

HOW COVID-19 LOCKDOWN HAS POSITIVELY CHANGED THE LIVES OF THE SOUTH AFRICANS: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BLACK COMMUNITIES.

BY

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Abstract

The Covid-19 Pandemic has had serious implications on people's lives globally. South Africa, like many countries around the globe, has not been spared. While most South Africans were negatively affected by Covid-19 lockdown, the latter has also brought relief in other people's lives, particularly blacks, where about 18% of the population already lived under poverty line. The implementation of Social Relief Distress (SRD) and increase in social grants, family togetherness, less gang violence, ban on alcohol and tobacco sale, distribution of food parcels, sheltering the homeless and the support of informal sector and SMMEs were some of the things which brought happiness in other people's lives. This study attempts to examine and analyze how Covid-19 lockdown has positively changed the lives of the South Africans, focusing on black communities. The study

employed qualitative research in the form of secondary data sources to collect, interpret, and analyse data. Through secondary method of research, academic materials such as journal articles, review papers, newspapers, magazines and conference papers were used. This study found that the implementation of Social Relief Distress and increase in social grants, family togetherness, less gang violence, ban on alcohol and tobacco sales, distribution of food parcels, sheltering the homeless and the support of informal sector and Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME) were some of the things which made positive impacts on people's lives, especially in black communities. The study concludes that while the majority of the South Africans were negatively impacted by Covid-19 lockdown, the latter has also positively impacted in the lives of other South Africans, especially black communities.

Keywords: Covid-19 lockdown, positively, changed, lives of South Africans, black communities.

Introduction

Corona virus (Covid-19) began in China, Wuhan city towards the end of December 2019. It gradually spread to the entire world. On March 2020 South Africa began experiencing Covid-19 pandemic and eventually, the country became the most affected country in Africa. The country started with the single case on 5th March 2020 and it eventually reacted swiftly and placed the country under strict nation-wide lockdown for six weeks. Even though, the South African government introduced strict Covid-19 lockdown, where many people were negatively affected, the latter also brought some positive changes in

the lives of some South Africans, especially black communities.

This paper attempts to examine and analyze how covid-19 had brought positive changes in the lives of South Africans, with special reference to black communities. It attempts to examine and analyze positive changes which were brought by COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa's black communities such as the implementation of SRD and increase in social grants, family togetherness, less gang violence, ban on alcohol and tobacco selling, distribution of food parcels, sheltering the homeless and the support of informal sectors and SMMEs.

The problem statement

This study discusses on how COVID-19 lockdown has positively changed the lives of the South Africans, focusing on black communities. The study would be premised on the following research question:

- How COVID-19 lockdown has positively changed the lives of the South Africans, particularly black communities?
- What role did the South African government play to combat the spread of pandemic and the improvement of the living standard of poor people in the country?

Literature Review

Various literatures regarding the tile of the study have been reviewed. Hall (2020) argues that before the outbreak of Corona virus the unemployment in South Africa was at 29.19%. Khowa (2021) posit that because

the South Africa at the time of Corona virus did not have money to assist its own citizen during the pandemic, it was compelled to borrow money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). According to Khowa (2021) the amount of 4.3 million was borrowed from the organization in order to assist its own people, especially those who were living on poverty. Webb & Valley (2020) postulate that when lockdown was introduced in South Africa, the South African government decided to increase social grants by 50 billion which would deal with the country's inequality, high unemployment rate and the economic aftermath of the pandemic. Gronbatch (2021) argues that through the expansion of grants, especially, child grants, made an impact on the household poverty level as well as on children's health and welfare. October et al., (2020) in their study discuss about the family togetherness, they argue that Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa came as a relief to most families because they became united as well as bringing families closer than before the pandemic. Daniel (2020) in his discussion discusses about the reduction of gang violence since the introduction of lockdown. He states that since the lockdown the country has witnessed the reduction in gang violence because people were being restricted to move around. Olivier (2020) argues that some gangs were even trying to build the relationships with their communities and they were also distributing food parcels to their community. Riggio (2020) in his study on family togetherness argues that staying home meant fewer expenses and families spent less money on transportation, entertainment, even when they were supposed to eat outside. Murhula & Nunlall (2021) argue

