

OCTOBER 27 2022

# The BULLETIN

with



ISSUE  
NO. 38

SPECIAL EDITION

More Local. More Inclusive. More Interactive

## COVID-19 IS ALMOST GONE, BUT HWANGE HEALTH SECTOR REMAINS IN TATTERS

BY Calvin Manika

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# COVID-19 IN NUMBERS

Cumulative cases, deaths and recoveries from COVID-19 since March 2020

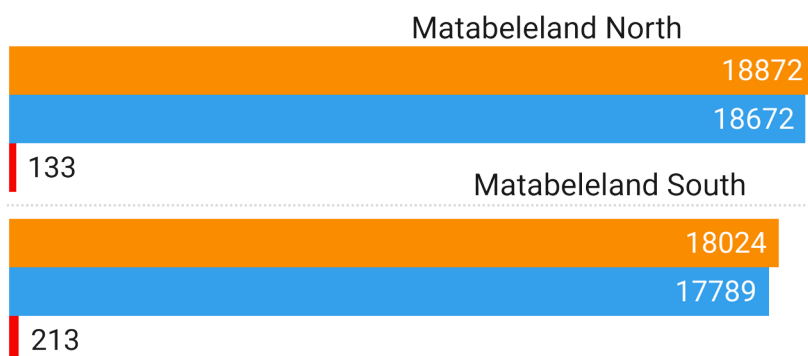
## LOCAL

### COVID-19 in Matabeleland

#### North and South Provinces

Total number of cases, recoveries and deaths from COVID-19

Cases Recoveries Deaths



## REGIONAL

### COVID-19 in Matabeleland

# 36,896

Total number who have tested positive for COVID-19

**+343** cases since last BULLETIN

# 36,461

Total number who have recovered from COVID-19

**+303** recoveries

since last BULLETIN

# 346

Total number who have died from COVID-19

**+2** deaths

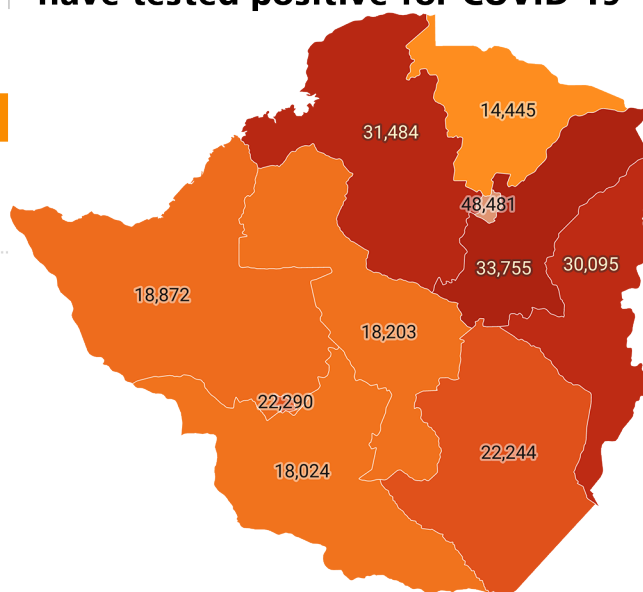
since last BULLETIN

## NATIONAL

### COVID-19 in Zimbabwe

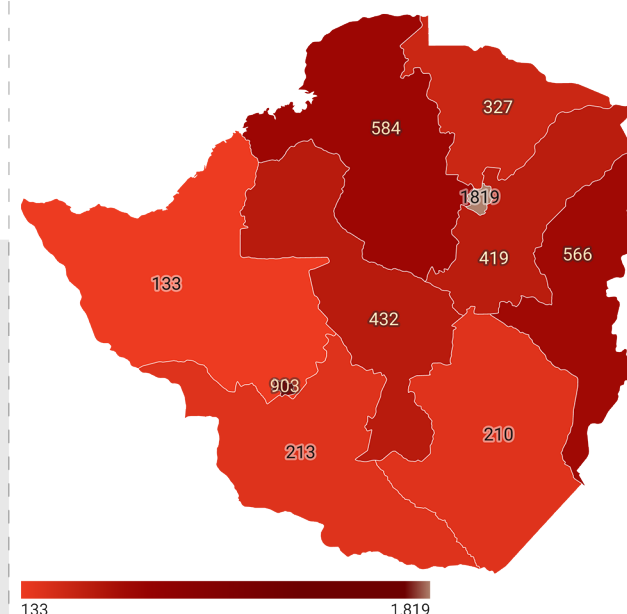
#### Cases by region

Total number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19



#### Deaths by region

Total number of people who have died from COVID-19



Source: The Ministry of Health and Child Care daily COVID-19 Report

Note: Data as at 15 October 2022



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ISSUE NO: 38 | 27 OCTOBER 2022



