

Research article

The voter education “ghost” in Zimbabwean harmonised elections of 2008 and 2013: What can be done? Case of Midlands, Gweru district.

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Abstract

Zimbabwean harmonised general elections of 2008 and 2013 have been marred with voting irregularities and mainly voter apathy. There has been serious political constentations over the voter education practice with various stakeholders engaged in direct, formal as well as indirect and informal voter education. Despite political parties and Zimbabwe s Electoral Body- Zimbabwe Election Commission taking part in voter education, the results have been the same. Many people do not vote, many people are turned away from polling stations and many spoil their ballot papers. This research sought to find out the challenges and prospects of voter education in Zimbabwe with particular emphasis on Gweru District prior or during the 2008 and 2013 Harmonised Elections. The study also sought to understand and find out the challenges of voter education since the numerous concerns by the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), political parties and other stakeholders in the electoral process pertaining to voter apathy, spoiled ballots and voters turned away revolved around voter education. In view of the voter education problems noted it was imperative to look at prospects of voter education and make recommendations for improvement. The research adopted a qualitative approach and minimally made use of some quantitative data presentation and analysis techniques. Officials from CSOs and political parties that were operating in the Gweru District during the period under study were interviewed. The research found that voter education had limited duration, lack of adequate funding, lack of resources. ZEC was unprepared, the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) was not favourable to the other stakeholders such as CSOs and government failed to honour its mandated duties and obligations to ensure that ZEC was adequately funded and resourced. The major recommendation is that ZEC and other stakeholders such as CSOs should come up with a

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co-ordinated voter education so as to solve the challenges that were faced. **Copyright © WJPDIR, all rights reserved.**

Background to the study

Voter education is a world-wide concept/practice expected to take place prior to the elections and failure to do so will attract condemnation and discrediting of the electoral process. Principles of voter education include comprehensiveness, integrity, inclusiveness, accessibility, transparency, credibility and security, among others. Voter education is about informing citizens on how to vote, exercise their rights and the whole electoral process. Successful voter education ensures that voters are ready, willing and able to participate fully in the election process; and is essential to ensuring voters are well-informed and can effectively exercise their voting rights and express their will on election day (Scytl, 2013). As such it should be conducted by an independent non-partisan group or institution. However, if conducted by political parties the difference would be the partisan nature of voter education, as the political entities parties utilise it to garner more votes over their opponents. Even if analysts according to the Standard (June 16, 2013) believe that political parties and CSOs have right to participate in voter education, in Zimbabwe ZEC is the body mandated to do voter education while list political parties restricted to political campaigning.

Nevertheless CSOs use different forms of voter education that ranges from candidate events, issue advocacy, legislative scorecards, voting records and candidate questionnaires. It is important that both men and women must understand their rights, their political system, the contests they are being asked to decide, the voting process and where the polling stations are located.

Voter education is not limited to teaching people how to fill out a ballot (Gothe, 1997), but provides information on the eligibility to vote, where and how to register as a voter, where to check/inspect the voters' roll to ensure that your name is present, the type of elections and election date, how to vote, who the candidates are and how to lodge dissatisfactions. When doing voter education, factors taken into consideration includes high rates of illiteracy or the use of different languages in a country, even if there is one official language (UNDP, 2003). Minority groups, internally displaced persons and other marginalised segments of society should be specifically targeted; as well as the eligible voters.

Voter education should strongly encourage the citizens to vote. Effective voter education starts early and continues throughout the election process (UNDP, 2003). Voter education should not be one-off exercise done just for 90 days before an election; it must be a continuous exercise throughout the year (ZCBC, 2008: 16).

Though ZEC a commission mandated to provide voter education and voter registration claims to have met its legal obligation to that effect, a lot of concerns have been raised by political parties and CSOs pertaining to its inadequacy, short duration, lack of resources and funds. It is a result of these shortcomings that participating political parties disputed the election results, as they allege vote rigging. Looking at their grievances and claims one will see them pointing to voter education and voter registration.

As losers claims there were noted problems such as voter apathy, spoilt ballots' and voters turned away. It is against this background that that this research seek to understand why there was voter apathy, spoilt ballots' and voters turned away when voter education is claimed to have been done, well-funded and the duration it was undertaken was reasonably adequate as claimed. The researcher is of the opinion that if all the stakeholders had taken this exercise seriously such negative claims or sentiments would be minimal or non-existent. Voter education exercise is of paramount importance to the electoral process and serves as a democratic pre-requisite.

