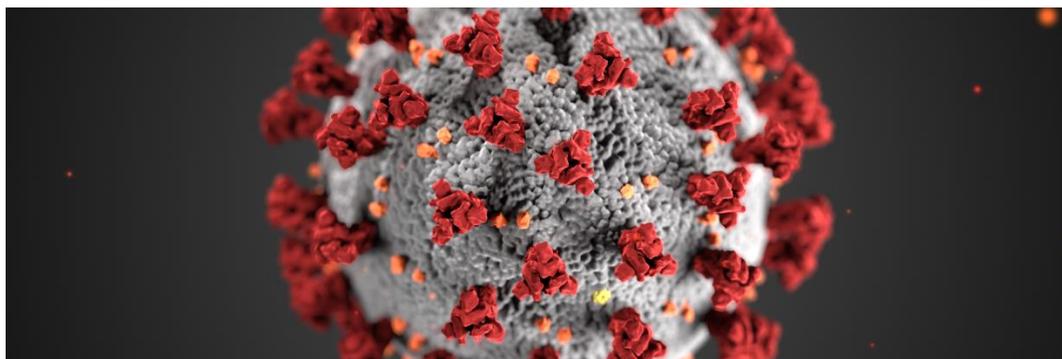


Zimbabwe Election Support Network



Monitoring Government Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

2021 Update # 2



1. INTRODUCTION

This report is a part of ZESN’s efforts to inform policy makers and interventions of non-State actors who seek to compliment government efforts in flattening the COVID-19 curve. Based on updates received from ZESN LTOs, the report covers developments that occurred during the month of March 2021.

During the reporting period, the country entered into the second phase of the

COVID-19 vaccination programme targeting school teachers, the security services, Judiciary, clergy, elderly and people with chronic conditions.

During the same phase, President Emmerson Mnangagwa also received his first shot of the Sinovac vaccine on 24 March 2021. As he launched the second phase, President Mnangagwa indicated that over 68% of the targeted group under phase one had been vaccinated¹.

¹ <https://voyagesafriq.com/2021/03/29/zimbabwe-victoria-falls-prioritised-mass-covid-19-vaccination-revive-tourism/>

Zimbabwe bought 200,000 doses of the Sinovac vaccine from China earlier this month. China also donated 400,000 Sinopharm doses. The country received the first consignment of the Indian Covaxin vaccines (35 000 doses out of the 75 000 donated by the government of India) on 29 March.²

1.1 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 06 April 2021, Zimbabwe had 36 966 confirmed cases, including 34 242 recoveries and 1 531 deaths. To date, a total of 139 133 people have been vaccinated against COVID-19³.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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

2.1 ENFORCEMENT OF LOCKDOWN REGULATIONS

Overall, LTO reports indicated that uniformed forces had relaxed the enforcement of lockdown restrictions following the easing of the lockdown by the President in his address of 1 March 2021. Uniformed forces were now mostly found at roadblocks where the Police was mainly targeting unlicensed public transport operators.

No cases of the use of excessive force in enforcing lockdown restrictions were reported. However, on 25 March 2021, there was a report that Municipal Police forced the closure of some grocery shops and barbershops in Kadoma Central because the operators had not been vaccinated.

Movement of people increased following the relaxation of the lockdown and resumption of many activities in the informal sector. Regrettably there were widespread reports that members of the general public's adherence to COVID-19 regulations such as the proper wearing of

² <https://twitter.com/nickmangwana/status/1376391487315935233?s=20>

³ <https://twitter.com/MoHCCZim/status/1379513713661722632>

face masks and maintenance of safe distance was also on the wane.

Nevertheless commendable efforts were being made to urge people to comply with COVID-19 regulations. For example, the Ministry of Health was sensitizing people about COVID-19 using door-to-door visits in Norton and sensitising communities about the COVID-19 vaccines in an outreach programme in Vungu. In Musikavanhu Constituency, Environmental Health Technicians were closely working with traditional leaders to ensure compliance with COVID-19 regulations at funerals. The District Medical Team was moving around vaccinating those who were willing in Muzarabani North. At a conflict management training by Community Water Alliance targeted at the water point committee, police officers urged the committee to grant access to the water point to only those wearing face masks.

2.2 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE HEALTH SECTOR

During the reporting period, reports from observers indicated that local health facilities provision of health services has improved in comparison to previous reporting periods, however shortage of

essential medicines and medical staff persists.



Reports received from some Constituencies, for example Glen View North and Highfield East in Harare, indicate that the number of pregnant women attended to was limited, in Glen View North for instance, the number was limited to just 20 women per week. Further, pregnant women had to pay USD 25 for booking and USD 10 for a scan, with the local currency (ZWL) being rejected. Musasa Project was reportedly supporting women from poor neighborhoods to access maternity services by paying the maternity fees on their behalf.

