



ZIMBABWE LOCKDOWN EXTENSION

“THEIR VOICES MATTER”

COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO COVID 19 MEASURES

Week 6 Report



W/O 3/93
Campaigners for Human Rights



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

Email: publications@zimrights.org.zw

www.zimrights.org.zw

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Several human rights issues emerged during the sixth week of the extended lockdown as more businesses began to operate and government made little progress in providing adequate social safety nets to the millions affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

Notably business, small and large, began operating, and this brought into focus the issue of business and human rights, including labour rights.

As state security services remained deployed in large numbers, with a number of them manning several roadblocks mounted across the country, concern grew over how government was not prioritizing the human rights entitled to those providing state security services.

As the COVID-19 crisis continues, it also raises questions on how government is and will manage resources especially because during such times, fiscal responsibility becomes a priority. This period is also marked by the emerging inequalities arising from the current crisis.



2.0 THEY ARE HUMAN TOO...

A Check on Human Rights for Security Services during the COVID-19 Fight

When President Emmerson Mnangagwa announced that Zimbabwe was to go on a lockdown, he mentioned that state security agents, namely, the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) and the various municipality police departments were to enforce the process.

The move attracted a lot of interest as many feared the state security agents - who have a tainted human rights record - would use brutal force when deployed.

Sure enough and true to their nature, state security agents were consistently accused of brutality from the first day of the lockdown. Apart from the human rights abuses, another major emerging issue was how government was not providing the state security agents with Personal Protective Equipment, and how the police and the army were often packed in trucks, raising the risk of COVID-19 amongst themselves.

These fears are not unfounded. In South Africa, News24 has reported an increasing number of police officers testing positive. There are fears that Zimbabwe's tests maybe unreliable and infections in police stations may go undetected.

2.1 The Human Side of State Security

On 15 April 2020, the High Court issued an order partly to the following effect that personnel responding to the coronavirus pandemic including drivers and their assistants, security personnel and essential services employees be regularly screened and tested.

Despite the court order, state security officials have continued to operate without proper PPE and have not been seen to adhere to the principle of social distancing.

This brings to the fore the human rights of the state security officials, because they are human too, and they deserve to work under healthy and safe conditions that accord them dignity.

2.2 Worrying Observations

In light of this, ZimRights spoke to various state security officials, and aggregated a couple of images showing the state of their work environments.

Key observations include the following

- State security officials are working without proper PPE
- The hundreds of roadblocks set up do not have toilets or source of clean water, with some of the officers being forced to use the bush system, which is unhealthy.
- State security personnel have inadequate transport and they often find themselves hiking from their work points after work

2.3 Their Voices also Matter

ZimRights spoke to some of the state security officials and here is what they said. Due to the nature of their job, this report will not reveal their identity.



“We just go behind that tree when we want to urinate. We have to go at a time when there are no people walking by as this place is just an open space with that tree being the only place we can use.”

A police officer manning a roadblock along Entreprise Road



“We work under command and we cannot demand more than we are given. So, if we have to be in a truck, and there are so many of us that we cannot observe social distancing, we cannot do anything about it, and we cannot challenge our superiors as this is punishable”

A soldier on patrol in Harare



“We go behind that wall. That is what we use as a toilet.”

A police officer at a roadblock along Simon Mazorodze Road



“Every morning when I wake up to go to work, my wife always reminds me to be careful and not do anything that can expose me to COVID-19.

This worries me because we work under a command system and I cannot defy my bosses even if they were to ask me to do anything that may put me under risk.”

A police officer working in Mbare

Audios covering this part of the report are withheld for the safety of the officers who gave information.

Here are some images to show the environment the state security works operate under. These images are random and not related to the testimonies published above.



