

Public Memorandum and Communiqué to the County Government of Bungoma

For immediate Press Release

By Members of the Civil Society

Dated: 2nd November 2020

THEME: THE STATE OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC AND LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS FOR ITS CONTAINMENT IN BUNGOMA COUNTY

We the members of the undersigned Civil Society organizations operating in Bungoma hereby state as follows:

1. We are deeply concerned that Covid 19 cases have surged not only in Bungoma County but in Kenya and globally. In the recent past, our County has witnessed the highest spike from the time the pandemic was officially reported in the Country in March 2020. In the last two weeks, over 30 cases have been reported. These include 7 members of staff and 6 Members of the County Assembly (MCAs), County Governor, Chief of Staff, 11 students of Friends School Kamusinga and 6 Students from St. Lukes Boys Kimilili Secondary School.
2. It is sad and unfortunate to point out that Governor Wycliffe Wafula Wangamati, the County Covid Response Committee he Co-Chairs with the County Commissioner and the County Department for Health and Sanitation have not been giving regular updates to the county citizens and general public about the state of Covid Pandemic in the County. The public is yet to be informed by the duty bearers about the total number of people who have been tested for Covid 19 so far, number positive cases, number of death as well as number of recoveries from the Covid 19 pandemic.
3. The County Government of Bungoma has for a long time paid lip service to the prevention and management of Covid 19 pandemic that is now an epidemic in the entire County, despite the fact that the second wave of Covid 19 is likely to be worse than the first wave in terms of its negative socio-economic effects and impact. Indeed, there is inadequate political goodwill from the top duty bearers of the County Executive under the leadership of **H.E. Governor Wycliffe Wafula Wangamati**.
4. We state categorically that the County Government of Bungoma, except the County Assembly has not put in place effective measures to prevent and manage the spread of Covid 19 Pandemic. Bungoma Civil Society Forum (BCSF) wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Speaker of the County Assembly of Bungoma, **Hon. Emmanuel Situma** for decisive and pragmatic steps to lead the assembly members and staff in undergoing mandatory Covid 19 tests, which confirmed the **7 Covid cases** among the staff and the **6 cases** among the MCAs.

Currently, the County Assembly has gone into a lock down but the County Executive of Bungoma is operating thus “*it is business as usual*”.

5. We wish to inform the residents of Bungoma County and the general public that H.E. Wycliffe Wafula Wangamati, the Governor of Bungoma is yet to take any administrative policy decision and other known concrete measures to prevent and manage the spread of Covid 19 in the County. He instead has been making numerous trips across the 9 sub counties and 45 wards in the County in the name of inspecting and launching development projects and meet the people tours under the populist theme of ***Limotole Mashinani***”. Indeed, the Governor, his County Executive Committee Members , Chief Officers, Office Staff, Field Staff and some loyalist MCAs (dubbed members of the Deep State) have become a weak link in the fight against Covid 19 because of the their careless interactions with the masses and local communities during the aforementioned public forums.
6. We note with great concern that the majority of the masses during those public meetings organized by the county leadership, hardly observe the health protocols such as keeping social distance of one metre away, wearing masks, washing and sanitizing regularly. In this regard, while the top county leaders and duty bearers can afford critical healthcare in case of infections, majority of the ordinary citizens cannot afford such critical healthcare services such as ventilators/oxygen, ICU bed care, specialized attention by health workers and protective gears, whose minimum cost is estimated at **KES 75,000.00** per day.
7. In the recent past, the County Government of Bungoma has been in mainstream media and social media for wrong reasons related to impropriety, corruption, misappropriation, illegal and irregular transfer of funds from the Bungoma County Referral Hospital and Webuye Sub County Referral Hospital to the tune of **KES 6,986,000.00** and **KES 5,000,000.00**, respectively. The County Executive is yet to disclose, publish and publicize how it spent **KES 100,000,000.00** from the Emergency Fund for the **Financial Year 2019/20** and **KES 213,000,000.00** from the National Treasury disbursed as conditional grant for the purpose of putting in place health infrastructure and related healthcare facilities, equipment and amenities for the prevention and management of Covid 19 Pandemic in the County.
8. We warn that the rising Covid-19 cases in Bungoma County could cause a major public health crisis, if not checked with far and severe socio-economic consequences. That soon or later, the County Health facilities, including the Isolation Centres and the health workers will be inadequate to cope up with the surging Covid 19 cases during the Second and envisaged Third wave of infections. The alarming rate of community infections requires proper planning, budgeting, effective implementation of the Covid 19 protocols as well as efficient monitoring of the public health care services in all the health facilities and units the County.

