



CIVIL REGISTRY URGED TO HAVE CONTINGENCY PLANS

THERE are concerns that the civil and voter registration drive may be derailed ahead of the 2023 Harmonized elections if authorities fail to find a lasting solution to machine breakdowns at the Civil Registry.

The Civil Registry was forced to suspend the issuance of e-passports sometime in August 2022 following a major machine breakdown.

There are also reports of frequent breakdown of machines used for the processing of identity documents needed for voter registration.

A national ID or valid passport is a requirement for one to be able to register to vote.

Vote Ekhaya spokesperson Nkosikhona Dibiti said the government should have a contingency plan to ensure that services that require IDs are not disrupted.

"Faults do happen but there should always be a contingency plan around what people should do, especially when identity documents are required for most things, for instance voter registration," Dibiti said.

Another analyst Pardon Taodzera said system breakdowns were a major setback in the acquisition of national identity documents. *"After years of incapacitation which saw a huge backlog and demand for national identity documents we are once again back to default settings. A national IT system of such magnitude and importance must at least have a contingency backup system to deal with such scenarios,"* Taodzera said.

Academic Methuseli Moyo raised concern that this may be misconstrued as a deliberate move to slowdown the voter registration drive. *"These (breakdowns) have a ripple effect on voter registration because an ID is required for one to be on the voters' roll. We call upon relevant authorities to swiftly address this anomaly,"* Moyo said.

There have been calls on the government to decentralise the process of acquiring birth certificates and other identity documents and to conduct more issuance blitzes to enable eligible voters to register to vote for the upcoming elections.



LAUNCH OF THE ZIMBABWE CSOS 2022 -2024 ELECTION STRATEGY

As the country gears up for the 2023 Harmonized Elections, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) launched the Zimbabwe CSOs Election Strategy for 2022-2024 on Thursday 17 November 2022 at the ZESN offices. The chief objective of the Election Strategy is to bring about a coordinated approach in terms of election related activities to enhance transparency and accountability in the electoral process in Zimbabwe around the Electoral Cycle.

Among the 49 people who attended the launch which was also live-streamed by Sly Media TV and cross posted to the ZESN Facebook Page, were representatives from development partners Zimbabwe Media Commission, ZESN Board Members, Southern African Parliamentary Support Trust, members of the 5 clusters that contributed to the crafting of the strategy and other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The Election Resources Centre (ERC) Programmes Manager Solomon Bobosibunu was presided over the launch proceedings as the Moderator



Some of the Cluster members present at the launch

In her opening remarks, the ZESN Acting Executive Director, Ellen Dingani gave a brief background of the CSOs Strategy highlighting that an economic and political situational analysis was conducted to enable the 5 Clusters involved in the production of the Strategy to assess what they could and could not do to deal with different issues they had identified.

Dingani brought to the fore that, ZESN is currently championing the coordination of five distinct CSO clusters working on the development of electoral democracy in Zimbabwe. These include; Elections Monitoring and Observation Cluster, Media, Oversight and Advocacy, Legal and Medical Services and Civic and Voter Education, constituted by ZESN network members and non-members alike.

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LAUNCH OF THE ZIMBABWE CSOS 2022 -2024 ELECTION STRATEGY

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In his closing remarks, ZESN Board Member Mr Paul Muchena expressed gratitude to all the guests for setting aside time from their busy schedules to attend the launch of the CSOs Election Strategy and their unwavering support towards the promotion of democratic elections in Zimbabwe.



Paul Muchena
ZESN Board
Member

Muchena said the presence of representatives from the Zimbabwe Media Commission at the launch is a sure sign of the engagements in enriching the electoral reforms discourse in Zimbabwe and hope the CSOs Election Strategy will help the media in understanding the electoral processes. He implored people to foster peace ahead of the 2023 elections to enhance electoral credibility and integrity.



Representatives of cluster groups explaining their sections contained in the Strategy



ZESN CONDUCTS CIVIC AND VOTER EDUCATION CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOPS

ZESN organized and conducted 3 Civic and Voter Education Capacity (CVE) building training workshops in Masvingo, Bulawayo and Mutare on 3, 4 and 8 November 2022 respectively. The trainings were conducted following the development of a comprehensive ZESN CVE Training Manual which is to be used as a guide by Civic and Voter Education providers in Zimbabwe. A total of 124 participants were drawn from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), Disability Programming Organizations (DPOs) and Social emerging groups participated in the training workshops and were facilitated by ZESN Secretariat, Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) officials and other resource persons with experience in civic and voter education.

