

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE - NUMBER 11

Harare – 23 November 2017 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) continues to observe Phase 3 of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise which commenced on, 16 November 2017 and will end on 1 December 2017. Phase 3 was marred by a few incidents which include; challenges powering the BVR equipment when using solar power in cloudy weather. ZESN observed phases 1 and 2 and continues to observe phase 3 and phase 4 of the BVR process with at least 1 observer per ward.

Turnout

ZESN observed, a generally low turnout, during the first week of phase 3, which can be attributed to the onset of the rainy season which hindered movement of people. In addition the start of the 2017 planting seasons meant that people's attention would be divided between setting aside time to engage in farming activities and registering to vote. Furthermore the political impasse that was experienced during the period 16-21 November 2017 had a negative effect on turnout as people were cautious about travelling to registration centers. Examples of voter registration centers that recorded low turnout include Arex House, ward 12 Bikita west, 5 people registered on 16 November 2017, Luveve Depot Hall, in Ward 16 of Bulawayo which registered 4 people on 17 November 2017, Silver stream, Umguza in Matabeleland South registered 2 people on 18 November 2017, Masuku primary school A, in Bulawayo South which registered 3 people on 21 November 2017. Hence ZEC and other electoral stakeholders need to consider increasing their voter education and voter mobilization to increase turnout for phase 4.

Cumulative Registration Statistics

ZESN commends the Commission for increasing the frequency with which they are providing updates on registration statistics. According to an update released by the ZEC on 21 November 2017, a total of 381,611 people have been registered to date under the phase 3 of the registration exercise. Cumulatively 2,830,735 people have been registered since the commencement of phase 1 through to phase 3. ZESN implores ZEC to also disaggregate the statistics by gender and also by age.

Power Challenges

ZESN observers have noted that, in instances where heavy rains occur and when the weather is cloudy, challenges are being experienced with regards to charging the batteries

for the BVR kits. This consequently affected registration in some parts of the country as registration had to either be halted to allow for the battery to attain a charge above 50% or alternatively ZEC would move the kits to a nearby registration center where there is electricity, and then bring back the kits when charged.

Special Needs Groups

At 100% of the registration centers where ZESN observers are stationed, ZEC officials were making deliberate efforts to ensure that the elderly, nursing and pregnant women, and persons with disabilities were receiving assistance they required. This assistance was rendered in the form of preferential treatment whenever there were queues at the registration centers, assistance in completing the affidavit forms and help accessing registration centers in instances where there were no ramps for those using wheel chairs.

Recommendations:

1. ZEC should explore the possibility of providing power sources for BVR kits in remote and rural places which suffer from power outages to ensure that registration is not disrupted at any point during the day.
2. ZESN continues to call upon ZEC to provide stakeholders with disaggregated data on sex and age of registered voters at the end of each phase to enrich stakeholder's appreciation of registration trends.
3. ZEC should continue facilitating the accreditation of Civil Society Organizations that are keen on assisting in the provision of voter education and the publicizing of the ongoing voter registration exercise. Deliberate efforts should be made to target youth and special needs groups.
4. ZEC, as part of its voter education efforts, should publicize the various proof of residence documents that can be used by people intending to register.
5. ZEC should convene a meeting with electoral stakeholders in order to jointly review the progress made and challenges encountered during the voter registration exercise so far to allow for appropriate adjustments to be effected.
6. Due to the rather low turnout ZEC has managed to register slightly over 40% of its target. ZESN therefore recommends that the Commission considers extending the voter registration period to allow for more citizens to be registered.
7. The Registrar General should also extend the mobile National Identity Documents registration exercise to match the same period covered by the ZEC voter registration exercise.