

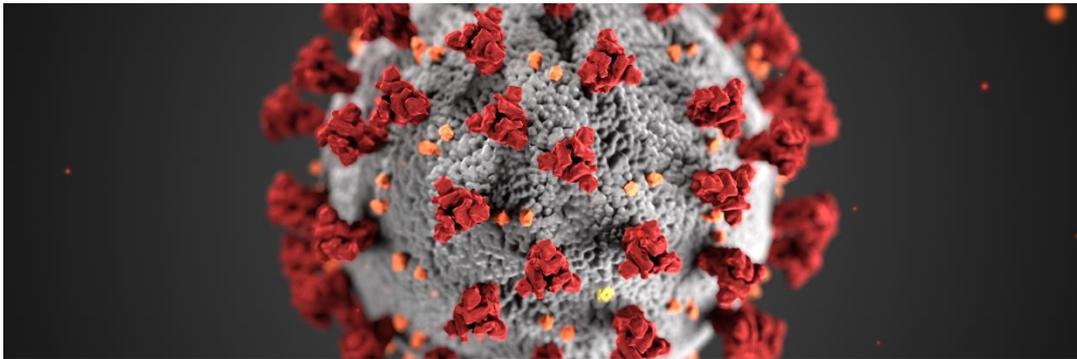
# Zimbabwe Election Support Network



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## Monitoring Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Update # 21



### 1. INTRODUCTION

The reporting period was characterised by intriguing developments in the field of elections in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) lifted its suspension of by-elections on 13 September 2020<sup>1</sup>, shortly thereafter after the media was awash with reports that the ZEC had given 5 December 2020 as the dates for the impending by-elections. However the Government issued a contrary pronouncement that suspended by-elections indefinitely citing the COVID-19 Pandemic as a formidable disease, which created conditions that made it too risky to conduct by-elections.

Throughout the lockdown period ZESN has been sharing reports from its Long Term Observers (LTOs) so as to inform policy makers and interventions of non-state actors who seek to compliment government efforts to flatten the curve.

### 2. MINISTRY OF HEALTH SUMMARY OF UPDATES

The Ministry of Health and Child Care continues to consistently provide updates on COVID-19 via its social media platforms and its official website. Such updates continued to be vital in informing interventions of both state and non-state actors.

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<https://twitter.com/ZECzim/status/1305821821602861058/photo/1>

As at 19 October 2020, Zimbabwe had 8 159 confirmed cases, including 7 683 recoveries and 232 deaths<sup>2</sup>.

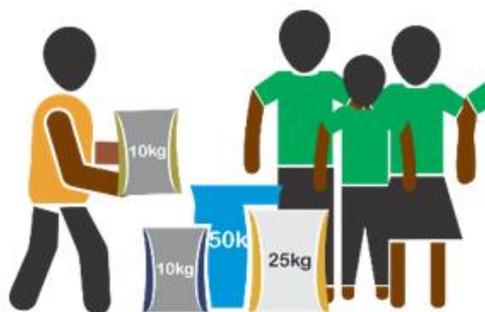
### 3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

During the period 14 September to 19 October 2020, ZESN received the following feedback from its Long Term Observers resident in the 210 National Assembly Constituencies.

#### 3.1 LIVELIHOOD ISSUES

Government provided agricultural inputs to citizens in most parts of the country who are participating in the pfumvudza maize farming model. Such reports were received from Uzumba, Makoni West, Mutare North, Muzarabani South, Mbire, Mutoko East, Wedza North, Magunje, Mhangura, Muzvezve, Bikita South, Gutu West, Masvingo South, Mwenezi East, Zaka North, Chiwundura, and Gokwe-Chireya, Gokwe-Sesame Constituencies.

#### 3.2 FOOD AID DISTRIBUTION



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<https://twitter.com/MoHCCZim/status/1318256017659121668>

#### 3.1 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE HEALTH SECTOR

The Department of Social Welfare conducted food distribution during the reporting period in Nyanga North, Mbire (ward 1, 2, 7, 10, and 16), Mangwe (ward 10), and Chiredzi South Constituencies.

Save the Children Foundation provided financial aid to selected beneficiaries amounting to 65 United States dollars per household in Mbire Constituency.

World Food Programme (WFP) donated food in wards 1, 5 and 7 of Tsholotsho North Constituency. CARITAS distributed food in Ward 1 of Matobo South Constituency.

The United Family International Church donated food hampers during the reporting period to elderly and orphans who reside in Gokwe-Nembudziya Constituency.

