



## **ASSESSMENT OF ISSUES INFLUENCING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS AND DECISION MAKING IN ZIMBABWE**



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# 1. Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome	PLWD	People living with disability
BEAM	Basic Education Assistance Module	RAU	Research and Advocacy Unit
BVR	Biometric voter registration	SADC	Southern Africa Development Committee
CRD	Centre for Research and Development	SDC	School Development Committee
CBO	Community Based Organization	SMS	Short Message service
CSO	Civil Societies Organization	TV	Television
DZT	Deaf Zimbabwe Trust	UNICEF	United Nation International Children Emergency Fund
FDI	Focus Group Interview	VIDCOs	Village Development Committees
FG	Focus Group	VR1	Voter Registration Form
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	VR6	Voter Registration Form
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus	VR9	Voter Registration Affidavit form
ICT	Information Communication Technology	WADCOs	Ward Development Committees
ID	National identity	YETT	Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust
IPU	Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU)	ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
KI	Key Informant	ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcast Cooperation
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change	ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
MINDS	Mandela Institute for Development Studies	ZIM	Zimbabwe
MP	Member of Parliament	Zimstat	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency
MPOI	Mass Public Opinion Institute	ZTV	Zimbabwe Television
NGO	Non Governmental Organizations		

## 2. Executive Summary



This is a summary of the findings from a study that was commissioned by the Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT) in September 2017. The study sought to understand the dynamics influencing youth participation in decision making processes at both local and national levels, including national elections.

It used a mixed method approach, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, which helped the researchers understand the complex issues that affect Zimbabwean youth's participation in electoral processes by triangulating evidence to corroborate findings.

Among the key findings of the study is that, although Zimbabwean youth are not currently fully engaging in political and civic activities such as voting and attending community meetings, they are however not totally disengaged. For various reasons, the youth have disengaged from traditional platforms of civic engagement, such as national and local budget consultative meetings, village development meetings, political party meetings and elections. But they are however engaging in public affairs in alternative spaces which include voluntary associations like youth social clubs and community associations like sporting, savings and gardening clubs. The youth are also associating in youth clubs in church, where a significant number of them are finding fellowship and support in these times of severe economic and social crises.

The wide range of factors influencing youth participation in elections and other decision making processes include internal factors such as limited time and commitment to attend community meetings regularly due to their preoccupation with livelihood issues, lack of knowledge and skills on how to get involved in decision making processes and the lack of tolerance for the bureaucratic and customary practices involved in formal decision making platforms. The multiple external factors include the practice of gerontocracy, patriarchy, patronage by seniors at both community and national level. Also youth disillusionment with leadership failure and lack of visible youth representation in leadership positions, economic resource constraints and discrimination against youth from leadership and participation on the basis of disability, ethnicity, regionalism and autochthony was noted. The situation is worse for marginalized groups, such as young women and PLWD, who are discriminated against at family, community and national level when they aspire to occupy leadership positions.

While youth are generally disappointed by their exclusion from decision making, many of them still value elections and take voting seriously. The majority of youth (86.4%) from across Zimbabwe that were consulted in the survey that was conducted for this study, think it is their responsibility as young people to vote, while 80.2% expressed their interest in registering to vote if given a chance and 77.2% confirmed they were planning on voting in 2018. Only youths from the marginalized provinces of Bulawayo, Matebeleland North and South were less enthusiastic about voting in the upcoming 2018 elections. The study also found out that the number of youths who are not willing to vote in 2018 is more among young women than men.

#### ZIMBABWE YOUTH ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT VOTING IN 2018

86.4%

77.2% PLANNING TO VOTE

80.2% INTERESTED IN VOTING

YOUTHS FROM THE MARGINALIZED PROVINCES OF BULAWAYO, MATEBELELAND NORTH AND SOUTH WERE LESS ENTHUSIASTIC

Despite the youth's enthusiasm to vote in the upcoming elections, there are various factors restricting their participation. The factors include the failure by the key election stakeholders, such as the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), political parties and civil society, to provide adequate information about elections and to consult youth as a sector in the design and implementation of election programmes; inhibitive registration and voting requirements; the



marginalization of youth in election management by both election management bodies and political parties; the neglect of youth issues and concerns in political parties' election agendas; and the failure by key stakeholders to cater for the unique needs of the youth during both registration and voting.

Youth living with disability are the worst affected by election stakeholders' failure to cater for their unique needs. There is often no provision for infrastructural and human support in the form of transport for those not able to walk, election education material in Braille, or election material in sign language in order to enable the deaf to register and vote. Overt and covert violence, including threats of economic deprivation, is also a key factor restricting youth from participation in elections. Nationally, 76.6% of the youth think violence plays a key role in affecting their participation in elections.

#### ZIMBABWE YOUTH ON OVERT & COVERT VIOLENCE

76.6%

**YOUTH** THINK VIOLENCE PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN AFFECTING THEIR PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS.

The study also found out that while youth are highly interested in voting in the 2018 elections, their levels of participation in the ongoing Biometric Voter Registration across the country is very low. The study further found out that there are many gaps in youth knowledge and awareness about the 2018 voter registration, voting processes and requirements among the youth, with some of them not sure of who is supposed to register or not.

The main gaps in youth's knowledge of the registration and voting processes are on documents required to register, including documents required for personal identification and for proof of residence. Some youths, especially those from rural areas, were not even aware that voter registration had started or what BVR is all about. Others were not aware of the documents required for voting, with a significantly high number of youths not aware that they have to bring their IDs on election date. Broadly, most youths did not know about the difference between BVR and biometric or electronic voting, and many are confused about whether the country is going to do biometric voting or not. A large number of the youth consulted did not know about the difference between ward based and polling station based voting. Only 22.1% of youth consulted across the ten provinces confirmed they knew the difference, while 64.9% admitted they did not know, and another 10.6% said they somewhat knew. Many did not even know that the 2018 elections will be polling station based. The study also found out that most youth are suspicious about both BVR and polling station based voting because they did not know about the reasons for its adoption or why their unique physical features such as, finger prints, facial scans and physical addresses, have to be recorded when they register to vote.

#### ZIMBABWE YOUTH ON DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WARD BASED AND POLLING STATION BASED VOTING

10.6% SOMEWHAT KNOW

22.1% KNOW

64.9% DID NOT KNOW



On information dissemination about elections, the study found out that there is a general dearth of information about voter registration which is largely attributed to the failure by election stakeholders (i.e. ZEC, political parties, CSOs and the media) to use the most appropriate information channels for communicating with the different categories of youths located in different parts of the country.

The study makes the following recommendations to enhance youth participation in elections.

In order to improve youth registration and interest in elections, there is need for election stakeholders to do the following:

- Provide comprehensive voter education to demystify and address youth suspicions about BVR, focusing on explaining what BVR entails, reasons for its adoption, and how the registered voters' data is going to be stored and used.
- Provide human and material assistance to help youth facing multiple structural barriers that can inhibit them from registering to cast their vote.
- Ensure voter mobilization campaigns speak to how youth participation in elections in general, and not just the 2018, helps to address youth concerns.
- Advocate and lobby political parties and ZEC to involve more youth in the election management, including increasing their roles in election campaigning as either candidates or campaign leaders and employing them as voter registration and polling officials.
- Ensure ZEC's mobile registration units visit places where youth are found in large numbers, such as vendors markets, shopping malls, restaurants, informal industries, vocational training centres and high schools.

In order to improve registration and voting of PLWD, emphasis should be on:

- Improved advocacy for ZEC to involve more disabled people in its election management processes, including management of voter registration and polling.
- Enhanced CSO involvement of PLWD in election education, voter mobilization and monitoring that could help to motivate more young PLWDs to register and vote.
- Lobbying political parties to include more PLWD as candidates in order to improve inclusivity and representation of PLWD.
- Ensuring voter registration centres and polling stations are not only accessible to PLWDs but also have user friendly facilities that cater for the needs of the different groups of PLWD.
- Facilitating improved access to election related information to different categories of PLWD that would help them to register and vote from an informed position.

In order to improve the participation of young women in elections, emphasis should be placed on:

- Working closely with various solution holders (traditional leaders, Police and other government officials) to ensure that young women who want to vote but are finding it difficult to do so because of structural barriers are given an opportunity to register.
- Lobbying ZEC to create favourable conditions to enable young women, especially those with young children, to expeditiously register and vote.
- Providing BVR education & awareness with a targeted focus on young women who are often marginalized

by mainstream processes and train more young women who connect with their peers to conduct voter education within their constituencies.

- Facilitating increased involvement of more young women in both election management processes (voter registration, registration campaigns & leadership campaigns as both candidates & campaign leaders)- it will encourage more young women to register.

In order to improve information dissemination, the following strategies should be prioritized:

- Strong partnership among election stakeholders (ZEC, political parties, civics, media, etc) to do massive electoral education campaigns. These should be tailor made to target various youth groups, especially marginalized groups like youths on farms, youths living with disability, young women, across the country, that could help address high levels of ignorance about BVR.
- Increased election education and awareness programs on provincial commercial and community radio stations that have a good listenership reach among youth in the provinces.
- Information dissemination through bulk smses and social media, especially whatsapp which is the most utilized social media platform by youth because of its relatively low cost.
- Working with various church leaders to encourage youth in churches to register and training of focal youth educators within churches who can in turn educate their peers about registration and voting.
- Teaming up with popular Zimdancehall youth cultural heroes and icons who can serve as voter education champions and package voter mobilization messages that encourages and inspire young people to find relevance in participation.
- Work with community leaders such as chiefs, headmen and village heads who have more respect and access to the communities and existing community structures like VIDCOs and WADCOs to disseminate information in rural spaces.
- Working with core groups of youths in different key spaces, such as vendors, transport operators, market women, informal miners and organizers of youth social and entertainment clubs to raise youth awareness about voting and registration.

## 3. Introduction



### 3.1. Study Background

This is a report of a study that was commissioned by the Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT), a networking youth organization committed to the full participation of young people in sustainable development through advocacy and capacity

development of youth organizations in Zimbabwe. The study sought to understand the dynamics influencing youth participation in decision making processes at both local and national levels, including elections. The study is part of YETT's work on youth and elections. The study is part of YETT's initiatives that are designed to promote evidence-based programming and advocacy as

it implements its Ballot Buddies Campaign which seeks to enhance active, positive and peaceful participation of all youth, male and female, in electoral processes.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.2. Objectives of the Study

The key objective of the study was to systematically gather data that would enable YETT to develop a deeper understanding of the dynamic issues influencing young Zimbabweans' participation in elections and other decision making processes, including the upcoming 2018 election. The specific objectives of the study were to examine the following key issues:

- The nature and extent of youth's participation in electoral processes as well as their attitudes and behavior towards elections;
- Contextual political, economic and social factors that influence youth's participation in electoral and other decision making processes;
- Factors that motivate and demotivate youth to participate in electoral processes, including processes such as voter registration and voting on election days;
- Knowledge and awareness levels about election procedures and processes among youth, including their voting rights as well as voting regulations and registration requirements;
- The adequacy and relevance of electoral information and dissemination processes to the needs of young people;
- How political party activities contribute to strengthening or marginalizing the participation of youth in elections; and

- Strategies and approaches that can enhance youth participation in elections and other decision making processes.

### 3.3. Research Methodology

The study used a mixed methods approach, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, to understand the complex issues that affect Zimbabwean youth's participation in electoral processes. The study deliberately decided to use both quantitative and qualitative research and data gathering methods in order to offset the inherent weaknesses of each approach and corroborate findings through triangulation of evidence. The integration of the data obtained from both qualitative and quantitative research enabled the researchers to gain some in-depth information on issues affecting youth's participation in decision making and provided for a better understanding of the research problem than could have not been possible through use of one approach.

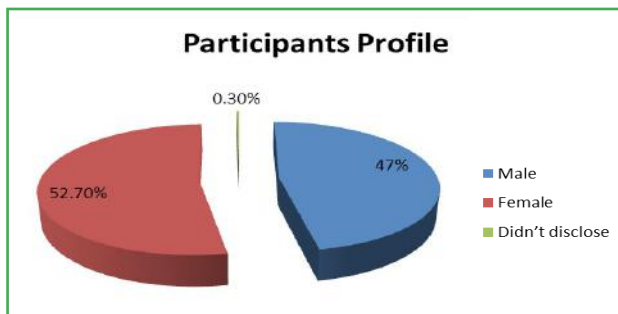
The study utilized multiple data gathering techniques to obtain various types of information from different youth respondents. The main data gathering methods used to get information included the following:

#### *i) Youth Opinion Surveys:*

The opinion survey was administered through fieldwork research that was conducted by the research team with youth drawn from the country's 10 administrative provinces. These are the two metropolitan provinces of Harare and Bulawayo; Matabeleland South, Matabeleland North, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland West, Mashonaland East, Masvingo, Midlands and Manicaland. A total of 624 youth participated in

<sup>1</sup> The term 'Youth', as used in this study, refers to adolescents, teenagers and young adults, both male and female, who fall within the age group of 18-35 years, encompassing definitions in Zimbabwe's electoral laws and constitutional framework as well as aspects of the United Nations and continental definition of youth (African Youth Charter) that defines youth as persons aged 16 to 35. The eligible age for voting under Zimbabwe's electoral laws is 18, while the marriageable age for both young males and females, without parental consent under the 2013 Constitution is 18.

the survey.<sup>2</sup> The research team targeted 60 youth participants per province, with the exception of Harare, a metropolitan province made up of four districts, namely Harare Urban, Harare Rural, Chitungwiza and Epworth, whose population size of 2,123,132 outstrips that of other provinces.<sup>3</sup> In Harare, the research team interviewed 145 participants. There was gender balance in the selection of youth participants for the survey.