1.2 Statement of the problem

During the 2008 Harmonised elections there was a marked decrease of registered voters who participated in the elections by 38% when compared with the 2003 elections (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2011). According to ZEC statistics during the 2013 Referendum 718 votes were rejected in Gweru District, with Gweru Urban and Mkoba constituencies 180 and 150 respectively (www.zec.co.zw). It is estimated that Gweru Urban and Mkoba constituencies had about 28 589 and 30 794 registered voters respectively in 2008; while in 2013 about 29 060 and 30 819 respectively. About 34% and 38% was the estimated voter turnout for 2008; while for 2013 was 52% and 53% respectively (www.sokwanele.com).

The incidents of voters turned away and spoiled ballots underscores the importance of voter education; which is premised on informing the citizens on the requirements for electorate to be eligible to exercise their right to vote. Statistics released in respect of the 2008 and 2013 Harmonised Elections pointed out that a significant number of the electorate brought unsuitable forms of identification such as driver's licence, expired passports, photocopies of National Registration Certificates and business cards; a scenario that resulted in them being turned away. It should however, be noted that active participation of the citizens eligible for voting in this instance is one of the pre-requisites of democratic processes such as the just ended elections of Zimbabwe.

In the Midlands Province in which Gweru Urban and Mkoba constituencies falls under. ZEC recorded 5363 spoiled ballots and the turnout was 44% in the first round of the presidential elections (www.electoralgeography.com). In view of the above it is important to explore the challenges of the voter education with regard from 2008 Harmonised elections to 2013 Harmonised Elections and prospects.

In Gweru Urban, during the 2013 Harmonised Elections MDC-T had 7 755 votes, while ZANU-PF 6 146 and MDC-N 578 The statistics indicate that about 14 581 of the registered voters in did not vote and basing on the 2012 Census (ZimStat 2013). The Gweru Urban population is a youthful one which makes assumptions that the youths did not actively participate in the election. In view of the number of registered voters it is evident that effective voter education is a pre-requisite to encourage the people to exercise their democratic right.

Table Midlands Province 2013 Referendum results

District	Yes Votes	No Votes	Total votes rejected	Total votes cast
Chirumhanzu	29,083	1,382	549	31,014
Gokwe South	65,968	4,568	1,261	71,797
Gweru	52,711	3,207	718	56,636
Shurugwi	25,307	1,432	325	27,064
Zvishavane	30,401	1,993	506	32,900
Gokwe North	61,346	3,311	1,346	66,003
Mberengwa	48,229	2,222	976	51,427
Kwekwe	65,400	4,024	1,257	70,681
Total	378,445	22,139	6,938	407,522

Source: ZEC (2013)

A closer look at number of people that voted during the 2013 Referendum (Table above) and the 2013 Harmonised Elections clearly revealed that some people who voted during the referendum did not vote during the elections. 56 636 in Gweru District voted during the 2013 Referendum while the registered voters for the same period is 59 879. 29 154 voted in the 2013 Harmonised elections indicating a difference of 27 482 people who did not vote during the harmonised elections but who had voted in the 2013 Referendum.

One of the political parties, the Movement for Democratic Change Tsvangirai formation (MDC-T) claimed in its petition challenging the electoral result in the Constitutional Court; that more than 500 000 voters in urban areas were turned away without voting (Newsday, August 6, 2013). The problem in this claim is why people who had received voter education were turned away for reasons highlighted above and when millions of dollars had been allocated for the two month long voter education programme.

Objectives of the study

The main objective is to research the challenges encountered in voter education in Gweru.

Other objectives:

1. To analyse the impact or effectiveness of voter education by CSOs, ZEC and political parties.
2. To find the prospects in voter education exercises in Zimbabwe.

Research questions

1. How effective was the voter education in influencing the electorates behaviour during the 2008 and 2013 Harmonised Elections of Zimbabwe; and to what extent did partisan oriented voter education affected the electoral processes and outcomes?
2. What were the challenges to voter education exercise in the run to 2008 and 2013 Harmonised Elections?
3. How effective were the tools and strategies used in the voter education?
4. Did funding have any negative impact to the voter education programme?
5. How effective was the voter education conducted by ZEC, CSOs and political parties?
6. How did the government/ZEC policy and electoral law(s) impacted on the voter education?
7. What are the prospects of voter education to propel democratic elections?

1.6 Justification and Significance of the study

This research will provide the missing link from other investigations by other researchers. Dewa (2011) focused on voting patterns and behaviours during the 2008 Harmonised Elections without dwelling much on the factors that influence patterns and behaviours; of which voter education is central. Mapuva (2013) in his studies sought to highlight the controversial way elections have been held in some countries, which have led to the loss of confidence with the results, in some cases, the disputed elections has led to civil wars, re-run of the electoral process or the formation of coalition governments. Although Mapuva (2013) highlighted the importance of civic education, his study fails to give information on its impact and influence to the election process and outcome; an area which this researcher seeks to explore to complement such previous studies.

