

WE4L

Women Empowered for Leadership

Hivos
people unlimited



Her Experience:
Zimbabwe 2018 Election

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Acknowledgements

This book celebrates the unprecedented participation of women in the 2018 Harmonised Election. The 30th of July 2018 Harmonised election was a unique election that provided hope for change and a better future for the people of Zimbabwe.

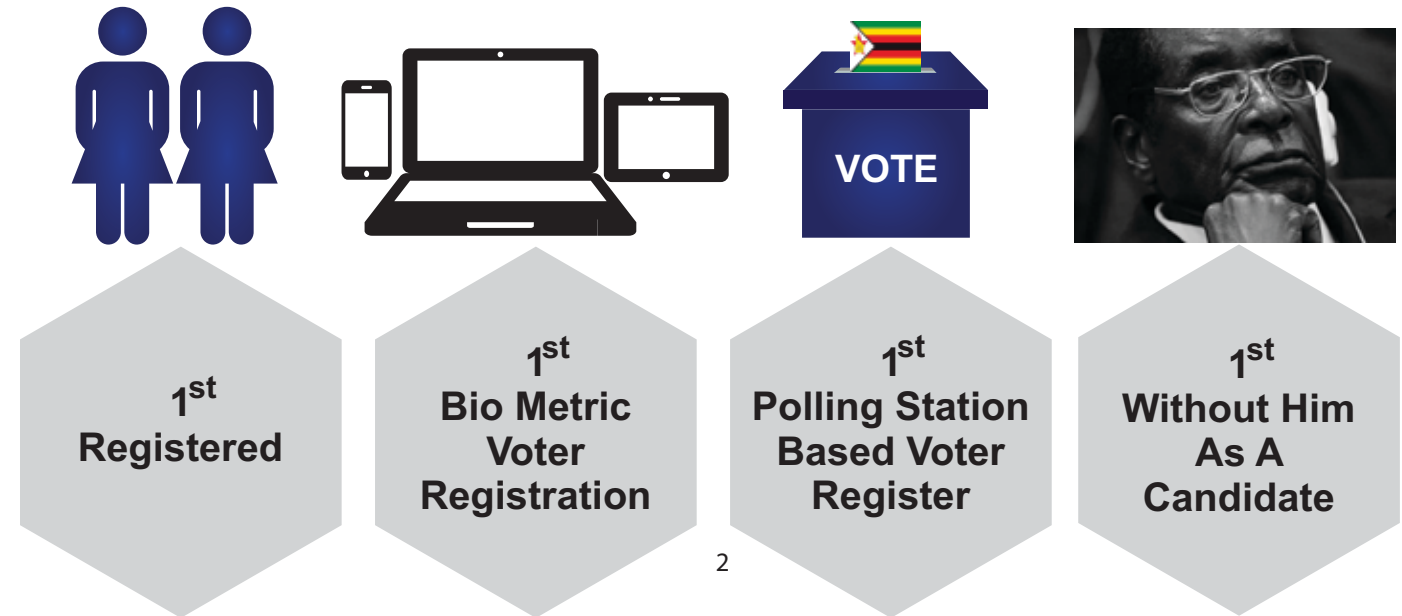
This book is dedicated to two women who died while participating in the 2018 Harmonised election held on the 30th of July 2018. A woman from Bulilima passed away in a queue while waiting to vote. Another woman who was an observer, collapsed and died in the polling station while carrying out her duties. The dedication to participation is symbolic of the enthusiasm that women displayed in the 2018 election. This book is a celebration of women’s participation in the 2018 election process.

Introduction

The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences. (Universal Declaration of Democracy)

The elections were historic and unique in many ways. Women participated in a number of ways as candidates, voters, party agents, observers and as polling officials. This book celebrates the participation of women in 2018 Harmonised elections, not to say that all was well. We celebrate the incremental steps that women have made in taking control of their destiny through participation.

The 2018 Harmonised election was a first in many respects. It was the 1st election where over 50 per cent of registered voters were women. In addition, it was the 1st election in which the Biometric Voters Registration method (BVR) was used in Zimbabwe. It was the 1st election where the polling station based voters roll was used. It was the 1st election in thirty seven years where Robert Mugabe was not a candidate. Thus this election was a 1st in many respects.



