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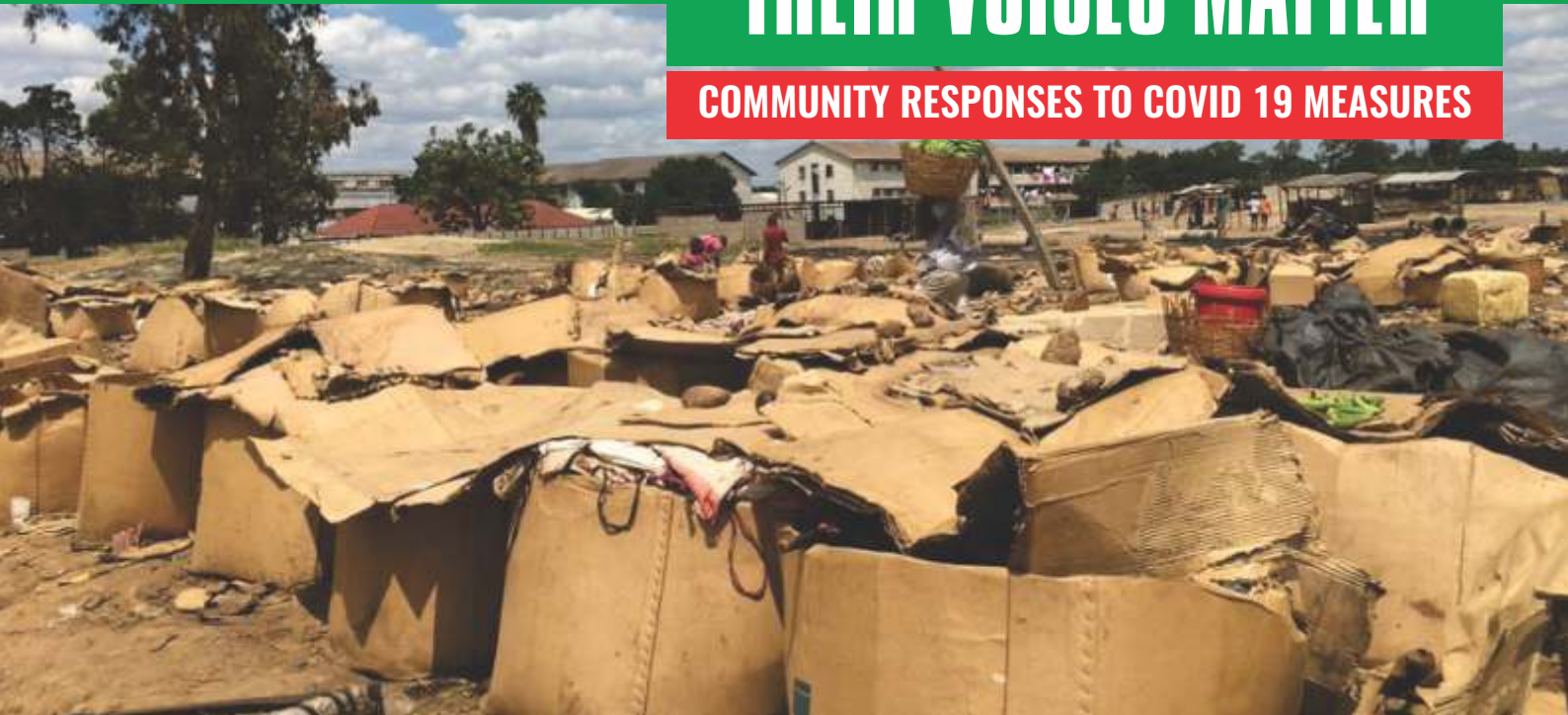
Campaigners for Human Rights

Week 1 Report

21 DAYS LOCKDOWN

“THEIR VOICES MATTER”

COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO COVID 19 MEASURES





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“THEIR VOICES MATTER”

COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO COVID 19 MEASURES

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Their Voices Matter: Community Response to COVID 19 Measures in Zimbabwe

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This report is produced as part of ZimRights’ Community Justice Programme to give voice to the communities that are affected by national policies. If you wish to receive ZimRights publications regularly, join our mailing list by emailing publications@zimrights.org.zw

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“Rural farmers were stranded with tonnes of produce on the start of the 21 day lockdown.”

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This catastrophe plunging the industrialised world into darkness will do more damage for fragile economies in Africa.

Introduction

The world has been turned upside down by the COVID 19 pandemic. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has since pointed out that the world has recorded more than 680 000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in 203 countries as of 29 March 2020. Italy, China, Spain and United States recorded more than 40 000 deaths and the numbers are increasing daily. In the first 3 months of the pandemic, the global economy has lost around USD3,2 trillion.

