



ZIMBABWE LOCKDOWN EXTENSION

“THEIR VOICES MATTER”

COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO COVID 19 MEASURES

Week 4 Report



W/O 3/93
Campaigners for Human Rights



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Their Voices Matter: Community Response to COVID 19 Measures in Zimbabwe

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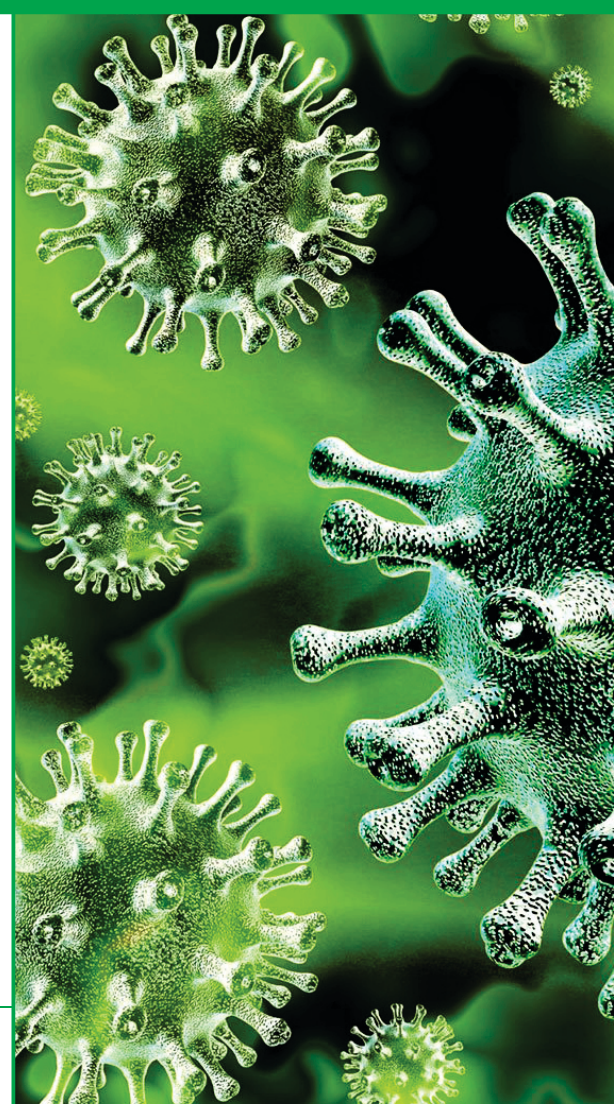
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe entered into the 4th week of the lockdown, after it had been extended by a further 2 weeks by the President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa. The extension came with relaxations to allow the mining and manufacturing sectors to resume operations in the spirit of rescuscitating the economy.

Sadly, in as much as the COVID-19 is relentless, Zimbabwe's state of preparedness is still wanting and the government is yet to scale-up the number of tests it has to make and is falling behind its target of testing 40 000 people by 30 April 2020.

As usual, ZimRights, through its countrywide membership, managed to track and document community responses to COVID 19. Through members contributions, this week's report focuses on the distribution of COVID-19 aid, the ongoing countrywide demolitions of informal sector spaces, ZimRights initiatives to raise awareness on COVID-19, and the emerging human rights issues.



2.0 DEMOLITIONS: PILING MORE ANGUISH...

On the 18th of April 2020 the government through the local authorities in various Zimbabwean cities and towns, ordered the demolition of illegal vending stalls and workspaces. The move was done unannounced and came as a shock to many Zimbabweans who survive on informal activities.

The move is seen as a deprivation of property in violation of the fundamental right to property enshrined in Section 71 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

In addition to that, some structures that were destroyed served as shelter and this impacted on the fundamental right to shelter.

Section 74 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe stipulates that:



“no person may be evicted from their home, or have their home demolished, without an order of court made after considering all the relevant circumstances.”





A bulldozer demolishes informal sector structures in Glen View, Harare

Also the obligation of States to refrain from, and protect against, forced evictions from home(s) and land arises from several international legal instruments that protect the human right to adequate housing and other related human rights. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 11, para. 1), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 27, para. 3), the non-discrimination provisions found in article 14, paragraph 2 (h), of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and article 5 (e) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

In addition, the demolitions undermined the livelihoods of many Zimbabweans who already suffer the burden of unemployment.

Economist John Robertson, postulates that formal unemployment in Zimbabwe is at 90 percent,¹ and this means millions have turned to the informal sector, where most also operated from the spaces and structures affected by the demolitions.

The income earned from this is just a bare minimum for survival.

