

Heal Zimbabwe

lockdown update (25 April – 27 April, 2020)

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

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

Matabeleland North

Lupane

Most shops at Lupane, Masenyane, Canmore, Jotsholo and Gwaai centres were open on the 27th of April. The police are reinforcing adherence to social distancing, albeit with failure. Local shops opened from 9am to 3pm. After the announcement of extension of COVID-19 lockdown by another 14 days the rentals and essential goods have ballooned beyond the reach of the ordinary public. This has caused the panic among people as they are now stocking basic

commodities such as cooking oil in their houses. Property owners have also hiked their rentals. In some areas rentals for a room has shot up from US\$10.00 to US\$30.00. Basic commodities such as mealie-meal, sugar and cooking oil are pegged at ZW \$ 160/10kg, ZW\$ 90/2kg and ZW\$ 180/2ltrs respectively. Today the 27th of April, community members queued for subsidized roller meal at Zapalala supermarket from as early as 0300 hours, without observing social distancing. Community members in Lupane access information on COVID-19 from radio stations. Ecocash agents are charging 30% interest on every cash withdrawal. St Lukes hospital and Lupane State University were designated as local COVID-19 screening centres.

Tsholotsho

By the 27th of April, most community members were not observing social distancing as they fetch water at Community boreholes. 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\$150.00. There is no subsidized mealie meal in the district. The Department 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. 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

Umzingwane

Community members from Ward 1 are experiencing severe hunger due to inaccessibility of transport and closure of informal trading in the area. This is the same situation in Ward 2. However, community members in Ward 2 are faced with an increase in house breaking activities, and in most cases the thieves are targeting granaries. Community members from this ward are not exercising social distancing and disinfecting at community boreholes. Ward 1 is surrounded by 3 army barracks and this has lured young women into survival sex in search for food. The ward is also not aware of the district COVID-19 referral centre. Information about the virus is only available in local clinics, and yet people rarely visit the clinics.

Beitbridge

Hunger and starvation has taken a toll on most people who rely on cross border trade ever since South Africa closed the border. In a bid to survive most vendors are openly displaying their wares at business centers and the local bus terminus. Subsidized mealie meal is usually available at Gain supermarket, N.Richards, Baobab spar and Kwikspar Mashakada where community members queue for hours without observing social distancing. The local vegetable market is opening from 0600 hours and closing at 1300 hours. No social distancing, sanitizers and protective clothing such as masks are being prioritized at the market. Yesterday, the 26th of April, Council demolished some flea market at the local bus terminus. Community members are not aware of information around COVID-19. Information on the virus is accessible through South African radio stations and text messages from South African based mobile operators.

Harare Metropolitan Province

Hopley

By the 27th of April, community members in Hopley Ward 1 were retaliating against uniformed

services for continuously beating them up and dispersing them from bars and markets. Residents were gathering around markets and bars with arguing that they cannot stop vending since it is the only viable form of livelihoods. Police and soldiers seized residents' live chickens they were selling near Irvines. Local wholesalers in Hopley are selling subsidized mealie meal at US\$4.00. There have also been rumours that some security officers were demanding for bribes from some of the residents especially after residents are caught vending or loitering around.

In high density suburbs such as Glen Norah, Highfield, Budiriro, Mabvuku and Tafara community members are resorting to sleeping at queues for subsidized mealie meal. At these queues no social distancing is observed as people scramble to buy either mealie meal or cooking oil. In middle and low density suburbs such as Westgate, Mt Pleasant, Greencroft, Malbereign, Avondale, Eastlea and Belgravia there is a sharp increase of human traffic at shopping centres. This is testament to the fact that citizens' are weary of the lockdown and the economic impact that it has. In all this, there is no corresponding increase in the testing and tracing of corona cases. Government needs to seriously rethink and strike a balance between restoring economic activity and ensuring compliance with mechanism that seek to reduce the spread of the virus.

Manicaland Province

Mutare

On the 25th of April, Sakubva Vegetable Market was closed. Mutare City Council highlighted that farmers were supposed to take their produce for resale in Dangamvura, Hob house and Chikanga only. On the same day, the Manicaland Provincial COVID 19 Taskforce earmarked mining communities including Penhalonga, Chiadzwa, Marange and Chimanimani as areas where COVID 19 related aid would be channelled. The Taskforce further inspected Mutare Provincial General Hospital Ward dedicated for COVID-19 and ruled that renovations were expected to be completed by Friday the 1st of May, 2020.

Today, the 27th of April, a truck from Mega Market Wholesalers was moving around Ward 12 – Florida, under police escort, selling government's subsidized mealie-meal at ZWL\$70.00 or US\$2.00 per 10kg. The police was ensuring that people do not end up queuing at the truck. However, none of the police or the Mega Market team was wearing a mask, thereby putting their lives and those of the customers at risk of contracting COVID 19. A local fresh produce market at Chikanga Spar in Ward 16 was also relocated to Chikanga Sports Complex where there is a functional basketball court. The new market place has no adequate space to practice social distancing, no toilets to service large numbers of people, does not have running water, has got limited parking space and part of the sporting field is a wetland and it poses a health hazard when fresh produce waste is being dumped in the wetland.

Chipinge

Today, the 27th of April, community members in Ward 1 stayed in their homes. Police were deployed around 09:00hours to help enforce the National Lockdown. Bangwe Clinic in Ward 1 was open for emergency cases only, drugs were not available and nurses were complaining over lack of protective clothing for them to perform their duties well. Community members from Maunganidze were having a challenge in withdrawing cash from their Ecocash accounts. Ecocash Agents were charging 40% commission for every cash withdrawal.