Economists predict that if the pandemic is not stopped by August 2020, the world will plunge into a recession much much worse than 1929. This catastrophe plunging the industrialised world into darkness will do more damage for fragile economies in Africa. With 2million Chinese people living in Africa, the bridge for the pandemic to find its way to the continent and to Zimbabwe at high speed is set. In Zimbabwe, the health care system is already in ICU.



680 000

confirmed cases of COVID-19
in 203 countries



40 000

Recorded deaths in Italy,
China, Spain and United States



USD3,2 trillion

has been lost around
the global economy

If the pandemic comes with the same viciousness, the impact will be unimaginable. By the time of the compilation of this report, Zimbabwe has reported 9 cases with one death.

On Monday 30 March 2020, the government decreed a 21 day lock-down through SI 2020-083 Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) Order, 2020.

In this fight against COVID 19, community voices matter. This report captures the community responses to these measures in the first week of the lockdown and the subsequent human rights implications.

These responses are documented with the hope that they will be able to influence the decisions about COVID 19 and how measures to fight it are implemented in an approach that is not only sensitive to human rights but rather in way that are proactive to the rights of the most vulnerable.

No Time for Preparation

“We were ambushed”

While there were whispers ahead of the 21 Day Lock-Down, many communities were caught without preparation. Unlike in South Africa and Botswana where people were advised of the pending in advance, in Zimbabwe the President announced the Lock Down on Friday 27 March 2020 to take effect on 30 March 2020. This caused panic in the communities, generating a rush on the banks, shops, fuel stations and pharmacies. In cities where people felt they could not afford a 21 days lock-down, they flocked to the rural areas raising the risk of urban-rural infection.

Speaking to ZimRights, one rural bound traveller said he could not risk staying in the city for 21 days without food, water and other basic needs. He said he stands a better chance of survival in the rural areas.

A member of ZimRights in Buhera said they were shocked to see the village flooded by urban dwellers who were drinking and partying at the local townships.



“We confronted them and told them that they were putting our village at risk,”

said the member who teaches at a local school in Buhera.

He said they advised fellow community members to stay indoors and avoid townships.

No Water Supply

“How do we practice hygiene without water?”

Zimbabwe has always been bedevilled by water challenges due to the collapse of service delivery by the national water authority. In nine high density suburbs where reports were received from, which include Highfields, Glen Norah, Budiriro, Zengeza, Glen view and in Bulawayo’s Magwegwe, Makokoba and Mupopoma, most families found themselves locked up without access to water. Consequently, the people most affected by this are women who in most communities are responsible for the general welfare of the family. Members reported that they visited an average of three boreholes in each suburb, where hordes of people were gathered and were trying to access water.



Residents of Glen Norah fetch water at a community borehole on the first day of the lockdown.



“With water not coming out of our taps, we have no choice but to come here and fetch borehole water. Besides, even if tap water is running, we no longer drink it because it is not safe. We, however, still call on the council to provide us with clean, potable running water so that we can stay at home and not risk our lives by being out here during this lockdown,”

Catherine in Highfields, Harare

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A resident of Masvingo says the police are beating up people who attempt to access water from public boreholes



In respect of the water crisis, the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), took government to court took the government of Zimbabwe to court on March 30 over failure to provide potable adequate water in the face of Covid-19 and the subsequent “lockdown.”

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This resulted in the High Court ordering, on 31 March, the government of Zimbabwe and the City of Harare to urgently take concrete steps to improve water supplies in the face of the COVID 19 and the subsequent lock down.

[Click to Read Article](#)



However, a week later, queues at boreholes remain long as it appears that both the central and local government authorities are not taking action to provide running water to residents.

Section 77 (a) of Constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees the right to safe, clean and potable water.



Residents of Makokoba in Bulawayo queue for water

Panic Buying and Access to Basic Needs

“Its hunger versus COVID 19: How do we survive?”

Many families in Zimbabwe live from hand to mouth due to the biting economic conditions.

With the high levels of unemployment, and the general economic meltdown the country has experienced, Zimbabweans generally live in extreme poverty and their level of deprivation means they are unable to access basic goods and services that are considered necessary to an acceptable standard of living, according to the World Bank Standards.

With an unverifiable but high number of Zimbabweans living as economic refugees in other countries, Zimbabweans who have remained home live on handouts from their relatives in Diaspora.

In 2019 alone, Zimbabwe received 635 million U.S. dollars in diaspora remittances, up by 2.6 percent from the 2018 figure of 619 million US dollars, according to the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe.



USD635 million

2019 Diaspora Remittances

However, the situation for these people who rely on their relatives who live outside the country has been made worse by the shutdown as the country as money transfer agents have also stopped operating.



Citizens queuing for basic needs amidst the lock down

No Option for the Vulnerable

“The streets are our home... where do we go?”

The government announced a lockdown without reflecting on the situation of the most vulnerable groups. ZimRights spoke to a number of homeless people facing potential arrest under the lockdown law and without access to food.

