



ZESN CAPACITATES FREELANCE JOURNALISTS ON ELECTION REPORTING AHEAD OF 2023 HARMONIZED ELECTIONS

AS the country gears up for the 2023 harmonized elections, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) convened a virtual training workshop for 41 freelance journalists on 13 June 2022 to strengthen their capacities on election reporting as well as raise awareness on key electoral processes. The chief objective of the training workshop dubbed "Media training on electoral processes" was to equip them with knowledge of aspects of the whole electoral cycle and ensure that their reportage covers beyond polling day activities only.

In her opening remarks, the Acting ZESN Executive Director, Ellen Dingani, underscored the imperative role the media play as important electoral stakeholders in educating the masses on voter and political rights which in turn allows citizens to participate in electoral processes and make informed decisions.

"The media sets the agenda for public discourse and shapes public opinion through assessing community needs and opinions, measuring candidates' deliverables, influencing social change and policy, thereby making the exercise of freedom of expression and information a reality. The analysing of election management and results by the media helps in the assessment of the fairness and credibility of elections in Zimbabwe," said Dingani.

The ZESN Media and Information Officer, Emilia Bundo, highlighted that the media sets the electoral agenda by informing the electorate what to think about and this reflects in their reportage e.g. interpretation, emphasis, presentation, exclusion and inclusion of key issues as well as highlighting attributions or shortcomings of legislators key in political participation for citizens in electing leaders.

"Zimbabwe's elections have been marred by hate speech and electoral disputes which culminates in intra and inter-party violence and this mars the electoral process, hence it is the role of the media to report accurately on such issues without proliferating hate speech. The media can actually serve as a space for reconciliation, dialogue between contesting candidates to reduce polarization and consolidate peace building," said Bundo.



Emilia Bundo
ZESN Media and Information Officer

The ZESN Monitoring and Observation Officer, Reikai Rusinga, outlined three different forms of observation which are Long Term Observation (LTO), Short Term Observation (STO) and Sample Based Observation (SBO), together with their methodologies that journalists should acquaint themselves with as they are all important in the electoral cycle. He highlighted that election observation serves to promote openness and transparency; ease tensions; increase security as well as to deter improper practices and attempts at fraud and provide checks and balances that protect the viability and honesty of election administration.



Reikai Rusinga
ZESN Monitoring and Observation Officer

Rusinga highlighted that LTO focuses on all aspects of the electoral cycle, STO mainly focuses on the Election Day processes and SBO, a special type of STO, focuses on the Election Day processes, from opening to counting and tabulation of results, using a systematic methodology.

He stressed that journalists should not leave out the observation methodology when they report on electoral processes as it helps the audiences understand better, including appreciating the limitations of any methodology used by observers.

Senior Advocacy for Electoral Reform Officer at ZESN, Heather Koga, said that the media plays a key role in keeping the electoral reforms discourse on the national agenda as it pivots advocacy for social and policy change. She implored the media to focus on the gender dimensions of elections with a bias towards women to encourage their participation in electoral processes and ensure gender equality and inclusiveness in political spheres in Zimbabwe. This is against the backdrop of political violence that women are subjected to, hate speech, stereotypes, cyber-attacks and focus on personal lives rather than their agenda or manifestos among other things.

Koga emphasized that elections are a process and not an event, she urged the media to adopt some of these principles as guidelines: familiarity with the electoral law, including regional and international instruments that guide the conduct of democratic elections;

electoral systems used in the country; an understanding of the overall electoral process; understanding of the role of the media in covering elections; knowledge of the country's election history as well as detailed knowledge of voter registration, boundary delimitation, the vote, the count and any areas of potential controversy e.g. diaspora vote and political parties regulation.



Heather Koga
ZESN Senior Advocacy for Electoral Reform Officer



Ellen Dingani
ZESN Acting Executive Director



LET'S TALK ABOUT DELIMITATION OF ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES

SECTION 161(1) of the Constitution provides that delimitation must take place: - "Once every ten years, on a date or within a period fixed by the Commission so as to fall as soon as possible after a population census.

Q: What is Boundary Delimitation?

A: Boundary delimitation or districting is the drawing of electoral districts/area boundaries. Generally it's about the assigning of an almost equal number of voters to each voting area. It applies a formula to establish the limits or boundaries of voting areas or to demarcate voting places or constituencies for the purpose of assigning voters to polling places.

Q: Who delimits electoral boundaries?

A: In Zimbabwe the delimitation of constituencies, wards and other electoral boundaries is done by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission [ZEC] as provided for in Section 239 of the Constitution.