that drinking culture in South Africa is that the drinkers of alcohol often drink from the same bottle or from the same class, thereby increasing the risk of spreading the corona virus. Maphanga et al (2023) state that excessive alcohol consumption; is associated with the burden of infectious diseases, no-communicable disease such as injury and trauma. Meldrum & Ntshangase (2020) argue that the ban on alcohol witnessed the decline in serious crimes. Baleta (2021) posits that since the ban on alcohol, the weekly number of unnatural deaths such as motor vehicle accidents, suicides and murders decreased at about 50%. Mogotsi & Bearak (2020) state that since according to South African Medical Research Council, due to the ban on alcohol, there was about 5,000 fewer admissions to trauma units per week. Egbe et al (2020) state that South Africa has one of the highest rates in tobacco use in Africa with about 37% South African men and 8% women are using tobacco. Egbe & Ngobese (2020) argue that most young smokers are using various tobacco products and these youths are mainly found in black communities. Vermuelen at al., (2020) argues that about 50% of the South Africans were living under poverty line and were unable to afford basic necessities prior to the increase of child and old age grants. Stonehouse et al (2020) discuss various factors which can force people to live their houses. Hlati & Maziwisa (2020) state that the imposition of Covid-19 lockdown, both informal sector and SMME survived the closure and continued operating.

Methodology

In this study, qualitative research in the form of secondary data sources has been utilised to collect, interpret, and analyse data. Through secondary data sources, academic materials such as journal articles, review papers, conference papers, newspapers and magazines were used to gather information regarding the study.

Findings and Discussion

Through secondary data collection, it was revealed that COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa has positively changed the lives of the South Africans, particularly black communities. Seven min findings are critically discussed with supporting citation as evidence and with reference to relevant research conducted through literature review.

Implementation of SRD and Increase in Social Grants

Implementation of SRD

The imposition of Covid-19 lockdown by the South African government has led to the closure of companies, businesses, schools and tertiary institutions. Prior to the outbreak of corona virus in the country, the unemployment stood at 29.19% (Hall, 2020). With the closure of companies and businesses, the percentage of unemployment increased, especially in black communities. The government had no choice but to assist in the alleviation of poverty among the South Africans. Because the government did not have money

to do so, it was compelled to borrow money from the International Monetary Bank (IMF) in order to assist its own citizens. The amount of 4.3 billion was borrowed (Khowa, 2021). These funds were aimed at assisting the South Africans in Social Relief Distress (SRD) and Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), among other things (Khowa, 2021). The government further established Solidarity Fund on 23 March 2020 (Khowa, 2021). The purpose of this implementation was to help the country's response to the covid-19 pandemic to prevent its further transmission and those who were affected. The solidarity fund was to supplement the funds borrowed from the IMF. The IMF funds and that of Solidarity were also aimed at helping the South Africans financially in order to survive during Covid-19 lockdown.

In order to help the needy, the South African government established SRD where every unemployed South African would be able to get R350.00 a month for six months (Webb and Valley, 2020; Atkins, 2021). The SRD came as a relief to many South Africans, particularly in black communities because many people were unable to make ends meet prior to its implementation due to poverty which is caused by unemployment. Through SRD the government aimed at assisting the unemployed South Africans who do not receive any form of stipend or income. In order for someone to qualify for this type of a grant, he or she should be 18 years and older (Atkins, 2021). However, some people could not receive the grants, especially if they were getting a source of income. The interesting part with the SRD was that it

was not discriminatory because even foreign nationals, especially the registered refugees became beneficiaries (Gronbach, 2021). This program was to run for only six months but there has been some extensions to the time of writing. The SRD reached 10 million additional beneficiaries by 2022 (Patel et al, 2023). Caregivers were excluded from the grant because they were already receiving Child Support Grant (CSG) (Atkins, 2021),

The initial package of relief measure was aimed at supporting households by expanding the Unemployed Insurance Fund (UIF) but as economists have shown, 45% of workers were eligible for the fund (Gronbach, 2021). Apart from UIF, the government revised Temporary Employer Relief Scheme (TERS) (Gronbach, 2021). TERS was revised and extended to provide financial support to employees who had been laid off from work due to Covid-19 pandemic. This Scheme was initially launched in 2019 and administered by Unemployed Insurance Fund (UIF) (Gronbach, 2021). TERS allowed businesses in financial distress to lay off workers temporary while they received professional training and were paid training allowance. Under the new scheme was that employers were allowed to claim financial support for their employees amounting to 60% of the regular salary (Gronbach, 2021). From October 2020, about ZARs 81 billion (USD3.46 billion had been allocated to workers of more than 1 million companies (Gronbach, 2021). A rapid appraisal of the SRD conducted in 2020 found that 93% of beneficiaries used the money for food (Department of Social Development, DSD 2021 as cited in Patel 2023).