Police officers on patrol without any PPE. Image courtesy of News24.com



Police officers and soldiers at a roadblock in Khami Road, Bulawayo. This checkpoint, like the rest, does not have any ablution facilities. Image by Chronicle



Police officers at a roadblock along Seke Road. Officers resort to using the bush system



Police on patrol, packed in a truck in violation of the social distancing regulations

2.4 Recommendations

In light of this, government is urged to relook at the working conditions of state security officials, who, by virtue of them being Zimbabwean, deserve to be accorded the same dignity and right to good health. In order for that to happen, government should do the following:

- Provide State security officials with proper PPE
- Set up mobile toilet and water points at roadblocks so that state security officers do not end up risking their health by using the bush system or drinking water from unsafe sources. This will also protect the general public from a probable outbreak of other sanitation related diseases.
- Government should provide transport services to State security personnel especially the police, as these are frontline workers too.



3.0 WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT? _____

Business, Human Rights and COVID 19: A Community Perspective

3.1 Introduction

Since COVID 19 started ravaging the world in late 2019, business has been turned upside down. Besides the health implications of the disease, which has a mortality rate in excess of 3% according to the World Health Organization, the outbreak has led to global lock-downs causing havoc on the global economy. The International Labour Organization initially estimated that up to 25 million jobs could be lost worldwide due to the pandemic, pushing millions of people into unemployment, underemployment and working poverty.

These figures have since been up to 195 million job losses globally. Experts have predicted unprecedented global famine due to lack of production in farms and lack of supplies for farmers due to industry lockdown.

While Zimbabwe's economy rests mainly on the informal sector, the country has not been spared of the havoc as informal markets have been closed.

The situation in Zimbabwe is worsened by the fact that the government, known for its predatory tendencies, has come in full force against the informal market destroying livelihoods.

3.2 Community Views from Local Markets

In week six of the lockdown, ZimRights, working in communities has interacted with local businesses and community markets actors on how they are experiencing COVID 19 and its impact.

ZimRights spoke to Mr. Samuel Wadzai Mangoma, the Director of Vendors Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation on the impact of COVID 19 on the sector. He said that the funds made available for the informal sector have not reached the beneficiaries. He also stated that the sector is worried with ongoing demolitions of informal traders.



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



**Click to Listen to VISET
Director Samuel Wadzai**

In Mashonaland West, ZimRights National Chairperson Takesure Musiiwa has been working with informal traders who recently received threats from the police that their merchandise would be destroyed.

These threats follow demolitions of market stalls in Chinhoyi by Chinhoyi Town Council. Following a court application by the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) Council has been ordered to build the market stalls.



Karoi Market Stalls

ZimRights National Chairperson Mr. Takesure Musiiwa speaks about the desperate situation for people who survive on trading through the stalls that are being destroyed.



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



Click to Listen to the National Chairperson Takesure Musiiwa

3.3 COVID 19 Impact on Rural Economies

Although the government has allowed farmers to continue with production, rural farmers have faced challenges. As part of the measures to combat COVID 19, the government has decentralised the tobacco auction floors to provinces. Where farmers usually carry their tobacco to Harare, they are now supposed to go to local provincial market. It would appear that this measure would reduce congestion and allow farmers to save on transport. In practice, this is not the case.



“Decentralisation of tobacco auction floors has affected the price of the products as there less competition locally.”

One ZimRights member from Hurungwe

He said Hurungwe tobacco is usually high grade and fetches more money in Harare, its decentralisation in Harare means the local farmers are competing against themselves leading to buyers short-changing them. Many people are now taking advantages of the crisis to offer very little.

3.4 Increases in Price of Basic Commodities COVID 19

As the COVID 19 pandemic makes a hit on the economy, many businesses seem to have seen an opportunity to capitalise. A snap survey by ZimRights in the cities around the country showed that prices have significantly gone up since COVID 19. ZimRights members speak about the shock of rent-seeking in businesses.



“The price increases are troubling us because already, we have not been and for some of us, salaries have been cut by 50 percent, leaving us unable to afford the basic.”

A resident of Glen Norah, Harare



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



[Click to Listen to the Audio](#)

A worker speaks about how he can no longer afford basic goods because his salary has been cut and that prices have gone up.

