



ZESN HOLDS VIRTUAL COMMUNITY TOWN HALL MEETINGS ON VOTER REGISTRATION



THE advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for most institutions to hold public meetings and discuss pertinent issues concerning democratic electoral and governance processes. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) was however presented with an opportunity to tap into technological spaces and carry on with efforts to provide civic education to the electorate.

As part of efforts to complement the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) in providing continuous voter education and enhancing citizen participation in key electoral processes; the ZESN conducted a series of virtual Provincial Community Town Hall meetings from the 7th of September to the 12th of October 2021. The meetings ran under the theme, *Voter Registration in Zimbabwe: Community Perspectives, Challenges and Opportunities for enhanced citizen participation.*

The meetings were part of ZESN efforts to sensitize citizens on the importance of active participation in electoral processes; to raise awareness on the voter registration process and requirements as well as to gather citizens' expectations and concerns surrounding the voter registration process to formulate home-grown strategies to address the challenges in all the provinces.

ZESN conducted virtual Community Hall meetings for Mashonaland West, Midlands, Bulawayo Metropolitan, Manicaland, Matabeleland North, Mashonaland East, Matabeleland South, Harare Metropolitan, Masvingo and Mashonaland Central Provinces. In attendance were members of the community, community-based organizations, representatives from the ZEC, social emerging groups, youths, trade unions, women, the business community, People with Disabilities (PwDs) among others. Speakers were drawn from ZEC, CSOs representing PwDs, Youth, Women and independent opinion leaders.

Key issues discussed in the meetings included;

The need for continuous broad-based civic and voter education to sensitize communities on the importance of citizens' participation in governance and the electoral process was underscored.

Young people implored ZEC and CSOs to embrace ICTs and increase the use of digital platforms and social media platforms to mobilize young people to register to vote in the 2023 harmonized elections.

BELOW: One of the Public Flyer Poster inviting people to attend the Virtual Meeting.

Participants called upon ZEC and CSOs to ensure that voter education campaigns are appealing to the youth through edutainment, music, podcasts and engagement of celebrities' and the so-called 'brand ambassadors'.

Participants also discussed and highlighted that the low numbers in voter registration were mainly caused by long distances to provincial and district voter registration centres. Participants requested ZEC to increase and further decentralize voter registration centres in both rural and urban areas. Further participants encouraged ZEC to have a toll-free number to enable citizens who may have queries to get in touch with them.

Some participants suggested that governance and electoral education should be part of the school curriculum so that citizen participation in democracy is nurtured in young people at an early age.

Participants recommended that voter education efforts be targeted more in urban areas because turnout of urban people in key electoral processes remains low as compared to rural folk.

Participants highlighted the perennial challenges that youths and potential first-time voter's face in accessing National Identification, and that if not addressed many youths will be disenfranchised in 2023 elections.

PwDs implored ZEC to ensure that voter registration centres are disability friendly and accessible to people on wheelchairs and that some IECs be produced in a format that can be accessed by PwDs in particular those who are visually impaired, those with hearing impairment and those with speech impairment.

Representatives from the different workers' unions requested ZEC to be flexible on their operating times since voter registration is currently being done during working hours. They also urged ZEC to consider voter registration blitz after hours and during weekends and to decentralize the process and consider even conducting mobile registration at Covid-19 vaccination centres.

LET'S TALK ABOUT VOTER REGISTRATION

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK IS INVITING YOU TO A SCHEDULED ZOOM MEETING

TOPIC

VOTER REGISTRATION – COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCED CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

07 OCTOBER 2021
1400 – 1630HRS
HARARE VIRTUAL COMMUNITY HALL

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88069656138>
MEETING ID: 880 6965 6138 PASSCODE: 187221

DESMOND SHARUKAI
(YETI) MODERATOR

LODEEN MUDASIRI
COMBINED HARARE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION (CHRA) DIRECTOR

MAYIS KALUMBU
ZIMBABWE CIVIC EDUCATION TRUST (ZIMCET) TEAM LEADER

KENAS SHONHAI
ZIMBABWE HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION (ZIMHRA) PROJECTS LAWYER

SAMUEL GWENZI
ZINASU NATIONAL COORDINATOR

DI BITA NYAMPINGA
WOMEN'S COALITION OF ZIMBABWE (WOCZ) POLITICAL AND DECISION MAKING CLUSTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – FEMINIST

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK

CHRA

ZIMCET

ZIMHRA

ZINASU

WOMEN'S COALITION OF ZIMBABWE (WOCZ)

STAY SAFE FROM COVID-19

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ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION – IS ZIMBABWE READY FOR IT?



