

# ZIMBABWE DEMOCRACY INSTITUTE (ZDI) PUBLIC HEALTH ACCESS MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2021

## CONTRADICTIONS IN COVID-19 INFORMATION DISSEMINATION



### About the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI)

The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) is a politically independent and not for profit public policy think-tank based in Zimbabwe. Founded and registered as a trust in terms of the laws of Zimbabwe in November 2012, ZDI serves to generate and disseminate innovative ideas, cutting-edge research and policy analysis to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe. The institute also aims to promote open, informed and evidence-based debate by bringing together pro-democracy experts to platforms for debate. The idea is to offer new ideas to policy makers with the view to entrenching democratic practices in Zimbabwe. The ZDI researches, publishes and conducts national policy debates and conferences in democratization, good governance, public policy, human rights and transitional justice, media and democracy relations, electoral politics and international affairs.

Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) - 66 Jason Moyo Avenue, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Bothwell House, Harare, Zimbabwe

## Summary

The continued prevalence of irregularities in the fight against Covid-19 in Zimbabwe mirrors the despicable conditions in the country's public healthcare delivery system. Corruption in the pandemic's humanitarian aid continues to increase and its perpetrators are never prosecuted.

Following the commencement of the National Roll out and Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP), there have been clear cases of vaccine discrimination whereby children of high-ranking politicians have gained access to the Sinopharm vaccine before high-risk frontline workers could get it.

There have been unprecedented contradictions in vaccine information dissemination by the government. This has undermined transparency and accountability in the manner in which the authorities are making use of aid from development partners and purchasing the vaccine from the manufacturers.

## Introduction

Access to healthcare is one of the fundamental rights that every citizen of

Zimbabwe is entitled to. This right is clearly provided for in local, regional and international statutes. Section 76 (1) of Constitution of Zimbabwe stipulates that "every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe has the right to have access to basic health-care services, including reproductive health-care services"<sup>1</sup>. After almost a year following the spiral spread of COVID-19 and subsequent series of national lockdowns, the country is in a midst of administering the pandemic vaccines to frontline workers. However, the government had not been transparent and accountable in developing the vaccine roll out plan.

## Vaccine deployment and roll-out plan

On 15 February 2021, Zimbabwe received its first batch of vaccines (Sinopharm) from the People's Republic of China. On this day, the country received a total of 200 000 doses of Sinopharm vaccine. This followed after the Chinese Ambassador to Zimbabwe on 2 February 2021 said; "Zimbabwe will be one of the first 14 countries to

---

<sup>1</sup> Constitution of Zimbabwe (No.20) Act. 2013. Available at: <https://zimlil.org/zw/legislation/act/2013/amendment-no-20-constitution-zimbabwe>

receive vaccine aid from China very soon.”<sup>2</sup>

The government announced a phased vaccination programme and on 18 February 2021, the first phase consisting of high-risk frontline staff commenced.



### Incoherent vaccination information dissemination vis-à-vis a blurred vaccine procurement process

The government’s inconsistency in policy pronouncement is not new, but with Covid-19 related information, the problem seems to be escalating. Besides a total of 400 000 Sinopharm vaccines/doses donated by China to Zimbabwe, the government has not clearly disseminated information on how

<sup>2</sup> Chine Ambassador to Zimbabwe on Twitter: [https://twitter.com/China\\_Amb\\_Zim/status/1356489953572749312](https://twitter.com/China_Amb_Zim/status/1356489953572749312)

many vaccines it had actually procured as at 7 May 2021 when the country received its second batch of 400 000 doses of Sinopharm Vaccine. The government’s transparency and accountability in the procurement of vaccines came under public scrutiny when its spokesperson Nick Mangwana and state media posted on social media varying figures regarding the source and number of procured jobs. Below is how this particular information was varying posted on social media.