The purpose of the study was to find out the challenges and prospects of voter education in Gweru District (Gweru Urban and Mkoba constituencies); in view of the problems encountered during the 2008 and 2013 harmonised election in Zimbabwe, such as rejected votes and voters turned away due to various reasons. After the inquiry the research will inform stakeholders involved in elections on what to do in order to face the envisaged problems.

The study dig deeper on the influence of voter education to electorate participation in elections, an area which many researchers have stumbled on or inadequately gave attention despite it being pivotal to the whole electoral processes. Incidences which took place after the 2008 and 2013 Harmonised Elections, when the MDC-T refused to accept the result(s) deciphers problems in voter education. Mapuva (2013) in his study was concerned about elections and the electoral process in general terms; although he briefly deliberated on civic education, the research failed to adequately look into the influences/impact and challenges of voter education. In view of that this study will provide the missing link in previous researches.

Dewa (2009) studied the factors affecting voting behaviour and voting patterns in Zimbabwe's 2008 Harmonised elections; however, his study does not give much attention to voter education which is a determinant of voting behaviour and patterns. In this context this study will also complement other studies previously undertaken. This research will enable the electoral environment and processes to be understood, as well as the motivation and level of electorate participation.

Research methodology

The researcher made use of the qualitative methodology and the descriptive research design. Information was obtained through primary sources of data, semi-structured/open ended interviews.

Population

In this study, the population included political parties' representatives, CSOs and the residents of the City of Gweru since they have first-hand experiences of what transpired in their community/constituencies with regard to the voter education; as well as their level of involvement and participation.

Sample and sampling procedure

The researcher specifically targeted the local offices of ZEC, ZANU PF and MDC-T because they are the major players in the process due to their huge following. ZESN and other CSOs operating in Gweru also constituted the targeted groups. The researcher made use of the purposive sampling. The main reason being the need to select individuals' or respondents that will provide the most useful information about the topic under study while at the same time taking into consideration the limitedness of time.

The sample involved 10 representatives of political parties' and CSOs operating in the Gweru Urban and Mkoba Constituencies such as ZESN and GURA. The researcher employed purposive sampling for the political parties' representatives/ politicians chosen under study since they were part of bodies that had an influence to the electoral processes. Focus group discussion information gathered is also presented. Tables, figures and percentages are used to show the responses. It is important to note that since the area under study is political and some officials' targeted feared victimisation if participated in the research interviews and FGD, in such cases convenience sampling was the alternative.

Semi-structured interview and focus group discussion

Semi-structured interview was used to probe further on issues/topics that could not be adequately explained. Interview(s) involved face to face or direct verbal interaction and telephone interviews between the interviewer and the interviewee. It was also used to find out their opinions from their knowledge and experience as professionals.

The information supplied by the interviews was blended with information from audio-visual and written records; as well as newspaper articles to bring about the real situation or answers to the area under study. The researcher was aware of the fact that interviews have the disadvantage of providing different information from different people and may not be able to make comparisons among the interviewees. The Interview was semi-structured and the questions short and clear. The researcher did not give chance to arguments and avoided general questions.

Focus group discussion (FGD) of not more than ten (10) people was conducted since time was limited and to cater for some people who feel more comfortable when talking in a group than alone. The researcher acted as the moderator and introduced the issues for discussion and controlled the discussion to ensure that it was confined to the topic under study.

Findings

Challenges encountered in voter education in Gweru.