Background of women's participation in election

Women's participation in electoral processes has been hampered by a number of factors including the patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean society, lack of supportive policies in political parties, lack of political funding to participate in equal terms, intra-political violence, patriarchal systems, inter-party violence as well as the lack of the political will to implement existing policies. Reports from women in politics are testimony of the challenges they faced in the 2018 election. Political parties form the major agent through which people can access state power. The key functions of political parties include political recruitment of candidates for election, interest aggregation, interest articulation, political social education that involves training of political leaders and political communication. Research has shown that party politics is a major contribution of women's marginalization in politics.

Women's position in political parties is a major determinant to their access to power, presence and influence within the party. Men continue to dominate the structures of power within parties and outside parties in the political playing field. Research has shown that one of the reasons why women are not put forward as candidates for elections on political party tickets is that they are not well represented in the leadership of political parties. Hence party politics defines the position of women in politics. Zimbabwe is signatory to a number of protocols such as the SADC protocol on gender, the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), The Beijing platform for Action, that would enhance women's participation if domesticated, and implemented. However these have not been ratified and as such are not effective as tools to support the participation of women.

Women's turnout on Election Day July 30th 2018

Women participated with much excitement on Election Day, defying the morning chill and the afternoon heat to cast their vote. While the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission has not yet provided statistics on women who voted in the election, anecdotal evidence shows over 50 per cent of people who cast their vote where women. While women form 52 per cent of the population in Zimbabwe and 51 per cent of registered voters they still face challenges in political participation. They are under-represented in positions of leadership and left without a voice in decision making. The number of women candidates in direct election fell between 2013 and 2018. Women candidature in the 2018 election was marred by a number of barriers.

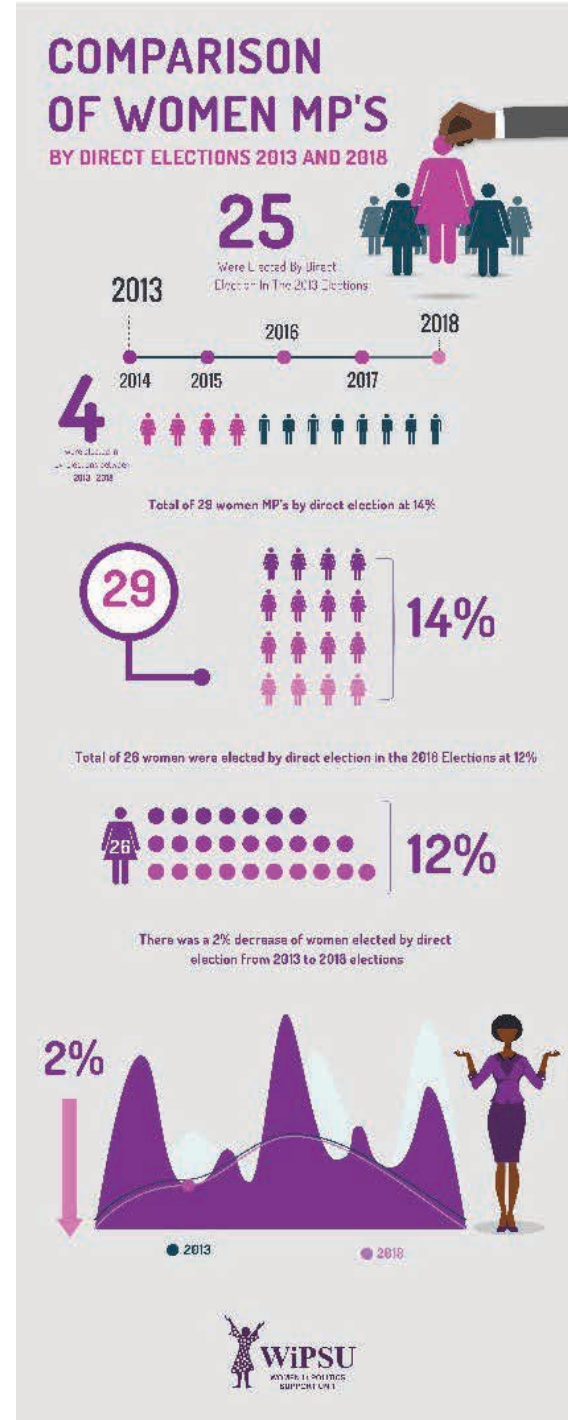
Barriers to women's candidature included lack of intra party democracy which resulted in violence. Women were elbowed out of the electoral processes in aggressive ways and candidate imposition was rife in all the major parties. A number of women contested as independent candidates as a result of being elbowed out of the party. As independent candidates most women lost the election as people voted along party lines.

