



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EFZ COVID-19 RESPONSE PAPER WITH RECOMMENDATIONS – 12 MARCH 2021<sup>1</sup>

The major outcome of this Taskforce is to provide information, knowledge, and objective analysis of the current COVID-19 context to assist Church Leaders and their Churches to make individual and informed decisions on the scientific, medical, and ethical integrity of the drug and vaccine development process, the potential benefits and risks therefrom and the acceptability of the developed vaccines or drugs for use for vaccination. **This report holds no brief nor prejudice for a decision or position and will leave that to church leaders and their denominations** as in any unfolding and recently developed situation, there are pros and cons to any perspective that can be offered. This report has attempted to factor in the most significant of these pros and cons without taking a value judgement.

### 2.1 Vaccines And Vaccinations

Recent developments have produced six vaccines: two of them, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, being mRNA and nanotechnology-based, while the others like Oxford-Astra-Zeneca, Sinovac, SinoPharm, Sputnik, and Johnson & Johnson are based on conventional methods of vaccine development. An attempt has been made in this document to address the most common questions about nanotechnology and mRNA-based vaccines. The aim was to separate truth from fiction and fear from fact and not to support or authenticate any vaccines based on these technologies or any vaccine for that matter. The United Kingdom Government, whilst on one hand approving the Pfizer vaccine, has also issued a cautionary statement on the unknowns that are attendant to that vaccine.<sup>2</sup> These unknowns could well be extrapolated to other vaccines as well.

There are also other drugs<sup>3</sup> that have been developed that are options for vaccines and vaccination. There is therefore a range of options that nations and individuals can now choose from based on affordability, availability, viable temperature storage, and distribution. In this regard, the Pfizer vaccine will require storage at -70°C and the

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<sup>1</sup> This is a summary of a 29 page document which you are encouraged to read in full on our website [www.efzimbabwe.org](http://www.efzimbabwe.org)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-pfizer-biontech>

<sup>3</sup> <https://investor.lilly.com/news-realease/news-release-details/new-data-show>

Moderna one at -20°C. This of course poses challenges for countries and communities in Africa and Zimbabwe where refrigeration capacity and function might be challenged by institutional and logistical infrastructure deficiencies and intermittent electricity. Of the range of vaccines offered, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine may well be a more viable option as it can be stored at room temperature for 6 to 9 months and will only require one dose.

In the light of the recent development of vaccines and drugs for the treatment and prevention of COVID-19, the nascent technologies (messenger RNA technology and nanotechnology delivery systems), where the long-term impact on patients are still unknown an unreserved an unqualified position in support of any drug or vaccine would be ill-advised. Based on the information and knowledge presented in this document, each church leader and denomination must draw their own conclusions and make independent and informed decisions on whether to accept vaccination or not and which vaccine or drug would be preferable for them if they do.

Several therapeutic drugs have been developed as an alternative to vaccines and vaccination. This can be a welcome option to those who are uncomfortable or unwilling for a variety of reasons to be vaccinated, and members of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and the church at large need to be aware of these options available to them, over and above vaccines and vaccinations. In addition, other drugs such as Ivermectin have been authorized by the Zimbabwean and South African governments<sup>4</sup> as possible therapeutic options to the currently developed vaccines, though many authorities argue that the efficacy of this drug is still clinically unproven and is merely anecdotal.

## **2.2 COVID and Human Rights and Liberties**

The right of choice and conscience is safeguarded in many constitutions of the world and in the Zimbabwean constitution in particular. This right of choice and conscience must be safeguarded and guaranteed regarding policy positions taken by the state, government, policymakers, and political players regarding vaccines and vaccinations during this period. The decision by the European Union court on to uphold the right of refusal or abstention from vaccination stands as a beacon for emulation in this regard. Christians should not have their rights to freely assemble and worship being curtailed as long as measures to prevent the spread of the virus according to World Health Organization and the Government are observed. Rights and freedoms should be viewed as a whole than exclusive i.e., right to life, health, freedom to access information, share information and associate and assemble contribute to the integrity of the whole person.

