



IYWD

ZIMBABWE ELECTION DAY

OBSERVATION REPORT

*Highlights of the Institute for Young Women Development's
findings from observation of the election day.*

IYWD ELECTION DAY 2018 OBSERVATION REPORT

Introduction

A delegation of 30 accredited and more than 50 unaccredited young women and men comprising of IYWD members, staff and networking organisation from Liberia observed the 30 July Harmonised Election. A total of 69 polling stations were observed, 65 in Bindura, Mazowe, Shamva, Guruver, Mt.Darwin and Rushinga Districts of Mashonaland Central Province. 4 of the polling stations were in Goromonzi and Seke Ditsriacts of Mashonaland East Provinces. Guruve, This report provides highlights of the Institute for Young Women's Development's (IYWD's) findings regarding the environment and conduct of electoral officers administering the election, voters, candidates, political parties, security forces and the generality of communities on the election day.

Methodology

The observation was conducted in consistence with the Alliance for Community Based Organisations' (ACBOs) Rural Engagement Strategy (RES). This entailed making use of socially embedded activities and networks of young women and men including *Dandemutande*¹ (Spiderweb) to observe the elctions on 30July. The observers included those who were stationary in polling stations and also roving observers who moved to different polling stations. The observed polling stations were predominatly in rural communities and also farming and mining communities of Mashonaland Central Province. While log term, pre and post elections observations were made, a separate Long Term Observation Report will be shared later. This report is thus based on information collected on 30 July during the opening of polls, voting, closing of the polls, sorting counting, tabulation of results and sealing of ballot boxes. On average the observation period stretched from 0630hours of 30July to 0430hours of 31July after most of the observed polling stations had finished counting and sealing of ballot boxes

1. Polling Stations Opening Times

Generally all the polling stations observed opened at 07:00 am but most voters had already started queuing before 07:00am. This resulted in very long ques especially for the greater part of the morning with voterss becoming few and few towards noon. Frustrations were noticeable as a result of the time spent waiting in long queues to vote. The delegation of local observers noted that young women and men were eager to participate in the elections, standing in long queues before polling stations opened.

¹ This is an IYWD initiated Electoral Model that uses peer-peer relationships and individuals' inner circles to mobilise each to participate in the electoral process. During observation, Dandemutande helped in gathering and sharing information from young women and men based on their own experiences and observations of the election in their localities

2. Accessibility of Polling Stations

The majority of the polling stations were accessible to majority of the voters. However all the observed 69 polling stations proved inaccessible for differently abled voters. Some of the polling stations were on hilly areas, others were using classrooms or buildings on high foundations that were not accessible for voters on wheel chairs, clutches and the elderly. None of the polling stations had sign-language translators to assist voters with hearing impairments and none had brail ballot papers for the visually impaired. For instance at Trojan Mine Primary School polling station in Bindura Rural District and Batanai Primary School at Batanai Farm in Mazowe Rural Districts were on hilly areas. At Thorncroft Primary School polling station at Thorncroft Farm in Mazowe Rural District was situated next to a railway line where voters needed to cross in order to access it.

3. The Voting Process

On average, it took approximately 3 minutes per person to vote. However, at some polling stations voting took more than 3 minutes due to high numbers of people being assisted to vote. For instance, at Retreat Farm in Bindura Rural District many people were assisted because they were regarded illiterate and this made voting per individual take longer. Some observers reported the manual searching of voters' names in the voters roll as one of the reasons for delays.

Voters were handed 3 ballot papers, one for the local government representative, one for the member of parliament and one for the President and instructed to drop all in respective ballot boxes..

In most polling stations, preference was given to pregnant women, nursing mothers, the elderly and differently abled voters who did not join long queues. However, at some polling stations people started complaining that this was causing delays and the police and ZEC officials abandoned the privilege citing that they had to avoid noise and violence.

4. Assisted Voters

There were large numbers of people being assisted to vote on the basis that they were not able to read and write. These were more in the rural settlements compared to urban and peri-urban settlements. Most of the assisted voters were females compared to males. At Retreat Farm, at Kambira Primary School Polling station, in Bindura North Constituency all voters were assisted to vote. A total of 494 people voted at that polling station.

The pattern of assisted voters were not consistent with characteristics of people requiring assistance to vote. For instance, some of the assisted voters were known by the *Dandemutande* observers as occupying community secretarial positions for some traditional leaders.