Meanwhile, there was another fund which was created to assist South African artists, athletes, technical personnel and registered tourist guides and this was implemented from the specific government Departments (South African Government, 29 March 2020). Like other unemployed South Africans, these people too, became unemployed as they were no longer participating in social events, Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture, Minister Nathi Mthetwa, announced measures and a relief fund of R150 million which would assist artists, athletes, technical personnel and the core ecosystem that supports them (South African Government, 29 March 2020). Athletes who were supposed to perform at sporting event that was cancelled or postponed due to covid-19 and whose income is only generated from specific sporting events were eligible for relief provided they produced proof that their events have been cancelled (South African Government, 29 March 2020). Coaches and technical support personnel were encouraged to work with athletes so that they too would make their earnings from these events. Apart from athlete relief fund there was also arts and culture relief project. Funded project which has already entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department and first payment has been made, where artist venues and other suppliers of the project have been paid, but the project implementation has been cancelled due to covid-19, the beneficiaries would be compensated for the expenditure incurred (South African Government, 29 March 2020).

Increase in social grants

About 17 million South Africans depend on social grants to put food on the table for their families (South African Medical Research Council, 25 May, 2020). Most recipients of social grants and child support grants in particular are found in black communities because of poverty and inequality in these areas. During lockdown, the South African government decided to increase social grants by R50 billion (Webb and Valley, 2020). The social grants increase would deal with the country's inequality, high unemployment rate and the economic aftermath of the pandemic. The increase in social grants would also be able to deal with food insecurity in the country since there was a shortage of food, especially the imported ones because of the closure of borders, seaports and airports. Moreover, the price of food went up in many South African stores due to its scarcity and people could no longer afford, especially those who were receiving government social grants. According to Webb and valley (2020) about 28% of South Africans live in extreme poverty. With social grants, about South Africa's 11.3 million social grants recipient benefitted from top up payments, starting from May 2020. The recipient of the child support grants received an additional of ZAR300 (USD 20) per child in the first month and ZAR 500 (USD 340) caregiver for an additional five months (Gronbach, 2021). The recipient of other grants such as disability and elderly received a ZAR 250 (USD17) monthly top- up for a period of six months (Gronbach, 2021). The expansion of grants has made an impact on the household poverty level and the

child grants in particular has had a demonstrable effect on children health and welfare. The child support grants enabled women in poor communities, and black communities in particular to exert greater control over general households spending. It has played an important part in the alleviation of poverty since many people were no longer engaged in informal economy such as street hawking due to country's lockdown. Because school going children were also no longer receiving school nutritional meal due to the closure of schools and the increase of child support grants made a great impact to many households.

Family Togetherness

Some families and black families in particular work far from home and these people usually come home on weekends or once a month and as the results, they cannot often see each other. The imposition of Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa came as a relief to most families because they became united and it brought them closer than before (October et al, 2021). Sometimes you will find that one or both parents work far from home and he or she comes late in the night while their children are already asleep and as the result children and their parents can only see each other on weekends and therefore Covid-19 lockdown gave them an opportunity to see each other regularly as they were no longer going to work and school. During lockdown parents and children were able to share household chores such as cleaning and cooking (October et al., 2021; Care Health Insurance, 27 June 2020)). Sharing household chores was one of the noticeable benefits of staying home.

Furthermore, staying home meant fewer expenses and this means that families would spend less money on commuting, entertainment as well as eating outside (Riggio, 2020). Most families during lockdown were finding staying home an opportunity to strengthen family relationship through cooperative activities and shared entertainment. It also provided an opportunity for families to share and talk about their feelings and emotions. As parents and children were spending more time together, this created the opportunity to build and strengthen relationships amongst them (October et al, 2020). Lockdown gave other families time that they never had before just to sit together and have a meal as a family (October et al, 202; Care Health Insurance, 17 June 2020).