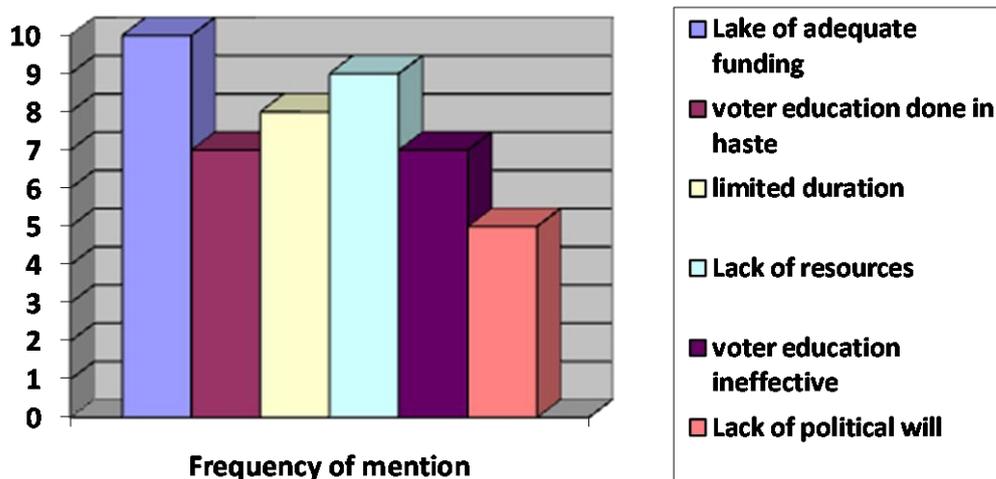


Table above indicates that voter education in Gweru faced numerous challenges such as the limitedness of the voter education duration which resulted in inadequate voter education conducted and many residents eligible to vote unable to register. The inadequate voter education and limited duration therefore, culminated in electorate with insufficient information, hence the voters turned away for reporting in wrong wards, bringing wrong documentation and non-appearance on voters' roll due to failure to inspect the voters' roll. It is also important

to note that the limitedness of the voter education hindered the people previously labelled “alien” from regularising their citizenship and register as voters’.

Discussion of findings

Much of the voter education was conducted by ZEC within the short timeframes stipulated considering that the date proclaimed for the election was close; the issue of lack of resources and adequate funding was however, not taken into consideration although it should have been in order to ensure an informed electorate.

CCJP (2013) claimed that: “ZEC voter educators’ lacked entry strategies and some of them were seen just waiting at public places and asking people whether they have identification documents, registered as voters’ and whether they know how to vote” The ZEC voter educators who managed to call meetings lacked group dynamics and community mobilisation skills resulting in a handful of people attending.

To a lesser extent the issue of voters turned away in Gweru was not due to poor voter education that was imparted but a problem emanating from the inadequacy of complementary processes such as the inspection of the voters’ roll and voters’ registration exercises. According to the Zimbabwe Independent (10th of July 2013) ZESN called for the extension of the mobile voter registration by at least a week after many potential voters failed to get registered and spent hours in queues especially in areas such as Phumelelo Primary School in Mkoba.

Voter turnout in Gweru Urban and Mkoba during the 2008 and 2013 elections

	2008	2013	% Improvement	% range not voted
Mkoba	38%	53%	15%	47%-62%
Gweru Urban	34%	52%	18%	48%-66%

Table above indicates that the eligible voters in Gweru District who did not participate in the 2008 and 2013 elections are in the average range 47.5% to 64%. Over the years, voter turnout has slowly been decreasing: 94 per cent in 1980, 84 per cent in 1985, 47 per cent 1990 and 52 per cent in 2000 despite the election witnessing an increased competition (ZESN, 2013:12). In view of the 2008 and 2013 voter turnout it is evident that the voter education was inadequate, despite an improvement noted in 2013 basing on the 2008 voter turnout.

The voters were turned away for non-existence in the voters’ roll and reporting at wrong wards. However, if these people had inspected their names in the voters’ roll as a result of adequate and effective voter education; they could have re-registered to vote. Apart from the voter turnout figures the reports and publications made by various CSOs and other stakeholders pointed that the voter education conducted by ZEC in Gweru was inadequate; and no proper planning was done to ensure effectiveness. EISA (2008) believes that voter education and voter registration was undertaken with little consultation of the relevant stakeholders and lacked transparency. Inadequate resources and two voter educators per ward were not enough and not adequately trained to professionally and competently deliver quality voter education. The poor delivery of voter education is evidenced by the statistics for spoil ballots in Gweru.

Limited time, lack of preparedness and weak institutional capacity

The limited time to prepare for the elections affected the electoral processes such as voter registration which was also insufficiently funded and funding often received late (ZESN, 2013). The main problem was the heavy politicking between parties in the inclusive government as they would disagree on most views and were determined to outdo the other unnecessarily. From the data gathered during the FGD lack of political will and conflicting statements were cited as the source of confusion and in view of such a scenario adequate voter education should have cleared the perceptions on whether elections were going to be held or not.

According to ZESN (2013) biased media coverage, intimidation of prospective voters and the lack of intra-party democracy among other factors were the major problems that were encountered during the 2013 harmonised elections. While the above is true to a lesser extent some of the challenges encountered had nothing to do with the actual voter education but institutional weaknesses on the part of ZEC. During the parliamentary debate of 22nd of May 2013 (House of Assembly) Mutambara cited lack of political will to ensure that every Zimbabwean who is eligible to cast a vote as the other problem that hindered electoral processes including voter education.

Some of the challenges included resourcefulness, organisational efficiency and administrative competence which were equally important to conducting effective voter education. Because of lack of preparedness and on the other hand making efforts to meet set deadlines voter education as well as other complementary processes such as voter registration and voters' roll inspection were poorly resourced and executed.

