

Open Letter to the SADC Secretariat, national governments, donors, the private sector, the public and other relevant stakeholders

BACKGROUND

The novel Covid-19 virus and the steps taken by many governments to mitigate the impacts of the spread of the virus, have had profound social and economic impacts around the world. This is particularly acute in Africa where health systems are fragile and 41 per cent of the population lives in poverty.

To date, African Union Member States have reported approximately 34915 COVID-19 cases, 1521 deaths, and 11,309 recoveries (as at 29th April 2020). Governments must respond urgently and decisively to avert the very worst impacts of the crisis.

African countries have an average score of 32 on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2019, a measure of public sector corruption. This figure is far below the global average of 43. During this crisis, it is vitally important to ensure that money intended to help the most vulnerable, and especially money that is desperately needed to support healthcare systems and livelihoods jeopardised by this crisis, cannot be lost to corruption and those who would use the pandemic for illicit, personal gain at the expense of others.

The Signatories to this letter would like to highlight the importance of taking a proactive risk management approach in order to prevent losses from corruption that would increase loss of life and reduce access to basic goods and services, particularly amongst the poor. The Signatories recognise the importance of cooperation between various actors including civil society who remain an important partner in ensuring minimal loss to life and livelihoods.

The Signatories commend the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and African Governments for their leadership in developing structures and processes for limiting the transmission and effects of the COVID-19 virus.

The Signatories further commend the Africa Center for Disease Control , SAC Secretariat and national healthcare systems for working with all affected countries to support testing and control, surveillance, and other response support where requested;

The Signatories recognise the particular efforts of health professionals, scientists and essential workers who continue to support the fight against the COVID-19 virus and support the provision of basic goods and services to the public;

The Signatories further recognise the role of the public in cooperation with national Governments in maintaining social distancing and solidarity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic;

Drawing on lessons learned by the international community of the particular challenges associated with emergency response, the Signatories recommend the Southern African Development Community, national governments, donors, the private sector, the public and other relevant stakeholders to adopt the following Ten Guidelines to address corruption risks that may emanate during this pandemic:

Guidelines on emergency Procurement and trade

The Signatories recognise the increased level of responsiveness required during a pandemic and the amount of pressure it may put on national procurement systems but highlights the importance of ensuring that money goes where it needs to be invested to overcome the crisis and save lives.

We recommend that:

1. Governments maintain **public and open procurement systems including online procurement, and beneficial ownership transparency where possible ,with rapid, trackable and transparent procedures** highlighting the cost of procurement, the grade-level of the procured materials and delivery lead times to ensure public contracting processes that can withstand audit and are responsive to the health system. These need not be complex matrices, but simple tools which clearly outline public expenditure in a fast, efficient and transparent way, and support emergency planning processes.
2. Governments **monitor, deter, and take relevant action** against individuals and companies involved in unfair trade practices including **price hiking of essential goods** such as masks, bibs, hydro-alcoholic gels and food.

Guidelines for the SADC Secretariat

3. The SADC Secretariat prioritises the efficient resourcing and implementation of the SADC Anti-Corruption Strategic Action Plan for 2018-2022 as well as the effective monitoring of the SADC mechanism for the Pooled Procurement of Medicines and Medical Supplies, to ensure transparency.
4. The SADC Secretariat strengthens the coordination of sub-regional mechanisms to deter, investigate and punish corruption.

Guidelines on whistleblowing

5. Governments ensure the protection of those who expose wrong-doing of any kind whether in the procurement system, or beyond, and refrain from restraining the overall freedom of expression within their territories. Governments should collaborate with corporations, civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholder to ensure that **whistle-blowers are protected from all forms of retaliation, and ensure that the information they disclose can be used to advance needed reforms.**

Guidelines on Media and Civic Space

6. Government ensure freedom of the press and freedom of expression to promote diversity of opinions and enlarge civic freedom and civic participation. Governments should further support the exchange of reliable information on treatment options and good practices.

Guidelines for the Management of Donor Funds

The Signatories recognise the importance of Donor Funds, Disaster and emergency Trust Funds, as well as other similar funds for supporting responses by African governments to the COVID-19 virus. However, there is a high probability of abuse of such funds where proper oversight mechanisms are not put in place. We recommend that:

7. sufficient operational support and resources are provided to crisis response funds to ensure **efficient operation and accounting for resources;**
8. **effective auditing processes**, tools and procedures are implemented to ensure transparency and accountability for resources;
9. **effective and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** are adhered to, to ensure that donor funds not only reach intended beneficiaries but that beneficiaries are able to provide feedback to support lessons learned;

10. The public receive **open, transparent and regular communication on the funds**, and a Communication Strategy is developed that clearly outlines communication channels with the public and relevant stakeholders on Fund resources and use.

Signatories:

Corruption Watch

Centro de integridade Pública

Transparency International Zambia

Transparency International Zimbabwe

Transparency International Mauritius

Transparency International Initiative Madagascar

National Integrity Platform

Botswana Center for Public Integrity

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