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## THE ZCTU RESPONSE TO THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) ON THE ZIMBABWE'S ECONOMY AND WORKERS

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### 1. Background

COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak, which started in China in December 2019 has now been declared a global pandemic. As at 26 March 2020, there were a total of 465,915 confirmed cases, 21,031 confirmed deaths with 200 countries, areas or territories with cases<sup>1</sup>. The pandemic has weighed on global economic performance, with varied in-country socio-economic impacts.

Zimbabwe has not been spared by the COVID-19 pandemic. As at 27 March 2020, the Ministry of Health and Child Care announced that out of the 188 tests conducted, 7 cases were COVID-19 positive, 181 cases were negative, and one death recorded.

Governments across the world are putting in place COVID-19 response mechanisms. In the case of Zimbabwe, COVID-19 response measures by the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 2020 included:

- i. Boarder control – banning of all non-essential travel (excluding returning residents) and traffic, both inbound and outbound, except for movement of cargo;
- ii. Ban on entertainment and recreational activities such as nightclubs, bars, beerhalls, movie houses, swimming pools, gymnasium and sporting activities;
- iii. Public gathering – which should not exceed 50 people in the following: religious fellowships, weddings, conferences, workshops and funerals; and,
- iv. Restricted hospital visits which have been reduced to one visit per day involving relative per patient.

In addition to the above, the Government, through advice from the Tripartite Negotiating Forum(TNF) declared the pandemic a national disaster. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, the Government received a COVID-19 donation windfall from Jack Ma and Alibaba Foundations namely: 20,000 laboratory diagnostics test kits, 100, 000 medical face masks, and 1,000 protective suits and face shield.

Subsequent to this, the Government announced additional measures namely:

- i. A total lockdown for 21 days starting Monday, 30 March 2020. Only essential movement related to seeking health services, to the purchase and procurement of food and medicines and for other essential supplies and critical services will be exempted;
- ii. Suspension of all public transport operations excluding ZUPCO and Public Service Commission;
- iii. Security forces may be deployed;
- iv. Government and local authorities to ensure regular water supply to all areas including refuse collection;
- v. A hotline #2019 for the period;
- vi. Expedition of COVID-19 testing to be decentralized to provincial centres;
- vii. Employers to show compassion to their workforce; among others.

Whilst Governments globally are putting in place various measures and mechanisms, trade unions across the world are also aware to the impact of COVID-19 on workers and were also putting in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

place preventative and mitigation mechanisms to protect workers during this period. The ZCTU had already put in place migratory measures against exposure to COVID-19 infections namely: allowing its workers to work from home, as well as scaling down on activities that have the potential of exposing staff and its members to the virus such as cancellation of its annual events.

Whilst this is the case, it is critical to assess (i) the risks and likely impact of the COVID-19; and, (ii) the impact of the measures stated above on the economy and workers in Zimbabwe as shall be discussed below.

## 2. Economic impacts of COVID-19 on the Zimbabwean economy

The economic impact of COVID-19 will largely be felt through mechanisms such as trade disruptions, travel bans and closure of borders, low remittances, disruptions in agriculture and manufacturing sectors and exports, depressed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), disruptions in supply chains and the re-channelling of resources initially meant for humanitarian assistance towards in country COVID-19 support systems. These disruptions have the potential to cause fiscal constraints on the Zimbabwe's economy. As indicated in Figure 1 the sources of Government's liquidity namely exports, remittances, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and loans will be negatively affected by the pandemic with pressures from COVID-19 related global recession worsening the situation.