Less Gang Violence

South Africa has been experiencing gang violence for decades. Almost every province in the country has group of gangs and Cape Town in the Western Cape is believed to be a province which has larger gangs as compared to other provinces. Most gangs are found in black communities in the country. The activities of most gangs are to kidnap people, especially for human trafficking, manufacturing and selling of drugs, carjacking, and theft, and other criminal activities. In 2018 Cape Town was found to be one of the most violent cities in the world with 66 homicides per 100,000 people (Daniel, 2020). With the imposition Covid-19 lockdown gang violence became less as movements of people were restricted and as a result, homicides fell more than 70% (Daniel, 2020; Business Tech, 20 April, 2020). Murders declined to

71% in the week after the restrictions were imposed, to 94 from 326 in the same period (Business Tech, 20 April 2020). Gang violence became less because lockdown has interrupted the drug supply as there was restricted movement of people and goods. The scarcity of drugs has reduced gang violence because most crimes are committed by gangs while under the influence of drugs. The introduction of curfew during lockdown has also played a role in the reduction of gang violence as it (curfew) restricted movements of people between 9 PM and 4 AM and as a result gangs were not able to move around or visit other gangs between the stipulated times. Communities were now roaming the streets without any fear from being attacked by these gangs. With less gun sounds during the night, communities were now sleeping peacefully in their houses.

Because most gangs in the country became inactive, many gang afflicted communities in the country were feeling the reprieved (Daniel, 2020). The imposition of lockdown meant that those within the homestead would be spending more time together (October et al, 2020). Lockdown has also provided opportunities for families of gang to share and talk about their emotions and feelings as they were now together at home due to restricted movements. Gangs in the country have eventually agreed to a cease-fire (Business Tech, 20 April 2020; Olivier, 2020). A network of gang leaders across the country's nine provinces known as the council have even made funds available to members of the groups so that they could take care of their families during the lockdown (Business Tech, 20 April 2020; Olivier, 2020; CBS News, 18 April 2020). Some gangs

were even trying to build the relationships with their communities and were distributing food parcels to residents (Business Tech, 20April 2020; CBS News, 18 April 2020).

Since the imposition of covid-19 lockdown in the country, the South African gangs were unable to network with other gangs from other countries due to the closure of borders, airports and seaports. This has also caused the scarcity of drugs. Cape Town city in South Africa is known to be an epicentre of gang activities as well as a key point for heroin trafficking (Business Tech, 20 April 2020). The nation- wide covid-19 lockdown appeared to have achieved a lot regarding to gang violence in the country. In Manenberg, one of the worst gang violence in Cape Town became calm (IOL News, 11 April2020)

Ban on Alcohol and Tobacco Sale

Ban on alcohol sales

South Africa has the highest alcohol consumption in Africa per capital (Oliver, 2020). Most black communities in South Africa are characterized by taverns, shebeens, night clubs and liquor stores and this is where one finds many people consuming alcohol, from youth to adult, males and females. On week-ends drinkers, especially the youth don't sleep, the move from one drinking place to the other. As they move from these places they confront and terrorize people along the way and when they reach their drinking places, they continue provoking people who could end up into a fight between them. Alcohol drinkers when they got drunk are likely to

commit crimes such as rape, assault, murder, robbery and other criminal activities.

Drinking culture in South Africa is that drinkers often drink from the same bottle or from the same glass, thereby increasing the risk of spreading the corona virus (Murhula and Nunlall, 2021). Another thing which can increase the spread of the virus is that when people consume alcohol, they don't adhere to corona virus regulations such as wearing of face mask, social distancing and sanitizing or washing of hands because they don't have time to do that. Mapanga et al (2023) states that excessive alcohol consumption is associated with the burden of infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases such injury and trauma.

The ban on alcohol during covid-19 has also seen a decline in domestic violence. Most domestic violence in South Africa, particularly in black communities are caused by excessive use of alcohol whereby one partner is physically or emotionally abused. The use of alcohol increase tension which may result in violent confrontation and increase of domestic violence, especially when under stress due to lockdown (Murhula and Nunlall, 2021)

The intention of the South African government to prohibit the sale of alcohol was to save lives because it knew that when people are under the influence of alcohol are not likely to observe corona virus measures such as wearing of face mask, social distancing, hands washing or sanitizing, therefore, the restriction on the sale of alcohol would be able to help in the behavioural

change, since it would assist in people practicing social distancing and other measures. Lack of running water and physical distancing in drinking places are among things which compelled the government to prohibit alcohol which led to the closure of taverns, pubs, night clubs and shebeens. In fact, alcohol restriction was imposed to limit social gathering as well as relieve hospitals of alcohol related trauma.