Number of women contesting local council elections: 1,176 (17 percent).

Number of women contesting National Assembly seats: 243 (15 percent).

Number of women leaders in presidential race: 4 out of 23 (none in 2013)

Of the 210 constituencies, only 26 women won by direct election, a 2 per cent decrease from 2013. More women will come into the National Assembly using the quota system, however the quota system will constitutionally end with this term of office. Women in parliament because of the quota system have reported inferior treatment by peers and the public as the quota is perceived as a "free ride" and therefore are not respected as equals in parliament.



Election Day Experiences

The 30th of July 2018, was a chilly morning in most parts of the country, but women braced the cold to cast their vote. There was a lot of excitement and expressions of hope in the early morning queues and women were some of the 1st voters in the queues. Stories were being shared and laughter filled the morning air.



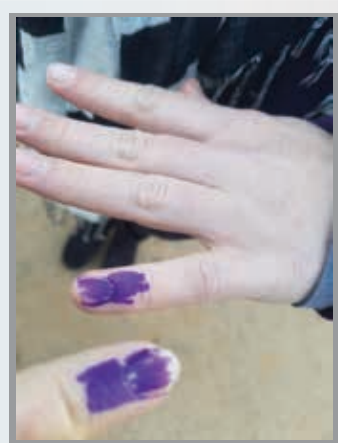
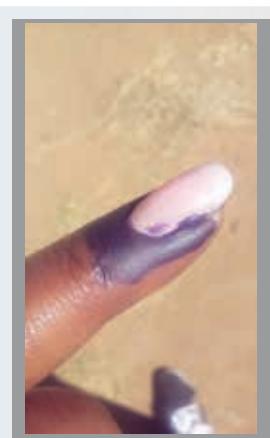
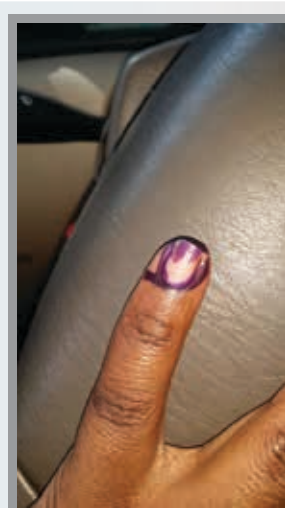
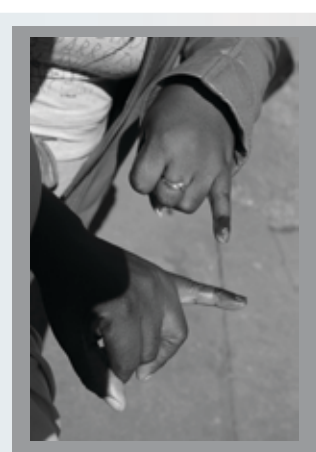
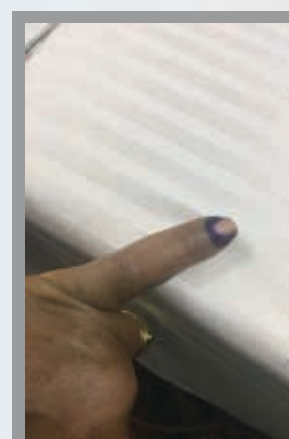
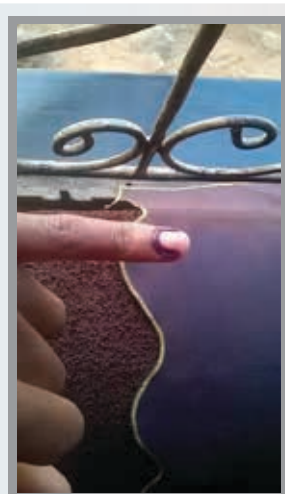
While the Election Day was largely peaceful there were a number of incidents that were reported by women.

