

2023 HARMONISED ELECTIONS: POST ELECTION REVIEW AND LESSONS LEARNT CONFERENCE REPORT



HOLIDAY INN – BULAWAYO
28-29 FEBRUARY 2024



**Zimbabwe Election
Support Network** ■

Promoting Democratic
Elections In Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) held a two-day Conference in Bulawayo from 28 to 29 February 2024 with the overall objective; **to review the 2023 Harmonized Elections focusing on the legislative framework, the administrative framework and the political environment**. The meeting also analyzed the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other electoral stakeholders in the elections. More specifically, the Conference sought to facilitate a constructive evaluation and well-informed review of the 2023 Harmonized Elections by reflecting on the successes, failures and lessons learnt in the elections. It also sought to share an understanding among stakeholders of the gaps in the electoral framework as well as stakeholders' input on the recommendations to be adopted ahead of the 2028 Harmonized Elections and by-elections that take place in between.

The Conference was attended by 130 delegates drawn from ZESN Member organisations, the Chapter 12 Institutions Supporting Democracy, political parties, members of the academia, media organisations, other CSOs' Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) working on elections and representing various interests groups like women, youth and Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Among the Chapter 12 Institutions were representatives from the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC), Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) and the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC). Political parties represented at the workshop included Zimbabwe African Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), United Zimbabwe Alliance (UZA) and the Labour Economists African Democrats (LEAD).

The presentations at the Conference covered various themes, including the legislative and administrative framework, the political environment and the role of CSOs and other electoral stakeholders. Other themes examined included political party campaign strategies and messaging, electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, the role of the media in elections and key lessons and recommendations from the 2023 elections. The Conference featured presentations and panel discussions led by experts, practitioners, and observers who offered diverse perspectives on the 2023 elections.



ZESN Chairperson:
Mr Andrew Makoni

In his welcome address, ZESN Chairperson Mr Andrew Makoni stated that following an invitation by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), ZESN trained and deployed a total of 6,500 Short-Term Observers (STOs) to observe the 23 August 2023 Harmonised Elections. He remarked that the 2023 Harmonised Elections in Zimbabwe were marked by a lack of genuine electoral reforms, with only cosmetic changes made. He stated that the Zimbabwean government made cosmetic amendments to the Electoral Act, such as removing the driver's license as proof of identity, which critics believe omitted substantive reforms that could have improved the transparency and credibility of elections. Mr Makoni further noted that the appointment of six (6) new Commissioners, freshmen and women, under controversial circumstances, sparked concerns about the appointment process. He submitted that voter turnout dropped 14.2% compared to 2018, with only one woman contesting among the 11 presidential candidates; young electoral participation and representation were limited, with only 35 young people making it into the National Assembly. Mr Makoni remarked that voting day faced challenges due to delayed ballot papers, leading to the proclamation of Statutory Instrument (S.I) 151, which extended voting to 24 August. He also made reference to the SADC Election Observer Mission (SEOM) report which had indicated that some aspects of the Harmonised Elections fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act, and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021).

The session on “*The Review of Electoral Reforms and Legal Framework*” focused on Electoral Reforms and the Electoral Legal Framework between 2018 and 2023 as well as a synopsis of Zimbabwe's dispute resolution and election-related litigation in the pre and post-2023 Harmonized Elections period. The discussion highlighted some of the outstanding electoral reforms that still need to be addressed before the conduct of the next harmonized elections including the need to consider registration, regulation and financing of political parties, enhancing ZEC independence and other institutions supporting democracy, ensuring gender balance in governance and electoral representation among others.

The Conference also noted that the 2023 Harmonized Elections were one of the most contested in Zimbabwean history, with the highest number of electoral disputes brought before the Courts. The discussions at the Conference examined the numerous court challenges and disputes that arose during the 2023 elections and the level of impact these had on the election processes and outcome. The need for a more efficient and effective system for resolving electoral disputes was emphasized.

Dr James Tsabora, a legal expert and member of the academia presented on; “*A Review of the 2018-2023 Electoral Reforms and Electoral Legal Framework*” and started his session by asking for reform suggestions from the house. The participants cited the following as pertinent reforms: political party regulation, independence of ZEC, Security sector reform, voter registration, media reforms, diaspora/external voting, electoral system overhaul and inclusion of women to gender 50/50 system.



