moment in time, it is imperative to remind the responsible authorities that as the country gears up for the fight against COVID-19, there is an urgent need to protect the rights of the poor and the most vulnerable especially those families and individuals that continue to rely on social welfare programmes such as health and food schemes. The country remains in a fragile state when it comes to food security. The Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) estimates that 5.5 million people, 38 percent of the rural population, is currently food insecure whilst urban food insecurity is now affecting 2.2 million people. The issue of maize imports from as far as Uganda seem to be on hold, but the provision of food handouts to the poor and vulnerable should remain on the priority list amid the fight against the pandemic.

Whilst the lockdown is necessary to curtail the spread of COVID-19, citizens registered mixed feelings on the effectiveness of the lockdown considering the state of public service delivery in most parts of the country where the majority of citizens, for instance, rely on community boreholes and the concern is around the need for social distancing. Concern has also been raised on the social well-being of citizens whose survival is pinned on the informal sector surviving on a hand to mouth basis and the lockdown means these operations are not feasible, so how are these families going to survive? However, the Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Honourable Senator Monica Mutsvangwa allayed such fears by announcing that the Social Welfare Department has been instructed to cater for vulnerable groups. Ironically, the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare is not

even part of the Inter-Ministerial Taskforce responsible for, among other things, monitoring the situation and managing the response to the Covid-19 outbreak and identifying gaps for corrective action. The effectiveness of the implementation of the social welfare programmes is therefore questionable when the responsible Ministry is not part of the strategic Taskforce.

Through a [press statement](#) issued on 30 March 2020, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development assured the nation that ZWL\$200 million will be availed on a monthly basis to cater for one million vulnerable households per month under the harmonised cash transfer programme. Effectively, this will translate to ZWL\$200 per household.

With ZWL\$200 one household can only buy either of the following products:

- 6 loaves of bread only per month
- 2kg of rice only per month
- 4kgs of sugar only per month
- 1 pocket of potatoes only per month
- 1kg of meat only per month.

The ZWL\$200 million is therefore not enough to sustain vulnerable citizens and the government commitment to safeguarding the lives of the poor and vulnerable remains questionable. Whilst the government is doing whatever it takes to respond to the health emergency by for instance hiring extra staff it is also important to consider people's livelihoods.

Recommendations

- The role of social welfare in the fight against COVID-19 cannot be overemphasised. The conspicuous absence of the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare in the COVID-19 Inter-Ministerial Taskforce is being treated as an oversight on the part of government. ZIMCODD therefore strongly recommends that the government incorporate this important ministry which will go a long way in identifying the real beneficiaries of the harmonised cash transfer programmes proposed by the government. In addition, resource allocation must be informed by a needs assessment which lies in the mandate of the same Ministry. Needs assessment will inform upward revision of the social protection budget allocation for the poor and marginalised urban households.
- The government should take a holistic approach to the fight against COVID 19 by addressing the varying needs and aspirations of the vulnerable groups including women, informal traders, People with Disabilities (PWDs) and food insecure households.
- The government should scale up its effort in resourcing the designated hospitals dealing with COVID-19 and make conditions favourable for the victims to recover. Ill resourced health institutions increase the overall risk of further spreading the

pandemic. This will go a long way in increasing voluntary testing and ultimately making it easier for the government to account for COVID-19 victims.

- The fight against COVID-19 entails intensive use of public funds. In this regard, there is no reason why Parliament must be under total lockdown for Section 299 of the Constitution requires the Parliament of Zimbabwe to exercise oversight and approve all expenditure by government. Relevant Portfolio Committees (Health Committee, Budget and Finance Committee and Public Accounts Committee) must therefore exercise oversight remotely to ensure fiscal transparency and accountability.

Lest you missed this!!!

The National Purse | COVID-19: Resource Mobilisation, Oversight and Accountability Issues
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Covid Conversations: What is the role of multi-lateral organisations and NGOs in fighting Covid-19? [Click here](#)

In the media...

1. African Medallion Group in \$5 million aid to Zim for Covid-19 fight

AFRICAN Medallion Group (AMG) has announced a US\$5 million financial aid package to Zimbabwe to help the country fight the Covid-19 outbreak which has claimed one life among seven confirmed cases so far. [READ MORE](#)

2. US\$2,2bn assistance needed

Zimbabwe needs US\$2,2 billion worth of humanitarian aid over the next 12 months, with over two thirds for drought relief food and agriculture and US\$220 million to fight Covid-19, according to a formal appeal made by President Mnangagwa yesterday. [READ MORE](#)

3. Corporates join fight against coronavirus

Zimbabwe's business community has joined the fight against the coronavirus outbreak in the country with a taskforce now in place to spearhead the response. [READ MORE](#)

4. Doctors raise alarm over COVID-19 tests

LOCAL medical doctors have expressed concern over the low numbers of people being tested for the deadly coronavirus in the country as the United Nations (UN) yesterday warned that Africa could lose millions of lives to the novel virus in the next fortnight if developed countries fail to assist the continent. [READ MORE](#)

5. Chitungwiza residents sue council over water

CHITUNGWIZA Resident Trust (CHITREST) has filed an application at the High Court to compel the municipality to provide residents with clean and enough water during the 21-day COVID-19 lockdown. [READ MORE](#)