Q: Why delimit boundaries?

A: Delimitation is an important process which maps out electoral boundaries of voting zones – constituencies and wards.

Q: What is the significance of delimitation in elections?

A: The delimitation of accurate boundaries is critical to the success of any election. If electoral boundaries are poorly drawn, it can lead to under-representation of the people in some constituencies which would have more people, while creating over-representation in other constituencies with fewer people.

Q: What is the link between delimitation and voter registration?

A: Section 161 of the Constitution also stipulates that;

- The boundaries of constituencies must be such that, so far as possible, at the time of delimitation equal numbers of voters are registered in each constituency within Zimbabwe.
- The boundaries of wards must be such that, so far as possible, at the time of delimitation equal numbers of voters are registered in each ward of the local authority concerned.
- In delimiting the boundaries of wards, ZEC must ensure that no ward is divided between two or more local authority areas;
- In delimiting the boundaries of constituencies, ZEC must ensure that no ward is divided between two or more constituencies.

- The Constitution provides for the rationalization of constituencies that are too big or too small by a threshold of +/- 20% registered voters.

Q: How do citizens participate in boundary delimitation?

- A:** As key stakeholders, citizens are encouraged to participate by;
- Registering to vote.
 - Providing civic and voter education on boundary delimitation.
 - Attending community meetings and providing information as requested by ZEC during consultations.
 - Making submissions during public hearings and comment on the accuracy of the preliminary delimitation report for further consideration.
 - Submitting observations and comments about the accuracy of the delimitation exercise.
 - Peace building initiatives (boundary delimitation can be a source of conflict if not managed well.

Principles and Factors Considered When Drawing Electoral Boundaries

Section 160 (1) and (2) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe stipulates that the delimitation of constituencies and wards is a function of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.

Q: What are the key considerations in dividing Zimbabwe into wards and constituencies?

- A:** ZEC in respect of any area, gives due consideration to;
- its physical features;
 - the means of communication within the area;
 - the geographical distribution of registered voters;
 - any community of interest;
 - historical issues;
 - in the case of any delimitation after the first delimitation, existing electoral boundaries;
 - population

Q: What are the principles of good boundary delimitation?

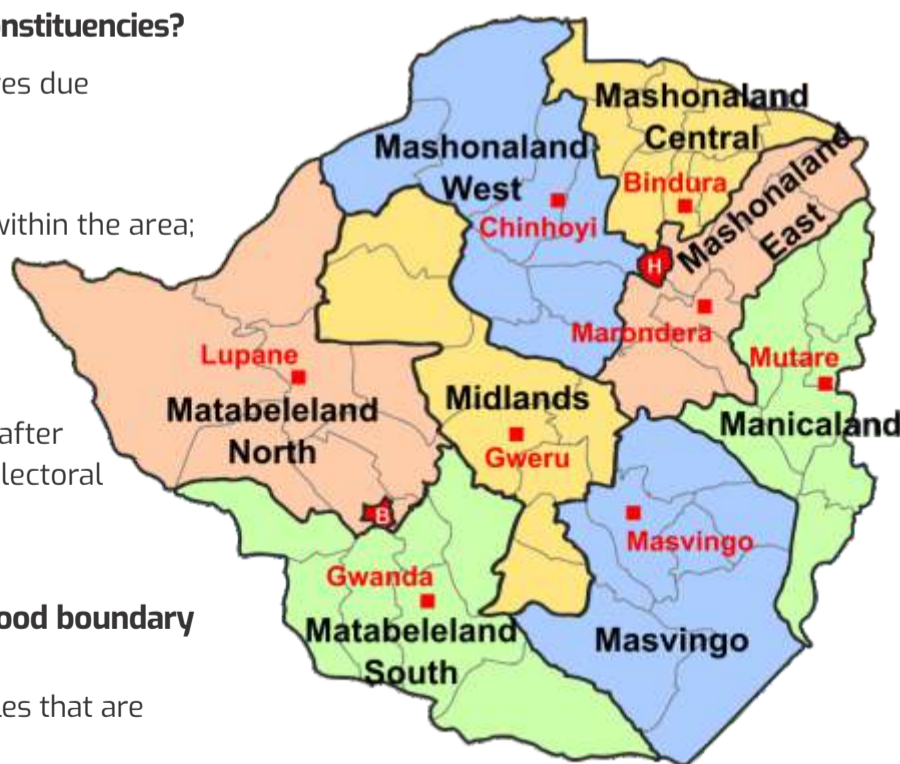
- A:** There are basically five principles that are considered which are;
- Impartiality
 - Representativeness
 - Accuracy
 - Equality of voting strength
 - Transparency

Q: What are the Outputs of a Boundary Delimitation Process?