2.3 ACCESSIBILITY OF CLEAN WATER

LTOs reported that there was improved access to portable water in most constituencies. This is partly attributable to abundant rains received that replenished

water sources. However, challenges of access to clean water were still reported in a number of both rural and urban constituencies. In urban constituencies, for example in Kadoma, Kuwadzana, Masvingo Urban, and Chinhoyi Constituencies, Councils were not supplying clean water on a daily basis.



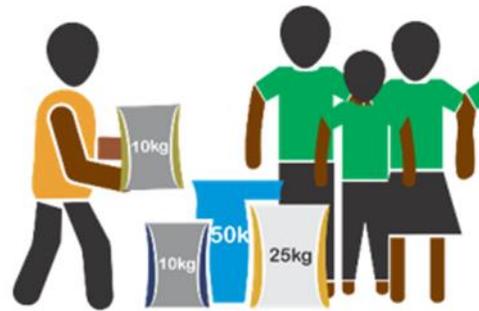
Picture 1: Water supplied by the City Council in Chinhoyi

Water supply by ZINWA was interrupted by power cuts in some areas, for example Zvimba South. In Mberengwa East Ward 5, boreholes that broke down about three months ago are yet to be rehabilitated and in Hamandishe in Ward 6, and Wards 8 and 19 in Makonde, people were fetching water from rivers. People were also fetching water from unprotected sources such as

rivers and streams in Ward 31 of Mberengwa West.

There was improved access to clean water in Mwenezi West where Christian Care helped by rehabilitating boreholes that had broken down in the Constituency.

2.4 FOOD AID DISTRIBUTION



During the month of March, the Social Welfare Department distributed food aid in Constituencies that include Gokwe Sasame, Gokwe Nembudziya, Gokwe Kana, Chiwundura, Mangwe, Gwanda Central, Gwanda North, Bulilima East, Lupane East, Buhera West, Nyanga South, Zvimba South, Gutu South, Masvingo West, Matobo South, Gokwe Gumunyu, Chimanimani West, Mberengwa West, Musikavanhu, and Makonde. In most cases, beneficiaries got 50 kgs of maize each.

Other non-governmental actors also intervened in food aid distribution. Red Cross distributed maize and cooking oil to beneficiaries in Muzarabani. World Vision distributed sorghum and cooking oil in Buhera West, Chipinge South, Gokwe Kabuyuni, and Gokwe Chireya. WFP distributed sorghum, beans, and cooking oil in Masvingo South, Mazowe Central, and Mwenezi East and gave beneficiaries grocery vouchers in Chipinge Central. GOAL gave beneficiaries grocery vouchers in Marondera Central. CARITAS distributed sorghum, porridge and cooking oil in Masvingo South and Chikomba Central. Care International distributed varying quantities of maize, sorghum, beans, peas, and cooking oil (depending on family size) in wards 1, 3, 5 and 7 of Chivi South and in Zaka Central. Oxfarm distributed maize, beans, and cooking oil in Mangwe. Zimplats helped beneficiaries with 25 kgs of mealie meal and 2 kgs of beans each in Mhondoro-Ngezi.

There was also food aid distribution by some political actors. For example, the MP for Gokwe Chireya, Torerayi Moyo, distributed rice to the elderly (over 70 years) with each getting 2 kgs. Norton MP,

Temba Mliswa, gave beneficiaries maize, beans, and cooking oil in Shurugwi South. Speculation is rife that Temba Mliswa my campaign for the Shurugwi South national assembly seat in 2023. Kadoma Ward 10 Councillor, Cosmas Dhaka, provided food aid to people with disabilities in his ward.

Prophet Uebert Angel Angel donated a truck load of mealie meal in Zaka West Constituency.

2.5 ELECTIONS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

On 23 March, 2021, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) released a Press Statement in which it announced the resumption of electoral activities, with effect from 1 April 2021. These activities include of voter registration and some boundary delimitation related field work. This followed the relaxation of lockdown measures of Statutory Instrument 10 of 2021 on 01 March 2021.

ZEC however maintained the suspension of by-elections “in view of the danger still posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to uphold some health provisions of Statutory Instrument 10 of 2021 which is

still in force”⁴. The Commission indicated that this position will be reviewed in due course and that stakeholders will be advised accordingly.

The continued suspension of by-elections means that citizens in Constituencies where elected leaders such as MPs and Councilors were recalled or died continue to be without representation. ZESN is concerned that a section of the registered voters may lose interest in elections should they feel like their vote does not matter.

The two Kusile Rural District Council MDC Alliance Councillors who were erroneously recalled by the MDC-T were reinstated but had not yet received letters of reinstatement from the Ministry of Local Government. As such, they were not attending Council meetings and they have lodged complaints with the CEO of Kusile RDC.

