

IYWD and Alliance of Community Based Organisations (ACBOs) Preliminary of MDC-T primary elections Observation Report

The Institute for Young Women Development (IYWD) and the Alliance of Community Based Organisations (ACBOs) continues to observe the electoral processes including political party primary elections in Zimbabwe. From the 19th of May 2018, IYWD and ACBOs deployed community observers to observe the primary elections of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) led by Nelson Chamisa, which are still ongoing. IYWD and ACBOs community observation of political parties primary elections in rural, farming, mining and peri-urban communities will continue as other political parties carry out their own primary elections ahead of the General Election slated for 30 July.

Objective

The objectives of the primary election observation by IYWD and ACBOs was to take note of the developments happening during the MDC-T primary election and also make an independent assessment of the process, paying attention to free expression, freedom of choice, women's and marginalized groups participation as well as the general environment. We also intend to use the information and developing events in communities to engage the political parties, civil society as well as the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) and other stakeholders to allow free and meaningful participation of citizens, especially women and youth in rural, farming, mining and peri-urban communities.

Methodology

The observation process was conducted by IYWD and the Alliance's *Dandemutande* (Web) Champions that are part of a long-term community-based elections initiative using organic structures of mobilization and socially embedded educational approaches. The *Dandemutande* (Web) Model is a peer-to-peer grassroots-oriented community mobilization and voter education initiative which mimics network marketing models leveraging on socially-embedded activities, with an aim to encourage young women and men to register as voters and promote their participation pre, during and post elections. Primary information and reports were gathered from the *Dandemutande* (Web) Champions and ACBOs members embedded in communities across the country. Other sources of information included meetings with civil society organizations, media and interviews with MDC-T officials and aspiring candidates.

Election Management and Preparedness

The MDC-T primary elections happened at the backdrop of a pre-arrangement by the party to first start by having the different aspiring candidates from the same constituency or ward negotiate for a Consensus, then go into an election if the former did not work. From the different parts were the *Dandemutande* and ACBOs followed the candidates selection process, it did seem that the Consensus arrangement worked in some constituencies, especially those outside Harare and other major cities. Some ended up going through a primary election.

The primary election was generally disorganised, characterized by poor planning and management intra-party violence, allegations of voter rigging, manipulation and intimidation, as

many people were not aware of the time, venues and electorate. In St Mary's Chitungwiza for instance, the election was rescheduled from 19 to 25 May before being postponed again to 1 June after people having waited for hours, during each process. Two (2) candidates withdrew from Bindura South claiming that communication of the date and time had not reached them in time. The party had planned to conduct the elections in Harare, Masvingo, Chitungwiza and Mashonaland East Province on 19 May while in Manicaland and Mashonaland Central and West they then settled for 21 May. However, only elections for councils proceeded after the party resolved to wait until 23 May when members of the MDC national executive who were working with the electoral commission would have returned.

In Marondera Central, Caston Matewo was declared winner in a chaos-marred poll, where voting was suspended in two wards at the weekend. Matewo, who was based in the United Kingdom, beat three other candidates after polling 796 votes. The primary election was marred by violence after one of the top officials was found in possession of ballot papers. No voting took place in wards 4 and 5 in Marondera owing to violence. In other areas such as Shamva Mutumba, and Hwange the primaries had to be abandoned.

Owing to some observations noted above and from our observers in rural communities there is clear indication that the primary election process was disorganized compromising the credibility of the election outcomes in most constituencies.

Candidate Selection: MDC T noted that over 3000 people submitted CVs and 512 wanted to represent the party as MP and the 2488 want to represent the party as councillors. Submission of CVs allowed candidates to freely express their desire to participate in the primary elections.

Ballot Papers: In some areas it was reported names of candidates were missing from the ballot. Late arrival of ballot papers and officials was also noted.

Voters Roll: The observers noted that the voters roll format was not uniform in some areas party structures were allowed to vote whilst in some areas all card carrying members were allowed to vote.