#### 3.2 ENFORCEMENT OF LOCKDOWN REGULATIONS

Enforcement of COVID-19 regulations contributed immensely to efforts to flatten the curve, as the majority of citizens in various parts of the country appeared to comply with the stipulated health protocols out of fear of being arrested for contravening the same. This conclusion is based to reports from

observers that indicate that compliance with health protocols was mainly done by citizens when venturing into spaces that they knew had an increased presence of police such as shopping centres and highways.



However, reports of police either soliciting for or accepting bribes were also received during the reporting period. Some of the biggest culprits in this regard included unregistered transport operators who were bribing police manning various roadblocks along routes that the operators would be plying. Such reports were received from many Constituencies including Mutasa North, Murehwa West, Masvingo South, Goromonzi West and Gokwe Central Constituencies.



**Picture 1: An overloaded and unregistered public transporter plying the Maphisa to Tshelanyemba route in Matobo South Constituency.**

Access to antenatal and postnatal services remains a challenge at some public health institutions with some clinics offering a limited range of services and referring clients to larger referral hospitals for services that the clinics used to offer before the advent of COVID-19. For instance a Clinic in Harare East Constituency was reportedly referring women due for delivery to Parirenyatwa Hospital.

On 28 July 2010, through Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation, and acknowledged that these two are essential to the realisation of all human rights<sup>3</sup>.

Throughout the reporting period there were reports of challenges encountered by residents of various urban and rural communities in accessing portable water. This has resulted in residents congregating in large numbers at boreholes. Such reports during the

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[https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human\\_right\\_to\\_water.shtml](https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml)

reporting period were received from Pumula, Luveve, Makokoba, Njube-Lobengula, Glen View South, Mufakose, Marondera West, Mudzi South, Zengeza East, Mudzi South, Lupane East, and Mhondoro-Ngezi Constituencies.



Picture 2: Women fetching water from a borehole in ward 2 of Mudzi South Constituency.

The municipalities which are expected to ensure that water remains available to residents have failed to deliver on this mandate. During the reporting period the Bulawayo City Council resorted to providing water to residents in various townships, using bowsers. However the water remains inaccessible to the vulnerable residents of those townships as Council was reportedly asked residents to pay cash (in United States dollars) upfront for the water.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wvi.org/publications/case-study/zimbabwe/covid-19-aftershocks-and-their-impact-girls-education-zimbabwe>  
<https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/explai>

#### 4. EDUCATION IN THE COVID-19 ERA

United Nations Women notes that “In times of crisis, when resources are strained and institutional capacity is limited, women and girls face disproportionate impacts with far reaching consequences that are only further amplified in contexts of fragility, conflict, and emergencies”<sup>4</sup>.



Picture 3: Learners maintaining social distance during a lesson conducted outside the classroom at one of the schools in Chiredzi South.

During the reporting period feedback from LTOs, for instance, revealed that there were a significant number of school drop-outs mainly due to teenage pregnancies. The World Vision believes that aftershocks of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe are threatening gains made in Girls’ Education hence the need for consented efforts by the government and other stakeholders to ensure that girls who drop out of school because of teenage pregnancies or early marriages continue school after giving birth.

[ner/covid19/en/index.html?gclid=Cj0KCQjw8rT8BRcBARIsALWiOvQ4ImyoDX1CLOWpJgFQe8kRgVO5zonoOD9i75u42P90Zx7pfiNPu5EaAol6EALw\\_wcB](https://www.wvi.org/publications/case-study/zimbabwe/covid-19-aftershocks-and-their-impact-girls-education-zimbabwe)

While the number of girls who dropped out of school owing to teenage pregnancies this year are still being compiled, it is likely that the figures will be much higher than previous years. According to the Primary and Secondary Education Ministry in 2019, 7000 girls dropped out of school due to pregnancy countrywide. Out of these dropouts, 367 were from primary school and 6,419 were from secondary school<sup>5</sup>.

The government should be applauded for the amending the Education Policy to allow pregnant girls to continue attending school. However much will need to be done to facilitate the creation of conditions that are conducive for the affected girls to continue with their studies.

While Government authorised the phased re-opening of schools, it was apparent that various schools appeared not ready to resume classes owing to the low number of teachers that returned to schools.

Reports of teachers not reporting for duty for various reasons, including protesting the low salaries, were received from Nketa, Kuwadzana, Mufakose, Mbare, Buhera Central, Buhera West, Buhera South, Danganvura-Chikanga, Makoni Central, Mutare South, Bindura North, Muzarabani North, Chikomba Central, Goromonzi South, Mutoko

South, Seke, Mhondoro-Mubaira, Norton, Zvimba West, Zvimba East, and Zvishavane-Runde Constituencies.