### **Sampling Approach:**

The research used a purposive sampling approach that helped to ensure the selection of participants for the survey was balanced and representative. This selection of participants was done with the help of YETT's local partners in each province visited. This approach was utilized because of its convenience, given the contextual factors at the time the research was undertaken. The fieldwork research began just before voter registration was launched on 14 September 2017; a development that led to contextual changes in the political environment

in the country.<sup>4</sup> Zimbabwe is a highly polarized country where research on political issues like elections cannot be conducted without raising people's suspicions and fears. It was therefore going to be very difficult for the research team to move into provinces and look for youth participants on its own, without the assistance of local organizations that are trusted by both citizens and officials on the ground.

The field survey was conducted between 8 and 26 September 2017. The selection paid attention to the following critical issues to ensure there was balance in the profile of survey participants: gender; age; religion; class; education; residence and settlement (i.e., rural, urban, commercial farms, resettlement, and mining areas). The research also paid critical attention to issues of marginality, ensuring that each provincial consultation meeting had People Living With Disability (PLWD) represented.

The questionnaire for the opinion survey was written in English, but administered in English, Shona and Ndebele.<sup>5</sup> It was administered by the research team in a workshop format. The research team helped the survey participants to understand the questions in the questionnaire by reading and interpreting the questions in the language of respondents' choice.

### **ii) Focus Group Discussions:**

The researchers held Focus Group (FG) interviews with the youth who participated in the survey. After every survey held at each provincial site, participants were broken into FGs to facilitate in-depth discussions about their personal and group thoughts on issues influencing youth civic

<sup>2</sup> This is a good representative sample size for a country such as Zimbabwe with a total 4, 702 046 young men and women aged 15-34 years (i.e. 36% of the total national population of 13, 013 678), according to the 2012 national census statistics. Afrobarometer has in the past used a sample size of 1200 when measuring opinions of all adult citizens in Zimbabwe, a sample size that yields a margin of error of +/- 3% at a 95% confidence level. See Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZimStat), 2013. Population Census National Report: 2012.

<sup>3</sup> According to the results of the 2012 national census, Harare's combined population was 2,123,132. The other provinces' population was distributed as follows: Manicaland-1,752,698; Midlands-1,614,941; Mashonaland West-1,501,656; Masvingo-1,485,090; Mashonaland East-1,344,955; Mashonaland Central-1,152,520; Matebeleland North- 749,017; Matebeleland South-683,893; and Bulawayo- 653,337.

<sup>4</sup> See President sets BVR exercise in motion. The Herald, 15 September 2017.

<sup>5</sup> According to the 2012 census, 96% of those age 15 years and above were literate.

engagement in their communities. At each and every provincial research site, the team organized 3-4 FGs of 10-15 participants. From its consultations in all the 10 provinces, the team managed to organize 30 FG interviews that provided rich insights into the diverse civic engagement experiences of youth across the country.

**iii) Key Informant Interviews:**

Key Informant interviews were held with the youth and provincial stakeholders working with youth, including government and political party officials working on youth affairs, CSOs working with youth and some of the youth activists in the provinces. Key Informant interviewees were also held with some of the youth who participated in the FG discussion and would have raised some important issues that the research team wanted to explore further outside the group setting.

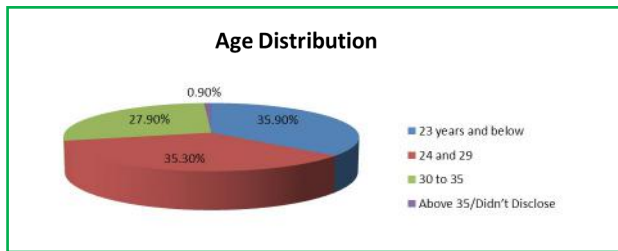
**iv) Secondary and Primary Documents:**

The study also utilized secondary and primary source documents to get insights into youth perspectives. The reports consulted included media reports on youth and elections (e.g. press releases by youth organizations, print newspapers, and online and social media platforms); key source documents on Zimbabwe's electoral framework such as the Electoral Act and Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) electoral regulations. To ensure the study's findings were located within a broader national and continental context, the researchers analysed findings from a number of research reports and books on youth's participation in politics and electoral processes in Zimbabwe that have been done in the past.

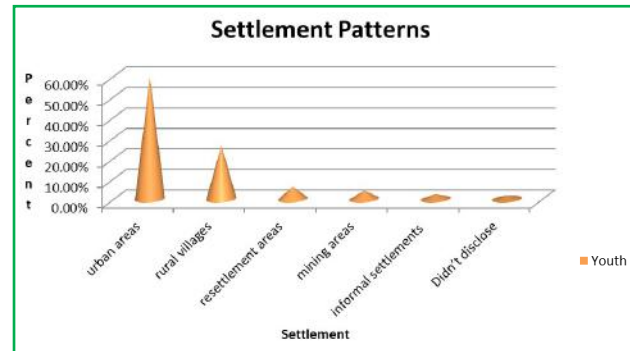
# 4. Discussion of Key Findings

## 4.1. Profile of Participants

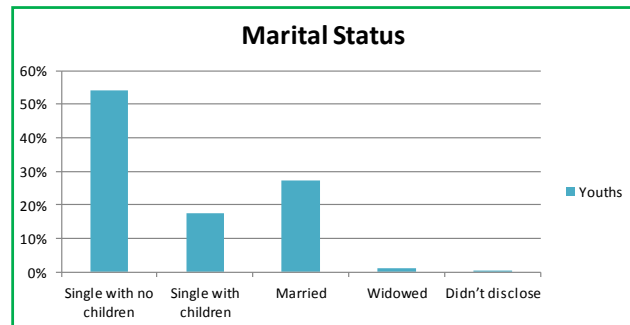
The majority of the 624 youth participants were 23 years and below-first time voters. The age distribution of the participants is displayed in the graph below:



The majority of the participants (59.5%) lived in the urban areas. The table below shows settlement patterns of the participants:



The majority of the participants were single. The graph below shows marital status of the participants:

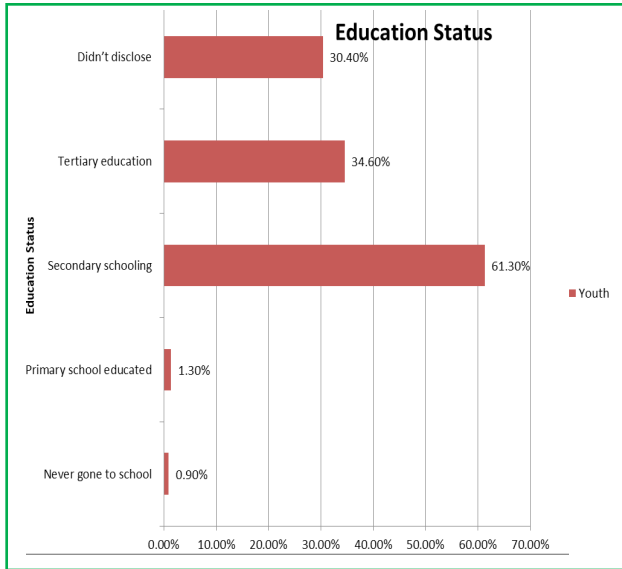


The majority of the participants were literate, with a significantly high percentage having completed secondary education. Below is the information on the educational background of the participants:



Zimbabwean youth have thus become so disempowered over the last few decades that it has become difficult for them to effectively participate in some civic and political affairs.



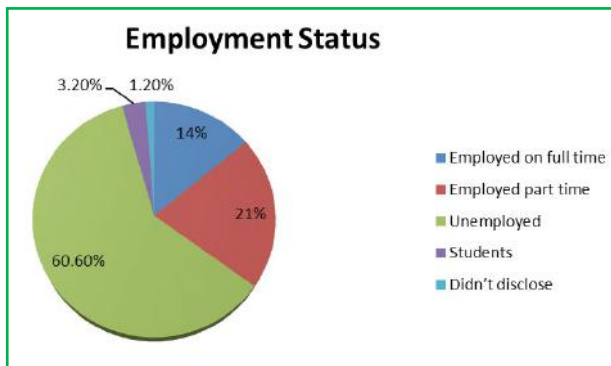


ZIMBABWE YOUTH POPULATION

**75%**  
**(10 MILLION) OF**  
**NATIONAL POPULATION**  
**13,061 239 IS**  
**35 YEARS & UNDER**

**4.2. Nature and extent of youth’s participation in decision making process and elections**

Only a small percentage of the participants (13.9%) were employed on a full time basis. The employment profile of the participants was as follows:



Zimbabwe, like the rest of the SADC region and the African continent, has a huge youth population, with over 75% (almost 10 million) of the national population of 13,061 239 under 35 years.<sup>6</sup> A number of recent studies that have been done on youth have portrayed Zimbabwean youth as less engaged in civic engagement, i.e. being involved in processes designed to make a difference in the quality of life of their communities through both their political and non-political action.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Zimbabwean youth are not engaging in political and civic activities, such as voting and attending community meetings to decide on public affairs, to the same extent as their elderly compatriots or youth counterparts in other countries in the region such as South Africa.<sup>8</sup> Young people in Zimbabwe are facing many economic and social challenges, including unemployment, housing, food insecurity and health challenges like HIV-AIDS, which have all increased their vulnerability as a social group. Zimbabwean youth have thus become so disempowered

<sup>6</sup> See Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZimStat), 2013. *Population Census National Report: 2012*; P. Vogel 2015. *Generation Jobless? Turning the youth unemployment crisis into opportunity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan)  
<sup>7</sup> Afrobarometer and MPROI (2016). *Civic Disengagement in Zimbabwe* (Afrobarometer Dispatch 70); Zimbabwe Youth Council and UNICEF (2015). *Youth Situational Analysis*.  
<sup>8</sup> Mandela Institute for Development Studies (Minds), 2016. *Youths Participation in Elections in Africa: An Eight Country Study* (Johannesburg: Minds); United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2013. *African Governance Report III: Elections and the Management of Diversity by the Economic Commission for Africa*.

over the last few decades that it has become difficult for them to effectively participate in some civic and political affairs.

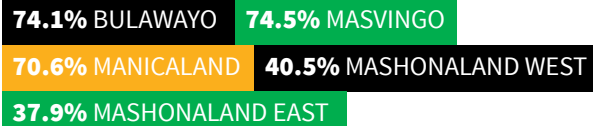
However, contrary to popular perceptions and other research, Zimbabwe's youth are not completely disengaged from civic or public engagement. Research conducted with youth across the country revealed that while political engagement among the youth, particularly among young women, is declining, the youth are not totally disengaged from civic participation. Our analysis of youth civic engagement, as measured by participation in a range of collective actions and events, showed such engagement to be above average. The quantitative surveys for this study that were conducted across the country's ten provinces revealed that almost two thirds of the youth (59%) are getting engaged in community development and public affairs at the local level, often through their involvement in youth social groups or community associations that include sporting, savings and gardening clubs. Furthermore, the youth are actively involved in NGO activities, with statistics from the survey revealing that 61.3% of the youth are participating in NGO (both local and foreign) activities in their communities. The biggest percentage of youth participating in voluntary association or community activities is found in Bulawayo (74.1%), Masvingo (74.5%) and Manicaland (70.6%), while the smallest percentage is found in Mashonaland East (37.9%) and Mashonaland West (40.5%).

The variations in youth activism in these provinces can be explained by their contextual differences. In the case of Bulawayo, for instance, there has always been citizen activism rooted in the protest politics of the province dating back to 1980. Most residents of the province have felt alienated from the nation-state on

## ZIMBABWE YOUTH ON CIVIC AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

**59%**  
ACROSS THE COUNTRY'S  
TEN PROVINCES ARE  
ENGAGED AT A LOCAL LEVEL

**61.3%**  
ARE PARTICIPATING IN  
NGO ACTIVITIES IN THEIR  
COMMUNITIES



account of economic marginalization. Manicaland and Masvingo have in the last few decades also become hotbeds of protest politics due to growing feelings of economic marginalization by the central government. In the specific case of Manicaland, there has been a growing sense of exploitation and marginalization among residents who have been complaining about not benefiting from revenues accruing from diamond mining in their province.<sup>9</sup> Residents of the drought prone province of Masvingo, besides lacking employment opportunities in their province, which has very few industries, have in the past also complained about not being represented enough in both government and lucrative sectors of the economy and being discriminated against by the Zezuru from the Mashonaland provinces.<sup>10</sup> Mashonaland East and Mashonaland West have for a long time been closed political environments where the ruling ZANU PF exercises dominion politics. Mashonaland East, for

<sup>9</sup> See 'Nothing to show for our diamonds: Chimene', *The Herald*, 22 August 2017; Centre for Resource Management (2016). *Citizen Engagement in natural resource governance*. (CRD Report August 2016)

<sup>10</sup> See Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatshehi (2007). 'Echoing Silences: Ethnicity in post-colonial Zimbabwe, 1980–2007', *African Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2, p289; S.J. Ndlovu-Gatshehi (2013). *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: myths of decolonization* (Dakar: Codesria), pp 224-228.

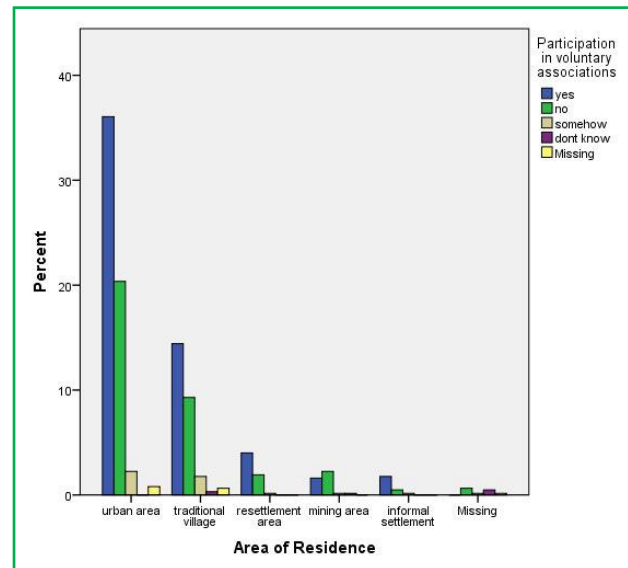
instance, has always given Zanu PF its widest margin of victory over the opposition. It is one of the provinces which have experienced some of the worst forms of electoral related violence in the post-2000 period and the ruling party has managed to maintain its control over citizens through coercive methods.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Mashonaland West, most youths live on closed farming and mining communities which are not conducive for civic engagement.

