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## ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



### **Preliminary Statement on the Nyanga Rural District Council Ward 26 and Bikita Rural District Council Ward 31 By-Elections**

**16 July 2019** – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) observed the Nyanga Rural District Council (RDC) Ward 26 and Bikita RDC Ward 31 by-elections. Ward 26 of Nyanga RDC is found in Nyanga South Constituency while Ward 31 of Bikita RDC falls under Bikita East Constituency. The Zimbabwe African Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the MDC Alliance (MDC-A) contested in both by-elections while, in addition to these parties, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) also contested in the Bikita by-election. The Nyanga RDC by-election was necessitated by the death of MDC Alliance Councillor, Elias Mashumba, while the Bikita RDC by-election seat fell vacant following the death of ZANU-PF Councillor, Patrick Marozhe, both in April.

#### **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 deployed two Long Term Observers (LTOs) – one in each of the two Wards – and five Short Term Observers (STOs) to observe the Nyanga RDC Ward 26 and Bikita RDC Ward 31 by-elections. LTOs deployed on 29 May 2019 reported on electoral developments from the pre through to the immediate post-elections period. STOs observed on Election Day, including at Ward collation centres. ZESN STOs covered three of the four polling stations in the Nyanga Ward by-election and two of the six in the Bikita by-election.<sup>1</sup> This preliminary statement is based on reports received from ZESN LTOs, STOs and is specific to polling stations where the observers were deployed.

#### **Opening and set up of polling stations**

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<sup>1</sup> In Nyanga, ZESN had observers at Erin Forest; Nyamupinga Shopping Centre tent; and Selbourne Primary School (ZESN did not have an observer at Mutarazi). In Bikita ZESN observers were based at Mandadzaka A and Chikaka Primary School (ZESN did not have observers at Mandadzaka B; Chikuku; Chivaka; Zeka; and Chishangu).

At polling stations where ZESN had observers, all polling stations were reported to have opened on time with procedures duly adhered to. All the materials needed for polling such as ballot boxes; indelible ink; the stamp to mark ballot papers; and ballot papers were reported to be available and polling stations were designed to ensure that voters could mark their ballots in secrecy.

### **Political environment**

The political environment ahead of and during the by-elections was largely peaceful in both wards with no incidents of peace disturbing electoral malpractices reported. However, ZESN observers later confirmed news of an incident in Ward 31 Bikita where ZANU-PF and MDC-A supporters clashed.<sup>2</sup> Despite this incident, voting proceeded without problems after the intervention of the police. ZANU-PF party supporters were also given food commodities such as rice and maize in Bikita. There were also pre-election reports of the politicisation of food aid in Nyanga Ward 26 where ZANU-PF supporters got rice and maize on partisan grounds. This amounts to vote buying and may have influenced the choice of voters, especially as it was alleged that a senior ZANU-PF official told supporters at a rally in Nyanga that those who wanted to get aid would have to vote for ZANU-PF in the by-election. ZESN condemns the alleged clash of parties and the politicisation of aid as these undermine the free choice of voters against the principles of democratic elections.

### **Voting process and procedures**

Voting proceeded smoothly at all polling stations with procedures such as showing ballot boxes to be empty, checking voters' names against the voters' roll, checking voters' fingers for indelible ink and applying the ink being duly followed. Observers also reported that all voters were required to present identification documents before voting with those presenting defaced or invalid identification being turned away.

### **Party agents**

Political parties and candidates contesting in an election can deploy up to three polling agents on Election Day, one inside the polling station and two outside the polling station. ZANU-PF and the MDC-A deployed party agents at all polling stations where ZESN had observers. However, the NCA did not deploy polling agents at Chikaka and Mandadzaka Primary Schools in Bikita where the party contested. ZESN commends the political parties that deployed agents and continues to urge all political parties to

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<sup>2</sup> ZEC confirmed on Twitter reports of the intimidation of supporters of a particular political party by another but did not specify the parties involved. The police was called to intervene.

comprehensively deploy agents so that they can monitor polling processes.

### **Assisted voters**

By midday, the number of assisted voters was high at some polling stations and low at others. Two polling stations observed in Bikita, Chikaka and Mandadzaka Primary Schools had already recorded high figures of 19 and 20 assisted voters respectively by midday. This trend did not change given the fact that, by end of polling, over a hundred voters had been assisted to vote at all the polling stations in the Bikita by-election. These included 12 visually impaired voters).<sup>3</sup> Most voters were assisted on account of illiteracy. While it would be expected that a number of voters would need assistance in rural areas because of illiteracy and old age, ZESN is concerned about the high figures given the history of elections in Zimbabwe where literate people have feigned illiteracy just to make sure they are assisted to vote and prove they would have voted for a certain political party.

### **Voter turnout**

Voter turnout was not satisfactorily high for both by-elections. A total of 62% of registered voters cast their ballots in the Bikita RDC Ward 31 by-election yet in the harmonised elections the percentage poll was 84.73%. Turnout was lower at 51% in the Nyanga RDC Ward 26 by-election which was also lower than the 83.81% percentage poll for the same Ward in the harmonised elections. Political parties and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) need to comprehensively educate voters about the importance of elections and mobilise them to participate in by-elections, especially local authority by-elections which continue to consistently record low turnout figures.

