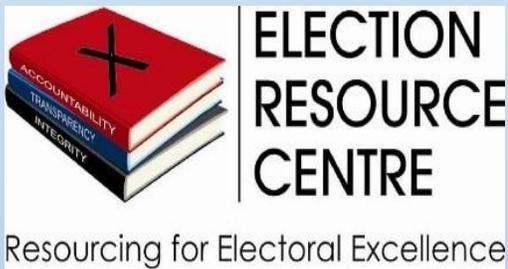


An observer report on the implementation
of Biometric Voter Registration in
Zimbabwe (Phase 2)



Zimbabwe Voter Registration 2017

Monitoring and Observation
Report –Phase 2

Election Resource Centre (ERC) Nov 2017

Zimbabwe Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) Phase 2 Implementation Report: Strengthening Oversight in Electoral Processes

Introduction

Phase 2 of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise implemented by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) ahead of harmonized elections expected mid-2018 ended on the 13th of November 2017. The continuous BVR exercise was launched in 63 districts on 18 September 2017 while a national blitz program to register more Zimbabweans was launched on 10 October 2017. The blitz is being implemented in four phases ending on the 19th of December 2017.

The Election Resource Centre (ERC) and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) in their observation and monitoring effort aim to facilitate near real time responses to issues emanating from the BVR exercise. In doing so, an election situation room to receive issues was established on the 10th of October 2017. The ERC and ZimRights deployed 63 monitors in the 63 districts. The observation effort covers both BVR implementation and voter education for voter registration. The unique oversight efforts are informed by the realization that observation alone, while necessary is no longer adequate. Rather, a combination and complementary of observation coupled with near real time remedies to challenges and issues emanating from the BVR exercise enhances transparency and accountability in electoral processes.

This report details observations of the citizens and observers, oversight and mobilization efforts of the ERC and Zimrights in the second phase of BVR implementation and the continuous process in 63 districts.

Environmental Scan

The second phase of the BVR exercise began on 29 October 2017 and ended on 13 November 2017. The operating environment was largely characterized by peace and improved voter education efforts by the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC). Importantly, the phase was implemented at a time the political environment was riddled with factional fights in the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party. These led to the expulsion of Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa from both the party and government. The period also saw the reshuffling of cabinet. Significantly, a new Minister for Justice, Legal, and Parliamentary Affairs was appointed. Furthermore, implementation of phase two began at a time when traditional leaders declared allegiance to the ruling party and President Robert Mugabe. This was in direct violation of their constitutional mandate and responsibilities. Moreover, it comes at a time when the traditional leaders have been accused of intimidating citizens through demanding voter registration confirmation slips for records. Additionally, the phase witnessed an upsurge in efforts to influence the commission's work regarding invitation of foreign observers. Both the new Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President insisted that western foreign observers would not be welcome in the expected 2018 elections.

These events, though isolated, serve to undermine the work of the commission in asserting its independence, credibility and promoting integrity of electoral processes.

Fundamentally, in the second phase, ZEC registered 1,120,974 people. However, as in the first phase, these figures did not include 27% of registration centres as they faced network challenges. Cumulatively, ZEC has registered 2,361,433 citizens being 32.7% of the projected eligible population. The numbers of those turned away stood at 48, 425 at the end of the second phase. The major reasons for this include lack of identification documents, “alien” citizens, failure to produce proof of residence, under age and defaced identification documents. Significantly, ZEC was not providing VR5 forms to turned away citizens arguing that they had not objected to their registration but rather advised them to seek proper identification documents from the Registrar General.

Methodology

The ERC and ZimRights employed a comprehensive methodology anchored on citizen observation (crowd sourcing), 63 district accredited observers and monitors, a sample of 1 200 observers (yet to be accredited) and a technical (mobile) team responsible for escalation of emerging issues in real time. These were coordinated through an election situation room and a call centre. During phase 2, the call centre received 421 phone calls from citizens reporting on the BVR exercise. Of the reported issues, 27 issues were escalated or referred to relevant bodies in particular ZEC to ensure redress in near real time.