IN July, the South African government announced the launch of an online voter registration portal. The first phase of South Africa's voter accessibility initiative started in 2019 where they made it possible for the electorate to amend and confirm their details online. The practice and procedure for voter registration is prescribed in section 17A of the Electoral Act which states that voter registration must be open and continuous in all Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) district and provincial centres in Zimbabwe.

Citizens should be allowed to register as voters anytime by filling out the registration form and submitting biometric data to a ZEC Voter Registration official who captures the submitted data. In 2017 the ZEC adopted a form of electronic registration model named Biometric Voter Registration (BVR).

GOVERNMENT has been urged to fully migrate all voter registration processes online after announcing that mobile devices will be used for mapping and data collection for the 2022 Census. The questions that some stakeholders have been asking, is whether Zimbabwe is ready for it?

Recently the ZEC developed an online based platform where voters can verify if they are registered or not as well as their details such as if names are correctly spelt, the polling station allocated where they can cast their vote on polling day, residential address, the National ID number among others.

The question has been can ZEC take a step further and allow the platform to enable voters to correct their data.

TechZim Editor Valentine Muhamba argued that there is no more excuse for failure or refusal to allow online voter registration since eligible voters could verify their registration details on USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data) ahead of the 2023 general elections.

The USSD is a Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) protocol that is used to send text messages.

The SMS, USSD and online verification process is, according to the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), one of the four ways voter registrations and verification can happen online or digitally. "The pandemic should be used as a reason to introduce online voter registration. It is strange that in the age of digitisation, there has yet to be an attempt to bring the voter registration process online in Zimbabwe," Muhamba argued in a commentary calling for online voter registration.

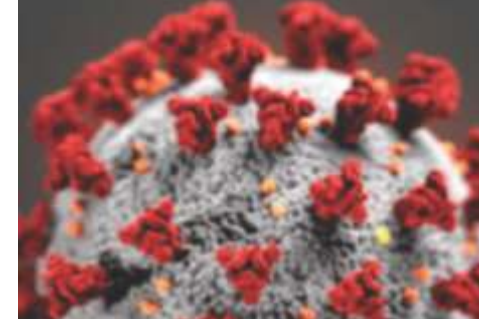
Muhamba added that, "we all submit our biometric data when we get an ID or passport, which means that the government has that data on file, the authorities can verify the information submitted when an online voter registration application is made. There has never been a better time than now to bring the process online or at the very least put it to a test."

An American network of academics and researchers under the umbrella body, the Scholars Strategy Network, lists a number of online voter registration benefits such as offering familiar conveniences. "Registration problems are uncovered before Election Day, because registrants receive immediate feedback to indicate that they are registered or that their registration information has been updated successfully. Online registration likewise reduces the risk of clerical errors caused by the manual transcription of paper forms," the Network notes. "This ensures a more accurate voter registration list and makes it much less likely that would-be voters will be turned away or delayed when they attempt to cast their ballots."

While it may be noble to migrate voter registration to online platforms since it is one of the fundamental electoral processes, adequate resource mobilisation is also pertinent to guarantee the compilation of a quality voters' roll and campaigns since the exercise is largely costly. This therefore means even the sustainability of high-tech approaches can be problematic especially for countries like Zimbabwe currently experiencing economic challenges. Furthermore, there will be a need to formulate clear regulations and policies to safeguard against abuse and intimidation of potential voters.

The disadvantages of mobile voter registration are; issues surrounding capturing registrants' biometric details such as fingerprints and facial or iris recognition data; absence of data integrity checks when the data is captured, no pointers around glitches incurred at the point of registration and forms can be wrongly filled in since there is no data verification.

It
takes
'u' and 'i'
to
fight
COVID-19
V-R-S



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MIXED VIEWS OVER WOMEN AND YOUTH PROVISIONS IN CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT NO. 2



STAKEHOLDERS have expressed mixed views over the women and youth provisions contained in Constitutional Amendment No. 2 with some saying that the provisions fall short in addressing gender equality across the board as well as addressing representation of the youth. On the other hand, some sections of Zimbabwean women and youths believe that they have emerged the 'biggest winners in Constitutional Amendment Bill No. 2.

The gazetting of Constitutional Amendment Bill No. 2 comes months after the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and women organisations called for the enactment of the Political Parties Registration, Regulation and Finance Act which will compel political parties to ensure 50/50 gender representation in the executive of political parties and candidates when contesting in elections.

The 2013 Constitution had a clause shielding six women per province from the rigors of a direct election by authorising political parties to pick them depending on their provincial popularity. This clause was valid for ten (10) years and was supposed to expire in 2023 and the Constitutional Amendment No. 2 extends the clause by a further ten (10) years.

The amendment further says at least (5) five of the women elected indirectly must be under the age of 35 years. This means that apart from getting more women in Parliament in general, the Constitution now specifically gives space for young women in the legislature.

