

**A CONSOLIDATED REPORT OF LONG TERM LOCAL OBSERVATIONS OF 30 JULY HARMONISED ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE**

**COMPILED BY THE ALLIANCE OF COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS (ACBOs)**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Alliance of Community Based Organizations<sup>1</sup> (ACBOs) is a convening space for community-based organizations based and working in local communities across eight Provinces<sup>2</sup> of Zimbabwe. The ACBOs was formalized in 2016 and is a space for capacities sharing, strategic collaborations and solidarity for community based organisations. The ACBOs assumes a rotational leadership and is currently convened by the Institute for Young Women Development (IYWD). Currently the ACBOs comprises of 13 community-based organisations.

Given their nature of being embedded in grassroots communities, the ACBOs share some of the traditional approaches to community organising and mobilisation towards issues that affect citizens with a broader goal of advancing democratic development in Zimbabwe. In April 2017, in the run up to the 2018 Harmonised Elections, the ACBOs came up with their collective strategy for elections mobilisation, electoral education and continuous electoral environment monitoring. This focused on the rural populace hence it was a Rural Engagement Strategy (RES).

67,62%<sup>3</sup> of Zimbabwe's population resides in rural areas hence the focus of the RES was on that populace.

The RES had three key focus areas which were, Community mobilisation, Local Electoral Advocacy and Long term Local Electoral Observation. This report thus shares a continuum of observations from the period September 2017 to September 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> Members are IYWD, PYD, CYDT, WODAZ, Hands of Hope, ZOYP, YICD, YICET, YDZ, COTRAD/ICOD, Plumtree Development Trust, Godhwayo Community Radio, Mission to Live,

<sup>2</sup> Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Midlands, Matebeleland South, Matebeleland North, Masvingo and Manicaland

<sup>3</sup> <https://tradingeconomics.com> citing World Bank

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The observations were mostly conducted in a low cost manner and over a period of twelve months. The observers constituted of young women, men, students and the elderly members of communities most who are members or alliances of different CBOS in the ACBOs. In the pre-election period, the observers shared their day-to-day experiences with the conduct and behaviours of government institutions and members, community leadership structures including traditional and religious leaders and active members of political parties. On the Election Day observation efforts were intensified with the ACBOs members employing systematic means of information gathering and sharing using networks of local community observers. This included observing candidates' selection processes of the major political parties that is ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations. In the post election period, the ACBOs reverted back to use of personal experiences in the communities.

In the pre and post election periods, the information was gathered and shared through community activities conducted by the various members of the ACBOs, individual communications by the observers and continuous updates from community activities.

*'The network of community observers was basically an organic network in which any citizen was free to share their experiences in the community during the campaigns. This helped us to remain non-partisan and objective in our documentation of the prevailing environment'* shared one CBO leader during the ACBOs pre-election Coordination and Reflection Meeting in Masvingo on 05 July 2018.

The ACBOs, in its partnership with Organising for Zimbabwe Trust also facilitated community observation by representatives from Naymote (Liberia), a group of international observer delegation from Afrika Kontakt (Denmark) and the South African Peace and Repression Monitors Observer Mission who came under the umbrella movement of the Zimbabwe Solidarity Forum (South Africa)

The observation covered 33 districts in the eight provinces mentioned above. The specific communities were mostly rural, farming including resettlement areas, mining and peri-urban.

### 3. CONTEXT

Zimbabwe has over the past years had a series of disputed elections characterised by political violence and allegations of gross election irregularities which among them include vote –buying, abuse of state resources and institutions and rigging in favour of the ruling party ZANU PF. The party has been in charge since the country’s political independence from Britain in 1980 and was presided over by one Robert G. Mugabe.

In November 2017, Robert Mugabe was removed from power through military intervention and Emmerson D. Mnangagwa was assisted to ascend to power by the same military. From the opposition side of politics, the major opposition MDC lost its leader Morgan R. Tsvangirai (May His Soul Rest in Peace), the man who had dominated and had become the face of oppositional politics in Zimbabwe since the start of the millennium.