From left to the right: Valerie Zviuya, Fortune Chasi, Dr. James Tsabora & Jeremiah Bhamu

In his presentation, Tsabora highlighted that proper electoral procedures are crucial to ensuring citizens fully enjoy their rights. He stressed the importance of focusing on the right procedure as this allows people to exercise their rights. He also highlighted that key international principles have very limited impact as they are watered down to be more agreeable among various States. Commenting on the SADC Principles on Elections, Tsabora said these were good but required to be updated.

In his remarks, Dr Tsabora pointed out to the significance of continually reviewing and progressing electoral laws and guidelines to safeguard the conduct of democratic elections.

Another presentation under this segment was by legal practitioner Jeremiah Bamu who presented on Zimbabwe's Electoral Dispute Resolutions and gave an overview of the electoral litigation in the pre and post 2023 Harmonized Election. Bamu argued that the 2023 Harmonized elections were the most litigated elections in Zimbabwe as several issues were brought into the Courts. He traced the litigation of cases since 2020 when factional battles with the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party were brought to the Supreme Court.

The presenter noted that the events of March 2020 triggered a lot of electoral disputes. The Supreme Court held that Nelson Chamisa was not the rightful leader of the CCC, which triggered recalls in the party. Another case was that of Douglas Mwonzora who made an application on the delimitation report to have it re-written. He made an appeal for the president not to proclaim elections until the delimitation had been redone. Douglas Mwonzora lost his challenge. Hence the 2023 elections were held against the contested delimitation.

The presentation also acknowledged that on Election Day, there were delays in the delivery of ballot papers and other materials in some areas, mostly in Harare, Bulawayo and Manicaland. It was noted that a Statutory Instrument (SI) was promulgated to extend voting in affected polling stations by a further 12 hours. However, there is no law which gives the president such powers to pass the SI, making its promulgation unconstitutional.

Plenary discussions:

During the discussion, a question was raised inquiring on whether litigation was producing the desired results or not. Dr Tsabora stated that the courts should not be the only dispute resolution mechanism and there is a need for several administrative institutions that are strong to resolve electoral matters. Citing the Konjana case of 2018, Tsabora argued that the current law strips ZEC of all powers to correct even simple mistakes and that this should be resolved.

A question directed to Jeremiah Bamu asked on what kind or the extent to which electoral anomalies or malpractices warrants nullification of polls. Bamu responded that, in line with the Electoral Act an election can only be set aside if the malpractice substantially affects the outcome of the election.

Election Observation

The session on '*Key Observations and Lessons Learnt in the 2023 Harmonized Elections*', brought to the fore that in 2023, organisations were given accreditation for voter education late, which affected their efforts to complement the ZEC in voter education. The presentation by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC), Kurai Makumbe, highlighted that even though the environment was peaceful and calm, about 90 cases of political violence were recorded, in addition to reports of partisan distribution of food aid, the partisan involvement of the police and traditional leaders in elections.

Kurai Makumbe the representative of the ZHRC noted that the 2023 Harmonized elections were conducted in line with the law starting with the Proclamation, Nomination Court, Polling and Announcement of results. She stated that the ZHRC commends ZEC for conducting voter education exercises across the country which made the electorate appreciate the voting process. The ZHRC notes that despite the logistical challenges that included delay in the delivery of ballot papers, voters roll and other election material, voting went on for a prescribed 12-hour period allowing people to exercise their right to vote.



From left to the right: Paul Muchena, Kurai Makumbe, Ian Goredema, Dr Barbara Bhebhe & Dr Tendaiwo Maregere

The ZESN Monitoring and Observation Manager presented on behalf of the organisation. He gave an overview of some of the key changes to the electoral framework that took place before the elections. His presentation also focused on voter registration, voter education, the candidate selection process and the Election Day administration. He bemoaned the lack of meaningful electoral reforms and the disruption of ZESN observation efforts on Election Day. He noted the key lessons from the elections include the need for the review of the voter education curriculum and methodology, the need for better coordination of election observers and the timely adoption of electoral reforms to enhance the credibility of the electoral process.

An Election Observation Expert, Dr. Tendaiwo Maregere highlighted that Zimbabwe's 2023 election was held in a highly polarized political environment, marked by growing restrictions on political and civil freedoms, increasing pressures on civil society, and an acute economic crisis. Electoral stakeholders – particularly the government, political parties, and civil society organisations – clashed over several issues related to critical reforms in the administration of the polls,

the composition of the election management body, the boundary delimitation process, voter registration, candidate nominations, and the inclusivity of the voters' roll, among other things.

