

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE – NUMBER 5

Harare – 13 October 2017 - ZESN has deployed observers under the first phase of the Biometric Voter Registration blitz and this update is based on reports received from all the 10 provinces where registration is currently taking place.

Intimidation of observers

Of concern to ZESN are numerous reports of accredited observers being intimidated for observing the BVR process and in some instances being denied access to the centres by ward councillors and alleged members of ZANU PF. For instance in Ward 6 Chipinge Central, a ZESN observer was threatened and intimidated by the Ward councillor and his supporters resulting in the centre being closed by the registration officials who felt the situation was threatening to get out of hand. In Epworth Ward 2 at the Local Board, a physically challenged ZESN observer was forced out of a registration center by a ZANU PF Ward councillor. The Councillor insisted that observers should not be granted access into the registration centre. Efforts to get registration officials to intervene were fruitless. Another instance was reported in Ward 10 of Mwenezi West, where the ZESN observer was denied access to a registration center by the registration officials, who insisted that in addition to being accredited by the Commission, the observer needed additional clearance from the ZEC district offices.

Challenges with voter registration

At most of the registration centres where ZESN observers were stationed the BVR equipment functioned well, there were however reports of equipment failure at some of the registration centres. For instance, in Chipinge East Ward 14 at Nyamadzi primary School the laptop malfunctioned in the morning and had not been fixed by the end of day yesterday. Reports from Ward 4 in Umzingwane district showed that registration officials faced challenges in setting up the solar system to power the BVR equipment. In Ward 2 Gokwe Kabuyuni, ZESN has received reports that VR1 forms have run out at Mareka Centre resulting in potential registrants being told to go home and return to the centre tomorrow.

Commissioners of Oath

ZESN continued to observe that Commissioners of Oath were not present at most registration centres. A registrant would need to look for a Commissioner of Oaths and pay

for the service. Consequently, a number of potential registrants could not register as a result. In Epworth Ward 7, a Ward Councilor stopped a school headmaster from stamping and signing affidavits and took over the role, reportedly serving members of his political party only. ZESN observed that at some centres, political parties were bringing their own Commissioners of Oath. In other areas, the Councilors would tell those who wanted their services as Commissioners of Oaths to follow them home, where they would receive political education before getting their affidavits stamped. In Mutoko South at Corner Store, potential registrants are being asked to buy proof of residence forms for 20 cents by the ward councilor.

Intimidation of Registrants

ZESN received disturbing reports of registrants who were being threatened with losing their land if they later vote for the opposition.

Registrants Turnout

The turnout of registrants remained low at most registration centres in Harare. However, some centres, for example Mt Pleasant Library, registered more than 100 people. In Mashonaland East Province, Uzumba information from ZEC officials shows that high numbers of registrants have been recorded so far. Some centres like Dindi secondary, Sowa community Hall and Chipokoteke primary registering more than 120 people. ZESN urges ZEC to provide regular updates and information on number of registered voters per ward. The provision of disaggregated data based on age, sex and wards will enable electoral stakeholders to take appropriate initiatives such as targeted voter education to encourage participation in the voter registration process.

Recommendations:

1. ZEC should create a one stop shop at registration centres so as to do away with the issue of turning away registrants without proper identification documents. At every registration centre they should issue out IDs so as to allow smooth registration and also cut transport costs.
2. ZEC should ensure that accredited observers are protected from intimidation and threats to enable them to effectively conduct their duties.
3. The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and ZEC must investigate reports of intimidation of observers and potential registrants in order to create an enabling environment for citizens to enjoy their right to participate in electoral processes.
4. ZESN urges ZEC to frequently avail data on number of registered voters at various levels such per Ward
5. At the end of each phase ZEC should provide information on the number of registered voters aggregated by age, sex, wards and district to all electoral stakeholders.