**Figure 1: Sources and drainers of market liquidity**



**2.1 Trade especially exports will be disrupted due to depressed global demand caused by COVID-19:** The interconnectedness of Zimbabwe with trading partners such as South Africa, China, USA, and Europe, which have been adversely hit by the pandemic means that the economic slowdown in these countries will have a trickle-down effect on the country's export performance. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) interim economic outlook report of March 2020<sup>2</sup> projected a decline in the world's economic growth from 2.9 percent to 2.4 percent. It further projected that for the Euro area, economic growth would decline from 1.2 percent to 0.8 percent, and that of the G20 from 3.2 to 2.7 percent. Furthermore, the projected fall in Chinese demand with the contained COVID-19 outbreak scenario would reduce world Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 0.5 percent, whilst the downside scenarios would reduce global GDP by

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/>

1.5 percent. Hence, slow recovery of these trading partner's economies will have a domino effect on the country's agriculture, mining and manufactured exports, further straining the country's economy.

Furthermore, the restrictions or closure of ports and borders by countries in the region and abroad translates to the lock out and / or disruption of revenue flows mainly through trade- related taxes and transport and logistics-related taxes, thereby threatening the income streams of the economy and the already constrained fiscal space.

- **Agriculture exports will be hard hit:** The outbreak and spread of COVID-19 coincides with the country's 2020 tobacco marketing and trading season. Tobacco is one of the country's major foreign currency earners with export earnings reaching US\$142,2 million by February 2019, an increase of 122 percent from US\$63,5 million recorded in the comparative period in 2018<sup>3</sup>. Sadly, the major importers of flue-cured tobacco namely China, South Africa, selected European countries, among others are the largest hit by COVID-19. Thus, depressed demand and slow recovery in these countries will likely have a trickle-down effect on the country's export earnings. The same uncertainties also apply to other agriculture exports particularly, horticulture exports, whose main market in Europe.

- **Mixed impacts on the mining sector and mineral exports:** COVID-19 and its impacts are likely to have a negative impact on the mining sector and subsequently mineral exports. Whilst commodity prices of some minerals are likely to decline, gold prices are likely to improve as investors see gold as a safe haven in periods of economic crisis. However, exports of mineral commodities are likely to slow down as a result of depressed demand from China and advanced countries following COVID-impact on their economies. Already the lockdown in China has resulted in a decline in demand for steel and iron ore. This is likely to cause a domino effect of commodity prices of such minerals, and others which the country also relies on for export revenue. As an exporter of raw commodities, Zimbabwe is likely to be negatively affected posing threats to its economic recovery.

**2.2 Remittances will slow down worsening fiscal space and vulnerabilities of remittance-dependent households:** Economic slowdown in countries where Zimbabwean diasporans are found, is likely to negatively impact remittance (both formal and informal) flows into the country. Remittances have been growing over the recent years, becoming one of the key sources of income and liquidity (Figure 1) for the Government and general populace. For instance, the country received US\$635 million in diaspora remittances in 2019 up from US\$619 million dollars in 2018, representing a 2.6 percent increase. Whilst there is no formal data on informal remittance, clearly, they have served as an important social protection buffer for the majority of households during this national crisis. Thus, any disruptions in remittances will have a double impact on (i) fiscal space; and, (ii) household vulnerability to poverty.

**2.3 Channelling of global resources towards fighting COVID-19 and its impact will leave little or no resources for humanitarian assistance for the country:** The COVID-19 related slowdown in the (advanced) economies expected to provide humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe, has a potential of worsening the humanitarian situation in the country, as most of the advanced economies' resources will now be channelled towards provision of COVID-19 stimulus packages in order to mitigate the pandemic's impact in their respective countries and boost economies. This means development assistance to developing countries may decline as more countries become

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<sup>3</sup> <https://equityaxis.net/2019/02/11/tobacco-exports-surge-by-over-122-percent/>

inward-looking. For Zimbabwe, pre-COVID-19, Zimbabwe's humanitarian assistance was estimated at US\$467.9 million to cover 5.53 million people who were food insecure between October 2019 to April 2020<sup>4</sup>. The country's humanitarian situation is projected to escalate in light of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

**2.4 Slowdown in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** The outbreak and spread of COVID-19 will negatively affect global FDI flows. The UNCTAD March 2020 report projected a negative impact on global FDI flows ranging from -5 percent to -15 percent in 2020 (with the effect of the demand shock filtering through 2021). According to UNCTAD, much of the impact will be driven by delayed investment as a result of the global demand shock with a significant negative impact in economies and industries that are highly dependent on global value chain trade. Given that Zimbabwe is on the lower echelons of global investment radar, it is a no brainer that not much is expected in that area.