The levels of participation in voluntary associations between young men and women are almost level, with 59.4% of the young males involved in the survey being engaged in community activities at a national level as compared to 56.2% of their female counterparts. Youth from informal settlements, mining and resettlement areas are less involved in community clubs and voluntary association activities. Statistics revealed that 0.4% of youth living in informal settlements, 1.6% in mining areas and 4% for resettlement areas are engaged in these activities. The youth in urban areas and traditional villages, on the other hand, are participating more, with 35.9% involved in community clubs and voluntary association activities while 14.5% living in the villages are actively participating.

The disparities in the levels of participation between these youth groups have more to do with the political and economic conditions under which they live. The political environment in the urban and rural areas is relatively open to community organizing than that found in the mining areas, resettlement areas and informal settlements.<sup>12</sup> As confirmed in FG discussions with youth from Masvingo and Midlands, most resettlement areas are closed political societies under the rigid control of

the land committees and individual farm owners. Youth in mining areas, besides spending most of their time toiling on the mines, also find it difficult to organize themselves without the permission of the mine owners.

*Below is a graph showing youth levels of participation in community and NGO activities, according to residence:*



The levels of youth participation in voluntary clubs and associations established by this research are higher than those established by other recent research studies for all citizens at a national level. For instance, a survey conducted by MPOI and Afrobarometer in 2016 showed that most Zimbabweans (75%) did not belong to any voluntary associations or community groups.<sup>13</sup>

The youth's increased involvement in voluntary clubs and associations are partly fuelled by their frustration with unemployment and general lack of economic

<sup>11</sup> See 'UMP: Inside ZANU PF's terror stricken election stronghold.' *The Standard*, 6 August 2017.

<sup>12</sup> For more detailed discussion of politics of control in these areas, see P. Zamchiya, 2015, 'The Role of Politics and State Practices in Shaping Rural Differentiation: A Study of Resettled Small-Scale Farmers in South-Eastern Zimbabwe', S. Mawowa, 2015, 'The Political Economy of Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in Central Zimbabwe'. In Jocelyn Alexander, JoAnn McGregor and Blessing-Miles Tendi (eds), *Politics, Patronage and the State in Zimbabwe*

<sup>13</sup> See Afrobarometer and MPOI (2016), *Civic Disengagement in imbabwe* (Afrobarometer Dispatch 70).



The youth's increased involvement in voluntary clubs and associations are partly fuelled by their frustration with unemployment and general lack of economic opportunities.

opportunities. The FG discussions conducted with youth from all the ten provinces revealed that many young men and women are frustrated with their idleness and have taken to organizing themselves into youth social clubs that provide them with recreation. Such recreational youth clubs include football, netball, and darts and snooker clubs. Others, especially young women, are involved in community savings and gardening clubs. The youth further pointed out that what restricts some of them from participating regularly in these clubs is the lack of equipment like soccer balls and resources like transport to enable them to travel and compete with youth in other areas. The research found out that 60.6% of the survey participants were unemployed, with 314 (50.3%) disclosing that they were still looking for

employment and the other 64 (10.3%) saying that they have not been employed in a long time. Further analysis of data from the survey showed that 31.6% of the youth involved in community and voluntary activities are unemployed, 15.8% are employed on a part time basis, while 13% are employed full time.

The significantly high number of youth involved in voluntary association activities is also probably motivated by the need for economically marginalized youth to find some modest cash income from the modest transport allowances/reimbursement of between \$2 and \$10 given to participants. While the amount involved is quite insignificant, for most of these youth who are unemployed and have no other

## ZIMBABWE YOUTH SURVEY UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

60.6% UNEMPLOYED

50.3% LOOKING FOR EMPLOYMENT

31.6% BEEN LOOKING FOR A WHILE

alternative ways of getting cash income, getting even a dollar means a lot. As one of the KI pointed out, some of these youth can hardly afford decent meals at home and getting an opportunity to have decent lunch, even for one day can be an incentive to attend these voluntary association meetings.

Furthermore, the growing number of youths who are spending their time in church in an attempt to deal with their social and economic frustrations through spiritual means have also taken to joining youth church clubs in numbers for youth fellowship and support. A significant number of Zimbabwean youth who have been jobless for years have lost hope in the power of their agency in transforming their lives. They genuinely believe that they could get a job or riches by going to church.<sup>14</sup> This partly explains the huge youth presence in Zimbabwean churches, especially the new Pentecostal or 'Prosperity Gospel' churches that promise instant riches.<sup>15</sup> According to the survey results, an overwhelming majority of youth (95.5%) attend Christian churches, either regularly or occasionally. Within this group of youth who go to Christian churches, 76.1% attend on a regular basis, with the majority of youth who go to church regularly being young women (43.8%) as compared to 32.1% young males.

While the youth are engaged in civic participation through voluntary associations in large numbers, the

95.5%

OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF YOUTH ATTEND CHRISTIAN CHURCHES... THEY GENUINELY BELIEVE THAT THEY COULD GET A JOB OR RICHES BY GOING TO CHURCH. THIS PARTLY EXPLAINS THE HUGE YOUTH PRESENCE IN ZIMBABWEAN CHURCHES, ESPECIALLY THE NEW PENTECOSTAL OR 'PROSPERITY GOSPEL' CHURCHES THAT PROMISE INSTANT RICHES.



76.1% REGULAR

43.8% YOUNG WOMEN

32.1% YOUNG MALES

Key Informant (KI) and Focus Group (FG) conversations that were held with youths from across the 10 provinces revealed that they are not actively participating in political institutions and many other public decision making spaces available in their communities. For instance, the youth are peripherally involved in community decision making structures like Village Development Committees (VIDCOs), Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) and School Development Committees (SDCs). As confirmed by other recent studies that have been conducted, the youth are also not actively engaged in collective public decision making processes like elections, national and local budget consultative meetings, local council meetings and political party meetings.<sup>16</sup>

Zimbabwe's youth are in fact very much disengaged from participating in elections, either as voters or candidates.<sup>17</sup> Anecdotal evidence from various research studies that have been conducted over the last few years shows that the youth currently make up about 41% of the eligible voters, but only constitute 14% of the registered

14 For more detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see E. Chitando (2013). *Prayers and Players: Religion and politics in Zimbabwe*.

15 'Prosperity Gospel, search for meaning and riches', *The Herald*, 2 November 2016; 'Of prosperity gospel and today's churches', *The Herald*, 28 February 2017.

16 For comparative findings, see RAU, 2016. *Exploring obstacles for women and youth participation at local government level* (February, 2016); ActionAid (2013). *Eager or Slumbering? Youth and political participation in Zimbabwe* (ActionAid Denmark, March 2013).

17 Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU), 2017. *Framing the Debate: Youth Voter Registration in Zimbabwe in preparation for the 2018 election* (RAU Opinion 1/17, April 2017); RAU (2013). *An Audit of Zimbabwe's 2013 Voters' Roll* (Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit, July 2013); L.T. Chigwenjere (2016). *Examining youth participation in the electoral process of Zimbabwe from the period 2000 - 2013: case study of Kuwadzana* (BSc Honours in Politics Dissertation, Midlands State University).



voters in Zimbabwe.<sup>18</sup> The survey conducted found out that only a small percentage of respondents who were eligible to vote in the previous elections had voted. Only 20% of the youth aged above the eligible age (18 years) had voted in the 2013 elections. Voter apathy among the youth was strongest among urban youth. While 52.1% of youth participants from rural areas who were eligible to vote had voted in the 2013 elections, 39.4% of their urban counterparts had voted.

### 4.3. Factors influencing youth participation in elections and other decision making processes

There are a number of both external and internal factors influencing youth participation in elections and other decision-making processes.

**Lack of time and commitment:** The internal challenges include the youth's lack of time and commitment to participate in decision making processes, especially the regular community meetings, such as School Development Committee (SDC), village health committee, VIDCO and WADCO meetings, where decisions for community development are made. The youth consulted admitted that Zimbabwe's massively unemployed youth are often busy attending to other business, particularly to do with economic survival. This leaves them with little time to attend to political and civic meetings. In cases where some of the youth are selected to leadership positions, their preoccupation with economic survival often leaves little room for them to commit to their civic responsibilities.

**Lack of knowledge and awareness about processes:** Another critical challenge negatively affecting youth's effective participation in decision making processes

that was identified by the youth themselves is lack of knowledge and awareness among the youth about decision making and how to get involved in some decision making processes. Some of them are not even aware of their right to participate in certain platforms or the qualifications that are needed. For instance, as correctly revealed in the ActionAid study on local governance of 2013, our consultations with the youth revealed that a small number of youth knew that they had a right to attend Full Council meetings.<sup>19</sup> Some of the FG consultations also revealed that some youth are not aware of the qualifications for contesting as a local councillor. Without knowledge of the Local Government Act provisions, some young men and women erroneously think that one needs to have fixed property in order to be a councillor. Others think that there are minimum education requirements for the position. Often lacking in knowledge and experience about decision making because of various reasons, youth do not have critical skills and knowledge about procedural processes that are supposed to be followed when participating in certain decision making platforms. This lack of knowledge and skills about decision making weakens youth advocacy initiatives.

**Lack of patience and tolerance:** Closely related to the above is what was described by one KI from Matebeleland North as the youth's lack of patience and tolerance for bureaucratic, cultural and customary practices when they participate in decision making platforms, such as traditional village courts. The informant explained that youth in rural areas fail to influence processes at community gatherings because they often adopt a belligerent attitude towards the elders and the cultural practices they consider archaic. In his view, the youth's disrespect of village elders results in confrontation rather than dialogue and engagement. Once there

<sup>18</sup> RAU (2017). *Youth Voter Registration in Zimbabwe*, p.2.

<sup>19</sup> Development Impact Consultancy (2013). Report on the research on Local Authorities' capacities to provide services in a gender sensitive manner (ActionAid Zimbabwe, October 2013), p 35.



A significant proportion of the youth consulted (**45.2%**) feel that decision-making processes in their communities are not open to youth participation. Only **22.4%** of the youth participants thought the processes were open, while the other **25.5%** felt they were somewhat open. Almost half (**44.1%**) of the youth consulted felt that they are being side-lined and are not being given enough space to play a more meaningful role in public decision making processes by elders.



is confrontation, the elders who control power and influence in communities sideline the youth and their ideas.

Apart from internal factors, there are multiple external factors constraining the youth's effective participation in decision-making processes. In all the provinces, patriarchy, patronage and economic marginality were identified by the youth as the three key factors negatively affecting youth's access to leadership positions within decision-making processes and platforms.

#### ***Gerontocracy and youth marginalization by elders:***

Citizens actively participate in public life when they feel their voices make a difference, and the participation of youth in public decision making processes, including elections, fundamentally depends on how young people are treated and what roles they occupy in the different facets of public life. Consultation with youth from across all the ten provinces revealed that one of the fundamental reasons for youth disengagement from collective public decision making is the widespread practice of youth marginalization by elders in decision making processes and platforms. Most youth feel that

both their national and community leaders are not taking their voices seriously. A significant proportion of the youth consulted (45.2%) feel that decision-making processes in their communities are not open to youth participation. Only (22.4%) of the youth participants thought the processes were open, while the other (25.5%) felt they were somewhat open. Almost half (44.1%) of the youth consulted felt that they are being side-lined and are not being given enough space to play a more meaningful role in public decision making processes by elders. Discussions with youth in FGs confirmed that youth are either deliberately being excluded from decision making processes or invited to participate in the decision making platforms such as village courts, VIDCO and WADCO meetings, without being given the room to engage or make any decisions, participation without representation. The youth are excluded from making meaningful contributions at these platforms through patriarchal practices of ageism and sexism.

The youth consulted across the country talked about how patriarchy and ageism have remained very strong in Zimbabwe, especially in rural communities, and how elders in their communities manipulate these patriarchal cultures to exclude youth from positions of power and to dismiss their views and contributions at community decision making platforms. They complained that whenever they try to contribute at decision making platforms their views are dismissed as manifestations of youthful immaturity and lack of experience in governance. They are told that they are 'still too young to understand governance processes and the art of politics and decision making'. In the rural areas where the legacy of the liberation war is still strong, the youth complained about the dismissal of their views on the basis that they 'did not experience the war of liberation and therefore do not understand Zimbabwe's



political culture, development priorities and governance dynamics.<sup>20</sup>

During FG discussions, the youth further talked about how patriarchy is used to exclude them from positions of leadership and power. They were unanimous that elders are reluctant to share power with the youth and that there is a general belief among both urban and rural Zimbabweans that the youth are not entitled to lead older people. They also talked about how political parties in the country were also marginalizing youth from taking meaningful leadership positions by relegating them to leadership positions in the less powerful youth leagues or assemblies of the party. A good example they gave is that of ZANU PF whose Youth League seniors always led until recently when Kudzai Chipanga was selected to be Secretary. The position of Secretary for the League was reserved for a senior leader from the days of Josiah Tungamirai who continued to lead the Youth League after retiring from the Airforce, Absalom Skhosana who led the ZANU PF Youth League when he was way above 60 years and Togarepi Pupurai who also led when his own son was old enough to be the youth league leader.

Youth activists in the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) similarly complained about how they were marginalized from contesting for leadership positions within the main wing of their party. Young women in political parties expressed the view that their ascendancy to leadership positions within political party structures is much more difficult because they have no sense of political belonging. They are discriminated in both the main and youth wings of the party on the basis of sexism, and they are also marginalized from occupying leadership positions in the women's wing that is dominated by senior women leaders on account of their youthful age.



According to the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) report of 2016, Zimbabwe ranks number 31 on the global list of countries with parliamentarians under the age of 30 with its 3% youth representation.



