

# ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



## BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE - NUMBER 8

**1 November 2017** – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) is observing Phase 2 of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise which commenced on 29 October 2017.

### Highlights of observations under Phase 1:

- Comprehensive deployment to all registration centres
- Intimidation of registrants and observers
- Inadequate voter education and mobilisation
- Challenges with services of Commissioners of Oath who were not always present at most registration centres
- Low youth turnout nationwide

### Advocacy Initiatives with ZEC

ZESN has engaged the ZEC on issues arising from the BVR process since its commencement in early October. ZESN wrote six letters to ZEC between the 11th and the 24th of October appreciating ZEC's efforts in the BVR process and also bringing attention to issues of concern noted from observation of the process. These issues include the denial of ZESN observers into registration centres, the need to provide clarity on ZEC's plans to counter misinformation during the BVR process, the need to provide clarity of data transmission procedures, the shortage of material like VR 9 forms and equipment failure at some registration centres, reported cases of the intimidation of registrants and requests for voter registration statistics.

The following update is based on observations by observers deployed countrywide under Phase 2.

### Phase 2 Update 1

#### Commissioners of Oath

During the first phase of the voter registration process, ZESN continued to observe that Commissioners of Oaths were not present at most registration centres thus resulting in potential registrants in need of their services returning home without registering. Having reported the various challenges that registrants faced regarding the proof of residence requirement, ZESN welcomes the proposal by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to have the ZEC supervisors accorded Commissioner of Oaths status as this will help in

facilitating the registration of citizens requiring affidavits. However ZESN is of the view that the same facility should be extended to registration officials as these are the officials that are permanently stationed at the registration centers across the country.

### **Pre-filling of Affidavit forms**

ZESN has received numerous reports of political leaders such as Members of Parliament, Ward Councillors and Traditional leaders distributing the pre-signed affidavits especially on partisan lines. The pre-filling of the affidavits needs to be investigated by ZEC and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) given that this is one of the factors that have fueled incidents of intimidation where registrants are given the pre-filled affidavits and asked to submit serial numbers on their registration slips. For instance, in Ward 17 and 19 Murehwa South, Rushinga Ward 4, traditional leaders are giving out proof of residence forms on the condition that once registered, the registrants will submit the serial numbers of their voter registration slips to the traditional leaders. Similar incidents have been reported at Iminyela Centre in Mpopoma where councillors were issuing out pre-signed affidavits and also recording serial numbers.

### **Challenges with BVR Kits**

At the commencement of the Phase 2, ZESN received a significant number of reports of some registration centres failing to open due to the late arrival of registration officials and kits. In instances where the BVR kits arrived on time registration was unable to commence because the kits were not charged. For instance such reports were received from Zvishavane Ward 8 at Nyaradzai Hall, Mberengwa East Ward 5 and Mberengwa South Ward 27 the kits were not fully charged resulting in potential registrants being turned away as the kits were being charged. In Mberengwa East Ward 3 at Chemimwe, people did not register because the registration officials arrived around 6pm on 29 October 2017. In Nyanga South ward 28, the BVR kit only registered 2 people on the 31st of October before the kit experienced challenges with its power source.

### **Observers denied access to centres**

Some accredited ZESN observers were denied access into registration centres by Ward registration supervisors insisting that they first report at the District offices. Observers were denied access in Zvishavane at Nyaradzai Hall in ward 8, Lundi Hospital in Ward 10 and Weleza in Ward 13 as well as at Thekwane High School in Bulilima East. ZESN through its member organisation the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights engaged ZEC resulting in the observers being allowed into the centres. ZEC should ensure that its officers facilitate the observation of electoral processes including voter registration exercise as this is crucial for promoting transparency and credibility of electoral processes.

## **Statistics of Phase 1 turnout**

At the end of Phase 1, ZEC indicated that they registered approximately 1.2 million people, with ZESN observer reports indicating that the time taken to process registrants has improved as the operators are becoming more acquainted with the system. It is however imperative that the electoral Commission avails the number of registered voters for each ward under phase 1 which is disaggregated by age and sex to enable targeted voter education and mobilization by stakeholders such as CSOs, political parties and ZEC voter education department.

## **Recommendations:**

1. The ZHRC and ZEC must investigate the incidents of intimidation of registrants and the distribution of pre-filled affidavits by political parties and traditional leaders.
2. ZESN urges ZEC to ensure that the BVR kits are fully charged before they are transported at the conclusion of each phase.
3. There is need for standardization of operations for all BVR Ward Supervisors with regards to how they relate with observers to ensure that there are no obstructions to the work of observers during the registration process.
4. Statistics of registered voters should be availed on a daily basis to observers and interested stakeholders as a way of enhancing transparency and accountability. The electoral Commission should even consider printing and posting daily registration statistics at each registration centre disaggregated per ward by sex and age.