**2.5 Poor infrastructure to support working from home:** The world of work is being profoundly affected by COVID-19 pandemic. A number of organisations such as CSOs and NGOs and other businesses are encouraging workers to work from home as a preventative measure against the spread of the disease. However, in the Zimbabwean context with poor supporting infrastructure such power cuts at residential level, unstable internet connections, and high cost of internet data or bundles, the noble measure may not be conducive to promote full productivity, in an already fragile economy.

**2.6 Lockdown will negatively affect rural economy and livelihoods, increasing vulnerability to poverty:** The lockdown will inevitably disrupt the rural-urban agriculture supply chain. The rural communities play a critical role in the production and supply of agriculture commodities, particularly fresh vegetables to surrounding major cities' and towns' vegetable markets, a typical example is Mbare Musika / Market, and similar markets across the nation. Such an ecosystem sustains employment, incomes and livelihoods for both rural (suppliers) and urban (buyers) population. Whilst open-air food markets and supermarkets will be allowed to operate during lockdown period, demand for these agriculture commodities will decline as there will be less human traffic due to the travel restrictions. This will result in loss of incomes and increased vulnerability to deeper poverty for people, predominantly women who rely on these markets.

**2.7 COVID-19 impact will slow down the country's economic progress:** The lockdown will inevitably result in disruption of economic activity as a time when the economy is already crippled. This is likely to put downward pressure on the projected economic growth which has been estimated at 0.8 percent by the IMF, 2.7 percent by the World Bank, 3 percent by the Government.

### **3. Workers at high risk of COVID-19 and its impacts**

#### **3.1 Workers in service sectors will be hardest hit**

Workers in service sectors such as health, tourism, transport and logistics, and retail sectors are among those that will be hardest hit by the pandemic. This is due to the fact that most of the jobs involve person to person contact, especially consumer industries as such as tourism, catering, trade, entertainment and logistics (particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises). Workers in these

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<sup>4</sup> Humanitarian Appeal Revision: February 2019 - April 2020, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ROSEA\\_Zimbabwe\\_HumanitarianAppealRevision\\_06082019.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ROSEA_Zimbabwe_HumanitarianAppealRevision_06082019.pdf)

sectors are at high risk of contracting the virus once they are in close contact with COVID-19 positive customers, clients and guests.

**3.1.1 Tourism and hospitality sector workers:** COVID-19 has a double effect on workers in the tourism sector (particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises). On one hand, workers in this sector are at high risk of contracting the virus once they are in close contact with COVID-19 positive customers, clients and guests. On the other hand, the travel bans, closure of borders and self-isolation has already started negatively affecting the sector's performances especially those in tourist-based towns such as Victoria Falls and others. This is amidst the first reported coronavirus case by the Government on 20 March 2020, a man who returned to his home in the tourist resort town of Victoria Falls from Britain. Additionally, the lockdown on weddings, conferences, workshop will severely impact on companies in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Some operators in this sector have already recorded cancellations of bookings and trips by international travelers following the outbreak of COVID-19. Resultantly, workers in this sector who are largely precarious (casual and contract) worker will be negatively impacted through forced leave and income loss, the majority

The Africa Albida Tourism Group will temporarily cease operations at all its Victoria Falls properties for the next 3 months starting March 31, 2020. The affected businesses include Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, Victoria Falls Safari Club, Victoria Falls Safari Suites, Lokuthula Lodges and The Boma – Dinner & Drum Show.

**Source:** [https://mcusercontent.com/44d89d6770f14113ea889729c/files/ad4c5cf6-bda1-4623-bcc3-1a8a26a448ac/VFSL\\_Closure\\_Trade\\_Release\\_2020\\_final.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/44d89d6770f14113ea889729c/files/ad4c5cf6-bda1-4623-bcc3-1a8a26a448ac/VFSL_Closure_Trade_Release_2020_final.pdf).

who could barely sustain decent livelihoods due to poverty wages.

