

COTRAD Masvingo COVID-19 Situation Report.

Introduction

Community Tolerance Reconciliation and Development (COTRAD) trained 14 Health Champions to observe, record and document information about COVID-19 in Masvingo. The Health Champions from 7 districts of Masvingo province having been observing the COVID-19 lockdown situation for the past 21 days. The observations show that the residents of Masvingo province both in rural and urban areas have gradually adopted the lockdown regulation. The observations highlighted that during the early days of the lockdown the residents, mostly in rural areas and high density suburbs were not respecting the stay at home order and social distancing wasn't being observed in queues. However, the residents later on complied after the Ministry of Health and Child Care and other stakeholders intensified COVID-19 awareness programs. The deployment of the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the Zimbabwe National Army in the streets also reinforced the enforcement of the lockdown order in Masvingo. The service providers were at most times relaxed in ensuring the availability of hand washing facilities at premises entrances and also lack of seriousness in enforcing social distancing on queues and at tills. At shops such as Pick and Pay, OK supermarkets and Spar supermarkets order and social distancing was being enforced by the police and military. A number of human violation cases were recorded, soldiers and police officers brutalizing citizens who were caught milling around the streets, defying the national lockdown. The Health Champions have observed that Masvingo province COVID-19 preparedness was way far below standards. The Province established 10 COVID-19 isolation centres with a total capacity of holding 125 patients at a time. Fortunately, no positive cases to COVID-19 have been confirmed in Masvingo province yet. Highlights from districts are presented below:

Bikita

During the first days of the lockdown the residents of Bikita district were conducting their business as normal, many shops were not complying with the national lockdown order. It was reported that some hardware and other non-essential shops were seen opening although it was not allowed in terms of the lockdown order as declared by the president. Tax operators were also seen driving around Nyika Growth Point using bush roads avoiding police roadblocks. Challenges to maintain order and enforce social distancing were observed during food aid distribution programs, people were found mixing and mingling as if everything was normal. The Bikita RDC and the police were however seen moving around Nyika Growth Point and Bikita Minerals doing COVID-19 awareness. The Bikita RDC has also played a crucial role in renovating and extending isolation centres in the district. Initially the district had 1 isolation centre with a capacity of holding 3 patients at a time and later on increased to 3 isolation centres through renovation of Bikita Rural District Hospital, Mashoko Mission Hospital and Silveira Mission Hospital.

Chiredzi

Chiredzi district was reportedly relatively calm throughout the national lockdown period, many residents deserted the Chiredzi Town, Triangle and Hippo vally Business Centres in respect of the lockdown restrictions. In Chiredzi Town agriculture and other vegetable markets were ordered to open from 07:00 to 09:00 am and then from 15:00 to 17:00 pm per day to allow customers to purchase agricultural produce. However, in Hippo vally and Triangle vegetable markets were closed through the lockdown. Mealie-meal queues were being seen mainly at OK and TM supermarkets, however in most cases customers were not observing the social distancing rule. There was fear and pandemonium after a report of a suspected COVID-19 death at Chiredzi District Hospital on Tuesday 7 April. Nurses at the hospital were reportedly refusing to handle the deceased's body due to lack of protective cloth and equipment. However, the results later on confirmed that the deceased was negative to COVID-19. Tell Zimbabwe journalist Beatific Gumbwanda

was arrested by the police following the report she made on the suspected COVID-19 death at Chiredzi District Hospital. Two isolation centres were established in Chiredzi district which are Chikombedzi Mission Hospital with a capacity of 30 patients and Chiredzi District Hospital with a capacity of 15 patients at a time. The health champions have also recorded partisan distribution of Mealie meal by top Zanu PF officials during the lockdown period.

Chivi

Chivi Rural District Council started by suspending the operation of open markets program on 19 March which were scheduled to start on 22 March due to coronavirus outbreak. The traders tried to resist the ban by illegally gathering at Takavarasha shopping centre for the open market trading on 22 April. However, the Chivi RDC officials and ZRP dispersed them. Latterly the highlights from Chivi district shows that in most areas people were observing the lockdown restrictions. The Chivi RDC has been seriously enforcing the lockdown orders from the first day. However, it was observed that social distancing was difficult to enforce during food distribution programs facilitated by Caritas, WFP and other non-governmental organizations in rural areas. Rarely some short queues of customers were being seen at N Richards, Chingwangwa supermarket in Chivi Growth Point with the service providers failing to ensure social distancing at the lines and inside the shops. On 19 April people flooded into the growth point to buy Mealie meal at N Richards Supermarket, there was total disorder and social distancing rule was total being ignored. An isolation centre was established at Chivi District Hospital with the capacity of holding 16 patients at a time.

Gutu

Most residents in Gutu have been respecting the lockdown restrictions however, observation shows that social distancing was problematic in most cases at shops such as N Richards Shops, Chifamba supermarkets and Spar Supermarket where people were queuing for basic commodities and Mealie meal in particular. In rural areas selling of traditional beer was a major challenge, people were meeting in numbers until the ban was enforced by traditional leaders. Gutu Rural District Council (RDC) rationally allowed only 10 vendors to do business for a limited number of hours per day to provide customers with agriculture produces. The council has successfully managed to maintain order through allowing a limited number of vendors to do business so as to reduce disorder and inconveniences for those that need vegetables. Gutu RDC seems to be the most serious of all rural local authorities in the province in enforcing the lockdown. One COVID-19 isolation centre was established at Gutu Mission Hospital with a capacity of holding 8 patients at a time.