The FG discussions also established that youth are frustrated by their exclusion from certain public posts because of age limits. For instance, youth complained about their exclusion from both the Senate and the Presidency on account of their age. The current age qualification for the position of both President and Senator is 40 years, effectively disqualifying all youth from contesting for these positions. This, the youth indicated, partly explains their limited presence in crucial public offices like Parliament. According to the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) report of 2016, Zimbabwe ranks number 31 on the global list of countries with parliamentarians under the age of 30 with its 3% youth representation.<sup>21</sup> The youth felt it is important to change the age limits for candidates running for these elected offices in order to give them more chances to compete for all elected offices, thereby increasing youth participation in decision making.

***Patriarchy and discrimination on basis of sexism:*** Young women are discriminated on the basis of both age and gender. Across the provinces, young women complained about not being listened to on the basis of both their age and gender. As one young FG participant from Masvingo explained, young women in some of the culturally conservative districts like Chiredzi are not given even a chance to raise their issues at decision making platforms in the village on the justification of 'culture'. They have to speak through a young male colleague if they want their issues to be heard.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> FG discussions in Masvingo, Manicaland and Mashonaland East.

<sup>21</sup> IPU (2016). Youth Participation in national Parliaments. Inter-Parliamentary Union.

<sup>22</sup> FG discussion, Masvingo, 11 September 2017.

## ZIMBABWE YOUNG WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

**Young women were asked if their capacity to participate in decision making is affected by their social status as women.**

**49.5% YES 25.3% SOMEWHAT**

Young women are particularly constrained from playing a critical role in governance and decision making because of the negative effects of patriarchal practices of ageism and gender discrimination at the family, community and national level. Asked if they thought young women's capacity to participate in decision making is affected by their social status as women, 49.5% of the survey respondents answered affirmatively while a further 25.3% felt it somewhat did. Young women consulted during FG and KI interviews further discussed how most young married women are not allowed by their husbands to participate in politics, civil society and other community affairs. Most of these young women's husbands feel threatened by the ideological empowerment of their wives through participation in civic meetings that help to make them conscious of their human rights.

Furthermore, the patriarchal ideologies of some young men lead them to try and force their wives to stay at home in order to take care of the children instead of attending public affairs meetings. In the rare cases where these young women's husbands allow them to participate in decision making processes, the patriarchal elderly in-laws might overrule both their sons and daughters in laws, 'often arguing that *zvepolitics hazviitwe pamba pano* [our household norms do not allow involvement



in politics]'. In some cases where the daughters in-law belong to different parties from their in-laws, the in-laws might even try to influence their daughters in law to abandon their parties and join their political party- a process that helps to demobilize young women from politics as part of their protest action against attempts to control their freedom to exercise political choice. Young single women are also often subject to the patriarchal control of their fathers and brothers who rarely allow them to participate in political affairs.<sup>23</sup>

More critically, young women experience more obstacles than young men when they aspire to occupy leadership positions. Both young and old males, including the educated and uneducated, rural and urban, often feel challenged and threatened directly and indirectly when young women contest for leadership positions that they try everything in their power to sabotage their leadership ambitions. As one young female participant at a recent youth workshop graphically put it, 'the image of power and leadership in patriarchal Zimbabwe is that of a man with a big pot belly, anything outside that is not acceptable.' To compound their challenges, young women are further marginalized from effective participation in decision making by older women

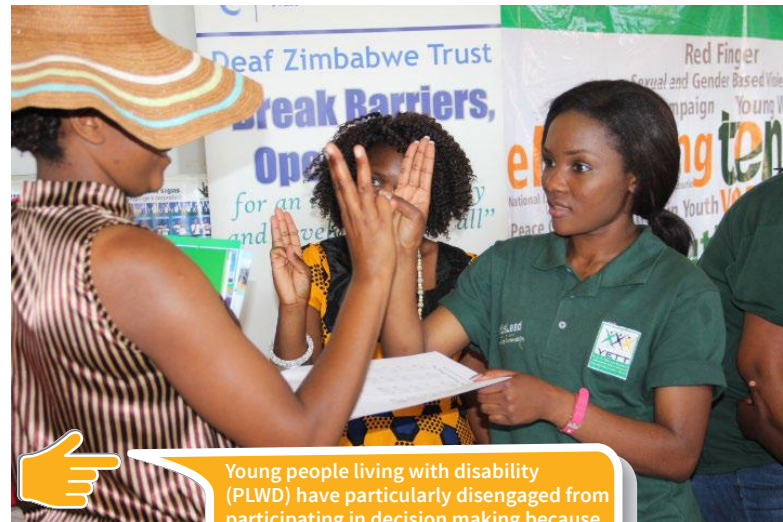
<sup>23</sup> KI interview with a leader of an organization working with young women, Harare, 25 September 2017.

who tend to dominate the spaces reserved for women in almost all decision making platforms, including women's platforms.<sup>24</sup>

**Discrimination on basis of disability:** Young people living with disability (PLWD) have particularly disengaged from participating in decision making because of the negative ways in which they are treated. Young PLWD consulted during this research pointed out that PLWD are often not selected for leadership because of the prevailing negative stereotypes about their ability to lead. As one of the young men living with disability vividly put it, 'most people think that disability is inability and that all people living with disability cannot think like people who are surviving without disability.' Almost all young men and women living with disability consulted cited the lack of group representation in almost all key decision making processes at both local and national level as one of the key factors that discourage them from participating in decision making platforms and processes. They complained about the negligible representation of PLWD in the legislature through 2 Senators only, which is 0.006% representation in a Parliament of 350 members (80 senators and 270 MPs).<sup>25</sup> These young PLWD consulted, strongly felt that they are not considered for public office because of negative stereotyping by both government and society about their ability to lead due to the fact that they are living with disability. As some of the participants pointed out, when government wants to appoint representatives for PLWDs for public positions it often selects those with acquired disability, rather than those born with disability, without even giving them the chance to elect their own representatives or consulting PLWD themselves.



They complained about the negligible representation of PLWD in the legislature through 2 Senators only, which is 0.006% representation in a Parliament of 350 members (80 senators and 270 MPs). These young PLWD consulted strongly felt that they are not considered for public office because of negative stereotyping by both government and society about their ability to lead due to the fact that they are living with disability.



Young people living with disability (PLWD) have particularly disengaged from participating in decision making because of the negative ways in which they are treated.

### **Discrimination on basis of regionalism and ethnicity:**

Ethnicity and regionalism have continued to be salient in Zimbabwe's governance politics at both national and local levels.<sup>26</sup> Like their adult contemporaries, Zimbabwe's youth have not been spared from the negative effects of the country's regional and ethnic politics. The youth consulted in different parts of

<sup>24</sup> Action Aid 2013, *Eager or Slumbering: Youth and political participation in Zimbabwe*, March 2013, p.15.  
<sup>25</sup> The population of PLWD is estimated to constitute between 15 and 20% of the total national population.

<sup>26</sup> For a more nuanced discussion of ethnicity in Zimbabwe's governance politics, see M Sithole (1999), *Zimbabwe: Struggles Within the Struggle*, 2nd edition. (Harare: Rujeko Publishers); Muzondidya and Ndllovu Gatshehi (2007), 'Echoing Silences': Ethnicity in post-colonial Zimbabwe, 1980-2007', *African Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2, S. Ndllovu Gatshehi, 2009. Do Zimbabweans Exist: Trajectories of Nationalism, National Identity Formation and Crisis in a Postcolonial State (Peter Lang Publishers)

the country openly discussed how they have seen youth being excluded from participating in certain decision making platforms on the basis of ethnicity, regionalism and autochthony. FG discussions with youth in Mashonaland Central, for instance, revealed how youth of Malawian, Mozambican and Zambian descent are being excluded from occupying certain positions in local community structures (SDCs, Dip tank committees, VIDCOs and Land Committees) on the basis of community members' notions of autochthony which reduce these descendants of migrants to 'aliens' with limited rights of belonging and representation.<sup>27</sup> A significant number of the youth from other districts, especially those populated by diverse ethnic groups such as Gokwe, Muzarabani, etc, spoke about how regionalism, ethnicity and autochthony ideas continue to influence their access to positions in the community.

**Economic marginality and lack of resources:** The youth consulted talked about how difficult it was for them to find even bus fare to travel to attend some of the community meetings that are held in their districts, such as district budget consultative meetings held at district offices. They also talked about the difficulty of campaigning for leadership positions in communities because of their general condition of impoverishment and economic marginality. The situation is more difficult for young women who are more impoverished than their male counterparts because of the feminization of poverty in Zimbabwe.<sup>28</sup> Young women's structural conditions of economic marginality as women seriously constrain their ability to participate in decision-making processes at both membership and leadership levels.<sup>29</sup> Like their mothers, they shoulder the burden of taking care of the children. They often do not have babysitters



Asked if economic resource shortages negatively affected youth's ability to play more effective roles in decision-making processes, **71.2%** of the youth participants in the current research affirmatively responded, and **12.8%** felt it did somewhat. Further asked if they thought young women's capacity to participate in decision making is affected by their social status as women, **49.5%** of the participants responded in the affirmative while an additional **25.3%** thought it did somehow.



who can take care of children while they attend public meetings. Young single mothers are among the most vulnerable social groups in Zimbabwe who not only struggle to survive and fend for their children but rarely have enough income to travel and attend meetings or participate in public affairs such as voter registration or voting. Asked if economic resource shortages negatively affected youth's ability to play more effective roles in decision-making processes, 71.2% of the youth participants in the current research affirmatively responded, and 12.8% felt it did somewhat. Further asked if they thought young women's capacity to participate in decision making is affected by their social status as women, 49.5% of the participants responded in the affirmative while an additional 25.3% thought it did somehow. As a result, young women are more disengaged from participating in governance processes than both their male counterparts and older women.

**Exclusion through patronage:** The youth further talked about their disadvantage of being under-resourced when competing with established, elderly and affluent candidates who often used their patronage networks to build support with offers of cash and other material rewards. This, the youth noted, was a serious obstacle to young, often under-resourced candidates attempting

<sup>27</sup> A KI in Mashonaland Central talked of an incident where an SDC in which she had been elected into had to be dissolved after community members complained that that the 'majority of the people who had been elected were aliens.'

<sup>28</sup> Development Impact Consultancy (2013). *Report on the research on Local Authorities' capacities to provide services in a gender sensitive manner* (ActionAid Zimbabwe, October 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Almost a quarter of the youth female participants (22.2%) agree that lack of economic resources affect their ability to participate in decision-making.

to win elections in impoverished Zimbabwean communities that now value materialism ahead of ideas, ideals, policies and values in selecting leaders during this time of economic crisis.<sup>30</sup> The youth also complained about how their lack of economic resources and assets is always used to exclude them from almost all leadership positions in their communities. As FG participants in Mashonaland East put it:

**Community members always want to know what sort of economic assets one has before they can consider him or her for a position of leadership or authority. Even when you want to run for a position in the School Development Committee as a young person, they do not simply look at your leadership potential or whether you qualify as a parent with children at the school. They ask you about the kind of economic resources or assets you have that they can ask the court to attach in the event that you abuse SDC funds. When you want to be a member of the dip tank committee, they ask you how many cattle you own besides those of your parents. It is worse when you want to aspire for a high profile leadership position like that of MP. They want to know what type of vehicle you drive and look at the size of your neck and pot belly to see if you will afford to dish out patronage gifts.**

**Disillusionment with political leaders:** Another important contributing factor to the low levels of civic engagement among the youth is their widespread perception that elected officials, including Members of Parliament (MPs) and local government councilors, do not honour their electoral promises and do not listen to their needs as youth.<sup>31</sup> FG discussions and interviews held with the youth in all the ten provinces revealed that there is widespread distrust of political leaders and parties among youth at the moment and this is



Almost eighty percent (**78%**) of the youth who participated in the survey thought that more youths would be interested in participating in decision making if more young people had more leadership positions in governance.



negatively impacting on youth participation in decision making processes, especially elections. Youth consulted felt they were “used” by political leaders and their parties to gain votes and being excluded from government and decision-making processes after the elections. They criticised political leaders as self-interested, corrupt individuals who are ‘interested in stepping on the youth to get to the top, only.’ The views expressed by the youth consulted during this study confirm the findings the 2016 study on youth engagement conducted by the Research and Advocacy (RAU), which noted that most urban youths don’t attend community decision making meetings because they are disappointed by the lack of development in their areas and the poor state of infrastructure and lack of initiatives by their elected councilors to solve their problems.<sup>32</sup>

**Frustration with lack of economic development:** Disaffected by, and frustrated with, the lack of development in their communities, jobs and opportunities for youth economic empowerment, most youths consulted during FG discussions across the provinces revealed that they would rather go and look for economic resources to sustain themselves than waste their time attending public meetings. As, in the RAU study case, the youth described the meetings and elections as sheer waste of time, talk-shops and sideshows where nothing fruitful materializes and youth get no benefits from participating.

<sup>30</sup> For more detailed discussion of Zimbabwean moral degeneration in time of crisis, see M. Mawere (2011). *Moral Degeneration in Contemporary Zimbabwean Business Practices*.

<sup>31</sup> See Afrobarometer and MPOI (2016). *Civic Disengagement in Zimbabwe (Afrobarometer Dispatch 70)*.

<sup>32</sup> RAU (2016). *Exploring obstacles for women and youth participation at local government level*, p14-16.



