



**Zimbabwe Election
Support Network** ■
Promoting Democratic
Elections In Zimbabwe

Press Statement

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE 17 DECEMBER 2022 MUTASA RDC WARD 6 LOCAL AUTHORITY BY-ELECTIONS

Harare - 18 December 2022 - In line with its mission to promote democratic free and fair electoral processes through objectively and impartially observing elections in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) observed Mutasa Rural District Council (RDC) Ward 6 Local Authority by-elections conducted on 17 December 2022. The by-election in which the ruling party won, was held after a vacancy arose in Ward 6 of Mutasa RDC following the death of Councillor Stephen Kavhuru of the MDC-Alliance.

Legal Framework

The by-elections were held under Section 121 A of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) for the purpose of electing a councillor for the Ward following the passing on of the 2018 elected Councillor Stephen Kavhuru of MDC Alliance. The Nomination Court sat at the offices of the Chief Executive Officer for Mutasa RDC on 17 November 2022 to receive and consider nominations for the by-election. Barara Regina of ZANU-PF and Nyamururu Babrah of CCC were duly nominated as candidates for the vacant local authority seat.

Observation methodology

In order to effectively gather, disseminate and communicate objective information about the by-election, ZESN trained and deployed four (4) static and four (4) mobile observers who were accredited by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). The observers were deployed to four (4) polling stations of Ward 6 Mutasa RDC a few days before polling to observe the electoral and political developments ahead of the polls. The findings and recommendations of this preliminary statement are made in reference to the Electoral Laws of Zimbabwe, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing the

Conduct of Democratic Elections as well as other regional and African election guidelines and principles. This preliminary statement is based on reports received from the ZESN observers.

Pre-election Observations

Campaigning by candidates for votes in Ward 6 of Mutasa RDC commenced towards the end of November soon after the sitting of the Nomination Court on 17 November 2022. The pre-election environment was reported to be peaceful with no reported incidents of political party clashes and or violence within the area where the by election was scheduled. ZESN commends the existence of such an environment and continues to call for all political parties to foster peace and tolerance of divergent views in line with the dictates of Section 67 (2) of the Constitution which sets out the political rights of Zimbabwean citizens.

Polling day political environment

ZESN observers reported a generally tranquil and calm political environment in the Ward on polling day. However, ZESN is concerned by an incident that disturbed the smooth flow of polling processes for a few minutes where a turned away voter chanted slogans within Bvuma Business Centre Tent polling station. While the individual was reprimanded following the intervention of the ZEC Presiding Officer at the polling station, this was in violation of Section 147 (1) (c) **on prohibition of certain activities in vicinity of polling stations:** *“without derogation from any other provision of this Act or any other enactment, no person shall, within three hundred meters of any polling station on any polling day- utter slogans”*. ZESN would like to urge political party leaders to continuously educate their supporters and to familiarize themselves with legal provisions that govern the conduct of elections to enhance electoral integrity.

Set up and opening of polling stations

Prior to the setting up of polling stations, voters’ rolls were displayed outside to enable the electorate to check their names, a good practice from the ZEC that supposedly serves to lessen the number of redirected and turned away voters on polling day. ZESN observers reported that in the four (4) polling stations observed, they were opened on time with all the essential polling materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible finger markers, voters’ rolls and the ZEC official stamps available.

Political parties’ agents

The Zimbabwe African National Unity Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) comprehensively deployed party agents at all the four (4) polling stations in Ward 6 of Mutasa RDC to track polling processes. ZESN commends political parties for fielding

party agents as this allows them to track polling processes and their ability to make any informed interventions where necessary.