2.6 POLITICAL PARTY MEETINGS DURING LOCKDOWN

In Njube-Lobengula, the MDC Alliance held a meeting where it was announced that the

MP representing the Constituency had crossed the floor to join the Mwonzora-led MDC-T. MDC Alliance also held a rally at a farm in Ward 31 of Masvingo Central on 29 March 2021. The rally was addressed by Moses Mavhaire who is said to have an interest in contesting the National Assembly seat. The MDC Alliance and the MDC-T held local meetings in Nketa during the reporting period. In Mutare North Constituency, ZANU-PF held a meeting at Madziro Shopping Centre to discuss the strategy for closing existing gaps within some of its ward structures. There was a ZANU-PF meeting at Zaire in ward 15 where members of the ZANU PF District Coordinating Committee (DCC) were introduced to supporters within the Constituency. ZANU-PF held cell meetings in Nyanga South and Mhondoro-Ngezi. The prospective ZANU-PF National Assembly candidate for Dangamvura-Chikanga constituency was sponsoring women soccer matches.

ZANU-PF DCC Chairperson, Langton Mabhangwa, who seems to be interested in

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<https://twitter.com/ZECzim/status/1374263464454189056/photo/1>

contesting as the party's National Assembly candidate in 2023, donated three electricity transformers to Waverly township substations and two to Rimuka substation. The areas had gone without electricity for months owing to broken down or stolen power transmission equipment.

ZANU-PF was reportedly engaged in a process of registering new party members giving them membership cards in a number of constituencies. In Umguza, names of those whose membership cards, which cost 2 United States Dollars, were ready for collection were posted on a community WhatsApp group (Ward 5A) where those yet to have the cards were encouraged to do so. However there were also reports of some intimidation targeting those without the membership cards.

3. HIGHLIGHTS OF ZESN ACTIVITIES

In response to the partial lifting of the suspension of electoral activities by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZESN and the Election Resource Centre (ERC) produced a joint statement which implored

the ZEC to consider resumption of all electoral activities, including the holding of by-elections as there was evidence that these activities could be conducted safely without endangering the lives of electoral stakeholders , if conducted in full compliance with World Health Organisation and Ministry of Health COVID-19 protocols.

During the reporting period ZESN implemented a number of virtual meetings that included:

A cluster meeting for women organizations which was held on 5 March 2021 to discuss issues affecting the women with regard to elections, democracy and governance and to chart the way forward on how best to engage the government on reforms in 2021. The meeting was attended by 20 people (19 females and 1 male). On 12 March 2021, ZESN a cluster meeting with organizations for People with Disabilities (PWDs), the meeting was attended by 20 people (12 females, 8 males).

On Wednesday the 3rd of March 2021, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) hosted a public webinar via the

ZOOM platform on the topic, “The Nexus between Delimitation and the Population Census: Implications for Electoral Democracy. The meeting was a notable success as it allowed for a robust discussion and information sharing on the pending Delimitation exercise. It was attended by over 73 people and had a social media reach of 434 people on the ZESN Facebook page.

On Friday, 26 March 2021, ZESN hosted a virtual workshop for the Portfolio Committee on Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. This meeting was held to raise awareness and capacitate the Committee members on the theory and practice of the Delimitation process in Zimbabwe. A total of 21 people attended the meeting including the Committee Members and Secretariat of Parliament, in addition to representatives from the ZESN board members, ZESN staff and civil society representatives.

Two Radio programs were held, on Radio Zimbabwe, during the reporting period discussing the importance of Citizen Participation in the Delimitation process and also the Importance of Voter Registration to the Delimitation process.

Seven radio programmes were held to sensitize citizens on the delimitation, census and voter registration process the programmes were held with the following community radios, YA FM in Masvingo, Nyaminyami FM Mashonaland West, Diamond FM, Getshenge Community Radio in Plumtree, Fairtalk Skys FM in Bulawayo Hwange community radio and Community Radio in Harare (CORAH).

A Training workshop for the CVE Cluster, on digitizing civic and voter education was held on 19 March. 25 organizations were capacitated with skills and information on how to digitize CVE initiatives and the use Information Communication Technologies (ICTS), social media and other electronic platforms to engage with the electorate.

A video skit was produced to sensitive communities on the link between population census, voter registration and the boundary delimitation process

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The Government needs to ensure that antenatal and postnatal services offered by public health institutions are affordable.

- ii. The ZEC should engage the Government with options that demonstrate how by-elections can be conducted safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. Members of the public are encouraged to remain vigilant and observe stipulated health protocols.
- iv. City councils around the country are urged to ensure that safe drinking water is provided to citizens on a consistent basis.