

17 A CALL TO LEADERS TO BE POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

Community gatherings, festivals and church services can lead to the spread [of](#) COVID-19. At a time when there is a resurgence of COVID-19 infections in Zimbabwe and the festive season is here, religious, community and traditional leaders must be positive role models. There is a concern that some leaders do not adhere to legislation regarding the size of gatherings, wear masks or model positive behaviour. How can this problem be addressed?

RADIO:

Start with playing the 'COVID-19 – Together we can beat it' song.

Welcome to the 19th of our 'COVID-19 – Together we can beat it' radio programmes.

These programmes are brought to you by MIET Africa in partnership with the Zimbabwe Ministry of Health, to strengthen the SADC Region's response to COVID-19, with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

As you all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for our country, our communities and every one of us. In this programme, we talk about these and find solutions together.

Keep listening and have your say! Phone us on [XXX](#), SMS us on [XXX](#) or send a WhatsApp message on [XXX](#) to be part of the conversation.

And remember our PRIZES for lucky winners! At the end of this programme, we'll ask a question about today's topic. The first FIVE listeners who SMS or WhatsApp the right answer will get a FutureLife-Now! drawstring backpack and water bottle. So keep listening, and send us your answers!

Over the past 17 weeks, we've spoken about how to protect ourselves against COVID-19. We've also discussed other challenges linked to the pandemic.

Last week we spoke about the very unfortunate stigma attached to COVID-19, which can make life very difficult for people who are targets of stigma, and undermines efforts to contain the virus.

This week, we talk about the positive leadership that we need from influential religious, community and traditional leaders at the start of the festive season, to motivate and inspire their followers to stay [safe](#) from COVID-19 infection.

Large religious, family and community gatherings could create surges in COVID-19 infections, at a time when Zimbabwe is already experiencing a spike in infections.

So right now, Zimbabwe needs strong leadership and positive role modelling from leaders across the board. We need them to ensure that protocols for large gatherings are observed. If they do this, it is likely that their followers will do the same.

Can and will our leaders do that? Let's talk about it!

The festive season is upon us. It is a time when people travel across the country, families gather and there are large church services. In a time of [COVID-19](#), this happy time is sadly also dangerous. Large gatherings have been known to be 'super spreaders' of the virus.

Zimbabwe is already experiencing a worrying spike in new COVID-19 infections: 1 250 new cases were reported between 20 Nov and 8 December. At this time, we cannot afford 'a surge on top of a surge', as has happened in other countries after times of celebration.

People across Zimbabwe are concerned about the increase in COVID-19 cases. But at the same time, after a year of 'lock-down', we can't wait to be with family and celebrate Christmas and the New Year.

Religious, community and traditional leaders are highly influential role models. And we need their strong leadership to convince their followers to keep themselves safe in this time of celebration.

By modelling good behaviour and spreading the correct messages, leaders across the board can play a major role in ensuring that infections don't rise dramatically.

Here are a few obvious ways to stay safe, which our leaders should promote:

- Numbers at church services and large gatherings must be kept to under 100.
- Even for family gatherings, we should try to keep a safe distance from others.
- Where possible, we should gather outside in the fresh air rather than inside in closed spaces.
- We must wear masks.
- We must wash our hands regularly and well.
- If we have a fever, cough or other symptoms of being ill, we must self-isolate and try to get tested.

It is good to know that Africa₂ and Zimbabwe₂ have some strong Christian and other religious leaders who are setting positive examples.

In a paper for [the](#) IDEAs website, Never Pavari argues that the leadership of Zimbabwe's Apostolic Faith Mission is supporting members during COVID-19 and playing a vital role in making people aware of necessary safety measures in the time of the pandemic, thereby fundamentally changing people's attitudes toward COVID-19.

In the [sS](#)outh of Zimbabwe, some traditional communities have decided to postpone traditional events such as ceremonies to connect with their ancestral spirits.

The President of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Zimbabwe, Sheikh Ishmael Duwa, has also argued that preserving life is one of the higher objectives of Islamic law. When a situation arises which exposes lives to harm, permission is therefore given to forgo some obligatory Islamic acts.

Some religious leaders have however chosen to carry on with large open-air church gatherings despite restrictions, refuse to wear masks, or claim that they can cure COVID-19 through prayer. And listeners have expressed concern that many of our leaders are not positive role models.

So what do you think about the situation in Zimbabwe? Are our leaders positive role models and do they motivate their followers to do the right thing? If not, how can we challenge them to provide the leadership we need?

Let's hear from all of you, from across our country. Tell us what is happening where you are. Our lines are open.

We are also fortunate to have an inspiring church leader with us tonight, to answer our questions, as well as a young person who will share her/his perspective.

<Introduce panellists>

QUESTIONS TO THE PANELLISTS:

<Alternate questions between panellists, and give time between questions for calls from listeners. Their questions and contributions come first!>

Religious leader

- 1 Do you agree that the current COVID-19 threat merits changes in how we approach the holiday season and celebrate Christmas?
- 2 Should religious and other leaders set a positive example and urge their followers to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, what do you see as their role and what actions can they take?
- 3 Christmas is arguably THE most important Christian festival of the year. In the light of this, how could Christians celebrate Christmas and also keep themselves safe?
- 4 Please share with us what you have personally done as a religious leader to reduce the spread of COVID-19?
- 5 As an inspirational leader, what is your message for Zimbabweans?
- 6 And what is your message for other religious, traditional and community leaders?

Youth

- 1 Are you aware of the current surge in infections, and does it concern you?
- 2 What role would you like religious and community leaders to play in reducing the spread of infections?
- 3 What message do you have for them?
- 4 Do you believe that youths could and should be positive leaders and role models, inspiring others to fight the spread of COVID-19 through positive behaviour?
- 5 Do you see yourself as a positive leader at this time, helping to keep your family, friends and community safe? If so, could you share your thoughts with us?
- 6 What is your message for other youth?

<AT END OF PROGRAMME:>

The moment that you've waited for - Our prize-winning question:

What is the current permitted size of gatherings in Zimbabwe?

SMS or WhatsApp your answer to us NOW. Also give us your name, age and where you live.

We'll announce the lucky winner's name next week, and tell you how we'll get your prize to you.

Answer to quiz: 100