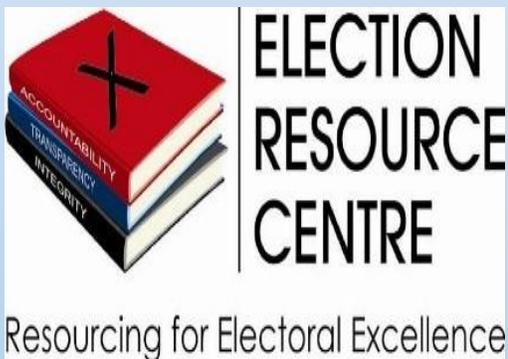


An observer report on the implementation
of Biometric Voter Registration in
Zimbabwe (phase 3)



Zimbabwe Voter Registration 2017

Monitoring and observation
report –Phase 3

Election Resource Centre (ERC) Dec 2017

Zimbabwe Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) Phase 3 Implementation Report: Strengthening Oversight in Electoral Processes

Introduction

The third phase of BVR was implemented from 16 November to 01 December 2017. It proceeded smoothly despite political challenges that characterized the country. However, the political challenges saw a dip in the registration figures recorded during the period. Biometric Voter Registration was launched in 63 districts of Zimbabwe on 18 September 2017. A blitz program to register more Zimbabweans was launched on 10 October 2017. The blitz is being implemented in four phases. In an effort to monitor the process the Election Resource Centre (ERC) and Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (Zimrights) established an election situation room comprising a call centre, a citizen justice desk and an escalation desk. The two organizations also deployed 63 monitors in the 63 districts to monitor the continuous voter registration process. Additionally, a total of 330 sampled observers were deployed across the country for the third phase.

Summary of findings

1. Numbers of turned away would-be registrants reduced to 14,499 from 28,515 and 21,848 in phase 1 and 2 respectively.
2. No kits were reported to be malfunctioning in phase 3
3. A number of kits, about 3%, were reported to have run of power during registration. This was attributed to cloudy weather as the kits are solar powered.
4. Hopley, Amsterdam Park and Stone-ridge residents were not allocated registration centres and had to travel to Southlea Park to register.
5. Aliens were not allowed to register in the phase. However, a High Court judgement of 30 November 2017 stated that they were citizens and must be allowed to register.
6. Some registration centres, about 5%, ran out of materials in particular VR9 and VR1 forms.
7. There was demand for Commissioners of Oath at registration centres, notwithstanding the fact that voter registration supervisors were allowed to commission.
8. Voter registration turnout is decreasing with each phase from 17, 2% (phase 1) to 16, 7% (phase 2) and 15% in phase 3.
9. Phase three captured 11.5% of Harare registrants (highest in figures) compared to 19.1% in Mashonaland Central (highest in turnout)
10. Harare figures changed by +0.5% from 01 December 2017 to final statistics but all centres had submitted. The same applied for Bulawayo and Masvingo.
11. 20% of registration centres failed to submit statistics as at closure of phase 3 due to network challenges compared to 27% in phase 2 mainly in Midlands and Matabeleland North.

12. No cases of demand for registration confirmation serial numbers from traditional and community leaders were reported.

Background and environmental scan

The phase under review was characterized by a shift in the political environment as the Zimbabwe Defense Forces (ZDF) “stepped in” to normalize the political situation which they claimed had been hijacked by “criminals” surrounding then President RG Mugabe. Following that, citizens of Zimbabwe marched in the streets on the 18th of November demanding the resignation of the former President of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe. Further, an impeachment process was initiated by Parliament of Zimbabwe. Under pressure, President Robert Mugabe announced his resignation through the Speaker of Parliament on the 22nd of November 2017. Significantly, on the 24th of November, President Emmerson Mnangagwa was sworn in as the new President of Zimbabwe. The turn of events left many citizens with uncertainty on how and when the election period will commence thus some citizens were reluctant to turn up for the registration process. In the meantime, BVR implementation continued amid reduced numbers of registrants as the country recovered from political changes.

Methodology

The ERC and Zimrights employed a comprehensive methodology anchored on citizen observation (crowd sourcing), 63 district accredited observers and monitors, a sample of 330 unaccredited sample observers and a technical (mobile) team responsible for verification and escalation of emerging issues in real time. These were coordinated through an election situation room. During phase 3, the call centre received 1,012 phone calls from citizens reporting on the BVR exercise. Of the reported issues, 13 issues were escalated or referred to relevant bodies in particular ZEC to ensure redress in near real time. A total of 13,559 messages were received through the bulk sms platform.