Long Queues

The new polling station based voting resulted in longer queues as there were fewer polling stations in most urban areas.

While there were shorter queues in the rural areas, a number of women in urban areas complained of long queues which were discouraging. In some cases, women reported that they stood in the queue for two (2) to three (3) hours. The waiting was made more unpleasant as the day's temperatures increased and the day became hot. The queues were long and winding in most urban areas hence many women had to brace the heat as the cool of the morning melted bringing in the afternoon heat. Although fatigue was setting in from waiting in the long queues, perseverance was evident as women sat on the ground and on rocks and on anything they could find to rest their tired legs as they waited patiently for their turn to cast their vote.





Young women were not to be outdone as a number of young women were registered as voters. The pride in voting was evident as women posted pictures of their purple pinky fingers on various social media platforms. The purple pinky finger became fashionable and symbol of participation and the pride in their vote.



Young women were seen participating with their small babies. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) made special provisions for pregnant women, women with babies and elderly women; giving them priority so that they could cast their vote first. Eager to determine their future, women with children made sure that they cast their vote.



A 20 year old sociology student, Rachel Kadau from Harare, also noted that “it was a great experience knowing that most people my age and women are voting. Even though the process was very slow, voting for change was a great experience.”

Jane Murinda 24 : “I am voting for the first time and I am full of hope and happiness. The feeling of being a part of something bigger than yourself is very fulfilling. I was too excited to notice the queues.”

Anonymous 35: “Women are still under represented, I did not know most of the women I saw on the ballot paper so I found it difficult to give them my vote.”







Age was not a deterrent to participation as older women proudly went to cast their vote desiring to be part of this historic election.



Mrs Marimo 65 years voted at Kuwadzana 2 Primary School. She was happy about the peace prevailing during this election. They are more people voting in this election. I have been voting since 1980 and now I know what and who to vote for.



Gogo Musunje from Kuwadzana 4 "I am very happy and I look forward to seeing things change because of my vote"



Ma Modesta Goriwoto 48 years old from Kuwadzana stated that "my vote will bring a change and my children will live a better life."



Gogo Mudyiwa 96 years from Highfield voted and said "I want young people to get jobs"



Incidents and reports received on Election day

Poor lighting

On Election Day women who voted in tents reported that poor lighting made visibility of ballot papers difficult. This was reported across the country in a significant number of polling stations. The situation became dire in the evening as counting started in many of the tents.

Lack of special provisions

Women reported that in some cases, the ushers did not give priority support to women with special needs such as women with disabilities, pregnant women, women with young babies and the elderly. This resulted in increased discomfort for women with special needs.

Intimidation

Women in some areas reported intimidation as they were going to the polling stations. Intimidation was in the form of threats that there will be unspecified action if they did not vote well. This made women fearful to participate freely in places where this was happening. Women in Mbare Ward 3 and 4 and Guruve South Ward 12 reported cases of intimidation. It is refreshing to see that there were fewer incidents of intimidation unlike in previous elections.

Women with disabilities

The work of civil society organisations working with persons with disabilities in voter education paid off as voters who were hitherto excluded from voting voted for the first time in electoral processes. Deaf women were among the most excluded from electoral processes. Political party campaigns, voter education and voting were not explained in formats they could understand hence exclusion and marginalisation.



Precious Masiye 30 years old (Hard of hearing)

I am a registered voter and I voted on the 30th of July. I don't know all the candidates in my area because there is no Sign Language in many of the campaigns. I hope for peace in a new Zimbabwe. Voting is important for me because it allows me to choose the right leader to bring back the economy and give back jobs to people who are unemployed.



Loveness Mushangwe 40 years old (Deaf)

I registered to vote during the BVR exercise. I know that there are many candidates who want to be president but I only know a few of them. I know there is Nelson Chamisa, President E.D Mnangagwa, Joyce Mujuru and Thokozani Khupe. I hope to have a leader who supports the people. I want a better future for me and my children. I want us Deaf people to be able to enjoy our rights. I am excited that I voted today.



