

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



Preliminary STATEMENT: CHIWUNDURA NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY-ELECTION

Harare –16 JULY, 2017 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), as part of its observation of the Chiwundura National Assembly by-election, deployed 15 static and mobile observers. The static observers were deployed at ten ward collation centres, and the constituency collation centre, whilst the mobile teams were roving around the Constituency.

President Mugabe proclaimed 15 July 2017 as the date for the Chiwundura by-election to fill the vacancy that arose following the death of the incumbent ZANU PF Member of Parliament, Mr Kizito Chivamba, who died on 19 April 2017 following a short illness.

Election Observation Methodology

ZESN conducts its observation efforts in conformity with the Declaration of Global Principles for Citizen Election Observation and Monitoring which was launched at the United Nations on 3 April 2012 as well as the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO). The findings and recommendations of this election observation are made in reference to the laws of Zimbabwe, the Revised Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections as well as other regional and African election guidelines and principles. In addition, ZESN's observation methodology seeks to measure compliance of the Election Day processes with the Constitution, Electoral Laws and the aforementioned regional and international standards that govern the conduct of elections.

Voters' roll

ZESN again observed the continued use of the two voters' rolls by the Commission, a new roll with those who registered for the by-election as well as the 2013 supplementary voters' roll. This has become a trend in all the by-elections that ZESN has observed post 2013 harmonised elections.

Of concern in the Chiwundura by-election, ZESN mobile observers received reports of anomalies that were unearthed by the Commission during the de-duplication exercise and audit of the Chiwundura voters' roll. ZEC informed the ZESN mobile observer team that there were irregularities relating to the appearance of persons with the same name and surname, date and place of birth but with different identification numbers and photos on their national identification documents. According to ZEC there are some records of people

with exactly the same first name, surname, gender and date of birth but with different identification numbers. Some voters are reported to have identification numbers that are invalid. This reinforces ZESN calls for ZEC to discard the 2013 voter roll which continues to affect the credibility, confidence and trust of the ZEC and elections.

ZESN calls upon ZEC to provide clarity on the reported anomalies, *“This clarity will enhance stakeholder confidence in electoral processes and allay fears that have been raised by stakeholders with regards to possible double registration or electoral malpractices particularly in view of the impending Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) process”*, says the ZESN Chairperson Mr Andrew Makoni.

“The explanation by ZEC is important as the same issues are likely to appear at a larger scale when the final audit of the BVR register is conducted. If these issues are not clarified and rectified they can be detrimental to the credibility of future elections in Zimbabwe”, he reiterated. There is also need for the Registrar General to investigate and rectify this issue, as the office in charge of issuing the national identification documents.

Ballot papers

At all the polling stations that ZESN observed, there were sufficient ballot papers. According to ZEC, Fidelity Printers and Refiners (Private) Ltd was given the mandate to print 43 800 ballot papers for use in the Chiwundura National Assembly Constituency by-election[1]. The ballot papers printed were premised on the total number of registered voters for Chiwundura Constituency which was 43 688 for both the new and supplementary voters’ rolls. ZESN has observed in the previous by-elections that very few voters on the supplementary roll turn out on polling day. ZESN is concerned with the apparent waste of resources through the continued use of two voters’ roll by the Commission given the financial constraints currently being experienced.

Voter turnout

By and large, voter turnout was low in the Chiwundura by-election especially in the urban wards as compared to preceding National Assembly by-elections. The majority of voters who turned out were the elderly population. ZESN observed low participation of the youths, a trend that continues to emerge in almost all by-elections observed by ZESN post the 2013 elections. In order to increase youth participation in future electoral processes, deliberate efforts should be directed towards targeted voter education for the youths.

The overall turnout for the Chiwundura by-election was very low, recording a dismal 23.6%.

Assisted voters

ZESN also noted insignificant numbers of assisted voters in most polling stations, attributed to illiteracy, old age and disability. For instance, some very low numbers of assisted voters

were recorded Fletcher secondary where our observer reported that only one person (female) was assisted. The low number of assisted voters could be reflective of the low turnout that was observed in the by-election and part of the consistency is in an urban set – up where literacy levels are high.

