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Increasing women's political participation

Executive Summary

Young women are interested in politics but have no faith in political parties. They feel that political parties do not have their interests at heart and that they are not concerned about the ordinary person: their main concern is in enriching themselves and their inner circles. These young women summed up the key governance problems in Zimbabwe as failed government, failed opposition parties, self-seeking politicians, disrespect for the rule of law, corruption, and the lack of citizen participation.

Introduction

In May 2017, RAU conducted an online survey targeting young professional women, [*Will Young Women Make A Difference In The 2018 Elections? Findings From An Online Survey.*](#)

The focus of the survey was to determine their engagement in politics. The findings of this survey were not surprising looking at the [previous research](#) and anecdotal information conducted and collected over the years.

Young women are intending to register to vote in 2018: because it's their right, they want their vote to mean something, and they are tired of complaining without participating. Young women are aware of their rights and the importance of their participation in governance issues. They also recognise that taking a backseat has not benefited them in the past and that power is not going to be handed over without a fight. The fight, as they see it, is mainly being against patriarchy, ageism and political patronage. They stated that they are moved to vote because of the worsening economic crisis and they want a different and younger leadership that is concerned about citizens.

Historically, [the voice of the youth](#) has largely being ignored with young people (mostly young men) being said to be too inexperienced and impetuous to make any meaningful contribution to politics: they need to be subservient and to cheer on *madhara*.

The role of young women in politics has always been even more in the background and therefore largely invisible, cooking and providing domestic services to their leaders. Globally, there has been a shift in the role of young people in politics and this has had an impact on

Zimbabwe. Most young people acquire their information from social media: this group was no different, and they see changes in other parts of the world happening as a result of a push by the youth, and they believe this is possible in Zimbabwe.

Across the political divide, the recognition of the importance of the youth is evident: young people are standing as candidates, as members of political parties and as independents. The President is carrying out youth rallies across the country to coax this group to register and vote in 2018. This is well and good, but are political parties seriously looking to include the youth agenda in their manifestos for 2018 and beyond? The young women are not convinced. An agenda, which is focused on providing opportunities, i.e. providing solutions to the political and economic crisis, as well as addressing unemployment.

Key Findings

The new study by RAU identified a number of issues of concern as regards the political views of young women:

A finding that should be taken seriously is their views of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC): 68% said they don't trust ZEC to run the next elections, mainly because of its closeness to ZANU PF as an interested party in the elections.

Also the management of the past elections did not inspire confidence. The current issues with the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR), also the latest comments by the ZEC Chairperson regarding women are further diminishing the little confidence that was there.

Young women do not trust political parties as historically they have not kept their campaign promises. Political parties have shown that they are not taking the concerns of young people seriously. The young women stated that the governance issues can easily be resolved if politicians put citizen issues at the forefront of their policies. The problems were said to be a failed government, which has not only failed to govern Zimbabwe but has also "*ruined the idea of democracy.*" Opposition parties were said to have the same leadership flaws as the ruling party and part of the rot; they are seen as mediocre and have no capacity to take the country forward. There is a preoccupation with getting and maintaining power. Politicians were described as dictatorial, misguided unethical and selfish.

An obvious critical issue for policy makers, in their views, is how to re-engage citizens in governance and political issues as there are overwhelming feelings of helplessness as their voices are ignored. Citizens are cowered and do not participate actively.

According to the survey, the outstanding feature of Zimbabwe's governance landscape is unabated and institutionalised mismanagement. This fuels corruption and stimulates self-seeking behaviour from all office and duty bearers in public and private sectors. Consequently, citizens resort to an "*I don't care attitude*" as they accept that they cannot change anything. Most young people have little interest in governance issues: the generality of the population is looking out for themselves individually, not caring about the next person. As a way forward, it is evident that there is need for increased citizen engagement to hold government accountable.

Conclusions

- From the survey it is clear that young people, particularly young women are geared to register then vote: they indicated that this is not the time to sit back and do nothing. This time they intend to get to know the candidate, and what they are bringing to the table, before voting. The campaign stage is therefore critical.
- They want the inclusion of young women in strategic government positions because 65% of this nation is below the age of 35 and the majority is female. Their call is for pro youth and gender sensitive policies in line with the Constitution.
- Most importantly they want to elect into office political leaders that put people first, leaders who are accountable and there to serve not be served.