The amendment's focus on youths does not end there – it now provides for ten (10) more seats in the National Assembly, one from each of the country's ten (10) provinces, must be for people aged between 21 and 35 years, also elected through proportional representation and to implement this new provisions there is a proposal from women and youth organisations that the youths should be five (5) of each gender.

The provisions therefore guarantee that 15 seats in the Lower House will be held by youths aged 35 years and below.



Rosewita Katsande
Youth Empowerment and
Transformation Trust (YETT)
Executive Director

Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT) Executive Director Rosewita Katsande said they welcome the institutionalisation of the youth quota as this is something that youth have been demanding for since 2017. *"The youth quota signifies a realisation that for a long-time youth have faced structural barriers which have prevented their meaningful participation in politics and governance processes of the country"*, said Katsande.

Katsande highlighted that the youth quota of 10 seats is however inadequate and the 25% as outlined in the National Youth Policy should have been the starting point. In addition, any youth quota must never be deemed as an end but the beginning of serious youth inclusion. *"We recommend the following measures concerning the youth quota:*

i)The youth quota system should not be dominated by party politics and must ensure inclusivity to cater for marginalised groups of young people such as young women and youth living with disabilities

ii)The youth quota should ensure representation of youth in all public office/ leadership positions from the grassroots going upwards e.g. starting at village, ward, and council to National level".

Katsande added that, as a country, there is also a need to address some inconsistencies and realities that affect meaningful youth participation including the following: the minimum age required for one to run for office (21 years - parliamentary, and 40 years- senate and president); decentralization of the issuance of national documents; addressing existing laws and practises that limit the participation of youths and young persons in political life including reforming the electoral act as well as media laws.

The minimum age to run for office is often higher than the minimum voting age pegged at 18 years, hence there is need to address such inconsistencies by ensuring that as soon as a citizen can vote, they are allowed to run for public office. Furthermore, voting in one's democratic right, and most youths especially from the rural communities cannot exercise this right because they don't have IDs. The government through the Ministry of Home Affairs should decentralize the issuance of national documents and providing adequate resources to solve challenges associated with IDs.

"As we welcome the youth quota discussion, we implore the government to be cognisant of the fact that Youth constitute more than 67% of the total population, the 10 seats is not a true reflection of youth representation/political participation especially as candidates. We need increased commitment by the government to youth inclusion by creating an enabling environment that facilitates open, inclusive, participatory and accountable governance. Youth representation must straddle state bodies, agencies, institutions and other public bodies," said Katsande.

Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) president Douglas Mwonozora said the amendments on the women and youth quota is 'consistent' with demands of the opposition party. *"It is consistent with what we said as the MDC T. We support the women's quota and youth quota provisions because we believe that the women's and youth quota enhance democracy,"* Mwonozora said.



Douglas Mwonozora
Movement for Democratic
Change T (MDC-T)
President

Mwonozora highlighted that, *"these are what we call empowerment provisions in the sense that we are empowering previously marginalised groups like the youth and the women. For the first time, we are going to have about 10 more MP's who are youth. It is consistent with our philosophy that the youth are not leaders of tomorrow, they are leaders of today."*



Sikhululekile Moyo
Movement for Democratic
Change Alliance (MDC-A)
Bulawayo Councilor

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MDC Alliance Bulawayo councilor Sikhululekile Moyo added: "As women, we are happy for that move because it increases chances of women political participation. However, we should be working towards 50/50 representation otherwise for now with this amendment on the youth and women's quota; we believe we are in the right direction."

An analysis of the 2013 and 2018 election outcome shows that representation of women at local government has been declining since the 2008 elections when the representation of women at the local level stood at 18%. In 2013 it had declined to 16% and by a further 2 percentage points to 14% in the 2018 elections.

According to Gender Links, a South African headquartered civic group with offices in 10 SADC countries and formed in 2001 to advance women's rights in the sub-region, they said the Constitutional Amendment No. 2 was a 'God-send' for women in Zimbabwe.

"This amendment is a huge milestone as Gender Links turns 20," said Priscilla Maposa, Gender Links Local Action for Gender Justice Regional Networking Manager.



Priscilla Maposa
Gender Links Local Action for
Gender Justice Regional
Networking Manager

The extension of the women's quota through Amendment No. 2 came just over a month after the Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence (WALPE) launched a campaign to mobilise 2.2 million women across the country to vote for women candidates to reverse the historical and structural inequalities that inhibit women from effectively and fully occupying influential leadership positions.

President Mnangagwa in December consented to a demand by female politicians to allow for a 30% representation in local government during a Woman in Local Government

Forum held under the auspices of the Zimbabwe Local Government Association (Zilga) in Victoria Falls. ZESN and women organisations are working together to come up with an advocacy model on how this 50-50 representation can be achieved under the current electoral system.

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