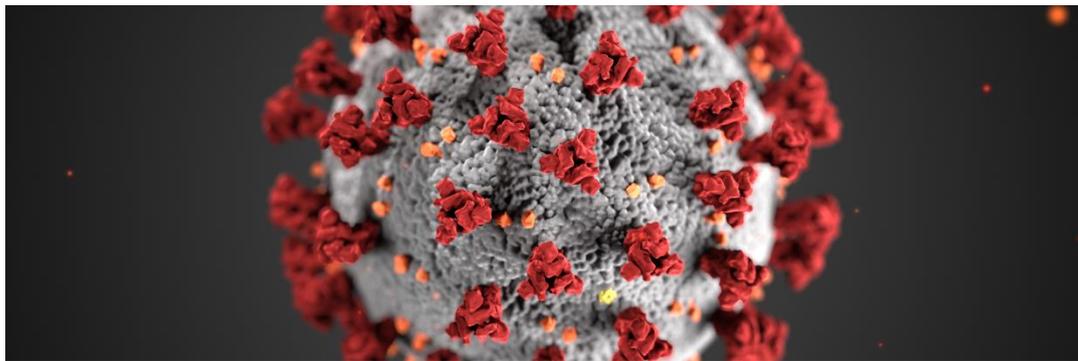


Zimbabwe Election Support Network



Monitoring Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Update # 14



1. INTRODUCTION

The fight against the COVID-19 can benefit from coordinated efforts of both state and non-state actors. ZESN seeks to support these efforts by engaging in sustained efforts to raise awareness of the stipulated health guidelines which, if observed stringently, will help flatten the curve. ZESN shares reports from its Long Term Observers (LTOs) so as to inform policy makers and interventions of actors mentioned above.

Besides commenting on the extent to which duty bearers are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic the report also comments on how the rights holders are likewise observing the health regulations stipulated by the Ministry of Health and Child Care, which are in keeping with

those established by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to flatten the curve.

2. MINISTRY OF HEALTH SUMMARY OF UPDATES

The Ministry of Health and Child Care has been consistently providing daily updates on COVID-19 via its social media accounts and official website. This is commendable because credible information is critical in the fight on curbing COVID-19.

As of 5 August 2020, 74 845 Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT) and 67 374 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Diagnostic Tests had been conducted. Zimbabwe had 4 339 cumulative confirmed cases, including 1 264 recoveries and 84 deaths since the onset

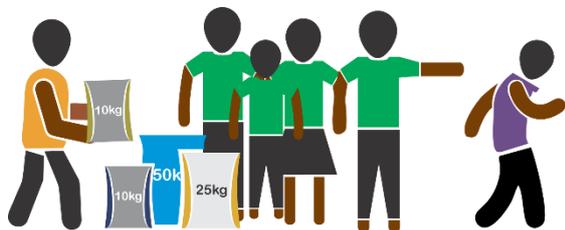
of the outbreak of the virus on 20 March 2020¹.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

During the period 29 July to 8 August 2020, ZESN received the following feedback from its Long Term Observers resident in the 210 National Assembly Constituencies:

3.1 FOOD AID DISTRIBUTION

The majority of reports about food aid distribution have been positive, with beneficiaries being selected based on need and prescribed health regulations being observed when food aid is distributed.



This week the Department of Social Welfare distributed food in Mangwe Constituency.

Panic buying of basic foodstuffs was reported in a number of constituencies ahead of the 31 July demonstration that some political activists had announced via several media platforms. LTOs in Chakari, Glen View North, and Highfield East Constituencies made such reports.

1

<https://twitter.com/MoHCCZim/status/1291223430046584833/photo/1>

Access to vegetable (farmers) markets in Dangamvura-Chikanga remains restricted. The main vegetable markets in the Constituency are required by the Municipal police to operate for only three hours daily, from 06:00 hours to 11:00 hours.



Picture 1: Residents who arrived after 07:30 hours at the fresh produce market at Chikanga 2 sports field being denied access. (Dangamvura-Chikanga Constituency).

3.2 ENFORCEMENT OF LOCKDOWN



Patrols by security personnel to enforce the lockdown order and the curfew that was announced under Statutory Instrument 174 of 2020 intensified this week. On the last day of July 2020 and the first two days of August 2020 LTOs reported that access into towns and cities

was restricted. Those travelling in cars and busses were denied access into town during the same period.

