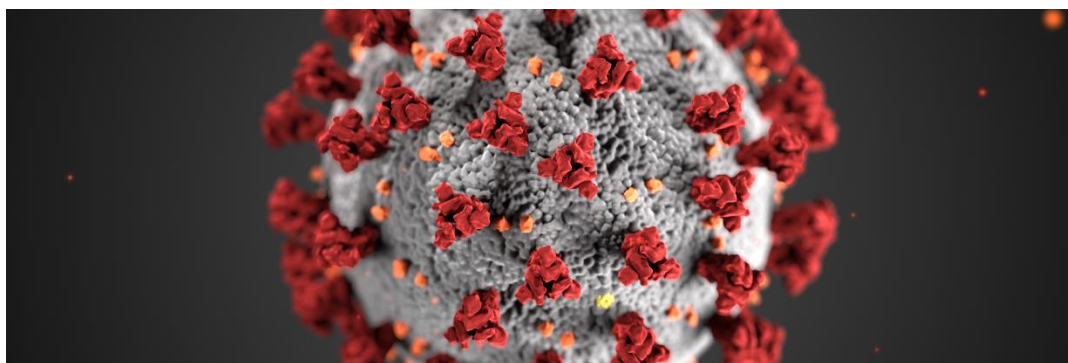


Zimbabwe Election Support Network



Monitoring Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Update # 1/2021



1. INTRODUCTION

This report from ZESN's Long Term Observers is part of efforts to inform policy makers and interventions of non-State actors who seek to compliment government efforts in flattening the COVID-19 curve. The report covers developments that occurred during the first two months of the year 2021 (January and February).

During the reporting period, Zimbabwe received a donation from China of 200,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines. As part of Zimbabwe's vaccine deployment strategy, the country's health workers; health personnel in the Zimbabwe Republic Police; the Defence Forces; Prisons and

Correctional Services; Zimbabwe Revenue Authority; Immigration and Department for Agricultural Technical and Extension Services (Agritex) workers; and persons over 60 years as well as other vulnerable groups will be prioritized first under Phase one.

2. MINISTRY OF HEALTH SUMMARY UPDATES

The Ministry of Health and Child Care continues to 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.

As at 01 March 2021, Zimbabwe had 36 115 confirmed cases, including 32 905 recoveries and 1 468 deaths.¹



3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

During the period covered by the report, ZESN LTOs in constituencies around the country reported the following:

3.1 ENFORCEMENT OF LOCKDOWN REGULATIONS

Reports from LTOs indicate that overall, uniformed forces continued to enforce lockdown regulations professionally, save for some incidents where some were reported to be taking bribes at roadblocks from those travelling without letters authorizing them to do so, and from motorist ferrying hitchhikers.

Isolated cases of the heavy handedness of uniformed forces in the enforcement of lockdown restrictions were also reported including violent clashes between uniformed forces and civilians in St Mary's after a man had been dragged to a Police's vehicle and assaulted. In Gokwe Nembudziya a ZANU-PF Senator, Mrs Mbowa, reportedly intervened to rescue a civilian who was being assaulted by law enforcement officers for contravening lockdown regulations.

3.2 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE HEALTH SECTOR

In general, clinics and hospitals were offering more services in comparison to the situation that obtained last year. However, shortages of drugs or medication were commonly reported and a number of health facilities were operating but with limited staff, while some temporarily closed, after some staff members tested positive for COVID-19. For example, the Municipality Clinic in St Mary's Chitungwiza was temporarily closed.

Some health facilities were only attending to critical/emergency cases or restricting the number of patients as they sought to curb the spread of COVID-19.

In the majority of cases, women were receiving antenatal and postnatal treatment within their constituencies. In some cases however, health facilities were limiting services rendered to pregnant women attending to complications only and asking them to come when due for delivery. This was reported in Chitungwiza South, Highfield East, and Chikomba Central Constituencies for example.

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<https://twitter.com/MoHCCZim/status/1366477055660072964>

Waiting mothers' shelters were closed as part of measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, for example in Buhera South. In Glen View North, the local currency (ZWL\$) was being rejected from pregnant women seeking maternity services.

3.3 ACCESSIBILITY OF CLEAN WATER

The level of access to clean water significantly improved in many areas with rains replenishing underground and surface water sources.