“ We used to walk from Madumabisa to Good Hope Mothers orphanage shelter in Cinderella for food, but when COVID-19 emerged, our safe haven was closed and this meant that there would be no food for us. (14)

Nicol Nyathi, a 10-year-old orphan

”



“ It was a tough time for the rest of the village. Without much harvest, our hope was the government and we received nothing even in the middle of the pandemic (COVID-19). (18)

Thobekile Sibanda, a Hwange villager

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# COVID-19 is Almost Gone, But Hwange Health Sector Remains in Tatters

**In Zimbabwe, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need to revamp and build existing and new health facilities. Hwange did not benefit and its health sector remains in tatters, raising fears the small mining town could fail to cope with similar pandemics in future.**

by Calvin Manika | @The\_CBNews

**I**n early 2020, Vusimuzi Banda remembers watching international news awash with what newsmakers said was a deadly virus - COVID-19 - which had ravaged China. Within two months, in March, Zimbabwe recorded its first COVID-19 death.

The incident raised the alarm all over the country.

“I could not imagine how a country like Zimbabwe would cope with the casualties of that deadly disease. I had seen thousands of people in intensive and high dependency units, thousands dying in developed countries like Italy and China. In Hwange, we have two hospitals which I knew were incapacitated to handle such a disease,”

says Banda.

Many Hwange residents like Banda thought the coming of the pandemic and the lockdowns would be an opportunity for the central government and local authorities to construct hospitals especially with assistance of other stakeholders like mining companies operating in the coal mining town.

“

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not witness any infrastructural development in our local health facilities. It is clear that we are not prepared for another pandemic. At least, we should have learnt a lesson from COVID-19.

PPEs are important but there was a need for fixed assets for the benefit of the community for future eventualities.

Vusimuzi Banda, a concerned resident

”

In Zimbabwe, whose healthcare sector is in tatters, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need to revamp and build existing and



new health facilities. But Hwange, just like many parts of the country, did not benefit from the hurried development, and might not be able to cope with future pandemics, or worse still even everyday ailments such as TB or Cancer.

Residents allege that despite receiving millions of dollars in cash and kind to fight COVID-19, the central government failed to construct a new hospital or revamp existing ones in Hwange. Residents say in the case of an outbreak like Malaria or other diseases Hwange has no capacity to assist its population.

“This shows that, our government never learnt anything, the slow response to COVID-19 teams due to shortage of ambulances and reaction vehicles and shortage of isolation facilities was enough to make us prepare for future pandemics,” says Itayi Moyo, a former member of the local COVID-19 response team.

With stricter conditions, the Hwange Colliery Hospital mainly caters for its company’s workforce and residents who can afford the hefty consultation and medical fees. The majority of the locals go to St Patrick’s Mission Hospital where consultation fees are affordable. For complicated cases, patients are referred to St. Luke Mission Hospital in Lupane or United Bulawayo Hospitals.

Currently, Hwange Rural District Council operates without an ambulance resulting in villagers hiring private cars and some dying along the way in scotchcarts.

“We had been donated an ambulance by a local safari company, but it’s now off-road due to a breakdown. We are hiring motor vehicles to ferry our sick relatives. Nothing is coming forth from both the local council and the central government,” says Abednego Shoko, a village head in Makwandara, Hwange. ■



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## VISION

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# Mining Companies Accused of Failing to Equip Local Hospitals During the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Despite wrecking millions from mining, companies operating in Hwange failed to donate substantially to the COVID-19 cause. As a result, local hospitals failed to cope with the pandemic as a result of unavailability of resources.**

by Calvin Manika | [@The\\_CBNews](#)

**R**eward Ncube of Madumabisa village remembers how the nearest clinic and hospital, both could not send him an ambulance when he contracted COVID-19.

Courageous relatives had to risk their lives and hire a neighbours' vehicle which was to be fumigated after taking Ncube to the nearest hospital.

“

I could have been dead. What surprised me is that in a town with dozens of mining companies and safari companies, local hospitals should have been well equipped to handle COVID-19. In other cities, local companies had chipped in to support the capacity of local hospitals.

*Reward Ncube, a villager in Madumabisa*

”



The high number of infections and deaths in Zimbabwe put the country's ailing health infrastructure under pressure. Government was forced to convert some schools and idle structures into isolation centres while PPEs were scarce. But through companies and organisations responding to the distress calls their needs were addressed.

Hwange has vast deposits of coal which are estimated to be available for at least for the next 1000 years. At the height of COVID-19, residents say most of the rich mining companies operating in the district failed their Corporate Social Responsibility test as they did not do enough to support efforts to halt the pandemic.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the mining sector has evolved to become a central part of mine-community relations. Mining companies now accept that the communities affected by their operations need to have basic services like water, health care, electricity and sanitation.

Maxwell Sithole, a community rights activist, says developing a mine presents an opportunity to improve conditions within these communities.

