



PRFT's Position on the Reopening of Informal Markets and Mealie-Meal Shortages

The informal fruit and vegetable markets were reopened on the 7th of April 2020 following a directive from President Mnangagwa after an outcry from farmers and vendors whose products were rotting. This paper assesses the decision to reopen the markets and makes recommendations to ensure the markets can function efficiently without endangering the citizens. The paper also looks at developments in the mealie-meal market and measures that the government can put in place.

Informal Fruit and Vegetable markets

As PRFT we welcome the reopening of the informal fruit and vegetable markets which are an important source of livelihood for our farmers and informal traders. However, we are concerned at the business as usual approach where important issues of social distancing and hygiene at these markets are disregarded. The centralisation of the wholesale market as is the case of Mbare in Harare poses a huge risk while the unclean environment also presents a health hazard beyond COVID-19. There is therefore a need to ensure that the markets operate in a way that maintains high hygiene standards and conform to the social distancing practices encouraged by the health experts. India and Nigeria have shown glimpses of the possibilities of informal markets working if authorities and citizens work together. In order to do achieve this we recommend the following:

- Moving away from a centralised wholesale fruit and vegetables market towards decentralised small markets across the country and making use of pre-existing infrastructure where possible, in the process decongesting Mbare musika.
- Government and local authorities should take over the distributional role of produce as a way of minimising the movement of farmers and traders.
- Local authorities must ensure the provision of clean water and sanitation services at the markets.
- Local authorities working together with the police must ensure that there are adequate measures for social distancing and traders adhere to the required hygiene standards.
- Farmers must also be linked to food processors in order to complete the value chain as well as consider low cost methods of preserving their produce such as drying.
- Markets for agricultural inputs must be decentralised as well to limit movement of farmers.

Mealie-Meal

The mealie-meal shortages are also another source of huge crowds across the country reducing the efficiency of the lockdown. Mealie-meal sales must be decentralised and households allocated time according to surnames, places of residence or any other criteria that ensure there is order and adequate supplies for everyone. Government must decisively deal with the corruption and black market in the mealie-meal sector.

Conclusion

There is a need for increasing awareness on the need for good hygiene and maintaining of social distancing as a way of minimising the spread of COVID-19. As PRFT we also call upon Government and Development Partners to speed up the distribution of food packs as a way of encouraging people to observe the lockdown. The longer people are in lockdown without access to basic necessities the risk of people breaking the lockdown rules increases.

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