### **Redirected and turned away voters**

Some polling stations recorded considerably high numbers of turned away voters. For example, as early as midday, 13 voters had been turned away at Erin forest polling station in Nyanga for not being on the voters' roll and producing the wrong identity documents. Others were turned away for not being registered though they had turned 18 after the 2018 harmonised elections. Some significant numbers of redirected voters were also recorded. For example some of the 10 voters who were redirected to other polling stations at Selbourne in Nyanga voted at that same polling station in the harmonised elections. This is testament of the need for intensive voter information efforts by ZEC. ZEC should also focus on educating

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<sup>3</sup> This was revealed by a ZEC official later on the election day on Twitter

people and widely publicise the continuous voters' registration process for the benefit of first time voters in any election.

### Women participation

ZESN is concerned that there were no women candidates in both by-elections. ZESN has been calling for the improved participation of women, particularly as candidates in elections. However, ZESN commends women in Bikita for their active participation, albeit only as voters. In its update as of 1600 hours, ZEC reported that 68% of those who had voted were women.

### Election Results

The tables below show the results of both by-elections which were won by ZANU-PF. The tables also give a comparison of the results with those of the 2018 harmonised elections.

*Table showing Nyanga RDC Ward 26 Harmonised Elections and By-election Results*

By-election results				2018 harmonised elections results			
Candidate	Party	Sex	Votes received	Candidate	Sex	Party	Votes received
Bisset Mapeta	ZANU-PF	M	397	Bisset Mapeta	M	ZANU-PF	351
Vincent Bopoto	MDC-A	M	236	Mashamba Ellias	M	MDC-A	524
				Tongoona Violah	F	Independent	137
Valid Votes Cast	631			Valid Votes Cast	1012		
Votes Rejected	7			Votes Rejected	39		
Total Votes Cast	638			Total Votes Cast	1051		
Voter Population	1238			Voter Population	1254		
Percentage Poll	51.53%			Percentage Poll	83.81%		

**Source:** ZEC

*Table showing Bikita RDC Ward 31 Harmonised Elections and By-election Results*

By-election results				2018 harmonised elections results			
Candidate	Party	Sex	Votes	Candidate	Sex	Party	Votes

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<b>Thomas Mataga</b>	<b>ZANU-PF</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>1112</b>	<b>Severino Patrick Marozhe</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>ZANU-PF</b>	<b>1083</b>
Moses Maposa	MDC-A	M	410	Moses Maposa	M	MDC-A	835
Peter Mavenga	NCA	M	23	Chokuda Chireshe	M	independent	177
Valid Votes Cast	1535			Valid Votes Cast	2095		
Votes Rejected	16			Votes Rejected	25		
Total Votes Cast	1551			Total Votes Cast	2120		
Voter Population	2480			Voter Population	2502		
Percentage Poll	62.54%			Percentage Poll	84.73%		

**Source:** ZEC

### **Analysis of the results**

ZANU-PF retained the seat previously held by its Councillor in Bikita Ward 31. In Nyanga Ward 26, the MDC-Alliance failed to retain the seat, which was won by ZANU-PF. In Bikita, ZANU-PF won with 702 more votes than the second winning party MDC-A while in Nyanga it won with a margin of 161 votes. In Bikita, ZANU-PF got 29 more votes than in the last elections and 40 more votes in Nyanga. The MDC-A got 425 less votes in Bikita and 288 less votes in Nyanga between the 2018 harmonised elections and the by-elections.

### **Conclusion**

Ward by-elections are critical given the service delivery mandate of local authorities. It is important that they be held democratically leading to elected representatives in whom residents have confidence. By-elections also present an opportunity for the implementation of electoral reforms that are needed to improve the credibility of electoral processes in Zimbabwe.

### **Recommendations**

- Vote buying: Political parties should desist from partisan distribution of aid as it negatively affects the extent to which elections are democratic. There is need for the enforcement of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, Candidates, and Other Stakeholders to deal with issues that include vote buying.

- Intolerance amongst political parties: There is need to maintain a peaceful political electoral environment and tolerance among political parties. There is also need for the enforcement of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, Candidates, and Other Stakeholders to deal with issues that include intolerance among political parties.
- Political party agents: All political parties contesting in any election should comprehensively deploy agents.
- Assisted voting: ZEC should find mechanisms to address high numbers of assisted voters, including intensifying voter education linked to the secrecy of the ballot to try and deal with suspicious cases of assisted voting.
- Turned away voters: ZEC should intensify voter information to ensure the electorate is well informed about the requirements for one to vote.
- Voter turnout: Political parties and CSOs should emphasise to citizens the importance of by-elections, especially local authority by-elections and mobilise voters to participate.
- Women participation: Political parties and CSOs need to continue encouraging women to participate in elections. Political parties need to make deliberate efforts to field and support female candidates in elections.

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### **PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE**

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