"...and unless the community benefits, the mine risks becoming an enclave. The challenge of Corporate Social Responsibility in Zimbabwe and other parts of the world is not mandatory or in statutes but voluntary. Therefore, it is difficult to enforce a voluntary gesture. But, these mining companies somehow must be held accountable," says Sithole.

Villagers allege that Hwange companies did not do anything worthwhile despite the fact that they make millions of dollars monthly from their mining operations in the district.

Siphiwe Zulu, a villager in Makwandara says, the donations could have helped but they

were insignificant to the larger communities of Hwange as people expected more.

"We understand that Safari companies didn't make money during the pandemic since there was business. But, for coal mining companies, they made a lot of money even during the pandemic," says Zulu. "Right now they continue to destroy our environment. It was time to pay back, but nothing came."

At the height of the pandemic, frontline health workers could not attend to COVID-19 suspected patients as they feared contracting the disease. In some clinics with few staff, they were closed in case one staff member tested positive. Hwange villagers say they suffered and continue suffering in accessing basic health care post the COVID-19 pandemic.

“

Most of these companies have their own private clinics on their sites with good doctors and equipment. And they are able to fly their executives to other cities. But, for us without their support, we have to endure poor services at ill-equipped public hospitals.

Siphiwe Zulu, a villager in Makwandara

” ■





# COVID-19 Cuts Access to Sexual Reproductive Health Services for Rural Women

**COVID-19 surfaced as a coterie of challenges for women residing in rural areas. Access to sexual reproductive health services is one of the many challenges they had to deal with in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

by Lethokuhle Nkomo | @The\_CBNews

“It was during the peak of the COVID -19 pandemic when hospitals were becoming a no go area. I really wanted to get a contraceptive jab but failed. I was unable to walk for 17 kilometres to the next hospital which is Lukhosi, public transport was scarce during that time,” narrates Shantani Dube from Chilanga village.

COVID-19 affected people differently. It left a trail of structural inequalities and worsened gender inequality.

For women like Dube, the effects linger.

“

My failure to have Jadelle as a form of contraceptive resulted in me having this



baby. Well, I regret it but there is nothing I can do now. I stay in Chilanga, and we only get our health services at Lukhosi hospital which was not accessible during COVID-19-induced lockdowns.

Shantani Dube, a villager

”

While COVID-19 has a severe, and in some cases, devastating impact on health systems, in Zimbabwe, studies show that during the peak of COVID-19 there are people whose human rights are least protected. Vulnerable group of people such as women are likely to experience unique difficulties in accessing quality sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Access to Sexual Reproductive Health Rights Services (SRHR) at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic was difficult for most rural women in Hwange district. Additionally, most rural women were misinformed about COVID-19 thereby limiting their ability to take care of their bodies and protect themselves from COVID-19 and other sexually transmitted diseases.



Women say they could not deny their husbands conjugal rights resulting in unwanted pregnancies.

“I spent most of the time indoors and failed to access contraceptives, and for me to deny my husband’s his conjugal rights would probably lead to the end of my marriage,” says Redi Phiri another villager from Chilanga.

In 2021, Zimbabwe continued to face multiple hazards dominated by two waves of the COVID-19 outbreak containment measures introduced in 2021, which included lockdowns, school shutdowns, and curfews severely affected business operations and had deleterious impacts on industry, and the informal sector and eroded the fragile livelihoods of vulnerable populations such as women.

Ruth Bikwa the Director of Hopeville Zimbabwe, another organisation which works with vulnerable groups which include women and children, indicated that COVID -19 had left a trail of disaster in the lives of rural women and their children.

“Due to inaccessibility of reproductive services, some rural women had a number of unwanted pregnancies. As a result these children are going to suffer the consequence,” says Bikwa.

A recent research on Maternal, Sexual and Reproductive Health conducted by the Ministry of Health and Child Care shows that the COVID-19 outbreak affected women and young people’s access to sexual and reproductive health services, including access to family planning. ■



# Elderly People Silent Victims of COVID-19

**Elderly people living in care homes feel abandoned by their families and friends. COVID-19 restrictions made the situation even worse. Without support, the situation for many could lead to a total mental breakdown.**

by Lethokuhle Nkomo | @The\_CBNews

**E**lton Phiri\* (89) staggers as he carries his old mat. He heads to the big mango tree where he wants to relax under the shade.

After struggling to sit, he slowly stretches his feet as he tries to take a rest. With no one to talk to, Phiri remembers how Old Badala was a vibrant old people's home.

There are only a few left, some have died and some God knows what happened to them

“

I remember this was once a good place prior to COVID-19; people used to come in their numbers to give us food, but since the beginning of the pandemic, a few people showed interest in visiting us.

*Elton Phiri\*, an old man*

”



Phiri is among the few elderly people in Hwange residing at Old Badala home who have found the going tough as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. They feel isolated and neglected by their friends and loved ones.

