

Heal Zimbabwe

Day 23

lockdown update

Introduction

On the 19th of April, Zimbabwe extended its lockdown with 14 days as a way of escalating measures of reducing the spread of COVID-19. The country's extension illustrates the government's commitment towards effectively containing the virus in the country. The current partial lockdown relaxed restrictions on mining companies, agricultural and food producers, among others as a way of ensuring constant supply of revenue to the government and food. The government also rolled out social assistance programs for vulnerable households including the elderly, vendors and People with Disabilities as a way of reinforcing the lockdown extension. The government's Task Force on COVID-19 also intensified its outreach activities to establish district and provincial isolation centres for cases of COVID-19 across the country.

Issues covered in this Update

Given the increase in government efforts to contain the virus, Heal Zimbabwe's Early Warning and Early Response Situation Room increased the number of the indicators it was tracking in relation to the fight against COVID-19 in the country. In this report, Heal Zimbabwe's Early Warning and Early Response Situation Room provides an update on: how communities are responding to the extended lockdown, availability and cost of basic commodities such as mealie-meal and cooking oil, people's access to savings, the conduct of lockdown enforcement officers, the availability and quality of health care services for COVID-19 and other diseases, and the availability of information on COVID-19 in local communities.

Methodology

A total of 4 000 trained Early Warning and Early Response Committee members and at least 5 000 community members who participate in HZT's outreach activities, CBOs operating in areas where Heal Zimbabwe operates and Heal Zimbabwe's Peace Clubs provide and verify information in this update.

Presentation of Updates

Masvingo Province

Gutu

Community members from Gutu Ward 6, Ward 5, Ward 31 and Ward 7 are staying in their homes and practising safe hygiene. Police officers are peacefully reinforcing the

lockdown in these areas. Only a few community members are still finding it hard to observe the rules. Community members are getting information about COVID - 19 from their radio sets and mobile phones. Community members in these wards are not yet clear on where they are supposed to go for COVID-19 specialized services in Gutu. Local clinics are refusing to assist community members who present with non-chronic diseases. Matizha Clinic and St Mary's Clinic rarely do not have contraceptive drugs and women are having difficult times controlling pregnancy.

Basic commodities such as mealie-meal, sugar and cooking oil are now scarce and are now being charged in US dollars on. A 2kg of sugar is now being charged at \$4.00. Government's subsidized mealie-meal is very rare to find in Gutu rural. Community members in rural wards have long resorted to purchasing maize from locals who are charging a bucket for not less than ZWL\$190.00. Only a few people in Gutu receive food aid from the Department of Social Welfare. The situation is worse for community members in rural wards, where they cannot access their savings in banks. There is no transport for people such as pensioners to travel to Mupandawana Growth Point or Masvingo to withdraw their money.

Zaka

Community members from around Jerera Growth Point spent their day gathered at Old N.Richards for a food distribution exercise. Community members did not observe social distancing at this meeting. The food was being distributed by ZANU PF Chairperson Juliet Chari (also known as Mahembe) without the knowledge of the local Councilor. Sometimes, community members from around Jerera spend hours queuing for government subsidized mealie-meal at Jerera shops. This is being charged ZWL\$76.00 per 10kg, but in most cases the majority of people do not access it due to the high demand. Basic commodities are available in most shops servicing Zaka. However, community members are complaining about price hikes especially on cooking oil and sugar. Prices for cooking oil range from ZWL\$140.00 to ZWL\$160.00 whilst a 2 kg of sugar ranges between ZWL\$100.00 to ZWL\$120.00. The prices are even higher when one is using Ecocash.

This has made it difficult for community members since all banks are closed at Jerera and there is no transport for community members to travel to Masvingo to access their savings. Ecocash agents are charging 25% for community members to withdraw cash. Police are reported to have used violence and disrupted services at Mukuru Zaka branch, demanding that people observe social distancing. Community members in Zaka are not yet clear on where to go for specialized COVID-19 services. Ndanga General Hospital was designated by the government as the district referral centre for COVID-19 cases. However, only a few community members know about this development. Some indicate that Musiso Mission hospital is the one designated as the district referral centre for COVID-19 cases. Women in Zaka are also complaining over shortage of contraceptives in local clinics. Local clinics are only taking chronically sick patients.