**3.1.2 Health sector workers:** Health sector workers are the “frontline soldiers” in the fight against COVID-19 and they too need to be protected as they are at high risk of contracting the disease especially if they are not well equipped with the relevant and specialised personal protective clothing and equipment (PPC/E), complemented by relevant capacity building programmes (specialised education and training) to deal with the virus. For instance, in Italy, 20 percent of responding health-care workers were infected, and some have died<sup>5</sup>. Already, nurses and doctors are on strike due to lack of appropriate and adequate PPC/E to deal with COVID-19<sup>6</sup>.

**3.1.3 Retail sector workers:** As the case with tourism sector workers, these workers are also exposed to COVID-19 due to their nature of jobs that require jobs involve person to person contact. Worse more, the lock down in industry and business means that the majority of these workers who are mostly precarious workers will lose incomes exposing them to deepened poverty as most already earn poverty wages. Already, informal communication indicate that some retail supermarkets have closed shop due to the virus, thus affecting all workers in those supermarkets. Selected companies are also beginning to scale down or close, giving themselves 14 days before reopening. If Zimbabwe goes for a major lockdown, a large workforce in this sector will be negatively affected.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30644-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30644-9/fulltext)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2020/03/covid-19-disaster-nurses-plot-strike/>

This will also have a trickle-down effect on the sector's supply chain. Downward spiral effect on the suppliers of goods and services to hospitality and tourism sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing sectors will kick in as hotels, restaurants, and lodges subsequently reduce demand of quantities. This will consequently threaten workers' jobs and income security in these sectors.

**3.1.4 Workers in trade, transport and logistics:** The restrictions or closure of ports and borders by countries in the region and abroad translates to the lock out and disruption of many businesses in trade and transport and logistics, those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass thereby threatening the livelihood of workers in these industries.

### **3.2 Workers in the informal economy are most vulnerable to the spread and impact on COVID-19**

**3.2.1 High informality is a risk during the COVID-19 period:** The deterioration of the country's economy and high levels of de-industrialisation has resulted in the exponential growth of the informal economy, as most workers cannot afford being unemployed, amidst high levels of poverty. The 2019 Labour Force and Child Labour Survey revealed that employment in the informal economy grew from 859,060 in 2014 to 975,880 in 2019 representing a 14 percent increase. Similarly, an IMF report of 2018 on shadow economies indicated that Zimbabwe's share of informal economy was 60.7 percent ranking third globally after Georgia, 64.9 percent and Bolivia 62.3 percent. Furthermore, the 2019 LFCLS indicated that the share of informal economy employment was 76 percent of employment out of the total employment, clearly indicating the high levels of informality in the country, thus threatening COVID-19 spread.

**3.2.2 Over-congested informal economy markets and artisanal mining areas, with poor water and sanitation is a COVID-19 time-bomb:** The high levels of informality aggravate vulnerabilities and risks of rapid spread and impact of the COVID-19. The already over-congested informal economy markets such as at Fourth Street in Harare CBD, Mupedzanhamo Market, Mbare Siyaso home industries, Glenview Area 8 Furniture Complex, and many others in various parts of the country, pose high risks of the spread of COVID-19 for the majority of workers in those areas. In addition, there exists many other informal economy workers in the streets trying to make a living in the context of high poverty levels and failure by the Government to resuscitate the economy in its so called "new dispensation". Workers working in these areas including artisanal mining areas are exposed to indecent working conditions characterised by poor Occupational, Health and Safety and Environment (OSHE) standards, poor water and sanitation, and insecure incomes. The ability of informal economy employers and workers to procure COVID-19 prevention gear such as masks and sanitisers given their meagre, insecure and irregular incomes, as well as social distancing is a major challenge. Furthermore, the call by the Ministry of Health and Child Care of washing hands with soap and water to avoid COVID-19 infection and spread does not apply in these informal economy workspaces, home industries, artisanal mining areas which either have erratic water supplies or no water supplies at all.