Nursing homes such as Old Badala implemented drastic measures such as restricting visitors and prohibiting group activities. But these measures took a toll on elderly people kept at their homes.

Carol Cullins, a Hwange based psychologist, says measures implemented to protect the elderly led to some financial and emotional consequences.

“

One protective mechanism which is isolation of older adults, resulted in unintended physical, mental, emotional, social, and financial consequences during the (COVID-19) pandemic.

Carol Cullins, a psychologist

”

The economic effects of COVID-19 also forced income facilities in Hwange to abandon the old age tradition of taking care of the elderly.

Priscilla Gavi, Executive Director of Help Age Zimbabwe says old people are the silent victims of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Impala car rental donation at Old peoples home... COVID-19 restrictions took a toll on elderly people kept at such homes. Image by NewsDay

“The community saw elderly people as an extra strain in the face of the pandemic,” Gavi says. “Although it is against our culture, some families took their elderly to old people’s homes as a way to unburden themselves,” she adds.

According to HelpAge international, Zimbabwe care homes have experienced a 60 percent increase in admission since the emergence of COVID-19 in March 2020. People aged 70 and above make up less than 3 percent of Zimbabwe’s population of about 15 million and often became casualties of belt tightening.

The old Badala home in Hwange relied on donations from Hwange residents and the corporate world but at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic most companies abruptly ceased their donations, for different reasons. ■

# Election Coverage Zimbabwe

## Met with Violence Authorities in Zimbabwe Worried Over

Godwin Mangudya was punched, slapped and burned with cigarettes. Assailants beat and kicked Toneo Rutsito so hard he lost a tooth. Their crime? Journalism.

The assaults on the Zimbabwean journalists came as they tried to cover political events. VOA journalist Mangudya was attacked by security personnel from the ruling Zanu-PF party, and Rutsito, an editor at a local publication, was beaten by its supporters.

They are among a growing number of journalists reporting violence in the run-up to the 2023 elections, with the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Misa) saying around 30 journalists have been attacked, arrested or harassed this year. - [Zimbabwe Independent](#) ■

## ii Exam Leak Cases

The Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (Zimsc) is investigating the extent of pre-access on the ongoing Ordinary Level examinations while deliberating on the dates for a possible re-write of the leaked papers amid revelations that ii cases have so far been reported to the police countrywide.

The police have issued a stern warning saying they were seized with the matter and will ensure the arrest of all those involved. - [Sunday News](#) ■

## Illegal Miners' Deaths

Authorities in Zimbabwe say the death toll from illegal mining is rising, with more than 100 killed so far this year - more than double the casualties in 2020. The government has launched a safety campaign aimed at illegal miners, but the struggling economy pushes many people to keep risking their lives underground. - [VOA](#) ■

## Zimbabwe Tries to Rally Support Against Western Sanctions

Hundreds of Zimbabweans turned out Tuesday for rallies against Western sanctions that the government has long blamed for the country's economic troubles.

The sanctions, some of which date back 20 years, were imposed in response to alleged election rigging and rights abuses under former President Robert Mugabe, who died in 2019. - [VOA](#) ■



# REPORT WITH US

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# Vulnerable Children Hardhit by COVID-19

**In Hwange, COVID-19 left a trail of damage, but vulnerable children were the most affected.**

by Lethokuhle Nkomo | @The\_CBNNews

handouts were halted.

**A**s families lost their sources of income due to COVID-19 and the global economy plunged into a recession, more households fell into acute poverty. For the poorest families, including those who do not have access to social protection, the situation became dire.

Vulnerable children living in Hwange were not spared in this predicament.

Before the pandemic, vulnerable children such as orphans and children living with disability survived on food handouts from well-wishers, but with the emergency of COVID-19, food

“

We used to walk from Madumabisa to Good Hope Mothers orphanage shelter in Cinderella for food, but when COVID-19 emerged, our safe haven was closed and this meant that there



would be no food for us.

Nicol Nyathi, a 10-year-old orphan who has been benefiting from Good Hope Mothers Shelter

”

Good Hope Mothers is a Hwange based orphanage shelter which was mainly established to feed the vulnerable children. They had a time table of feeding scheme programs, with the coming of the COVID-19 the shelter recorded a number of children who were in need of food and social protection.

“When COVID-19 emerged in 2020 we had a high number of children who came to our shelter for food and social protection from family and domestic violence; we would offer the children lunch. As the numbers overwhelmingly increased, we were left with no choice but to halt our lunch feeding schemes,” says Stella Mpofu an official from Good Hope Mothers.



Food handouts to vulnerable children such as orphans and children living with disability were halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The feeding schemes have been a way of boosting morale and giving the vulnerable children support.

According to a [UN policy brief](#), children are the biggest victims of the COVID-19 as it affects their well-being and social welfare.

