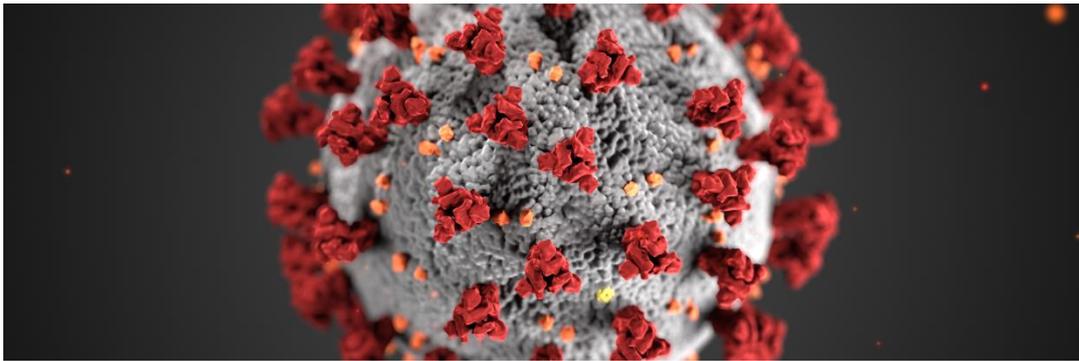


Zimbabwe Election Support Network



Monitoring Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Update # 22



1. INTRODUCTION

While the indefinite suspension of by-elections remains in force, the reporting period witnessed the holding of important political activities by various political parties, in anticipation of the eventual lifting of the suspension.

Throughout the lockdown period ZESN has been sharing reports from its Long Term Observers (LTOs) so as to inform policy makers and interventions of non-state actors who seek to compliment government efforts to flatten the curve.

2. MINISTRY OF HEALTH SUMMARY OF UPDATES

The Ministry of Health and Child Care continues to provide updates on COVID-19 via its social media platforms and its official website. Such updates continued to be vital in informing interventions of both state and non-state actors.

COVID-19 update: As at 22 December 2020, Zimbabwe had 12 544 confirmed cases, including 10 159 recoveries and 326 deaths¹.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

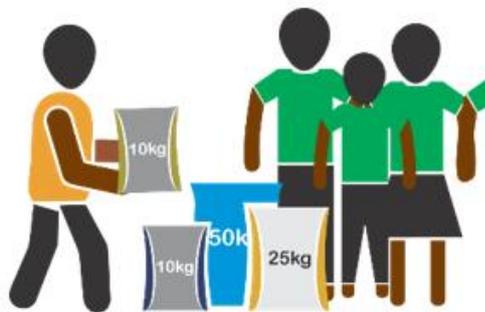
During the period that spans from the first of November to the twenty second

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<https://twitter.com/MoHCCZim/status/1341493657740996608>

of December 2020, ZESN received the following feedback from its Long Term Observers resident in the 210 National Assembly Constituencies.

3.1 FOOD AID DISTRIBUTION



Various state and non-state actors continue to come to the aid of vulnerable citizens who are food insecure in both the urban and rural communities. During the reporting period the following feedback was received from LTOs regarding the various food distribution efforts which the LTOs observed.

The Department of Social Welfare conducted food distribution in Chimanimani West, Buhera South, Lupane West, Nkayi North, Tsholotsho South, Mazowe Central, and Musikavanhu Constituencies. 50 kilogrammes (Kgs) of mealie meal were given to each of the beneficiaries who mainly comprised elderly or persons with disabilities. The department of Social Welfare also distributed COVID-19 relief funds valued at ZWL 600 per individual in GlenView North and ZWL 300 Kuwadzana Constituency.

Danish Church Aid provided support to vulnerable members of Mpopoma-Pelandaba-Matshobana Constituency in the form of grocery vouchers redeemable at local supermarkets. In Buhera South constituency World Vision and CARITAS distributed cereals, beans and cooking oil in wards 28 and 29. In Marondera East and Central constituencies GOAL-Zimbabwe provided grocery vouchers to vulnerable households valued at 40 United States Dollars (USD) per household. World Vision distributed cereal, cooking oil and peas to Mudzi North residents who were jointly selected by the World Vision and Department of Social Welfare. World Vision also provided food hampers in ward 18 and 29 of Nkayi South which consisted of 50kgs of sorghum, 2 litres of cooking oil and 5kgs of beans.

The World Food Programme (WFP) provided COVID-19 financial assistance ranging from 70-300 USD depending on the size of the family, in Kwekwe Central Constituency.