Furthermore, the ERC conducted a quick and rapid assessment of the implementation of the BVR exercise in Midlands, Bulawayo, Masvingo and Matabeleland South provinces. The rapid assessment was informed by the need to complement the work of ERC monitors and observers countrywide. It sought to understand and follow up on reasons for low turnout, issues of network challenges, voter education, the political environment, reasons and action taken on turned away potential registrants among other issues. The findings thereof will complement the already available information collated through the call centre, district monitors and sampled observers across Zimbabwe. The assessment took the form of interviews with key informants in particular District Election Officers (DEOs), Provincial Election Officers (PEOs), Councilors, monitors and observers, citizens and registration officials. Furthermore, the assessment utilized the opportunity to observe implementation of the BVR exercise.

Summary of findings and recommendations

1. There were no VR5 forms at all registration centres under phase 2. ZEC officials interviewed stated that they were not sharing the forms as they are not objecting or denying anyone registration but are simply advising them to get proper documentation. The ERC recommends that the form be made available to allow citizens a possibility of recourse.

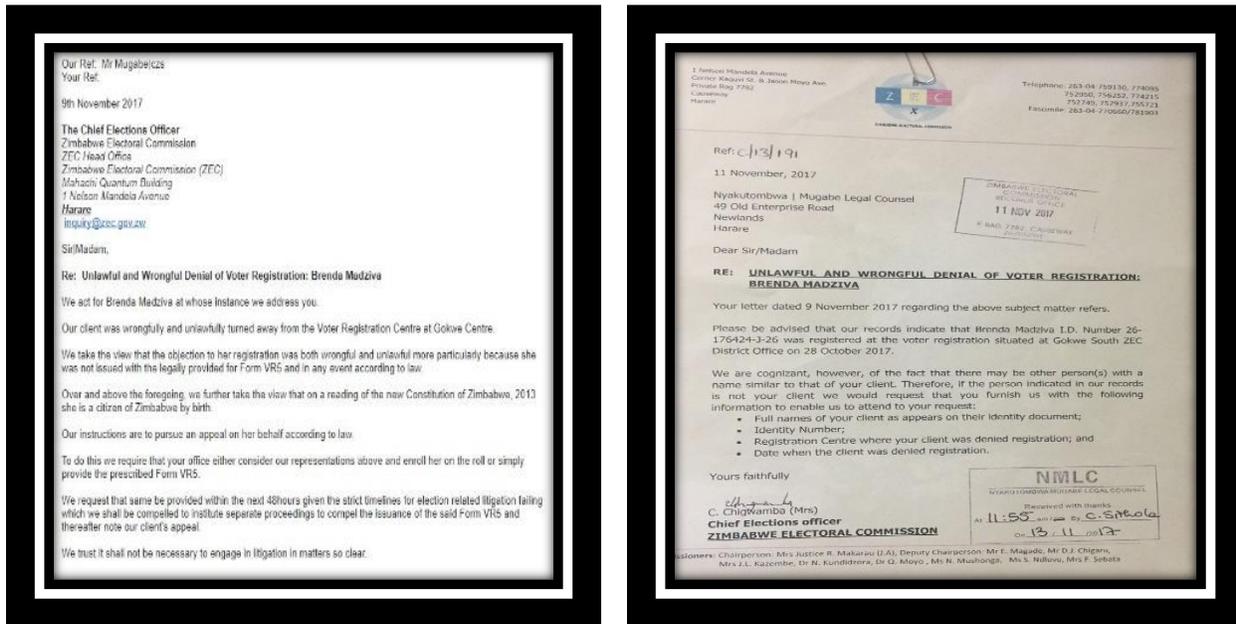
2. BVR kits were not separating statistics of registration between phases, rather they were only providing cumulative figures thereby making it difficult to disaggregate figures for each phase.
3. The authorisation of voter registration supervisors to be Commissioners of Oath greatly improved challenges associated with the requirement of proof of residence.
4. Voter education was carried out 5 days before the voter registration. Four voter educators were allocated per ward. This was coupled by road shows, mass media adverts and posters.
5. Voter registration by youths of ages 18-25 remains very low.
Voter mobilisation efforts by ZEC and all stakeholders must target the young people. It must emphasise on the importance of voting.
6. Voter registration by women was higher as compared to that of men.
7. A majority of registration centres set up at school premises recorded lower turnout compared to those set up in the open, under tents.
8. Network challenges were concentrated in Matabeleland South, North, Midlands, and Masvingo. Registration statistics transmission was via phone calls, the mentioned areas were not adequately covered by the three network providers Netone, Econet and Telecel.
ZEC must facilitate the use of foreign networks in border areas such as Beitbridge, Plumtree and Chirundu. Citizens in these areas already use foreign networks.
9. Identity documents were the major reason for turned away potential registrants. The Registrar General's mobile exercise was not issuing IDs on time and was not issuing to "aliens."
The Registrar General should decentralise the issuance of new identity documents to "aliens." Additionally, they must rapidly issue documents to those who have applied.
10. There are no political agents observing the voter registration process in the provinces observed.
Political parties must closely monitor the BVR process to enhance their appreciation, transparency and accountability of the exercise.
11. Weather patterns (especially cloudy) paused a challenge for BVR kits power provision through solar.
ZEC must find alternative sources of powering BVR kits, for example, hiring out generators.