The ban on alcohol during covid-19 lockdown became a relief to most black communities because the use of alcohol increases tension which may result in a fight between patrons. Because patrons no longer visit drinking places and there was no longer loud noise coming from those places as these places used to operate the entire night. Since the ban of alcohol under lockdown, serious crime has decreased (Meldrum and Ntshangase, 2020). In hospitals and Community Health Care Centres (CHC) there were less people injured from drunken driving and from people beating their wives or husbands. The number of admissions to hospital and CHC emergency room from alcohol related crimes and vehicle accidents have been reduced significantly. Since the ban of alcohol, the weekly number of unnatural deaths such as motor vehicle accidents, suicides and murders was about 50% (Baleta, 2021). With the introduction of curfew during lockdown unnatural deaths was brought to 26% lower than expected (Baleta, 2021). Cape Town's main trauma units at Groote Schuur hospital is one of the examples where there was a drop in trauma cases since sale of alcohol was restricted (Oliver, 2020).

Since the ban on the sale of alcohol, crime statistics revealed between March 29 and April 22, 2020 that:

- Murder cases dropped from 1542 to 432, showing a decrease of 72% (1110 decrease),
- Rape cases dropped from 2908 to 371, showing 87,2% (2537 decrease),
- Attempted murder decreased from 1300 to 443 showing 65,9% decrease (857 decrease),
- Robbery with aggravating circumstances decreased from 6684 to 2022, showing a 69,56 decrease (4662 decrease),
- Robbery at non-residential premises decreased from 1345 to 464, showing a 65,5%(881 decrease),
- Robbery at residential premises decreased from 1437 to 664, showing a 53, 8% decrease (773 decreases).
- Carjacking dropped from 1146 to 219, showing 80, 9% decrease (927 decreases), (Movendi, 25 April 2020).

The ban on alcohol sales had probably led to 9000 fewer trauma cases being admitted towards every week, against an average of 35000 cases, in other words there was a likely 25% reduction in cases (Movendi, 25 April 2020). According to Charles Parry, a director of alcohol research at the South African Medical Research Council is that more than 5,000 fewer admissions to trauma units per week can be attributed to the alcohol ban (Mogotsi and Bearak, 2020). All these statistics figures show that the ban on alcohol in the midst of lockdown has positively changed the lives of the South Africans,

particularly in black communities. Curfew which was introduced during lockdown has also contributed to the decline in crime because it curbed the movement of people thereby reducing crime. The introduction of curfew has witnessed unnatural deaths being reduced from 300 (24%) per week, while a curfew of eight to nine hours, reduced unnatural deaths by about 324(32%) (Baleta, 2021).

Ban on tobacco sales

South Africa has one of the highest tobacco users in Africa with about 37% of South African men and around 8% of women using tobacco (Egbe et al, 2022). In South Africa, especially in black communities smoking at an early age has become a norm. About 22% of South Africans aged 15 use various tobacco products (Egbe and Ngobese, 2020). Most of these young smokers are residing in black communities. In June, 2020, the World Health Organization((WHO) issued statement on tobacco use and Covid-19 affirming the link between tobacco smoking and Covid-19 disease severity and urged smokers to quit to decrease their chances of severe infection (Egbe et al, 2020)). It is believed that smoking weakened respiratory system which is attacked by the virus (Meldrum and Ntshangase, 2020). When smokers, smoke tobacco, they usually share thereby, risking the infection of the disease. It was found that those who are smoking tobacco under covid-19 are likely to become more severe and leading to death are higher among people with history of smoking (Egbe et al, 2020).

The South African government impose restriction on the sale of tobacco products because they were not categorized as essential goods by the Disaster Management Act (DMA) of 2020 which implemented the lockdown (Egbe et al, 12022). It also wanted to prevent the spreading of covid-19 via cigarette sharing. Cigarette sharing has become an obligation among township smokers, especially among township and rural youths and this sharing is called “*Skeif*”. ‘*Skeif*’ is a South African street language which means, let’s share and this language is mainly used by young smokers. According to Dickinson (2020) sharing a cigarette is part of sociability of township life. This is because smokers cannot afford to buy their own cigarettes due to poverty which is caused by lack of employment in most black communities. Most smokers are not aware that “*Skeif*” kills because some people are unable to read what is written on the cigarette box because they are educationally disadvantaged.

