

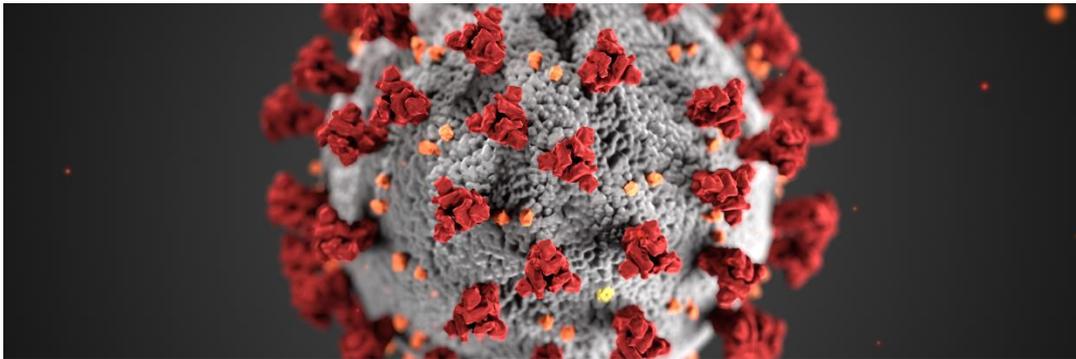
# Zimbabwe Election Support Network



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## Monitoring Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

### Update #6



#### 1. INTRODUCTION

As part of ongoing efforts to manage the effects of COVID-19 and flatten the curve in Zimbabwe, a series of Statutory Instruments (SI) have been gazetted.

The latest SI <sup>1</sup> extends the national lockdown for an indefinite period, subject to fortnightly reviews, while providing for a limited relaxation of the lockdown further to the one specified in Statutory Instrument 94 of 2020.

In pursuit of sustained accountability, and transparency regarding responses to COVID-19 by both State and Non-State

Actors, ZESN presents a summary of the reports that it received this week from its Long Term Observers<sup>2</sup>.

#### 2. MINISTRY OF HEALTH SUMMARY OF UPDATES

The Ministry of Health and Child Care has been providing daily updates on COVID-19 via the Ministry's social media accounts and the Ministry's official website.

As of 08 June 2020 <sup>3</sup>, 31 767 Rapid Diagnostic Test (RDT) and 21 901 Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Diagnostic Tests had been done. Zimbabwe had 287 confirmed cases, including 46 recoveries and four deaths

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<sup>1</sup> See Statutory Instrument 110 of 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Reports received between 4-8 June 2020

<sup>3</sup>

<https://twitter.com/MoHCCZim/status/1270070837937348610/photo/1>

since the onset of the outbreak of the virus on 20 March 2020.

### 3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This update is informed by reports from ZESN's Long Term Observers resident in the 210 National Assembly Constituencies. A summary of the issues raised by the observer reports are highlighted below:

#### 3.1 LIVELIHOOD ISSUES



Report of demolition of illegal structures by municipalities were received from Chipinge central where makeshift Church structures and informal traders' structures were demolished this week.

In Mutare Central, the biggest vegetable markets known as the Sakubva market and green market remained closed, forcing farmers to sell their wares in alleys, backyards and conducting car boot sales.

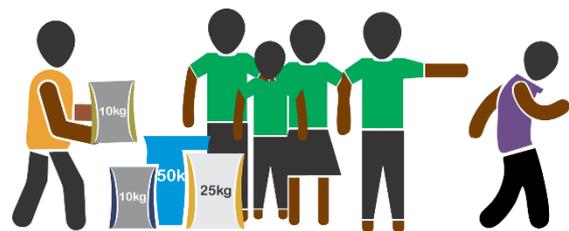
The timing of the demolitions give an impression that Municipal Authorities are taking advantage of the lockdown to enforce Urban Council planning laws, at a time when citizens are likely to offer the

least objections, owing to the restriction on freedom of movements ushered in by the lockdown. The timing of the demolitions is however regrettable as it is being done at a time when those who trade in the informal sector have already suffered huge erosion of their savings and thus are more vulnerable now than before the lockdown.

The cost of living continues to escalate, LTOs have reported the general increase in the price of basic commodities such as sugar, cooking oil, mealie meal among others. Those relying on public transport have also been affected by the withdrawal of ZUPCO buses from plying certain routes like the Nkayi South-Bulawayo route, and the Kwekwe-Gweru route.

In times where people's income has been eroded, access to affordable health care becomes more challenging because of persistent drug shortages reported at some health centres such as a report was made in Gutu East. Previous reports have provided more examples that demonstrate that drug shortages at public health institutions is common.

