

ZIMBABWE DEMOCRACY INSTITUTE (ZDI) PUBLIC HEALTH ACCESS MONITORING REPORT

MAY 2021

VACCINES STOCK RUNNING OUT?



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), 2021

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus pandemic continues to spread across the globe. As of 31 May 2021, there were 1 714 566 617 confirmed cases of Covid-19 across the globe, including 3 564 772 deaths and 153 902 557 recoveries¹. Africa has a high mortality rate as compared to other continents. Global statistics show that Africa has critically ill COVID-19 patients with a death rate of 48% compared to the global average of 32%.² As such, Africa appears to be on the receiving end of the pandemic.

In Zimbabwe, the month of May 2021 was characterised by a gradual increase in COVID-19 confirmed cases. As of 30 April 2021, the country had 38 257 confirmed cases including 1 567 deaths, 35 612 recoveries and 414 735 people vaccinated.³ Between 30 April 2021 and 31 May 2021, the country had an increase of 707 confirmed cases and 29 deaths.⁴ This points to a case of further spread of COVID-19 in the country.

In the midst of the pandemic, the government of Zimbabwe seems to be running out of vaccines as statistics pertaining to vaccines received and

communicated formally through State media indicate that in less than 2 weeks the country will be left with no jobs. Besides that, the government appears to be clinging on the selective application of law in the enforcement of COVID-19 preventive measures.⁵

QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE: WHAT ARE THE INDICATORS SAYING?

In the context of COVID-19 and three years after the promise of quality and affordable healthcare was made by President Mnangagwa's government, the provision of basic healthcare appears to be still a dream. In Kariba on 4 May 2021, a woman gave birth outside Nyamhunga clinic when the nurses told her they were on lunch.⁶ This points to low motivation that nurses have in the midst of COVID-19 after the government's continued failure to fulfill its promise of incentivising healthcare workers.

Upon the launch of COVID-19 vaccination programme in the country 4 months ago, the government promised nurses a daily allowance of US\$10.

¹Worldometer. 2021. COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC. Available: https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR35ZFIRZJ8tyBCwazX2N-k7yJjZOLDQIZSA_MsJAfdK74s8f2a_Dgx4iVk.

² A study by The Lancet titled African COVID-19 Critical Care Outcomes Study (ACCCOS) revealed that Africa has the highest global mortality rate of critically ill Covid-19 patients and was done by observing 64 hospitals in South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya and Niger between May and December 2020. The study can be viewed here: [https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736\(21\)00576-6](https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736(21)00576-6)

³Ministry of Health and Child Care. 2021. Zimbabwe Covid-19 Situation Report 30 April 2021. Available: <https://twitter.com/MoHCCZim/status/1388250400084668426>

⁴Statistics from the Ministry of Health and Child Care indicate that as of 31 April 2021, Zimbabwe had 38 257 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1567 deaths. A month later on 31 May 2021, the country had 38 961 confirmed cases and 1 596 deaths.

⁵ The ruling party ZANU PF continues to defy health regulations meant to curb the spread of COVID-19 through holding campaign meetings in different parts of the country. For example, the ruling party recently rolled out its road map to the 2023 elections in Masvingo in the presence of not less than 200 people, more than the required 50 as reported by a Masvingo based media outlet, Lowveld Checkpoint (https://lowveldcheckpoint.co.zw/2021/05/31/zanu-pf-campaign-meetings-fingered-in-covid-19-spike/?fbclid=IwAR30MxoarEyAJHWCZzFGPAeVq4_FqR1euTkVzmkCrP78A0K3YR_WsFX6v3ps). Meanwhile, opposition parties' gatherings and by-elections continue to be banned on grounds of COVID-19 preventative measures.