Ruth Bikwa the Director of Hopeville Zimbabwe, an organisation which deals with children, says COVID-19 left a trail of destruction for vulnerable children and non-vulnerable children living in Hwange.

“Children suffered neglect, there were a lot of cases of domestic violence due to loss of income.”

“GBV affected the children emotionally and loss of income by parents also affected the children on their nutritional well-being,” she says.

Chances of children getting diseases such as HIV were higher because with the pause of the feeding scheme by Good Hope Mothers, most vulnerable children became desperate to earn a living, and engaged in illicit activities.

“We have been dealing with cases where vulnerable children were now exchanging their bodies for any amount which is as small as one dollar or a plate of food,” adds Bikwa.

Bikwa says the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed government authorities on how their incapacitation can affect vulnerable children in Hwange. ■



# Life After COVID-19

## Lockdowns: Informal Traders Struggling to Recover

**Informal traders who, before the emergence of COVID-19, were able to raise enough cash to feed their families, are struggling to make ends meet. For a majority of them, illegal vending provides temporary relief but isn't the ultimate solution.**

by Calvin Manika | [@The\\_CBNews](#)

**I**t's a Saturday afternoon. Mavis Nkomo touts for customers as she displays some clothes to attract people passing by the road. Nkomo sells second hand clothes in Lwendulu, a suburb near the Hwange main bus terminus. Nkomo only comes to this spot during sunset. During the day she will be vending around the compound.

"Things changed during the 2020/21 lockdowns which were long. COVID-19 was killing people and we

appreciated the directives by the government to lock all the activities for our safety and health. However, Hwange Colliery Company Limited (HCCL) continued charging and demanding the rentals despite the fact that we were not doing business," says Nkomo.

In March 2020, the central government declared a national lockdown. The lockdowns were reviewed fortnightly and people were confined to their homes and only essential service providers



were allowed to work. Hwange Colliery Company Limited (HCCL) continued charging monthly rental on its market stalls despite a plea by vendors. A majority of the vendors failed to pay their rent and were evicted.

Annamore Shoko, a vendor, said the Colliery Company was inconsiderate.

“

This is the time where everyone was home and literally locked down. We needed to focus on our health. But, to HCCL, a company we respect so much, it was about money. I wonder how and where they think we were to get rentals. It was a misinformed decision.

Annamore Shoko, a vendor

”

During the same period, the government decreed through a statutory instrument that tenants were exempted to pay rentals at least for three months. Tenants would pay the dues when the country eases the restrictions allowing the economy to open. Trymore Mutale, a local social development consultant says the Colliery Company did not comply.

“Despite being a government entity it failed to comply. The decision reversed many gains which the Colliery Company had made before the COVID-19 pandemic in establishing order and sanity in the town. Now, every unoccupied place is being invaded by illegal vendors, the once stall owners,” says Mutale.

Well before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the Colliery police were having operations that made street vending increasingly challenging. Yet, vending continues to support thousands of urban households in Hwange. Most of the harassed street vendors could not secure market stalls

as places were fully occupied.

HCCL was reached for comment, but the companies press relations department had not responded to questions sent by *The Citizen Bulletin* at the time of publication.

During the lockdowns when most of the market vendors failed to pay rentals, the desperate street vendors occupied the stalls and strived to pay until the market places were opened again.

“

It was not easy. But, I needed the place, so I had to risk my health by continuing with street vending during the lockdown to pay rentals at the market. Sometimes, I approached loan sharks to cover the rentals.

Betty Ncube, a vendor in Lwendulu

”

During a listening session organized by *The Citizen Bulletin* and the *Rooted in Trust 2.0* Project, vendors said drastic income cuts meant they could no longer afford to send remittances to families in their rural hometowns forcing them to opt for black market loans to supplement their meagre incomes. But the loans attract exorbitant interest rates and sometimes incurred threats of physical violence. Some had borrowed informally before the pandemic, and then found themselves in strife during the first lockdown.

“It was a hard time, even to take our inventories and try to sell them at home, we were unable to reduce sale prices due to minimal profit margins already, of course some ended up discounting their goods but it was a loss,” said Eunice Dube, a vendor. ■



# Climate Change Worsens COVID-19 Effects

**In Hwange, villagers had to leave their homes in search of food and temporary jobs to feed their families despite lockdown restrictions. They blame climate change for worsening the situation.**

by Calvin Manika | @The\_CBNews

Innocent Shoko, a villager in Hwange, remembers the scary trips he had to make in search of food and jobs during the COVID-19 induced lockdown which lasted for 2 years.

Shoko says due to low rainfall induced by changes in climate, he had harvested less than a tonne of maize to feed his family.

“That has been the most painful time of my life. I had harvested less than a tonne of maize to feed my family,” Shoko says. “I had to risk going to areas like Gwayi in search of food.”