Bikita

Community members in Bikita are still staying in their homes. However, community members are complaining over the fact that Marozva clinic is usually out of medication for most diseases and contraceptives. Community members in Bikita access information about the virus on their mobile phones and radios. They currently do not know whether there is a district referral centre for COVID-19 cases in Bikita. Prices of basic commodities have also hiked at Nyika Growth Point and local shopping centres such as Chikuku, Mandadzaka, Makotore and Nehanda. Prices for cooking oil ranges between ZWL\$180.00 to ZWL\$200.00., whilst

mealie-meal prices range between ZWL\$150.00 and ZWL\$175.00 per 10kg. These prices are even higher for community members who will be making their payments using Ecocash. Local Ecocash agents at Nyika Growth Point are charging as high as 30% interest for cash withdrawals. This has also worsened the lives of most community members in Bikita as they rely on food aid to survive. Currently, there is only Department of Social Welfare which is providing food aid in the area. Very few people are receiving this aid. Today, the 23rd of April, community members were gathered at Makotore ward centre for food aid distribution. Community members were not maintaining social distancing or were they sanitizing or washing their hands at the distribution meeting. Police and soldiers were peacefully reinforcing the lockdown at Nyika Growth Point.

Mwenezi

Community members at Neshuro Growth Point are still staying in their homes. Police is only moving around Neshuro Growth Point at around 1400 hours to ensure that all shops are closed. Neshuro hospital is providing services to everyone, outside its premises. This has resulted in the hospital violating the rights of patients who are on Anti-Retroviral Therapy. The hospital does not have any test kits for COVID-19 and community members do not know where they can go for specialized COVID-19 services. Basic commodities such as sugar, mealie-meal and cooking oil are now charged in South African Rands. Sugar is being charged at ZAR70.00. Only National Foods used to sell government subsidized mealie-meal. However, most of the mealie-meal would be bought by local shop operators who then over-charged community members at ZWL\$200.00. These days, there has not been any subsidized mealie-meal in the district. This has made it difficult for community members since food aid from the Department of Social Welfare has not been adequate enough to cover for the majority of people. Community members are facing difficulties in accessing their savings. There is no Mukuru outlet at Neshuro Growth Point and Ecocash agents are charging 40% interest for all cash withdrawals.

Mashava

Community members from Mashava are staying in their homes. Police peacefully maintains order and social distancing during opening and closing hours of shops. Community members are concerned that local Gathsmine clinic is referring all critical conditions to Masvingo at the time where transport is not available. The clinic does not have a medical doctor to service it or test kits to help detect and isolate COVID-19 cases. Prices for basic commodities have gone high, with a 10kg of mealie-meal being charged at ZWL\$200.00 and cooking oil at ZWL\$150.00. These prices are even higher when one wants to make a payment using Ecocash despite the fact that accessing cash in the area is very difficult. Ecocash agents are charging 40% interest for all withdrawals, and community members cannot travel to Masvingo to withdraw money from their Mukuru and bank account. The mining town has not received any government subsidized mealie-meal or aid to help cushion community members from starvation. The Department of Social Welfare's food aid only caters for a few people from Mashava. The distribution last took place on the 21st of April and people were observing social distancing and good hygiene practices during the distribution.

Mashonaland Central Province

Mbire

On the 21st of April, a group of soldiers forced all operation to close at ARDA – Mushumbi. The company never ceased its operations since the beginning of the lockdown. Community members in Mbire are still staying in their homes. However, community members were concerned with the way prices for basic commodities have hiked. The district rarely receive government subsidized mealie-meal, and local shops are charging as high as ZWL\$250.00 per 10kg of mealie-meal. All the shops are also forcing people to buy groceries worth ZWL\$300.00 in order for them to be able to

buy a 2kg of sugar. Most of the people in the district survive on aid from World Food Program and the Department of Social Welfare. Currently, the district does not have any clinic or hospital for referring cases of COVID-19.