PRODUCT	PRICE BEFORE LOCKDOWN (ZWL)	PRICE AFTER LOCKDOWN (ZWL)
10kg Subsidised mealie-meal (scarce)	70.00	70.00
10kg Non-subsidised mealie-meal	180.00	285.00
2kg Sugar	45.00	90.00
2kg Rice	45.00	95.00
10kg Potatoes	250.00	450.00
2L Cooking Oil	65.00	150.00
Bar of soap	18.00	35.00

3.5 Who carries the cost of doing business during COVID-19

With the kicking in of level 2 lockdown, the government directed that there be mandatory COVID-19 testing for all workers. It further made the wearing of face masks mandatory for all public places. This caused a number of challenges as companies that were supposed to open could not because of the confusion around the testing centres and the cost. At USD 25 per testing kit, companies, which were already struggling after five weeks of not operating, could not afford the cost.

However, the scenario provided a dilemma for business because according to Section 6 of the Labour Act, no employer shall (d) require any employee to work under any conditions or situations which are below those prescribed by law or by the conventional practice of the occupation for the protection of such employee's health or safety;



Section 12A (2) further states that:

“Remuneration may be payable in kind only in industries or occupations where such payment is customary, and shall be subject to the following conditions - (c) equipment or clothing required to protect the health and safety of the employee shall not be computed as part of the remuneration of the employee.”

However, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Chapter 29 places the right to provision of health services on government's shoulders

It states that

- 1. The State must take all practical measures to ensure the provision of basic, accessible and adequate health services throughout Zimbabwe.....
- 3. The State must take all preventive measures within the limits of the resources available to it, including education and public awareness programmes, against the spread of disease.

ZimRights spoke to some employees who are worried that a test on employees only are not effective because the employees have to go back to their families who have not been tested.

He states that will still report for duty despite the fact that he is not being paid. He cannot demand to be paid because his company is actually struggling to remain open.



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



Click to Listen to a Murehwa Employee Speak on the Lockdown

Another employer said we are in a big dilemma.

"Tirikutsva kumusana nekudumbu."



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



Click to Listen to the Dilemma of Working During Covid-19

Another employee from Zvishavane reports that they only received half salary of worthless Zimbabwean dollars.



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



**Click to Listen to the views
of the Zvishavane Worker**



*Following a meeting with the
Confederation of Zimbabwean
Industries (CZI) and, the government,
the order to test was reversed.*

3.6 The Hazard of Masks

Many communities struggled to deal with the requirement for masks in the public places. Supermarkets started blocking people without masks from entering. In Masvingo, ZimRights members reported that people were now exchanging masks at the entrance creating a hazard.

On May 3, 2020, the NewsDay reported that there were people collecting masks from garbage and selling them. This prompted the Ministry of Health to issue a statement asking people to destroy their masks before disposal.

ZimRights members weighed in and recommended that there is need for the government to provide free masks for those who could not afford.

“During elections, they distribute free t-shirts,” said one member from Bulawayo, “Why can't they do the same with masks?”

Other members recommended that businesses like supermarkets must share the burden the public and

provide masks on entrance into the shops so that people don't have to choose between buying bread and masks.

Some business owners spoke to ZimRights on their social responsibility in responding to COVID 19.

In Murehwa a business owner spoke of how he is trying to keep his business afloat. He says he cannot meet the obligation to pay employees when there has been no business. He says down in Murehwa, how is expected to test employees using what equipment.

"I don't even know what a thermometer is."



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



**Click to Listen to a
Murehwa Business person**

From Gweru, a small business owner says reduced working hours make businesses non-viable.



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



**Click to Listen to the views from
a Gweru small business owner**



ZimRights Audible
Speak Out



**Click to Listen to the views
from Zvishavane**

3.7 The Plight of Workers

While Zimbabwe has a high unemployment rate, the remaining workers have been seriously affected by COVID 19 as their businesses also depend on the active informal markets to drive their products.

Behind the dying economy in Zimbabwe, there is a resilient workforce that over the years has kept the remnant of industry afloat with poverty wages, dangerous and unsafe working conditions and very few if any social protections.