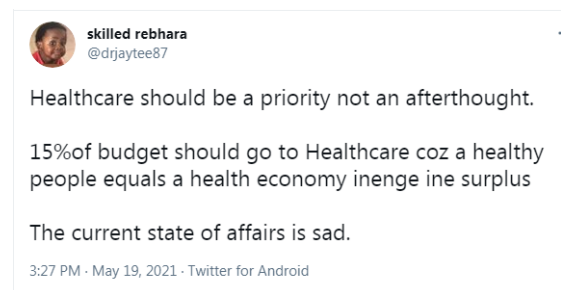
⁶Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) on Twitter. 2021. Available: <https://twitter.com/zppINFO/status/1389572541182849026>

However, health workers were paid allowances for 1 month.⁷ Such failure by government to honor its promises fuels corruption and opacity in the public health sector as witnessed by several reported cases of nurses being involved in the selling of vaccination certificates.⁸

The bad state of public health delivery system in Zimbabwe is a subject of discussion among healthcare workers. One outspoken medical doctor who uses a name 'skilled rebhara' on Twitter said on 19 May 2021:

"...Healthcare should be a priority not an afterthought." "15% of budget should go to Healthcare because a healthy people equals a healthy economy inenge ine [with]surplus. The current state of affairs is sad,..."⁹

The current state of public health in the country is in sharp contrast to what President Mnangagwa said on 15 May 2021 in Bulawayo that Zimbabwe's quest to revamp its health systems and facilities to attract regional and continental visitors seeking medical attention is gathering pace following massive investments in the sector made by the Second Republic.¹⁰



POOR COVID-19 INFORMATION COMMUNICATION: INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS LAY BARE.

The nature of the coronavirus, as a national issue, demands that there should be clear and prompt communication of information regarding the pandemic as part of the constitutionally enshrined right of access to information.¹¹ However, the period under review was characterized by a shambolic communication of pertinent COVID-19 information by the responsible authorities.

⁷NewsDay. 2021. Govt yet to pay nurses COVID-19 allowances 4 months on. Available: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2021/05/govt-yet-to-pay-nurses-covid-19-allowances-4-months-on/>

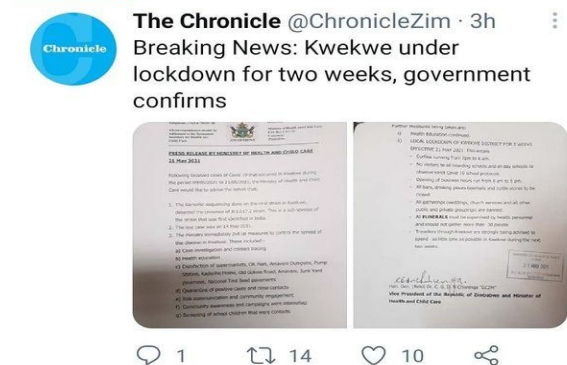
⁸ See 4 above.

⁹Posting on Twitter, skilled rebhara (a Zimbabwean medical doctor working in the public health sector) said that all is not well in the public health delivery system. The tweet can be viewed here: <https://twitter.com/drjaytee87/status/1395008104828440580>

¹⁰ The Herald. 2021. Quality healthcare dream shapes up. Available: <https://www.herald.co.zw/quality-healthcare-dream-shapes-up/>

¹¹ The Constitution of Zimbabwe under section 62(1) stipulates that: "every Zimbabwean citizen or permanent resident, including juristic persons and the Zimbabwean media, has the right of access to any information held by the State or by any institution or agency of government at every level, in so far as the information is required in the interests of public accountability." In addition, section 3 (2) (g) of the same Constitution of Zimbabwe provides that "the principles of good governance, which bind the State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level, include transparency, justice, accountability and responsiveness." Available: http://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Constitution%20of%20Zimbabwe%20Amendment%20%28No.%2020%29.pdf

Following the confirmation by government that Zimbabwe had been hit by the new Indian COVID-19 variant¹², there has been incoherent communication coming out from central government pertaining to Kwekwe town lockdown as shown below;



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¹²NewsDay. 2021. Deadly Indian variant hits Zim. Available: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2021/05/deadly-indian-variant-hits-zim/>