For the first time the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission made efforts to make sure that polling stations were accessible where persons with physical disabilities were registered. Ballots booths made for women who use wheelchairs and those of short stature were available to ensure comfortable voting. In addition, special provisions were made to ensure that women with special needs were given priority.

Women in election administration

The role of women in electoral processes is salient as it provides confidence to other women to participate in electoral processes.





Women as election observers

Women participated in the election as observers. Local observer groups such as the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) deployed observers. Over 50 per cent of ZESN observers are women. They were responsible for ensuring that the election was administered in line with the law and procedures agreed to. Women who were election observers braced the day and worked into the night as counting went into the night.

The Electoral Commission

Gender parity in Zimbabwe has resulted in women participating in election administration at the highest levels. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) is chaired by a woman, Justice Priscilla M. Chigumba, with 4 of the 8 commissioners being female. ZEC's women commissioners actively participated on Election Day, ensuring that the election was conducted well and addressing different stakeholders.



ZEC had over 50 per cent women as polling officers during the 2018 Election process in sync with the representation of women in the country. As one walked to any polling station in the country, women were at the forefront as polling officers consequently increasing the visibility of women in electoral processes.





Women played a pivotal role in mobilising for the 2018 election. With unemployment rife among women in Zimbabwe, many political parties sort out community structures which women coordinate to mobilise voters from the time of registration to elections.



Women supporting political parties

The backbone of any political activity in Zimbabwe is women. Women are involved in various political party activities as parties' canvas for support. Women provided support to political candidates in many ways including as party agents, campaign agents to mention a few. It is critical to have both quality and quantity in women who participate in governance processes. It has been shown that increased women participation in electoral and governance processes has bigger economic benefits, increased cooperation across party lines and sustainable conflict resolution .







While also participating as voters women were actively involved in political party campaigns.







Natasha Karimakwenda
Candidate for Councilor Ward 5,
Bulawayo



Tabitha Khumalo
Candidate for MP Bulawayo East



Jasmine Toffa
Candidate for MP
(Propotional Representative)



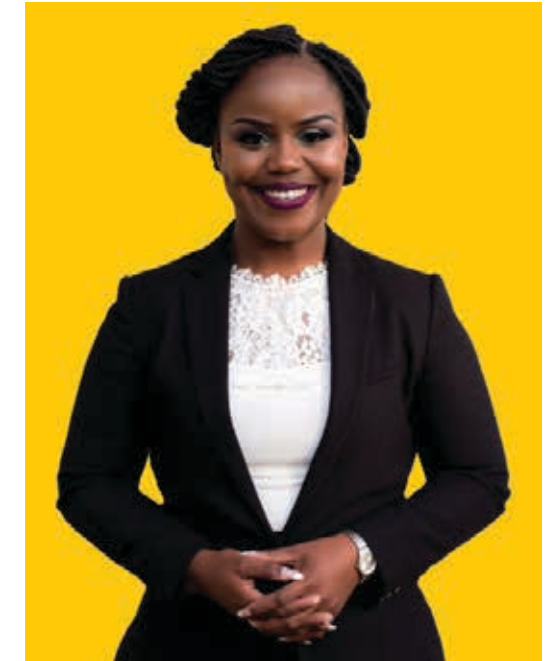
Vimbai Musvaburi
Candidate for MP Bulawayo South

Women as Candidates

The participation of women as candidates in the National Assembly was not without obstacles. Women faced barriers to their candidature as primary elections were marred by vote buying, violence and lack of intra party democracy as candidates were imposed by men with influence. The nature of the primary elections was such that women had to brave the undemocratic spaces in their parties. Some women decided to stand as independent candidates as their parties elbowed them out of their preferred constituencies.



Candidates for Harare West Joana Mamombe
(left) and Jessie Majome (right)



Fadzai Mahere
Candidate for MP Harare Mount Pleasant



Linda Sibanyoni
Candidate for MP Harare East



Kudzai Mubaiwa
Candidate for Councillor Harare Ward 6



Monica Mutsvangwa
Candidate for Senate



Susan Matsunga
Candidate for MP Mufakose

While the highest number (4) of women participated as presidential candidates in this election, less women participated as candidates for local government and national assembly elections. Women candidates faced significant barriers to effective participation as candidates including an uneven playing field biased in favour of men mainly due to restricted access to financial resources. The women candidates gave it their best shot in the face of negative attitudes to women's participation, factionalism in political parties, and lack of policies in political parties that support participation, trolling and negative statements on social media.