3.8 Recommendations

Government has the primary responsibility to provide healthcare for its citizens. However, employers also have an obligation to ensure that they do not compel their workers to operate under an unhealthy environment.

In light of this, it is recommended that the Tripartite Negotiating Forum be kept alive and also actively include informal and small businesses in order to find a win-win situation for the health benefit of citizens and workers.

Government should also ensure the availability of adequate testing kits as more businesses continue to open and there should be increased awareness raising as the movement of people grows.



4.0 ...AS THE POOR GET POORER

The widening inequalities between the rich and the poor



“We are not in the same boat.

The storm is the same, but boat is not.”

A Zimbabwean citizen speaking about the
inequalities exposed by COVID 19

4.1 Inequalities owing to COVID-19

On the 16th of May 2020 Zimbabwe looked forward to ending the 8-week lockdown only for it to be extended indefinitely by the president, Emmerson Mnangagwa.

The main reason for the indefinite extension was that the government was yet to meet the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended thresholds needed for easing or lifting the lockdowns.

However, this time, the hope and belief that greeted the initial lockdown announcement on the 27th of March was replaced by anxious feelings and desperation mainly by the majority of Zimbabweans who have been suffering more from depressed livelihoods than COVID-19 itself.

Zimbabweans, already suffering from a crippled economy and a simmering political crisis had their woes mount with the arrival of COVID-19 and the subsequent response mechanisms. The current lockdown has exposed the underlying inequalities that exist in Zimbabwe.

4.2 Education

Another area where glaring inequalities have manifested themselves has been in the education sector.

The country's learners have been away from school since

the lockdown began. This raised fresh fears of disruption of syllabi and more especially for the students who were writing their terminal examinations in grade 7, form 4, form 6 and final year college and university students.

With no clear intervention in sight, most private schools and colleges resorted to online learning. However, this left out the majority of students who are among the urban poor and rural dwellers who are not able to afford the steep price of data let alone the gadgets needed to conduct online classes.

Furthermore, Electricity is still beyond the access of many in Zimbabwe – the Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (ZETDC) says only 41% of Zimbabwe has electricity.



41%

of Zimbabwe has electricity.

Where the online lessons were introduced, parents and students complained of exorbitant tuition, fees ranging from ZW\$10 000 to ZW\$27 000 were reported to have been charged by some private school in April alone.

To this effect, a majority of Zimbabwean students have been excluded from access to education.

4.3 Health

With the current crisis being a health crisis, it is in the area of health that blatant inequalities were mostly exposed.

Zimbabwe recorded its first case of COVID-19 on the 21st March, 50 days after it had been declared a pandemic by WHO.

The ill preparedness of our healthcare system was exposed two days earlier, on the 23rd of March after the death of Zororo Makamba who became the first victim of the pandemic in Zimbabwe. He has been hospitalised at Wilkins – the supposed national centre for the treatment of the disease.

A few days later allegations surfaced to the effect that the political elite and the well-connected were revamping the upmarket Rock Foundation hospital where some of the COVID-19 equipment was supposedly diverted to – to serve a few beyond the reach of the public.

This did not come as a surprise given the penchant of the country's leaders to be treated abroad while neglecting the local health infrastructure. It is important to note that the current pandemic came into after the country's

Vice president Constantino Chiwenga spent four months seeking treatment in China.

In addition, the country had also witnessed a crippling strike by health professionals who were demanding decent work conditions. Currently, the doctors and nurses at the frontline have to improvise on Personal Protective Equipment.

Away from the COVID-19 crisis, ordinary citizens have been left with no access to healthcare facilities as the healthcare professionals are not equipped with adequate PPE to use when handling patients.

Most patients have been neglected at hospitals and clinics and a more recent case involves a Marange woman who had to give birth on the veranda of a local clinic after nurses refused to attend to her. The spike of malaria - related death in Mashonaland East and Matebeleland South are also attributed to shortage of equipment. As a result, this has left Zimbabweans failing to access healthcare facilities.