The 2018 harmonised election was thus the first election without the former arch-rivals Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai. Their absence in the contest gave a breath of hope, especially to the young people whose energy, political consciousness and enthusiasm to participate in the election in different capacities was rejuvenated. The takeover of the presidency of the opposition by Nelson Chamisa, and the subsequent merging of the different formations of the MDC into MDC Alliance was regarded as an interesting factor in the 2018 election. Zimbabwe was certainly presented with an opportunity to re-write its electoral narrative, by instilling confidence in the citizenry of Zimbabwe and the international community about its electoral system.

Subsequently, the July harmonized elections saw twenty-three, four women and nineteen male candidates running for Presidency, with one withdrawing six days

before the Election Day. 6 576 candidates contested for local council and 1 631 for the house of assembly<sup>4</sup>.

In addition, the compilation of a new voters' roll using the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system was another notable factor. An estimated 5 681 604 registered voters were reported by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) in their briefing on 15 July as having successfully registered for the 2018 harmonised elections. An estimated 60% of the voters were women and averagely people below the age of 40.

Previously, the Alliance has issued two reports which focused mostly on candidates selection processes by the two major political parties Zanu-Pf and the MDC Alliance. This report is a long term report that covers the period from September 2017 to September 2018.

#### **4. OBSERVATION FINDINGS BY THEMATIC AREAS**

##### **4.1 POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT**

The political environment at the commencement of the observation period, from September 2017 to November 2017 was highly characterised by political polarisation and hate speech. The polarization resulted from intra- and inter-political parties and was very visible and pronounced from the ruling party Zanu Pf as it intensified its internal succession battle to succeed Mugabe. Communities were forced to attend political rallies for the ruling party. The factional fights and purging in the ruling party saw the easing of pressure on surveillance of civic groups and CBOs as state security machinery focused internally against those perceived to be against Mugabe. This is notwithstanding how the normalization of hate speech that was being churned into the communities from the political rallies continued to defeat the cause for respect of divergent views and political plurality, including choosing not to affiliate with any political party for those who felt so.

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<sup>4</sup>Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC), Zimbabwe Gender Commission Preliminary Election Monitoring Report On The 2018 Harmonized Elections, <http://kubatana.net/2018/08/17/zimbabwe-gender-commission-preliminary-election-monitoring-report-2018-harmonised-elections/>, Accessed on 17 August 2018

In the period after the removal of Mugabe, the effect of mobilisation of citizens to openly challenge Mugabe's presidency somewhat reinforced the right of citizens to challenge leadership to the generality of masses some who still doubted their power to do so. Hence, from November throughout the election campaign there was a modicum of freedom for citizen mobilisation and some openly following leaders of their choice.

The political environment in the weeks leading up to the election day and actual election day was relatively calm in most of the ACBOs areas of operation. More so, the competitiveness and inclusiveness of the political environment this time around proved to be a break away from the past regardless of the fact that the two major political parties, that is the Nelson Chamisa led MDC Alliance and Emmerson Mnangangwa led ZANU PF overshadowed the others in terms of rallies' support, popularity, financial capacity and visibility. Zanu-Pf however was more visible and frequent especially in peripheral rural communities compared to the MDC Alliance. Zanu Pf proved to be financially stronger as evidenced by mass distribution of campaign regalia in the form of t-shirts, wrapping cloths, branded vehicles and even big and colourful billboards were found in rural areas.

The animosity that had characterized inter-party candidate engagements in previous elections was close to nonexistent in the run up to the July 30 Harmonized Elections. The majority of candidates from opposing parties exhibited co-existence as they participated in community debates and engaged with the electorate deliberating on developmental issues rather than party politics.

The atmosphere however remained somewhat tense with suspicion as reports of subtle intimidation of the rural electorate by ruling party agents, traditional leaders and war veterans resurfaced. Some of the cases documented included but not limited to the following red flags:

- In Bindura and Guruve Rural Districts of Mashonaland Central, traditional leaders and war veterans threatened villagers to vote 'correctly' or risk being 'dealt with properly' after election.
- Displacement of an independent young woman candidate from her ward in which she was contesting in Mashonaland Central