Approaches/tools utilised and their effectiveness

The ZEC voter educators mainly relied on individuals met in the streets resulting in them not reach out to a significant number of eligible voters. The people did not take these voter educators seriously and some mocked them and alleging that they were being paid for standing in the streets. Even those who visited the households did not take much time to answer questions or give informative details on voting and the elections because they wanted to cover many households within a short period of time.

There was atrocious publicity and voter education during the 2008 and 2013 harmonised elections; as reflected by some citizens' lack of knowledge about the voter registration that was taking place and the requirements needed for one to register. The fact that the first time voters were interested in getting the National Registration Certificates than exercising their democratic right to participate in the election through voting is a signal of ineffective voter education. Since the new voters had no prior experience and knowledge of voting and its importance, effective voter education was a pre-requisite to make them an informed electorate.

The voter education conducted did not cater for differences in educational attainments and the materials/ mediums used were not ideal to cater for all age groups such as the elderly. The elderly are not conversant with the modern technology therefore resources to cater for such categories could have been availed. Since according to the 2012 Population census of Zimbabwe about 68% are the youth a massive and effective voter education was a necessity to encourage them to participate in the elections.

Funding and resources

The finance minister slashed the initial 2013 election budget of US\$250 million to US\$132 million and indicated that it could be further reduced to \$100 million (Ndlovu, 2013:14). In 2008 voter educators complained of not being allocated insufficient meal allowances and adequate training to disseminate correct information, while in 2013 they were paid satisfactorily. Although the voter educators allowances were availed however, under difficult circumstances the manner in which the voter education operational funds were released hindered effective execution of voter education.

In both the 2008 and 2013 ZEC failed to accredit more CSOs to partake in the voter education despite funding challenges it was facing. According to ZESN (2013) the holding of elections was not feasible due to the fiscal challenges the country was facing and the minister of finance had repeatedly insisted that there was no money for the elections.

In view of the challenges of the resources and funding challenges ZEC could have utilised the CSOs who have access to large sums of donor funds. The main challenge with the donor funds is as usual however, associated with some conditions which might have been unfavourable to ZEC. The motives for giving aid by the western donors basing on the past electoral processes in Zimbabwe tended to be biased towards a regime change agenda, which hinders an impartial, credible election and effective non-partisan voter education.

Role of the political parties and CSOs

Since ZEC had denied CSOs room to conduct voter education; the CSOs had resorted to avoid using the term "voter education" programmes and instead use the term "awareness campaigns", in an effort to avoid prosecution. ZESN (2008 and 2013) noted that the impact and effectiveness of voter education conducted in influencing the 2008 and 2013 election outcome was negative, since the voter education started late and the accreditation for CSOs and NGOs was very restrictive. The late accreditation of some few CSOs could not have

made a significant contribution considering that it was only about two weeks before the elections. However, they managed to conduct door to door voter education as well as on radio.

In an effort to ensure that voter education is conducted continuously and well before the elections some ZESN officials were arrested at Midlands Hotel in Gweru while training people. The basis upon which the arrests were made is that they had not sought police clearance in terms of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA). To obtain police clearance is sometimes difficult. In future elections ways should be made to soften the laws to allow for effective voter education to prevail.

ZESN (2013) further claimed that in Mkoba constituency a new party, the United Movement for Democracy Party (UMDP), is said to have bought voters using cash. However, this is wrong and an unacceptable form of voter education in a democratic society and is a hindrance to achievement of community development. Due to the competition between political parties in Zimbabwe especially in Gweru and Mkoba constituencies, voter education faces the challenges of neutrality and non-partisan nature. The electorate becomes confused with the messages and manipulated voter education such that they are left with no choice but to boycott voting. Since the rival political parties perceive their opponents as bad, at the end the some of the people will see nothing good in voting as they are all bad in one angle or the other. However, with effective, adequate and quality voter education such a problem can be resolved amicably.

Impact of government/ZEC policy and the electoral law

It is important however, to note that ZEC acted pursuant to the sections of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) which are summarised in the Table 4.7 below. If it acted according to the electoral laws of the land, how does the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) impacted on the voter education? The non-accreditation of CSOs in the conducting of voter education was largely due to political considerations; however, ZEC could have accredited them and monitor them to ensure that they were operating pursuant to the law.

From the below (Table 4.7) the government violated the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) by failing to avail adequate materials and funds to ZEC to conduct effective, quality and adequate voter education. It is important to note that the foreign donors and organisations were not willing to channel their funds directly to ZEC as they view it to be biased towards the ZANU-PF and feared that it could misappropriate the funds. In simple terms they have a negative perception about ZEC's credibility, impartiality and professional conduct; mainly due to the manner in which the Commissioners were appointed.

