

June 2023

VOICES

WOMEN & YOUTH NEWSLETTER



**Build up to the
2023 Harmonized
Elections**



INSTITUTE for
YOUNG WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT



Zimbabwe
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GENDER LINKS
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Focus turns to the elections

The 2023 Harmonized Elections are upon us and women and youth have been working hard

Words by **Lizwe Chitunganya**

Welcome to the June 2023 edition of the Voices newsletter, which take a look at women and youth issues. We showcase the stories of women and youth leaders who are making a difference in Zimbabwe, through our **Women and Youth Inclusion for Equality** project. This newsletter is brought to you by Hivos, and the project is funded by the European Union in Zimbabwe and the Embassy of Ireland in Pretoria.

As we approach the 2023 Harmonized Elections, we want to highlight the achievements and challenges of women and youth who are actively participating in national and local governance processes, such as in elections, accountability and decision-making. We believe that women and youth have a vital role to play in shaping the future of Zimbabwe, and we want to amplify their voices and perspectives.

In this edition, we will take a look at various topics, through the work that our partners within the project have been doing. We will look at:

- How young women are leading community dialogues on gender equality and social justice in rural areas.
- How youth activists are using social media to raise awareness and mobilize support for democratic processes.
- How intergenerational partnerships are fostering collaboration and mentorship between women and youth leaders across different sectors and movements.

We will also feature some contributions from our other projects – **Women and Youth Leadership and Participation**; and the **Women’s Voices Matter**. Please share comments and suggestions on the stories featured in this edition.



Participation

Women vying for Parliament and Council at an elections training workshop in Bulawayo & Kwekwe

Optimism for more women playing a part in coming elections



Tendai Kokera is not only a Ward councilor, she is also the Mayor of the City of Kadoma – a rare feat for women in local government. As a gender champion in the city, a provincial chairperson of her political party, and a mother to a daughter, Kokera has many roles to balance.

She entered politics in 2013 and faced challenges in working with people from different political backgrounds. “Through capacity building I was able to set aside political differences and work with individuals who had different political views from mine,” she said.

This also filtered down to the community where her popularity enabled her to be re-elected into office in 2018 despite having desired to only serve one term in office. “My popularity and the leadership skills that I have developed have helped me realize that I can be a leader. I never at one time thought that I could be the Mayor of Kadoma City Council”.

Kokera is still unsure if she will contest the forthcoming 2023 Harmonized Elections at the local level. However, she notes that the community she serves still has confidence in her and wants her

to represent them. She hopes to advance beyond local government, but is not certain what her political party will nominate her for.

While aiming for a higher position, Kokera has also been at the forefront of mentoring young women and men to assume political decision-making positions, especially at the local level. These young people are mostly identified through her political party’s youth structures. She believes that “young people are the leaders of today” and it is important that they receive the right mentoring.

Kokera’s expectations for the 2023 elections are that women and youth are fully empowered and the 50-50 parity is realized. She expects that the proportion of women councilors in Zimbabwe will go up from the current 14%. She stated that the 30% local government is an enabler for realizing this increase.

Kokera expects that the 30% local government quota will improve women’s participation in the elections because “those who have little or no access to resources for campaigning would be able to get support”.

Women Stepping Forward in Politics

Recounting their experiences in politics during our partner in the Women and Youth Leadership and Participation project: Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD)'s panel discussion titled *"Running to Win Conversation"*, women representatives across the political divide highlighted that while they were stepping forward to take up leadership roles, existing structural barriers continued to curtail their full and effective participation in civic spaces.

Opening the panel discussion on behalf of Bulawayo Provincial Affairs and Devolution Minister, Hon. Judith Ncube, the Director Coordination in the Ministry of State's Office, Boetsoanelo Noko, noted that despite the ratification of gender equality instruments such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Maputo Protocol, the SADC Protocol on Gender Development, and the national Constitution's commitment to promoting gender equality, women were under-represented and, compared to men, lagged behind.

"While there has been progress in terms of women's participation in Zimbabwe, as the country heads to the 2023 elections, there remains much to be done to achieve gender equality in politics," said Min Ncube.



Sithembakuye Nyoni

Sithembakuye Nyoni, a participant, said in Tsholotsho, women played a leading role in the development of their communities, but rigid gender norms frustrated women's efforts to participate in politics.

"Women play a vital role in developing rural communities, but they are lagging in political participation because of rigid gender norms. When a woman stands up for a political position, questions are asked. Will a woman fully represent us? Is she married? Will the husband allow her to go participate in Parliament, and then your husband is also questioned on how he can allow you to go participate in Parliament with other men," Sithembakuye said.



Some of the political representatives at the *"Running to Win Conversation"* gathering in Bulawayo



Youth election impression

What are your feelings towards the 2023 elections?

I am kind of anxious about the election period because elections in Zimbabwe are usually associated with violence. I remain hopeful that the elections will be violence-free and will continue to preach peace and encourage youths not to be used as perpetrators of violence.

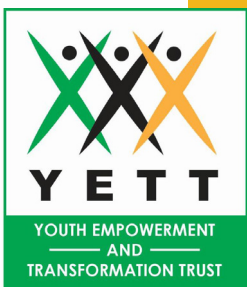
How are the election preparations going?