Both government and the South Africans especially, smokers benefitted from tobacco prohibition. The sale ban on tobacco did cause people to smoke less and prevented more than 2000 tobacco related deaths (Van Dyke, 2021). About 9% of pre-lockdown smokers have successfully quit smoking (Filby et al, 2023). The studies conducted by doctors at one Western Cape regional hospital revealed that the number of patients who needed hospital treatment for sever chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (a lung disease that makes it hard to breath and that is often caused by smoking dropped dramatically by 70% during the tobacco sales ban compared to the same period in 2019 (Van Dyke, 2021).

Distribution of Food Parcels

Prior to the outbreak of corona virus in South Africa, the child support grant and old age pension have been important for boosting incomes and it contributed in the alleviation of poverty in post-apartheid South Africa (Dullo 2003, Coetze 2013 as cited in Willis et al, 2020). The outbreak of Covid-19 disease has posed many challenges to people's livelihoods globally. The pandemic caused a negative impact on the food system and economic aspects of the entire World. Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa resulted in the rise of hunger and malnutrition due to the shortages of food in some areas, especially in black communities due to restrictions and measures placed on lockdown (Mbata et al, 2021). Oxford (2018) as cited in Mbata et al (2021) says that food insecurity is a national problem since almost 28% of household were at risk of hunger, while about 26% were already experiencing hunger prior to covid-19 pandemic.

Willis et al (2020) argues that 2 of every 5 adults reported that their households lost its main source of income since the commencement of lockdown in South Africa which was imposed on the 27th of March 2020. The closure of companies, schools and tertiary institutions worsened food insecurity in the country. The imposition of lockdown has led to the closure of companies and businesses which caused high unemployment, while the closure of schools and tertiary institutions added on the existing household and thus intensifying a problem of food. Data indicated that 75 per cent of grant receiving households were receiving

income from sources apart from grants, such as employment, business or remittance (Willis et al, 2020). However, this became impossible for many households due to the imposition of lockdown which witnessed the closure of companies and businesses. Since lockdown began on 27 March 2020, about 42 per cent of adults in grant receiving households lost their main source of income (Willis et al, 2020).

The price of food increase from various South African stores also became a factor whereby people could no longer afford to buy it, especially staple food. About 50% of the South Africans were living under poverty line and were not able to afford basic necessities (Vermuelen et al, 2020). During lockdown, many households had many mouths to feed because everybody was at home and were no longer going to work and school due to the closure of the latter and the former. South Africa was one of those countries which were severely hit by corona virus pandemic and as a result, it became affected by lack of food and the government ended up establishing the National Policy for food and Nutrition Security to tackle insecurity (Mbata et al, 2021). The aim of this establishment was to ensure that those who were vulnerable; have access to safe and nutritional food during lockdown. Prior to Covid-19 pandemic 14 million people, about 23% of the population were poorly insecure (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 25 June 2020). The president of the country, Cyril Ramaphosa stated that about 250000 food parcels would be distributed throughout the country (Vermuelen et al, 2020). During Lockdown the Department of Social Development together with

Rasins-South Africa and various packers contributed about 10 000 food parcels to the people (Rasins South Africa, “n.d.”). The total financial contribution to the Department of social Development and South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) was R289487.90 (Rasins South Africa, “n.d.”). Not everybody qualified for food parcels. According to SASSA is that who qualified for food parcels were people living with disabilities whose grants lapsed in March, people who have experienced natural disasters, the unemployed, child-headed households and people who could not work for six months for medical reasons (SABC News, 15 April 2020). Apart from the government’s role in the provision of food parcels, the South African Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO’s) have also played a role in the distribution of food parcels to the needy and these Ngo’s included South African Red Cross Society; Food forward South Africa; Gift of the Givers and Solidarity Fund (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, PMG 25 June 2020). These organizations ensured that vulnerable citizens, particularly those who are residing in black communities are food secured.

Sheltering the Homeless

South Africa has been experiencing problem of sheltering the homelessness for many years, long before covid-19 hit our country. Many people in South Africa are living on the streets due to homelessness. Although homelessness affects all races in the country, blacks are in the majority.

