

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE - NUMBER 15

12 January 2018 – The Biometric Voter registration (BVR) Blitz which commenced on 10 October 2017 came to an end on 19 December 2017. Following pleas by electoral stakeholders, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) announced that a mop up of the voter registration would be done over a 30 day period from 10 January to 8 February 2018. In view of the BVR mop up exercise, ZESN is deploying static observers at district registration centres as well as at randomly selected centres across the country. In addition mobile observer teams will also be deployed in all the 10 Provinces.

Election Preparedness

While ZESN commends the Commission for heeding calls by electoral stakeholders for an extension of the BVR exercise, it is clear that the Commission would have benefited from a bit more time to complete preparations to roll out this exercise. This is evident in that the Commission was only able to publish the itinerary for the mop up exercise on the day that the mop up commenced. The itinerary that was published seems to be changing continuously. For instance the itinerary that was published in the Herald on 10 January 2018 indicated that ZEC will only deploy one team in ward 1, Chivi North at Vutete Clinic for a period 4 days (10 -13 January 2018) however on 12 January ZEC opened an additional registration center in the same ward at Mukotose Primary School, this center will be open for two days (12-13 January 2018). Such changes seem to indicate that the deployment strategy in use is not identical to the schedule published by the Commission.

ZESN notes that efforts to enfranchise voters by opening more registration centers can only produce optimum results when effective voter education efforts and publicity of centres have been implemented well ahead of time. An analysis of the schedule of the registration centers to be used during the mop up shows that some centers are open for a few days with

some opening for one day. This presents a narrow window of opportunity for registrants who may prefer to register at those particular centers, Hence it is critical for ZEC and other electoral stakeholders to ensure that potential registrants are informed of this schedule so that they may be able to present themselves for registration at the centres near them.

Reports from ZESN static observers deployed from the commencement of the mop up indicate that a number of centers, even in the urban areas opened late on the 10th of January 2018, examples include centers in Budiriro, Highfield, Gweru Urban, Glen Norah, and Glen View. On the other hand, registration centers like Mbembeswana 2 Primary School in Bubi ward 18, in Matabeleland North did not open at all as advertised. Registration officials who arrived in the afternoon of 10 January 2018 indicated that the center at Mbembeswana would only open once it has been allocated police officers to provide security. However this did not happen as the center had been scheduled of open for two days (10-11 January 2018). ZEC needs to inform residents in wards where the same challenge was experienced if the registration centers would be opened at a later date.

Aliens

ZESN has received reports that some of the citizens classified as aliens are being denied to register because they do not have long birth certificates while at some centres voter registration officials are insisting that aliens are not allowed to register as voters despite a court ruling to the contrary. For instance potential voters classified as aliens were turned away at Menyezwa Primary School in Lupane Ward 14 and at Glen View 1 Primary School Ward 31 in Harare.

Political Environment

Throughout the BVR blitz ZESN received numerous reports of intimidation of registrants by political players and traditional leaders who were recording serial numbers of voter registration slips. ZESN is saddened to note that this practice persists especially in rural areas even under the mop up exercise, for instance in Mberengwa North villagers under Chief Mapiravana in Mberengwa North were called to a meeting on 10 January 2018 to have serial

numbers on their voter registration slips recorded on the basis that this information would be used during food distribution and primary elections for the ruling party.

ZESN BVR Roadshows

In order to help mobilize and encourage potential voters to register ZESN is holding roadshows in Gweru, Karoi and Mutare on Saturday 13 January 2018. In Gwanda and Plumtree roadshows will be held on 17 and 19 January respectively. The roadshows are complementing other civic and voter education and mobilization efforts by the ZEC and other electoral stakeholders.

Recommendations

1. ZEC needs to closely work with government in setting up ensure that there is standardization of operations especially
2. ZEC should ensure wider publicity of the registration centres in all media, the advert on the centres was only published in The Herald.
3. There is need for targeted Voter Education programmes hence the need for ZEC to heed the call by electoral stakeholders to avail disaggregated data by age, sex, ward and district.
4. The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission should investigate the reports of intimidation in particular the recording of voter registration slips' serial numbers.
5. Electoral stakeholders such as CSOs, the media, political parties and faith based organisations must complement the efforts of ZEC to mobilise registrants as well as ensure publicity of the registration centres.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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