

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE – NUMBER 6

20 October 2017 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) continues to observe Phase One of the Biometric Voter Registration exercise in all 10 provinces of the country. There are six days left before the close of voter registration under Phase One and ZESN has made the following observations over the past seven days:

Misinformation on the BVR process

ZESN has received reports of intimidation, especially in rural areas, whereby registrants are being misinformed about the BVR and its purpose. Potential registrants are being informed that having registered using the system it is possible to know who they will vote for in the 2018 elections. These cases were reported in Mudzi North Ward 1, Murewa North Ward 4 and Muzarabani Ward 3 among other areas. ZESN notes that the misinformation and intimidation of citizens is a serious violation of the right to free participation in electoral process that threatens the credibility of the whole electoral process. In addition, ZESN has received reports of registrants being forced to submit their names and details such as serial numbers of voter registration slips to Ward chairpersons and other community leaders as a way of intimidating them into believing that their voting choices will be traceable in the 2018 election. ZESN therefore urges ZEC to conduct comprehensive voter education and information to ensure that citizens are well informed about the BVR process to demystify some of these shenanigans by politicians.

Lack of required documentation

ZESN observers have reported cases of people failing to register in areas such as Matebeleland provinces and other remote areas because they do not have birth certificates and national IDs. ZESN urges the government to consider waiving the fees for obtaining birth certificates in order to facilitate easy acquisition of National IDs by potential registrants especially in remote areas.

Turned away registrants

ZESN observed that some citizens intending to register were turned away on the basis of presenting defaced identity documents, for being 'Aliens', failure to produce proof of residence and producing wrong form of identification such as drivers' licenses. The government must adequately publicize the procedures for regularizing the citizenship status of citizens classified as 'Aliens' to enable them to register to vote.

Mobile registration centres

Whilst ZESN appreciates the setting up of mobile registration centres at places like the Parliament of Zimbabwe building, old people's homes, hospitals and institutions housing people with disabilities; the Network calls upon ZEC to adequately publicize the facilities in all the 10 provinces to ensure that eligible citizens can register to vote.

Issues with proof of residence and Voter Registration Affidavits

The Network continues to observe that ZEC Commissioners of Oaths are not always available at registration centres resulting in citizens requiring this service either returning home without registering or being charged for the commissioning of their affidavits. Instances of challenges with proof of residence were reported in Nyanga North Ward 5 Kambarami village, the Village Head is reported to be demanding that villagers who require proof of residence pay \$5.

Turnout

According to statistics released by the ZEC, as of 19 October 2017, a total of 814,181 people had registered at 1890 registration centres under Phase One. ZESN has also observed that significantly high numbers have been recorded in areas like Harare and Midlands while areas like Matebeleland provinces have experienced very low turnout. ZESN observed that at Sinansengwe Business centre in Binga North ward 4 not a single person presented themselves at the registration centre on 19 October 2017. Low turnout figures were also recorded in Mashonaland East at Shamba Dip tank in Maramba Pfungwe Ward 6, only two people registered on 18 October, while at Kanzire Primary School in the same ward, only one person registered. Yesterday, at Maramba Primary school, 60 people; males 28 males and 32 females registered. Some centres that recorded high turnout yesterday are as follows: Seke Primary School in Chitungwiza South Ward 18, 252 (190 were female and 62 male), at Remembrance Hall in Mbare, 217 registered (167 female and 50 male). In Midlands at Chinyenyetu Primary School Gokwe Nembudziya, 164 people were registered on 18 and 19 October 2017.

Efficiency of the registration process:

At registration centres where ZESN has observers, ZEC registration officials are reported to be following the stipulated registration steps including correctly capturing the biometric features of fingerprints and facial photographs. At most of the centres, most of the registrants were successfully issued with voter registration slips at the end of the process. ZESN received reports of challenges with the process at Mashumba Tent Ward 8 in Bulawayo Central where names of registered people disappeared from the kit resulting in officers calling upon technicians retrieve the information which was successfully done. ZESN notes that there is no uniformity in the provision of registration statistics by registration officials with some referring observers to the provincial supervisors for daily statistics.

BVR Kit malfunction

ZESN received some reports of kits malfunction at some of the centres. On 19 October at Sango centre in Zengeza West Ward 12, the BVR kit number 0619 malfunctioned and despite efforts by the technicians to fix the challenge was said to be requiring a new power box. In Chipinge South Ward 28 at Chusuma Primary school, the BVR kit broke down and had to be taken for repairs, it stopped the registration process for the rest of the day and potential registrants eventually gave up and went back home after waiting for two or more hours. Another incident of kit malfunction was reported at Musikawamatanda in Ward 4 Chiredzi West on 18 October 2017. ZESN urges the ZEC to publicize procedures outlining how incidents such as kit failure and malfunctions are to be dealt with including protocols for data backup for malfunctioning kits.

Missing Constituency on BVR database

The Member of Parliament for Mudzi South has challenged ZEC to include his constituency on the BVR database having noted that it was missing under all the four phases. The electoral Commission is reported to be in the process of rectifying the anomaly that was highlighted by the MP.

Conclusion

ZESN reiterates its calls for citizens to turn out in their numbers and participate in this vital process. In addition, the creation of a conducive electoral environment will ensure the full enjoyment of fundamental freedoms and eliminate political and intimidation of voters. ZEC must amplify efforts in providing comprehensive and inclusive voter education and

mobilisation for voter registration to increase participation and demystify the myths surrounding the BVR process.

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