If the gender-lens are factored, the high prevalence of women in the informal economy means that more women are at risk of being infected, with the risk becoming higher given women's' gender-roles of caring for the families. It is therefore the responsibility of the Government through its Municipalities to implement robust-COVID-19 response mechanisms targeting informal economy workers through social dialogue with associations that represent them, in order to protect the lives of the workers and their families, and the nation at large.

**3.2.3 A lockdown without alternative sources of incomes and livelihood support for informal economy workers may render COVID-19 precautionary measures weak:** The informal economy workers including artisanal mining are contributing immensely to the country's economy, employment, household welfare as well as filling the social protection gaps created by the deteriorating economy. Thus, any lockdown will result in enormous disruptions to sources of income. This has a potential to further push workers into abject poverty, as any day's loss in income has ripple effects on food security, rentals, school's fees, social security, medical care, among others. Meaning that, without any other source of income or livelihood support from the government, it will be business as usual in informal economy markets, worsening the vulnerabilities of risk and exposure to COVID-19.

**3.3 Hoarding of basic food commodities causing inflationary pressures:** Panic buying before and after the announcement of the 21-days national lockdown resulted in some citizens hoarding basic commodities such as sugar, cooking oil, bread as well as sanitisers. Resultantly, shortages ensued whilst some supermarkets reacted by increasing prices of basic goods, for instance, by as much as 50 percent (from \$44 to \$66 per 2kg sugar packet<sup>7</sup>), at a time when wages and salaries remained stagnant, leaving the majority of workers who are already "working poor" stranded. Inflationary pressures will likely to be worsened by increased shortages as most cross border traders' businesses closed as a result of the shutdown of borders.

#### 4. Recommendations

In light of the above, the ZCTU calls for:

**4.1 Employers in both formal and informal economy to put in place robust COVID-19 mechanisms to protect workers in risky sectors, especially service sectors where there is more person to person contact.** Enhanced COVID-19 OSHE standards, PPC/E, and workplace reorganisation (work shifts) without undermining workers job security are critical. This process should be undertaken through effective social dialogue and in line with World Health Organisation (WHO) and International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s guidelines on COVID-19 as well as national realities. Workplace social dialogue mechanisms such works councils should take centre stage in developing a win-win outcomes.

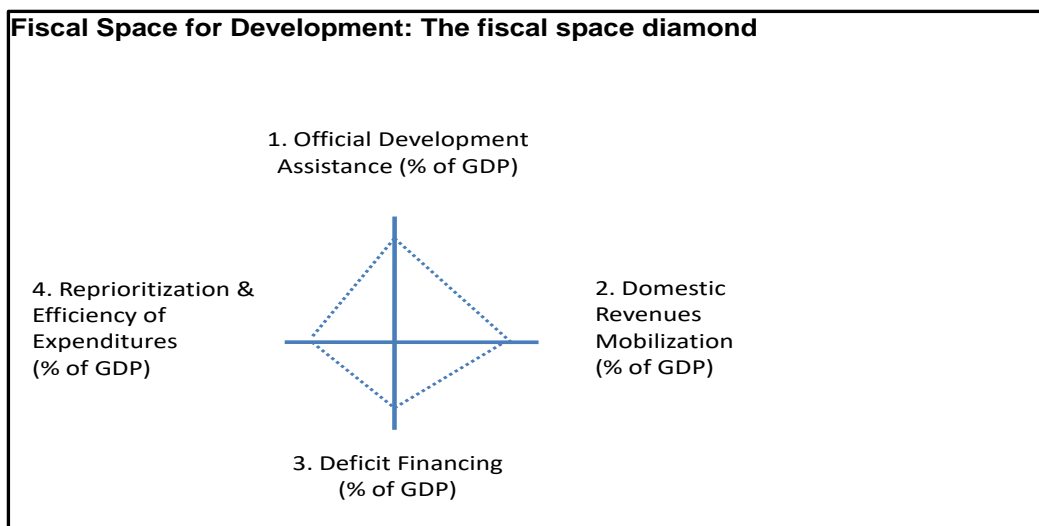
**4.2 Workers livelihoods and that of their families should not be sacrificed at the expense of**