Table Role of ZEC according to the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13)

Voter education means any course or programme of instruction on electoral law and procedure and procedure aimed at voters generally and not offered as part of a course in law or civics or any other subject for students at an educational institution. The Commission (ZEC) should provide adequate, accurate and unbiased voter education and ensure that voter education provided by other persons is adequate and not misleading or biased in favour of any political party. Foreigners are not allowed to conduct voter education and foreign organisations can only provide it if the person/ organisation employs a Zimbabwean to conduct the voter education. The government should give the Commission whatever assistance it may require in providing programmes. The Commission should monitor voter education by other persons. No foreign contribution or donations for the purpose of voter education shall be made except to the Commission, which may allocate such donations to any person.

Apart from the above the Electoral Act stipulates that ZEC shall avail the voter education funds received from foreign donors to any organisation of its choice; in the process the donors do not have control in deciding who should be given. Because most CSOs and NGOs in Gweru and Zimbabwe are foreign funded they are therefore rendered ineligible to conduct voter education.

Comparison of 2008 and 2013

According to ERC (2013) in 2008 there was continuous registration and targeted election related registration while in 2013 continuous registration of voters was sustained. The above indicates that in 2008 many eligible or potential voters managed to register as opposed to 2013. Citizens' born in Zimbabwe but whose parents are not Zimbabwean were not allowed to vote during the 2008 elections. However, with the coming of the new

constitution in 2013 those people previously regarded “aliens” were now eligible voters, but due to poor funding and short duration of the mobile voter registration periods failed to register as voters.

In 2008 voter education and information was conducted by the electoral commission while in 2013 it was the same with the exception of few CSOs that were accredited to complement the ZEC exercise. During the 2013 elections voter education for polling day was insufficient with ZEC deploying 2 voter educators per ward prior to the elections (ERC, 2013). In view of the above the major differences between the 2008 and 2013 elections seems to be related to adequacy of funding, duration of the exercises and level of preparedness of ZEC.

It is also important to note that there was a better legislative environment in 2013 than in 2008, the 2008 elections were held under the Lancaster House Constitution with the support of repressive laws such as AIPPA and POSA, while in 2013 the new constitution that respected the people’s rights was made use of.

Prospects of voter education: Way forward

Pursuant to the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) the government should meet its mandate by availing adequate resources and ensuring a sufficient budget be set for the elections including the voter education exercise. The Electoral Act and other repressive legislations/ policies should be softened to allow other stakeholders’ an opportunity to competently and effectively conduct voter education. The government should source funds for the electoral processes such as voter education well in advance instead of a few months prior to an election. ZEC should be continuously and adequately equipped and resourced all the time instead of only supported during the elections. ZEC should impartially enforce the electoral legislations and policies. In addition to the above voter registration should be decentralised and weaned off from the Registrar General’s office; with ZEC establishing its own voters’ database that is independent.

The Zimbabwe government should work towards creating both ZEC-CSOs relationship and good international relations. Instead of ZEC and other CSOs independently conducting the voter education, ZEC should have come up with co-ordinated voter education programme which could have acted as the panacea for inadequate resources and funding and partisan oriented voter education.

Voter education should be conducted on a continuous basis instead of only when the elections are imminent as what transpired in 2008 and 2013 elections. The duration of election specific voter education should be long enough at least six months prior to an election.

The voter educators should be well trained in areas such as community entry skills, group dynamics and community mobilisation and their allowances must be availed in time as well as the other resources to ensure imparting of quality and effective voter education. The number of voter educators’ per ward should be based on the size of the ward as opposed to the uniform deployment.

Voter education should cater for the differences in educational levels of the electorate, as well as the differences in ages and socio-economic status so as to capture all the people. Varied approaches and mediums should be utilised according to characteristics of the target group. Voter education for school, college and university students should be imparted through the “edutainment” approach since it encourages active participation of the youth and first time voters.

There must be continuous registration of voters and an automatic registration when someone is issued with a nation registration certificate. The dead voters must automatically be removed from the voters’ roll when the Registrar of Voters’ who happens to be also the Registrar General issues death certificates/ burial orders. Any changes that have been effected to the voters’ roll such as delimitations of wards must be communicated and affected areas notified in time. Adequate time should be given to those previously labelled “alien” to regularise their citizenship status.

Stakeholders’ in voter education with ZEC actively involved should make a co-ordinated, holistic and non-biased monitoring and evaluation of the voter education programmes as the best way forward.