On the 26th of April, community members from around Ward 28 were gathered in Vheneka village to receive food aid handouts from Goal Zimbabwe. Community members were practising social distancing at the distributions. However, in Chipinge town, queues were long owing to the fact that it was a half day for OK and TM supermarkets. Most people wanted to supplement their groceries. Most shops in Gaza complied with the lockdown terms, opening at 0900 hours and closing at 1400 hours.

On the 25th of April, a group of soldiers dispersed men who had gathered to drink beer at a bottle store in Ward 26 in Macheni. Community members from Ward 26 were gathered at a food distribution meeting

at Chisumbanje shopping centre. The aid was being distributed by GOAL and community members were exercising social distancing. This was also the case in Marega village, in Ward 28. Soldiers were also reportedly seen in Ward 25, peacefully enforcing the lockdown.

Nyanga

Today, the 27th of April, community members in Ward 18 stayed in their homes. Mapako clinic in Ward 18 was open for emergency cases only, although nurses at the clinic were complaining shortage of drugs and water supply. The clinic has no test-kits for COVID-19. At around 10:00 hours, police officers were seen moving around Magarati village, encouraging everyone to stay in their homes. Community members have not yet heard of any referral centre for COVID-19 in the district. Community members were complaining over the prices set for basic commodities especially mealie meal ranging between ZWL\$200.00 and ZWL\$250.00 per 10Kg, and cooking oil being charged at ZWL\$150.00. Ecocash charges are as high as 40% for every cash withdrawal.

Mutasa

Community members in Ward 20 and Ward 21 stayed in their homes. Tsonzo Rural District Hospital and Hauna District were servicing their patients today. The hospital however, does not have test kits for COVID-19. Today there was only non-subsidized mealie meal in Ward 20 costing ZWL\$200.00. Most community members were complaining over Ecocash charges of 25% for every cash withdrawal. Community members from Hauna Growth Point highlighted that the local Ecocash Agents charge 30% interest on all withdrawals.

Mashonaland East Province

Murewa

It is still business as usual for community members from Ward 27, by the 26th of April. Shops are opening from 1000 hours to 1500 hours. However, local gatherings of people to drink both traditionally brewed and bottled beer are still going on without observing social distancing. Youths on the other hand, are still carrying on with their normal daily sporting activities like playing soccer. Price of basic commodities such as cooking oil and sugar have sky-rocketed to ZWL\$200.00 and ZWL\$150.00 respectively. To help reduce food shortages, the Department of Social Welfare has been distributing sorghum, albeit assisting only a fraction of the people in need.

Wedza

On the 25th of April, community members from Wards 4,5, and 8 were brewing traditional beer and selling it at night. These wards are a distance away from Ward 2, and police is failing to monitor them. Only a few shops namely Vimai, Chotace, Matemba and Kujeke were open at Wedza Centre/Growth Point, Ward 2. They opened from 0800 hours to 1500 hours. The police and council were peacefully monitoring social distance as well as precautions to prevent COVID-19. Prices of basic commodities have generally doubled with a 2kg of sugar costing ZWL\$115 and a 10kg of mealie-meal costing ZWL\$200.

Community members from the surrounding areas such as Tongogara and Maruta (5-7 km one way) were walking to the growth point to purchase groceries since, they could not find basic goods such as cooking oil from their areas. Community members from Chigwedere Township, Garabha and Mutandwa in Ward 6 also faced similar challenges, with local shops only accepting US dollars and Zimbabwean dollars in cash. Vendors at Wedza Growth Point are also facing difficulties given that only registered ones are being allowed to operate. The majority of vendors in Wedza are not registered.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Women, Small and Medium Enterprises Development is set to give small

grants of ZWL\$250.00 to help cushion vendors from the economic challenges they are facing during the lockdown. However, many of the vendors were complaining that their names were not registered and they are likely not to get any help. In Ward 6, where community members got better yields of small grains, small grains vendors are taking advantage of the situation to coerce farmers to sell their sorghum, beans, peas and maize at US\$3.00 per bucket. Most of the farmers have limited choices, given that GMB and other Miller's are closed at the moment. There has been a malaria outbreak in Wedza and only St Mary's Rusunzwe hospital has the treatment of the disease.

Masvingo Province

Chiredzi

Today the 27th of April, residents from Tshovani stayed in their homes. Police and soldiers were peacefully enforcing the lockdown. However, on the 25th of April, a group of 13 Police officers in Tshovani ward 4 assaulted 4 people. The four brothers were at the gate of their homestead in lion drive removing food stuffs from their car when police officers started assaulting them with button sticks. All of them were severely injured.

Zaka

Community members in Zaka continue to observe lockdown rules by staying in their homes and going to Jerera and Chinorumba business centres for essential goods and services only. The main reason for going to the shops would be for subsidized mealie meal at N Richards. However, on the 26th of April, community members were told that they will be buying mealie-meal from their respective wards and ZANU PF Chairpersons will be presiding over the sale of all government's subsidized mealie-meal. Member of Parliament for Zaka Central, Mr Davison Svuuure instructed people that they will be getting mealie-meal from their wards. Community members now fear that the mealie-meal will be sold on a partisan basis.

Masvingo

On the 27th of April, the local supermarket was being manned by 5 police officers, who were effectively enforcing lockdown measures by ensuring that there are hand sanitizers for disinfecting every customer. Runyararo and Mazorodze clinics open from 9am – 3pm to provide health care to the community members and suspects of COVID 19 are going to be handled at Rujeko clinic once completed. Rujeko Clinic was designated as the local COVID-19 isolation centre and the local council together with the Civil Protection Unit are renovating it.