Melbah Dzapasi
#1980 Freedom Movement Zimbabwe.



Dr Thokozani Khupe
MDC T

Women presidential candidates faced significant barriers including negative attitudes towards women in leadership. Women candidates including national assembly candidates fell victim to internet trolls.



Violet Mariyacha president of the United Democratic Movement.



Dr Joice Mujuru President of the People's Rainbow Coalition

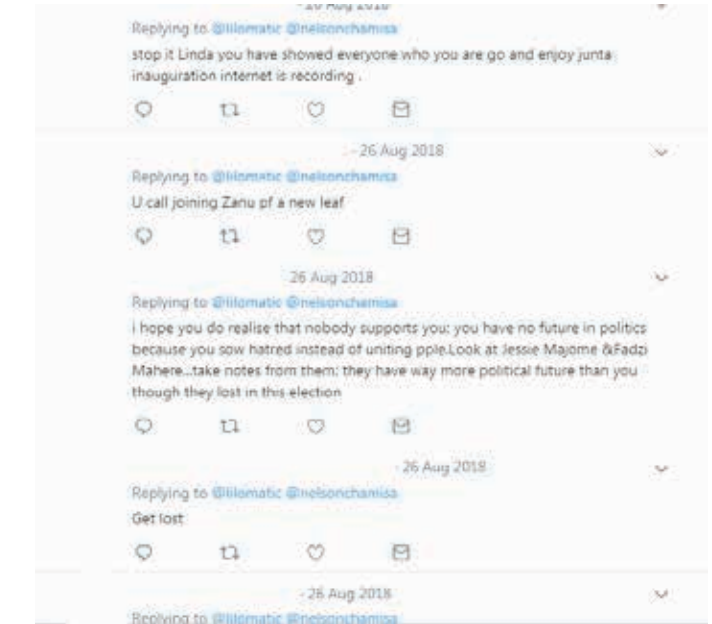
Trolling of women on social media

Women candidates were also subjected to undignified commentary dwelling into their private marital status and questioning them as mothers. Candidates were called derogatory names including "Hure" (prostitute) which led to one candidate Honorable Priscilla Misiharambwi making T shirts to defend women candidates.

Self-calling removes the power to insult by the person making the derogatory remarks. Used In this way, the term "Hure" is meant to show a woman who is uncompromising, strong and undeterred by slander.



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Women put themselves on the line being called all sorts of names by men on social media. Among the most vilified candidates were young unmarried women who dared to be candidates. They were called names and labelled unfit for marriage every time they posted something about their campaign and encouraged people to vote for them. These young women were brave, refusing to respond to attacks and choosing to be the bigger person. We celebrate their courage and dedication to the empowerment of women. Respect for women and difference is an aspect that should be learned so that we do not regress on the progress and strides made in gender equality in Zimbabwe.



Women in the media sector played key roles during elections as reporters and sources. Some kept social media informed on the situation on the ground which helped increase confidence in the voting process. Video footage and images from across the country were shared far and wide showing voting experiences. This book is a compilation of images and stories from various women who bore witness to the election.