ZEC should utilise the ICT’s to reach the masses in this highly electronic age. The use of social networking platforms such “Twitter” and “Facebook” are also useful options. Apart from the above if ZEC maintains an electronic voters’ roll that is readily available on an internet website, reduction in voters’ roll inspection costs would be realised. ICTs reduce many operational costs usually incurred in conducting voter education.

There was no way the voter education could have succeeded without adequate and meaningful support from the government. Since the government was incapacitated economically to fund the voter education meaningful and holistic engagement with some development agencies and CSOs was ideal, rather than the government maintaining that the resources and funds would be sourced locally.

This being the case, government needs to mend relations between Zimbabwe and the western world which are not conducive for the government to anticipate any meaningful assistance from them despite being a necessity. Faced with such circumstances we can on the other hand safely commend the government for ensuring that the electoral processes were successfully completed in a peaceful manner with meagre resources; and what is left is to plan now for the future elections.

Since the electoral regulations have been viewed as repressive by the stakeholders it is prudent to review them and make the best possible amendments that promote effective voter education and active participation by all the people concerned. In line with the international practice voter education in Zimbabwe should be done on a continuous basis even when elections are not in sight.

The Registrar of Voters who also doubles as the Registrar General's (RG) office if adequately staffed and resourced has the capacity to ensure that all the eligible voters are registered. With the advent of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) the RG's office has the potential to improve the management of the voters' roll and notifying the electorate individually and through the mass media on any changes and any issues pertaining to registrations and effects of the delimitation processes.

ZEC has great chances of improving voter education and the whole electoral processes (voter registration and voters' roll inspection) if proper and adequate planning in consultation with the electorate, CSOs and development partners is given room. In concurrence with Mapuva (2013) despite the shortfalls of CSOs, if ZEC creates a mutual and beneficial co-operation and partnership with them effective voter education would be realised. CSOs have vast experience and expertise in promoting free and fair election through the provision of civic education, creating awareness of the democratic and electoral processes, and most importantly they have easy access to international funds and resources.

Since Zimbabwe has a youthful population voter education tends to encourage the youth to participate in the electoral process if extensively conducted in areas such colleges, universities and high schools such as the Midlands State University (MSU) and Gweru Polytechnic College. However, the setting should be conducive for voter education to take place and make use of approaches such as "edutainment" (education entertainment).

In this era of Information Communication Technology (ICT) the creation and utilisation of websites to inform the electorate on the dates, time and documents required during mobile registration and inspection exercises is a pre-requisite especially in youthful populations like that of Zimbabwe. The use of text messaging and social networks such as "Twitter" and "Facebook" have been adopted successfully by other countries the world over and positive results witnessed. If ZEC adopts the new technological approaches highlighted above chances to reach the youths would be boosted.

Conclusions

Voter education that was conducted in Gweru during the 2008 and 2013 Harmonised Elections was marred with a number of challenges which however, do not hinder prospects for the future voter education if addressed in time. The issue of lack of adequate funding and resources was central in both 2008 and 2013 since the Ministry of Finance through its Treasury department failed to source adequate funds to bankroll the essential democratic electoral process. The challenge of inadequate funding in 2013 was also due to political conflicts of interest between the parties in the Government of National Unity (GNU) (ZANU-PF and MDC formations). The MDC-T did not want the elections to be held on the date that was proclaimed citing that the government was bankrupt and a number of reforms had not been made prior to holding an election.

Because of these conflicting positions it was not clear whether elections were going to be held or not. However, the Jealous Mawarire court case in which he approached the court to compel the president (Mugabe) to set or announce the date of the election rested the arguments; as the court ruled in his favour. The president was left with no option but to proclaim the date of the 2013 election, despite the fact that the resources and funds were

unavailable. Apart from that no adequate preparations had been made. It is the lack of adequate resources and funds which are mainly to blame for the ineffective voter education conducted.

While lack of funds and adequate resources was the major challenge, lack of political will is also be blamed since the GNU had failed to plan for the elections/ voter education well in advance when in actual fact they knew elections were due; and were supposed to be held since the GNU was a temporal arrangement.

The restrictive Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) was also a challenge towards the accreditation of CSOs to conduct voter education. This piece of legislation was enacted after the CSOs were accused of being used by the western donor countries to advance regime change agenda in Zimbabwe. However, with the birth of the GNU the law was supposed to be amended to allow the CSOs to partake in this important exercise and to complement ZEC efforts especially in this case when it was facing funding and resources scarcity.

Another major challenge to the voter education in Gweru prior to the 2008 and 2013 was the issue of limited or inadequate duration in which it was conducted. There was no way the duration could have been sufficient since no adequate planning was undertaken and no political will and unity was in existence. All these challenges compromised effective voter education.

