

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE – NUMBER 4

11 OCTOBER 2017 - The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) commenced the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) for the Wards which fall under Phase 1 yesterday. ZEC intends to roll out the process in four phases until 19 December 2017. ZESN has since made the following observations;

Registration Process

At all the registration centres that ZESN observed, all registrants had their BVR features; the face and fingerprints, captured for purposes of registration. All the registrants were issued with registration slips upon the completion of the registration process. In addition, ZESN did not observe any cases of registrants who registered without the documents required for registration i.e. proof of residents, identity, and citizenship. Furthermore, there were no reported instances of registration of ineligible voters.

Voter Registration Equipment and Materials

ZESN observed some, albeit few, cases of the malfunctioning of voter registration equipment. These included the laptop, camera, and printer at different registration centres. The registration process also came to a halt in Mbare at the Remembrance Hall registration centre after the centre ran out of the slips to issue to the registrants upon the completion of the process.

Accreditation

ZESN appreciates the accreditation extended to its observers. However, the accreditation process was not entirely smooth. In Harare and Bulawayo, accreditation was interrupted as some lists of observers that had been submitted to ZEC by ZESN were missing. In Gwanda, ZESN observers could not be accredited as there was no electricity in the area where the centre is located. The Marondera and Bindura accreditation centres experienced challenges relating to the absence of lamination machines while in Chinhoyi, the printer malfunctioned. The slow accreditation process and insufficient equipment affected ZESN logistically as more expenses were incurred in accommodating observers over an extended period. Of critical importance is the fact that the delay of this process resulted in some ZESN observers failing to commence observation in their respective wards when the registration blitz commenced. Moreover, ZESN is of the view that the accreditation fee, USD 10 per observer, is too high

given the in the prevailing economic circumstances and resource constraints. The Commission is therefore urged to review the cost of accreditation as well as ensure that the accreditation process is smooth so that no extra costs are incurred.

Opening of Registration Centres

In terms of opening time for registration centres, ZESN received reports of mixed observations. While some centres opened on time, other centres opened well after 10.00 am. St Mary's Ward 5 opened latest around 1.00 pm. The registration officials attributed the delay to logistical issues as they indicated that they were waiting for furniture that had to be transported from a close by school for use at the St Mary's Ward 5 registration centre. Registrants were thus seated at the centre for a long period waiting for the centre to start operating.

ZESN also observed that voter registration did not start yesterday at all the registration centres that ZEC intended to cover in the first phase. Whilst Gokwe, Binga and other centers in Mashonaland Central failed to open due to rains, similar incidents were also observed in urban areas. In St Mary's Ward 3, no registration took place at Mangoromera bus terminus tent. Registration officials at the centre left and came back around 4.00 pm to find most of the aspiring registrants gone. The registration officials announced that the process would commence the next day.

Furthermore, ZESN also observed that the location of some registration centres changed without prior communication to that effect by ZEC. For example, no registration was done in Mabvuku Tafara Sub District Office where, according to ZEC's plan, the centre was supposed to be located. Staff at the office was referring people to the Registrar General's Department while officials at the RG's Department having no knowledge of the location of the registration centre. Registration was however, done at Redbull/Soup instead. The location of the centre also changed in Budiro.

Time taken to Register Voters

ZESN observers manning various registration centres have reported that it is taking between 10 and 15 minutes to have one registrant complete the registration process. For some centres, in Budiro Ward 23 for example, the shortage of staff contributed to the time that was taken to register voters. There were only two registration officials at the Budiro registration centre.

Turnout

ZESN observed that more than 20 people had registered at most of the registration centres by end of day yesterday. By and large, the numbers of people who registered were low. While this is understandable at a time when the registration process has just been extended to the local level, and while it could be attributed to the distribution of centres which is quite

dense in some areas, ignorance about the registration process amongst the people may have affected the low turnout.

Commissioner of Oaths

At most of the centres where ZESN observed, there were no Commissioners of Oaths present to sign affidavits for registrants. In some instances, school headmasters were playing the role of Commissioners of Oaths. However, this was not the case at all centres that are located at schools. Some registration officials indicated that the Headmasters could only stamp and sign the affidavits if they were Commissioners of Oaths, not merely by virtue of them being Headmasters.

Signage

For all the registration centres visited, the general observation was that there were no signs to inform and direct people to the registration centres around the centres. The A4 sign posts that were displayed just outside, on the walls of the registration centres were not visible from a distance and were not sufficient to help inform people about the ongoing voter registration process.

Youth Participation

The general observation so far is that the level of youth participation in the voter registration process is low. This was evident in the queues that had a majority of the elderly population.

Posting of Names to Polling Stations

While the idea that one can register at any centre and have their name posted to their preferred polling station for purposes of voting is noble, registrants in Dzivarasekwa expressed displeasure as some of their polling stations of choice were missing.

Political Party Observers/ Agents

ZESN observed that there were no political party monitors present at voter registration centres.

Voter Education

Based on observations made so far, ZESN reiterates that robust voter education should have preceded the ongoing voter registration process. Among other things, this could have helped inform people about the ongoing registration process, the dates when the kits will be within their proximity, and enable them to easily locate the registration centres. In some areas, people within the radius of 200 metres or less from a registration centres were not

aware of the ongoing process. While people were anxiously waiting for the St Mary's Ward 5 registration centre to start operating as late as 12.00 pm, registration was ongoing at two close by centres which were located within a walkable distance. Apparently, this points to the lack of adequate voter education.

Recommendations

1. Based on the observation of the preliminary stage of the voter registration process, ZESN proffers the following recommendations:
2. In the spirit of meeting the target of registering 7 000 000 voters, ZEC should intensify the voter education process using various methods such as radio and social media platforms. This will help increase the numbers of registrants in view of the December completion date of the process;
3. ZEC and the government should review the accreditation process to put in place a mechanism that will simplify the process and enable observers to fulfill their mandate;
4. ZEC should also review the accreditation fees, it is too costly;
5. ZEC should ensure that there is a Commissioner of Oaths present at every registration centre to avoid a situation where registrants have to go and look for a Commissioner of Oaths away from the centres.