
ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE MUTASA RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL WARD 10 LOCAL AUTHORITY BY-ELECTION

Harare – 12 May 2019- As part of its comprehensive efforts to observe the local authority by-election in Ward 10 of Mutasa Rural District Council (RDC), the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) deployed six polling station based observers and a ward collation centre observer. In addition, ZESN had one mobile team assessing the political environment around the Ward.

Observation Methodology

The findings and recommendations of this preliminary statement are made in reference to the Electoral Laws of Zimbabwe, the Revised Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections as well as other regional and African election guidelines and principles.

ZESN's observation of the by-election included the deployment of one long term observer to observe the pre-election political environment during the campaign period. The LTO will also be observing the post-election period. This preliminary statement is based on reports received from the ZESN's long term observer and short term observers.

Set up and opening of polling stations

All polling stations in the by-election were set up in accordance with laid out procedures, and were set up in a manner that ensured that voters could mark their ballots in secrecy. All the polling stations opened on time and had already been processing voters by 7:30 am. Essential voting materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, ZEC stamp, indelible marker ink, biometric voters' roll with pictures were available at all polling stations. Commendably, observers reported on the presence of ballot booths to cater for persons with physical handicaps such as wheelchair users and voters of short stature. All polling stations had six polling officers including the presiding officer, at three polling stations there was no

female polling officer and, at the other three polling stations, five of the polling officers were female. None of the polling stations had a female presiding officer.

Voting process and procedures

Observers reported that voting procedures such as showing ballot boxes to be empty, checking voters' names against the voters roll, examining voters' fingers for indelible ink and applying the ink were duly followed in the Ward by-election. Further, observers reported that all voters were required to present identification documents before voting.

Assisted voters

ZESN observed that at all polling stations, the numbers of voters who were assisted to vote were within the range of 6 to 25. The majority of the assisted voters were assisted by persons of their own choice rather than the presiding officers and the main reasons were illiteracy and old age. However, there were cases where voters would be told to feign illiteracy so that they could be assisted to vote. In one of such cases, at Honde Mission, one man attempted to assist more than one person to vote. On the second occasion, the man was not allowed to assist the voter as he could not provide his identity card. The women then insisted that she could read and write and was left to cast her vote by herself. A closely similar case happened at Jombe Secondary School where a woman resisted attempts by a man who wanted to assist her to vote. Suspected ZANU-PF activists were also seen within a radius of 300 metres intimidating voters, threatening violence targeted at those who would not vote for their candidate.

Redirected and turned away voters

There were cases where voters were redirected to other polling stations within a radius of approximately less than five kilometres, for example from Samaringa Primary School to Samaringa Dip Tank, Honde Mission, or Gombazvikara Business Centre. Overall, a few voters were turned away with the numbers exceeding five only at Honde Mission and Jombe Secondary School polling stations.

Election agents

Political parties and candidates contesting in an election are allowed three agents on Election Day; one inside the polling station and two outside the polling station.

Commendably, all the political parties that contested in the by-election deployed agents to all the six polling stations although the NCA agent came late at Samaringa Primary School. ZESN applauds the political parties and candidates for investing in the deployment of agents as this enables them to observe and authoritatively comment on the polling processes.

Political environment

While no incident of violence was recorded on Election Day, ZESN condemns the behaviour of political party supporters that caused commotion at Masere Business Centre as earlier noted. The presence of party agents around polling stations, attempting to influence how people would vote as was the case at Honde Mission for example could be adjudged intimidatory. Prior to the Election Day, MDC Alliance supporters allegedly threw stones at the home of one person they accused of lying that the former Councillor, Frank Chitembwe, blocked roads during the January 2019 stay away. There were also incidents of intimidation, vote buying, and the defacing of campaign materials during the pre-election period. These acts are in contravention of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, Candidates, and other Stakeholders.

Voter turnout

It is encouraging that voter turnout was higher in this by-election than in other by-elections held earlier. ZESN observed rather long queues in the morning that however disappeared during the course of the day. More women than men were seen in the queues and youth turnout was particularly low when compared to other age groups. The by-election recorded a 68.17% voter turnout. This figure is however lower than the 85.70% voter turnout recorded in the harmonised elections.

Counting and results collation

At all polling stations, ZESN observers were permitted to observe counting and results collation. ZESN observed that closing and counting procedures were duly followed including checking the seals on ballot boxes, requesting election agents to sign V11 forms and affixing of results outside polling station

Election Results

The results of the by-election as well as the 2018 harmonised elections are shown in the table below:

2018 harmonized elections results				2019 by-election results			
Candidate	Sex	Political party	Votes	Candidate	Sex	Political party	Votes
Chitembwe Frank	M	MDC Alliance	1281	Mukodza Rose Tanyaradzwa	F	MDC Alliance	801
Matingo Michael Simon	M	ZANU-PF	451	Tindirika Margaret	F	ZANU-PF	548
Valid Votes Cast	1732			Valid Votes Cast	1365		
Votes Rejected	12			Votes Rejected	4		
Total Votes Cast	1744			Total Votes Cast	1369		
Voter Population	2035			Voter Population	2004		
Percentage Poll	86%			Percentage Poll	68%		

Source: ZEC

Recommendations

ZESN recommends the following:

- ZEC should ensure that voters are alerted timeously when they are reassigned polling stations or when there are changes to their registration.
- Responsible authorities should enforce the Political Parties' Code of Conduct to deter instances of intimidation and defacing of campaign materials.
- ZEC, political parties, and civic society organisations must ensure that voter education encourages the electorate to participate in by-elections and importance of local government.
- ZEC should strive to ensure gender balance in the deployment of polling officers particularly as polling officers.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE
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