5. Voter Turnout & Turned Away Voters

There were notably more women who voted compared to men. First time voters and young people between the ages of 18 and 35 turned out to be more in urban and peri-urban areas of Bindura,

Goromonzi, Seke and Mazowe districts compared to more rural, farming and minin settlements. In these rural communities, there was notably high voter turnout of the elderly.

At the 69 polling stations observed, approximately more than 55 637 people successfully voted. An estimated 900 people were turned away. The major reason cited was that they were at wrong polling stations. Other reasons given included that their names were not found on the voters roll despite having registration slips, obscure images on IDs, absence of original IDs, in some cases voters came in party regalia and unregistered voters who attempted to vote. There were also cases of voter names transferred during voters roll inspection but their names were not transferred on the voters' roll used.

6. Women Participation

Notably a high level of participation of women in the different polling stations was observed. As indicated by ZEC, of the total number of people who registered to vote 54% were women, hence there was presence of more women, of across the ages, that is first time voters, young women with children and the elderly who turned out to vote in most of the polling stations. At the 61 polling stations observed by IYWD, over 35 064 from the estimated 57 277 voters were women.

At ZEC level, there was also a notable number of women who were presiding officers however the majority of the polling officers were males. There was also a dominance of men among who ere polling agents for different political parties and independent candidates. Again, sadly, there were very few women compared to men who were contesting as candidates across the three levels of local government, parliamnet and presidential.

However the high level of assisted voters, majority who were women, and whose pattern was inconsistent with those who needed to be assisted is questionable.

7. The role of Security Officers

There was notable presence of uniformed security officers from the Zimbabwe Republic Police. In most polling stations they seemed to be manning polling stations and assisting voters. However there were incidences were they followed up to some mebers of the community who were talking to some the accredited Dandemutande observers and asking what they were talking about. For instance at two polling stations in Mazowe Central. At Bhodheri polling station at a farm Bindura North, there was a case where MDC Alliance agents were denied access into the polling room under allegations that their names were not found on the expected list. The case was resolved after the involvement of the District Presiding Officer.

8. Incidences of Violence / Intimidation

There were reported cases of intimidation of voters on the election day before they voted. In Chiveso village in Bindura South Constituency, ZANU PF party agents were heard threatening villagers that if they vote for opposition they will be 'properly dealt with' after the election. In Guruve, there was a

reported case of agents from different political parties who threatened each other during the night at one polling station. On the voting day, in Masembura, Bindura South Constituency members of the ruling party reportedly gathered 300 meters away from the polling station shouting at everyone who passed by to vote for their party. There was also a case at Marian Primary school in Bindura urban where an MDC Agent had a misunderstanding with the presiding officer after one voter was turned away and they exchanged words emotionally.

In Mazowe Central a Member of Parliament Candidate from Zanu Pf was seen handing money to some women in the polling station. In the same constituency an MDC Alliance candidate for local government was sat at the gate of two polling stations.

In Bindura North Constituency, at a polling station in a farming community Retreat, all voters were assisted to vote. The ZEC official at the entrance of the polling room asked voters who was going to assist them as they entered into the room. This sort of normalised and gave an impression that all voters were supposed to be assisted. These incidences may have resulted in intimidation of voters.

9. Polling Stations Closing Times

For 90% of the polling stations visited, voting ended around 1600hours, after which the polling officers had to await for individuals who were now coming at spaced intervals. In some polling stations, polling officers had started winding down on their paperwork by then. Sorting counting and tallying then started after 1900hours when the polling stations had officially closed. This took the whole night until 0400hours on average.

9. General Election Preparedness

While there seemed to be preparedness on many aspects of the election on election day, there was a general lack of attention to areas where there was no electricity especially in most rural, farming and mining communities. Yet opening of ballot boxes, sorting, counting and tabulation was definitely going to happen in the night. ZEC provided some gas lanterns which did not work in most of the observed polling stations.

Recommendations

- There is need to align and harmonise the electoral laws to comply with the Constitution.
- There is need to open mechanisms that enhance women's participation in all electoral processes, especially as candidates.
- There is need for legal mechanisms to safeguard the rights of voters who are forced to be assisted to vote
- ZEC needs to enhance its electoral efficiency in order to make electoral processes more transparent and credible by addressing issues to do with the voters' roll to avoid missing

names of registered voters even after they verified their details during voter's roll inspection; and accessibility of polling stations by all and other infrastructural aspects such as adequate lighting