Hwange is in agro ecological region four

characterised by high temperatures and low rainfall. The conditions, coupled with climate change, have brought a humanitarian crisis in the district’s outlying areas.

Low rainfall resulting in poor harvests has for years left villagers in Hwange food insecure.

The Global Climate Change Alliance plus Initiative says, in Southern Africa,



Zimbabwe included, the disease burden, lockdowns and other restrictions associated with COVID-19 disrupted food value chains at both production and marketing levels.

The restrictions in movement during COVID-19 lockdowns exposed villagers to COVID-19 as they had to travel or walk to nearby villages and towns in search of temporary jobs or food. Without an alternative for safety some contracted the virus.

“

It was a tough time for the rest of the village. Without much harvest, our hope was the government and we received nothing even in the middle of the pandemic (COVID-19).

Thobekile Sibanda, a Hwange villager

”

“They must implement policies to the letter lest we remain vulnerable and a basket and charity case to the donors.”

During the COVID-19 lockdown the central government announced that it will give vulnerable communities food hampers and cash. Obvious Ncube from Mashala Top village,

says, unfortunately they suffered the worst from both COVID-19 and climate change but no government assistance came their way.



In addition to the COVID-19 effects on their livelihoods, villagers also blame climate change for worsening the situation.

Section 30 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe obligates the State to take all practical measures, within the limits of the resources available, to provide social security and social care to those in need. Zimbabwe has a broad array of statutes, policies, and guidelines which further give effect to this Constitutional provision. Such acts of parliament include Social Welfare Assistance Act (Chapter 17:06), Disabled Persons Act (Chapter 17:10), Older Persons Act, Children’s Act and the Education Amendment Act.

According to the National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) of 2016, social protection is a set of interventions proposed to reduce social and economic risk and vulnerability, and alleviate poverty and deprivation. These interventions range from social assistance, social insurance, labour market interventions, and programmes aimed at supporting livelihoods and building resilience.

UNICEF Zimbabwe says, Zimbabwe spends only 0.4% of GDP on social protection, which is far less than 1.5% of GDP regional average for Sub-Saharan Africa. Increasing social protection spending to at least the level of its regional comparators is critical to reduce the vulnerability and deprivation among the poorest, the UN body adds. ■

FROM THE WEB



**Matobo Youth Development Initiative**

1d · 🌐

Today MYDI delivered cement and Air Vents to Ward 7 as a contribution towards the construction of Malaba (Nyashon... See more



**SHANGANO ARTS TRUST**

@ShanganoT

Today SAT in collaboration with Hwange Colliery Hunting section and Zimparks embarked on conservation education in schools# Hwange.#no to animal cruelty#

[@tusk\\_org](#), [@SharonHoole](#), [@AnimalCharityEv](#), [@iris4wildlife](#), [@HwangeResidents](#), [@amnesty\\_zim](#), [@nmutonhori](#), [@Newsbae](#), [@speakoutforanim](#)



**Ministry of Health ZW**

@MoHCCZim

Today, Zimbabwe officially launched the National Polio Vaccination Campaign which runs from 27 to 30 October 2022 targeting to vaccinate and protect at least 95% of the 2 556 800 children under five years in the country.



**Women's Weekly Journal**

@Allthingzfemale

For most women, inkomo yohlanga/ mombe yeumai is their only chance to have livestock in their name but in whose stock card do they register the cow? Women in Dongamuzi, Lupane being educated about land and property rights at a village awareness meeting yesterday by [@KASonline](#)



## PICTURE OF THE WEEK

The Citizen Bulletin is doing more than just community storytelling. Please send us great pictures which are inline with our reporting themes from and around Matabeleland and Bulawayo.







# COVID-19 Upends Working Conditions for the Worst in Mining Sector

**To halt the spread of COVID-19, many companies implemented different strategies including making it mandatory for employees to stay in company sites. However, employees of several companies operating in Hwange feel that the measures leaned more towards violation of labour rights than just containing COVID-19.**

by Lethokuhle Nkomo | @The\_CBNews

**T**he emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a lot of changes in the mining and energy industry.

Chinese companies working on the expansion project of unit 7 and 8 at the power station had to change the working conditions by isolating workers to protect them from contracting and transmitting the coronavirus.

Isaac Moyo (38), a father of two, has been working

as a welder at the Hwange Power Station expansion project. He has been isolated for 3 months. He works tirelessly and has no time to visit his family in Empumalanga.

“We were put in camps. The living conditions are just not conducive because the small cabins we live in are very small and accommodate four men,” says Isaac Moyo.

“

I'm not even allowed to visit my family, neither is my family allowed to visit me, whenever I miss my family I have to sneak out at night and make sure that I'm not noticed.