**In this Twitter post, Nick Mangwana said government procured 144 000 doses from Sinopharm**

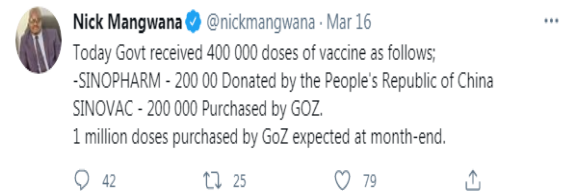
In the tweet above, the Information Ministry’s Permanent Secretary Nick Mangwana highlighted that Zimbabwe had received a total of 344 000 doses comprising of a donation of 200 000 and 144 000 procured by the government. At

the same time, the state broadcaster ZBC was posting contrary information as shown below;



In the above tweet, ZBC quoted President Mnangagwa who indicated that the country had received a total of 400 000 doses comprising of a China donation of 200 000 doses and another 200 000 doses bought by the government.

Such contradictions in Covid-19 information dissemination sparked a public outcry on social media with people demanding an explanation of a 56 000 doses variance. This online citizen oversight role resulted in Nick Mangwana backtracking and posting on Twitter information that was congruent to what President Mnangagwa has said during his vaccines acceptance speech. Below is Nick Mangwana's new tweet;



The dissemination of contradicting information regarding Covid-19 vaccination raises questions on government's transparency and accountability. In his earlier tweet, Nick Mangwana indicated that 144 000 doses had been bought from Sinopharm but President Mnangagwa as reported by the ZBC noted that 200 000 doses were actually procured from Sinovac. Under these circumstances of a blurred vaccination process, public confidence in the government becomes further eroded as people find it difficult to trust a government that disseminates contradicting policy positions.

### **Corruption: A major stumbling block in fighting Covid-19**

Following the confirmation of Zimbabwe's first Covid-19 case in March 2020, the fight against the pandemic has been riddled with high profile corruption cases. Tenders for the procurement and supply of Covid-19

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), test kits and other medical consumables were fraudulently awarded to companies linked to high profile government officials. In one such case, the former Minister of Health and Child Care Obadiah Moyo was arrested in June 2020 for corruptly awarding Drax Consult SAGL, a foreign-owned company, a tender to supply Covid-19 related medical goods. However, he has not yet faced any prosecution.

According to Transparency International Zimbabwe, a total of 1 400 complaints were made to the organisation and they relate to corruption in the healthcare particularly the embezzlement of Covid-19 pandemic humanitarian aid<sup>3</sup>. Recently, a Principal Director of Epidemiology and Disease Control in the Ministry of Health and Child Care, Dr Portia Mananganzira was arrested by the country's anti-corruption watchdog, the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC). She was arrested on allegations on allegations of

---

<sup>3</sup> ZimLive (2021). Zimbabwe's Covid-19 fight back hamstrung by corruption, vaccine discrimination. Available at: <https://www.zimlive.com/2021/03/23/zimbabwes-covid-19-fightback-hamstrung-by-corruption-vaccine-discrimination/>

misappropriating funds and fuel meant for training community health workers involved in COVID-19 awareness campaigns.<sup>4</sup> However, as in the case of Dr Obadiah Moyo, the case of Dr Mananganzira is highly likely going to suffer still birth. These continued cases of corruption stand in the way of building a robust health delivery system in Zimbabwe.

### **Discrimination in the vaccination programme**

The government made it clear that phase 1 of Covid-19 vaccination targeted high risk frontline workers who are comprised of health workers and the security sector personnel as further elucidated here<sup>5</sup>. However in early March 2021, the Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services, Monica Mutsvangwa's two sons went on social media and posted their pictures

---

<sup>4</sup> ZBC News Online (2021). BREAKING: Dr Portia Mananganzira faces charges of criminal abuse of office. Available at: <https://www.zbcnews.co.zw/breaking-dr-portia-mananganzira-in-court-over-alleged-criminal-abuse-of-office/>

<sup>5</sup> Zimbabwe Covid-19 National Roll out and Deployment and Vaccination Plan (NDVP). (2020). Available: [http://www.mohcc.gov.zw/index.php?option=com\\_phocadownload&view=category&download=245:coordination-pdf&id=25:coordination-planning-and-monitoring&Itemid=741](http://www.mohcc.gov.zw/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=category&download=245:coordination-pdf&id=25:coordination-planning-and-monitoring&Itemid=741)



whilst receiving Sinopharm jabs as shown here<sup>6</sup>. This was clearly a sign of nepotism whereby high-ranking 'non-essential' individuals lined up their families to receive vaccination at the expense of essential and high risk frontline workers.