Call centre summary

Phone Calls/Messages	Totals	Issues Raised
Incoming calls	1,012	- Information and reports on BVR processes in respective areas. -Citizens seeking help on getting new ID documents. (lost documents, deceased relatives, defaced IDs, Aliens) -Turned away would be registrants -Citizens looking for VR9 forms
Outgoing calls	917	-Providing information on registration centres

		-inquiries on environment, verification of issues emerging from registration centres
Incoming messages	13,559	-Citizens enquiring on voter registration phases, centres and requirements
Outgoing messages	79,003	-Bulk messages were sent encouraging citizens to register to vote and informing them of the call centre toll free number.

Voter registration turnout

Phase 3 of voter registration was characterized by a low turnout as compared to phase 1 and 2. According to statistics provided by ZEC as at 01 December 2017, a total of 1,083,453 aspiring voters successfully registered during the 16 day period. The end of phase 3 saw the cumulative figure for registrants rising to 3,532,577.

A total of 14,499 potential registrants were turned away during phase 3. Reasons for turned away include underage, aliens, no IDs, invalid passports, drivers license, broken metal ID and intending to use birth certificates as form of identification. This was significantly lower than 28,515 in phase one and 21 848 in phase 2.

Summary of escalated issues

The ERC and ZimRights call centre received reports on the voter registration process from deployed monitors and citizens. The issues were forwarded to responsible authorities for near real time redress.

Issues Raised	Where	When	Action Taken
BVR Kits out of power	Townhouse	28 November 2017	ZEC replaced the machines that were out of power with two more.
	Southlea Park	28 November 2017	
	Glen View-Makomva	27 November 2017	
Inaccessible (far away) registration centres	Southlea Park Registration centres far away for Hopley and Stoneridge citizens.	16 November to 01 December 2017	Referred to ZEC DEO's office.
High number of turned away potential registrants on the basis of being aliens	Southlea Park	16 November to 01 December 2017	A citizen justice desk was set up by the ERC to assist the aliens. The High Court passed a judgment
	Budiriro		
	Gokwe South		
	Marondera		
	Bulawayo		

			allowing the aliens to register.
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On the 30th of November 2017 High Court Judge Justice Nyaradzo Munangati-Manongwa granted an order allowing the called Aliens to go and get registered as prospective voters by ZEC provided that they bring along with them:

- Their identity documents endorsed alien coupled with a birth certificate
- Proof of residence

The granting of the court order came after human rights lawyer Denford Halimani of (Zimbabwe lawyers for Human Rights) ZLHR petitioned the High Court on behalf of Harare resident Sarah Kachingwe and two opposition political parties namely MDC-T and MDC-N seeking an order to compel ZEC to register the so-called aliens as prospective voters for the 2018 general elections during the ongoing BVR exercise.

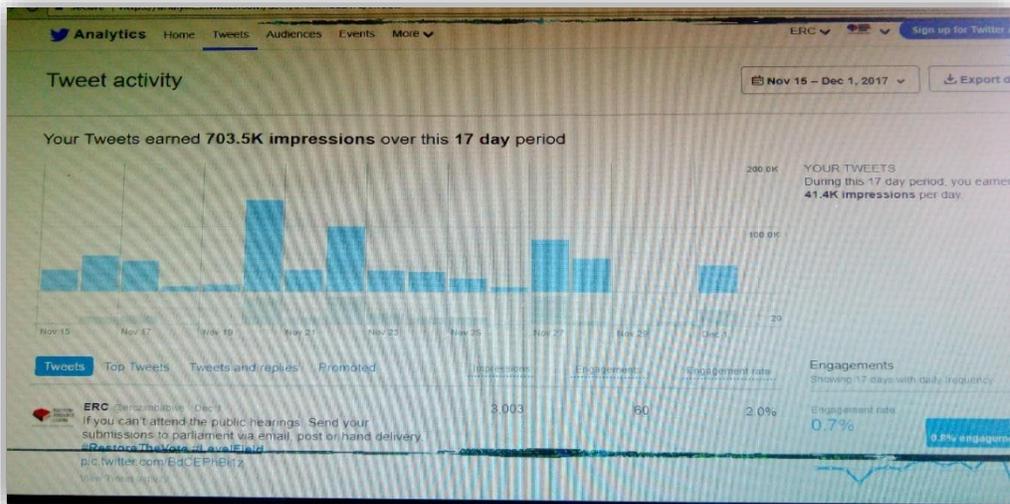
In the last two days of phase three, the ERC noted that some registration centres began to allow aliens to register while others still waited for a directive to that effect. ZEC has since welcomed aliens with the documents stated by the High Court Judgment to register.