86.4%

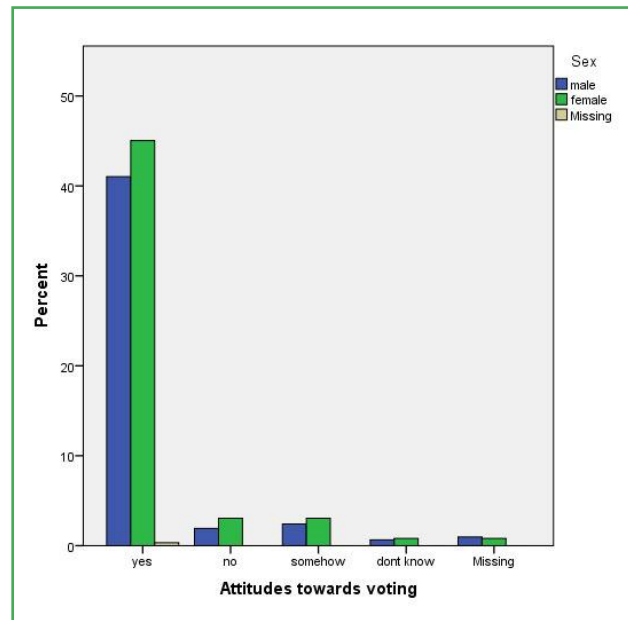
**MAJORITY OF YOUTH AFFIRMED THAT IT IS THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AS YOUNG PERSONS TO VOTE.**

Clearly, the distrust in political parties and leaders emanating from their failure to implement electoral promises and frustration with lack of opportunities for economic and social development for the youth is causing intense political disenchantment among the youth. This mainly explains the low levels of youth interest in participating in decision making processes like elections, including the ongoing voter registration processes. Without visible meaningful representation in leadership positions decision making processes at both local and national level, the youth end up giving up on active participation. Almost eighty percent (78%) of the youth who participated in the survey thought that more youths would be interested in participating in decision making if more young people had more leadership positions in governance.

#### 4.4. Youth and Elections: Enablers and Constraints

**Youth valuing of Elections:** The consultation across the country showed that the majority of youth (86.4%) value elections and regard voting as their responsibility. Also asked if the government of Zimbabwe should consider introducing compulsory voter registration for eligible voters, as was the case in other countries such as Australia, North Korea, Luxembourg and Singapore, as part of initiatives to promote youth participation in elections, 47.9% of the survey participants affirmatively responded while another 5.9% indicated ‘somewhat’.

The graph below illustrates youth opinion on voting, categorized by sex:



**Faith in Elections:** The youth are also quite aware of the value of elections in bringing changes in governance and development. Asked if they thought voting contributes to changes in the development of their communities and country, almost two thirds (62.7%) of the youth population contacted responded affirmatively, while 13.8% thought it somewhat did. It was only youth from the provinces of Bulawayo, Matabeleland South and North that did not have much confidence in the value of elections as an agency of developmental change in the country. In these provinces, 50.5% of the youth in Bulawayo thought elections could contribute to changes and 49.1% of youth from Matabeleland North and South thought they could. The relatively low confidence in elections as a potential agency for

change and development among the youth in these three provinces is likely to be linked to the feelings of economic and political marginalization among youth from these provinces.<sup>33</sup>

### Factors constraining youth participation in elections

Although a significantly high proportion of Zimbabwean youth still seem to have some faith in elections as agencies of change and development in their communities and country, their ability to participate in elections is constrained by a number of factors:

**Violence:** Among the key factors negatively affecting participation of youth in elections is politically motivated violence. The deployment of violence during election campaigns has not only led to a general aversion to politics among the youth, especially among vulnerable groups like young women and PLWD, but has also led to youth having to shun elections. The youth consulted cited violence as a key factor negatively affecting their willingness to stand as candidates in elections or even go to vote. Most youth consulted during FG discussions felt that given their previous experience of violence during elections in Zimbabwe, the youth feel that it is better to refrain from participating in elections in order to avoid the possibility of being targeted for violence for either contesting for political leadership positions or voting for opposition parties. As the youths in Manicaland explained, *‘tikafunga nyaya dzveviolence, dzimwe nguva tinopedzisira tava kuti zviri nane tigare zvedu kudzimba dzedu nenhamo dzedu* [when we consider the possibility of electoral violence, we often think that it is better to stay at home and be content with our hardships than participate in elections and face the prospect of becoming victims of violence.]’

### ZIMBABWE YOUTH SURVEY ON THEIR FAITH IN ELECTIONS

Asked if they thought voting contributes to changes in the development of their communities and country.

62.7% YES

13.8% SOMEWHAT

The youth from the rural areas spoke passionately about the 2008 election violence, and cited it as the main reason why they would consider abstaining from participating in politics and the 2018 elections. The youth from the provinces of Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and South also spoke about how the legacy of the Gukurahundi violence continues to affect negatively their involvement in politics, explaining that elderly family members often warn them about the beatings, killings and forced disappearances of the past whenever they try to be active in politics.<sup>34</sup> Nationally, 76.6% of the youth consulted thought that violence plays an important part in discouraging youth from participating in elections. The highest number of youth who think violence negatively affects their participation is found in provinces that have been worst affected by electoral violence in the recent past, especially during the 2008 elections. These provinces include Masvingo (89.1%), Manicaland (82.4%), Harare (84.1%) and Mashonaland Central, (80.0%), while the least is found among youth living in provinces that have experienced relatively less violence over the past few elections such as Matabeleland North and South (54.4%) and Mashonaland West (67.6%).

33 For more detailed discussion on this, see S. J. Gatsheni (2011), ‘The changing politics of Matabeleland since 1980’, Available at <http://solidaritypeacetrust.org/994/the-changing-politics-of-matabeleland-since-1980/>; J. Muzondiyaya and S. J. Ndllovu-Gatsheni, 2007, ‘Echoing Silences: Ethnicity in Postcolonial Zimbabwe, 1980-2007’, in *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 7 (2) (2007), pp. 257-297.

34 The researchers noted a significantly high level of insecurity among youth from Matabeleland South, Matabeleland North and Mashonaland Central during the FG interviews. Participants took time to open up, and most were not comfortable with the recording of interviews.





Asked if political parties, ZEC, CSOs, traditional and church leaders, radio and newspapers were giving enough information to promote youth voter registration in the 2018 elections, **57.7%** of the youth thought that government and ZEC were either doing nothing or very little, while **58.5%** thought the same about CSOs, and **65.5%** held similar views about voter education initiatives by political parties.



The youth from the rural areas spoke passionately about the 2008 election violence, and cited it as the main reason why they would consider abstaining from participating in politics and the 2018 elections.

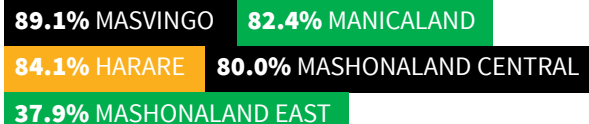
The threats of violence against the youth come in various forms. Violence, as the youth consulted expressed, often comes in the form of physical harm or threats of harm whenever they try to challenge or oppose powerful voices. In most cases, violence is delivered in the form of indirect threats to the youth and/or their families which are meant to force the youth to conform to expected political behaviour. Taking advantage of the youth's economic vulnerability, elder members of society, especially community leaders like Traditional Village Heads (*Sabhuku*), often coerce youth to refrain from challenging their decisions or challenging them for leadership positions. Youth from rural areas consulted talked of how traditional leaders often used threats of eviction from farming land and exclusion of the youth's family members from relief aid benefits from the government and international development partners, as some of the most common threats used to 'discipline' them. A young KI in Mashonaland East talked of how he was forced to withdraw from the Selection Committee of the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), the UNICEF funding initiative meant to support vulnerable children gain access to education, after Village Heads (*Sabhuku*) in the same Committee threatened his family with eviction from their farming land for trying to push for transparency and fairness in the selection

## ZIMBABWE YOUTH ON ELECTORAL VIOLENCE NATIONALLY

# 76.6%

**YOUTH THINK VIOLENCE  
PLAYS AN IMPORTANT PART IN  
DISCOURAGING YOUTH FROM  
PARTICIPATING IN ELECTIONS.**

The highest number of youth who think violence negatively affects their participation is found in provinces that have been worst provinces worst affected by electoral violence in the recent past, especially during the 2008 elections.



While the least is found among youth living in provinces that have experienced relatively less violence over the past few elections such as...



of beneficiaries. In those rural communities that still strongly believe in witchcraft, youth are often receive threats of death through witchcraft.<sup>35</sup>

**Inadequate Information:** The failure by election stakeholders, including the electoral management bodies, political parties and civil society, to provide the youth with enough information about elections, especially information that speaks to the unique needs of the youth, during voter mobilization and education campaigns is one of the key reasons that accounts for limited participation of youth in elections. Asked if political parties, ZEC, CSOs, traditional and church leaders, radio and newspapers were giving enough information to promote youth voter registration in the 2018 elections, 57.7% of the youth thought that government and ZEC were either doing nothing or very little, while 58.5% thought the same about CSOs, and 65.5% held similar views about voter education initiatives by political parties.

**Non-consultation of youth:** Youth consulted during FG discussions expressed that their unique needs and aspirations as young people are not catered for by election stakeholders in a number of ways. They particularly complained about not being consulted or involved as a sector by the various election stakeholders in both the design and implementation of election programmes and processes, including election dates, voter registration campaigns and election management. As one of the FG participants expressed, ‘the youth are always treated as invited guests to elections who have no say in the design of both the election agenda and the running of the election itself. These political parties act like a friend who looks for you only when he needs something from you. In this case they only look for us during election time for our labour [for voter mobilization] and numbers [to decide the election

result]. In-between elections, nobody thinks about us-not even CSOs.’<sup>36</sup>

**Neglect of youth issues:** Most youth consulted felt that political parties not only need to have a dedicated focus on youth issues and their concerns in their election agenda, but also to involve youth in leadership within political campaigns. In the specific case of ZEC, youth from across the country complained in FG discussions about marginalization of youth in the ZEC election management processes. They called for ZEC to consider employing more youths as voter registration officials and polling officers rather than have a situation where youth are involved in election management as polling agents of political parties or observers and monitors for CSOs. They urged ZEC to prioritize recruiting the millions of educated but jobless youth who are currently roaming the streets as voter registration officials and polling officers instead of recruiting civil servants who are already employed by government and are receiving salaries every month. Asked if they thought more youths would be interested in elections if more young people were involved in electoral processes like voter education and voter registration, 80.3% of the youth, participants responded affirmatively while another 10.9% thought it might not.

**Inhibitive registration and voting conditions:** The youth consulted also felt that their growing disengagement from elections is partly due to the failure by election management bodies like ZEC to create favourable conditions for the youth to register and vote. They not only complained about ZEC failing to provide enough information about elections, but also about ZEC’s failure to package its information in ways that appeal to the youth. The youth also talked about ZEC’s failure to engage the youth in their ‘own youth spaces’ and through their ‘own modes or language of communication’. They

<sup>35</sup> Focus Group Discussion, Manicaland, 9 September 2017.

<sup>36</sup> FG Discussion, Harare, 26/09/2017.



They urged ZEC to prioritize recruiting the millions of educated but jobless youth who are currently roaming the streets as voter registration officials and polling officers instead of recruiting civil servants who are already employed by government and are receiving salaries every month.

particularly complained that ZEC often locates its voter registration centres and polling stations in places that are not convenient to them as youth. They prefer voter registration centres to be located next to ‘those spaces where we spend time hustling for survival’ such as vendors’ trading markets, vegetable markets, informal industries, saloons and transport ranks or areas where the youth try to relax like shopping malls, open braai spaces, bottle stores and nightclubs so that they do not waste too much time travelling to register or vote. As they explained, most youths are self-employed people who live from hand to mouth and cannot afford to spend time away from their businesses in the current harsh economic environment.<sup>37</sup> Students in schools and colleges, as vocational training students who participated in a FG discussion in Mashonaland West pointed out, can hardly find time during this busy last quarter of the year when they are busy preparing for examinations to go and register at centres located away from their study premises. They appealed for ZEC’s mobile voter registration units to visit their schools and colleges to facilitate student registration.

**Adhoc approaches:** The youth also complained that both ZEC and CSOs, like political parties, often come to mobilize them for elections just before elections rather than engaging them on a continuous basis. Engaging youth on elections on a continuous basis, as the youth pointed out, helps to keep them motivated.

**Marginalization of PLWD:** Youth living with disability consulted, in particular, strongly felt their participation in elections and other decision making processes was mainly constrained by the failure by existing governance institutions and electoral processes to cater for their unique needs as people living with disability. They complained that their ability to vote from an informed position is always constrained by the fact that political parties do not care to communicate in the languages that different groups of PLWD understand. For example, deaf youth consulted during a FG discussion in Harare noted that no political party cares to use sign language when addressing participants at rallies, a factor that often leaves prospective deaf voters frustrated by their lack of knowledge about what the political parties and their candidates had to offer.

**Lack of infrastructural and human support for PLWD:** More importantly, young PLWD further pointed out that the electoral processes, including voter registration and voting processes, do not cater for the unique needs of the different groups of PLWDs such as transport for those not able to walk; election education material in Braille to enable the visually impaired to read on their own; and election material in sign language to enable the deaf to understand.<sup>38</sup> While ZEC is currently working with organizations such as Deaf Zimbabwe Trust to translate voter education material, it is instructive to note that in the past electoral management, bodies have not provided election information in sign language.<sup>39</sup> More critically, the young PLWD pointed out that their ability to participate in elections is often constrained by the lack of infrastructural and human support to enable them to register or vote at both voter registration and polling stations. For instance, most visually impaired and physically disabled youths require assistance to travel to registration and voting centres since ZEC does

<sup>37</sup> Participants in FG participants in Mashonaland East; Harare and Bulawayo expressed these views.

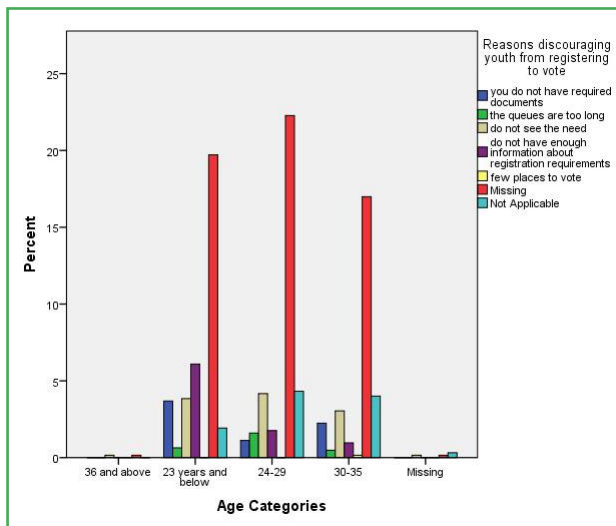
<sup>38</sup> FG discussion with deaf youth, Harare, 26/09/2017; KI interview with disabled young woman, Harare, 26/01/2017.