Towards near real time remedies to BVR challenges

The monitoring and observation strategy employed by the ERC endeavors to facilitate near real time remedies to issues raised by citizens and other election stakeholders. Towards meeting this endeavor, the ERC and Zimrights set up a situation room comprising of a call centre and a citizen justice desk. Below is a summary of some of the issues received and escalated;

Through the citizen justice desk the ERC managed to file and raise complaints on behalf of 10 "alien" citizens with ZEC and or with the Magistrate Court. One case of Brenda Madziva from

Sesame Constituency in Gokwe was resolved by ZEC and the citizen was registered after she acquired an identity document from the registrar's office.



Pictures 1: Engagement with ZEC on behalf of an “alien” citizen in Gokwe

Summary of Escalated Issues

Issue Raised	Where	When	Referred to	Status
Political intimidation of villagers by village heads.	Mbire Ward 12	29 October 2017	Zimbabwe Chief’s Council, ZRP	Pending
	Murehwa West Ward 14	30 October 2017		
	Nyanga South Ward 30	05 November 2017		
	Mutoko Ward 11	05 November 2017		
	Nyanga North Ward 3	06 November 2017		
ZEC officials turning away potential registrants as early as 1300hrs	Keldon Shopping Centre Hatfield	13 November 2017	ZEC DEO	Closed
	Pangola Acturus Harare East	20 October 2017		
Harassment and intimidation of vendors wearing ERC t-shirts written “Register, Elect, Engage”	Mbare	05 November 2017	ZRP	Closed

Turned away potential registrants on the basis that they are aliens	Karoi, Gokwe Central and Chitungwiza			One resolved, Others pending
Shortage of VR9 and VR1 forms	Townhouse	07 November 2017	ZEC DEO	Closed
	Budiriro	06 November 2017		

Other issues recorded

421 phone calls were received by the call centre. A majority of the calls involved issues on shortage of VR9 forms, unavailability of Commissioners of Oath and intimidation through recording of serial numbers by traditional leaders.

Issues Raised	Where	Action Taken
Shortage of VR9 forms	Townhouse	ERC distributed 22 000 VR9 forms.
	Budiriro	
	Mt Pleasant	
	Mabvuku	
	Chinhoyi University	
	Dzivarasekwa	
Unavailability of Commissioners of Oath	Mabelreign Girls High	ERC deployed Commissioners of Oath.
	David Livingstone	
	Glen Lorne Shopping Centre	
	Chinhoyi University	
	Mbare- Remembrance Complex	
Recording of serial numbers	Muzarabani North Ward 5	The ZHRC was engaged to assess human rights violations and intimidation in relation to voter registration.
	Shamva North Ward 7	
	Mudzi North ward 10	
	Mutoko Ward 11	
	Murehwa Ward 4	

The call centre also received calls relating to BVR kits malfunctioning largely due to weather. These were referred to ZEC.