In Mbire the Lower Guruve Development Association distributed some food hampers, while SAVE the Children Foundation distributed relief funds worth 30USD to individuals who benefited from the programme.

In Binga North Constituency, the International Red Cross distributed some food hampers to a number of schools. The hampers comprised beans, cooking oil, and maize meal.

There was also a report that ZANU-PF distributed food hampers in Gutu East constituency which consisted sorghum seed, millet, and fertiliser. The hampers were given to beneficiaries drawn from across the political lines.

3.1 ENFORCEMENT OF LOCKDOWN REGULATIONS

Enforcement of COVID-19 regulations continues to contribute immensely to efforts to flatten the curve, as the majority of citizens in various parts of the country appear to comply with the stipulated health protocols out of fear of being arrested for contravening the same. This conclusion is based on reports from observers that indicate that compliance with health protocols was mainly done by citizens when venturing into spaces that they knew had an increased presence of police such as shopping centres and highways.

During the reporting period less number of uniformed forces were deployed to traffic road blocks and on enforcement related assignments. Nevertheless citizens not wearing face masks in public spaces continue to be arrested for contravening public health regulations.

There were reports that some members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police were heavy handed in their response to the surge in unregistered public transporters that are plying various urban and rural routes. Many of the reports indicate that the police were smashing the windows

and windscreens of vehicles being used by the unregistered public transporters.

The surge the number of informal traders selling their wares, and foodstuffs in undesignated trading places in various towns and cities continue to be reported. The Municipal police continues to engage in running battles with vendors who try to resist arrest such reports were received from mainly LTOs resident in urban constituencies.

3.2 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE HEALTH SECTOR



Access to antenatal and postnatal services, as well as essential medication remains a challenge at most public health institutions with some clinics offering a limited range of services and referring patients to larger referral hospitals for services that the clinics used to offer before the advent of COVID-19. Nevertheless LTOs' report an increase in the number of local clinics that have re-opened. Such reports were received from Chitungwiza North and South, Dzivarasekwa, Zengeza East, Buhera West, Chipinge Central, Mutare Central,

Njube-Lobengula Constituencies. However, some clinics remain closed such as Braeside clinic and Kuwadzana Extension Clinic resulting in women seeking antenatal and postnatal services having to travel far to get medical assistance. Some go as far as Parirenyatwa Hospital, thus increasing the burden on this national referral hospital.

Acute drug shortages at the majority of public health institutions was reported. The situation was compounded by the limits being imposed by some clinics on the number of persons that can access certain services per day, for instance the clinic in Kuwadzana 3 suburb was limiting the number of women that can register for antenatal services to 10 per day.

As reported previously, the shortage of portable water persists in most urban and rural constituencies forcing residents to congregate in their numbers at most boreholes.

4. ELECTIONS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Despite the indefinite suspension of by-elections by the Government, there were reports of low level political campaigns in the constituencies where national assembly vacancies exist. In addition the governing ZANU-PF party held its District Coordinating Committee (DCC) elections during the reporting period. Primary elections were also conducted by both

ZANU-PF and MDC- Alliance during the reporting period.

4.1. ZANU PF DCC ELECTIONS

The political campaigns conducted ahead of the ZANU-PF DCC elections were reported to be mostly peaceful, however, some incidents of electoral malpractices were reported.

Campaigns methods used ahead of the DCC elections included use of posters, social media campaigns and door to door meetings.

Reports of use of hate speech during the campaigns were received from Gutu South. While the prevailing political environment was described as tense in Lupane West and Kariba Constituencies. Allegations of vote buying were reported in Mberengwa East Constituency.

There was a report from Chipinge Central of some persons not on the voters' roll were permitted to cast their vote. It was also reported that some of these ineligible voters were well known MDC-Alliance supporters who were paid to cast a vote in favour of one of the electoral contestants.

In Bindura North Constituency, some of the main complaints received about the DCC elections were that some of the candidates who were imposed by party heavyweights, were not popular in the district. In Muzarabani North some

supporters alleged that the election results were tempered with. In Mutoko the results took unusually long to be announced, and the elections were held amid allegations of factionalism in party and tempering of election results. The election outcome in Mutoko South was heavily contested. While allegations of ballot stuffing were reported in Lupane West.

In ward 10 of Magunje Constituency the elections were postponed when the election officials did not turn up at the election venue. While the elections were concluded in Chiredzi North reports indicate that some wards were excluded from participating in the elections, thus disenfranchising some of the voters.