Already, a Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce research said the COVID-19 could place 25% of permanent formal jobs and 75% of casual/temporary formal jobs at risk in Zimbabwe.²

All this is comes when the World Food Programme, has said that about eight million people - half of the population - are acutely food insecure.³

1. <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/lockdown-the-cost-of-harare-demolitions-for-informal-traders/>

2. <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/calls-grow-reopen-parts-zimbabwe-crisi-ridden-economy-200422235520476.html>

3. <https://www.wfp.org/news/world-food-programme-expands-emergency-operation-zimbabwe-drought-and-economic-hardship-plunge>

Demolitions: A Historical Perspective

The current demolitions are reminiscent of the 2005 demolitions dubbed Operation Murambatsvina where the government carried out mass demolitions of illegally built structures and houses. According to the United Nations, over 700,000 people were left internally displaced.⁴

Over the years, there has been varying phases of demolitions of illegal structures – which themselves are a testament of the insincerity of the government in providing decent shelter, employment and social security to its citizens.

Government Reneging on its Roles

The state is complicit in creating the so called illegal vending sites and structures, which have been created by enterprising Zimbabweans wishing to earn an honest livelihood.



Actually, the State violated Section 13 of the Constitution which requires it and all its institutions and agencies to endeavor to facilitate rapid and equitable development, and in particular, take measures to promote private initiative and self-reliance.

4. [www2.unhabitat.org/documents/ZimbabweReport.pdf "UN report on Zim. government"], Report, 17 June 2005.

In addition, the government should have provided alternative working spaces before demolishing and should put in place robust measures to improve the economic situation in the country.

Government and local authorities should also provide safe, and serviced workspaces for the informal sector.

Accordingly, ZimRights raised a red flag regarding the demolitions and you can read the statement below.

Click to Read More on the Statement

ZimRights members in communities that have so far been affected by the demolitions have continued to speak out.

An Epworth man shares his pain after his barbershop and wife's hair salon were destroyed

during the lockdown. This was their only source of livelihood.



A woman from Solani Shops says her shop was destroyed. She is a mother of four and the destroyed shop was her only source of income.





ZimRights has not only captured the demolitions but also the widespread reports of police and soldiers taking away goods from informal sector structures.

An 80 year old woman from Norton said two police officers and two soldiers went away with ZWL200 and all goods in her tuckshop.

According to her, the officers had accused her of opening her tuckshop in violation of lockdown procedures.



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



Click to Listen to the Audio

Recommendations

Solution-based approach needed

The impact of the ongoing demolitions on the lives of the already suffering Zimbabweans can never be over-emphasised.

Government should also be reminded that demolitions can only add to the country's long standing bad human rights record. It is clear that post-demolitions, the lives of the majority of Zimbabweans will be worse off.

In light of this, it is recommended that:

- Government should halt demolitions and abide by Sections 72 and 74 that guarantee both the right to property and the right to shelter.
- Government should also reconsider its policy of demolition without an alternative. History has shown that government tends to demolish structures then attempt to find alternatives to cater for the victims who would have endured months, sometimes years without any recourse.
- Government should immediately engage informal traders through their various representative bodies in order to find a win-win situation.
- For those that have been affected, government should, through, the various local authorities, compile a database and immediately provide safe and standard structures for the informal traders to resume their work.

3.0 THE MANIPULATION OF FOOD AID

Food Aid and the Situation in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has largely been reliant on aid to sustain the livelihoods of millions of its citizens after suffering decades of serious economic decline. Once an agricultural powerhouse, Zimbabwe has over the years, gone on a downwards spiral mainly owing to poor policies by the government as well as successive droughts. The current scenario sees about 8 million Zimbabweans being food insecure requiring urgent assistance.⁵

Regardless of this, the government has allowed the perennial blot of partisan distribution of food aid to go unabated. While food aid is meant to benefit the underprivileged, the well-connected and powerful political elite have been manipulating food aid and other donations.

The State and its Complicity

The current gaps in food production have been enabled by the state's failure to implement proactive policies to avert food crisis. The Command Agriculture programme has proved to be a monumental failure, two years

5. <https://www.wfp.org/news/world-food-programme-expands-emergency-operation-zimbabwe-drought-economic-hardship-plunge>



after its inception, the country is facing mass starvation.

Furthermore, the government, in contrary to the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture, only allocated 4% of the 2020 total budget to agriculture.

At the Second Ordinary Assembly of the African Union in July 2003 in Maputo, African Heads of State and Government endorsed the “*Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa*” which contained several important decisions regarding agriculture, but prominent among them was the “*commitment to the allocation of at least 10 percent of national budgetary resources to agriculture.*”⁶

Regarding the manipulation of food aid ZimRights through its more than 250 000 members across the country, has received reports and documented cases mainly through distribution of the subsidised maize – meal. The Government subsidised mealie meal is part of its Humanitarian Response Plan targeted at about 5.6 million people.