- In Chipinge district of Manicaland, traditional leaders instructed villagers to profess ignorance of the voting process in order to get food and farming inputs assistance
- Partisan distribution of food aid and government programmes such as poultry, fisheries in all the eight Provinces with many incidences reported in Gwanda District in Matebeleland South and Chivi in Masvingo
- In Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Manicaland and Midlands cases of open violence were houses belonging to known MDC-Alliance polling agents were reported
- High incidences of assisted voters, with one polling station have had all voters assisted to vote in a farming community in Manicaland, Midlands and Mashonaland Central
- Polling agents for young women candidates from an opposition party, and independents were denied access into a polling station in Mashonaland Central
- Vote-buying using cash by ruling party candidates in Manicaland and Mashonaland Central Provinces
- Misinformation that there's no secrecy of the ballot because of the bio-data used, and that voting patterns will be detected
- Taking down of serial numbers for voter registration slips

It is imperative to note that the political environment was highly characterised by systematic violence against women and girls. This targeted women who played different roles in the electoral process, voters, candidates, in elections management bodies and non-participants especially through sexist and misogynistic campaign rhetoric.

The aftermath of the election instilled fear following state sponsored violence in which the army killed at least six people loosing in Harare on 1 August. The actions led to an unspoken code in rural communities not to discuss politics, or anything that implied criticizing the government. It also led to self-imposed curfews.

#### **4.2 ELECTION ADMINISTRATION**

On 30 July, ACBOs observers increased their attention at the many different polling stations situated in their respective communities. The observers included those

accredited under ZEC and non-accredited participants who shared their personal experiences. A number of aspects including opening and closing times, accessibility of polling stations and conduct of uniformed officers at the polling stations were looked at.

Polling Stations opened at 7am on average as noted by observers having arrived from 6 to 6:30 am. The average closing time noted was 7pm with voting counting commencing shortly after till early morning hours of 31 July. There was the exception of polling stations in Gwanda, Matabeleland South where polling agents, uniformed officers and local observers began casting their votes at 6:30 am.

Pregnant women, women with children and the elderly received preferential treatment.

Accessibility of polling stations by differently abled people was limited as some polling stations were located on high ground, some with stones and others had steps and no ramps. Those with walking difficulties were in some instances lifted to access the polling stations/booths. There was no brail and no sign language translators and voters were assisted by their relatives or polling officers. This means these voters were automatically denied secrecy of their ballot.

Ballot papers were a contested issue in the days leading up to the election. Aspiring candidates in Chipinge South were found in possession of ballot papers for the presidential, parliamentary and local government candidates before the election day.

The conduct of some police officers milling in a number of polling stations in Beitbrigde in Matabeleland South intimidated the voters, especially first timers. The same was also reported in Mazowe Central, in Mashonaland Central where some police officers pursued voters whom they thought made contact with especially foreign observers.

Lack of electricity and poor lighting characterised most polling stations across the eight provinces. Polling officers and agents ended up improvising by providing light with candles and mobile phones to tally and count the ballots.

For numerous polling stations in peripheral rural communities observed there were reports of V11 forms being withheld from opposition party agents and the electorate. Some of the mentioned areas included Chipinge and Chiredzi South in Manicaland

Province and Uzumba, Maramba and Pfungwe districts in Mashonaland East province.

Another common issue across all the eight provinces was the high numbers of assisted voters on the Election Day. Below is a table showing some of the exact figures gathered in numbers or percentages at observed polling stations in different areas in the Provinces:

**Table 1**

Polling Station& Province	Number	Percentage of total
Matebeleland South	512	-
Matebeleland North	319	-
Mashumbi (Manicaland)	240	-
Mabee (Manicaland)	110	-
Garahwa (Manicaland)	80	-
Vheneka (Manicaland)	-	70%
Mahiyana (Manicaland)	-	70%
Mashonaland Central	896	-
Rimbi (Manicaland)	-	45%

*Statistics of assisted voters at observed polling stations in different areas in the Provinces*

There were also reports of some voters being turned away on the basis of obscure Identity Cards, transfers of registration which did not match with the receiving polling stations and also voters registered but not for the 30 July elections. High numbers were recorded in Matebeleland, Midlands and Masvingo.

#### **4.3 PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN**

The 2018 Harmonized Elections saw a significant number in the rise of women voters and also candidates. ZEC statistics indicated that 60% of the total voter registrants were women.

The ACBOs through its mobilisation and observation work observed that there were a lot of women, young and old who expressed interest to contest as candidates and even campaigned. While the number of women candidates from political parties eventually were low, there was initially a lot of women who expressed interest to contest. There was also a significant number of women who contested as independent candidates. The low numbers can thus be attributed to sexist, electoral systems and practices that do not favour gender equality internally in political parties and nationally than the supply side of women candidates.