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<sup>4</sup> [Sabcnews.com/sabcnews/sahpr/#SABCNews#Covid19InSA](https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/sahpr/#SABCNews#Covid19InSA)

## **2.3 Improved Stakeholder Communications And Information**

For the church and other stakeholders to make meaningful decisions and contributions in the fight against, COVID-19, there needs to be improved and increased access to correct and constantly updated information and collaboration between government and its social partners including and in particular, the church, business, and other community entities. A national response task force needs to be set up with effective and functional representation and communication from and to the church and other social partners. The national dialogue around the current pandemic on the existing institutional incapacity challenges facing the health sector needs to be discussed by an inclusive and trusted participatory national forum.

## **2.4 Improved Strategic Policy Making and Implementation**

The availability and roll out vaccines were at the time of the compilation of this document still pending but recently since then the government has given its authorization to the roll out of the SinoPharm vaccine from China as well as a vaccine from India. This first phase is targeting frontline personnel, medical professionals and selected essential service groups. As this is a two dose or two-phase vaccine, the vaccination of at least 95% of the population to achieve herd immunity will in all probability become a reality in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of this year as producing countries in the developed parts of the world will first ensure that their citizens are vaccinated before making any vaccine or drugs available to Africa and Zimbabwe in particular as a low to middle-income country<sup>5</sup>. Urgent strategies and cogent measures need to be taken and implemented in the interval between now and the arrival and roll-out of vaccines and/or drugs, to combat COVID-19. WHO has predicted a third and more devastating wave from May to August 2021.

Lockdowns as a control method have not provided a sustainable platform for combating COVID-19 and invariably negatively affects the economy and quality of life. The current regime of lockdown measures and COVID-19 protocols have suffered from a range of deficiencies ranging from being knee-jerk reactions to spikes, to the incoherent and inconsistent application and policing of travel and transportation restrictions, as well as inconsistency and uneven - handedness in the targeting of sectors such as the church in comparison to other sectors or events labeled as super spreaders. Clearer and better policy planning and strategic management of COVID-19 population movement restrictions is required in the absence of an effective and available vaccine or drug roll-out program. A national response task force with a strategic and contingent management plan that is known to all and is produced by the significant social partners in the nation must be formed and fully supported.

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<sup>5</sup> Mckinsey & Company;Healthcare systems and Services;www.mckinsey.com

## **2.5 Engaging Strong Alternative Views, Opinions and Theories; The role of 5G networks in the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The deficit of adequate and constant information on the unfolding developments and engagements around COVID-19 has resulted in an infodemic outbreak of very strong alternative views, opinions and theories relating to COVID-19, the new world order, the 666 mark of the beast, and the end of the world. This document has not attempted to engage and address the myriads of views and theories that abound, many of them very speculative and unverifiable. The 5G link to COVID-19 is however easier to deal with, as it is in the realm of verifiable facts and science that can be checked. Fortunately, we have in Zimbabwe and in the church at large experts in the realm of digital telecommunications who have greatly assisted us in discussing the 5G networks link to COVID-19.

In this paper we therefore recommend as follows:

1. The expeditious gathering and communication of information, facts, and truth by all responsible authorities including the church, traditional leaders, government and, civic authorities as well as the regular engagement of members of the public sector is necessary so that people's choices and behaviours are not misinformed and misdirected resulting in prejudices.
2. All communication media need to be deployed to educate the public to question the veracity of 5G and other very strong alternative views and opinions on COVID-19 theories.
3. There is a need to exercise extreme caution and prudence in selecting the sources and volume of information through the digital portals that billions have access to post and publish without verification.
4. Believers should not be society's laggards in embracing the dividends offered by technological advancements. Our ignorance or failure to fully understand these latest innovations should not drive us to formulate baseless theories or needlessly vandalize 5G equipment.
5. Technologies developed by mankind will, if not rightly deployed by believers, be at the disposal of the future world dictator who will seek to stand against our Lord. The church, therefore, needs to bring itself abreast of digital developments and use the urgency of the times to communicate the gospel as we see the end of times beckoning.

## **2.6 The Psycho-Social Responsibility of the Church**

The Church is one of the only institutions that has survived time and pandemics, found everywhere in communities as an entity trusted, established by Divine Order and able to meet the spiritual, social, economic, political and emotional needs of people-groups. Through her values, philosophy, institutions and resources, the Church has and continues to be an essential part of the human society, and the nation. The Church addresses and deals with individuals and societies in intrinsic and foundational issues

of spirituality, morality, emotional and mental health and social stability in particular addressing what governments, money and power cannot.