Those flouting the prescribed health regulations such as wearing face masks in public and observation of social distance were arrested. Such reports were received from LTOs resident in Luveve, Gweru Urban, Njube-Lobengula, Chitungwiza South, Chitungwiza North, Epworth, Dzivarasekwa, Glen View North, Harare East, Harare West, Bulilima East, Kuwadzana East, Mabvuku-Tafara, Mt Pleasant, Buhera North, Chimanimani West, Chipinge Central, Makoni North, Goromonzi South,

In some instance, members of the public who had already entered the cities, town were ordered to return home, and because of unavailability of public transports, they had to walk back home. Such reports were received from LTOs in Mabvuku-Tafara, Mufakose, Kwekwe Central, Gweru Urban, Mbizo, and Chegutu West Constituencies.

In St Mary's Constituency, crowds were dispersed using teargas by the police at Chigovanyika complex, on 30 July 2020 and those found loitering after the curfew time (18:00 Hours) were assaulted by security personnel.

In Makokoba and Dangamvura-Chikanga Constituencies, access to ZUPCO buses was only granted after the passenger produced exemption letters.

On 31 July, all LTOs reported a drastic reduction of people who ventured

outside their homes as the majority preferred to stay indoors. The few people who went to shopping centres were instructed to return to their homes by security personnel. LTOs in Glen View South, Harare Central, and Gweru Central made such reports.

3.3 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE HEALTH SECTOR



There is a general surge in the reports that were made by LTOs with regards to incidents of suspected COVID -19 cases in their respective Constituencies. The need for all citizens to act responsibly and to observe stipulated health protocols cannot be over-emphasised.

Currently the trend is disheartening as ZESN continues to receive numerous reports of members of the public not maintaining the required social distance, not wearing masks or washing/sanitising their hands as recommended. Reports from Zvimba North, Muzveze, Mhondoro-Ngezi, Mhangura, Magunje,

Musikavanhu, Kuwadzana East, Highfield East, Glen View North, Luveve, Mudzi North, Mudzi West, Wedza South, Chivi Central, Chivi South, and Mwenezi West indicate that most people were congregating at water distribution points, church gatherings, shopping complexes and not maintaining social distance and the majority were not wearing masks.



Picture 2: Overloaded ZUPCO bus plying the Manhenga to Bindura town route in Bindura Central Constituency)

The Bindura Central LTO reported that public transport is failing to meet the transport needs of the commuting public, some ZUPCO² buses were now carrying more passengers than those stipulated by the busses manufacturer. This also means that passengers in such buses are unable to maintain the required physical distance.

The ZESN Gutu South LTO reported on a funeral wake that was attended by mourners who exceeded the set limit of 50 per such gatherings, many of the

mourners did not have face masks and were not maintaining physical distance.

The behaviour of citizens noted above continues to erode efforts to flatten the curve and thus put additional pressure on the already overburdened health infrastructure.

4. ELECTIONS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

As part of ongoing electoral education efforts, ZESN will this week host a radio programme on Radio Zimbabwe where the relationship between judicial independence and integrity of elections will be discussed.

The Network has this week held virtual meetings with its provincial representatives in the different provinces to share information, review the Network's programming, and opportunities to continue supporting various aspects of the electoral cycle during the COVID-19 era.

ZESN continues to keep the debate on electoral reforms alive, by among other things hosting webinars to review proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Electoral Bill drafted by the Network.

² Zimbabwe United Passenger Company is a parastatal company in Zimbabwe, which operates for urban and long-distance bus routes.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Members of the public need to strictly observe the stipulated health regulations in order to help flatten the curve and provide the already stretched health systems a chance to cope with the high numbers of people seeking medical assistance for COVID-19 and other ailments.
- ii. Members of the public should cooperate with law enforcement officers who were given a lawful mandate to enforce the lockdown and the curfew.
- iii. Members of the security sector should enforce the lockdown order in a manner that is humane and respects citizens' dignity.
- iv. Government should urgently address the concerns expressed by health professionals as they are a critical component of the health delivery infrastructure of the country and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.
- v. Members of the public are urged to minimise unnecessary movement, within and outside their residential.
- vi. ZUPCO buses should give preference to those working in sectors classified as essential services, when ferrying passengers. The stipulated health protocols should be strictly adhered to by those operating the buses as well as the passengers.