General Campaign

MDC-T noted that 72 constituencies out of the 120 where the MDC will field prospective parliamentary candidates were selected through consensus. So elections were held in the 48 constituencies. Aspiring candidates had opportunity to campaign freely and meet the electorate to present their manifestos. Aspiring candidates also shared campaign messages through social media, posters and fliers were distributed in different districts. In Chitungwiza aspiring MPs conducted car rallies as people waited to vote on the 19th of May. The campaigning period was characterized by some of the following reports:

- **Vote Buying:** There were reports of vote buying in Mashonaland West Chinhoyi where aspiring candidates were promising the electorate money and rewards if they vote for them.

Violence and hate speech: Incidents of violence resulting in the votes being called off in some

constituencies. In Harare's Budiro suburb, youths from Ward 43 blocked people from voting and closed the entry gate to the community hall resulting in the elections being postponed. The youths were against the selection of Machingauta whom they claimed had been imposed by officials. In St Mary's, violence characterised the process which had been scheduled for the 27th of May, with counter complaints and arrests, home invasions, emotional and physical fights, mainly fronted by young men. In another instance, violence erupted in Ward 8 and 9, resulting in the party abandoning the polls as sitting candidates comprising Hwange Central National Assembly member Mr Brian Tshuma, Ward 8 Councillor Rhoda Sibanda, Ward 9 Cllr Chiratidzo Maphosa-Mudimba, her husband Mr Jabulani Mudimba and the party's district elections officer Mr James Sibanda allegedly visited their rivals' houses at night, threatening them to withdraw or face unspecified action.

Women's Participation

It is sad to note that there was generally low participation of women in the elections, characterized by withdrawals from the party by top party figures like Jessie Majome and Lynette Karenyi current and former Members of Parliament for Harare West and Chimanimani respectively. MDC legislator for Harare West constituency Ms Jessie Majome withdrew her candidature during a Press briefing citing irregularities in the conduct of the party's candidates selection process and that the playing field was 'not level.' On 20 May, in Dangamvura/Chikanga constituency in Manicaland the party's national women's wing chairperson and former MP for Chimanimani Lynette Karenyi indicated she will contest as an independent if the results saying she had lost to Prosper Mutseyami were allowed to stand. In Bindura South, an aspiring female councillor later on withdrew, citing that she was now backing her superior, Mr Gwarada who is the Provincial chairperson of the party. The MDCT said they will strive to abide by the women quota and 20 % percent youth quota during the candidate selection process.

While the primaries were characterized by intra-party violation of women, inter-party dynamics also influenced the processes. In Chiredzi where a young woman who was going through primaries for a council seat was de-campaigned by the traditional leadership and community in general on allegations that her mother was a witch.

The ACBOs are yet to get the finalised list of candidates and will provide further gender analysis.

Media Coverage and Environment

The primary election received moderate coverage from the private and very low coverage by the state media. Social media was a preferable alternative to disseminate news on campaigns, and reports election outcomes.

On the social media used, IYWD and the ACBOs were disappointed by the sexist and derogatory responses that young women and women received from the different audiences including those from their parties, inter-parties and non-affiliated quarters of the society.

General Participating Environment

As observed on the 19th and 20th of May, there was high turnout of voters at different polling stations although they were disappointed by late logistical problems, particularly dates and venues, resulting from poor communication dissemination and coordination.

Post-Election Environment

In some areas elections have been suspended pending intervention by the leadership due to violence. For example in Zengeza 4 looting and property vandalism was reported. It is reported that tension is high in some areas where elections are yet to be conducted and those where results are being contested.

Recommendations

The ACBOs believe that internal democracy in political parties is key in the forthcoming General Elections. The elections give room for party members to democratically choose candidates they want to represent them. Generally, the MDC-T elections were marked by chaos, poor coordination, intimidation, violence and poor management and fake news. Consequently, we make the following recommendations to MDC-T:

1. There is need for planned and fair distribution of information like election dates, time and venues to candidates and the electorate.
2. The voters roll should be clear and shared before the election day.
3. It is a must for political parties to ensure equal participation and representation of women, youth and marginalized groups by implementing the quota systems enshrined in their constitution and Zimbabwe's Constitution specifically Section 17 and S56 that stipulates gender balance, equality and non-discrimination of all.
4. MDC-T should shun violence by taking serious action against their members who perpetrate violence.
5. MDC-T should improve on access to information by journalists, media and other stakeholders related to the election as it strengthens transparency and credibility of the process and outcome.