The objectives of the trainings were; to enhance participants' capacities to raise awareness on electoral issues more effectively and efficiently; to enhance participants' professionalism in conducting civic and voter education and to build an understanding of the standards and principles underpinning civic voter education.

Some of the topics covered included; The legal framework for voter education in Zimbabwe; The role of Civic Society Organisations, Faith Based Organisations, Disability Programming Organisations, Social Emerging Groups and Community Based Organisations in civic and voter education; Introduction to the electoral cycle concept; Principles of civic and voter education and cross-cutting issues; Skills for planning and facilitating civic and voter education;

Potential Civic and Voter Education (CVE) audiences and mobilization strategies; Strategies for enhancing networking and collaborations in CVE programs; Introduction to the CVE manual and steps for CVE programming; Safety and security tips for civic and voter education providers.



Mutare workshop

The key observations drawn from the workshops were that; Elections are more legal than logical as they are conducted according to their provisions in the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the Electoral Act; The electoral cycle concept brought to the fore the continuous nature of the electoral processes.



Masvingo workshop participants



Bulawayo workshop participants



BALLOT Newsletter

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK(ZESN)

ELECTIONS BULLETIN

ISSUE 01



ZESN CONVENES A NATIONAL DELIMITATION CONFERENCE

A total of 114 diverse stakeholders including members of the Chapter 12 Constitutional Commissions, member organizations of the ZESN network, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), political parties in Parliament and media representatives converged in Bulawayo on 21 October 2022 for a National Delimitation Conference hosted by ZESN, attended the Conference. The conference's chief objective was to enhance stakeholder understanding of the Delimitation of electoral boundaries process ahead of the Harmonized elections in 2023.

Conference discussions focused on the Historical background of the process, its significance to electoral processes, legal framework, international best practices of Delimitation and an assessment of the process so far in Zimbabwe and proffered a way forward



ZESN Programmes Director presenting on the Historical Background of Delimitation

The Constitution provides for the number of constituencies and wards into which the country should be divided and the equality of voter's principle for constituencies, subject to the 20% derogation limit.



Panelists making submissions during plenary sessions

The Conference noted that the significance of the Delimitation process lies in ensuring effective representation of voters as it addresses the equality of constituencies and the weights of votes and is critical for resource allocation in constituencies. It was highlighted that delimitation could be affected by a number of factors and should be guided by clear principles, which include representativeness, equality of voting strength; transparency; non-discrimination; accuracy; timeliness and participation of stakeholders. These crucial stakeholders include political parties, Civil Society organisations, Chapter 12 Commissions and voters in general.

A Delimitation regional expert brought to the fore experiences from the South African Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB) and other best practices on delimitation from the region and beyond. In South Africa, the process is guided by geographical factors, communication and accessibility, topography, among other factors. Stakeholder consultation is part of the demarcation process and Zambia, Malawi and Mauritius are other countries in the region that have delimitation processes that are EMB led.



Regional Expert on Delimitation making a presentation based on South African Experiences

Participants recommended the need to enhance public input into the current processes and that it may be necessary to establish a CSO working group that will analyse the delimitation report once published and advise on the way forward and that ZESN could coordinate this process. A forum at which political parties engage the ZEC separately was also suggested without mixing with members of the public, as incidents of violence have taken place during the ZEC public engagements.



ZESN HOSTS A SERIES OF VOTER EDUCATION AND DELIMITATION SENSITIZATION ROADSHOWS IN VARIOUS DISTRICTS

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) held a series of voter education and delimitation sensitization roadshows from August to December 2022 to inform and raise awareness on boundary delimitation exercise to communities in Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Harare Metropolitan, Bulawayo Metropolitan and Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South Provinces.

As part ongoing civic engagement activities by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), ZEC partnered with ZESN to offer Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) services onsite. ZEC managed to register more than 200 people onsite.



ZEC Personnel conducting voter registration on the sidelines of the ZESN Roadshow at Murehwa Centre.

ZESN also took the opportunity to distribute its promotional campaign materials such as caps, wrappers and facemasks inscribed Register to Vote. A total of 6 000 copies of the Ballot Newsletter were distributed which contained stories on electoral reforms and delimitation of electoral boundaries among others.