Administrative Issues

Issues Raised	Where	Action Taken
Shortage of VR1 and VR9 forms	Consortium- Southlea Park	ERC distributed 62 300 VR9 forms. ZEC provided more VR1 forms for concerned registration centres.
	Townhouse	
	Budiriro	
	Gwanda	
	Bulawayo	
	Mbare Netball Complex	
	Buhera West	
Demand for Commissioners of Oath	Marondera Central	With assistance from Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) and ZimRights, the ERC managed to deploy 15 Commissioners to Oaths in the respective areas. ZEC Supervisors also alleviated the situation as they commissioned affidavits.
	Harare- Southlea Park, Budiriro, Mt Pleasant	
	Mazowe North	
	Mangwe	
	Seke Ward 15	
	Silobela	
	Makoni	

Mobilization and Information provision

As part of ERC and Zimrights’ mobilization and information provision efforts a myriad of activities were implemented including exhibition, distribution of IEC materials and social media blitz. These efforts complemented those already under implementation by ZEC. In particular, about 703,500 citizens were reached via twitter and more through, Facebook, radio, mass media articles and story coverage. Targeting young people, the ERC exhibited at the Big Turn Up event. The team interacted with youths, provided information on the BVR blitz and encouraged those who haven’t registered to do so. Additionally, a concert dubbed “celebrate a milestone” was conducted to encourage and celebrate young people who had registered to vote at Hellenic sports club on the 17th of November 2017.



Picture1: Shows the interactions on Twitter during phase 2 of Voter Registration (16 Nov – 01 Dec)



Picture 2: Exhibition at the Big Turn Up conducted by ERC in Harare

Findings from accredited observers

Pre-Registration Process

Opening times

93% of the voter registration centres opened on time (between 7-8am) while 3.15% opened marginally late between 8-9am. 3% opened before 7am and only 1% opened after 9am. Most centres opened late on the first day of phase 3. This was attributed to transfer of BVR kits mostly in rural areas.

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. It was additionally noticed that the first few days of phase 3 were characterized by power cuts and some centres could not use solar panels because of the rainy climate experienced.

Again, as in the other two phases, 100% of the sampled centres did not have VR5 forms. These are issued to turned away would be registrants for recourse with the Magistrates Court. Upon inquiry, ZEC officials confirmed that VR5 forms were not available at the centres because they had not received official communication to distribute the forms.

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

A majority of 96% registration centres in phase 3 reported to be accessible to people living with disabilities. 2% reported inaccessibility to the disabled. The inaccessible centres remain the same as reported before as they are mostly district registration centres in Gokwe, Murombedzi, and Chipinge among others.

How many registration officials were present in the Registration Centre?

A majority of the registration centres (95%) were reported to be staffed by between 1 and 4 registration officials. 4% reported registration officials numbering between 5 and 9 officials while 1% reported more than 10 officers present. Were more officials were noted there were also more kits in the centre.

Availability of party agents

92% of the registration centres were not staffed by political party agents. 5% reported presence of between 1 and 4 political party agents while 1% reported the presence of more than 5 political party agents.

Registration Process

Did the registration officials check the identification documents when registrants arrived?

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 Oaths and how many registrants used affidavits?

80% of the registration centres under phase 3 were staffed by Commissioners of Oath at any given day of registration. The demand of Commissioners of Oath was also reduced due to the fact that voter registration officials were given the powers to commission.

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. A majority of these were alien citizens.

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

98% reported successful completion of registration process through confirmation/ registration certificate issuance.

Were the elderly and pregnant women given priority to register?

Phase 3 of BVR blitz witnessed elderly and pregnant women given priority to register where there are queues. 98% reported such preference.

Was there violence or intimidation around the registration centre?

Phase 3 of the registration process was characterized by peace around the voter registration centres. 98% reported a peaceful environment, free of intimidation, intolerance and violence.

Were registration staff able to operate the BVR equipment?

96% 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?

0% of registration centres in phase 3 refused to register people from other registration centres.

How many registrants were being processed within 1hour interval?

46% of the registration centres were processing 6-10 people an hour, while 5% processed between 11-20 an hour and 5% processed less than 5 an hour. This can also be attributed to the general low turnout during the phase.

How many registrants were NOT allowed to register?

During phase 3 the number of turned away aspiring registrants decreased massively to 11,704. 23% reported average figures of between 1 and 10 people turned away per centre, while 3% 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 1645hrs-1730hrs while 7% closed before 1645hrs and 11% closed after 1730hrs. 13% of the registration centres had people in the queue when the registration centre closed. A majority attributed the early closures to power shortage on the BVR kits.

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

97% were confirmed to have followed due procedure by locking the aperture on the BVR registration kits while 2% did not confirm.

Who was present at closure?

At closure, 91% of those present were identified to be police officers, 56% to be accredited observers, 7% were political party agents and 6% reported to be unidentified/unauthorized 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. 74% did not provide any updated details claiming that the statistics will be provided for at ZEC headquarters after consolidation.