The Coronavirus pandemic has severely challenged the church in its provision of spiritual ministry and psychosocial support to its members and to the community as a result of the ban in gatherings and ease of movement. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to have a hitherto undefined and underestimated toll on individual, family, community, social and national mental and physical health. The reported cases of gender-based violence and domestic violence appeared to have spiked during this period, not to mention the effect of lockdown on school-going children who have not only suffered in terms of loss of education but also in terms of mental and physical health. The church must find adaptive and innovative ways to develop clearer and better ways to provide spiritual ministry and psychosocial support to its members and to the community without putting its key ministers, its members and the community in harm's way. While the use of digital technology has been embraced by the church it is often prohibitive in costs and limited in network availability especially to the poor.

The role and responsibility of the church in providing psychosocial support must be recognized by the Government and other key stakeholders. The church must be allowed to provide the necessary support to ensure that the mental and physical health of the citizens of the country is supported and undergirded from a non-governmental position. It is therefore recommended that segments of the church which include pastors, elders and deacons be considered providers of essential services requiring commensurate freedom and support to render such services.

## **2.7 COVID 19 and Eschatology**

COVID-19, being the most serious global health crisis our time has served to heighten misguided, fear-inducing interpretation of Scripture. We offer the following guidance to Christians regarding the association COVID-19 with biblical Eschatology (end time teaching):

Firstly, there can be no doubt that in Jesus' teaching (Matthew 24:7-13, Mark 13:8 and Luke 21:11) His Second Coming will be preceded by such occurrences as nation rising against nation, famines, earthquakes, and pestilences (disease outbreaks). This is affirmed by Revelation 6:8 – *“I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine, and plague...”*. In terms of this clear biblical teaching and the world-wide existential experience typified by COVID-19, we are nearer to the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour than ever before in world history.

Secondly, when we interpret the book of Revelations in its proper context, we can dismiss the fear of the vaccine as being the “mark of the beast – the 666”.

Thirdly, the awakening of our consciousness that we are nearer to the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour than ever before in world history must cause us to live today in the light of eternity. COVID-19 has shown how much materialism offers no lasting value. Instead, as 1 Peter 4:7-11 teaches, we must pray, love, and serve for the glory of God as we anticipate the consummation of Christ's rule.

## **2.8 The Economic Impact of COVID-19**

The outbreak of the Corona Virus in 2019, and its presence in Zimbabwe added to the existing and ongoing challenges and crises that Zimbabwe was and is facing as a country. This document has borrowed heavily from the Tripartite Negotiating Forum Guidance Note (October 2020) that addressed the interface between COVID-19 and the economy. The COVID-19 pandemic reached the country when it was already experiencing far-reaching challenges, with levels of poverty way above those experienced by any region of the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa. This was further compounded by climatic and economic shocks and late and erratic rainfall during the 2019-20 season. Social dialogue is important in coming up with sustainable solutions to various political and economic crises as well as accelerate recovery from the crises and it is increasingly clear that governments can neither tackle the causes and consequences of the crises nor ensure social stability and economic recovery through unilateral action. Although challenging to undertake due to diverging views of social partners, consultations and negotiations remain the way to go to reach national consensus and unleash national resources for resilience and energy to combat crises. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learnt from past social dialogue experiences, the ILO 26 provided the following eight lessons (TNF Document):

- i. Countries having experience of social partnership and well-established social dialogue institutions are more likely to formulate rapid and effective responses.
- ii. Governments should involve the social partners at the earliest possible stage of crisis response.
- iii. The social partners should be proactive in quickly bringing the concerns of actors at the grassroots level to the attention of the public authorities.
- iv. With political will, the social partners can achieve consensus on targeted measures to help citizens and enterprises particularly hard hit by the crisis.
- v. The crisis context can even provide an opportunity to overcome previously adversarial industrial, social and political relations.
- vi. While social dialogue is an important tool for bridging differences and building consensus, it cannot solve all the problems on its own. Sound public policies and regulations and appropriate fiscal space are especially crucial in the crisis context.
- vii. Free, independent, strong, and representative employers' and workers' organizations, trust among the actors, and respect by the government for the autonomy of the social partners are essential preconditions for effective social dialogue;

This is an Executive Summary of a more comprehensive document which readers are advised to go to for a full and comprehensive overview. The need for a more comprehensive and inclusive forum for dialogue on national challenges like COVID-19 is underlined by this current experience.

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