

WALPE Activity update-03



MARCH BY-ELECTIONS: Are Female Candidates Ready?



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LIVE BROADCAST ON:   ZTNnews  zimpapers tv network  ZTN

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i) Women reject the Private Voluntary (PVO) Bill.





The WALPE observed the public hearings on the Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO) bill in the country's ten provinces from 28 February to 04 March 2022. The public consultations on the PVO Bill were being spearheaded by the Parliamentary portfolio committee on Labour, Public Service and Social Welfare. The Bill in its current form aims to restrict the work of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

The WALPE teams were on the ground monitoring the process in Harare, Guruve, Zhombe, Mutoko, Beitbridge, Kariba, Tsholotsho, Lupane, Gwanda, Masvingo, Rusape, Bulawayo, Gutu and Chinhoyi. Most of the participants made contributions against passing of the bill highlighting the drastic effects this would have on their socio-economic and political life. It is sad that some of the hearings were marred by violence and disruptions and has to be adjourned prematurely. These include the ones held in Highfields- Harare, Rusape, Gutu and Bulawayo. It looked like there were people coordinated to disrupt the hearings and block people from raising their objections on the content of the bill.

Some of the submissions made during the PVO public hearings.

- No evidence has been presented to substantiate the allegations that PVOs are responsible for any terrorist activity for which the law seeks to address.
- In the bill, political lobbying, is not clarified leaving room for the government and its agencies to trivialize non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the course of their operations. This means that NGOs working on enhancing women political participation like WALPE are at risk of closure and attacks from the government and this will overall derail efforts towards advancement of gender equality.
- NGOs particularly women's rights organizations have played an instrumental role on issues of sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR), constitutional awareness, ending gender based violence, unpaid care and domestic work, gender equality, climate change, child marriages etc.
- NGOs have been supporting communities to improve the welfare, education, health, advocacy for upholding of constitutional rights, which will leave communities vulnerable if their operations are restricted.
- The bill is giving the minister too much power. It is unheard of that the Bill empowers the minister to remove the leadership of NGOs who would have "digressed from their mandate" and appoint committees to the organizations who will not share the same vision and, uphold the same values on which an organization is premised.
- NGOs have been transparent when distributing aid in communities unlike some government departments who are partisan and politicize the process.
- NGOs have assisted communities in times of crisis like natural disasters where the government would have failed to cater for its people's welfare.
- Issues of money laundering are already covered in other pieces of legislations such that there no need to bring in a new law to regulate that.
- NGOs have already been complying with registration processes with the local authorities and other government departments when getting into communities and there is no need to impose further restrictions.
- The Bill contravenes a number of regional and international protocols which Zimbabwe ratified.

ii)TV Program highlights what needs to be done to push for women participation in elections.



Members of the Women Reform Network (WRN), an electoral reform platform that WALPE coordinates converged on BUSTOP TV for a discussion on “*What can be done by the government and political parties to push for the full participation of women in electoral processes as we move closer to the election*”. The programme was supported by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and brought together 35 women members of 10 women’s rights organizations with an interest in elections.

The participants shared what they are doing through their organizations in various constituencies that they operate in preparation for the by-election and the national elections scheduled for 2023. They also highlighted pertinent issues that need to be addressed to ensure a level playing field for men and women in the run up to the elections including:

- (i) Mentorship, grooming and coaching programmes for aspiring women leaders offered by women’s rights organizations ought to be intensified to increase the number of effective women leaders.

- (ii) The government must ensure equal media access for both male and female candidates.
- (iii) The government must guarantee that political party finance allocations have a clear quota for women leaders' capacitation to enable a level playing field and reduce challenges of vote buying which disadvantage women candidates.
- (iv) The government must set up policies that eradicate political violence to protect women candidates that are usually subjected to various forms of abuse during election periods.

iii) March 26, Bi-elections: Are female candidates ready?



As the countdown to the March 26, 2022 by-elections begins, the Women Reform Network (WRN) held a talk-show with three female candidates from the ZANU PF, MDC Alliance and Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) political parties on 25 February 2022.

The talk-show was hosted by ZTN TV with support from National Democratic Institute (NDI) and laid bare some of the challenges women candidates are facing in the run up to the by-election. Some of the issues raised include: i) lack of funds to run meaningful campaigns, ii) political violence, iii) name calling, iv) being labelled radical feminists, v) limited access to media and vi) subjected to bullying on various social media platforms.