BVR equipment malfunctioning

Registration Centre	When	Action Taken
Plumtree, Umzingwane, Keldon Shopping Centre Hatfield, Pangola Acturus (Harare East). Power cuts due to heavy rains.	13 November 2017	Referred to ZEC which acknowledged the issue and was referring would be registrants to other registration centres which were fully functional.
Nyamazizi Primary School, Mt Darwin	07 November 2017	Referred to ZEC

Mobilisation and Information provision

As part of ERC and Zimrights' mobilisation and information provision efforts a myriad of activities were implemented including roadshows, distribution of IEC materials and social media blitz. These efforts complemented those already under implementation by ZEC. In particular, roadshows were conducted in Masvingo, about 380 000 citizens were reached via twitter and more through mass media articles and story coverage.



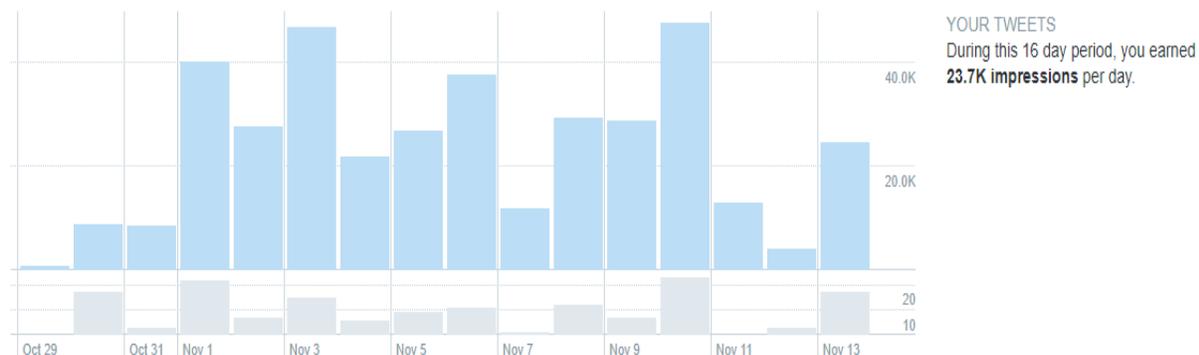
Picture 2: Roadshow conducted by ERC and ZimRights in Masvingo

Tweet activity

Oct 29 – Nov 13, 2017

Export data

Your Tweets earned **379.9K impressions** over this **16 day** period



Picture 3: Shows the interactions on Twitter during the Phase two of the Voter Registration (29 Oct – 13 Nov)

Findings from Accredited Observers

Pre-Registration Process

Opening times

90.07% of the voter registration centres opened on time (between 7-8am) while 5.15% opened marginally late between 8-9am. 3.68% opened before 7am and only 1.1% opened after 9am. It was likewise revealed that some of the centres (in Zvimba North) failed to open on the first day of phase 2 voter registration owing to heavy rains. Another polling station (KG6) opened towards the end of the phase on the 9th of November 2017, only registered for two days and did not open afterwards until the end of phase 2.

Availability of materials

95% of registration centres had sufficient materials in place. The materials evaluated incorporated the BVR kit in its working state, voter registration forms (VR1, VR9), functioning printer, a working camera and a backup solar and generator. Around 76% of the registration centres sampled had a functioning solar system. It was additionally noticed that the last two days of phase 2 were characterised by power cuts and some centres could not use solar panels because of the awful climate experienced.

However, 100% of the sampled centres did not have VR5 forms. These are issued to turned away would be registrants for recourse with the Magistrate's Court.

Was the registration set-up in a way that promotes easy movement of registrants with disabilities?

A majority 88% of the registration centres in phase 2 reported to be accessible to people with disabilities. 15% reported inaccessibility to the disabled.

How many registration officials were present in the Registration Centre?