<sup>39</sup> FG discussion with deaf youth (Harare, 26/09/2017).

not have special registration or voting systems for them. The voter registration centres and polling stations often do not have ramps or special toilets for physically disabled persons on wheel chairs.<sup>40</sup>

Youth living with disability consulted also complained that election management officials are often not accommodative to their needs, especially when they do not know how to communicate with them or handle their special needs. Visually impaired youth specifically complained about the assignment of strangers to assist them with voting- an issue they felt leaves them insecure when they cast their votes. They pointed out that they preferred being assisted by their own personal assistants or any other person of their choice that they trusted.

*The graph below illustrates reasons that will discourage youths from voting, per age category:*



The above highlighted factors are not only negatively affecting youth participation in elections in general but also the levels of voter registration among youth in the on-going registration for the 2018 elections.

#### 4.5. Levels of youth participation in BVR registration

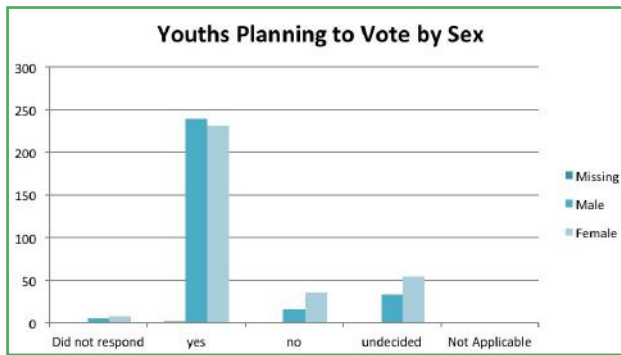
The research found out that levels of youth participation in the ongoing registration across the provinces have been very low. Our random survey during FG discussion revealed that very few youths participating in the survey (less than 5 per provincial site visited) had registered or attempted to register. Some youths, especially in the rural provinces, were not even aware that registration had started, while others were not even aware what BVR is. Those who knew that registration had started were hardly aware of the location of the registration centres in their provinces.

Despite the low levels of registration among the youth at the moment, the youth consulted expressed high levels of interest in registering for the 2018 elections. Asked if they would register to vote if they were assured that their vote would make a difference to their future and that of their communities, 89.8% of the youth consulted said that they would. Further asked if they were planning on voting in 2018, 77.2% of the youth confirmed they were. Matebeleland North and South have the highest percentages of youth either not yet decided about voting or not planning on voting, with 20.4% saying they are not decided, yet, and a further 7.4% making it clear they are not going to vote.<sup>41</sup> A total 80.2% of the youth consulted across the country said that they would be interested in registering to vote, if given a chance.

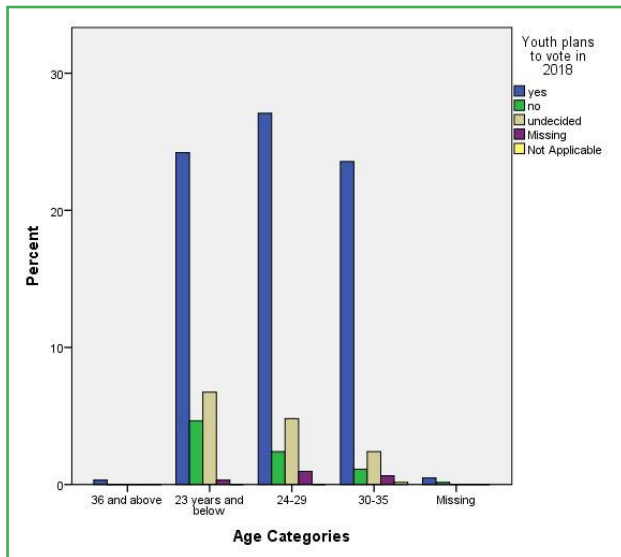
40 KI interviews with young physically disabled youth in Bulawayo (13/09/2017).

41 The significantly high number of youth not decided on voting or planning on not voting in these provinces could have something to do with the feeling of marginalisation from the nation state by youth from these regions.

The graph below illustrates youth planning to vote in 2018, by sex category:



The graph below illustrates youth plans to vote, by age:



Those indicating that they would vote in the upcoming 2018 elections cite their dissatisfaction with the government’s management of the economy, their lack of employment opportunities, the growing poverty

in the country, the deterioration of social services, political repression, and the continued stay of one party (ZANU PF) and President Mugabe in power as factors influencing their interest in participating in the elections. Almost two thirds (60.6%) of the youth consulted for the research were unemployed, with 50.3% disclosing that they were still looking for employment and the other 10.3% saying that they have not been employed in a long time. Asked to describe their socio-economic status at the moment, the majority of the participants (64.9%) described their social and economic living conditions as bad, with 63.5% disclosing that their living conditions were bad, while the other (1.4%) described their condition as extremely bad.<sup>42</sup> Only 4.6% described their socio-economic conditions as good, while the other 23.1% described their conditions as balanced. Another 5.6% said that they did not know, and the remaining 1.8% chose not to respond to the question. Those who chose not to respond to the question and those who said that they did not know probably gave that response out of their sense of insecurity. The assumption is that they feel their situation is bad, but they were not comfortable to disclose their feelings to the researchers. If this assumption is correct, the number of participants who feel that their situation is bad is 73.2%.

Given the above levels of disaffection with their current living conditions, youth interest in voting and registering for the upcoming elections among the youth is partly explained by the relatively high hopes for change in their conditions that the country’s impoverished and unemployed youth are associating with a possible change of government after the 2018 elections. Nationally, 60.2% of the youth whose opinions were sought confirmed that that they held hopes for change in their condition as young persons because of the

42 These findings are above those revealed in the Afrobarometer studies for the all-adult Zimbabweans in May 2017. In the Afrobarometer assessment that have been conducted since 2014, an average 56% of adult Zimbabweans have been saying their personal living conditions were bad. The differences could be a result of differences of experiences between the youth and other population groups, with the youth experiencing more hardships than their adult contemporaries. See MPOI-Afrobarometer (2017). Zimbabweans still dissatisfied with the economy and doubt usefulness of bond notes. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 143 | 3 May 2017.





upcoming 2018 elections. The youth in Masvingo (76.4%) and Midlands (68.4%) hold the highest hopes of change in their condition after the 2018, while the youth in Mashonaland Central (40%), Matabeleland North and South (51.9%), Bulawayo (51.9%) and Mashonaland West (52.7%) have least hope in the 2018 elections changing their social and economic conditions.

The high level of optimism in the 2018 elections among the youth in Masvingo and Midlands could be linked to the ethno-regional politics of the country. There is widespread speculation within those two regions that

Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa, a Karanga who hails from Midlands, would succeed the incumbent President Mugabe after the 2018 elections, and that he will be more sensitive to the economic and social development needs of his home regions, thereby opening opportunities for youth development there. The same optimism is not shared among the youth in the provinces of Mashonaland Central, Bulawayo and Matabeleland North and South that have historically lagged behind in national development, and where the majority of the youth have experienced high levels of unemployment and acute poverty for years.



These increasingly apathetic youth, found across the provinces, were adamant during our FG discussions that 'they would rather abstain from participating in useless elections as long as the government does not provide employment for them'.

Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South, alongside Bulawayo, have the biggest percentage of unemployed youth in the country, while Mashonaland has a number of economically and socially deprived districts, such as Rushinga, Mt Darwin and Bindura rural.<sup>43</sup>

Although a significant proportion of the youth (75.6%) expressed their interest in registering and voting in 2018, there are three critical issues negatively affecting their voter registration: political apathy among some youth due to frustration with unrealized dreams; the lack of

political change in the top leadership of the country since they were born and political frustration from the challenges with the on-going voter registration process. Results from both the survey and FG discussions conducted revealed that there is a significantly notable proportion of the youth which has become politically apathetic due to the persistent failure by political leaders to fulfill previous promises to deliver on social and economic services like jobs and frustration with the current economic and social hardships. The politically apathetic youth are also frustrated with elections

<sup>43</sup> See UNICEF, 2015. Descriptive Child and Youth Equity Atlas: Zimbabwe, pp.33-42.



because of lack of any visible changes in the country's political system and leadership at the top. Most youth feel that the office that matters most in governance is the presidency, which has not changed despite the numerous presidential elections that have been conducted in Zimbabwe since 1980. These youth feel that their vote is a total waste, and there is no need for them to bother voting, even for local Councillors and MPs, because the presidency will not change and the system will not change. Their vote will therefore not make any difference to the outcome of the election or their personal lives. These increasingly apathetic youth, found across the provinces, were adamant during our FG discussions that 'they would rather abstain from participating in useless elections as long as the government does not provide employment for them'.<sup>44</sup> Such youth have adopted what they described as 'no jobs, no vote' attitude.

The politically apathetic youth are further frustrated by the plethora of challenges being experienced in the on-going BVR process. The majority of the youth are complaining about the following:

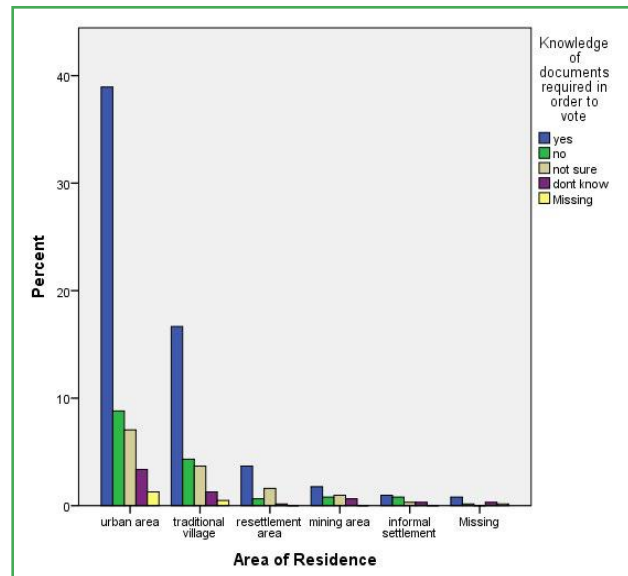
- Problems in accessing the current registration points due to distance;
- Problems in accessing the required registration documents such as IDs and proof of residence, with youth in the rural areas particularly complaining that it is not always easy to get chiefs, councillors or public officials like headmasters to issue those confirmation letters because of political polarization; and
- Youth are not even aware of the VR1 and VR9 form option or how to go about getting them, and having them signed by a commissioner of oath.

The youth in general are not happy with the current voter registration requirements, which they regard to

be unnecessarily cumbersome and pointless. Many of them feel that ZEC should have just allowed them to register using their IDs, without the requirement of supplementary documents like proof of residence. Others expressed the view that citizens should have been allowed to simply walk to vote on Election Day without having to go through registering. Almost 60 per cent, i.e. 59%, of the youth who participated in the survey thought that more young people in their communities would turn up for voter registration if government relaxed voter registration requirements, while another 18.9% thought it might register under the current conditions.

#### 4.6. Knowledge and Awareness about Registration and Voting Processes

*The graph below shows youth levels of understanding about voter registration requirements:*



<sup>44</sup> Focus Group Discussion, Bindura, 20/09/2017.

**Main Gaps in Knowledge:** A significant proportion of the youth who participated in the survey (64.4%) affirmed that they had adequate knowledge of the registration and voting requirements for the 2018 elections. However, our consultation across the country revealed that there are many gaps in youth's knowledge and awareness of the 2018 voter registration and voting processes and requirements. At the time of conducting fieldwork research, for instance, BVR had already started but a number of youths in the provinces were not even aware that the process had begun. Many were also not aware of where the registration centres were. Some youths, like their adult counterparts, are not sure of who is supposed to register. They are under the erroneous assumption that only those who have previously not registered to vote are the only ones required to register while those who have registered before will have their names transferred from the old voters' roll onto the new computerized voters roll.

**Documents Required:** The youth have limited knowledge about the range of documents required to vote and register as a voter, including the documents required for personal identification and the multiple documents that can serve as proof of residence. Many youths in the urban areas tend to think that the only person authorized to write an affidavit to confirm proof of residence for tenants is the landlord, while those in the rural areas think that Village Heads (sabhuku) and Councilors are the only authorities with the official powers to sign affidavits confirming the residence status of those living in rural villages. Very few are aware of the wide range of other forms of confirming prospective voters' residence status such as the VR9 form; affidavit from a friend or relative; affidavit from a school headmaster or any other public official; and a post office letter with one's address details.

**Difference between BVR and Biometric Voting:** Further, most youth, like many other Zimbabweans, are confused about whether the country is going to do biometric/electronic voting or it is simply going to do biometric voter registration and then do manual voting as in the past. Like most Zimbabweans, youth are under the erroneous impression that voting in 2018 will be conducted electronically. The consultations also revealed that the more ignorant ones, especially the illiterate youth on the farms and rural areas, couldn't distinguish between biometric voter registration and actual voting. Their assumption is that biometric registration is the new voting system where people will be registering and voting at the same time.

**Documents Required for Voting:** A significantly high number of youth are not aware that they have to bring their IDs on the voting day. Most of them think that once your identity details have been recorded and stored in the ZEC data base, voters will be identified through finger prints on Election Day.

