

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



ZESN Preliminary Statement on the Tongogara Rural District Council Ward 6 Local Authority By-election

15 December 2019 – The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission conducted a by-election in Ward 6 of Tongogara Rural District Council (RDC). The by-election was held in accordance with section 121A of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) following the death of the previous councillor, Edward Chitera, who was elected on a ZANU-PF ticket in the July 31, 2018 harmonised elections.

The Nomination Court sat on Thursday 14 November 2019 at Tongogara RDC Offices in Shurugwi to receive nominations of prospective candidates to fill the local authority seat vacancy. Two candidates, Addmore Chitera of ZANU-PF and Marry Choga of the MDC Alliance, were duly nominated at the close of sitting of the Nomination Court.

There were two polling stations in the by-election, namely China Gansu Tent and Zvamatenga Primary School. The Ward Collation centre was located at Zvamatenga Primary School.

ZESN observed the by-election and this preliminary statement is based on reports received from ZESN observers.

Observation Methodology

ZESN deployed observers to the two polling stations and the Ward Collation Centre in the Tongogara RDC Ward 6 by-election. The two observers had been deployed earlier to observe and report on the pre-election period. ZESN's election observation methodology is guided by election-related provisions in the Constitution of Zimbabwe and electoral laws of the country. In addition, ZESN's assessment of elections is also guided by a number of regional and international conventions and declarations which Zimbabwe is signatory to, such as, the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Network is also guided by the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors' (GNDEM) Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organisations, Code of Conduct for Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observers.

Pre-election Observations

ZESN observers reported that political parties campaigned in a peaceful manner and political environment was serene with no recorded incidents of intimidation and harassment. Only ZANU-PF was reported to have held a rally at Zvamatenga which was addressed by the party's top leadership including the party's national Commissar,

Shurugwi North and South Constituencies Members of Parliament on 6 December 2019. Door-to-door campaigns were reported for both parties.

Election Day political environment

In keeping with the pre-election observations, the political environment in the Ward was reported to be peaceful. No incidents were observed or reported.

Displaying of the voters' roll

Ahead of the Election Day, ZESN observers reported that the voters' rolls had been displayed outside the polling stations to allow voters to check their names. ZESN commends ZEC for continuing to implement this administrative reform and encourages the Commission to consistently do the same in all future elections. This enables the easy identification of polling stations by voters potentially helping to reduce the number of redirected voters on Election Day.

Set up and opening of polling stations

ZESN commends ZEC for setting up polling stations in accordance with the requirements of the law and in a manner that ensured voters could mark their ballots in secrecy. The two polling stations were also opened on time and all the essential polling materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible finger markers, voters' roll, the ZEC official stamp, were available at both polling stations.

Polling officials

Each of the two polling stations had six polling officers at the time of opening. At Zvamatenga polling station, four of the polling officials were female while three were female at China Gansu Tent polling station. The gender distribution of the polling officials is commendable as it is evidence of the promotion of the participation of women in elections administration.

Voting process and procedures

ZESN commends ZEC for administering the by-election well, following all polling procedures at both polling stations in accordance with the law. ZESN observers reported that 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, issuance of a stamped ballot papers and other key procedures were duly followed. Further, observers also reported that all voters were required to present identification documents before voting with those having invalid identification being turned away. All these help prevent electoral malpractices that may bring into question the integrity of the polling process.

Party agents

In terms of the law, political parties and candidates can deploy one election agent inside the polling station and an additional agent within the vicinity of a polling station. It is commendable that both contesting parties; ZANU-PF and the MDC Alliance deployed their party agents to track the polling process at the two polling stations in the by-election.

However, the gender and age distribution of party agents was of concern. Out of six polling agents at each of the two polling stations and ward collation centre, five were male. None of the party agents was of the youthful age.

Assisted voters

A few voters had been assisted to vote on account of illiteracy. For instance, about 18 voters were assisted to vote at Zvamatenga Primary School while about 12 were assisted at China Gansu polling station.

Turned away and redirected voters

Some people were turned away at both polling stations either because they were not registered voters or they could not produce valid identification documents. About 15 and 8 people were turned away at Zvamatenga and China Gansu polling stations, respectively. Perhaps attributable to the displaying of the voters' rolls outside polling stations prior to the Election Day, only three voters were redirected at China Gansu polling station while no voters were redirected at Zvamatenga.

Voter turnout

A 65% turnout was recorded in the by-election. In the harmonised elections, a higher turnout of 86.06% was recorded for Tongogara RDC Ward 6. The voter population dropped by only five voters between the harmonised elections and the by-election. While not satisfactory, the 65% turnout is relatively high as most by-elections conducted since the 2018 harmonised elections recorded lower turnout figures.

By-election results

The by-election was won by ZANU-PF with 396 votes compared to 16 votes received by the MDC Alliance. The table below presents the by-election results as well as the results for the Ward election in the 2018 harmonised elections.

2019 by-election				2018 harmonised elections			
Candidate	Party	Sex	Votes	Candidate	Party	Sex	Votes
Addmore Chitera	ZANU-PF	M	396	Edward Chitera	ZANU-PF	M	443
Marry Choga	MDC Alliance	F	16	Marry Choga	ZIPP	F	38
				Joshua Mborera	Independent	M	22
				Phillip Pheveni	MDC Alliance	M	20
Valid Votes Cast	398			Valid Votes Cast	523		

Votes Rejected	2		Votes Rejected	8
Total Votes Cast	400		Total Votes Cast	531
Voter Population	612		Voter Population	617
Percentage Poll	65%		Percentage Poll	86.06%

Analysis of by-election results

Votes received by ZANU-PF in the by-election decreased by 47 from the votes the party got in the harmonised elections in the same Ward. For the MDC Alliance, the votes decreased by 22. Voter population for the Ward dropped by 5, from 617 in the harmonised elections to 612 in the by-election. The by-election was won with a wide margin of 380 votes between the winning and the losing candidates.

Conclusion

The by-election was conducted well and in accordance with the law especially in terms of the polling day processes. ZESN will publish a more detailed report on the by-election.

Recommendations

Based on its observations, ZESN recommends the following:

- ZEC should amplify publicity about continuous voters' registration and the documents that are required for one to vote to possibly lower numbers of turned away people.
- In the interest of promoting the participation of marginalised groups in electoral processes, political parties should deploy more women and youths as party election agents.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

ZESN Chairperson Mr Andrew Makoni: +263772234891

ZESN Programmes Coordinator Mrs Ellen Dingani: +263772219462

zesn2011@zesn.net, info@zesn.net

Facebook: ZESN1

Twitter: @ZESN1

Website: www.zesn.org.zw