ZEC acted above board by enforcing the provisions of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) that govern voter education and by so doing it complied with the good governance principles of democracy which calls for upholding of the rule of law. The ineffectiveness of voter education was therefore not entirely for ZEC to blame, although it could have made it clear that it was ill prepared to ensure an adequate and effective voter education process. Instead of tabling their concerns with regard to preparedness, ZEC only on numerous occasions cited lack of funds as the only challenge. ZEC was of the view that if funds were availed they will provide all the required resources for the process; however, failed to make it a point that they had not adequately prepared.

The two voter educators' per ward were inadequate and failed to take into consideration the differences in the size of the wards; and that alone compromised the quality of voter education that was imparted. The ZEC voter educators were concerned about reaching the households and not ensuring that the message reaches the intended people sufficiently, since they had limited time to spend per household. Apart from the above the exercise itself was tiresome such that two voter educators per ward were not feasible. The ZEC voter educators were incompetent in the sense that some of them lacked group dynamics and community mobilisation skills and strategies. Some stakeholders claimed that they comprised of youths, neighbourhood police personnel who were unprofessional and do not met the basic education required for voter educators.

The other challenge was the inadequacy of voter education complementary processes such as the inspection of the voters' roll and voters' registration. Even if voter education had been effectively conducted, failure of these complementary processes would have rendered it ineffective since they depend on each other. However, on the other it is voter education that determines the electorate's response to the voters' roll inspection and voters' registration programmes; since it influences a positive attitude and behaviour towards the programmes being conducted. Publicity of the complementary processes was cited as one of the problems as the electorate was not aware of the dates and venues of the mobile voter inspection and registration teams. The situation was exacerbated by inadequate and limited time that the Registrar of Voters' teams spend in the wards.

If voter education had been imparted effectively the high numbers of voters turned away for reporting in wrong wards and bringing wrong identification documents such as the drivers' licence could have been avoided. The issue of voters bringing drivers' licences and reporting in wrong ward on voting day was due to the fact that they had used the same documents during the Referendum in the same year 2013 and any person 18 years and above was eligible to vote. During the 2013 Referendum no voters' roll was used and a person could report to any polling station of choice. After the 2013 Referendum the voter education was supposed to tell the people that the voting requirements were not the same with particular emphasis to the elections.

2008 saw the first harmonised elections held in Zimbabwe and in view of that adequate, lengthy and effective voter education was pre-requisite to ensure that every eligible voter was conversant to the new electoral system.

However, ZEC failed to give voter education adequate time and resources resulting in the low voter turnout witnessed.

It is not ZEC to blame for the ineffective voter education alone as the political parties and CSOs had a stake in contributing to some challenges especially in 2008. The voter education conducted by political parties during rallies was partisan-oriented and intended to yield many voters than the other rival political party. Some political parties employed threats that if a certain party won the election there would be war or the sanctions would be increased by their western allies and the economy would revert to what it was prior to the GNU. Such statements and claims tend to confuse the electorate which may view the contesting political parties as equal devils and in that respect see no reason to go and cast their vote.

To support the points raised above the MDC-T during a rally held at Mkoba Stadium on the 21st of July 2013 hinted that if ZANU-PF was to win the election in 2013 it simply meant that the food on the supermarket shelves would vanish just like prior to 2008 elections and many companies would close. On the other hand ZANU-PF viewed an MDC-T win as tantamount to being in contempt of the liberation struggle values and sacrifices made. Quite a lot of scaring comments were made in both the electronic and print media prior to the 2008 and 2013 elections. In future the political parties should learn to campaign guided by development oriented manifestos with achievable objectives and desist from employing scaring voter education approaches.

Although a few CSOs had been granted permission to conduct voter education two weeks before the harmonised elections the time left was not enough to cover for the incompetence's of ZEC voter educators. Basing on the 2008 and 2013 statistics the voter turnout was not satisfactory and since the population is a youthful one it leaves the researcher with no option but to conclude that the youths did not partake in the elections due to ignorance or lack of adequate voter education.

Apart from the above and in-concurrence with ZESN (2013), ACE (2013) and many other stakeholders statements ZEC failed to provide adequate voter education to the electorate previously regarded as "alien". It is also important to note that the period that was given for these former "aliens" to formalise their citizenship status was inadequate considering the date of the election that had already been set.

Faced with reports of dead people still appearing on the voters' roll and duplication of names errors it is to a lesser extent another contributory factor to the challenges of voter education. The movement of people from the wards or polling stations they had voted in 2008 was another challenge which voter education was supposed to address if it had been publicised effectively.

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