

## **ZESN CONCERNED WITH THE SLOW PACE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF ELECTORAL REFORMS**

**29 September 2021** - The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) has been tracking progress by the government in the implementation of electoral reforms premised on recommendations proffered by local, regional and international Election Observer Missions (EOMs) to the 2018 harmonized elections. Notably, parliament passed and the President assented to the Constitutional Amendment Number 2, which extended the women's quota in the National Assembly for another ten (10) years, introduced a 30 percent women's quota in local government, and provided for a quota for ten (10) youths in the National Assembly on a party-list basis and five (5) female youths within the current women's quota.

While Constitutional Amendment Number 2 extended the women's quota for another 10 years, introduced a 30 percent women's quota in local government, ZESN is of the view that, notably this amounts to a change, however it is unlikely that gender parity will be attained in the 2023 elections based on this electoral framework. Concerning youth participation, the Amendment now provides for a youth quota system. While the constitutional change guarantees some youthful representatives in the National Assembly, it appears that the number of representatives provided for in the Amendment was not informed by a scientific approach or meaningful consultations with the affected youth. The quota is at odds with population demographics and official voter registration and participation statistics. Further, whereas the Amendment mentioned People with Disabilities (PwDs), it was short on details for implementation. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission adopted a Gender and Inclusion Policy, while it is a positive development, it cannot be enforced as law.

In the absence of a clearer and more effective legal framework on the inclusion of women, young persons and PwDs it would seem that these changes will remain as symbols of tokenism that will not address the values of the 2013 Constitution on these matters.

In addition, some of the critical reforms that have not been addressed include; strengthening the independence of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC); reviewing legal provisions around voter registration and the voters' roll; voter education and election observation; tightening the provisions on results management to enhance transparency, reduce suspicion and results contestation; streamlining election dispute mechanisms; domesticating the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG); enhancing electoral administration through clearer legal provisions and electoral practice; reviewing provisions on political party registration and regulation; establishing a clear legal provisions around the delimitation of electoral boundaries; implementing the provisions under Section 287 of the Constituency on integrity and ethics on the role of traditional leaders in elections; the right to vote and the inclusion of women, young persons and persons with disability in electoral and governance processes as well as in political representation; evening the electoral playing field and improving the political environment among other administrative electoral reforms which do not require any amendments to the electoral laws.

Media law and policy reforms remain in limbo despite the regulatory powers conferred on ZEC concerning the media during election periods. There have not been any changes to the ZEC media monitoring legal framework informed by experiences of previous elections. ZESN has noted the issuance of new radio and television broadcasting licenses which have resulted in a plurality of players, of concerns are sentiments from key electoral stakeholders that the stations remain appendages of the State and the country risks having a perpetuation of biased media coverage of elections, which is an anathema to democracy.

ZESN calls upon the government to move with speed in the implementation of the electoral reforms, as most remain unattended at a time when Zimbabwe is barely two years away from

yet another set of harmonized elections in 2023. If addressed early, the reforms would contribute to a more credible electoral process. Having to rush electoral law changes on the eve of elections, as has been the case in the past, is not in the best interest of democracy.

ZESN will continue to monitor and track the implementation of electoral reforms as part of its efforts in promoting and strengthening democratic electoral processes in Zimbabwe.////**ENDS**