A majority of the registration centres (87%) were reported to be staffed by between 1 and 4 registration officials. 11% reported registration officers numbering between 5 and 9 officials while one reported more than 10 officers present.

Availability of party agents

78% of registration centres were not staffed by political party agents. 17% reported presence of between 1 and 4 political party agents while 4% reported the presence of more than 5 political party agents.

Registration Process

Did the registration officials check identification documents when registrants arrived?

The voter registration process involves thorough checking of identity and proof of residence documents before a citizen can proceed to register. 97% followed the necessary thoroughness by checking documents of prospective registrants. Only 0.6% was reported to slacken in as far as confirming citizenship and proof of residence.

Did the Registration Centre have a Commissioner of Oath and how many registrants used affidavits?

Proof of residence is a prerequisite to the current registration process. Among the many possible proofs is a signed affidavit signed by a Commissioner of Oath. Most citizens were resorting to this method of proving residence. ERC and Zimrights monitors noted that 80% of the registration centres under phase two were staffed by Commissioners of Oath at any given day of registration. This was common around district registration centres and less common at blitz registration centres.

Were there any registrants who were not allowed to register but had all the required documents?

Incidents of citizens with adequate documentation but denied to register were not common. 89% successfully registered in areas where reports were received while 7% were turned away. ZEC reported that some citizens still had ID's marked alien, while others had defaced ID documents or did not meet the proof of residence requirements.

After successful registration, were voters given a copy of registration certificate/confirmation?

97% reported successful completion of registration process through confirmation/ registration certificate issuance.

Where the elderly and pregnant women given priority to register?

Phase 2 of BVR blitz witnessed elderly and pregnant women given priority to register where there are queues. 93% reported such preference.

Was there violence or intimidation around the registration centre?

Phase 2 of the registration process was largely characterised by peace around the voter registration centres. 94% reported a peaceful environment, free of intimidation, intolerance and violence. However, cases of intimidation were also reported particularly in rural areas.

Where registration staff able to operate BVR equipment?

95% reported successful and efficient operation of BVR equipment by the ZEC registration staff while 3% reported lethargy and elements of struggle in operation.

Did the registration centre register people from other registration centres?

ZEC notified stakeholders that the BVR process would allow citizens to register to vote from anywhere in Zimbabwe. It was reported that during registration, citizens would be allocated to a particular polling station within their proximity. However, reports from the monitors show that 9% of registration centres in phase 2 refused to register people from other registration centres. It was reported that these numbers largely did not exceed 10 citizens per centre. 88% of registration centres allowed people from other wards and districts to register.

How many registrants were being processed within 1hour interval?

ZEC stated that they expected to register a minimum of 12 people within an hour interval. 42% of the registration centres were processing 6-10 people per hour, while 52% processed between 11-20 per hour and 5% processed less than 5 per hour.

How many registrants were NOT allowed to register?

ERC and Zimrights monitors recorded numbers of citizens turned away to vote. 35% reported average figures of between 1 and 10 people being turned away per centre, while 5% reported high numbers of more than 11 people per centre.

Closing of Registration Centre

What time did the registration centre close?

A majority (80%) of the registration centres closed between 16:45 hours -17:30 hours while 9% closed before 16:45 hours and 9% closed after 1730hrs. 19% of the registration centres had

people in the queue when the registration centre closed. A majority of 19% were not allowed to register after closure of registration centres.

At the end of registration, did the registration officers seal/lock the aperture on the BVR registration kit?

94% were confirmed to have followed due procedure by locking the aperture on the BVR registration kits while 2% did not confirm. The remainder did not submit reports regarding the procedure.

Who was present at closure?

At closure, 90% of those present were identified to be police officers, 59% to be accredited observers, 20% were political party agents and 10% reported to be unidentified/unauthorised persons.

Did the registration Officer provide updated registration figures to agents, observers present at the close of registration?

Only 25% disclosed updated registration figures to agents and observers at closure. 75% did not provide any updated details claiming that the statistics will be provided for at ZEC headquarters.

Ends//