The enactment and consideration of legislation restricting fundamental freedoms of speech, movement, and association, as well as a pattern of human right violations in the lead up to the polls, created an environment that was not conducive to the conduct of genuine elections. All of these factors contributed to political tensions and polarization, and had a chilling effect on CSOs and the campaigns. Another presenter, Dr. Barbra Ontibile Bhebhe the Election Resource Centre (ERC) Executive Director noted that the 2023 fell short in many respects including catering for special needs such as braille for the visually impaired; access to the voters roll; an 'unprofessional' among other things.

Plenary discussions:

A question was directed to Kurai Makumbe, the ZHRC representative on why the Commission (ZHRC) does not take action even if they note several glaring illegalities in the conduct of elections. Makumbe responded that the Commission refers cases to the Commissioner General of Police to investigate and it has also made recommendations to political parties.

She further stated that the ZHRC was making a further effort to be truly national and accessible to all people and hence it has opened provincial offices in several provincial capitals including in Mutare, Chinhoyi, Lupane and Bulawayo.

Participation of Special Groups

The discussion on *"Participatory Rights- Key Lessons Learnt on the Participation of Women, Youth and PWDs in Electoral Processes in the 2023 Harmonized Elections"* highlighted that the participation of these groups in the 2023 Harmonized elections was minimal. Discussions also focused on ways to increase voter turnout, particularly among women, youth, and PWDs. Strategies included improving voter education, addressing accessibility issues, and promoting inclusive political participation. The presentations laid out the different barriers affecting these such as electoral violence, inadequate resources and opportunities. Political parties were urged to make provisions to facilitate greater participation of these groups through mechanisms employed at political party level.

Zimbabwe Gender Commission representative Dalubuhle Sibanda stated that the 2023 Harmonized Elections were the third elections to be held under a gender progressive Constitution in Zimbabwe, the elections also coincided with the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the global blueprint for women's empowerment. However, findings from this report reveals that despite some progress, the 2023 elections were held under constant sidelining and disregard for these legal frameworks. Despite the considerable progress made in recent years, gender equality in electoral processes remains an elusive goal.



From left to the right: Bruce Nyoni, Rosewitta Katsande, Misheck Gondo & Dalubuhle Sibanda

Another presentation was from the Director of the Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT) Ms. Rosewita Katsande was of the opinion that the youth quota system ignored gender parity, and this affected the representation of diverse groups of young people. She also stated that Youth quota MPs are more vulnerable to represent political party positions over youth constituency concerns in parliamentary debates. In addition to that, young people in political parties reported that selection of youth quota candidates was tokenistic. Elected youths had relations with political elites and may represent their interest over the youth constituency.

In the same vein, Mr. Misheck Gondo, the Director of the National Association of Youth Organisations (NAYO) noted some of the positive lessons learnt on youth participation from the 2023 Harmonized Elections. These include the existence of a largely peaceful pre-electoral environment, the increased use of Youth-Peer to Peer Mobilization Strategies, Youth Targeting and Engagement and the effective Use of Technologies including social media and other Innovation. He commended the relaxation of proof of residence for voter registration and the introduction of the Youth Quota System as having contributed to better participation by the youth in the elections. He also urged Zimbabwe to take a leaf from the South African book on the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) establishment of the National Youth Dialogue on Electoral Democracy (NYDED) which is an effective platform ensuring the participation of young people in the electoral process.

Mr. Bruce Nyoni the Executive Director Albino Trust of Zimbabwe noted that the turnout of persons with disabilities in the 2023 harmonized elections was very low, and some of the factors contributing to that were that some polling stations were without interpreters, and some were not accessible to PWDs. He recommended the need for political parties to have disability inclusion policies. He also called for a disability law which mandates the capturing of all disability types during voter registration, as well as the kind of assistance needed on polling day.

Plenary:

A query was raised concerning the responsiveness of ZEC to key demands from women, the youth and Persons with Disabilities and the extent to which there is progress towards the democratization of electoral processes. The panelists responded by stating that the main challenge was that electoral reforms are usually instituted towards elections which gives little time and attention to their demands.

Another question was raised on how voter apathy by you could be addressed or mitigated. It was suggested that the use of social media, which is popular with many young people, as well as more engagement opportunities with young people could be useful.