There were however some positive reports of schools fully complying with stipulated health regulations at schools such as wearing of face masks, providing facilities for hands sanitisation, and temperature checks at schools. Such reports were received from Harare East, Mpopoma-Pelandaba-Matshobana, Chipinge West, Makoni West, and Mhondoro-Ngezi Constituencies.

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

The reporting period was characterised by heightened uncertainty among electoral stakeholders due to conflicting pronouncements by the ZEC and the Government with the former lifting the suspension of electoral activities while the latter issued a pronouncement that indefinitely suspended elections, using SI 2020-225A -Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (Amendment) Regulations, 2020 (No. 4).<sup>6</sup>

With the ZEC COVID-19 policy complete and the COVID -19 pandemic seemingly at a stage where it is being managed, and COVID-19 regulations being relaxed, it appeared that elections could be held in a manner that observed the necessary

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<sup>5</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/202010100113.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.veritaszim.net/node/4461>

health protocols so as to safeguard the health of voters, members of the public, and ZEC personnel. The Government has even issued pronouncements underscore this. For instance, in a post cabinet briefing, the Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services Monica Mutsvangwa said cases of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe were on a downward trend<sup>7</sup>.

## **5.1. POLITICAL PARTIES PRIMARY ELECTIONS**

Despite the pronouncements by Government suspending by-elections indefinitely, political parties continue to prepare for the by-elections. Parties across the political divide are currently seized with the holding of primary elections in the constituencies where vacancies arose.

Campaigns were reportedly being conducted by political parties in various constituencies. ZANU-PF party and MDC Alliance are reportedly conducting campaigning activities that include door to door visits and meetings in Constituencies that include Glen View North, Marondera East, Mutoko East, Kwekwe Central and Kuwadzana.

The ruling party was reportedly conducting District Coordinating Committee (DCC) elections preparatory meetings in the following Constituencies; Chipinge Central, Wedza North, Wedza South, Hurungwe Central, Magunje, Zvimba South, Bikita South, Tsholotsho North, Gokwe-Chireya, Gokwe-Kabuyuni, Gokwe-Nembudziya. The MDC Alliance was reportedly conducting some party restructuring activities in Gokwe-Kabuyuni Constituency and held primary elections in Kwekwe Central Constituency.

Heightened tensions were reported between the MDC-T and MDC-A supporters over the use of the party offices in Kwekwe Central Constituency while similar reports were made regarding the supporters for the two ZANU-PF candidates aspiring to contest the seat for the same Constituency.

## **5.2. ADVOCACY FOR ELECTORAL REFORM DURING THE COVID- 19 PANDEMIC**

During the reporting period ZESN continued to provide numerous platforms for discussion among electoral stakeholders on a range of issues, as well as enhance public appreciation of key political and electoral developments and their impact on electoral processes.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.mohcc.gov.zw/index.php?option=com](http://www.mohcc.gov.zw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=331:government-continues-to-enforce-covid-19-restrictions&catid=84&Itemid=435)

[content&view=article&id=331:government-continues-to-enforce-covid-19-restrictions&catid=84&Itemid=435](http://www.mohcc.gov.zw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=331:government-continues-to-enforce-covid-19-restrictions&catid=84&Itemid=435)

This week ZESN will conduct a webinar on the suspension of by-elections and its impact on democracy. In previous weeks other webinars were held with the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Justice Legal and Parliamentary Affairs and with members of the public (to discuss Devolution provisions in the Constitution).

On Radio programmes, this week ZESN will conduct a radio program on the suspension of by elections. In previous weeks the radio programmes focused on the draft comprehensive Electoral Amendment Bill which ZESN submitted to Parliament, and another on the importance of the voter registration process.

Virtual meetings with voter education, advocacy for electoral reform, monitoring and observation clusters were also conducted. The meetings considered the suspension of by-elections and possible joint responses CSOs could undertake, how to conduct material development for electoral education in a collaborative way, and the key issues affecting youths, persons with disabilities and women were also discussed.

ZESN also participated in the webinar hosted by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission which provided an opportunity for ZEC and CSOs to consider

effective ways of conducting voter education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The Government is urged to reconsider the indefinite suspension of by-elections.
- ii. Members of the public are encouraged to remain vigilant and observe stipulated health protocols even though the cases of COVID-19 seem to be on a downward trend.
- iii. Political parties should ensure that they observe stipulated health protocols for any face to face campaign activities they may engage in during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iv. City councils around the country are urged to ensure that safe drinking water is provided to citizens on a consistent basis.
- v. The Government should ensure that schools create conducive environments for girls who continue with classes after falling pregnant.