

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE - NUMBER 13

15 December 2017 – ZESN continues to observe phase four of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) blitz and this update is based on reports received from all the 10 provinces where registration is currently taking place.

Shortage of voter registration slips

ZESN received reports of a significant number of voter registration centres that ran out of the print roll used for issuing voter registration slips to successful registrants. These incidents were reported at Takunda Ward 13, St Joseph Ward 3 Vungu, St Patrick's School in Chiwundura Ward 9, Gweru urban Ward 18 in Midlands Province, Bindura North District centre, Chigwagwa Primary ward 4 in Zaka North, Svuure Primary in Zaka East ward 25 and Zaka East ward 25. At some of the centres voter registration did not stop as ZEC indicated that they would print the slips upon receipt of new consignment of the print rolls. ZESN is concerned at the apparent shortage of the registration slips which might have an adverse impact during inspection of the voters' rolls for registrants who were not issued with the slips upon completion of voter registration. These concerns were conveyed to ZEC who indicated that efforts were in place to furnish registration centres with more prints rolls. ZESN notes that given that the target for voter registration was set at 7 million, ZEC should have matched the required voter registration materials with the target figure.

Challenges with alien registration

Whereas the High Court of Zimbabwe ruled that people who are designated as 'aliens' should now be allowed to register as voters, most of them are failing to register because in addition to proof of residence they are still required to produce the long birth certificate which some of them are not in possession of. Secondly, at some registration centres, it

appears that officials have not yet received clear instructions on how to handle registration of citizens classified as aliens. Such cases have been reported in Kuwadzana Wards 38 and 44 and Highfield East Ward 25 in Harare Province and some areas in Mashonaland West. ZESN reiterates its call for the ZEC to promptly provide the necessary clarity on the new status of the so called aliens. Such clarity needs to be mainstreamed into future registration efforts and be widely publicized by electoral stakeholders in particular the ZEC and the ZHRC to ensure enfranchisement of every potential voter. In addition efforts should be made by the registrar of general to facilitate provision of long birth certificates to the so called “aliens” born in Zimbabwe and other necessary documentation.

Closing of centres over lunch

Reports from ZESN static observers at the District centres show that some of these centres are closing during lunch hour leaving no one to attend to potential registrants. In some instances, the registration officers come back late after lunch and close the centres before the stipulated closing time (1700hrs). For instance, on 7 December 2017 at the Chipinge District centre, the registration officers delayed in coming back after lunch resulting in some potential registrants eventually giving up on the registration process. However, at some centres such as Chirumanzu, Mutare, Masvingo, and Chimanimani District centres, the officers take turns to break for lunch. Commendably, at the Gutu District centre, the registration officers sometimes do not break for lunch when there are large queues of people wanting to register.

Turnout

According to statistics released by ZEC on 14 December 2017, 4,345,808 registered had been registered since the start of the BVR Blitz on 10 October 2017. ZESN commends ZEC for availing the statistics on registered voters on a regular basis and reiterates its position for the Commission to also provide disaggregated statistics of sex and age of the registrants as well as by geographical breakdown.

Commissioner of Oaths

ZESN received reports of potential registrants who were turned away at the Chimanimani District centre on 10 December as they did not have proof of residence. There was no Commissioner of Oaths to enable the potential registrants to use VR.9 forms. In another incident, the Commissioner of Oaths at the Ministry of Youths office in Chimanimani was away for the whole day on 11 December making it difficult for individuals who required the services to have their VR.9 forms certified for purposes of proof of residence. Prior arrangements could have been made to have standby Commissioners of Oath who can step in such cases where the designated persons are not available so that every potential voter is registered.

State of mobile registration centres

ZESN has observed that some of the voters' registration centres especially the mobile centres such as tents especially in rural areas are not sensitive to the needs of women and other special needs groups as they are far from sources of clean water and ablution facilities. ZESN urges ZEC to ensure that to the extent possible future registration; inspection and voting centres are set up in conducive environments that cater for the needs of women and other special needs groups particularly female registration officials, women registrants, women observers amongst others. Though no direct formal complaints were received from ZEC officials, this issue was raised by most ZESN female observers who were deployed in all the four phases of the BVR Blitz. ZEC could in future consider hiring of mobile toilets for places that do not have proper ablution facilities as well as ensure provision for habitable facilities.

ZESN continues to observe that ZEC officials are giving preferential treatment to pregnant women and nursing mothers and people with disabilities at the registration centres which is commendable.

Misinformation

ZESN continues to receive reports of misinformation regarding the purpose of the BVR technology with the intention to intimidate potential registrants. For instance, 10 December, potential registrants were misinformed by suspected ZANU PF party members on the

registration procedures near Kuwadzana High in Kuwadzana Ward 44. Details were jotted down in a book without the supposed registrants producing Identification Documents and proof of residence after which they were told the registration procedure had been completed.

Equipment Malfunctioning

ZESN continued to receive reports of the malfunctioning of equipment which resulted in halting of voter registration processes in many instances. For example, in Mkoba Ward 16 registration was temporarily stopped for 3 hours on 11 December due to challenges with the thermal printer which was later repaired by the ZEC technicians. At Beitbridge Mission in Beitbridge East ward 4, Mazunga Primary School in Bindura North Ward 2 and at Chisamba grounds in Mutare Ward 4 on 12 December the registration kits' solar charging systems malfunctioned leading to the failure of many people to register.

ZESN BVR Roadshows

ZESN held two roadshows; one in Dzivarasekwa, Harare and another in Bulawayo, aimed at mobilizing people to register in areas where phase four BVR is ongoing. The roadshows were organised in order to encourage and mobilise illegible potential registrants to register to vote. ZESN provided Commissioner of Oaths services during the roadshow in Dzivarasekwa and over 200 potential registrants had their affidavits of residence certified enabling them to register as voters. The overwhelming request from participants for VR9 forms by the roadshow audience indicated that a significant number of people had not registered to vote in this constituency. ZESN reiterates its calls for disaggregated data even at ward and constituency level to enable targeted mobilisation efforts by electoral stakeholders.

Recommendations

The following recommendations could be adopted to improve the voter registration process:

1. ZEC should extend the BVR blitz in light of the turnout that has been recorded so far which is still far less than the targeted 7 million
2. ZEC should ensure that there is adequate supply of print rolls and other essential registration materials to cater for all eligible voters who may want to register as voters.
3. ZEC should promptly publicly provide via various media channels clarity on the state of the aliens to ensure the smooth processing of the registration as voters countrywide.
4. ZEC registration officers should not close centres over lunch as there are some potential registrants who may only be free and may want to register during that time.
5. ZEC and the ZHRC should investigate reported case of misinformation aimed at intimidating potential registrants regarding the BVR process. The Commission must also devise mechanisms to counter misinformation regarding the exercise.
6. For future electoral exercises such as BVR, inspection and voting, ZEC should consider hiring mobile toilets for places that do not have proper ablution facilities as well as ensure provision for habitable facilities particularly for women and other special needs groups.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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