

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE - NUMBER 17

25 January 2018 – As part of its oversight role on electoral processes, ZESN continues to closely observe the ongoing Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) Mop-up exercise. This update is based on reports from ZESN's mobile and static observers who have been deployed at selected registration centres countrywide.

Issues with voter registration slips

ZESN notes with concern the continued intimidation of registrants by political players and traditional leaders through the recording of serial numbers on the voter registration slips. The collection of serial numbers of the voter registration slips is being done to intimidate voters who are informed that it is possible to know who they will vote on election day and it is also being made a precondition for one to receive food aid and agricultural inputs. For instance, ZESN received reports that in Gangarabwe Ward 11, Chiwundura, the ZANU PF ward chairperson and his team are moving around collecting serial numbers in the area, in Chibisa village Ward 4 Nyanga North the village head called for a meeting at Ruwangwe Growth Point where she threatened those who have not registered with unspecified actions making reference to the 2008 election violence. In addition, in Mutandiko village Ward 2 Nyanga North known ZANU PF activists are collecting the serial numbers and misinforming the villagers that they have been sent by ZEC to do so.

ZESN has since written to ZEC and ZHRC requesting them to denounce these actions and advocate for investigations. In addition, ZESN calls upon ZEC to provide information on the real purpose of the registration slips deliberately informing the voters that the serial numbers cannot be used to track one's choice on the ballot. Further, ZESN also calls upon the police to arrest the involved culprits.

Operating hours for voter registration centres

ZEC indicated at the start of the voter registration exercise that centres will open between 7 am and 5 pm daily and that individuals in queues after 5pm would be attended to. ZESN has however received reports of some registration officials who are not adhering to the stipulated operating hours and are sending potential registrants away hours before registration centres are set to close. For instance, in Kwekwe at the District office on 19 January 2018, the police officer at the gate was instructed to send away potential registrants at 2 pm on the basis that there were enough people already in the centre to be registered on the day. At the Masvingo District Offices, potential registrants who arrived after 3pm on 24

January 2018 were asked to return on the following day for them to be registered as voters. ZESN urges ZEC to ensure that all registration centres are adhering to the stipulated hours of operation in order to allow for the registration of all potential voters. The sending away of people before the closing hours is an unnecessary impediment to ensuring that all eligible citizens are registered to vote.

Turnout

As of 20 January 2018, ZEC indicated that they have registered 5,009,075 voters since the start of the BVR Blitz. Over the past 7 days, ZESN noted that turnout was generally high across the country. Registration centres such as Harare Town House, Mabvuku-Tafara, and Epworth Local Board recorded as high as more than 800 per day, 143 people on 19 January and a total of 70 by 1430 hours on 20 January, and 92 by 1530 on 20 January, respectively. Other centres such as Tsungubvi Community Hall in Mazowe District Ward 17 registered 276 in two days while Queen Elizabeth Primary School in Bulawayo Ward 23 registered 103 people on 23 January and Dunuza Primary School in Chiredzi Ward 18 registered 162 voters on 24 January.

In addition to the regular updates that ZEC has been releasing on registration statistics ZESN continues to urge the Commission to break the information into granular level to allow for stakeholders to better understand the information. For instance the Commission needs to organize the registration statistics into categories that include constituency, sex and age.

ZESN held roadshows that helped increase registrants turnout. For instance at a roadshow held in Matabeleland South at Bulilima ZEC District Office, a total of 101 voters registered while 63 registered at a roadshow in Bindura South Ward 10 at Manhenga growth point. The areas were targeted because they experience low registration rates during the four phases of the registration blitz.



Part of the people who registered at the roadshow held by ZESN at Manhenga growth point, in Bindura South Ward 10

Alien registration

While aliens turned out to register as voters, a significant number were turned away as they did not have long birth certificates. At the Mabvuku-Tafara registration centre, an average of 20 people was turned away per day, the majority of whom were elderly aliens without long birth certificates.

Recruitment of ZEC personnel

Throughout the registration exercise ZESN observers reported numerous challenges with registration officials that were seconded to ZEC from other government departments. It appeared that this category of ZEC officials were the least cooperative to observers' requests when they were asked for basic information, erroneously citing the Official Secrecy Act at every turn.

The Government should consider expanding the range of persons that can be seconded to ZEC during peak electoral periods. Students at Universities and other tertiary colleges ought to be considered as their aptitude with regards to interfacing with new technologies is generally higher than that of the older generations. In addition, allowances for students are likely to be considerably lower than those of staff from government departments thereby reducing the cost of elections considerably. The saving could be channeled towards expanding the number of registration centers in the future and used in electoral operations, among other things. In this regard, a cue can be taken from countries such as Kenya that have conducted successful mass mobile voter registration using students.

Voters' Roll inspection

Beyond the static and mobile static centers that ZEC will open for the purposes of voters' roll inspection, there is need for the Commission to consider other inexpensive but effective ways of facilitating the inspection of the voters' roll. Android applications and a secure portal on the internet may help increase access to this process by those who would have registered. In addition, an SMS facility could also be used as is the case in South Africa and Uganda so as to reach out to more people, particularly those who may not have access to the internet.

Recommendations:

1. The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission should investigate cases of the recording of voter registration slips' serial numbers by political actors which has become rampant in most areas. In addition official pronouncements by the Commission denouncing this practice may help deter this practice and inform registration that they are not obligated to comply with such requests which are extra-legal.
2. The Government should consider expanding the range of persons that can be seconded to ZEC during peak electoral periods. Students at Universities and other tertiary colleges ought to be considered.

3. ZEC should provide disaggregated statistics by district, ward, age, and sex to the public.
4. ZEC should create internet and/or sms based platforms where people can check their registration status without presenting themselves physically at voters' roll inspection centers.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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