According to Stonehouse et al (2023) there are various factors which are forcing people to leave their residence to live on the streets and these factors include historical, social and economic. For instance, social factors may include divorce, single parenting, interpersonal violence, and child headed homes. Stonehouse et al (2023) says that the estimated number of street based people in South Africa is between 100 0000 and 200 000. For instance, people from rural are migrating into urban areas in search of better opportunities such as employment and because these people don't have relatives to stay with, they end up leaving on the streets because they have nowhere to go. These people are usually migrating to the major cities of South Africa such as Tshwane, Johannesburg and Cape Town because they believe that this is where they can get better opportunities and that is why larger numbers of homelessness are found in the cities, as opposed to small towns.

The imposition of Covid-19 lockdown by the South African government became a relief to most homeless people. In other words, lockdown helped them a lot because government started taking them into account. Covid-19 lockdown meant that everyone should stay indoors except the essential workers and those who are going out to buy food and other necessities. The government made sure that those who are homeless and leaving on the streets are also housed so that they could not be infected or infect others with the virus. The Department of Social Development made shelters available to provide accommodation as well as food during lockdown (Stonehouse et al 2023). There was a call by the government to those who are living on the

streets to move to temporary shelter during lockdown, even though some of the homeless people resisted to move into the shelters, they were being forced to do so by the enforcement officer, according to regulations issued in terms of the Disaster Management Act (Daily Maverick, 27 March 2020).

In Tshwane for instance, Pretoria Evangelism and Nurture (PEN) working in the inner city since 1992, partnered with Tshwane Homeless Forum (THF) erected up 11 temporary shelters to about 360 homeless people (Stonehouse et al 2023). About 35 shelters became available throughout the lockdown period in and around city centre of Tshwane and out of eight shelters were managed by the City of Tshwane (COT) and the remaining was managed by churches and NGOs (Stonehouse et al 2023). Caledonian stadium in Tshwane became the main mass temporary for sheltering the homeless (Marcus et al, 2020).

In Johannesburg, about 2000 vulnerable people were being housed in shelters and relocated to temporary accommodation (eNCA, 31 March 2020). According to Johannesburg mayor, Geoff Makhubo's spokesperson, Mlimandlela Ndamase, about 70% of those who were to be given shelters by the Johannesburg city bare substance users (eNCA, 31 March 2020). The then acting Social Development Member of the Executive Council (MEC), Panyaza Lesufi persuaded the homeless to move into shelters (Daily Maverick, 27 March 2020). Meanwhile, the Gauteng government worked with about 241 NGOs that had the capacity to house during the

lockdown and about 30 boarding schools had agreed to house the homeless (Daily Maverick, 27 March 2020).

In Cape Town, the city has identified a warehouse in Belville to be one of the shelters which would house the homeless during the shutdown (Daily Maverick, 27 March 2020). The Heaven Night shelter in Western Cape was also earmarked to house the homeless (Daily Maverick, 27 March 2020). However, sheltering of the homeless in the country had some challenges and these challenges included water and sanitation, electricity, food, among others.

Support of Informal Sector and Smmes

Many South Africans and blacks in particular are in informal sector such as street hawking, due to lack of formal employment. While most informal sectors and Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) such as street hawking and Spaza shops, among others were closed due to the imposition of nationwide Covid-19 lockdown by the government, some informal sectors and SMMEs survived the closure and continued operating. The continuation of these sectors only happened in some of the South African Metropolitan Municipalities (metros), especially in the major South African cities such as Tshwane, Johannesburg, eThekweni, Buffalo and Cape Town (Hlati and Maziwisa, 2020). The main reason for these sectors to remain opened was that other country's metros wanted to promote economic inclusivity whereby supporting redistribution and growing economic participation. The fact of the matter is that lockdown regulations in the country recognized

wholesale produce market and informal traders as provider of essential services and that is why some informal sectors and SMMEs survived the closure despite the imposition of lockdown. Since most blacks are in the informal economy and operating in South Africa's major cities, the government would be exacerbating a problem of poverty from prohibiting these people to continue operating their businesses.

During lockdown, some of the country's metros such as the City of Johannesburg and the City of Tshwane implemented measures such as issuing temporary permits for informal traders, including spaza shops (Hlati and Maziwisa, 2020). The issuing of these permits gave a chance to street traders and spaza shop owners to continue operating so that they could continue providing for themselves and their families. The newly established, the City of Tshwane Economic Recovery Response Plan went further to cancel historical debts of informal street traders as well as 50 percent for three months, on license and permits (Hlati and Maziwisa, 2020).