They all concurred that it was high time the government crafted a legislative framework that criminalizes violence against female political candidates. They also stated that some of the male candidates they are competing against instigate the use of harsh, derogatory and sexist language against them which discourages them and other aspiring women leaders from taking up public office positions.

iv)280 graduate in Transformative Feminist Leadership.









280 aspiring women leaders successfully graduated in Transformative Feminist Leadership (TFL) in Nyanga, Makoni, Gutu and Hopely under the Women for Community Leadership Program (WCLP). The program which is being supported by Citizen Engagement for Accountability Activity (CEAA) brought together, women, young women and women with disabilities from different social, economic and political backgrounds.

WALPE trained the women in groups of 20-25 in all the areas covering topics such as Leadership, Social Accountability, Negotiation and Consensus Building, Grooming and Etiquette, Climate Change, Public Speaking etc. The capacity building sessions ensured that the beneficiaries are well-rounded leaders and able to impose gender-responsive strategies to developing their communities and advocating for the advancement of gender equality.

The WALPE also distributed smartphones to all 280 women following a digital literacy course aimed at ensuring that they are up to date with trends in the socio-economic and political life. This also increases their presence on online platforms for campaigning purposes. The smart phones will go a long way in assisting the aspiring women leaders to access virtual meetings and communicate with the electorate real time.

v) #WomenForElectoralReforms safe spaces in Gutu launched.



With support from the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN), the WALPE conducted door to door sessions raising awareness and sensitizing women in their safe spaces on outstanding electoral reforms in Gutu from 18-20 February 2022.

The level of participation and involvement of women in the electoral reform agenda has been very low in Zimbabwe because they lack access to information and how women can benefit if sound electoral reforms are implemented. At the end of the dialogue sessions, the women exhibited increased appreciation of how their involvement in issues of electoral reforms will enhance gender equality in Zimbabwe. The organization also raised awareness on the importance of registering to vote through distributing branded masks, sanitizers, and bags to women in the informal sector in Gutu.

vi) 2.2 million votes for women from women campaign launch successes in Harare and Hwedza





Women first time voters from Harare and Hwedza came out in their numbers and registered to vote under the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) mobile biometric voter registration blitz from 11-14 February 2022.

In Harare alone, the Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence (WALPE) supported by the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN) mobilized 100 women first time voters to register to vote in Kuwadzana and Hopely.

The WALPE also took the opportunity to launch its 2.2 million votes for women from campaign and also observed the voter registration exercise advocating for free, fair and credible elections in the areas. The 100 registered voters were also given t-shirts branded with messages encouraging people to register to vote and participate in the electoral processes.

vii) Women accountability forums on reforms set up in Hwedza.



In a bid to strengthen accountability by political leaders and actors, the WALPE set up women community accountability teams in Hwedza during forums that were attended by women from different socio-economic and political backgrounds. The forums were held between 11- 13 February 2022 bringing together 150 women aspiring leaders with support from the Netherlands Embassy.

The participants discussed various strategies they can use to mobilise fellow women to register to vote and vote for female candidates. Hwedza is one of the areas with low participation of women in leadership and decision making positions. They also agreed on ways to engage those already in power and hold them accountable for promises they made in past elections. The women vowed to advocate for devolution, development and improved social service delivery working in partnership with local authorities and current community and national leaders in the area.

viii) Talk-shows highlight outstanding electoral reforms affecting women's full participation in leadership.

WOMEN REFORM NETWORK

**LIVE BROADCAST AT
DIAMOND FM 103.8**

15 February 2022-10:30 am

Prospects of
implementation of
outstanding electoral
reforms as the nation
gears for the 2023
elections.

What needs to be done?

Alice Kuveya
Director
CHITREST

Ruvimbo Chivere
SPROUT
Programmes Officer

With support from the National Democratic Institute, the Women Reform Network (WRN) hosted a radio discussion on *Prospects of implementation of electoral reforms as the nation gears towards the 2023 elections. What needs to be done?*

WRN member and Chitungwiza Residents Trust director, Alice Kuveya was on the talk-show and highlighted pertinent reforms necessary for the full participation of women and girls in elections including: i) the need for gender equality in all public elected positions in compliance with sections 17, 56 and 80 of the Constitution, ii) For political parties to walk the talk on gender

equality and increase women participation in leadership and decision making by affording them equal opportunities as their male counterparts, iii)for the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to acquire enough equipment for the mobile biometric voter registration exercise to reach everyone to increase women participation in electoral processes, iv) expand other strategies being implemented by women's rights organizations pushing the electoral reform agenda such as trainings on leaderships, the #LetsGo50/50 awareness campaigns, submission of petitions to parliament, access to media and end to all forms of violence against women in politics.