Muzarabani

Community members are still staying in their homes. Police from Muzarabani Growth Point has been enforcing the lockdown peacefully. However, community members are worried about a sudden rise in the cases of malaria in the district. This has resulted in queues at Muzarabani Clinic and St Albert Hospital. Currently, community members are not clear on where COVID-19 cases can be referred to for specialized services. Community members are also complaining over the increase in the price of basic commodities including mealie-meal and sugar. Most community members are now relying on food aid from the Red Cross and the Department of Social Welfare.

Mt Darwin

Community members are struggling to maintain themselves throughout the lockdown. This is as a result of price hikes that Wards 12, 14, 38 and 15 are experiencing on basic commodities. Government's subsidized mealie-meal is rarely available in these wards. These wards have a few shopping centres and this makes it difficult for people to be able to find all the basic goods and services. The case of these wards has also been heightened by the fact that there are no Ecocash or bank outlets in the areas. Community members end up footing as high as 50% interest on all Ecocash transactions. Community members in the district are not yet clear whether Karanda Mission Hospital is the district COVID-19 referral centre.

Mashonaland East Province

Murehwa

Community members from around Murehwa Growth Point are now moving around despite the lockdown. They are highlighting that they have to find livelihood activities to help them match up with the rising cost of basic commodities especially mealie-meal and cooking oil. Government subsidized mealie-meal is rarely available, and there is commotion and overcrowding whenever it is available. Other shops are charging as high as ZWL\$220.00 for a 10kg of mealie-meal. This situation has also been worsened by the fact that the Department of Social Welfare, which is currently providing aid to community members, is only providing such aid to a small number of people. Murehwa as a district is also facing an increase in cases of malaria. Community members are, however, not clear on where they can go for specialized COVID-19 services in the district.

Mutoko

On the 21st of April, a group of soldiers and police officers dispersed a group of people who were selling their vegetables at Cornerstore business centre. The group also assaulted one of the persons who was selling their wares. Price of basic commodities especially mealie-meal and cooking oil have gone higher in the area. A 10kg of mealie-meal is being charged at ZWL\$180.00. There are no organizations distributing aid in this area, save for the Department of Social Welfare which caters for a few community members. Community members from Ward 26, Cornerstore have not heard of the COVID-19 referral centre which was recently opened at Mutoko centre, less than 30km away. Yesterday, community members at Mutoko centre spent the whole day yesterday queuing for subsidized mealie-meal at Mutoko centre. Community members did not even bother to observe social distancing. Members of the police and nurses were also on the queue, in their uniform.

Maramba Pfungwe

Community members are still staying in their homes and exercising good hygiene. Community members in the district are not yet clear on whether there is a COVID-19 referral centre in their district. Prices of basic commodities have also hiked, with a 10kg of mealie-meal costing US\$6.00 or ZWL\$180.00. This has been exacerbated by the fact that subsidized mealie-meal is never available in the district. Nonetheless, most people in this district receive aid from World Food Program and the Department of Social Welfare. Soldiers and police officers are peacefully manning Mutawatawa Growth Point.

Marondera

Community members in Ward 15, Marondera West have been trying to maintain social distancing and good hygiene practices. Today, the 22nd of April, they have been receiving food aid from Caritas. Officials from the Ministry of Health and Child Care and ZRP were helping the Distributing Committee and Caritas to maintain social distancing and disinfecting project beneficiaries.

However, members of the Distributing Committee were caught with 14 litres of cooking oil which they had embezzled. Community members alluded this to the rising cost of living, and unavailability of social assistance programs to help community members through the economic crisis that the country is going through. Community members from Marondera West highlighted that they rarely receive government subsidized mealie-meal in the area. Shops are charging US\$6.00 per 10kgs of mealie-meal. They also highlighted that they currently do not know where they are supposed to go for specialized COVID-19 services.