Political Processes

A panel discussion titled; "Postmortem of the 2023 Harmonized Elections- with a focus on political processes consisting of Political Party representatives and an academic focused on pertinent issues that can help improve electoral integrity. Emphasis was made on the need for political party regulation to address, among other things, the allocation of funds to political parties. It was also noted that political parties are guilty of muffling female voices within their ranks which has led to fewer women having the courage to participate in elections. It was also observed that party recalls, although a noble idea in principle, have been manipulated to deal with intra party conflicts, leading to the erosion of democracy from political party level and citizens' interest in elections. It was recommended that there be clearly laid out motives, principles, thresholds and clear outlines for any recalls to take place. It was noted that candidate recall dates to 1989 and has been exercised by both the ruling party and the main opposition. However, in all instances, candidate recalls were seemingly done to suit party interests.

Dr Gordon Moyo submitted that internal party democracy is under attack and Zimbabwe is not alone in experiencing this backsliding in political organisations. This has become a worldwide phenomenon where autocracy and autocratic tendencies are increasing. He further stated that democracy was under attack with both the ruling and opposition attacking democracy. He submitted that internal democracy was under attack as the trend of idolizing party leaders was growing and academics, scholars were either leaving party politics or remaining silent to protect their privileges or opportunities. Dr Moyo argued that democracy in Zimbabwe has been reduced to numbers or populism rather than substance and this has seen the emergence of 'praise singers' replacing critical thinking.

On party registration, Dr Moyo said that there is nothing wrong with registration of political parties in a normal and functional democracy but there are context-specific problems when it comes to Zimbabwe as the institutions in Zimbabwe are not to be trusted with such responsibility. He submitted that there was a danger that some political parties could be deregistered and not allowed to participate in electoral processes.



From left to right: Dr Gordon Moyo, Elisabeth Valerio, Linda Masarira, Charles Madhiwa and Dr Phillani Zamchiya

In his presentation, Honourable Fortune Chasi, stated that ZANU-PF appreciates the work that ZESN is doing and its technical and funding partners. He highlighted that it is important that though ZESN and ZANU-PF do not always agree they meet at such platforms and dialogue. Honourable Chasi cited that democracy is a continuous process that all Zimbabweans must continuously work towards.

When democracy is contextualized in Zimbabwean political history, a political party is a key instrument of a democratic practice. Each political party must within itself epitomize democracy. Failure of the political parties to achieve democracy within itself will result in our people not being represented fully. The system ZANU-PF has as a party works for intra party democracy.

On political parties registration, Chasi stated that it was a current and ongoing debate and ZANU-PF was generally supportive of the idea. He stated that should political parties be registered or regulated such should be done guided by constitutional provisions and guidelines including gender equality, transparency (with respect to processes and campaign finance), accountability and being considerate to the national history of the country.

Charles Madhiwa of the CCC acknowledged that political party registration is a best practice and has been adopted both in the SADC sub region and on the continent and has helped to manage some teething problems associated with non-registration of political parties in their respective jurisdiction.

In Southern Africa Lesotho and South Africa are examples of jurisdictions whose laws provide for registration and regulation of political parties by their respective Election Management Boards. In East Africa, Kenya and Tanzania also have domestic laws that provide for registration of political parties, unlike the SADC examples the East African countries have a separate office that deals with Party registration, the office of the Registrar of Parties. In some jurisdictions like Angola and Mozambique political parties that are registered with the EMB receive campaign funding from the government.

Whilst acknowledging that political party registration theoretically good the CCC has reservations because of the political environment. He stated that political party registration has its advantages and disadvantages. In his view, the main challenge is the potential deregistration of other political players' particularly those in the opposition.

In his presentation on “*Zimbabwe 2023 Harmonized Elections, Recalls and Subsequent By-Elections: Lessons Learnt and Insights into Democratic Processes*”, Dr. Phillan Zamchiya argued that Zimbabwe was currently in a recall fever but however, recalls were not a new phenomenon or mechanism. He stated that ideally recalls mainly serve to reinforce accountability. In Zimbabwe, however, recalls are used for intra -political party power struggles and the law of recalls was brought forward by the ZANU-PF government after Edgar Tekere, having been expelled from the ZANU-PF party, remained a Member of Parliament. The recall law became part of the Zimbabwe law in 1989 and was first used at the turn of the millennium by the MDC opposition party when Morgan Tsvangirai recalled Munyaradzi Gwisai, with then President Mnangagwa being the Speaker of Parliament. Zamchiya stated that in other jurisdictions, the recalls are instituted by individuals or citizens rather than political parties and this makes Members of Parliament accountable to the electorate rather than the political party they belong to.

Plenary Discussions:

Asked on the issue of political violence and intimidation which was allegedly linked to the Forever Associates Zimbabwe (FAZ), believed to be affiliated with the ruling party, Hon Chasi remarked that he was not aware of the organisation and had never had any interaction or interface with it.

