Ballot Update Bulletin

LESSONS FROM UGANDA ON DEPLOYMENT OF BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION

"In February 2016 the ZESN National Director observed the presidential and parliamentary election in Uganda. For the first time Uganda used BVR."

● Uganda

○ Zimbabwe

In February, the ZESN National Director travelled to Uganda to observe the presidential and parliamentary elections, the first to be held using the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system in the country. The first lesson from the mission is that BVR and the use of ICTs is not a silver bullet to all electoral challenges.

The newly introduced system that uses human body characteristics to confirm a person's identity was aimed to improve inclusiveness and accuracy of the voter register.

The Ugandan electoral body compiled a new voter register for the 2016 general elections by extracting data on voting age citizens from the Ministry of Internal Affairs under the National Identification Register (NIR).

This was a National Security Information System (national ID) project. Biometric identification is where a voter offers a fingerprint, for example, and the device will look up all the biometric data it contains to see if there is a match (a 1:N match, where N is the number of records in the database).

The question being asked is "who is this person". Biometric verification, on the other hand, asks the question "is this person who they say they are?" So, for example, the voter's ID number is entered, and then a fingerprint and the system matches the offered fingerprint against just one, a 1:1 match.

Eight candidates were contesting for the presidency, including the incumbent Yoweri Museveni. One of them was a female. The parliamentary elections were for 413 seats in the National Parliament; out of this 238 members are elected by universal suffrage, the remainder represent special groups like women, youth, persons living with disabilities, army, among others.

They were 29 political parties contesting in the 2016 elections and several independent candidates.

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An election officer verifying the identity of a voter in the Uganda elections, the voter's paper has a barcode which the machine will scan to confirm identity.

What worked well?

All presidential candidates were given in soft and hard copies of the voter registers. These were also used at polling station by party agents to mark and keep a record of who and how many people voted.

In addition, the national voters' register was also available on the electoral commission's website. The voter location slips were issued in order to minimise time spent by voters locating their polling stations since as the country uses polling station based voters rolls whereby one is only allowed to vote at one designated polling station and not anywhere within the ward or constituency. The slips were distributed by the respective parish and sub-county supervisors something equivalent to a constituency and ward level in Zimbabwe. In addition there was also an SMS facility where one could get to know their voting location upon inquiring through SMS.

These are good lessons for Zimbabwe to tap on given that the country has wider mobile network coverage.

Picture source: http://www.ec.or.ug/

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Areas that need improvement.

While the BVR machines worked well, they were a number of shortcomings, in particular the electoral environment whereby the opposition leaders were intimidated and arrested, mistrust of the Election Management Body (EMB) by stakeholders, late delivery of election materials to some polling centres on election day, among others.

There were complaints that these new developments were not communicated on time to key electoral stakeholders such as political parties, civil society organisations (CSOs) and media. As a result there was no consensus if it was the best way to go.

Inadequate stakeholders' consultations led to insufficient information and voter education regarding the new system and its relationship between registering for the national ID and voter registration. As a result political parties complained that they were disadvantaged as they did not mobilise their supporters to register as voters.
The verification kits worked in most polling stations, hence quickening the verification process.

They were abandoned at few centres due to human errors not machine errors like putting wrong access codes and lack of skills to use them. In those situations they reverted to the printed voters register paper copies of the voter lists with photographs that the presiding officer could use to identify voters which were available at each polling station as an alternative option in case of technology failure.

"The greatest lesson for Zimbabwe is for the EMB to build trust and capacity as well as enhancing transparency by engaging key stakeholders at each stage of the voter registration process. If there is no trust in the EMB by stakeholders, introducing ICTs will not improve trust levels and confidence in electoral processes. I would reinforce that, BVR is not a silver bullet in solving all of Zimbabwe's electoral issues it must be complemented with other reforms to enhance the capacity and independence and trust of the electoral commission." said Mrs Rindai Chipfunde Vava on what lessons Zimbabwe can take from the Ugandan experience.

In Uganda the Electoral Commission used SMS platform for voters to receive information on the location of their exact polling stations

GOVERNMENT SHOULD CLARIFY TYPE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION (BVR)

It is two years before Zimbabwe holds the 2018 harmonised elections, the previous elections held in 2013 received widespread condemnation over the voter registration process which according to ZESN had serious irregularities such as under registration of voters especially in the urban wards. In the 2013 registration exercise, about 750 000 urban voters were missing in the voters' rolls according to ZESN's election report.

Therefore there is limited time to ensure that all requisite electoral reforms are implemented. Government has been under pressure from citizen observer groups to align the electoral

laws with the new constitution and as part of the reform measures crafted the General Laws Amendment Bill which carries a number of proposed electoral reforms. Some of the changes to the law include making ZEC independent and giving it the mandate to undertake voter registration, have custody of the voters' roll and introducing polling station-based voter registration and the possible adoption of Biometric Voter Registration (BVR).

ZESN recently responded to a report in The Herald of 10 March, 2016 on a number of electoral reforms that the government is proposing ahead of the 2018 harmonised elections especially

on the issue of what the paper termed "biometric (electronic) voting system".

