

Pandemic preparedness and response in human rights-based multi-level governance perspective: Insights from four municipalities in Zimbabwe

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Disasters unfold at different scales from the individual to the international. Recognizing this dynamic, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction endorses a multi-level, multi-stakeholder approach to disaster risk reduction. In practice, however, national law and policy tends only partially to reflect international standards, and local actors often lack resources and capacity to implement directives from the capital. Moreover, competing as well as intersecting priorities and interests within and between levels add layers of social complexity to complicate ambitions of coherent governance frameworks.

This paper takes the experience of members of residents' associations interacting with local authorities in four municipalities in Zimbabwe as a point of departure for examining questions about the enjoyment of the right to health and the right to water in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines national legal and policy responses to the pandemic from the perspective of international human rights law, and then traces the implementation of this legal framework down to the local level. It explores how legal frameworks structuring the relationship between national and sub-national levels affect implementation, paying attention to how responsible actors at different levels leverage the law in pursuit of their own objectives, which include, but may not be limited to, protecting people within their jurisdiction from risks associated with the pandemic and the measures taken to contain its spread.

The particular circumstances arising during the pandemic are situated within a broader political ecology characterized by widespread corruption, persistent drought, and a legacy of epidemics including cholera and HIV/AIDS. Taking these compounding factors into account, the paper aims to identify opportunities for enhancing pandemic preparedness and response that are contextualized and pragmatic.

Law in Crisis? Analysing the Challenge of Making Laws Work in and after Disasters and Crises