9. We wish to observe that people's health and wellbeing as well as their behavior and routines have been greatly affected by Covid 19 Pandemic in the Country and Bungoma County in particular. Unfortunately, the County Government of Bungoma has not grafted any concrete Post-Covid-19 Recovery Plan and Strategy for the benefit of the County Citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR CONTAINING COVID 19:

- A. We call upon, the County Governor of Bungoma, H.E. Hon. Wycliffe Wafula Wangamati and his County Executive Committee Members (CECM-Cabinet) to immediately and promptly break his silence and state their official position on the alarming surge and state of Covid19 Pandemic infections in the County.
- B. We recommend that the **Executive Arm** of the County Government of Bungoma should learn lessons from the County Assembly and implement partial lockdown of its departments and services, except the Health and Sanitation as well as the Finance and Economic Planning Departments, because of their special and essential nature of services the two departments offer to the County Government and general public.
- C. We call upon **Governor Wangamati, his CECM, MCAs, County staff** and allies to call off all public meetings and interactions with the county residents under the populist banner of ***Limotole Mashinani Shinanigans***. In the same breath, we urge the members of the public in all the 9 sub counties and 45 wards to be careful with mass physical meetings and functions organized by the County Government duty bearers and as well as political rallies such as those of BBI that are convened by local and national political leaders. This will help minimize the rapid spread of coronavirus in the community through unchecked and un-regulated interactions that violates Covid 19 health protocols.
- D. We strongly recommend that all the county government of Bungoma leaders and duty bearers and staff should immediately undergo mandatory/ compulsory Covid 19 tests and if found positive be put under forced quarantine to minimize community infections and spread. The results of all people tested including top county leaders, duty bearers, MCAs and all staff in the County Government should be made public through local and national media stations. Public sensitization and update of the Covid 19 status by the Governor and his top County Government duty bearers should be regular and continuous.
- E. The County Government of Bungoma should put in place practical measures and effective healthcare strategies of preventing the spread and managing Covid 19 cases. There is need to ensure adequate and reliable supply of testing kits, reagents, Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), Ventilators and other essential facilities for handling Covid 19 cases. The number of ICU Beds should be increased and adequate space provided for their location. We wish to point out

that the current Isolation Centre at Webuye Town is inadequate to contain and respond to the ever increasing demand for isolation space and facilities for Covid 19 cases during this second wave of infections.

- F. We highly recommend Home-Based Care approach for Covid 19 patients. It should be embraced and facilitated by the County Government and national Government since it is cost-effective and offers a friendly as opposed to Isolation Centres and Quarantine Centres, which are like temporary cells or prisons to some patients. This is also an appropriate strategy because the majority of the Covid 19 patients is asymptomatic and, therefore, can be best managed at home. However, this home-based care approach can only be effective if the Community Health Workers (CHWs) and Community Health Volunteers are properly trained, equipped, protected, facilitated and motivated to offer their services with full dedication and total commitment.
- G. We call upon the investigating agencies including the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, Directorate for Criminal Investigation (DCI) and the Office of the Auditor General to release to the public all the reports and findings of their investigation of the corruption and alleged looting, misuse, misappropriation of Covid 19 funds and other public funds by some leaders and duty bearers in the County Government of Bungoma. We further recommend that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (ODPP) should move with speed to prosecute all those found capable of misappropriating public funds in Bungoma County. There should be mandatory lifestyle audits to all the leaders, duty bearers and senior staff in the county government of Bungoma as well as directors of proxy companies that have been awarded several lucrative tenders by the County Government of Bungoma, especially those in the category of Covid 19 millionaires, who are currently either *“celebrating at the expense of with the Covid 19 patients and are likely to dance on the graves of victims of the virus”*.
- H. We call upon officers from the National Policy Service (NPS) and other law enforcement agents to ensure that the Covid 19 Health Protocols are adhered to by all citizens regardless of their leadership positions, socio-economic and political status. The wearing of masks and keeping of social distance among other measures should be strictly adhered to by everybody in the society.
- I. The County Government should consider partial lockdown to check the alarming surge of community infections in the County.
- J. There is urgent need for the duty bearers in the County Government of Bungoma to work closely with the Civil Society Organizations, National Government, Private Sector, Religious Sector and Development Partners to formulate appropriate **Covid 19 Management and Post-Covid 19 Recovery Strategic Plan** including livelihoods support and facilitation of income generating activities for vulnerable groups in the society such as women, youth, persons with disability, widows, widowers and elderly people.

OUR PARTING SHOTS:

- ✓ Covid 19 Pandemic is real in our homes, community and county. That each of us must take responsibility and strictly adhere to all the health protocols issued by the Ministry of Health.
- ✓ Let us break the silence and **SAY NO** to irresponsibility of our leaders and **SAY NO** to corruption and misappropriation of Covid 19 funds and other public funds in Bungoma County and the Republic of Kenya.
- ✓ The County Government of Bungoma is inadequately prepared and lack political goodwill to fight against Covid 19 Pandemic

CC. H.E. Wycliffe Wafula Wangamati, the Governor-County Government of Bungoma

Hon. Emmanuel Situma, the Speaker, County Assembly of Bungoma

Mr. Joseph Wakoli Wambati- County Secretary & Head of Public Service

Mr. John Kennedy O. Mosongo- Clerk to the County Assembly of Bungoma

DATED THIS 2ND DAY OF NOVEMBER 2020 AT BUNGOMA

Compiled by:

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