ZESN highlighted that the use of technology in electoral processes has been adopted by a number of countries and can be utilized in voter registration, polling day using verification machines and electronic voting and in results management.

However the network urges the government to clarify which type of technology will be adopted whether it will be both the BVR and electronic voting systems or just BVR.

ZESN's understanding is that BVR is where one or more physical, biological behavioural characteristics are stored usually in a database and used for identification and verification of the voters unmistakably using biometric identifiers such as fingerprints or iris of the eye.

Electronic or e-voting is voting using electronic means to either aid or take care of the chores of casting and counting votes in place of ballot papers.

Countries such as Brazil, Germany, USA, Venezuela and Namibia use electronic voting machines while countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Ghana have adopted BVR systems.

ZESN understands that Zimbabwe seeks to undertake Biometric Voter Registration and is of the view that the implementation of technology in electoral processes should be staggered in phases with the current reform mainly focusing on Biometric Voter Registration. "BVR system accompanied by other electoral reforms has great potential to transform the electoral system in Zimbabwe given that it offers significant protection against double registrations and inaccuracies.

In addition, ZESN notes that the BVR system requires careful planning, preparation and implementation which if not properly planned and implemented could have more disastrous consequences to the integrity and credibility of the electoral process," said ZESN National Director, Mrs Rindai Chipfunde Vava.

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ZESN'S OBSERVATIONS OF THE MHONDORO-MUBAIRA BY-ELECTION

ZESN deployed 15 short term observers comprising static observers based at the ward and constituency collation centres to observer the Mhondoro-Mubaira by-election held on 5 March 2016 as part of its oversight role in promoting democratic elections in Zimbabwe. The seat had become vacant following the expulsion from ZANU PF and subsequent recalling from Parliament of former MP Sylvester Nguni.

The network observed that at all polling stations where they had observers opening procedures were followed and conducted on time with adequate polling personnel and voting materials. Important voting procedures such as checking of names in the voters' roll, marking of fingers with indelible ink and ensuring that voters cast their ballots in secret were followed.

Worryingly the organisation reported that in most polling stations only ZANU PF had polling agents inside the polling station despite the law allowing for contesting political parties to have one agent inside the polling station and to have an additional agent stationed within the vicinity of the polling station.

For the purposes of this by-election, ZEC used the polling station based voter registration system to register new voters as well as assign voters already registered their new specific polling stations.

ZESN highlighted the Commission used two voter's roll in this by-election making it the third by-election that the two separate voters' rolls (main and supplementary rolls) under the polling station based voting system.

ZESN National Director, Mrs Rindai Chipfunde Vava said, "There is need for clarification from ZEC as to the continued use of two voters' rolls for each polling station as the continued use of the two separate voters' rolls raises questions over ZEC's preparedness to fully implement the system for the 2018 harmonised elections." International best practice encourages the use of a single voters' roll in order to enhance stakeholder confidence as well as integrity of the electoral process.

As part of its recommendations, ZESN urged the electoral Commission to come up with a comprehensive voter registration methodology to ensure that all eligible voters are captured by the new polling station based voter registration system. Government must avail adequate resources to enhance the capacity of the Voter Registration department at the Commission to enable the consolidation of the main voters' rolls with the Supplementary Rolls into one voters' roll. The use of one voters' roll in future elections will greatly enhance the transparency and integrity of the electoral processes said ZESN in its post by-election statement.

Voters queuing up at Mukono Primary School in Mhondoro-Mubaira

TECHNOLOGY IS VITAL TO SOLVE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES WITH VOTER REGISTRATION.

ZESN organized a workshop on voter registration technologies for CSOs on 1 March, 2016 in Harare. The workshop sought to interrogate the various technologies used in voter registration, challenges associated with the systems and possible solutions for identified issues. An international expert on voter registration technologies engaged by

ZESN, highlighted that there are three main uses of technology in electoral processes on Election Day namely; for identification and authentication of the voter, electronic voting and result management. In most countries biometric technologies are mainly used to register voters in order to deter duplicate voters.

Participants learnt that although technology in voter registration can make things more effective, facilitate transparency and increase voter confidence it cannot change human political behaviour or replace human oversight.

A number of challenges and issues with the current voter registration model for Zimbabwe were identified such as the difficulties faced in registering, names of deceased people on the rolls, limited access to the voters' rolls by various electoral stakeholders such as political parties and CSOs and inadequacies in voter education for voter registration.

As part of the solutions to the identified issues with the current voter registration methodology, participants

suggested that the Electoral Commission make use of SMS and online platforms for voters' roll inspection which has been successfully done in countries like Pakistan, Uganda and Zambia. On improving access to the voters' rolls participants suggested that the rolls be made available electronically in searchable formats. Collaboration with various CSOs in voter education would greatly enhance the scope and reach of the exercises.

There was general consensus that as Zimbabwe moves towards integrating technologies in voter registration requisite skills training for election managers, political will and availing of adequate resources were critical elements to the successful deployment of biometric voter registration.