LEAD president Linda Masarira asked Chasi whether the views he shared on political party registration were his personal views or views of the party (ZANU-PF). The response was that he was speaking on behalf of ZANU-PF.

A representative of Deaf Zimbabwe Trust asked Chasi on what ZANU-PF structures and platforms have for the inclusion of PWDs, and he remarked that ZANU PF has a progressive approach towards PWDs and they have a secretary at the highest party level, in the Politburo, who handles issues of PWDs.

An inquiry was made as to what was ZANU-PF's position regarding Section 129k of the Constitution (recall initiated after a Member of Parliament ceases to be a member of a political party). Chasi responded that S129K is what it is, it is the law. He stated that if the law is not sufficiently refined it is the role of the court to interpret it. Another question asked what was ZANU-PF's definition of 'youth'. Chasi's response was that ZANU PF looks at the constitution and the secretary for youth is a young person.

ZESN Chair, Andrew Makoni, directing his remarks to Chasi, stated that since political party registration was part of the current and ongoing debate as Chasi had alluded to, they could consider institutional arrangements such as Kenya where the Registrar of the Office of Political Parties register parties and have an online tracking tool. Makoni urged Chasi that his party could visit online and physically. Chasi stated that the Parliament of Zimbabwe has scheduled trip to Tanzania and some countries on a learning mission on political party regulations.

A delegate asked Chasi if ZANU-PF respects the work that ZESN is doing, and why ZESN staff and observers were arrested on election-day. Chasi responded that as a party ZANU PF does not arrest anyone, those who arrest were entirely a different body, and ZANU-PF is not a party to that body.

The Media and Elections

The discussion on “*The Media and Elections*”- *Lessons Learnt* focused on election reporting and Media Coverage of the 2023 Elections and the influence of social media on the electoral process. It was noted that great efforts were made to ensure that the media adhered to standards. The ZMC was commended for ensuring the creation of a conducive and peaceful elections. The Conference examined the role of media in shaping public opinion and ensuring informed voter choices. Concerns were raised about biased coverage and the spread of misinformation on social media. Participants called for a more professional and responsible media environment.

The presentation made by the Chairperson of the ZMC, Professor Ruby Magosvongwe, applauded the media for being professional in their conduct during the 2023 elections. She commended the training programmes undertaken by the Commission as well as by other stakeholders as having some indelible influence on the reportage of the election story. She noted that from the observations made, nearly all publications displayed a high level of fairness, objectivity and a high measure of responsibility. The Commission aimed to promote professional and responsible media that promotes free flow of information and content that enables citizens to make informed decisions. The media as the fourth estate was expected to provide a communication platform between contestants and voters, enabling voters to judge for themselves and make informed decisions when casting their votes or ballots. The ZMC constituted the Media Monitoring Committee, which monitored the coverage of the elections in line with the provisions of the ZEC Media Coverage of Elections General Regulations.

She also highlighted that in order to enhance the security of journalists during the election period, the Commission engaged stakeholders and called on them to respect the profession and allow journalists to work without undue hindrances. To enhance the safety of journalists, the Commission procured Press Jackets for all practitioners who covered the elections. Training programs undertaken by the Commission and other stakeholders had some influence on the reportage of the election story.



From left to right: Mrs Farisai Chaniwa, Rev. Useni Sibanda
Professor Ruby Magosvongwe & Nigel Nyamutumbu

Another presentation was by Mrs. Farisai Chaniwa the Media Monitors, Executive Director. She pointed out some irregularities in the media coverage of the 2023 elections, including gender inequalities evidenced by only 7% coverage of women candidates compared to 93% coverage for men. In addition to that there were numerous breaches to the defined ethical standards on reporting, with as many as 46 defamation of character cases reported. She recommended that for future elections, policy makers must work on improving public access to information and freedom of expression.

The presentation on *“Social Media Influence on Electoral Process – An Analysis of the Trends, Challenges and Key Lessons Learnt from the 2023 Harmonized Elections”* was taken by Mr. Nigel Nyamutumbu, Media Alliance of Zimbabwe, Programs Manager. He noted that making scientific conclusions on elections from social media data is problematic because disinformation is easily disseminated on such platforms. He however acknowledged the power of social media by noting that the reach on electoral information surpassed the number of people who voted. However, much of the engagement focused on partisan narratives and well as doctored statements purporting to be from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. He called for the implementation of the Data Protection Act which criminalizes the spread of false information. He also called for the adoption of Artificial Intelligent systems to enhance information sharing and dissemination.