Isaac Moyo, a mine worker

”

Moyo is among welders who have been employed at the Hwange Power Station expansion project. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the company made it mandatory for workers to live at the company's temporary cabins. Those who disobeyed the order were threatened with contract termination.

Human rights activists say the temporary cabins were not designed to accommodate people for a long time.

“The workers are crowded in these cabins. Although the cabins were designed to protect workers from going out to the community during the peak of the pandemic, the idea of being cramped in a small cabin is not conducive for fully grown men. The men also deserve a right to privacy,” says Mildred Moyo, a human rights activist based in Hwange.

*The Citizen Bulletin* established that the cabins only accommodate very few women who are cooks. The women who were working at the project lost their contracts because the project offered living conditions which are only suitable for the men.

Daniel Molokele, a legislator for Hwange Central Constituency says there is a need to unpack and address the living and working conditions of workers working in the Chinese companies.

“I have heard Chinese companies employees expressing concern about the terms and conditions of the camps where they are forced to stay while they are at work. They were concerned especially during the time of lockdowns and workers were not allowed to visit their families,” says Molokele.

The Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Diamond and Allied Minerals Workers Union (ZDAMWU), Justice Chinhema, says Chinese employers have been abusing workers in the name of following the COVID-19 protocols.

“

We have incidences of workers working long hours of work in unsafe environment, earn as you work system introduced by Chinese employers, casualization of labour across all mine, workers signing short term contracts when work of permanent is available, and rampant labour broking introduced by corrupt, greedy managers of big companies taking over labor at companies they manage so as to pay slave wages while they earn huge.

Justice Chinhema, ZDAMWU Secretary General

”

Efforts to get a comment from one of the Chinese companies operating in Hwange were unsuccessful. ■





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# COVID-19 Lockdowns Spike Teenage Pregnancies

**COVID-19 may be gone but in Hwange, the effects of the extended lockdowns are visible— young girls are now mothers, and school dropouts have spiked.**

by Lethokuhle Nkomo | @The\_CBNews

A baby with a stunted growth cries uncontrollably as she refuses to be spoon fed. Nandi Dube (17) struggles to feed her one year and six months old baby. Nandi got pregnant during the height of COVID-19 and her life changed drastically. Every morning, she regrets the time she spent with her boyfriend during the COVID-19 induced lockdowns.

“I had nothing to do, I spent the majority of my time at my boyfriend’s place. His parents had moved to the rural areas. We had unprotected sex several times and now I have a baby,” says Dube.

Dube says besides spending time with her boyfriend, she spent most of her time on social media and skipped online classes. Most schools conducted lessons on WhatsApp, a cheap messaging platform used by a majority of Zimbabwe.

“I did not have time to participate in online classes which were conducted by our school,” narrates Dube as she regrets the time she wasted. “Besides, online learning was something new to me and everyone around.”

Zimbabwe’s central government



revealed in a recent report that 5000 teenage girls became pregnant and about 1800 entered early marriages during the same period when COVID-19 was at its heights in 2021. According to a research conducted by civil society organisations in Hwange, a number of teenagers were greatly affected by the impact of COVID-19 due to idle minds.

“During the height of COVID-19, there was nothing to do for the youths, COVID-19 suspended everything school included. Youths were desperately looking for something to entertain them and occupy their minds hence indulging in sexual activities and drug abuse,” says Catherine Madondo from Multiple Therapy Trust, a civil society organisation based in Hwange.



Despite the introduction of radio lessons during the pandemic, Hwange recorded an increase of school drop outs. Image by UNPF

Madondo says the economic situation which negatively affected the source of income of their parents left the youngsters vulnerable to sexual abuse and early unwanted marriages.

“

Many girls were victims of COVID-19 effects, girls of school going age were spending

much time with Truck drivers exposing them to diseases such as HIV. The economic situation forced their parents to relocate to rural areas leaving them vulnerable to sex predators.

Catherine Madondo, member of Multiple Trust

”

According to Plan International, currently 31% of girls under the age of 18 are married and of these, 4% were married while they were under 15 years.

Although the United Nations Population Fund has been helping to ensure Zimbabwe's children have online and radio lessons during the COVID-19 lockdowns, there has been a notable increase of school drop outs mostly in Hwange rural schools.

Never Nyahunzvi, the Matabeleland North Province Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) representative, says teenage pregnancy, high rate of school dropouts and drug abuse were some of the effects of COVID-19 in Hwange district.

“As Matabeleland North Province we are already at disadvantage due to lack of teachers, so the learners even took advantage of COVID-19 and impregnated each other. If we zero in to Hwange district, the district has limited teachers and recorded zero pass rate last year.” ■

# Human Rights Abuses Rife During COVID-19 Lockdowns

**At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the central government deployed police and soldiers to man check-points on major roads across the country. In most cases, civilians were ill-treated. The State's proclivity to human rights violations played a significant part.**

by Calvin Manika | @The\_CBNews

Timothy Shoko walks towards a police officer who seems to be in charge of the roadblock. His intention is to explain to the man in uniform that he wants to visit his mother in the rural area where she is ill. The officer refers to him to a gun-carrying soldier by the side of the road. After a brief talk Shoko is ordered to sit down, joining about half a dozen people seated under a tree. He spent the whole day there.