In Gwanda North Constituency the elections were marred by late delivery of essential voting materials and suspicions of ghost voters, this raised the likelihood that additional votes were cast using assumed names.

Elections were postponed in Gokwe-Chireya Constituency because of very low voter turn-out. While in Kwekwe Central Constituency a re-run was scheduled in wards where complaints about electoral malpractices were received.

LTO reports indicated that on the actual days that the elections were conducted COVID-19 health protocols such as wearing of face masks, sanitising of

hands and physical distancing were not strictly adhered to.

4.2. CONFLATION OF GOVERNING PARTY AND THE STATE

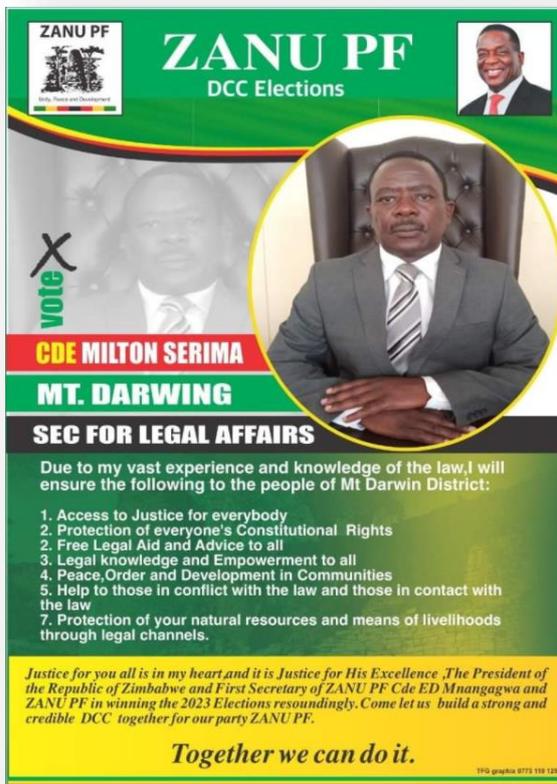
During the campaign period for the DCC elections, some disturbing reports were received to effect that some civil servants participated in the ZANU-PF DCC elections in contravention provisions of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, and the Public Service Code of Conduct.



Picture 1: Namatirai Chipere campaign poster

A serving officer of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), Namarari Chipere contested and won the position of Secretary for Legal Affairs during the ZANU-PF Gweru DCC elections. Yet

section 261 of the National Prosecuting Authority Act [Chapter 7:20] which provides for the Conduct of officers of the NPA, prohibits Officers of the NPA from being active members or office bearers of any political party or organisation².



Picture 2: Milton Serima campaign poster

A second example is that of Milton Serima, a serving member of the Judicial Services Commission (a magistrate), who participated in the Mount Darwin, ZANU-PF DCC elections. Serima contested the post of Secretary for Legal Affairs, in contravention of section 165(4) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which stipulates that members of the judiciary

should neither participate in political activities nor hold office of any political organisation.

The ZANU-PF Director of Information and Publicity through his official twitter handle, informed members of the public that Serima had resigned from being a judge before launching his campaign³.

The third example is that of Reuben Barwe, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation's (ZBC) Chief correspondent who also contested the position of Secretary for Information and Publicity for Makoni during the ZANU-PF DCC elections, in contravention of section 61(4)(b) of the Zimbabwean Constitution which requires ZBC to be impartial.

4.3.PRIMARY ELECTIONS

During the reporting period it was reported that both ZANU-PF and MDC-Alliance conducted primary elections to elect candidates who would contests the by-election for the Kuwadzana National Assembly seat. ZANU-PF elected Betty Kaseke while Johnson Matambo won the the MDC–Alliance primary elections.

MDC-Alliance held primary elections during the reporting period in Makokoba Constituency which were won by Edwin Ndlovu.

² National Prosecuting Authority Act [Chapter 7:20] < <https://zimlii.org/zw/legislation/act/2014/4> >

³ <https://twitter.com/tafadzwamugwadi/status/1328611126045773824>

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The Government is urged to ensure that relevant codes of conducts of public servants are enforced.
- ii. Members of the public are encouraged to remain vigilant and observe stipulated health protocols even though the cases of COVID-19 seem to be on a downward trend.
- iii. Political parties should ensure that they observe stipulated health protocols for any face to face campaign activities they may engage in during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iv. City councils around the country are urged to ensure that safe drinking water is provided to citizens on a consistent basis.