The preparations are going well since we managed to mobilize young people to register to vote. I have been actively involved in digital voter education through resharing and reposting YETT [Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust]’s My First Vote campaign material to broaden the reach. I have also been hosting WhatsApp weekly discussions on the delimitation process and sensitizing youth groups on new Wards and constituencies, nomination fees, structures of local council, biometric voter registration processes and requirements for one to participate as a candidate.

I know the youths are ready for this election season because after the proclamation of the election date by the President, we managed to mobilize 200 youths from Belvedere Teachers’ College, Harare Institute of Technology and youths from Seke district to go and register to vote so that they participate in the 2023 elections.

What are you looking forward to?

I am looking forward to participate in this election as a voter and election observer. I am also looking forward to seeing youth journalist reporting on elections. The youths have always been sidelined when it comes to reporting for elections so we are looking forward to having a youth narrative in elections work. However, my worry is on the high candidate nomination fees that might push away a number of interested youths.



Learn more
Manhangu
(24) works
with our
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YETT



“I feel it is time for a woman to take charge”

Sera Phiri is an aspiring Councilor of Ward 6 Hwange Central and she is the only female candidate out of 5 candidates who were nominated in the primary candidate selection process of her party. The Ward 6 seat has been occupied by men over the last 20 years. By contesting for this seat, Sera is not only making history, but also challenging a system that is deeply entrenched in patriarchy.

Before expressing interest to run for public office, Sera has been encouraging women to form rotating savings clubs and start small income-generating projects in order for them to realize financial autonomy and to be self-sufficient.

As an aspiring leader in her community, Sera has been using the skills and knowledge she gained from various women empowerment initiatives provided through training with our project partner, the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe. She has also been working with local women in engaging with responsible authorities to rectify the water issues in her area of residence.

Asked why she aspired to run for office, Sera says: “I am passionate about women's



Sera Phiri

issues and I feel I need to address various challenges in my Ward, which include issues of gender-based violence. I feel it is time for a woman to take charge as the Ward has been led by men for a long time.”

Sera Phiri currently chairs the Hwange Widows Association, an organization which also encourages widows to work and sustain their families. She is also a mother of two. Having worked in the administration of Hwange Town Council for close to 15 years, she believes she is confident and able to deliver and serve the people as a councilor if elected.

The challenge of being a female politician: Martha Paul



Martha Paul is one of two female councilors in Makonde Rural District Council. She is also the vice-chairperson of the Council and the Mashonaland West Women in Local Government Forum (WLGf) chairperson.

Martha, who has been in council for the last 5 years has relished her role, which saw her develop her constituency by promoting women's participation in economic development activities. She was also pivotal in the lobbying and advocacy for the 30% local government quota, which is a milestone for all female councilors in Zimbabwe. This work and popularity prompted her to again contest for a seat in local government.

Although Martha contested in the primary elections of her political party and lost out to a man, she stated that she had been prepared well. Part of her preparation included mentoring women and youth as well as encouraging them to vote and also to contest as candidates. She, however, noted with concern that building off her experience in the primary elections, most of the women and young women that were looking up to her had began to see no value in participating in politics.

"After this experience, the young women are saying that they do not think that they

Martha Paul

can survive in politics. Married women, especially, have said they do not think their spouses would allow them to participate in politics. It is going to take a lot of work to try and convince these women and young women to venture into politics", she said.

Martha highlighted some of the challenges she faced during the primary elections included lack of support from her party and low participation of voters at the primary elections among other issues.

"There were no resources - including financial - and information availed to me and the community, especially women, regarding the conducting of the primary elections", she said. "Most voters were swayed into voting for a candidate that had the financial backing."

Despite her loss in the primary elections, she stated that she certain that the local government quota would increase the numbers of women in politics.



Youths show off their voter registration slips

Getting young people to vote

How is your 2023 elections journey going?

The journey has been interesting, with lots of learning and unlearning on the myths around elections. I thought voting was for adults or people that were interested in politics hence registering to vote was never a priority. I did not think it was important to register to vote even though I stayed about a 100m away from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission offices.

The Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT) – a Hivos partner in the Women and Youth Inclusion for Equality project – held youth engagement activities with dutybearers in Hwange and that changed my perspectives on voter registration and my civic duty as

a young person. I learnt the role of elected community leaders in advancing development and opportunities for young people in influencing development at grassroots level. I pledged to participate in electoral processes, and community meetings to advance my interest as a young person in key development processes.

After the trainings, I managed to register to vote and influenced 10 of my friends to register to vote as well. Through my interactions with friends, I realized that most of my age mates are not registered to vote because they are not interested or do not know much about voter registration.

My highlight of my election journey was working as a YETT

youth champion responsible for voter education and mobilization of youths during the voter registration mobile blitz conducted where I managed to mobilize about 15 youths to register to vote.

What are you looking forward to in the 2023 elections?

I am looking forward to voting in 2023 as well as encourage young people to show up and vote on the election day. I am, however, worried that violence might erupt as we go towards the election day.

In conclusion, the election journey has been an exciting one for me as I got to know more about the electoral cycle, my role and the need to hold dutybearers accountable.



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