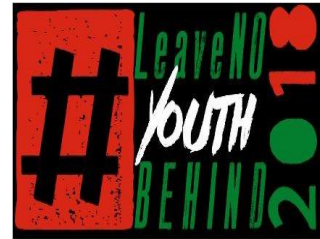




Transforming Youth, Transforming Zimbabwe



LeaveNoYouthBehind Dialogue Meeting Report



Venue: ZESA Training Centre

Theme: "What's at stake – youthful and running for office?"

Setting the Context

MacDonald Munyoro briefly shared with youth delegates on the background of the dialogue meeting and the ethos behind the Leave-No-Youth-Behind program which is working with youth running for public office, mobilizing the youth electorate to counter apathy and educating the youth on civic matters to enable their agency at both local and national levels.



Key highlights from this include:

- An ideological and deliberate initiative by youth to fight apathy, exclusion and marginalization that has characterized the present generation of youth for decades; It is challenging the status quo in its ambitious drive to mobilize 2 million youth voters – work with aspiring youth candidates both independent candidates and those running under political parties and making a clarion call to youth based on the four (4) key pillars of: GO EDUCATE, GO MOBILIZE, GO REGISTER and GO VOTE.
- Youth are the critical sub-stratum of our country, whilst the youth of yester year took up arms struggling for independence and sovereignty and were unified on this cause – the call is on us the current generation of youth to find the unifying force and fight to achieve this;
- Social change and transformation has seen youth on the frontlines, there is an urgent need for us to set a Generational Mandate and Obligations especially in this new political dispensation.
- It is imperative that as youth we engage and provide solidarity in any form possible to aspiring youth candidates as they are torch-bearers and game-changers in a political terrain that has reinforced youth marginalization and disempowerment over the decades.

Panellists

Linda Masarira

Linda Masarira is a Zimbabwean activist, a strong advocate for human rights, particularly women's rights and passionate about fighting for democracy in Zimbabwe. She has engaged in several public protests chief among these protesting against the government as part of the #16Day Occupation and the Tajamuka/Sesjikile Campaign. As part of her work on women empowerment she founded the Zimbabwe Women in Politics Alliance (ZWPA). She launched her campaign to run for office as An Independent Candidate in 2017 contesting the 2018 Harare Central parliamentary seat.



In her opening statement she noted that youth constitute over 60% of the Zimbabwean population yet are marginalized in political processes with the average age of a Member of Parliament at 53 years – the exclusion of youth is systematic cascading to political party and government levels. The first government of Zimbabwe following Independence was inclusive of youth with the first decade following independence witnessing immense growth and development making the country the bread basket, an economic power house and well educated country. Most of these youthful leaders that assumed leadership positions had taken an active lead in the war of liberation against colonial

rule – this was sacrificial on their part and their generation was united in the pursuit of the countries independence and sovereignty.

The present day generation of youth is nowhere near the echelons of political leadership yet on paper we are the best positioned generation to assume such positions – we need to understand why as youth, we need to rally behind a common vision moving forward and more importantly we need to stand up for office at whatever level including council, parliament, senate, cabinet and the presidium. In the generation of yester-year ascending to such positions within politics was not on a silver platter – they had to fight for this, as a generation what are we fighting for?

Having set the tone of her presentation she highlighted the following key issues:

- The need for youth to work collaboratively to push for the removal of the age cap of the presidium which is set at forty (40) years – this should be revised downwards to the age of voting which is 18. In addition, there must be placed an age cap at the top to ensure continual leadership renewal in the governance of the country.
- The need to revise the eligibility requirement to run for office as a parliamentarian – this must be revised downwards from 21 to the age of voting which is 18 years.
- The new constitution provides a strong basis to elevate youth into politics and occupying positions in civic and public life – chief among these provisions is section 20 of the constitution which speaks to youth.
- The country has ratified the African Youth Charter, the document provides very strong provisions for the emancipation of youth political leaders; and lastly
- The African Union (AU) – European Union (EU) Summit processes (including the Zimbabwe Declaration) in which Zimbabwe took active participation noted the need to look into set eligibility requirements for political leadership as this is acting as a barrier to youth across both continents.

In closing her presentation she noted that the environment is not enabling for youth to take leadership positions given the backlash of this which includes assault; abduction; surveillance from the state to mention a few. The political terrain is very patriarchal; this makes it even harder for young women in politics as they have to contend with added layers of challenges in their bid to run for office. Young women aspiring for public office thus need to see themselves first as candidates and not women as politics is a tough game.

Vongai Zimudzi – Aspiring Councillor

She is a Revolutionary Freedom Fighter (RFF) serving as the Deputy Secretary for information and publicity. Esther Vongai Zimudzi has been described by many not only limited to prominent people in society as a human social weapon who is very influential once given the opportunity to converse. She is hungry for excellence and artistically inclined with a mind set to uplift society to higher levels. She has shattered glass ceilings by being the first 20 year old to be running for office in 2018 as ward 22 (Hatfield) Councillor. This however can be accredited to her role from 2014-15 as a Junior Councillor in Harare when she was enrolled at Roosevelt Girls High School. She has been involved formerly in mainstream political parties before choosing to run as an Independent Candidate

Topic: From mainstream political party activist to independent Candidate

In opening her presentation she noted that political parties in Zimbabwe had failed youth – over the last few decades in both the ruling party and opposition there has been no deliberate effort to position youth for political office. The rise in Independent youth candidates towards the 2018 elections succinctly illustrates this trend and how frustrated youth are from the systematic marginalization. She narrated how entrenched patriarchy is within political parties which makes it difficult for aspiring young women to assume leadership positions or even run for office under the party ticket – this is done through the ‘pulling down’ system which effectively holds back youth regardless of gender.