ZESN voter educators distributing newsletters and CVE material at a roadshow in Pumula Bulawayo



Part of the spectators at Murehwa Roadshow



ZESN COURTS MEDIA PRACTITIONERS AT AN ELECTIONS ACADEMY ON ELECTORAL PROCESSES AHEAD OF 2023 ELECTIONS

ZESN held a Media Elections Academy in Kadoma from Thursday 1 September to Friday 2 September 2022 to inform and educate media practitioners on the delimitation of electoral boundaries in Zimbabwe. More so, the academy was held to interrogate the missing link between electoral processes and the actual conduct of elections as well as examine challenges and opportunities in election reporting and offer recommendations collectively no matter what ideology one subscribes to in order to strengthen Zimbabwean elections.

45 participants including the Chairperson for the Zimbabwe Media Commission, Professor Ruby Magosvongwe; the Chief Executive Officer for the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, Ms Virginia Muwanigwa; Acting Secretary for the Zimbabwe Media Commission, Mr. Academy Bvumayi Chinamhora; ZESN Board Member Ms Farisai Chaniwa; Alpha Media Holdings Editor-in-Chief Wisdom Mudzungairi; Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Classic 263 Station Manager Mqhele Tshuma, Media Alliance of Zimbabwe National Coordinator Nigel Nyamutumbu; CSOs and media practitioners drawn from various media houses.



Participants of the Media Elections Academy

In her welcoming remarks, ZESN Board Member Ms Farisai Chaniwa outlined that it was the maiden time content producers comprising of station managers, editors, reporters, producer/presenters with the Media Regulator in the midst and other stakeholders converged in that set up to discuss the delimitation of electoral boundaries. Chaniwa said a multi-stakeholder approach and packaging of targeted electoral information effectively and efficiently disseminated can go a long to increase participatory democracy in Zimbabwe. Without cohesion, it will be difficult to maintain social and political stability during the electoral cycle.



ZESN Board Member Farisai Chaniwa

ZESN Monitoring and Observation Manager Ian Goredema explained that Zimbabwe electoral systems and boundary delimitation are intrinsically linked and boundary delimitation is significant in maintaining the proportionality of the number of representative seats allocated to an electoral district, as well as upholding the fairness principle in an election. ERC Programmes Manager Solomon Bobosibunu touched on the current legal and institutional framework for boundary delimitation in Zimbabwe focusing on the principles and factors considered when delimiting electoral boundaries, legal gaps and proffered recommendations. Goredema recommended that, the legal framework could be improved, particularly with regard to ensuring transparency and public access to all phases of the delimitation process and identifying a clear path for resolving delimitation disputes.



Left: Ian Goredema ZESN Monitoring Observation & Manager Right: ERC Programmes Manager Solomon Bobosibunu

Media Alliance of Zimbabwe Coordinator Nigel Nyamutumbu unpacked how social media can be used to enhance electoral integrity. Issues highlighted included: who is informing – media generation of information or reporting, media ethics, verification and fact checking, gate keeping; magnifying of messages and geographic reach; social media (mediation),

misinformation of electorate by media; informing, educating and entertaining assumption; generating or reporting.



Media Alliance of Zimbabwe Coordinator Nigel Nyamutumbu

Further the Conference also deliberated on content analysis with regards to election reporting and advertising; Dimensions of Electoral Processes focusing on the coverage of Special Interest Groups by the media, in particular, women, persons with disabilities and youths; Safety and security of the media during election reporting.



Some of the Participants at the Media Elections Academy

Zimbabwe Media Commission Acting Secretary Bvumayi Academy Chinamhora dissected media laws that direct ethical behaviour within and outside election reporting. He outlined laws and regulatory framework distinguishing them from ethics in ensuring credibility of the profession. Chinamhora observed that some media houses have no resources and this increases dependence on brown envelopes which is a violation of media laws and ethics.

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ZESN COURTS MEDIA PRACTITIONERS AT AN ELECTIONS ACADEMY ON ELECTORAL PROCESSES AHEAD OF 2023 ELECTIONS

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ZMC Acting Secretary Academy Chinamhora presenting on media ethics

ZESN Media and Information Officer Emilia Bundo outlined guidelines on election reporting and key focus areas when pivoting for advocacy.