The metros went further and introduced local government relief fund for the local SMMEs and informal sectors (Hlati and Maziwisa, 2020). The City of eThekweni, in Durban was one of the local governments which established such fund and it became known as eThekweni Economic Recovery Fund. The purpose of this relief fund was to prevent job losses as well as helping small businesses that were at risk of shutting down due to lockdown. In a survey conducted by eThekweni local government, it was discovered that 93 percent of businesses experienced decreased in revenue

and 72 percent had to shut down completely (Hlati and Maziwisa, 2020). Like eThekweni, the City of Tshwane also proposed to establish Township Enterprise Development Fund (Hlati and Maziwisa, 2020).

In Cape Town, local government had reduced property rates for guest house owners as well as allowing interest free payment plans for businesses in distress over six months period, provided these businesses were closed during the lockdown (Hlati and maziwisa, 2020). In the Buffalo city, the metro played an important role by processing land and building applications and worked closely with stakeholders such as the East London Industrial Development Zone regarding road infrastructure (Hlati and Maziwisa, 2020).

Moreover, apart from few local governments which rescued informal sectors and SMMEs during the country's lockdown, the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) has also came up with three intervention measures to help SMMEs affected by Covid-19 pandemic and these were the Business Growth and Resilience Facility, SMME Relief Finance Scheme and Sefa-Debt Restructuring Facility (CNBC Africa, 25 March 2020; Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 28 April 2020). While the Business Growth and Resilience Facility was targeted at SMMEs who locally manufactured and supplied hygiene and medical products that were in demand in order to curb and manage the spread of the covid-19 virus, the SMME Relief Finance Facility would provide soft-loan funding for existing businesses in distress due to the covid-19 pandemic (CNBC Africa, 25 arch 2020). The relief

would be for a period of 6 months, from 01 April 2020 (CNBC Africa, 25 March 2020). The qualifying criteria for both Business Growth and Resilience Facility and the SMME relief Finance scheme is that the entities in orders to be assisted should be 100% South African owned and 70% of their employees should be South Africans and on the other hand the entities should be complied to SARS (CNBC Africa, 25 March 2020). Foreign nationals were not excluded from the intervention measures and were also assisted with the remaining 30% (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 28 April 2020).

Conclusion

This paper examined and discussed how Covid-19 lockdown has positively changed the lives of the South Africans, especially in black communities. The secondary methods research revealed that discussion indeed, Covid-19 lockdown has positively changed the lives of the South Africans, particularly in black communities. The implementation of SRD and increase in social grants enabled many South Africans especially, the poor to buy basic necessities for their families. Before the increase in social grants, many people could not afford to buy basic necessities for their families due to increase in price of food stuff.

With regard to togetherness of families, Lockdown has brought unity in most families because they were now together as one since no one was allowed to go to work and school or visit relatives. Families were able to help each other with house chores. Due to lockdowns, group

of gangs around the country called for truce and they started helping their families and their communities with the distribution of food parcels. Communities were now living peacefully without fear of being terrorized or killed by group of gangs. Drug trafficking and crime in general decreased. With regard to Ban on alcohol sales, there was a reduction in hospital admission from alcohol related injuries. There was also a reduction from alcohol related domestic violence such as murder, rape and other form of violence. Alcohol related crimes have also gone down. Ban on tobacco sale has witnessed a number of South Africans quit smokings. Tobacco ban has also reduced infection from various diseases such as corona virus, among others, because people could neither buy nor share cigarettes. Some smokers managed to quit smoking because there was nowhere to get tobacco, especially cigarettes. The distribution of food parcels addressed the problem of food insecurity in the country, particularly in black communities because they are the most vulnerable group in society. Poor households were able to feed many mouths since families became larger due to lockdown.

Prior to Covid-19 in the country, some people were without shelters and they lived on the streets. During the lockdown, in some cities, especially big cities such as Tshwane, Johannesburg and Cape Town, the government managed to move the homeless into temporary shelters in order to contain the spread of the corona virus.

While most informal sectors and SMMEs faced closure due to lockdown, some remained opened with the support of their local governments. Informal sectors and

SMMEs which continued operating during national lockdown included the City of Tshwane, Johannesburg, eThekweni, Buffalo and Cape Town. This became a relief to most informal traders because street trading and spaza shops were their daily survival. Some of the local governments managed to cancel debts incurred by the street traders and spaza shops owners, while other metros managed to establish relief fund to support both informal sectors and SMMEs.

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