Polling officials, Voting process and procedures

In the four (4) polling stations that ZESN observed there were eight (8) polling officers, and the gender disparity was balanced with regards to presiding officers deployed. Polling procedures were duly followed in accordance with the law, for example checking voters' names on the voters' roll and checking their fingers for ink before they could be allowed to vote. Ballot papers were stamped with an official ZEC stamp before being issued to voters. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, ZESN commends ZEC for putting in place preventative measures for voters, polling officials, political party agents and observers, such as hand sanitisers or water and soap to wash their hands as well as ensuring that voters properly wore masks before entering the polling station.

Assisted Voters

Observers reported that in all the polling stations visited or observed, there were assisted voters. Observers reported that 6 voters were assisted at Bvuma Business Centre Tent polling station, while at Gatsi Primary School polling station, 41 voters were assisted; 39 voters were assisted at Madziro Village Open Space Tent polling station and 7 people were assisted to vote out of 207 who voted at St Columbus Primary School. Assisted voting on account of illiteracy and visual impairment was mostly done by polling officials in the presence of the police in line with Section 59 of the Electoral Act on **voting by illiterate or physically handicapped voters**.

Voter turnout

The highest voter turnout was recorded in Gatsi Primary School polling station where 63.1% of the voter population turned up to cast their vote. Madziro Village Open Space Tent, St Columbus Primary School and Bvuma Business Centre Tent polling stations had voter turnouts of 58.9%, 55.6% and 54.7% respectively. Towards the end of polling, significantly lower numbers of voters turned out in all four (4) polling stations. ZESN continues to encourage registered voters' participation and voting in peace in all local authority elections as these are important and accord voters the opportunity to choose leaders of their choice who will be responsible for service delivery in their areas.

Redirected and turned away voters

The number of redirected numbers was particularly low in Ward 6 of Mutasa RDC St Columbus Primary School polling station having a total of 5 redirected voters. Further, ZESN observers

reported that some people were turned away for turning up without proper identification details or their names not being found on the voter's roll. In one incident ZESN observers reported that at Madziro Village Open Space Tent polling station, one female voter was turned away because she was on the exclusion list and records show that she was deceased. ZESN urges the electorate to inspect the Voters' Roll, the Deceased Voters' Notice whenever the Commission avails them as well as the Deceased Registrants that are published in the Government Gazette to enable to correct any anomalies so as to ensure the enjoyment of their fundamental rights.

By-Election Results

ZANU-PF won the local authority seat that was being contested. The table below shows the results of the by-elections.

Table 2. 17 December 2022 by-election results

RESULTS OF THE MUTASA RDC WARD 6, 17 DECEMBER LOCAL AUTHORITY BY-ELECTIONS							
2022 By-Elections				2018 Harmonized Elections			
Candidate	Sex	Party	Votes	Candidate	Sex	Party	Votes
Barara Regina	F	ZANU-PF	1080	Kavhuru Stephen E	M	MDC-A	1066
Nyamururu Babrah	F	CCC	433	Barara Regina	F	ZANU-PF	1063
				Nyakujara Precious	F	ZIPP	265
Valid Votes Cast			1513	Valid Votes Cast			2189
Votes rejected			15	Votes rejected			19
Total Votes Cast			1528	Total Votes Cast			2208
Voter Population			2597	Voter Population			2607
Percentage Poll				Percentage Poll			86.70%

Conclusion and Recommendations

ZESN commends voters who took time off to cast their vote in peace during the Ward 6 by-election which signaled the last plebiscite that was constitutionally held before the 2023

harmonized elections to elect their preferred local authority candidate. Women in Zimbabwean politics are traditionally marginalized. In light of that, ZESN commends the two parties and the Mutasa community for fielding female candidates in the by-elections.

The Network therefore proffers the following recommendations to improve the pre, polling and post-electoral periods in future elections:

- Political parties should encourage their supporters to observe electoral laws on campaigning and chanting slogans within the vicinity of polling stations.
- Voters are encouraged to inspect their names whenever voters' rolls are displayed outside polling stations before polling.
- ZEC and CSOs should do more civic and voter education to encourage voters to vote in local authority by-elections.//**ENDS**

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