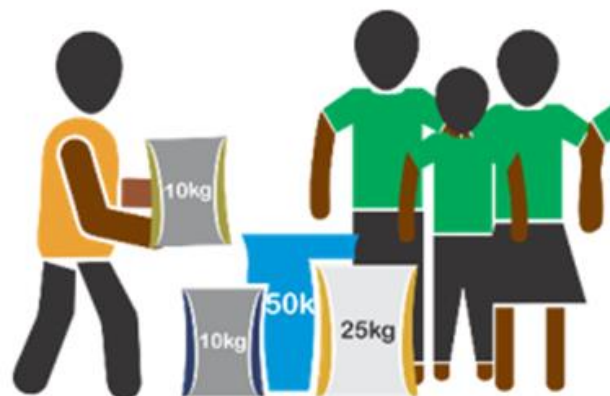
However, there were cases of the erratic supply of water, especially by local authorities in urban constituencies. These reports were received from Emakhandeni-Entumbane, Kadoma, Chinhoyi, and Kuwadzana Constituencies, among others.

In other Constituencies such as Pumula, the Bulawayo City Council was rationing and using bowsers to deliver portable water to residents. Power outages and the repairing of infrastructure (pipes) were also affecting the provision of water in some places. In St Mary's constituency, the use of some boreholes was discontinued as the water was found to be contaminated.

3.4 FOOD AID DISTRIBUTION

During the reporting period, government, through the Social Welfare Department, distributed food aid to vulnerable groups, including the elderly and people with disabilities. The Social Welfare Department distributed food aid in places that include Buhera North, Seke, Masvingo Central,

Masvingo South, Gutu South, Uzumba, St Mary's, Marondera East, Murewa West, Mutoko North, Mutasa North, Musikavanhu, Mangwe, Binga South, and Lupane West Constituencies.



Several non-state actors were reported to have helped the needy through the distribution of food aid. These include CARITAS in Uzumba; ORAP and Sizimele in Lupane West; World Food Programme (WFP) in Kwekwe Central, Chegutu West and Epworth; Red Cross in Mwenezi East; World Vision in Buhera Central and Chipinge South; Save the Children and DanChurch Aid which helped beneficiaries with money to buy groceries. In Mbire and Epworth, respectively; ZIMPLATS in Mhondoro-Ngezi and Muzvezve; and Church of Christ donated food items to its elderly members in Mutasa North.

Food commodities distributed include mealie meal, flour, cooking oil, beans, and peas. Mealie meal distributed by the Social Welfare Department varied in quantities from 10kgsto 50kgs per beneficiary.

3.5 POLITICAL PARTY MEETINGS DURING LOCKDOWN

The ruling party, ZANU-PF, reportedly held meetings at the local party's office in Rimuka in Kadoma Central. These meetings were reportedly held during the second and third weeks of February 2021. Meetings were also reportedly held at the residence of the ZANU-PF's District Secretary in the first week of February in Glen View North. On 19 February, members of the new ZANU-PF District Coordinating Committee (DCC) met for orientation and on 21 February, ZANU-PF supporters gathered at the district offices for the introduction of the new DCC and membership cards registration. COVID-19 regulations were not adhered to at the gathering. The Member of Parliament for Bindura North, Kenneth Musanhi reportedly held a rally during the first week of February, at his farm where COVID-19 regulations were reportedly not adhered to.

It was reported that Regis Vusango Charumbira, based in Canada, appeared to be interested in contesting for the Masvingo West National Assembly seat in 2023, on a ZANU-PF ticket, and was using social media platforms to campaign in the constituency. He was reported to have created a WhatsApp group to campaign and reportedly providing financial assistance to cover funeral expenses to bereaved families in the constituency. ZANU-PF vehicles were also frequently seen in Glen View with the aspiring

candidate for the Glen View North National Assembly seat reported to be donating food stuffs to the elderly, who reside in the constituency.



Picture 1: part of the crowd that gathered for the rally in ward 9 of Gutu West

During the fourth week of February 2021, ZANU-PF reportedly held a rally in ward 9 of Gutu North Constituency. The rally was attended by over a hundred people most of whom neither wore face masks nor maintained the required social distance.



Picture 2: part of the crowd that gathered for the rally in ward 9 of Gutu North

What all the meetings, reported above have in common, is that they were held during a time when lockdown regulations did not permit such gatherings, and stipulated health protocols were not adhered to.

3.6 ELECTIONS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

By-elections and electoral processes such as voter registration remain suspended as the Government is yet to lift the indefinite suspension of electoral activities. But political party activities have been reportedly going on in some constituencies, at times, in violation of COVID-19 regulations.