Chikomba

Police and soldiers are enforcing the lockdown with little or no cases of brute force having been recorded. Chivhu General Hospital has pitched a tent in preparation for Covid-19 tests. However, no corona cases have been dealt with at the hospital. The hospital is only offering emergency services. Prices for most basic commodities have gone up sharply. A bottle of 2 litres cooking oil is being sold for ZW\$180. Ecocash agents are charging 30 percent interest on all ecocash transactions. Information on Covid-19 is being accessed via radio and short message services. Community members have little knowledge on the virus as some even are failing to observe social distancing when queuing for subsidized mealie meal.

Mashonaland West Province

Norton

Community members from Katanga are beginning to move around despite the lockdown extension. Community members are also complaining over the sudden rise in prices of basic commodities and sudden deterioration of the availability of basic commodities in local shops. Community members are facing difficulties to access cooking oil, sugar and mealie-meal. Whereas, government's subsidized mealie-meal is still being pegged at ZWL\$70.00, most of the times, people fail to access due corruption and long queues.

Community members are also having difficulties in accessing their savings especially on Ecocash. Informal money dealers are charging as high as 40% commission for cash withdrawals from Ecocash. Community members currently lack credible information on the whereabouts of a local referral centre for COVID-19 cases. Fisheries who were

operating in Lake Chivero and Darwendale dam are complaining over the government's refusal to allow them to operate, whereas butcheries and other fisheries operating in Kariba were exempted from the lockdown.

Matabeleland North Province

Tsholotsho

Most clinics such as Sipepa and Samahuru are closed but are only offering emergency services. Prices of basic commodities have gone up with 10kg mealie meal being sold for 80 Rands or ZW\$150. There is no subsidized mealie meal. The Ministry of Social Welfare is distributing food aid in wards 5,7,10,12,15,16 and 17 to the elderly while organizations such as Leads Trust and World Food Programme are also distributing food to vulnerable groups. Community members are not observing social distancing as they fetch water at Community boreholes. Information on Covid-19 is usually accessible via radio mostly Radio Zimbabwe, Studio 7 as well as via short message services (SMS) from mobile operators.

Matabeleland South Province

Gwanda Central

Police Officers and soldiers are assisting community members to observe social distancing while they purchase subsidized mealie meal. Clinics are opening but only offering emergency services, Drugs for those suffering from other ailments such as Tuberculosis are available at most health centers although drugs for other ailments that are in short supply. Most health centers do not have corona tests kits. Prices for basic commodities have gone up. A 10kg of mealie meal being sold for ZW\$190 while a 2litres of cooking oil is being sold ZW\$150. There is no food aid being distributed. Local authorities, health institutions are raising awareness on Covid 19.

Manicaland Province

Buhera

Most health centres are only offering emergency services. World vision is giving people basic necessities such as cooking oil and mealie meal. The Ministry of Social Welfare is giving maize aswell. Prices for basic necessities such as sugar have risen significantly. A 2kg packet of sugar is being sold for ZW\$130. There is no subsidized mealie meal being sold in the area. Last month at Murambinda business centre sold subsidized mealie meal but only a few community members who stay close to the growth point purchased the mealie meal. Information on covid awareness is being accessed via radio. Local Ecocash agents are charging as much as 40 percent interest on all transactions making it very difficult for most community members to get value out of their money. Community members are not observing social distancing at community boreholes. Added to this, there are no hand sanitizers at boreholes.

Nyanga

Clinics are offering emergency services and turning away patients. Prices for basic commodities such as mealie meal have gone up. Mealie meal is being sold for ZW\$165 while a 2kg packet of sugar is being sold for ZW\$125. Local authorities and radios are raising awareness on Covid-19. People are not observing social distancing at community boreholes. Community members are observing social distancing though most community boreholes do not have hand sanitizers. Ecocash agents are charging 40 percent interest on all transaction. Nyanga hospital was designated as a Covid centre but to date, it has not dealt with any covid case.