The government, by its conduct, is in contravention of the right to equality and non-discrimination (section 56 of the Constitution), Right to

6. Source: Zimbabwe National Budget for 2020



4%

2020 Total budget to
Agriculture



10%

of National budgetary
resources to Agriculture



5.6 Million

People targeted: Government
subsidised mealie meal

sufficient food (section 77(b) of the Constitution)

The following cases were recorded;

- In Midlands (Mvuma, Chiwundura) and Masvingo (Chiredzi, Triangle, Zaka Jerera,) community members complained of hoarding of mealie meal by some unscrupulous shop owners in association with politicians who sell fewer volumes and then announce to members that mealie-meal has run out. ZimRights members have reported that the volume of mealie-meal sold at the end of the day does not tally with what the shop owners would have received in different communities.
- In Masvingo Ward 3, Chiwundura, Glen View and Mvuma, a 10kg mealie meal was being sold for \$270 cash while in other districts the same product was going for US\$5. This is worrying given that the government gazetted price is \$70.
- In Masvingo and Gweru the contract to sell the subsidised mealie meal was given to a well known (ZANU-PF) supporter from Gweru. The ZANU-PF member owns a chain of supermarkets which are selling most subsidised basic groceries like, cooking oil, sugar and mealie meal.
- On the 27th of April 2020 it is alleged in a voice note given as evidence in this report that food stuff meant for the poor and vulnerable was hijacked by the (ZANU-PF) leadership and never reached the intended beneficiaries of ward 1 and 2 in Masvingo. Ward 1 and 2 are the two wards which are known to have the largest number of poor and vulnerable people in Masvingo urban. In some cases, the

communities are complaining over information blackout regarding the timetable of mealie-meal distribution roster from local authorities. Elderly and persons living with disabilities have raised concerns regarding the selected selling venues that are neither central, nor accessible.

- Meanwhile, in Chiredzi on the 5th of April 2020, the Chiredzi West Member of Parliament, Hon Farai Musikavanhu, allegedly diverted 6 tonnes of mealie meal from OK Triangle to Chiredzi. Hon Musikavanhu is not new to controversy, in November 2019 he told a gathering who had come to receive government food aid that no opposition supporter was to get any government aid because they had not voted President Mnangagwa during the 2018 harmonised elections.
- The accessibility of the distribution points has also been another point. The mainstream and social media is even awash with images of hordes of members of the community crowding at supermarkets and other distribution points in an effort to access the subsidised commodities. Adherence to social distancing rules is ignored at these settings and observing lockdown regulations has been rendered difficult by many Zimbabweans who wander in search of the different basic commodities in neighbouring wards.

A member of the Muslim community says they have been left out of the food distribution process because of their religious affiliation.



Click to Listen to the Audio

A Mbare Resident laments the lockdown citing it as a cause of hunger since it restricts people from doing activities that sustain their livelihoods. She says they once had their names written down for donations and some had to pay to have their names written down but nothing has materialized yet. Most people in the community are suffering from lack of food.



A woman narrates how she and others went to buy mealie meal at Boka. Two known ZANU PF activists arrived at the queue and said that the mealie meal was to be sold to known ZANU PF supporters so it was distributed according to

their known structures leaving the rest of the people without food.



A person living with disability in Masvingo says he was left out of food aid. He says names were written, but those in genuine need of aid were left out, as ruling party officials were the ones who wrote down the list.



Tukisai Chodewa in Murehwa says he is left out of food aid because of his human rights activities. He says councillors act in a partisan manner when selecting those due to receive food and other forms of aid.



Recommendations

Transparency and Accountability Crucial

A government's sincerity is judged by how it handles national crises and the current crisis, which is exacerbated by the global effects of the Covid19 pandemic. In light of that, the following recommendations are made:

- Government should put in place measures to ensure that every deserving citizens gets aid and this should be in a manner that exhibits transparency and accountability. To do so, government should take note of key pillars of food security as follows:
 - Availability: Food Aid should be made available in sufficient amounts to all in need
 - Access: Government should then make that food aid physically accessible to those in need.
 - Utilisation: With proper assessment, government can be able to give food aid to where it can be utilised
 - Stability: Government should put in place long term robust measures to sustain food security of all

4.0 CONCLUSION

As the lockdown entered into its fourth week, there was no doubt that government needed to take a serious look at the key issues that have emerged throughout, and these are issues that have been coming from the very communities that have lived experiences, and their voices need to be listened to. A number of recommendations have been captured on how best to address the challenges highlighted. Below we summarise the recommendations affecting the areas covered in this report:

- The demolition of informal sector structures impacts very negatively on the already struggling economy of Zimbabwe. This is notwithstanding the fact that the Covid19 pandemic is already affecting the incomes of the millions of people who rely on informal work. In light of that, government should stop the demolitions, engage the vendors and find a lasting solution that will provide recourse to those already affected and have a win-win solution to those that are yet to be affected.
- The food insecurity situation of Zimbabwe did not start with Covid19, but by December 2019, the World Food Programme had already raised red flags and it would have taken proper planning beyond political rhetoric for government to put in place measures to avoid people starving. In light of the current situation, government should immediately step up efforts to provide food aid, and this should be done in a transparent manner, through the existing social welfare structures and not by political party officials. Government should also conduct a proper, and timeous mapping of the aid needs of all Zimbabweans. This will ensure that food aid goes to the deserving people.

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