Young women are vulnerable in political parties and are exposed to many things owing to this which include harassment, rape, assault and stereotyping that infringes on their rights. Such stereotyping includes them being viewed as woman of loose morals, this in turn tarnishes the image of self in the public sphere – owing to such she narrated how she had lost family and friends whilst part of a

political party. She highlighted the need to counter the systematic exclusion of both youth and women in politics, one such phenomenon which has institutionalized this exclusion is the existence of the youth and women wings. Effectively this has excluded youth and women from taking acting roles and positions within the main wing of the party which makes decisions and sets policies at party level. This needs to be dismantled; there must be equal representation within the main wing.

In closing her presentation she shared her views on eligibility for public office, concurring with Linda on the need to remove the age limit and allow anyone voting to run for public office including the presidium. She highlighted how youth over the years and in some spaces continue to bootlick politicians who have never stood for youth – it was high time for youth to set and pursue their agenda as a collective to remove the status quo which has been exclusionary.

Nhlanhla Moyo – Aspiring Member of Parliament

Independent Parliamentary Candidate for Bulawayo Central Constituency | Speaker | CEO at I ACT Leadership Foundation | Author

Topic: Youthful and running for office as an Independent Candidate

In opening his presentation he gave a narration of the culture of impunity and violence and how this has worked hand in glove to silence the youth and make them shun from aspiring to run for public office – their involvement has only gone as far as propping up the political elite. The memories of the past decade from 2000 especially in the year 2008 are vivid in the minds of many youth especially those in the rural areas and the few that were politically active that witnessed violence, assault; intimidation and death. He observed that the 2018 elections had witnessed an upsurge of youth that are aspiring for political office running as independent candidates – the protests and social movements that characterised 2016 had given hope to the youth.



Most youth running for office are viewed as splitting the vote by both politicians and the general citizenry and are rarely taken for the breadth of their vision to develop communities once they assume office. This view has propagated a negative perception to youth seeking public office – and as such youth running for office must work hard in defining their campaigns and engaging the electorate. He questioned the sustainability of vote buying techniques which the political elite has used to gain votes calling on youth to be pragmatic to counter such practices especially as the campaign period approaches.

He shared how owing to his decision to run for office he had been intimidated and had his life threatened on several occasions noting that in a context like Zimbabwe these were things to contend against. He noted that the silence of youth is a vote on its own – however apathy cannot influence the outcome of a ballot process as the decision is made by those that cast the vote, there is thus an urgent need to mobilize the youth electorate. Moyo highlighted the experiences of youth in Kenya that has successfully run for office with minimal resources changing the political narrative in their country.

In closing his presentation he shared on the overwhelming support and solidarity from fellow youth in his constituency and beyond – in building his campaign and structuring a formidable team to work with him. Youth solidarity will be key and as independent candidates running for office is not for the ‘self’ but rather the ‘collective’ – who we are and what we stand for as youth of the present generation. There is thus a need for us to appeal to the youth electorate which is demographically the majority yet most disengaged from the electoral process.

Patson Mashingaidze – Aspiring Member of Parliament

Author scholar; Freedom Fighter; Black Empowerment expert; Viva Zimbabwe Spokesperson.

Topic: Towards a shared youth vision

In opening his presentation he posed a question on where the disconnect is between the current generation of youth and that of yester-year; and more importantly among and within the current generation of youth. In his view this was an issue of ideology. He proceeded to explain the concept of Black consciousness as propagated by Steve Biko noting that in the current generation there was a lot of intellectual bankruptcy amongst youth. The Pull Him/Her Down Syndrome is being used to kill the movement – the youth are missing on providing leadership in public office and this is systematically conditioning youth to disengage in politics. The current levels of apathy we are experiencing which saw less than 10% of youth appearing on the 2013 voters roll shows a lack of consciousness amongst our youth.



He noted the urgent need to build the political literacy of youth in the country which would empower them ideologically on common issues to struggle and fight for as a generation. He narrated the increasing call within the youth movement to set a clear Generational Mandate and Obligations of the youth and how this provides an opportune time to support such conversations as there is a huge disconnect amongst the youth. Patson challenged the #LeaveNoYouthBehind Campaign to engage youth across the country both urban and rural as there is a serious disconnect between these two owing to different lived realities – such efforts could signal the beginning of a shared vision towards the future of the country owned collectively by youth.

In closing his presentation, he posed a question on who we are listening as youth and what society is saying of youth in the country. There society needs to change and as youth we must filter what we listen to if we are to successfully usher in social change and transformation that will emancipate the present generation of youth and see them at the echelons of politics.

Key Resolutions from the Dialogue

The dialogue allowed for youth to critically reflect on the struggles of the youth in attaining direct representation and participation in political processes – the new political dispensation was seen as providing a window of opportunity to foster dialogue and engage in various lobby and advocacy actions that can translate section 20 of the constitution into tangible frameworks to position youth.



Key resolutions from the Dialogue:

- Petitioning the Parliament of Zimbabwe on age eligibility caps to run for public office – this in realization that current provisions are in violation of the constitution and act to systematically exclude the youth from access to public office;
- Supporting robust youth movements that have strong grassroots ties to be able to address the rural-urban divide among youth – the disconnect has seen opposing youth agendas being pursued;
- The need to develop a school of political thought that builds the ideological and political acumen of youth – most aspiring youth candidates are running with limited experience and expertise on their part;
- Pushing for the localization of the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2250 – the involvement of NAYO in the work of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) and also the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) are seen as enablers to allow for the engagement of key stakeholders. Given the history of electoral violence, the Resolution is seen as empowering youth to demand and foster peace in the electoral period;
- Strengthening youth solidarity in the current electoral landscape to build agency that can see youth post the election being strongly involved on accountability and governance issues.