Plenary Discussions:

One of the participants raised a question inquiring on the resurgence of violation of journalists rights and safety and the safety nets that are there for them. Panelists responded that dialogue was being encouraged to curb zealous action from some quotas. A point was raised asking whether there was a way to make State media more inclusive in the coverage of both issues and political actors. Prof Magosvongwe responded that the ZMC is trying to bridge the gap of partisanship and toxicity through engagement and dialogue.

A question was also asked concerning what is being done to promote the use of other languages including sign language on national media platforms. Prof Magosvongwe responded that efforts are being made to encourage the use of local languages and community radios were also crucial in that.

Conclusions

The ZESN Post-Election Conference served as a vital platform for stakeholders to critically evaluate the 2023 Harmonized Elections. By identifying key issues and formulating actionable recommendations, the Conference contributes significantly to the ongoing dialogue on enhancing the transparency, inclusivity, and credibility of Zimbabwe's electoral processes. The proposed reforms, if implemented, can pave the way for future elections that truly reflect the will of the Zimbabwean people.

It was concluded that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and all other Chapter 12 Institutions must be supported to exercise their constitutional mandate and retain their independence in order for them to effectively deliver their respective mandates. There was also consensus on intra-party democracy as a critical steppingstone towards national democracy inspired, inter alia, by political party registration, regulation, and financing; in which case ZESN offered to support conversations, amongst key electoral stakeholders on the possibility of registration, regulation and financing political parties.

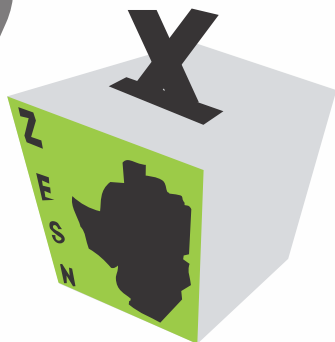
The Conference concurred that the credibility of electoral processes can be enhanced by the adoption of appropriate reforms (to avoid last-minute changes to electoral laws). Therefore, the electoral reforms discourse should be resuscitated in a timely fashion, ahead of the 2028 Harmonized Elections. Such reforms highlighted include:

- Improving impartial conduct of the media during the pre-electoral, electoral, and post electoral periods.
- Political will is critical to implementing the letter and spirit of the existing progressive electoral reforms.
- There is a need for electoral contestants and their respective political parties to better prepare for the nomination process by among other things submitting their documents ahead of the sitting of the Nomination Court.
- There is a need to find ways to restore confidence and participation of all Zimbabweans (including Youths, PwDs and Women) in the electoral processes.
- The role of both domestic and international observers should be strengthened, and their observation methodologies must be shared and explained to enhance stakeholders' understanding and appreciation.
- Continuous engagement of and feedback to Chapter 12 Institutions by both civil society and political parties is crucial. This will go a long way in enhancing the quality of engagement on relevant policy improvements and appropriate reforms.
- Special and external voting extended to all Zimbabweans, especially those in the Diaspora and locals who may not be able to physically present themselves at polling stations on Election Day.

Recommendations

- The Conference culminated in the development of a set of recommendations to be presented to relevant stakeholders, including:
- **Legislative Reforms:** Proposals for amending electoral laws to address identified shortcomings, with a focus on voter registration processes, media access for political parties, and clear guidelines for campaign financing.
- **Strengthening ZEC:** Recommendations for enhancing the ZEC's independence, transparency, and communication throughout the electoral cycle.
- **Promoting Peaceful Campaigning:** Proposals for fostering a culture of tolerance and peaceful political discourse, advocating for responsible use of social media, and holding perpetrators of campaign violence accountable.
- **Empowering CSOs and Voters:** Recommendations for strengthening the capacity and resources of CSOs involved in voter education and election observation. Additionally, proposals for initiatives to increase voter knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.
- **Strengthening voter education:** Utilizing a variety of communication channels to reach diverse populations, with a focus on first-time voters and marginalized communities.

- **Enhancing transparency:** The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission should provide clear and consistent communication throughout the electoral process, with easy access to information for voters and observers. Equally, members of the civil society should share their calendars with stakeholders such as ZEC and other Chapter 12 institutions for ease of collaboration and engagement.
- **Improving accessibility:** Addressing logistical challenges to ensure all eligible voters can easily register, cast their ballots, and have their voices heard.
- **Strengthening dispute resolution mechanisms:** Ensuring efficient, transparent, and accessible channels for addressing electoral grievances.



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