Homelessness is often underestimated but *according to the New Humanitarian*, about 1.2 million (about 8.4 percent of the population) Zimbabweans are without adequate shelter, and are therefore vulnerable and live in extreme poverty.

This is a significant part of the population, which needs to be considered as the country attempts to deal with Covid19.

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The African Commission on Human and People’s rights has already raised its concerns that the disease will have distressing consequences on people at risk including, among others, older people, homeless and people living in inadequate housing such as informal settlements, refugees and people with weak immune systems due to underlying health conditions.

While other countries like South Africa have taken into consideration their homeless people by at least giving them some shelter in



“THEIR VOICES MATTER”

a stadium, there have been reports that the Zimbabwe Republic Police have instead, brutalised and arrested people living in the streets, again further exposing them to the contraction or transmission of Covid19.

More worrying is that there has not been any policy pronouncement by government, on what it would do to assist the homeless, who are a critical and unique population. Instead, government has announced a yet to be disbursed one-size-for-all package for ‘vulnerable households’.

The government of Zimbabwe must be reminded that according to the Constitution Section 28, the state and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must take reasonable legislative and other measure to enable every person to have access to adequate shelter.

This is in conformity to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which has a provision that everyone has a right to housing.

The Plight of Informal Traders

“This war against livelihoods....”

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions estimates that over 85 percent of people work in the informal sector, where they run small to medium enterprises that require them to work on a daily basis as their income is based on low profits thresholds and high volumes and they hardly ever manage to have savings as they operate in a constricted economic environment. Therefore, the announcement that the country was to lock down in two days was too short a notice, leaving many not being able to buy the needed essentials as they did not have the money to do so. A total of 86 Zimrights members in Harare, Bulawayo, Masvingo, Mutare, Gweru, Buhera, and Matobo said they either witnessed, or were part of the people who did not manage to buy essentials in time, and ended up joining queues for basics like mealie-meal during the first three days of the shutdown, exposing themselves to the virus.

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An informal trader from Mwenezi narrates how they are now going hungry, and appeals to government to intervene



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Director of the Vendor Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation (VISET), Samuel Wadzai, says vendors have faced harassment from police during the first week of the country’s lockdown



Samuel Wadzai
Director of VISET



Detained people grouped and sitting close to each other

Interface with Security Services

“We are very very afraid....”

By Friday morning, the State-owned Herald newspaper, quoting the Police National Spokesperson, Assistant Commissioner Paul Nyathi, announced that police had arrested 485 people for *“failing to abide by restrictions outlined by President Mnangagwa last week when he announced a raft of measures to halt the spread of coronavirus.”*

According to Nyathi, those arrested were found guilty of operating shebeens, failing to observe social in queues, while some motorists were also arrested for moving around aimlessly. While the attempts by the police to enforce the lockdown are in line with their mandate, it is disturbing that the arrests have been handled in a way that further increases the risk of spreading Covid19.

Images of detained people grouped and sitting close to each other defy the whole purpose of avoiding the spread of the disease.

More worrying are the videos that have gone viral of the police beating up people, further heightening fears of the advent of yet another brutal crackdown.

Zimrights members across the country, especially in Harare, Masvingo, Bulawayo and Mutare, have reported incidents of police harassment targeting people. This comes as the history of the country’s law enforcement agents is marred by previous human rights violations targeted at innocent civilians.



Tinotendaishe Paul Chidakwa

am disappointed in them. people are still moving around
some still knocking on our doors and nobody is stopping
them

...

A Facebook contribution on the conduct of the law enforcement agents

These incidences also have serious human rights implications considering that according to the Constitution, the police are supposed to be the champions of human rights as they are supposed to conduct themselves in a professional, ethical manner and to exercise restraint as much as possible.

Community Interaction with Health facilities

Experiences of Health Practitioners

Ahead of the Lock Down, ZimRights paid tribute to health workers at the frontline of the fight against COVID.

As Zimbabwe recorded its first Covid19 case, Zimbabwe’s health care workers were among the most poorly paid, with a doctor in Zimbabwe earning less than USD\$100 worth of salary a month. However, faced with a global pandemic, the health care workers joined the rest of the world in the fight against the pandemic. Having downed tools, the healthcare workers agreed to return to work, even though

government had offered an insignificant risk allowance of between ZWL600 and ZWL1,500.00 a month.

These are healthcare workers who, without adequate resources, are out in the hospitals, prepared, or taking part in the fight against Covid19.



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ZimRights Audible
Speak Out

Tribute to Healthcare
Workers



Conclusion

The report documents community experiences in the fight against COVID 19. Many times these are overlooked and in the process their rights overlooked. ZimRights calls on all actors to listen to the voices of the communities and implement their measures with attention to community rights and expectations.

ZimRights will continue monitoring the situation and giving communities the voice that they require. To follow these conversations, keep a tag on our social medial channels.





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Campaigners for Human Rights

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