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Covid-19, lockdown, the vulnerable, and people's livelihoods

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Abstract

The covid pandemic which was originally detected in China has greatly disturbed the livelihoods of people across the globe. It has claimed lives of millions of people and people livelihoods has been disturbed especially those who are not formally employed. Zimbabwe has not been spared by the pandemic, this paper wants to scrutinize how vulnerable people's livelihoods were disturbed by COVID- 19. The paper is based on desktop study.

Key words: Corona, People, Lives, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The 21st century had not been spared by deadly diseases which had wreaked havoc world-wide resulting in massive loss of human lives and distortion of livelihoods. The Covid 19 pandemic attributed to corona virus is the latest disaster to be witnessed on this continent with effects spreading across the whole world although severe casualties have been witnessed in the developed countries. As noted by Shereen et al (2020) coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which emerged in Wuhan, China and spread around the world. Although the origins of Covid-19 disease are not clearly known, its human to human transmission has been widely confirmed. It is this transmission between and amongst human beings which had prompted most governments of the world to institute lock downs as a way of curbing local transmissions. Lockdowns were also accompanied by restriction of movement of people and public gatherings were banned such that people could maintain social distancing since the disease has been confirmed to be highly contagious. However, it is people in the formal sector who had suffered most in developing countries such as Zimbabwe since people could not engage in their daily activities for survival.

Origins of Covid 19

The emerging coronavirus disease (COVID-19) swept across the world, affecting more than 200 countries and territories. Manar et al (2020) reiterates that genomic analysis suggests that the COVID-19 virus originated in bats and transmitted to humans through unknown intermediate hosts in the Wuhan seafood market, China, in December of 2019. Manar et al (2020) even cast the net further by stating that the virus belongs to the Betacoronavirus group, the same group of the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), and for the similarity, it was named SARS-CoV-2. The outbreak, which was originally identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 was declared to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 30 January 2020 and as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 as noted by WHO (2020). In a space of months, it had covered the entire globe (Wang and Wang 2020). Since its emergence, the disease had claimed more than 2 million lives globally while more than 6 million people have been confirmed to be positive. While some people fully recover from the disease, the number of positively confirmed cases outnumber those who recover in most countries.

Measures introduced

Zimbabwe is facing three shocks the COVID-19 pandemic, climatic shocks and macro-economic shocks. Most sectors of the economy have been affected by the COVID – 19 pandemics with severity in the tourism, non-food manufacturing, mining, financial services, transport and distribution and education sectors. As reported by IMF (2020) about 7.7 million (nearly half of the population) need food assistance, and 1.7 million require social protection. A Covid-19 National Preparedness and Response Plan was launched on March 19, 2020 with President Mnangagwa declaring the pandemic a State of National Disaster.

Lockdown

Following the outbreak of covid-19, most governments of the world have resorted to lockdowns as a way of reducing the transmission of the contagious diseases amongst people. These lockdowns have been widely viewed as one of the effective measures for reducing the spread of covid 19. Following a 35-day lockdown initiated on March 30, 2020 in Zimbabwe reviewed on a bi-weekly basis, lockdown measures have been tightened of late following a surge in infections. This had resulted in all employees except those who are in essential services to remain at their homes and stop reporting for duty until the lockdown has been relaxed. WHO released a list of six criteria that countries need to consider before lifting the

lockdown, (WHO, 2020). With respect to the WHO criteria, Zimbabwe is yet to satisfy some of the requirements, particularly issues surrounding diagnostic testing, isolation, and contact tracing. While adhering to lockdowns is a noble idea as a way of decongesting public places, it is those people who earn their living through informal ways who bear the brunt of covid 19. Unlike formally employed workers such as teachers, police force, nurses, doctors and soldiers as who can rest assured their monthly salaries will come, vendors, hawkers and other small entrepreneurs will have a brisk business as they had to shut down operations.

Vulnerable groups in the wake of Covid 19

The effects of Covid -19 on vulnerable groups in the society is tremendous. With the outbreak of covid-19 accompanied by lockdown measures which restricts business and self-job through stressing staying indoors, the majority tend to suffer from hunger and acute food shortages. In support of the above assertion, Dzobo et al (2020) notes that there have been growing calls for the government to address the plight of many Zimbabweans who risk dying of malnutrition and starvation instead of Covid-19. The lockdown has deprived many urban dwellers of their source of livelihood, which is mostly in the informal sector. To worsen things, the prices of basic commodities have increased over the lockdown period, further eroding the buying power of the majority of Zimbabweans. Vulnerable groups comprise of self -employed people such as entrepreneurs, vendors, hawkers, builders, and all those who are not formally employed by the government and who depend on the public through selling their goods and services to raise monies for survival.

Peoples livelihoods and Covid-19

Livelihoods are a vital means of making a living. It encompasses people's capabilities, assets and activities required to secure the necessities of life. The shocks and stresses of the COVID-2019 crisis worldwide, although primarily considered a public health crisis, will have a much broader impact on the global economy predictably for a long term, leading to worldwide socio-economic disruptions and will not only diminished the well-being and livelihoods of people, but also undermined the social nets, markets and food security on which life depends. Both lives and livelihoods are at risk from this pandemic.

From economic and social points of view, confinement measures through lockdowns are not sustainable in the long run. The livelihoods of the majority of Zimbabweans depend on the informal sector, and further delay in lifting the lockdown would mean hunger for most households as echoed by Dzobo et al (2020). There are also fears that people may die from

non-Covid- 19-related deaths if the national economy goes into a slump due to the burden of the pandemic as most productive sectors of the economy had reduced operations. Nevertheless, literature on COVID-19 is only evolving, and there is thus, limited knowledge about the possible impact on the food security and livelihoods of vulnerable categories of society

According to Mhlanga and Ndhlovu (2020), while the virus is a public health catastrophe, concerns arise on its possible implications for both local and global food systems and their capacity to guarantee safe and affordable food accessibility and utilisation as well as adequate incomes for those located particularly in the smallholder sector and informal sector of developing countries. In light of the above, it is therefore argued that unless measures are put in place to safeguard informal business activities, COVID-19 has the potential to reproduce the same catastrophic implications created by Ebola in West African countries where peasant food systems were shattered and livelihoods strategies maimed. Ban on movement of people and goods, quarantine of returnees from abroad and limited opening of business can translate to reduced income for family survival. In Zimbabwe for instance flea markets which are found in almost all cities across the country have been shut down for months. This comes in at a time when unemployment rate in the country is very high hence thousands of people who feed their families through selling various goods had to wallow in abject poverty during lockdown.

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