While ZESN appreciates the need to take reasonable precautions to safeguard the health of citizens, it is of the position that the COVID-19 pandemic presents opportunities to conduct electoral processes differently, such as conducting some of the electoral processes online. Even if processes such as voting continue to be conducted in person, there is sufficient evidence from both the African continent and beyond that demonstrates that in-person elections can be safely conducted. Hence ZESN recommends that, whenever the lockdown regulations are relaxed, the government should also consider lifting the indefinite suspension of National Assembly and local authorities' by-elections. In a series of snap surveys² that were conducted by ZESN last year, citizens decried on the need for representation at parliamentary and local level.

By-elections should be conducted in line with COVID-19 health regulations and the ZEC Covid19 Policy on Electoral Activities³.

The picture below illustrates the findings a research conducted by the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control which was published by the Council on Foreign Relations in September 2020. The research demonstrates that in some countries like Croatia and North Macedonia the rate of new infections remained constant after the elections were conducted. In cases where the rate of infections increased after the elections it was noted that the rate of infections in those countries were already on an upward trajectory before the elections due to the easing of lockdown restrictions. Examples where this happened include Malawi and Trinidad and Tobago

However the rate of infections in South Korea continued to decrease after the elections were held in that country.

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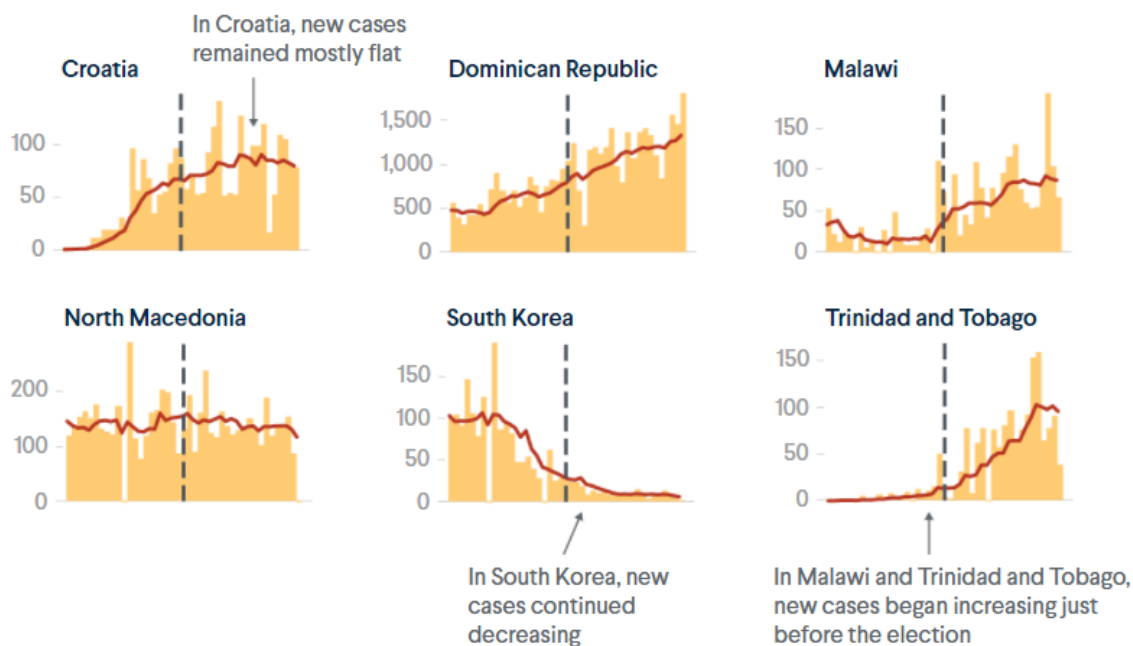
<https://www.facebook.com/ZESN1/videos/2725216874410228>

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<https://twitter.com/ZECzim/status/1303626305771057152>

■ New daily cases
 — 7-day average
 | Election

Where new coronavirus cases remained on the same trajectory after an election



South Korea “is viewed worldwide as an example of how to combat the coronavirus pandemic effectively”⁴. During the elections that were held in April 2020 voters were required to observe social distancing rules at the polling stations, wear face masks, disinfect their hands and wear disposable plastic gloves to cast their vote.

In addition, body temperatures were taken in front of the polling stations. If a high temperature was detected, a voter was guided to a special voting booth, which was immediately disinfected after the vote is cast.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Government should ensure that there is no selective application of COVID-19 regulations and that those who contravene the regulations should be investigated and be brought to book without fear or favour.
- ii. Political parties should observe stipulated health protocols for any in-person meetings or campaign activities they conduct during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. The Government should consider lifting the indefinite suspension of by-elections and ensure the by-elections are held in a manner that is in keeping with Health

⁴ <https://asia.fes.de/news/south-korea-elections-in-times-of-covid-19>

protocols established by both the World Health Organisations and the Ministry of Health and Child Health Care.