**prioritisation and efficiency of Government expenditures:** Government has four avenues in which it can create fiscal space namely; Official Development Assistance (ODA), domestic revenues mobilisation, deficit financing and reprioritisation and efficiency of expenditures as indicated in figure below.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/coronavirus-its-not-business-as-usual-anymore>





However, out of the four avenues, and in the context of COVID-19 crisis, Government must concentrate on reprioritisation and efficiency of expenditures in order to free-up resources that can be used to support efforts to deal with direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.

**4.3 Enhanced social protection support:** Since the Government has announced COVID-19 pandemic a national disaster, it is critical for it to learn from other countries on how they are managing the COVID-19 crisis in order to minimize the economy's contraction as well as protecting its citizens and businesses against the direct and indirect shocks of COVID-19. For instance, the Australian Government announced an economic stimulus of US\$10.19 billion, mainly for job security, business continuity and for SMEs owners; whilst in South Korea its economic stimulus US\$9.8 billion will focus on focus on vulnerable sectors such as SMEs and others in the informal economy. In USA, the stimuli package consists of \$500 million to be distributed to each taxpayer with an average amount of US\$1,000, depending on income and household size, among other measures. Japan, Canada, South Africa, among others are following suit.

According to UNCTAD Director, Richard Kozul-Wright, the only choice for Governments is to provide stimuli as adopted by a number of countries.

It is therefore, critical for the Government to be responsible and be awake to the realities of its workers and citizens, majority who depend on the informal economy which has already been disrupted and impacted by the COVID-19 Government measures. Stimuli options can be tailor-made according the country's Social Protection Policy Framework, whose measures are grouped into five broad categories namely:

- i. Social Assistance
- ii. Social Insurance
- iii. Labour Market Interventions
- iv. Livelihoods and Resilience Interventions.
- v. Social Support and Care

The 2019 Labour Force and Child Labour Survey indicated that only 2 percent of the population is covered by some sort of social security scheme. This leaves 98 percent of the population vulnerable to the direct and indirect shocks of COVID-19 pandemic. Provision of socio-economic support will also lessen the care burden of women given their gender-roles.



Therefore, the table below presents the scenarios that the Government can support through at least provision of food packages or food allowances based on the Food Poverty Line which was pegged at \$1,863.00 as at December 2019.

#### Scenarios for Government's COVID-19 social support

Scenarios	No. of Persons	% Population to be targeted	FPL (ZWL) Dec 2019 <sup>8</sup>	FPL (USD) Dec 2019 <sup>9</sup>	FPL @ current rate (ZWL) <sup>10</sup>	Estimated total support (ZWL)	Estimated total support (USD) <sup>11</sup>
<b>Scenario 1</b> - employed persons already working poor	2,897,064 <sup>12</sup>	100	1,863	111	2,777	8,045,960,394	321,838,416
<b>Scenario 2</b> - 95.4% of employed in vulnerable employment	2,763,799 <sup>13</sup>	95	1,863	111	2,777	7,675,846,215	307,033,849
<b>Scenario 3</b> - vulnerable households	600,000 <sup>14</sup>	100	1,863	111	2,777	1,666,368,515	66,654,741

Given the rise in urban poverty and the fact that urban citizens pay for almost all services (rentals, water, electricity, etc) as compared to rural households, it may be prudent to focus more on targeting urban poor households, whose incomes are already threatened by COVID-19 developments including the lockdown.