**Difference between ward based and polling station based voting:** More significantly, a very large number of the youth do not know about the difference between ward and polling station based voting. Asked if they knew the difference between ward based polling and polling station based voting, only 22.1 % of the 624 survey participants contacted in the ten provinces responded in the affirmative, while another 10.6% said they somewhat knew. The other respondents (64.9%) confirmed they did not know. The research team's attempts to assess the levels of knowledge among the youth about this issue during FG discussions further revealed that a significantly high number of youth did not know about the difference between the two, and that even those who had responded 'yes' to the survey

question might have knowledge gaps. The knowledge gap about the issue is higher among rural youth. Only 3.6% of first-time voters from the rural areas knew about the difference. Many others did not even know that the 2018 elections would be polling station based, a development that can result in a number of youth who would have registered for the polls being turned back on election because of having gone to the wrong polling station.

**Motive behind BVR:** In general, the youth, both educated and not, are not even clear about what Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) is and what it entails; the reasons and motives for its adoption; and how it is supposed to improve both voter registration and the elections. A number of youths are not aware of why ZEC is capturing unique physical features of individual voters, such as finger prints and facial scans. Consultation with the youth revealed that they, like many other citizens, are suspicious about the real reason why ZEC is recording the unique physical features and addresses of individual voters during registration. Influenced by the legacy of political intimidation and violence that has dogged Zimbabwe's elections in the past, many youths think that the physical features and details being stored in the voters' roll data base will be used by ruling party and state intelligence agents to track them down after the elections, if they vote for the opposition. They also think that the real motive for ZEC's request for voters' physical residential addresses (i.e. of proof of residence requirement) is to make it easier for the agents of the state to track down those who would have voted for the opposition. Due to the lack of transparency and publicity in the adoption and implementation of BVR, many youth continue to be suspicious of the real intentions of both ZEC and government in adopting the new registration requirements.

**Personal security concerns:** Consultation with youth during fieldwork also revealed some youths are suspicious that the request for their physical features, such as finger prints, and physical addresses is being done in order to make it easier for the Police to track down youth who have outstanding crime records. For instance, FG discussions with youths in the provinces where the youth are currently involved in illegal gold mining activities, such as Matabeleland South, Midlands, Mashonaland Central and Mashonaland West, revealed that artisanal and small scale miners are particularly not keen to register for the upcoming elections because of their fears about the possibility of being rounded up by the Police once they have registered. As one of the KI who is involved in artisanal mining in Midlands explained:

Most of us [makorokoza or artisanal gold miners] drink a lot when we get paid for our gold supplies. In the process, we commit petty crimes such as public fights and assault. As a result, we are usually on the Police wanted list for one reason or another. Our mining sites are our sanctuaries where we feel safe from the police. Supplying our finger prints and residential details to Government Officials during this BVR is literally handing ourselves to police who will surely come after us after the elections. We are not going to be that stupid and fall into such a silly trap!

#### 4.7. Youth Confidence in Electoral System

**Integrity of ZEC and Electoral System:** Youth's interest in the ongoing voter registration is being negatively affected by limited confidence in the integrity of the electoral system and the election management body (ZEC) by the youth. In all the provinces that were

covered by the research, the integrity of the electoral processes and institutions was brought into question in every FG discussions held. Many youths have heard and experienced cases of electoral fraud in the series of disputed elections that have been characterized by accusations and counteraccusations of manipulation of electoral processes and rigging of election results since 2000. With their views shaped by this negative legacy of the country's history of elections, the youth are convinced that ZEC had connived with the incumbent government to rig previous elections, and the 2018 elections would be no different. A significant proportion of the youth interviewed are concerned about how the BVR system can be used to rig the 2018 elections. Youth's fears about rigging through BVR are exacerbated by their widespread knowledge of ICT and how computer technology can be manipulated by humans. The younger generation, especially those who are technically savvy and know that ICTs are vulnerable to fraud and manipulation, are suspicious that electronic voting is going to be used to manipulate their votes. They think that the 2018 election results will be much easier to manipulate electronically.

**Political intimidation concerns:** Discussions with the youth during the research also revealed that the introduction of ICTs in the registration process has intensified intimidation among the youth, especially among the less educated rural youth. The youth across the provinces talked of how some of their contemporaries are worried about how the BVR process will make it easier for the ruling party and their electoral agents to identify ballot votes, thereby exposing them to political victimization if they vote for the opposition parties. With limited knowledge about BVR, they are suspicious of the whole electoral process, especially the new polling based voting system, the recording of finger

prints, facial details and residential addresses (proof of residence), and are afraid that their details are going to be used to victimize them by the state and its security agents. As one of the FG participants from Masvingo explained:

*In the past we took comfort in the anonymity of ward based voting which made it difficult to know who would have voted for the opposition in a big ward. This polling station based voting system, with its confinement of voters to a small single polling station, will not only make it difficult for the youth (often identified with opposition politics) to vote but also make it easy to track the identity of individuals who would have voted for opposition parties.*

**Disinformation:** The ongoing disinformation campaign being carried out by some individuals in some parts of the country is exacerbating some youths' fears of the possibility of ICT being used to identify their votes. The youths in Manicaland and Mashonaland East, for instance, talked about how some war veteran leaders were going around telling villagers about how the ruling party will be using the BVR process to ensure that it is able to identify all those who would have voted for the opposition parties in 2018. The same individuals are going around telling people that once your finger prints have been recorded, people get to know who you have voted for. The deliberate disinformation campaign is also emphasizing how the polling station based voting system that is going to be used in 2018 is part of the strategy to ensure easy identification of those who would have voted for the opposition.

Clearly, there is a general breakdown of confidence in the election system and ZEC among the youth across the provinces, with a lot of suspicion about ZEC's integrity

and impartiality due to the limited transparency through which ZEC has conducted itself.

#### 4.8. Information dissemination: Opportunities, Gaps and Challenges

Consultations with youth from all the country's ten provinces revealed that there is a general dearth of information about registration from ZEC, political parties, CSOs and both electronic and print media. The youth living in rural areas tended to be more ignorant of the ongoing electoral processes than their urban counterparts. In terms of gender, young women tended to know less about ongoing voter registration processes than their male counterparts. The youth living with disabilities also tended to be less informed about ongoing electoral processes.

**Distortions:** In cases where youth have some information about the 2018 electoral process, such information is distorted due to general ignorance of BVR processes or because of deliberate disinformation by some groups with different political agendas.



Both rural and urban youth unanimously acknowledged that they hardly watch local ZTV...Those who watch TV often watch satellite TV which has more entertaining programmes than local ZBC TV. As a result, very few of the youth consulted during FGs across the country were even aware of the regular ZEC election update program on ZTV which is broadcast every Thursday between 1930 and 2000hrs.



**Youth in rural areas:** The various groups of youths in different regions and residential locations are relying on different modes of information dissemination to acquire knowledge about the 2018 electoral processes. For instance, youth in rural areas are relying more on radio (especially regional commercial and community radio stations); messages from community meetings organized by traditional leaders and political leaders; and word of mouth from relatives, friends, neighbours, local religious leaders, teachers and other public servants who are revered in most rural communities. Because of the growing penetration of mobile technology, youth in rural areas are also increasingly relying on telephone messages (both sms and whatsapp) to receive information about contemporary developments and elections.

**Youth in urban areas:** Youth in urban areas, on the other hand, are relying more on mobile messages (mainly whatsapp and sms); word of mouth from friends, relatives, colleagues, neighbourhood networks that include market women and transport operators; and community meetings organized by CSOs to get the latest information about electoral processes and other national developments. A sizeable number of youths in urban areas is also getting its information through their church groups.

**Newspapers:** Youth from both rural and urban areas were unanimous that they rarely read newspapers because they not only 'find them boring' but also had no money to buy them. Youth in rural areas explained that in the political polarized districts newsletters could not circulate.

# 57.1%

ALMOST SIXTY PER CENT (i.e. **57.1%**) OF THE YOUTH RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY THOUGHT THE UTILIZATION OF YOUNG CELEBRITIES, INCLUDING MUSICIANS AND OTHER POPULAR FIGURES LIKE ACTORS, TO MOBILIZE YOUTH FOR ELECTIONS WILL MOTIVATE YOUNG PEOPLE TO REGISTER AND VOTE. AN ADDITIONAL **27.4%** THOUGHT IT MIGHT WORK.

**Television:** Both rural and urban youth unanimously acknowledged that they hardly watch local ZTV. Youths from rural provinces gave lack of money to purchase TVs and transmission problems as the main reasons they cannot access TV programmes, while their counterparts in urban areas like Harare and Bulawayo explained that they preferred spending time reading messages, watching videos and skits on social media platforms on their smart phones rather than watching TV or listening to radio. The few urban youth who listen to radio, listen more to Star FM which they find more appealing to their youthful tastes. Those who watch TV often watch satellite TV which has more entertaining programmes than local ZBC TV. As a result, very few of the youth consulted during FGs across the country were even aware of the regular ZEC election update program on ZTV which is broadcast every Thursday between 1930 and 2000hrs.

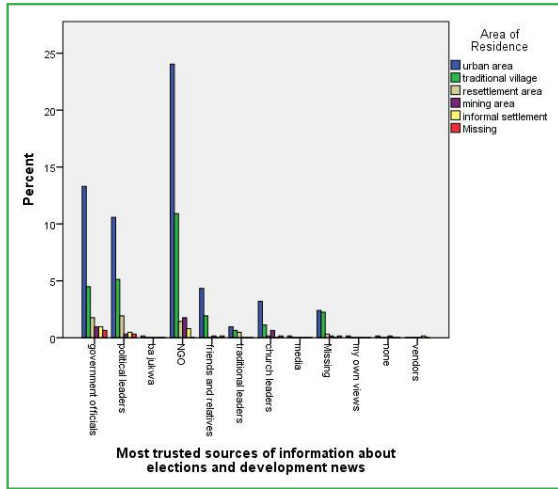
**Social media:** While acknowledging the growing importance of social media in their lives, youth from both rural and urban areas consulted emphasized their limited trust in social media news due to rampant abuse of social media in the recent past and noted that they trust bulk SMSs more for information dissemination. Face to face interactions work better especially in rural areas where people prefer personal contact with a person conveying a message.

**Popular Musicians:** Music can have a powerful impact on our ideas and ideologies and can tremendously influence young people who look up to musicians as their role models. Zimbabwe's unemployed and marginalized youth, especially "ghetto youth", have turned to Zim dancehall music as a pastime, as well as a means to earn some income. Zim dancehall has become a popular genre in the local music industry, with many youths composing songs and recording in cheap studios to earn a living. Most of these young musicians sing in clubs and beer halls where their crowds are mainly made of fellow youth.<sup>45</sup> Youth in urban areas who were consulted noted that most youths idolize their popular contemporary music stars (Zimdancehall musicians), especially those from their neighbourhood, and felt that the youth would definitely listen more to election related songs composed by these music stars and also attend in large numbers election promotional road shows organized in conjunction with these stars. Almost sixty per cent (i.e. 57.1%) of the youth respondents to the survey thought the utilization of young celebrities, including musicians and other popular figures like actors, to mobilize youth for elections will motivate young people to register and vote. An additional 27.4% thought it might work.

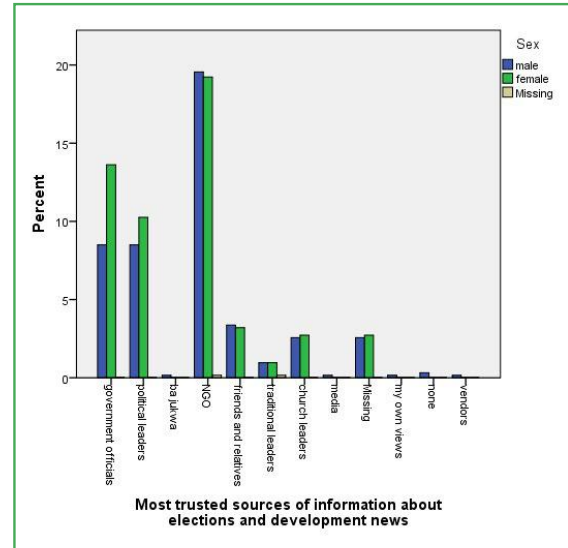
<sup>45</sup> Andrew Moyo 2015, 'Dancehall: The brave, new world of Zim dancehall', Sunday Mail, 31 May 2015.



The graph below illustrates the most trusted sources of information about elections and development news among youth, by residence:



The graph below illustrates the most trusted sources of information about elections and development news among youth, by sex:



## 5. Recommendations



### 5.1. Improving registration processes for youth and youth interest in elections:

- a) The success of BVR requires careful awareness and implementation to avoid low voter registration turnout due to underlying suspicions and citizen ignorance about the key aspects of the process.

A comprehensive voter education is needed to demystify some of the questions around the introduction of the new technology. YETT and its partners need to work in partnership with the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to provide adequate information regarding the implementation of the system to ensure that youth as stakeholders

understand the system and develop confidence in it. Youth civic education on BVR should be aimed at raising awareness among youth about the following key aspects: what the BVR process entails; the reasons for adopting BVR, including how the system can be used to improve the election system through simplifying voter identification and helping to improve the Voters Roll by eliminating duplicate names or multiple registrations; how the registered voters' data is going to be stored and used; the separate roles and responsibilities of ZEC, the office of the Registrar General and the Zimbabwe Republic Police in election management.

- b) A significant proportion of the youth living on the margins of the economy and society are facing multiple structural barriers that can obstruct them from registering to vote or casting their vote on the day of elections even if they are interested. For instance, many of these youths have no adequate documents required for registration or the financial resources needed to acquire the documents, including transport fares and the payment fees for acquiring birth certificates and national identity cards IDs. YETT and its CSO partners need to work on strategies to assist the youth to access the required documents and registration centres, including providing youth with up to date information on the ongoing registration processes and the RG ID/Birth Certificate issuing out blitz as well as proactive action to help youth acquire the documents (possibly even extension of financial resources to assist youth acquire some of the documents like birth certificates and IDs.