A: Section 161 (7 to 12) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe stipulates that; After delimiting wards and constituencies, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission must submit to the President a preliminary report containing—

- a list of the wards and constituencies, with the names assigned to each and a description of their boundaries;
- a map or maps showing the wards and constituencies;
- any further information or particulars which the Commission considers necessary;
- and the President must cause the preliminary delimitation report to be laid before Parliament within seven days.
- After considerations of issues that may arise and after complying with subsections (7) and (9), the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission must submit a final delimitation report to the President.

Within 14 days after receiving the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's final report, the President must publish a proclamation in the Gazette declaring the names and boundaries of the wards and constituencies as finally determined by the Commission.





PWD'S KEY DEMANDS TO ZEC

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PWDs) have complained over lack of access to election materials and facilities which meet their needs arguing their rights are being violated.

PWDs raised the concerns as the country is preparing for 2023 harmonized elections.

There has been concern over the low participation of PWDs in electoral processes despite the existence of legislation that provides for their rights. PWDs said they were being let down by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

The Disability Reform Coalition (DRC), an umbrella body that represents people and organizations for PWDs, said there was a need to remove barriers that impede the full participation of PWDs in electoral processes.

The DRC said it was critical to create an enabling environment ahead of the 2023 elections to ensure that PWDs have a say in the democratic governance of the country.

"The DRC's key demands to the ZEC include: disaggregating statistics on disability in voter registration, provision of mobile registration booths and deliberately targeting PWDs, access to voter registration, delimitation and provision of voter education information in accessible formats such as braille and sign language for PWDs," the DRC said in its key demands.

"Provision of tactile ballots to guarantee the right to secret ballot for voters with visual impairments, capacitating public service staff to be able to assist persons with disabilities at polling stations and inclusion of persons with disabilities as polling officers."

"Deliberate and direct efforts to provide voter education and information to persons with disabilities in rural areas to foster the participation of persons with disabilities in electoral processes and ensuring that all polling stations have disability friendly booths, clearly signed queues and disability friendly infrastructure."

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Section 67 which speaks on political rights also states that every citizen has the right to participate in elections and be represented, including PWDs.

ZEC Spokesperson Commissioner Jasper Mangwana, said the electoral management body was facing financial challenges to meet all the needs of PWDs.

"Although the commission would like every citizen to partake in the country's electoral activities, it is difficult to cater for all people with different types of disabilities owing to limited financial resources," Commissioner Mangwana told NewsDay recently.



#yes to electoral reforms



CSOS MEET RG'S OFFICE OVER ISSUANCE OF IDS

A GROUP of civil society organizations (CSOs) under the Ekhaya Vote 2023 banner have engaged the Registrar General's over the issuance of birth certificates and identity documents (IDs) in rural Matabeleland. This followed complaints from across the country that many people failed to register to vote during the first and second phases of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) voter registration blitz due to the lack of IDs.

According to ZEC, as at June 10, the country's registered voters numbered 5 804 975, a 2% increase on 5 695 706 from 2018.

A recent baseline survey by a consortium of civil society revealed that an estimated 445 852 people in Bulawayo, Matabeleland South and North provinces do not have birth certificates.

Ekhaya Vote 2023 Spokesperson Nkosikhona Dibiti, said the meeting with the RG's office was meant to highlight challenges faced by people when seeking IDs.

"The purpose of the meeting with the RG's office comes from the backdrop of us working on the ID registration blitz and as well as raising awareness on the issue," Dibiti said.

"So you noticed that our teams that were working on voter education are now working on the ID blitz, raising awareness and also engaging citizens and finding out what the process is like."

Dibiti added that, *"Our concern is that the blitz is only taking a specific or a certain number at a particular time. The teams are not stationed at one particular area. So these were some of our concerns."*

A recent report by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and the Election Resource Centre (ERC) revealed that lack of IDs and other necessary documents hindered several prospective voter registrants from registering to vote.

The ZESN and ERC said in their report that it was imperative for ZEC to carry out another voter registration exercise before elections expected next year.

The report noted that; *"A national ID is an important document for one to register as a voter during the voter registration process. ERC, ZESN and other stakeholders contend that without the issuance of IDs a large group of eligible Zimbabweans will be disenfranchised."*

"Considering that the RG is in the process of an ID blitz up to September 2022, ERC and ZESN implore ZEC to consider another blitz post-September 2022 to provide citizens that would have acquired national IDs the chance to register ahead of the commencement of the boundary delimitation exercise."



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