4.4 Water

Zimbabwe has always been bedevilled by water challenges due to the collapse of service delivery by the national water authority.

ZimRights high density suburbs where reports were received from, which include Highfields, Glen Norah, Budiriro, Zengeza, Glen View and in Bulawayo's Magwegwe, Makokoba and Mpopoma, most families found themselves locked up without access to water. Consequently, the people most affected by this are women who in most communities are responsible for the general welfare of the family, where the water is available, at boreholes and mobile water bowsers, residents are forced to crowd, disrespecting the social distance protocols needed to fight COVID 19 thus exposing them to the disease.

Currently, Bulawayo, the second largest city has been experiencing acute water shortages for many years and in May the water rationing has seen residents receiving tap water only once a week.

The water challenge has been existing for a long and local authorities have, on numerous occasions, called for it to be declared a national emergency but the political will to solve the crisis is lacking.

4.5 Livelihoods

Most Zimbabweans belong to the vulnerable groups largely characterised by poverty and informality.

Zimbabwe's fractured Economy left most of the economically active population surviving on informal activities, mainly vending.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions estimates that over 85 percent of people work in the informal sector, and these are people who cannot go for a day without working because they survive from hand to mouth.

The lockdown regulations meant that informal activities had to cease and with them the livelihoods of many.

The woes further mounted when the government ordered local municipalities to destroy the vending sites and workplaces in the name of cleaning up. This meant that the temporary problem brought by the lockdown has been made permanent.

With no economic redemption in sight, hopes of employment envisioned in the president's 2.2 million jobs, have since vanished.

For the majority, hunger and starvation have now become the real and immediate threats. All this is against the background where the government failed to deliver its promise of COVID relief for the vulnerable – 8 weeks into the lockdown. Sadly, this is in sharp contrast to the opulence displayed by the political elite and their cronies.

4.6 Recommendations

Government has not shown sincerity to introduce pro-poor policies that have a substantial effect on narrowing the rich-poor gap and what has happened since the lockdown began has proved how the poor are getting poorer, and with no social safety nets, the situation can only get worse. In light of this, government is urged to do the following:

- Introduce robust policies to avert the growing hunger and unemployment. Such policies should go beyond political rhetoric and should be implemented in a transparent manner.
- With the lockdown not ending anytime soon, government should ensure that access to education for all children and should provide mechanisms where children learn, but in a safe environment.



5.0 CONCLUSION

Since the lockdown began, a lot has been exposed about the nature of the Zimbabwe government, and chief of all, is how its policies are not people-centered. State security officers have continued to operate under unhealthy conditions and the gap between the poor continues to grow unabated while businesses have been affected greatly by the lockdown. In light of this, ZimRights makes the following summarised recommendations.

- Government should ensure that state security officers, who are on the frontline of enforcing the lockdown, must have adequate PPE, and should be accorded the dignity of having water and ablution facilities for their safety and for the safety of the public that they interface with.
- Government should introduce robust policies to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. Faced with inflation, shortages, unemployment and COVID-19, ordinary citizens are getting poorer everyday and it takes a responsible government to urgently provide the much needed social safety nets.
- Government should also keep the TNF alive so that businesses, labour and government find a win-win solution to the emerging labour issues during COVID-19, and all of this should be based on the principle of protecting the dignity of all people.

HARARE OFFICE

ZimRights House, Alverston Court
90 S. V. Muzenda Street
P.O. Box 3951, Harare, Zimbabwe
Tel: +263 242 707278/ 705898

BULAWAYO OFFICE

4 ESAT House, Fort Street
Between 12th & 13th Avenue,
Bulawayo
Tel: +263 292 61826/ 63721

MASVINGO OFFICE

ZIMRE Centre
Cnr Hughes/ S. Mazorodze
2nd Floor, East Wing, Masvingo
Tel: +263 392 266224/ 0772 318 047

Email: info@zimrights.org.zw
www.zimrights.org.zw



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