In total Zimbabwe received 675 000¹³ doses of Sinopharm meant to vaccinate 337 500 as it involves the administering of 2 doses per person at an interval of 21 days.¹⁴

Date	Received Vaccines (Purchased and/or donated)
15-Feb-21	200 000 (A donation from China)
16-Mar-21	400 000 (A donation of 200 000 & a purchase of 200 000)
29-Mar-21	75 000 (A donation from India)
TOTAL	675 000¹⁵

As of 24 May 2021, 2 749 people received their 2nd dose bringing cumulative for 2nd dose to 281 286¹⁶. It therefore means that, according to the known

¹³ On 15 February 2021, Zimbabwe received its first batch of 200 000 doses of China Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccine. The consignment came as a donation from the People's Republic of China. A month later on 16 March 2021, the country received 400 000 doses which included another donation of 200 000 and a government purchase of 200 000 doses. Then on 29 March 2021, the government received a donation from India of 75 000 doses of Covaxin vaccine

¹⁴ On May 7 2021, the World Health Organisation (WHO) listed the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use, giving the green light for this vaccine to be rolled out globally. WHO recommends the vaccine for adults 18 years and older, in a two-dose schedule with a spacing of three to four weeks [\[https://www.who.int/news/item/07-05-2021-who-lists-additional-covid-19-vaccine-for-emergency-use-and-issues-interim-policy-recommendations\]](https://www.who.int/news/item/07-05-2021-who-lists-additional-covid-19-vaccine-for-emergency-use-and-issues-interim-policy-recommendations).

¹⁵See 10 above.

¹⁶ The Ministry of Health and Child Care in its Covid-19 situation daily report of 24 May 2021 indicated that 1 139 people received their 1st dose bringing cumulative for 1st

vaccine stock, the country is now left with a stock that runs out when 56 214 receive their 2nd dose. As illustrated below, there is a weekly average of 8 405 people receiving their 2nd dose which takes up to 6 days ($56\ 214 \div 8\ 405$) for 56 214 people to be inoculated for the 2nd time.

Date	No. of people receiving 2 nd dose
24 May 2021	2 749
23 May 2021	4 812
22 May 2021	10 462
21 May 2021	11 163
20 May 2021	12 972
19 May 2021	7 753
18 May 2021	8 925
TOTAL	58 836
Weekly Average	8 405 ($58\ 836 \div 7$)

However, the government seems to be completely reluctant on maintaining the country's enough COVID-19 vaccinations buffer stock. As of 24 May 2020, the country was battling severely depleted vaccine stock levels as people were being turned away from vaccination centres on condition of

dose to 633 635 while 2 749 people received their 2nd dose bringing cumulative for 2nd dose to 281 286.

unavailability of jabs.¹⁷ However, during the post-Cabinet briefing held on the 25th of May 2021, Minister Monica Mutsvangwa assured the nation of more vaccine stock to be procured.¹⁸ Be that as it may, the cost of these vaccines is never communicated to the public and thus raising concerns pertaining to the opacity of the vaccine procurement process.

But again and as expected, the government maintains that there is still adequate stock to inoculate 'newcomers'.¹⁹ This can only be true if the government is opaquely purchasing the vaccines. If this is the case, there is conduct in contravention of principles of transparency and accountability stipulated in section 3(2)(g) of the Constitution which stipulates that:

"the principles of good governance, which bind the State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level, include transparency, justice, accountability and responsiveness."

¹⁷On 25 May 2021, the NewsDay (<https://www.newsday.co.zw/2021/05/vaccine-shortage-hits-covid-19-programme/>) reported that the country was facing a shortage of vaccines after several people who turned up at inoculation centres for the first dose in some parts of the country were turned away, while the second dose was said to be in limited supply. The same publication quoted the Medical and Dental Private Practitioners of Zimbabwe Association president Johannes Marisa who highlighted that the stock-outs were caused by limited stocks considering that Zimbabwe only ordered 675 000 doses.