#### 3.2 FOOD AID DISTRIBUTION



In response to the dire need for food aid by a significant number of both rural and urban citizens, government, through the department of Social Welfare is distributing food to those in need. In addition Non-Governmental Organisations and Philanthropists were reported to be distributing food hampers to the most vulnerable citizens in the country, especially the elderly and persons living with disabilities.

The department of social welfare was reported to have distributed food to elderly and other vulnerable groups in Mutoko North and Bulilima East this week. Celebration and Lutheran Churches distributed food hampers in Masvingo Urban.

LTOs also reported on some Councillors who were involved in giving food handouts to vulnerable citizens residing in ward 2 and 6 of Bulilima East, where were given 2kg rice per household. The Councillor for ward 11 of Chiwundura Constituency mobilised food humpers for a COVID-19 patient who was in self isolation. LTOs also expressed that food distributions were done in a non-partisan manner.

### 3.3 SECURITY OF QUARANTINE CENTRES

The Government needs to urgently address the security lapses at various quarantine centres as well as the conditions of living at the centres.

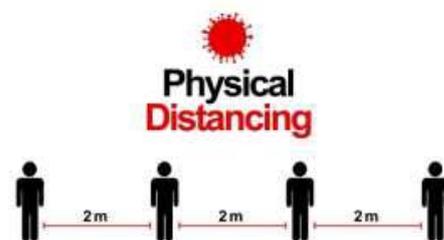
Some of the buildings at Bindura University were requisitioned as a quarantine facilities. These facilities are still operation at a time when students have begun to return to the university.

Some of the students expressed fear of being exposed to COVID-19 by inmates at the quarantine facility.

The Mutare Central LTO heard that some of the people at Mutare Polytechnic College, quarantine facility have gone on hunger strike objecting detention that exceeds the statutory 21 days. Some indicated they were not on their 24<sup>th</sup> day at the centre.

Honourable Cuthbert Mpame, Member of Parliament for Zvishavane-Runde, was reported to have distributed 300 face masks this week. The Masks were distributed to residents who gathered Mabasa Growth Point.

### 3.4 VIOLATION OF PHYSICAL DISTANCING



Reports of violation of this health guidelines continue to be received from LTOs resident in the country's 10 provinces especially in instances where people are gathered at funeral wakes, queues at retail outlets selling basic

commodities that may be scarce, and boreholes in places where portable water is not readily available.

In Makokoba, there were reports of large numbers of residents congregating around municipal water bowsers, with no masks and not observing social distancing.



In Chipinge central large crowds were observed at retail outlets that were selling sugar and reports on the illicit sale of alcoholic beverages were increasing, drawing large number of people to confined spaces such backyards.

### 3.5 CIVIC AWARENESS OF COVID-19



Concerted efforts continue to be made by both state and non-state actors to raise awareness of the pandemic. This week the ZESN LTOs in Mbire reported that SAVE the Children Fund conducted civic education on the pandemic while another LTO in Matobo South witnessed civic education activities by Habakkuk Trust.

## 4. ELECTIONS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Parliament, this week, released the schedule for the Constitutional Amendment Bill Public Hearings. In response, ZESN will embark on various activities that will help raise the public's awareness of the contents of the proposed Constitutional amendments. ZESN will also encourage those with concerns to express them at the hearings. In addition ZESN will make both oral and written submissions for consideration by Parliament.

In light of the restrictions to the enjoyment of the freedom of movement, ZESN is concerned that the success of the public hearings may be affected by the challenges that ordinary citizens may face as they travel from their homes to the venues for the public hearings.

ZESN also notes the announcement by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission of the indefinite suspension of electoral

activities that require gathering, such as by-elections.

Given that a number of countries have so far held electoral activities amid COVID-19, ZEC could draw lessons to guide the conduct of elections under circumstances that are more or less similar, so as not to quarantine democracy.

ZESN believe there is need to strike a balance between ensuring the health and safety of all stakeholders and upholding the law. ZESN thus recommends more dialogue between ZEC and electoral stakeholders on alternative methods of conducting other electoral processes that will ensure the health and safety for all involved.

Overall, ZEC's decision on the way forward regarding conducting electoral processes amid COVID-19 should be informed by an inclusive consultative process that taps into the views of all concerned stakeholders

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The Government should tighten Security of quarantine centres to stop those in the centres from escaping.
- ii. Government should provide urgent assistance to the informal sector to enable the sector to reopen their businesses in a manner that safeguards the health of their

customers and employees of this sector.

- iii. Members of the public are urged to fully comply with the restrictions imposed to manage the effects of COVID-19 and flatten the curve.
- iv. Members of the Public are encouraged to make oral submissions to members of Parliament during the public hearings.
- v. Parliament should also publicise the measures that have been put in place to facilitate movement of those intending to make oral submissions at the public hearings and measures in place to ensure health of those making oral submissions and the Legislators is safeguarded.