Ultimately the numbers of women elected into local government and parliament were lower compared to previous years as evidenced by the low numbers constituting those who succeeded in the primary elections of different political parties (15% at National Assembly and 17% at local Government) and the actual election results which showed that only 12.4% women were elected outside the women's quota for National Assembly<sup>5</sup> (60 out of 210 seats).

#### **4.4 ROLE OF MEDIA**

It was observed that in general the observed rural communities, traditional mainstream media played a less role compared to social media. State media mostly covered ruling party campaigns, and private media covered both ruling party and opposition campaigns, and both covered less of female contenders. However both these were less accessible to most rural communities including other peri-urban areas due to poor delivery and transmission systems and sometimes the cost attached to these when it comes to print and television/radio respectively.

However social media especially whatsapp played a key role in keeping generality of citizens informed on the campaigns. The observers noted that there were very few people who had smart phones and could access whatsapp. However these would share the news received through whatsapp with many people in their family or a larger group of people in their community.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://kubatana.net/2018/08/17/zimbabwe-gender-commission-preliminary-election-monitoring-report-2018-harmonised-elections/>

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS ON THE 2018 ELECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the Zimbabwe's electoral history that has always been characterized by violence and intimidation, before, during and after elections, the July 2018 elections noted a few improvements. The major improvements were the opening up of electoral space as the state did not use overt violence especially in the pre-election period as compared to previous years. The invitation and presence of international observers also made a difference.

However the systematic and structural issues that have in the past always affected our elections such as partisan use of state resources and institutions, vote buying, covert violence and intimidation by ruling party remained. While an obvious eye could not see these, their impact especially on the rural vote cannot be under-estimated.

The violent response of the state to 1 August protests using the army, which led to at least six deaths, presents a tip of the iceberg of a deep-rooted culture of violence in the state as used by Zanu Pf. This can be used to explain a deep-rooted culture of fear among rural communities that the need for a radical shift of mindsets and practices by our government is urgent if our electoral narrative is to change sincerely.

Having noted the above, the Alliance would like to recommend the following to the government of Zimbabwe, political parties, foreign observers and the generality of citizens:

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is an urgent need by the government of Zimbabwe to review existing electoral laws in order to ensure compliance with the Constitution in relation to gender equality and non-discrimination. The reforms should include ensuring that political parties' constitutions are in line with the constitutional gender and equality and non-discrimination provisions.
- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) needs to engage in a multi-stakeholder process and address the different structural issues that affect the conduct of a credible electoral process. A multi-stakeholder approach to this is key as there is also need to address attitudinal and behavioural practices experienced at local communities' levels.

- There is need for advocacy for reforms within political parties to promote democratic principles of transparency, accountability, gender equality, inclusivity of different socially marginalised groups and non-discrimination in line with the constitution.
- Different commissions established for the promotion of democracy and human rights including but not limited to the Gender Commission, National Peace and Reconciliation, Human Rights among others need to investigate intra-party violence and recommend the enactment of punitive measures against violence in political parties.
- Political parties are also encouraged to take seriously capacity strengthening of their different electoral actors, including polling agents
- Regional and international observers need to strategically collaborate with community based observers through CBOs to ensure that structural and systematic issues that affect elections are surfaced
- Citizens are encouraged to continue observing and sharing issues of a long term nature that affect electoral participation as elections are a cycle

### **CONCLUSION**

It is important to note that although the election period was somewhat different in a positive way in observed in the pre-election period and the actual day of the election. The improvement was mostly from an angle of reduction of the occurrence of overt violence cases. Nonetheless, a number of structural issues that affect the credibility of the 2018 electoral process remained.

The violence that occurred in the post election period, including the impunity that the army officials identified in the shootings in various media reports (including social media) have continued to have despite availability of evidence in identifying the killers, lead to questions on the sincerity of holding a credible election.

By and large, the role of government institutions, community and traditional leaders, war veterans and other actors in a partisan way points to the need for radical reforms if ordinary citizens in their diversity and in their geographical localities are to enjoy their full civil and political rights particularly on electoral issues

Citizens and regional and international observers have a duty of strengthening observation systems to inform the necessary reforms.