"It was a clear violation of my rights," Shoko says as he narrates his ordeal.

"My mother was not in the hospital or clinic that I could have provided any evidence of his illness. I am her only child living nearby but I was denied permission to visit her because I did not have a letter authorizing me to travel."

Members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the Zimbabwe National Army were tasked with monitoring and enforcing COVID-19 lockdowns across the country. Travelers were required to produce exemption letters from their employers or local police authorizing them to travel.

“

To worsen the situation, we were exposed to the disease. There was no social distancing among the suspects. When we tried to social-distance, we were ordered to sit close to each other. It was absolute harassment.

Timothy Shoko

”

Shoko recalls that, on the fateful day many people had been arrested for traveling without letters. But at sunset, there were only five people left and the law enforcement agents dismissed them after threatening them with violence.

Harassment of people was also fuelled by rumors that those detained by the police would be forced to be vaccinated. With vaccination hesitancy among the people, those caught were easily lured into corrupt activities to the detriment of the justice system and the efforts to fight COVID-19.

Local activists say issues of police officers and soldiers taking bribes were rampant.



Luckson Mpala, a second year student at a local university says without a relative or personal friend within the security establishments one had to part with US\$10-00 to get an exemption letter from the police.

“I was delayed to the examination despite showing the officers my examination timetable. I had to tell them that my father was a policeman so that they let me go without paying a bribe,” recalls Mpala.

At the height of COVID-19 induced lockdowns, Hwange faced a critical shortage of mealie meal and supermarkets invited police and soldiers to control the queues. “There are many girls which were sexually abused that time, just to feed their families. The issue of bribes was the order of the day in the queues. Without a bribe there was no chance to buy a mealie-meal in the designated shops around Hwange,” says Yusuf Banda, a resident.

Amnesty International says the human rights situation in Zimbabwe continued to deteriorate, with the government demonstrating hostility to human rights defenders and the general populace during the COVID-19 pandemic.

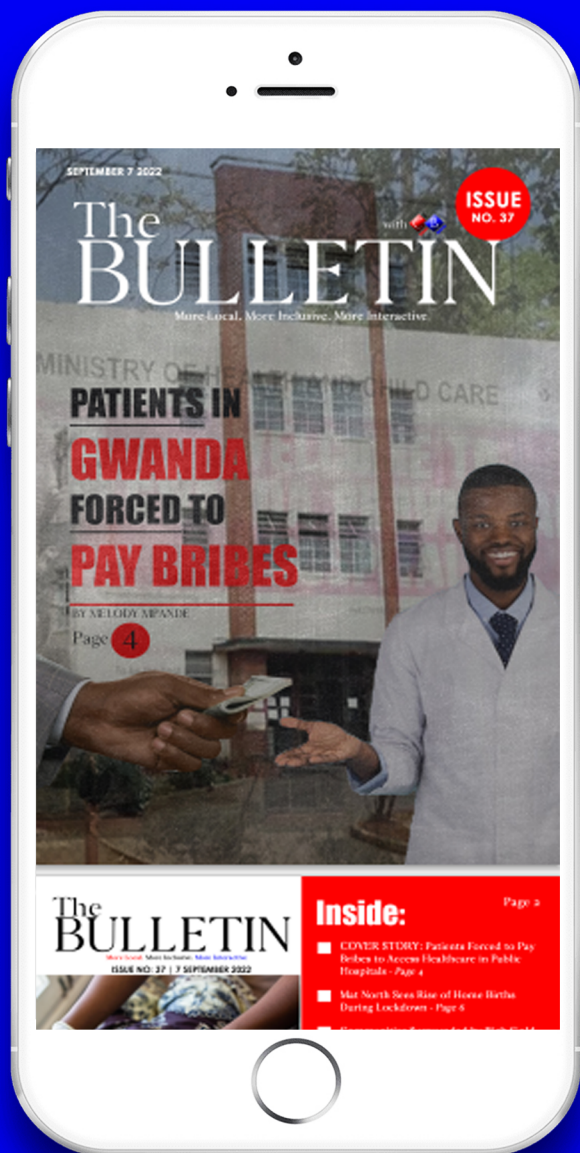
Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) says the Public Health Order gazetted by the government to contain and treat the COVID-19 virus was largely punitive as it violated the rights of the citizens.

In 2021, the ZPP in its sixth edition of the COVID-19 Accountability Tracker said the government paid more attention to what was not allowed while ignoring the livelihood needs of the majority who had been affected by the pandemic-induced lockdown for months. ■



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