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- c) Although a very high number of youths expressed their interest in voting in the 2018 election, the youth's frustration with leadership failure and the lack of changes in the national leadership of the country, especially the presidency, has the potential to promote voting apathy among the youth. When youth think about elections, they tend to focus on presidential election only. They do not think of how important changes in leadership at the local government level can negatively or positively affect their lives at the community level. YETT and its CSO partners need to package their messaging on elections in a way that helps the youth realize the importance of their vote, as the youth are the group with the largest demographic numbers of potential voters, in influencing the political leadership and governance system at both national and local level. In fact CSOs need to package their messages in a way that helps to educate the youth about the three tier system of government and elections in Zimbabwe and how youth can use the superiority of their numbers to serve their needs by influencing who gets to represent them at the local level, even if they fail to change the system at the national level. Research conducted by the Mandela Institute for Development Studies (Minds) in 2016 revealed that among the positive factors that contributed to increased youth participation in Nigeria's 2015 elections, included a growing awareness of the importance of elections and a more optimistic outlook on politics overall.

- d) To motivate youth to participate in elections, electoral campaigning needs to speak to issues of concern to youth. In all the provinces, the weak economy and unemployment were identified as some of the major problems that the youth are worried about. The issue of unemployment has also been cited as one of the key concerns among the citizens in other recent studies that have been conducted. The youth voter mobilization campaign will need to focus on providing answers to the question of how youth's participation in elections in general, and not just the 2018 elections, helps to address their concerns as youth. Civic education on elections also needs to emphasize how the quality of leadership elected has the potential to change delivery patterns. The consistent underlying theme in civil society voter mobilization messages should be a positive one that helps the youth to understand their duties of citizenship and its relevance in improving their welfare.
- e) One of the key findings of this research is that the youth's growing disinterest in elections and governance issues is related to their exclusion from leadership positions in governance. Analysis of data from the survey conducted showed that more youths would feel more encouraged to participate in the decision making process and elections if they see more of their peers occupying influential positions in public offices. Other country case studies have shown that some of the effective strategies that have helped to increase youth's interest in elections include a dedicated focus on youth issues and concerns among all concerned electoral stakeholders (government, political parties, electoral management bodies and civil society) and increasing youth involvement in the elections, including increasing youth leadership within political campaigns. This points at the importance of working towards promoting more youthful leaders, including marginalised groups such as young PLWDs and women, to occupy both elected and appointed public offices. This will help to inspire their peers to support them and to challenge perceptions about the inability of youth to occupy leadership positions. To motivate more youths to participate in elections, YETT and its partners will have to lobby and advocate for political parties to involve more youths in the elections, including increasing their role in election campaigns as either candidates or campaign leaders.
- f) To deal with the negative effects of patronage on youth participation in politics and decision making processes, it is important for civic education on elections to focus more on teaching voters to focus on values and policy proposals when assessing candidates rather than short term material gains. During Zambia's 2009 election campaign, civil society managed to mobilize more youthful voters by ensuring that civic education emphasized the need for youth to shun patronage by accepting political gifts without allowing it to affect their right to vote for a candidate of their choice. Comparative studies that have been done have shown that if voters begin to prioritise values and policy proposals, credible youthful candidates who will be able to present viable policy proposals, will stand a better chance to be elected into office.
- g) Youth cynicism in the ongoing BVR process is partly fuelled by the marginalization of youth from the election management process itself. Improved participation of the youth in registration and voting could be achieved through increasing the number

of young people involved in election management as voter registration officials and polling officials. A number of the youth consulted during FG discussions across the country, suggested that the participation of the youth could be increased through not only more voter education, but also greater involvement of the youth in election management. The youth participants were emphatic that the involvement of more young people in election management will not only help to alleviate unemployment among the youth but also inspire more youth to participate in the elections, having realized that the youth had a stake in the elections. YETT and its partners therefore need to lobby ZEC to involve more youths in election management, as voter registration and polling officials.

- h) The youth, unlike the elders, hardly have time, patience and resources to travel long distances and spend hours in long queues, waiting to register or vote. To motivate more youths to register, YETT and CSO partners will need to work with ZEC to ensure that ZEC's mobile registration units visit some of the places where youth are found in large numbers, such as the vendors markets, shopping malls, informal industries, vocational training centres and even some high schools.

## 5.2. Improving registration and voting processes for PLWD

- a) ZEC will need to work with and involve more disabled people in its election management processes (voter registration and management of polling), while YETT and its civil society partners will also need to involve more disabled people in their election education, voter mobilization and election observation



ZEC will need to work with and involve more disabled people in its election management processes (voter registration and management of polling), while YETT and its civil society partners will also need to involve more disabled people in their election education, voter mobilization and election observation programmes in order to motivate more young PLWDs to register and vote.



- programmes in order to motivate more young PLWDs to register and vote. Civil society also needs to push political parties to include more PLWDs as candidates. This will help to improve PLWDs sense of inclusivity and representation, and in turn inspire more young PLWDs to register and vote.
- b) To enable more young disabled people to vote from an informed position, YETT will need to work with various CSOs representing the disability sector, to raise the political knowledge and consciousness of these young voters through facilitating their access to the campaign messages of the different political parties and candidates.
- c) To enable young PLWDs to participate fully in registration and voting, ZEC needs to ensure that its voter registration centres and polling stations are not only accessible to PLWDs but also have user friendly facilities that cater for the needs of the different groups of PLWDs such as sign language for the deaf, Braille for the visually impaired and ramps and special toilets for those in wheelchairs. In order for ZEC to be able to cater effectively for the needs of disabled voters, ZEC will need to record disability details of every disabled voter they register so that



they get to know which polling stations might need what forms of assistance for disabled voters. ZEC might also need to breakdown its voter registration and voting statistics using disability as an analytical category as it does with gender and age. Similarly civil society monitoring of elections should also include disability as an analytical category in order to develop a holistic picture about voting patterns, the electoral assistance needs of PLWD and the kind of interventions needed to mobilize more PLWD for participation in elections. There is also need to ensure that at least every district has specialists who can assist disabled voters. Given the current resource and expertise shortages, ZEC will need the assistance of civil society in providing this service.

### 5.3. Improving voter registration and voting processes for young women

- a) The discussion highlighted the wide range of gender based obstacles to women's effective participation in elections and other decision making processes. YETT and its partners will need to work closely with various stakeholders who include traditional leaders, Police and other government officials to ensure that young women who want to vote but are finding it difficult to do so because of structural barriers, are given an opportunity to register.
- b) To avoid situations where most young women fail to register to vote because of the long queues currently being experienced, YETT and its CSO partners will need to lobby ZEC to consider creating favourable conditions that enable young women, especially those with young children, to expeditiously register.

- c) The research findings revealed that young women have less knowledge on the ongoing BVR process than their male counterparts. BVR education and awareness with a targeted focus on reaching women, including rural young women living with disability who are often marginalized by mainstream processes, is critical for increasing voter registration for young women. More effective voter outreach for these groups could be achieved through the training of more young women to conduct voter education within their constituencies. The trained individuals will have a better chance of connecting with their constituencies.
- d) The research also revealed that less young women are involved in election management and leadership campaign processes than their male counterparts, and this helps to reduce young women's interest in participating in elections. To encourage more young women to register, it is important to advocate and facilitate for the increased involvement of more young





women in both election management processes, including voter registration, and voter registration campaigns as well as increased representation of women in leadership campaigns as both candidates and campaign leaders. YETT voter mobilization interventions will thus need to enhance support for some of the initiatives being currently undertaken by some of the youth organizations representing young women that are designed to promote the improved participation of young women in the 2018 elections as candidates in the local government elections by training them on effective leadership and campaign skills, by putting young women under political mentorship programmes with experienced political leaders.

#### 5.4. Improving information dissemination

- a) Given the high levels of ignorance of BVR processes and voting processes (particularly details about what is involved in polling station based voting), YETT needs to partner with other election stakeholders (ZEC, political parties, civics, media, etc) to do a massive electoral education campaign. Such campaigns should be tailor made to target various youth groups, especially marginalized groups like the youth on farms, youth living with disability and young women across the country.
- b) The mass education on BVR, will need to focus on explaining what BVR is all about, who is supposed to register; how BVR is different from electronic voting; the range of documents required for identification and proving one's residence; awareness campaigns on polling station based voting; and proactive initiatives to ensure all registered youths know their polling stations before election day.
- c) In rural areas, ZEC and CSOs involved in voter education will need to work with community leaders such as chiefs, headmen and village heads who have more respect and access to the communities as well as community structures like VIDCOs and WARDCOs which have always served as effective information dissemination platforms for rural spaces.
- d) Election education and awareness programmes on radio will need to make more use of regional/provincial commercial and community radio stations such as Diamond FM and Kumakomo in Manicaland; Hevoi FM in Masvingo; Skies FM in Bulawayo; Nyami Nyami FM in Matabeleland North; and YA FM in Midlands. Most youth in the provinces seem to have embraced regional radio stations more warmly than the national radio stations and there is some noticeable sense of regional pride and identity with these regional radio stations among the youth in the country's provinces.
- e) Given the widespread use of mobile phones for communication among the youth, information dissemination through bulk smses and social media (especially whatsapp which is the most utilized social media platform because of its relatively low cost) will be one of the most effective ways of communicating election related messages with the youth.



Given the importance that youth in both urban and rural areas attach to the word of mouth for information dissemination, it is critical for YETT and other stakeholders to focus on training or raising the awareness of **identified influential individuals or core groups** within communities who can in turn be tasked or relied on to raise the awareness of their peers.



- f) A growing proportion of the youth go to church regularly, with the percentage of the consulted youth who revealed that they go to church regularly being over 80% in each and every provincial case study. In that case, YETT and its election stakeholders need to work with progressive church leaders to ensure that they encourage the youth in their churches to register to vote. There is also an imperative need to train focal youth educators within churches who can in turn educate their peers on registration and voting processes.
- g) A significant proportion of the unemployed youth are spending their time at sporting clubs (playing soccer, netball, darts, and snooker). The clubs are important points for information dissemination, and civil society needs to work the leaders or organizers of these youth social clubs to mobilize youth for registration.
- h) The consultation with youth revealed that they are socializing in their own spaces and creating their own countercultures where they are expressing their values, ambitions and frustrations, such as in new musical genres like Zimdancehall. The youth also have their cultural icons, local heroes and champions that include these Zimdancehall artists. YETT and its partners, including ZEC and CSOs, need to communicate with the youth within their cultural tropes in order to connect with them. This entails teaming up with popular Zimdancehall artists to package their voter mobilization messages in order to reach out to the youth and inspire young people to find relevance in the message of participation. During the X1G campaign of 2013, the use of music by youthful artistes was one of the most effective methods of drawing crowds and providing safe spaces for information dissemination to the youth.



Given the high levels of confusion and suspicions about the BVR system among the youth, YETT and its CSO partners need to work closely with ZEC to create platforms for BVR awareness campaigns where ZEC officials can explain to the youth the security mechanisms that have been taken by ZEC to ensure the security of data recorded from registered voters. ... Transparent dissemination of such messages from ZEC and other election stakeholders will help to reassure apprehensive youth voters of the confidentiality of their vote and security of the biometrical information that will be given to ZEC.



- i) *Given the importance that youth in both urban and rural areas attach to the word of mouth for information dissemination, it is critical for YETT and other stakeholders to focus on training or raising the awareness of identified influential individuals or core groups within communities who can in turn be tasked or relied on to raise the awareness of their peers. For urban areas, for instance, market women or vendors and commuter transport operators are among the groups of people who have direct contact with a lot of youths on a daily basis. They are also well known people within their communities and often trusted by the youth as the people who have their pulse on the latest information. The training of local ballot buddies tasked with educating their peers on voter registration and voting through the word of mouth would also work better in the politically closed environments found on the resettlement farms and mines where youth are organized into clubs/ associations and communities tend to be suspicious of strangers who come and go into their areas. It is therefore important to work*



*on educating and raising the awareness of core groups of youths from these areas who will in turn be entrusted with educating/raising awareness and mobilizing their peers for registration and voting.*

## 5.5. Improving Youth Confidence in Electoral System

a) The success of BVR depends on public assurance about safety and the integrity of the electoral processes. To dispel the apprehensions of youth about the significance of their vote in the electoral outcome, the youth need reassurance around the transparency of the electoral system, the impartiality and independence of the electoral management body-ZEC. It is important for the ballot buddies voter education campaign to be packaged in a way that helps to reassure the youth about the transparency and accountability of the BVR electoral system in

order to give more youths inspiration and confidence to go and cast their votes.

- b) Given the high levels of confusion and suspicions about the BVR system among the youth, YETT and its CSO partners need to work closely with ZEC to create platforms for BVR awareness campaigns where ZEC officials can explain to the youth the security mechanisms that have been taken by ZEC to ensure the security of data recorded from registered voters. The deliberate objective by all election stakeholders during these meetings will be to explain the reasons for adopting BVR and moving towards Polling Station Based Voting; and how both BVR and Polling Station Based Voting are supposed to improve voter registration and transparency in voting. Transparent dissemination of such messages from ZEC and other election stakeholders will help to reassure apprehensive youth voters of the confidentiality of their vote and security of the biometrical information that will be given to ZEC.
- c) To improve the confidence of youth in the integrity of ZEC and the whole electoral system, not only does ZEC need to be more transparent in its activities but civil society messaging on elections also needs to focus more on building voter confidence in the election management system and process. This involves highlighting some of the positive things that ZEC is doing rather than always focusing on the electoral management body's shortcomings by CSOs. While CSOs have a duty to criticize shortcomings in the electoral system, including ZEC's performance, by focusing on some of the positive things that the organization is doing to improve election management, CSOs will help to inspire public confidence in the elections, thereby assisting

to increase youth's interest in participating in the elections.

- d) To address youth's fears about their personal security during and after voter registration and voting, YETT and its CSO partners also need to work with both ZEC and political parties to have platforms at both national and local levels where ZEC, political parties, security chiefs, war veterans, community leaders such as chiefs, headmen, village heads, church leaders and youth leaders reinforce messages about community peace-building and peaceful elections.











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