Conclusion

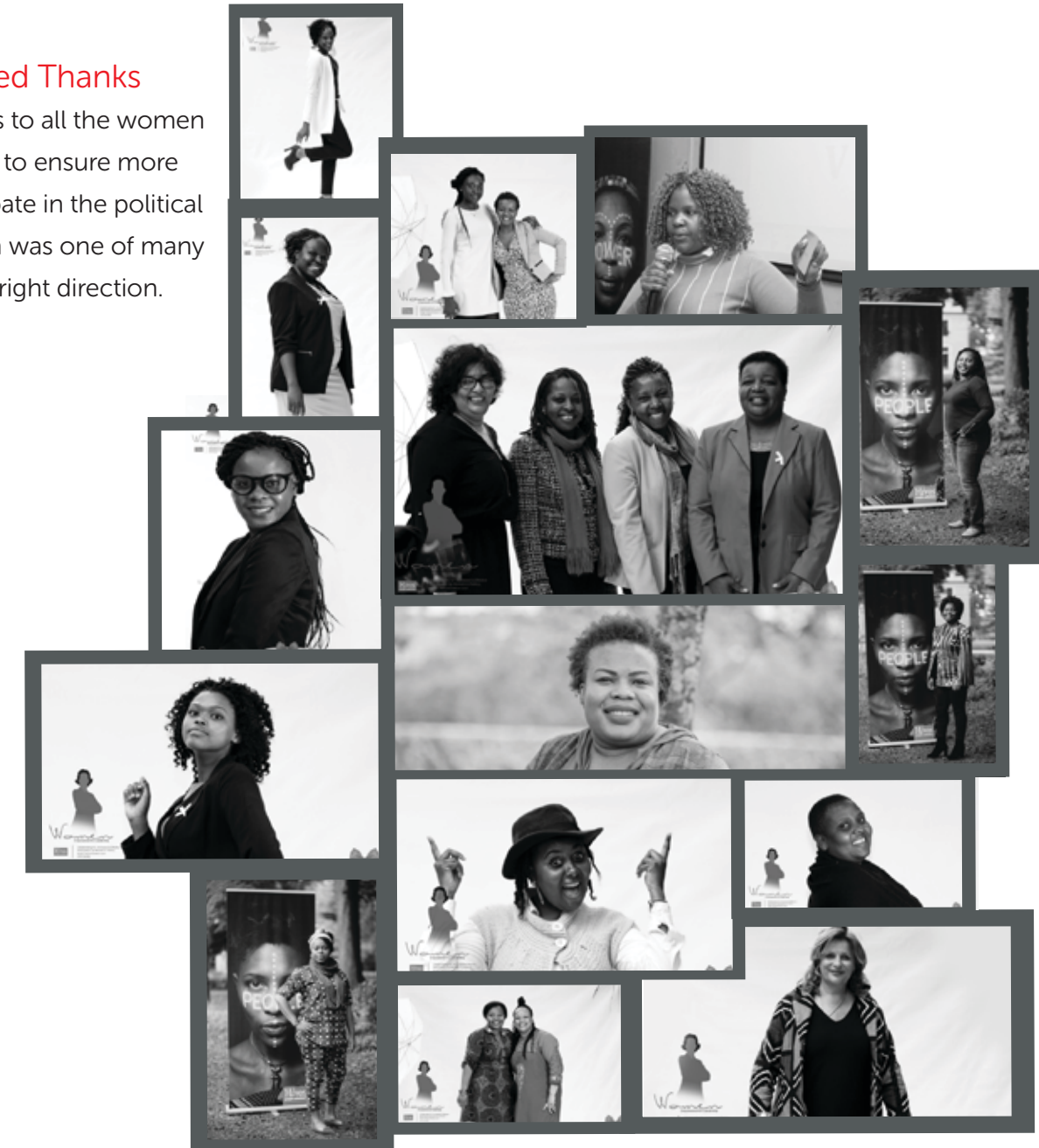
The Harmonised Election of 2018 were an election where the participation of women was full of paradoxes. While the women's participation grew as voters, there was a slump in women's participation as candidates. While this was a sad development it does not take away the fact that women are claiming space in the electoral processes and are participating in multiple ways effectively as voters, candidates, electoral officials, party agents and observers. We recognise the great work that women did in all these roles.

Promotion of gender equality in politics requires strategic and long term approaches. The participation of women as candidates needs to be accompanied by substantive equality, equal opportunities and equal access to opportunities. It is important to note that the activism of women and the actions of political parties work together to improve the participation of women in political office. Good policy intentions have not resulted in the increase of women candidates because they have not been followed by concrete actions.

These women were brave and put themselves on the line as candidates. While the women candidates did not garner significant votes, we salute their bravery. We encourage Zimbabwean women to vote for other women and for women in politics to remain connected to the women who voted for them.

Extended Thanks

A Special thanks to all the women working hard to ensure more women participate in the political arena. July 30th was one of many steps in the right direction.





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