ZESN Media and Information Officer Emilia Bundo

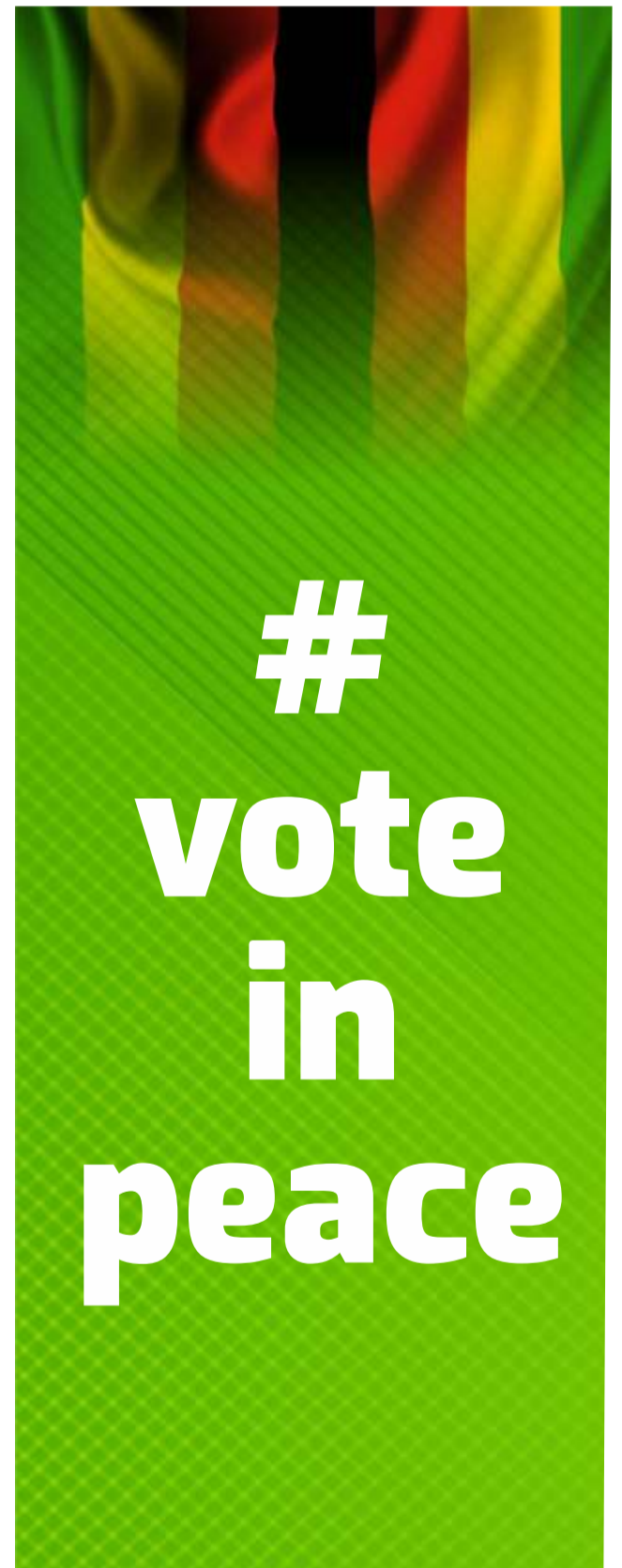
Ms Virginia Muwanigwa facilitated a plenary discussion on challenges and opportunities in election reporting. Participants agreed that resource constraints hamper their work and unanimously concurred that, there is need for continuous engagements between the media and electoral stakeholders in the quest to enhance electoral integrity.

In closing, the Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Media Commission, Professor Ruby Magosvongwe, expressed gratitude to ZESN for the great endeavour to bring media practitioners together in an affable environment for amicable discussions that turned out to be very constructive. She expressed optimism that funds permitting, it would be good to upscale such conversations. Professor Magosvongwe implored journalists to embrace professionalism when reporting on elections as they are key stakeholders of information dissemination to the electorate.



Zimbabwe Media Commission Chairperson Prof Ruby Magosvongwe

For feedback please
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"... the legal frame-work could be improved, particularly with regard to ensuring transparency and public access to all phases of the delimitation process and identifying a clear path for resolving delimitation disputes."