

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



ZESN CALLS FOR TRANSPARENCY IN DEPLOYMENT OF BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION

13 April, 2016 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) calls for transparency in the various stages of the deployment of Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system in Zimbabwe. ZESN notes that there is continued silence regarding the steps being taken in the adoption and implementation of the BVR system apart from print media pronouncements. The implementation process requires careful planning and preparation as well as transparency in processes such as tendering and procurement in order to enhance confidence, integrity and credibility of the process. There is therefore need for sustained engagements between ZEC and electoral stakeholders.

ZESN believes that the Biometric Voter Registration system accompanied by other electoral reforms has great potential to transform electoral processes in Zimbabwe. ZESN therefore urges the Government to clarify its position and clearly spell out the critical steps for the adoption of the biometric technologies for voter registration in light of the limited time before the 2018 elections.

“Procurement is one of the most critical steps in BVR deployment therefore there is need to ensure that adequate time is allocated for it. In addition, ZESN calls for a public tender process and public scrutiny of the decision-making process and engagement of the service provider.” Said ZESN chairperson Ms Irene Petras.

Some of the critical questions which must be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of the process include; has a feasibility study been conducted? Is there going to be a pilot of the system as witnessed with the polling station based voter registration? Has a vendor been identified or is there going to be a tendering process for the BVR equipment? When is the process going to be rolled out? What is the technical capacity of ZEC to relate with the new technology? Are there adequate resources to place for the successful implementation of the BVR?

Therefore, ZESN calls upon ZEC to provide a detailed guideline on the critical steps that will be taken in the implementation of the BVR system in Zimbabwe as a way to enhance transparency among stakeholders.

ZESN’s view is that steps such as conducting a feasibility study, pilot of the BVR, timely procurement procedures, staff training on use of BVR, setting up of mechanisms for IT support and data recovery and consolidation and mechanisms for the electorate to check their registration status must be taken for a successful deployment of the technology in Zimbabwe.

Recommendations

- ZEC must ensure that there is transparency in the whole process in order to increase stakeholder confidence.
- There is need to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study to determine the workability of biometric voter registration in Zimbabwe. Such a study would enable the Commission to clear any bottlenecks to the implementation of the system.
- The Government together with ZEC and other technical partners need to come up with a transparent and inclusive tendering and procurement process.
- Given that BVR is a novel experience in Zimbabwe, ZESN recommends that a pilot of the system be conducted especially during by-elections.
- ZEC should consider integration of SMS systems into BVR to enable citizens to verify their registration status via SMS.
- ZEC should conduct comprehensive stakeholder consultations such as political parties, the media and CSOs on the BVR system in order to conscientise the electorate on what it entails as well as busting some negative myths about the system.

Given that there have been contestations over voter registration and the consequential voters' rolls in previous elections the adoption of BVR technologies offer an opportunity to address issues of transparency and inclusivity in key electoral processes.

ZESN therefore calls for political will to ensure that due process is followed in the implementation of BVR.

**PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE
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