It is worrying to note that high-ranking political figures have been prioritised in the initial phases of the vaccination programme. On Tuesday, 23 March 2021 during the post cabinet briefing, Minister Monica Mutsvangwa announced the commencement of Stage 2 of Phase 1 of the National Covid-19 Vaccination Programme. She mentioned that this phase was targeting the clergy, teachers, the judiciary, security services, people with chronic conditions and the elderly (60 years & above).



However, on 21 March 2021 the government had announced that leaders of all political parties, presumably in President Mnangagwa's Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD), would accompany him to Victoria Falls for the launch of this second phase of vaccination and vaccinated. It is not clear whether or not the invited POLAD members fit into the prescribed phase 2 vaccination beneficiaries.

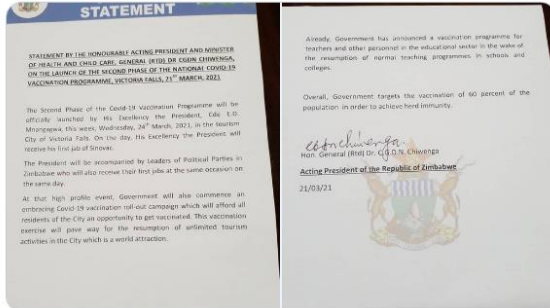
---

<sup>6</sup> ZimLive. 2021. Mutsvangwa sons get COVID-19 jabs ahead of frontline workers. Available: <https://www.zimlive.com/2021/03/10/mutsvangwa-sons-get-covid-19-jabs-ahead-of-frontline-workers/>



Ministry of Information, Publicity & Broadcasting  
@InfoMinZW

H.E President @edmnangagwa will receive his first jab of Sinovac on Wednesday, 24th of March in Victoria Falls. H.E will be accompanied by leaders of Political parties in Zimbabwe who will also get vaccinated.



8:19 PM · Mar 21, 2021 · Twitter Web App

Given the government's history of mismanagement of public resources amounting to corruption, a delegation that went to Victoria Falls with the President to get vaccinated is a disturbing development that comes at a time when the majority of vulnerable citizens have not yet been given the chance to receive their vaccines.



Nick Mangwana @nickmangwana · 2m

Isn't it wonderful when Zimbabweans come together to make a stand against Covid19!? HE @edmnangagwa, @DMwonzora and @lilomatic are seen in Victoria Falls, promoting #ZimVaccination and our premier tourism destination.



**A delegation that went to Victoria Falls with President Mnangagwa for the launch of Phase 2 Vaccination programme**

## Conclusion

Zimbabwe's response to Covid-19 has been constrained by the decay of the political factor, thus corruption, misinformation, policy inconsistencies and nepotism have emerged as its worrying scent. This explains the incessant collapse of the country's public health delivery system. The government has been caught in circuses, disseminating contradicting announcements regarding the procurement of Covid-19 vaccines from China. This shows how deep the political decay can go.

## Recommendations

Cognizant of the importance of having a robust healthcare delivery system, the ZDI in line with its aim to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe recommends the following;

- ✓ The government must ensure coherent messaging of information pertaining to the vaccination programme. There should be some official protocol followed and a known single office responsible for

dissemination of matters of national interest.

- ✓ The government must make public information on actual quantity and types of vaccines donated and procured. This is crucial in ensuring transparency and accountability in the use of Covid-19 resources from the satellite to the peripheries of its delivery systems.
  
- ✓ The government must fast-track the trial of public officials found guilty of embezzling Covid-19 resources. This will send a clear message to all public officials entrusted with public resources' management. This will aid the establishment of a transparent and accountable system in the use of Covid-19 resources.