Polling Procedures and Conduct of ZEC Polling Staff

ZESN observer reports revealed that all polling stations successfully completed setup and opening procedures on time by 7AM. At polling stations that ZESN observed, all the required voting materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, ZEC official stamp, indelible ink marker pens and the voters' roll were available at the time of opening. All observed polling stations were adequately manned with an average of six polling officials, 50% of them being female.

Political Party Agents

At all polling stations where ZESN had observed, ZANU PF had party agents (as many as three in some cases) while the NCA only deployed at very few polling stations and the other two parties, Free Zimbabwe Congress and Progressive Democrats of Zimbabwe having no agents at the polling stations where ZESN had static observers and visited by its mobile teams. Section 95(1a and b) of the Electoral Act provides for the presence of a party agent in each polling station where the candidate is standing for election and two within the vicinity of such a polling station. This allows for party agents to assess both the inside and outside of the polling station as they are 'watch dogs' of their respective political parties or independent candidates. Thus an agent has a crucial role of monitoring electoral practices and draw attention to any malpractices that may arise.

Voting and Counting

Voting went on relatively peaceful throughout the day at polling stations where ZESN visited or had static observers. In addition, counting was conducted in line with the prescribed procedures with results being posted outside the polling stations and at the constituency collating centre. At all polling stations that ZESN observed closing of polling and counting, party agents who were present signed the V11 forms.

Pre-election Environment

ZESN observed that the environment prior to the election was relatively tense with reports of political intolerance and isolated incidence of violence in the build-up to the by-election. Reports of intimidation of voters and partisan distribution of food aid were also noted, particularly in Ward 14. The role of traditional leaders in mobilising the electorate to vote for a particular party, sometimes through manipulative means was also noted in the Constituency as observed in most by-elections post 2013 elections.

Only one party, ZANU PF was visible in terms of campaigns, with some of its rallies addressed by the party's top leaders, such as Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa and Political Commissar Saviour Kasukuwere on 12 July 2017. The party also held door-to door campaigns. However, the other contesting parties' campaigns were not very visible according to ZESN members who reside in the Constituency.

By-Election Results

Candidate	Political Party	Sex	Votes Received
Ndlovu Brown	ZANU-PF	M	9426
Guzete Takudzwa	NCA	M	445
Mudzviti Brighton	Free Zim Congress	M	145
Zulu Webster	PDZ	M	118
Rejected			187
Total Votes Cast			10 321
Total Valid Votes Cast			10 134
Voter Population			43 688
% Poll			23.6%

Source: ZEC

Recommendations

1. ZEC should speed up the biometric voter registration (BVR) process so that it comes up with a clean, comprehensive and new voters' roll. In view of the impending 2018 harmonised elections, the biometric based voters' roll will enable ZEC to de-duplicate as this is one of the strongest advantages of the BVR.
2. In view of the unearthed anomalies of double registrants, ZEC should discard the continued use of the 2013 voters' roll as it compromises the credibility of elections.
3. ZESN calls upon ZEC to publicly issue a statement on the reported anomalies with regards to duplicates, and invalid IDs to instil public confidence in the electoral processes, particularly the voter registration.
4. There is also need for the Registrar General to investigate irregularities relating to the appearance of persons with the same name and surname, date and place of birth

but with different identification numbers and photos on their national identification documents as well as the invalid identity numbers and to rectify these issues, as they are the institution in charge of issuing the national identification documents.

5. Deliberate efforts should be directed towards targeted voter education for the youths in order to increase their participation in electoral processes.
6. There is need for ZEC to ensure that there are comprehensive voter education programmes that are aimed at increase citizen participation in electoral processes, in particular voter turn-out.
7. ZEC should avail demographic data it collects during polling to stakeholders so that targeted voter education programmes are designed.
8. ZEC should adopt an open data policy to enhance trust and confidence in electoral processes.
9. To improve transparency ZEC should produce a single voters' roll which adheres to principles of voter registration.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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[1] *The Herald* 15 July 2017