Masvingo

The situation in Masvingo initially showed resistance by the public especially in high density suburbs of Mucheke a lot of people were found by the police defying the lockdown regulation. However the defiance slowly disappeared after COVID-19 awareness campaign, police and military patrols and the creation of roadblocks at the Mucheke Bridge, Chitima Bridge, at Telone along Mutare road and many other local roads that goes to town. Lately the volume of traffic slightly increased in the city centre after motorists were using Masvingo Teachers Collage and Dhiyo bush roads which were later on discovered and blocked by the police. The community members also witnessed continues screening of vehicles getting into the CBD on daily bases. Both pedestrian and motorist had to justify their movement failure to do so was resulting to arrest or turning back home. The major concern was failure to observe social distancing during shopping. Many grocery shops were opening for 5 hours per day. The hand washing facilities were not consistently provided by service providers. However, OK, OK Mart and TM / Pick and Pay supermarkets later on

introduced compulsory screening of customers at the entrance. The refurbishment of an isolation center in Rujeko was also done, however the major worry was that the isolation centre accommodate only 8 people at a time and the centre didn't have major required COVID-19 equipment. Police brutality was also reported at Pangoline, Mucheke Rank, Sisk and Yeukai. Tell Zimbabwe Director Mr Maunganidze Golden and Passmore Kuzipa Tell Zimbabwe Official, George Maponga from Herald, former President of Zimbabwe Union of Journalists Mathew Takaona and other local journalists were arrested by the police covering news during the lockdown. The health champions also witnessed the mushrooming of illegal alcohol selling point (Shebeen) around Masvingo urban. New Zimbabwe.com Masvingo correspondent Tonderai Saharo injured after some Shebeen operators teamed up and attacked him when he visited an illegal Shebeen in Runyararo West suburb. The Minister of State for Masvingo Province Mr Chadzamira later on relaxed other lockdown restrictions by allowing the reopening of Chitima Vegetable Market though under restrictive conditions. Towards the end of the lockdown especially during the raining days people were entering into town as they wish due to absents of police at road blocks. Long queues of customers were being seen at Nyanigwe, OK, OK Mart, Pick N and Pay and N Richards amongst other supermarkets with police officers enforcing social distancing.

Mwenezi

In Mwenezi, reports says the police were moving around the few exempted businesses premises demanding to see shop licenses and employees' medical aid cards. Besides that, the situation was largely peaceful, with people staying at home as advised. Rutenga growth point in Mwenezi district was quiet but there was also a seemingly problematic Mealie-meal queue at Rutenga and Neshuro Gain Cash and Carry Branch. The Mwenezi Rural District Council mobilized for resources towards fighting the spread of coronavirus as well as to improve capacity in local health delivery systems. The local authority donated hand sanitizers, plastic drums, bleach, banners, posters and hand-washing buckets to Neshuro District Hospital. There was less police visibility in some places of Mwenezi but businesses at Maranda business centre and Rutenga growth point closed earlier than expected. In rural areas many villagers were reportedly going to the bushes to harvest amancimbi. In some cases community members were observing the influx of non Mwenezi residents coming to harvest amancimbi. An isolation centre was established at Neshuro District Hospital with the capacity of holding 12 patients at a time.

Zaka

The highlights from Zaka district shows that the Zaka Rural District Council was on high alert towards fighting the spread COVID-19 virus. The council started by suspending all mobile open markets on 18 March 2020. Food aid distribution by social welfare and the WFP continued under COVID-19 restrictions. During the first days vendors were seen at Gumbo, Ndanga and on roads sides selling agricultural produce but Jerera growth point was generally quiet. However reports of traditional brews were being made in some villages before it was totally banned by the traditional leaders. In Zaka district one isolation centre at Ndanga District Hospital was established with the capacity of holding 20 patients at a time. During the last two days of lockdown heavy police was deployed to maintain orders at N Richards Shop were the people were queuing for Mealie meal.

Recommendations

- The residents should comply with the lockdown orders as announced by the authorities.
- The deployed lockdown enforcement agents should execute their duty in a peaceful way without favor and fear in full respect of fundamental human rights as enshrine in the constitution.

- The deployed lockdown enforcement agents should be exemplary in following lockdown regulations, by ensuring social distancing amongst themselves, wearing protective cloths and approach people respectfully.
- The COVID-19 taskforces must execute their duty in a transparent and accountability by providing correct and enough information on how the public funds and donations have been used.
- The RDCs and other water service providers must consistently ensure the supply of clean and portable water during lockdown and similar situations.
- The Ministry of Health and Child Care should provide screening and testing facilities at provincial level, increase and equip the isolation centres with required machinery as well as intensifying COVID-19 awareness campaigns beyond urban areas.
- The food distribution institutions and essential service providers should ensure the respect of all lockdown regulations during business. This should be done by providing hands washing facilities, enforcing social distancing and provision of screening services.
- Traditional leaders should enforce lockdown regulations in areas of their jurisdiction in a peaceful manner.
- The residents who feel that their rights have been violated by the law enforcement agents and or by anyone should report their cases to the police and or to relevant authorities without fear.

END

Masvingo COVID-19 lockdown pictures



The above pictures were taken from Chivi on 11 and 19 April 2020. On 19 April there was disorderly line at N Richards Cash and Carry.



Pictures shows deserted Triangle vegetable markets and a queue at OK Triangle, social distancing was still a challenge



The pictures were taken in Mpandawana G/P on 10 and 25 April respectively. On 25 April there was an increase in number of people in the Growth Point.



The pictures were taken at Mashate Business Centre and In Mucheke Rank. At Mashate people were gathered during a food distribution program.



The pictures were taken at Neshuro B/C and Rutenga Market respectively. With all pictures showing absents of people