<sup>8</sup> ZIMSTAT

<sup>9</sup> RBZ interbank exchange rate USD1:ZWL16.77, <https://www.rbz.co.zw/index.php/research/markets/exchange-rates/13-daily-exchange-rates/811-december-2019>

<sup>10</sup> Calculated as Dec 2019 FPL (USD) multiplied by current exchange rate of 1USD:25ZWL

<sup>11</sup> Using the current exchange rate of 1USD:25ZWL

<sup>12</sup> 2019 Labour Force and Child Labour Survey

<sup>13</sup> Calculated from 2019 Labour Force and Child Labour Survey

<sup>14</sup> According to the National Social Protection Policy of 2015, 500 000 households were deemed to be below the Food Poverty Line and eligible for all forms of social assistance. Given the developments since 2015 (droughts, Cyclone Idai, etc), an estimated figure of 600,000 will be used in this case

Additionally, the Government should expedite addressing mealie-meal shortages in the suburbs in order to avoid long queues which can be a potential for the spread of COVID-19 infections

**Zimbabwean Government can afford COVID-19 stimulus package:** *there is need for the Government to re-prioritise its expenditures and create fiscal space to deal with the impacts of COVID-19.*

Some countries have stimuli packages towards:

- i. support for health services and operational funds to make lockdowns or partial lockdowns effective;
- ii. direct cash aid for citizens to enable consumption and support the domestic real sector;
- iii. SMEs, the hardest hit economic sector, comprising loan guarantees and avoiding layoffs;
- iv. the most severely affected sectors on the verge of bankruptcy and that would add to unemployment; and,
- v. lowering interest rates and bank reserve requirements, and tax stimuli for individuals and corporations.

**Government can seek support from development partners.** *Already UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, African Development Bank, among others, are preparing COVID-19 support for affected countries at various levels.*

**4.4 Support to business enterprises:** Support to businesses also means protection of jobs threatened by direct and indirect disruption businesses, for instance through the 21-days lockdown. Already, some of the companies are suffering from low capacity utilisation (some to as low as between 35-40 percent) and may be further affected by the national lockdown. Government support can be in the form of:

- ✓ *Tax relief measures; and/or;*
- ✓ *A stimuli package for hardest hit sectors such as tourism, agriculture and manufacturing.*

**4.6 Moratorium on retrenchments:** There is need to protect direct and indirectly affected workers by establishing a moratorium to freeze retrenchments during the lockdown or slowdown in business activity. Retrenchments during the COVID-19 pandemic will further contribute to socio-economic dislocations. Businesses will be covered by special measures suggested above (see point 4.5).

**4.7 Upscaling of health systems and infrastructure, water and sanitation:** Government must upscale investments in health systems and infrastructure as well as water and sanitation across the country. The impact of COVID-19 must never be underrated. The shortage of water and poor sanitation and dilapidated health systems in many of the communities across the country will make it almost impossible to deal with the pandemic if the Government does not act swiftly. The

Government must place social service delivery as a higher priority in its operations. Putting people at the centre of development as called for by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should take centre stage in Government's actions.

Additionally, Government and municipalities must upscale provision of adequate and safe water and sanitation in informal economy workspaces / markets that will be allowed to remain open during the COVID-19 crisis period in order to reduce the high risk of spread of the virus.

*Given President Mnangagwa's SONA on Friday 28 March 2020 which directed the Ministry of Local Government to ensure availability of water in all residential areas while councils were told to religiously collect refuse and guarantee sewer reticulation services, **it is critical that these be actioned swiftly.***

**4.8 Subsidisation of essential social services:** Government must consider subsidisation of social services such as water and electricity to households during the lockdown so as to avoid citizens queuing at service provider's offices to pay for these services. This will go a long way in preventing mass gatherings of citizens at one place/ area.

**4.9 Swift response in decentralisation of COVID-19 information:** Government must expedite decentralisation COVID-19 information dissemination (cases and response mechanisms) in order to avoid speculation by the public and misinformation.

**4.10 Transparency and accountability in the distribution of COVID-19 related funds and donations, for instance, donations by Jack Ma and Alibaba Foundations.** This also implies equitable distribution of the commodities by areas of most need rather than prioritising the elites and the politicians. As is well known in Zimbabwe, corruption thrives during crises. Thus, measures must be put in place to curb abuse of COVID-related public funds, donations and aid.