¹⁸ On the 25th of May 2021 during the post-Cabinet briefing, Minister Monica Mutsvangwa highlighted that Zimbabwe would receive of another batch of 500 000 Sinopharm vaccines from China to boost the national Covid-19 vaccination programme (<https://www.herald.co.zw/500-000-more-vaccines-on-their-way/>).

¹⁹ The Herald newspaper of 31 May 2021 reported that "there are 401 428 doses still in stock for newcomers, enough for both doses for more than 200 000 unvaccinated people" (<https://www.herald.co.zw/covid-19-millionth-milestone-reached/>).

THE DONATION OF AMBULANCES: EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION A MUST

With the government receiving a donation of 20 ambulances from India and the African Development Bank (AfDB) and set to receive its first batch of 100 ambulances that it procured as per state media reports²⁰, there is need to consider the peripheries and geographic minorities during the distribution and delivery. Cognizant of the fact that Zimbabwe has 44 district hospitals²¹, it follows that every district must now own an ambulance in order to ensure equitable access to health care.



CONCLUSIONS

The fight against COVID-19 seems to be a protracted one, with confirmed global cases, as of 31 May 2021, standing at 171 090 910 including 3 558 115 deaths and 153 237 358 recoveries²². In South Africa, President Ramaphosa on 30 May 2021 announced that the country would enter an adjusted alert level 2 of the lockdown effective from 31 May 2021²³. In Zimbabwe as of 31 May 2021, there were confirmed cases totaling 38 961

²⁰ On 28 May 2021, The Herald reported that “20 ambulances and ancillary medical equipment from the African Development Bank and the Government of India (<https://www.herald.co.zw/india-afdb-donate-20-ambulances/>).

²¹ Statistics compiled by the Ministry of Health and Child Care in its National Health Strategy for Zimbabwe (2016-2020) indicate that there are 44 district hospitals across Zimbabwe. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/364731563173429622/pdf/The-National-Health-Strategy-Equity-and-Quality-in-Health-Leaving-No-One-Behind-for-Zimbabwe-2016-2020.pdf>

²² As of 31 May 2021, Worldometer reported global statistics of; (i) 171 090 910 confirmed cases, 3 558 115 deaths and 153 237 358 recoveries (https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/?fbclid=IwAR35ZFIRZJ8tyBCwazX2N-k7yJjZOLDQiZSA_MsJAfdK74s8f2a_Dgx4iVik)

²³ Addressing the nation on 31 May 2021, President Ramaphosa highlighted that South Africa experienced a 31% increase in infections in the last week (<https://twitter.com/eNCA/status/1399050783925092358>).

representing an increase of 704 from the figure as of 30 April 2021. Deaths also increased by 29 within the same period of time. In the midst of the continued threat of COVID-19, fears of vaccines shortage are looming and thereby raising questions on the urgency of the government to ensure that every citizen get access to quality healthcare under the dictates of the law.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cognizant of the significance 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;

RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS:

- ✓ Carrying out robust research on transparency and accountability on government's response to COVID-19 in the marginalized areas.
- ✓ Monitoring and tracking records of COVID-19 vaccines' procurement and distribution.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

- ✓ Intensifying advocacy efforts to demand information on COVID-19 vaccines procurement including the quantity and costs incurred.

MEDIA

- ✓ Report on marginalized communities' access to COVID-19 vaccines.

GOVERNMENT

- ✓ Ensuring the availability of adequate and quality COVID-19 vaccines to enable every willing citizen to be vaccinated in line with its constitutional mandate of guaranteeing every citizen's access to basic health care services.
- ✓ Coherently and consistently communicate information pertaining to COVID-19 response and ensuring adequate information access.
- ✓ Allow non-state actors to procure World Health Organisation (WHO) licensed vaccines to ensure more availability of jabs to the public. In other words, the government must not have monopoly over the procurement and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines.