



# EAGER OR SLUMBERING?

**Youth and political  
participation in Zimbabwe**

**ActionAid  
Denmark**

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# FOREWORD BY ACTIONAID DENMARK

It is my pleasure to introduce this analysis of the political participation of youth in Zimbabwe. As in other countries in Africa, the youth makes up a huge part of the population and holds the future of the country in their hands. Yet, as the paper will show, they also bear the brunt of economic and political mismanagement.

Still the youth in Zimbabwe has an admirable belief that the future has positive change in store for them. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that government, political parties and civil society organisations include youth and let them have a say in how their country is governed. The reluctance to do so could have devastating consequences as a disillusioned, disenfranchised youth is a time bomb under a positive and stable development of Zimbabwe.

MS / ActionAid Denmark has supported civil society and the work for participatory democracy in Zimbabwe for more than 20 years and we are passionate about supporting and following the developments closely. We are hopeful that the youth of Zimbabwe will be a driving force for change and creation of a sustainable democracy.

We support civil society organisations, among them youth organisations, in the important work on demanding increased decentralisation and devolution of power in Zimbabwe. We support civil society actors in pushing for accountable and transparent management of resources and in their systematic monitoring of human rights violations. In this work we have a special focus on including young people.

The analysis in this paper points to the possibility of creating national and even international platforms across political and geographical divides. ActionAid

International is presently prioritising the creation of an international youth movement, Activista. Activista is a global youth network involving more than 50 ActionAid partners and thousands of volunteers in more than 25 countries including Zimbabwe. Activista is made up of youth activists working with artists, film-makers, musicians and with other campaigning organisations to create powerful and creative campaigns. Activista empowers and enables young people to actively participate in the decision making and political processes that affect their lives.

Given the fact that general elections are coming up in Zimbabwe, the time is now for government, political parties and civil society organisations to act and find new ways to include and listen to the pool of engaged youth that this paper shows is out there. Also international actors such as the UN agencies, Western donors and SADC should keep their eyes firmly fixed on the inclusion of youth in the election preparation process.

This briefing paper is the latest in a series of reports and papers on the political situation in Zimbabwe (ref. [www.ms.dk/afrika/zimbabwe](http://www.ms.dk/afrika/zimbabwe)). The paper is published by MS / ActionAid Denmark and solely represents the opinions of this organisation. The paper consists of an analysis of: A) Political participation of youth seen from a youth perspective, B) Government efforts to include youth, C) The efforts of political parties to include youth, D) Civil society organisations' efforts to include youth, E) Recommendations.

Happy reading!



Secretary General, Frans Mikael Jansen

Mellempøkeligt Samvirke  
Copenhagen 15<sup>th</sup> March 2013

## **Abbreviations**

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change - Tsvangirai
MPOI	Mass Public Opinion Institute
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
SADC	Southern African Development Community
Zanu PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZEC	Zimbabwe Election Commission
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network

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# 1 ■ introduction

Zimbabwe is a youthful country; youth defined (in this report) as those between 18 and 30 years of age constitute around half of the adult population. As such, youth is a crucial segment of Zimbabwean society - and the country's voters. No wonder then, that political parties make frequent references to youth and youth affairs. As a sign of how acutely aware the parties are of youth's role in the coming elections, Zanu PF at its recent congress in December 2012 declared that the youth vote "could make or break" the party's regaining of power.

However, in spite of these realisations of the importance of youth it does not play any conspicuous role in the country's public affairs. Rather, through Zimbabwe's history since dependence in 1980, the country's political elite has gradually grown older and is now dominated by the parents or grandparents of today's youth. The presidents of the three dominant political parties are 89, 61 and 51 years old and the vast majority of their leadership colleagues are age group peers. Similarly, though the country has more than 60 ministers in government, only one is younger than 40 years old. The parties' interest in youth is mainly manifested in attempts to control and direct its activities.

How do young people react to this? Is this spawning apathy amongst them? Are parties and civil society aware of the age gap and do they actively seek to close it? Is youth participation in political and public affairs actively encouraged?

Zimbabwean politics is regularly marred by violence and it is generally perceived that youth play a major role in this, mainly as perpetrators, but simultaneously

as victims. During election campaigns, there have been examples of youth being drafted into vigilante groups terrorising and torturing fellow citizens.

The patronising attitude of older politicians in this regard was recently displayed by Deputy Prime Minister Thokozani Khupe as she lambasted politicians for manipulating the youths and using them to hold onto power: "The youths should wake up and turn against anyone who wants to use them as pawns in the dirty game of political violence. These old and tired leaders do not have an eye for tomorrow," Khupe said.

Perhaps Zimbabwean youth is already wide awake, but nobody is really ready to listen to them? Khupe's own party is not particularly open to youth's participation.

Zimbabwe is also a deeply divided society. For decades, a divide has existed between urban and rural realities in which access to paid employment, modern medicine, democratic local government, and to information from independent media was skewed in favour of the urban. In the early years of independence a deliberate government policy actively contributed to diminish such differences, but the last decade's devastating economic crisis has once again exacerbated the differences. Often ignored, a major recent change besides the consequences of the economic divide has been government's re-introduction of indirect rule giving 'traditional' leaders (chiefs, headmen, etc.) strong powers over everyday life in the rural areas (allocation of land, arbitration of disputes, the authority to declare areas non-accessible to outsiders, etc.). During the years of Zanu PF's rule, the party successfully co-opted many such

'traditional' leaders as its local instruments. This has further aided to stifle rural life and to diminish space for political debate, especially for youth, as many such non-elected older 'traditional' leaders expect youth to defer to them.

A deep political divide between supporters of Zanu PF and the opposition MDC parties has further threatened to tear the country apart. Since the MDC first contested political office in 2000, most elections have been marred by political violence. MDC and civil society organisations have since the late 1990's repeatedly documented breaches of human rights on the part of authorities in order to suppress the views and supporters of critical Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the MDCs. This is still the case in spite of Zanu PF having been forced to enter into a coalition government with the MDC parties.

There is a long tradition in the country for such political intolerance; pre-independence politics was also characterised by intolerance, exclusion and suppression. Throughout this tradition, youth has always been used as foot soldiers for enforcing various parties' viewpoint, both literally as soldiers and their auxiliaries, and for violent vigilantism.

There is however nothing particularly Zimbabwean in this, all over the world youth has always constituted the core group of soldiers and vigilantes. There is similarly no reason to believe that Zimbabwean youth are more violently inclined than their contemporary global peers. As will be shown below, the vast majority of Zimbabwean youth is deeply against political violence.

It is however a fact, demonstrated below, that Zimbabwean youth feels politically excluded and that their voices are hardly heard in the public domain. Perhaps a higher degree of inclusion could give youth increased strength and possibility to withstand any conscription, voluntarily or not, into violent actions?

To provide a fact-based framework for the discussion of youth and political representation, the Mass Public Opinion Institute, MPOI, in January 2013 executed a nation-wide survey of youth<sup>1</sup>. A statistically representative (urban/rural, female/male, regions, age-groups, etc.) sample of 1,000<sup>2</sup> youth answered an array of questions about their situation and their views on this as well as on public and political affairs. In addition, views and comments have been sought from a number of youth organisations and their leaders and members as well as from Action Aid Zimbabwe.

As the results are presented below, this paper will seek to pose some of the most crucial questions to be answered in relation to understanding the realities of Zimbabwe's youth and its feeling of being excluded from political life.

Along with the old, the sick and the handicapped, young people have generally borne the brunt of the last 10-15 years' economic downturn in Zimbabwe. The deterioration of schools and the educational services has obviously impacted severely upon their ability to perform in society, and secondly, the unavailability of employment or paid work has been felt most severely by this group.

<sup>1</sup> "Youth Survey January 2013", to be published during March 2013 by MPOI.

<sup>2</sup> The margin of error in a sample this size is +/- 3% at 95% level of confidence. It is consequently not possible to distinguish confidently between a score of, say 43% and 47%. Differences have to be larger than 3 points to be significant.

# 2. Survey results

## 2.1 Background

Amidst national unrest, teaching was particularly disrupted from 2006 to 2009. In addition to suffering from insufficient funding, Zimbabwe's schools lost part of 2006, the entirety of 2007 and segments of the 2008 and 2009's academic years (UNICEF found that 94% of rural schools were closed by 2009). 20,000 teachers left the country between 2004 and 2009. With few mechanisms to help pupils catch up or re-take years when they returned, thousands found themselves unable to gain a meaningful education. Data from the Ministry of Education, Sports, Art and Culture reveals that between 2000 and 2008 more than 2 million children and young people failed their exam in national ordinary ('O-level') examinations or dropped out aged 13.

Whereas one may view the above figures as representing the crest of the crisis, its aftershocks are still severely felt with 82% of all students sitting for their O-level exams in 2012 failing these. Though the minister of education valiantly tried to put a positive spin to this as a sign of progress compared to the fail rate of 86% in 2009, when he and the rest of the present Inclusive Government took office, the figures are reflecting dramatically poor outlooks for the afflicted children and youth.

For the present generation of youth, the consequences of the educational and economic crisis are dire. Reports from the south of the country speak of entire villages and indeed districts almost devoid of youth as these have left for job-hunting abroad, mainly in South Africa (reliable figures does not exist for this migration).

## 2.2 Young people's present social situation

The figures for those remaining in the country speak volumes: According to our survey 73% of youth does not have any job that pays them a cash income; almost half of these have given up looking for such income. Only 13% have a full-time job giving them a cash income (in formal and informal sectors). More than a quarter (28%) is "always" or have "many" or "several" times gone without enough food to eat.

Such dire economic and educational conditions is locking youth into prolonged dependency on older family members and consequently bleeding their sense of personal freedom. It blocks youth's induction into adult society and hinders marriage and the establishment of normal family life; a large proportion of youth are forced to rely on parents or family for shelter and whatever little money can be spared for them; they feel they are begging for alms. It's humiliating,

Table 1<sup>3</sup>

	Do you have a job that pays cash income		Gone without enough food to eat?		
	#	%	#	%	
No (not looking)	342	34	Never	418	42
No (looking)	386	39	Just once or twice	303	30
Yes, part time	133	13	Several times	203	20
Yes, full time	135	14	Many times	66	7
Total	996	100	Always	9	1

<sup>3</sup> When reading the tables please note that as figures have been rounded up/down to avoid decimals, you might in some instances find when adding up the figures that the total will be 99% or 101%.



Table 2

Looking ahead, do you expect the following to be better or worse? % of respondents	Much Worse	Worse	Same	Better	Much Better	Don't know
Economic conditions in five years' time?	3	5	15	44	22	12
Your living conditions in five years' time?	3	4	15	38	29	11

debilitating and may breed both apathy and anger. Young women are especially vulnerable in this situation of limbo in delayed adulthood. 75% of female youths between 15 and 24 years have at least once fallen pregnant, a recent survey for Swedish SIDA found<sup>4</sup>. Given their poor economic means, their unstable social conditions, the unavailability of legal abortion but widespread use of illegal ones combined with the deteriorated health services, such statistics give a

glimpse into the difficulties in for instance reproductive health that young women face in their daily lives.

In spite of all this, youth in Zimbabwe is optimistic about the future, especially for themselves. A solid two thirds are convinced that both the country's economic condition as well as their own will have improved in 5 years' time.

The survey does not explore deeper into the beliefs and presumptions behind youth's optimism. They may be founded on a range of economic, social and political issues. This would be crucial to explore further in order to map areas of importance to youth and to better adjust policies and programmes to accommodate this.

## Box1

## Tsitsi: The Electoral Ambassador

Tsitsi is 21 years old and dedicated to bring herself forward. Her parents both died when she was 16, she had to leave school and she has since had to fend for herself.

*I started to make decorations and catering for church functions. I think I am good at my business, because I now make enough money from this to pay for myself, so I'm back in school again. I want to be a journalist. I'm staying at my sisters' place but she loves her children more than me. Sometimes I think she mainly looks at me as a maid serving her family – but I can't afford to live somewhere else."*

*I think when I'm older, I can go out and teach other women to be brave and take part in society, because I know what it takes – and I know it can be done. A lot of women are scared of politics, they fear for the violence and the intimidation. In my area there's a group of Zanus, most of them men in their 30'ies or 40'ies, very, very, very rough. You can see that they are dangerous people; they have scars all over and mean eyes. But they don't stop me, I know them and I know how to avoid them. I have become an 'Electoral Ambassador' in my area, organised by a youth organisation. We try to encourage the untapped youth vote, by arranging workshops, teaching about the electoral law, training people to be observers, etc. So I try to recruit more youths for training.*

*I think that there are three main groups of youth. 1) Those that are at school. 2) Those who failed at school and don't really do anything. They have little, if no hope. They are very difficult to connect with, because they almost have lost hope. 3) Those whose family have connections. They go to work or have managed to get back to school again. This is the easiest group to connect with; they're 'alive', and ready to look at the future with a sense that they belong in it.*

*Of course I'll vote I'm already registered: It was easy – you just go to the office and insist on being registered."*

### 2.3 Young people's participation in political and public affairs

Perhaps surprisingly, given the above description of youth's lack of political representation, our survey shows that young Zimbabweans are generally imbued with a will and dedication to be competent citizens, and they place great trust in the Zimbabwean society.

This attitude is persistently displayed by a solid majority ranging from two thirds to three quarters relative to a wide variety of questions on related issues: Two thirds have participated in community meetings, almost half has 'raised an issue' at such meetings, they believe no-one is above the law, not even the president, whom they consider should be held accountable by the parliament and by the media as well. They take a lively interest in political affairs - more than a quarter of them seek information on political issues every day. One out of twenty do so on the internet (6%, see Table 14).

They seem to act according to these values; during the elections in 2008, 17% actively campaigned for a particular party or candidate in (remember that 30%

<sup>4</sup> Youth Sector Analysis Zimbabwe, p. 126. Probe Market Research 2012 for SIDA.

of the present sample were too young to vote at that time) - but even more, a quarter (25%), intends to do so in the forthcoming elections (see table 19).

The youth is eager participants in building democracy through participation: Half of Zimbabwe's youth is registered to vote (the majority of the non-registered being young first-time voters- see Table 9). Of the non-registered, 50% say they will go register before elections; most knows the requirements for registering; only a small minority lack the necessary documents - however, most of these are first-time voters lacking a personal ID (see Table 24). Only 10% say outright that they are not interested in voting - a figure many 'developed' democratic societies would look upon with envy. Zimbabwe's present youth have grown up with respect for the country's institutions, and this seems to be imbued in them. The vast majority (3/4) think that youth has the same ability as others to influence their country and community, and they are convinced that their

Table 3

With regard to the most recent national Presidential run-off election held in June 2008 which statement is true for you?	Total %
You were too young to vote	30
You were not registered to vote	15
You voted in the elections	37
You decided not to vote	6
You could not find the polling station	-
You were prevented from voting	1
You did not have time to vote	1
You did not vote because you could not find your name in the voters' register	0
Did not vote for some other reason	10
Don't Know / Can't remember	0

vote counts (see Table 20). They also elicit as their first choice, to go to the police if they were violently and physically attacked by a supporter of another political party (71%)<sup>5</sup>; only 9% would try to get back to the person, "using the same method" (see Table 21) But their experience with the country's harsh realities

means that their trust is fraying. Youth's attitude to the police is telling in this respect: When asked about public service delivery, half of the youth (51%) find it "easy" or "very easy" to get help from the police. What

Table 4

In your opinion how much of a democracy is Zimbabwe today?	Female %	Male %	Total %
Not a democracy	13	20	17
A democracy, with major problems	32	32	32
A democracy, but with minor problems	29	27	28
A full democracy	13	15	14
Do not understand question /do not understand what 'democracy' is	3	1	2
Don't know	11	5	8

about the other half? 40% says it is "difficult" or "very difficult"<sup>6</sup> (see Table 22). That's a very high proportion of dissatisfaction and disapproval.

The approving yet critical attitude to the country's institutions is repeated in almost similar proportions when its democratic merits are summed up. Not even half of the youth, only 42%, think Zimbabwe is either a full democracy or one with only minor problems. The proportion of the disapproving is larger; almost half, 49%, say the country has major problems in democracy, of these more than a third doesn't even think the country is a democracy (17%).

## 2.4 Youth abhors political violence

A resounding majority of Zimbabwean youth (88%) say they will not accept political violence under any circumstance. Given the volatile situation that many communities sometimes find themselves in, and given that political violence is an almost daily event in the country as such, this is a very high proportion who has decided to refrain from this means – especially since quite a number of youth themselves have been victims of the violence (see below). Their constraint is further confirmed by the fact that only a small minority of 6% think that they might find themselves in a situation where they might use violence "for a just cause".

The table describes the respondents' stated intention not to be violent so the question is how many youth has actually personally taken part in violence? Firstly one should consider whether youth can be expected

<sup>5</sup> The police are rarely perceived in the Zimbabwean population as direct instigators of political violence, though there is a clear perception of the force being abused to suppress opposition or critical voices.

<sup>6</sup> 9% "had never tried" and 1% answered "do not know".

Table 5

Statement 1: The use of violence is never justified in Zimbabwean politics today. Statement 2: In this country, it is sometimes necessary to use violence in support of a just cause.

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Agree Very Strongly With Statement 1	52	58	53	54	54
Agree With Statement 1	34	32	35	32	34
Agree With Statement 2	4	2	3	3	3
Agree Very Strongly With Statement 2	4	1	1	5	3
Agree With Neither	3	3	2	3	3
Don't know	4	5	6	3	4

to reveal such activity to a researcher? According to MPOI, who conducted the survey, chances are quite good that respondents will answer honestly. Firstly, the survey is conducted anonymously. Secondly, perpetrators might want to get it off their chest. Thirdly, MPOI makes sure that the question is approached from various angles and at intervals in the survey.

If we list the answers youth gives to these questions, we see the following responses: 10 individuals of the 1,000 questioned (1%) answered "once or twice" to the following question: "Have you ever used force or violence for a political cause". Nobody answered in the category "Several times", and one person answered in the category "Often". When the essence of the question is repeated later in the survey, 25 individuals reply confirming to the question "Have you ever participated in any way in an act of political violence?" giving a frequency of 2,5%.

Based on this it should be safe to state that only 1-3% has actually ever been involved in perpetration of political violence. This is a very hopeful finding: The culture of violence is not ingrained. So much for older politicians' perception that youth is easy prey to manipulative elders.

The country's generally violent culture is however also reflected amongst youth. Many have been victims of political violence, and a vast proportion feel intimidated even in their daily lives by this.

Who does youth see as the best agents for stopping political violence? Once again, their trust in society and its institutions is worth noting. As the most important agency to stop political violence, most youth point to the police (56%) and community leaders (30%). 14% find that Zanu PF could stop the political violence; half that number (8%) suggest that MDC-T might be able to do so - perhaps a reflection of whom they finger as the violence's instigators? Church leaders and war veterans may play some role too (7-8%), as may NGOs (5%), whereas headmasters, radio and TV are considered having practically no effect on stopping violence (see Table 23).

Overall, Zimbabwean youth embrace the social values often associated with the stabilising and developmental effect of democratic values of the middleclass. Development of such middleclass values is often seen as a crucial step towards creating a modern, economically sound and stable society. From this perspective, the future of Zimbabwe should look bright.

## 2.5 Youths feel restrained

Yet Zimbabwean youth feels restrained. They are able and ready to contribute, but some institutional realities restrain them. Sure, two thirds say they have participated in community meetings - but almost the entire remaining group (30%) say they would too, "if they've had the chance". Why did they not have this opportunity?

Table 6

	Yes %	No %	Refuse to answer %	Don't know %
Have you ever been a victim of political violence?	13	87	0	0
Were any of your family or close friends victims of political violence	43	56	1	1

We observe the same sentiment of feeling restrained in further areas of public life - "if given the chance", 41% would also 'raise an issue' (47% have done so) and 29% would participate in a march or demonstration (only 6% have done so) (see Table 13). Our survey does not reveal specifically why these large proportions of youths have not been able to participate in such activities. But it overwhelmingly points to the fact that these large proportions of youths feel 'un-used' or 'under-engaged' in such political activities of representation.

Zimbabwean daily life is full of examples of how party, state or patriarchal structures tend to define any public agenda. One such example is the recent constitution-making exercise. At the local outreach meetings meant for the population to be able to express their desires for the new constitution, officials came to poll them with set questionnaires. Thus, the issues that citizens could express their views on were pre-defined. For youth, this was yet another example of how adults decide the issues and the agenda for them. There was no room for youth's own input. Youth in some rural areas can also give examples of how they were invited to take part in outreach meetings, but not to speak, as party and village heads had decided beforehand who should speak.

As recently as March 2<sup>nd</sup>, another glaring example was presented as national television broadcasted President Robert Mugabe's 89<sup>th</sup> birthday party in Bindura. A young representative of the 21st February Movement<sup>7</sup> was asked to step forward and present "the youth's" wishes. What did he demand? This young man firstly wished for Zanu PF to stop imposing leaders on local or youth organisations. And secondly, that in the party's primary election, locals were allowed to decide more freely on their own candidates.

A crucial source of youth's feeling of exclusion and being restrained is revealed in the survey, as a large proportion of Zimbabwe's youth do not "feel free".

Almost four out of five (79%) say they have to be careful about what they say about politics. Half of the youth population fear political intimidation daily and even more, 81% fear political intimidation during elections. These are highly disturbing figures. The sense of restraint from lack of freedom is persistent and pervading; almost half of Zimbabwean youth do not feel free to join any party (45%) or to say what they think (45%) (see Table 8). In addition, 13% feel powerless towards intimidation and violence and indicate that they have to "suffer in silence as they are not physically able to retaliate" (Table 21). Perhaps most disturbingly, almost half (41%) feel under pressure to vote in a particular way (Table 8c).

Table 7

In this country, how often do people:	Never %	Rarely %	Often %	Always %	Don't know %
Have to be careful about what they say about politics?	5	14	36	43	2
Have to fear political intimidation during election campaigns?	5	13	33	48	2
Have to fear political intimidation as they go about their daily lives?	15	32	31	21	2

In conclusion it is obvious that Zimbabwe's youth is geared toward taking over society from their elders, they have interest in country and society, are eager to be active participants - but do not feel free or welcome to fully do so.

## 2.6 The rural/urban divide is distinctive but not large

In many issues there is little distinction between the standpoints of youth according to their residence in rural or urban areas; they equally distance themselves from political violence, are equally insisting on promoting women's and girls' rights, even when it goes against tradition. Furthermore, they are equally inclined to vote yes or no in the referendum on the new constitution, and they are equally convinced that their vote counts.

But there are significant differences. Rural youth is far less optimistic about the future than their urban peers. They also have a pervading sense of being poorer off than other youths, not surprisingly, as they are poorer off: they are more frequently without any cash income

<sup>7</sup> Created by Zanu PF publicity officials with the aim of celebrating Robert Mugabe; named after his birthday.

or sufficient food, have less access to clean water, medical treatment and fuel for cooking.

There are also differences regarding political affairs: A slightly larger proportion of rural youth indicate that they or their families have been victims of political violence - but still, they are markedly more interested in politics than urban youth. This latter manifests itself in several areas: Compared to urban youth, the rural youth is more likely to attend rallies, to be registered as voters (53% rural, 43% urban - and a significant smaller proportion of non-registered rural youth will not register (11% vs. 16% urban). More of those who could vote in 2008 actually did so in the rural areas, more look forward to participating in forthcoming elections, and the rural youth has also more frequently taken part in community meetings or raised issues. Differences in political values are also clear, though not massive. An increased fraction of rural respondents (5-10%) have a slightly more authoritarian tilt than their urban counterparts (Table 17 - finding it acceptable that government ban organisations opposed to its policy, let the army govern, allow only one party to stand, limit media freedom), and find Zimbabwe a

“full” democracy or one with “minor problems”.

There’s however a marked distinction in the feeling of freedom/restraint. In general, rural youth feel less inhibited than their urban peers - however it should be noted that more than a third of rural youth do not feel free to say what they think, join a political party or vote without feeling pressured.

Not surprisingly, there’s also a marked difference in urban and rural youth’s access to news media, especially TV and internet, but also newspapers - though it should be noted that a fifth, 20%, of rural youth say they access the internet weekly. Also, though youth in general has very good access to telephones, rural youth is still lacking behind (64% of rural youth use the phone daily vs. 90% of urban youth), (table 11).

This lesser exposure to the national discourse through diminished access to media might assist in explaining some of the differences noted above. It might also be reflected in the fact, that when asked who the respondents believe sent the researchers

Table 8  
In this country, how free are you:

<b>A To say what you think</b>	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
Not at all free %	16	30	21	20	21	21	21
Not very free %	22	28	22	26	22	25	24
Somewhat free %	31	25	31	27	31	28	29
Completely free %	31	16	25	26	25	26	26
Don't know %	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
<b>B To join any political organization you want</b>	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
Not at all free %	20	32	27	22	25	24	24
Not very free %	19	25	20	23	19	23	21
Somewhat free %	28	21	27	23	27	24	25
Completely free %	30	19	22	31	24	28	26
Don't know %	3	3	4	1	5	1	3
<b>C To choose who to vote for without feeling pressured</b>	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
Not at all free %	19	26	22	20	22	21	21
Not very free %	20	22	19	21	20	21	20
Somewhat free %	25	22	25	22	22	25	24
Completely free %	34	28	29	34	31	33	32
Don't know %	3	2	4	2	6	1	3

for this survey, a considerable larger proportion of rural youth (59%) thinks that it is some or other branch of government (compared to 46% of urban youth). Similarly, only a tenth of the rural respondents have really understood that it is a private research company, half the proportion of their urban peers (19%) who understood this fact<sup>8</sup>. These divergences in media exposure and perception of whom they are responding to is perhaps also influencing the rural respondents' answers to questions of a more political nature, perhaps inducing them to answer in a more conservative, authoritarian way. From this perspective, however, it is quite remarkable that almost 40% of rural youth consistently say they feel un-free in various aspects.

## 2.7. Gender aspects

Young women tend to be less interested and active in political issues than their male peers. Almost three

quarter of young women (63%) say they are not at all or not very interested in politics compared to less than half (40%) amongst their male peers – and vice versa, only 9% of young women find politics 'very interesting' in contrast to 25% of the young men. Consequently, fewer young women are registered to vote and actually take part in voting. Whereas 55% of the young men are registered, only 44% of the young women are likewise, (table 9).

The reasons for this is likely complex and mainly linked to traditional notions of men's and women's societal limits and obligations, including a stronger feeling amongst (young) women of being outside this realm. 62% of young women feel that "sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand it" (see Table 15). Globally, this is a classical response of people feeling outside decision-making, whether in national



<sup>8</sup> Standard procedure during MPOI questionnaire research is to explain twice to respondents that the survey is conducted by a private organisation unlinked to government, NGOs etc.; this is done before the actual questioning.

## Box 2

## Lucia: The Football Coach

Lucia is a 20-year old woman, deeply involved in community affairs and in sports – and desperate to improve her educational status. Her parents live in Masvingo and have only limited resources, so she lives with an aunt in a Harare high-density suburb. She is almost completely dependent on her aunt to give her a few dollars to survive on.

*Apart from educating myself, my thing is football! I used to play but injured my one ankle, so now I am a football coach for the under-15 players, both girls and boys. In addition, I'm involved in the Youth Forum's local programmes of community activity. We go to old peoples' homes, orphanages, clean up streets and help with income-generating projects. Last year we made scarves with logos for our local school. I like designing and organised a cousin who has a printing business to print t-shirts for the school's students as well. We made a tiny surplus that we used for the football teams.*

*My school fell apart some years ago and I was stranded. I tried looking for a job but it was hard. I felt I was being pushed around for nothing, and then thinking about what people think about you, what they say about you, since I did not really do anything. I cried a lot, as I didn't think I had a future.*

*Finally, last year an uncle arranged to help me to go back to school – but I had to finalise two years' classes in only nine months. However, I managed and actually got the highest marks of all in class. So now I have my O-levels, and I want to push on, but lack the money as my aunt has other children to help. I want to go to university and study sociology or become a social worker.*

*I'm not interested in politics, and I don't think I'll vote. I'm not registered. Politics have ruined the country. Politics doesn't make sense, like the violence at last election. The problem is that to be involved, you will have to belong to one particular camp and that immediately cuts you off from the other side. You can't be neutral. I hate that!*

or local (or even domestic) issues. It's a feeling of helplessness, or at least of "being outside" and not respected. This interpretation of young women's attitude is underscored by the fact that 50% more

young women than young men feel that "for someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have" (13% young women vs. 8% young males - see Table 16).

This could be a result of young women being especially constrained in finding space in which to express themselves. In their outreach, government institutions, political parties and civil society organisations do not always consider the realities of young women. As an example, some meetings take place at night, but according to the survey, young women generally feel more insecure "walking at night" than young men. Traditional family patterns tend to gravitate against evening meetings as parents often demand that young women stay at home after 5 pm.

It is the experience of Action Aid Zimbabwe that even in youth organisations young women often feel constrained, as the organisations are dominated by men. Moreover, young women often complain that they don't get room in the women's organisations as these are dominated by 'aunties', older ladies.

The survey does however also point to some important possible entry points to connect with young women. They have similar access to mobile phones as young men and they are similarly eager to raise an issue "if given the chance" as their male peers (table 11, table 13). Though young women are less active in youth organisations and at meetings compared to young men, the survey shows that young women are far more active in other types of civic organisations and in church meetings outside services. Perhaps this is

Table 9

How interested would you say you are in politics?	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
Not at all interested %	18	19	24	13	27	11	17
Not very interested %	30	39	39	27	40	27	33
Somewhat interested %	33	27	27	35	25	36	31
Very interested %	18	14	9	25	8	25	17
Don't know %	1	1	1	0	1	0	1

  

Are you a registered voter of Zimbabwe?	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
Yes %	53	43	44	55	13	80	50
No %	47	56	56	44	87	18	50
Not sure %	1	0	0	1	0	1	1



where young women are more easily approached?

The fact that young women feel particularly excluded is a democratic shortcoming in itself. Looking at the figures from the survey, one might further detect ominous warnings of the consequences of this, as more young women tend to hold authoritarian views than their male peers. Though the vast majority of young women (78%) and men (85%) want their leaders to be elected through open and honest elections, a small group of young women do seem less confident in democracy and the democratic obligations of those in power than young men; 50% more young women than young men discard completely the choosing of the country’s leaders through open and honest elections (12% vs. 8%).

Similarly, young women are less than their male peers disapproving of allowing only one party, letting the army govern and abolishing elections and parliament (see Tables 16, 17).

**Table 10**  
**Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections. Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country’s leaders.**

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.	Female %	Male %	Total %
Agree Very Strongly With Statement 1 %	53	60	56
Agree With Statement 1 %	25	25	25
Agree With Statement 2 %	7	6	7
Agree Very Strongly With Statement 2 %	12	8	10
Agree With Neither %	2	1	1
Don't know	2	0	1

The pattern is consistent in all of the survey’s series of questions gauging respondents’ democratic attitudes. Young women’s less democratic attitude could be a consequence of the level of understanding of issues. They are, after all, the main losers in the education crisis; more girls leave schools than boys and they often do so at an earlier age. The less educated is more likely to go for ‘brute force’ in governance, feeling that force is the only efficient tool for solving serious problems. It’s also a reflection of lack of space to discuss alternatives, and lack of space in which they can involve themselves in local decision-making or even in decisions on their own affairs.

Constitutional issues have been at the heart of modern Zimbabwe’s political contest. All political camps have for years agreed that the present “Lancaster House” constitution should be substituted by a modern and more democratic one. After pressure from civil society, a government-proposed draft was presented to voters in 2000. The MDC and the umbrella civil society organisation National Constitutional Assembly rejected this draft and a majority of voters backed



# 3. Youth and the upcoming referendum and elections

them in this; since then the issue has been an integral part of opposition and mainstream politics. It has also been a consistent and crucial civil society demand.

As the present forced coalition government was formed on the foundation of the General Political Agreement of 2008, this agreement also included a defined procedure for a constitution-making process leading to a referendum on the proposed draft. After years of delay and hard negotiating, the parties finally agreed on a draft in early February 2013. Most of Zimbabwe was taken by surprise at the announcements by the political leaders that the referendum on the draft new constitution will take place on March 16<sup>th</sup>. This left less than five weeks for debating the draft.

Zanu PF's leaders have for years insisted on "early elections", latest at its conference in December 2012. The MDC parties have urged caution, demanding extensive electoral reforms to create conditions for free and fair elections. SADC has backed the MDC parties in this demand as far as insisting that all parties must agree to the conditions under which elections are held.

The elections hold hope of change of political leadership. Even as Zanu PF honours President Mugabe's leadership, its supporters and leaders often express a wish for renewal. For supporters of the MDC parties, there's the hope of finally succeeding in coming to power. The MDC parties draw support from a wide variety of quarters in the country. Their different aspirations are all condensed into the party's one-word slogan: Chinjira, change. This is likely to

appeal to youth feeling constrained by the present set-up. Should such change actually take place, it might even result in renewed opportunity for youth to improve their lives and partake in public affairs. At present, more than half of the youth, 59%, feel close to a particular political party and are consequently likely to feel especially involved in the upcoming elections.

## 3.1. Youth and the draft constitution

The draft constitution specifically mention youth as a group for which government holds a certain responsibility. It confirms their rights, for instance to education, to opportunities for employment or other forms of empowerment, and obliges government to protect youth from abuse or exploitation.

In its analysis of the draft, the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights note this as amongst "an impressive list of objectives that can guide interpretation and application of constitutional rights and duties. However actual compliance with these by duty-holders will be harder to achieve in practice."

A number of civil society groups have condemned the March 16th date as giving inadequate time for the country's voters to study and discuss the content of this crucial document. Also, in January the Zimbabwe Election Committee, ZEC, which by law is tasked with the holding of elections and referendums and with voter education, stated that it would need at least 10 weeks to prepare for the holding of the referendum. They were in reality given less than half of that time. Further, controversy is brewing over the issue of

sourcing funds for the referendum; government does not have the necessary means, estimated at \$80-100 million, and the short notice has made it impossible for donors to find the funds. The minister of justice, Patrick Chinamasa has however indicated that private companies are ready to donate the necessary funds – spawning speculation that illegally siphoned off diamond revenue will be used.

The National Constitutional Assembly, NCA, took government to court over the issue of the short notice for the referendum, but courts have dismissed the claim. Along with a small group of civil society organisations, NCA has long argued for voting no at the referendum, finding the entire process excluding and flawed to the extent of being illegitimate. Many youth organisations have historical bonds with NCA and share its criticism of the process, representing the youth group that feels marginalised in the process.

This sentiment is further exacerbated by the present mood of defeat as it is expected the ‘Yes’-side has already won. The three main parties have all agreed to the draft constitution after a long and gruelling process of negotiation and compromising. They seem determined to bring about a speedy referendum in order to proceed to the ensuing elections as quickly as possible; all of them apparently convinced that they will gain by acting hastily. In doing so they risk disenfranchising a large part of the population, notably the young first-time voters, as these do not have the necessary documents for being allowed to vote (31%, see Table 24).

Presenting a national ID will provide access to voting in the referendum. However, our survey shows that quite a large proportion of youth does not possess a national ID (17%). This is particularly true for many

first-time voters as almost a third of the 18-24 year old youth does not possess this document. The problem is slightly more widespread in rural than in urban areas, and is generally a larger problem for young women than young men. It is further compounded by the fact that most youth find it difficult to obtain an ID (see Table 22).

### **3.2. Youth and elections; preparations still lacking**

There are a number of controversial, contentious issues pertaining to the upcoming elections, mainly regarding the lack of service provided by Zimbabwe Election Committee, ZEC, and the state of the voters roll. In spite of his earlier insistence on thorough electoral reform, Tsvangirai has recently repeatedly suggested this should happen as early as July this year. Along with the haste for holding referendum, this gives worry that MDC-T is ready to compromise on reforms.

Civil Society has consistently demanded a number of changes before the holding of elections (see for instance MS/Action Aid Denmark’s briefing paper “Along the Winding Road” from June 2012<sup>9</sup>). If the reforms are not implemented, there is not sufficient space for political expression.

As the survey has shown, youth is particularly vulnerable to being disenfranchised or further marginalised in elections. Contrasting with their high hopes for the future, there’s a serious risk that this particular generation of youth might get seriously disappointed.

At the time of writing there were no signs of the government making a particular effort to alleviate youth’s immediate problem of lack of documents and voter registration. This points to two further major issues pertaining to the upcoming elections.

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<sup>9</sup> Ref: [www.ms.dk/afrika/zimbabwe](http://www.ms.dk/afrika/zimbabwe)

# 4. Governmental and institutional efforts to include youth

## 4.1. The voters roll

Zimbabwe's electoral system requires that an eligible person must first register before s/he is allowed to vote and this has been the law and practice since the 1985 elections. As a consequence, voter registration is a critical function in the overall electoral process. It has been a highly contested function and Zimbabwean civil society has consistently over the last years showed the present voters roll to be in a very sorry state. Too many voters are missing from the roll and among those registered a large proportion seems to be dead or missing. Indeed, the recently resigned<sup>10</sup> ZEC chairman Justice Simpson Mutambanengwe publicly conceded in August 2010 that: "As it is, the voters roll is in disarray" and that it needed cleaning up. Civil society and the two MDC parties have persistently sought to hold ZEC accountable to this task, but so far have achieved few results. One of the ZEC commissioners estimated that the agency would need at least a year to clean up the voters roll, however in February 2011 the ZEC chairman said it could be done in three months.

In spite of this, ZEC has not managed to prove they have as yet accomplished the task.

Before the 2008 elections, the voter registration function was performed by the Office of the Registrar-General (RG) but since then the electoral laws state that custody of the voters roll is vested in the ZEC. However, the actual management of the voters roll is still in the hands of the RG, perceived as being a staunch Zanu PF member in whom neither the MDCs nor the civil society have much trust. In March 2012, this distrust was further exacerbated as the Registrar General claimed to the state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) that the voters' register is "perfect".

ZEC in late 2012 announced that beginning January, it would embark on a voter registration campaign (including the deployment of mobile registration units), but so far, nothing has come of this - ostensibly due to lack of funds.



<sup>10</sup> High Court Judge Rita Makarau has been nominated for the post.

Police has recently initiated a clampdown on civil society organisations that had taken a special interest in assisting voters to register<sup>11</sup>. Civil Society often finds that officials responsible for registering new voters are non-cooperative. “They have so many ways of impeding it, for instance saying, ‘we can only register 5 per day’, etc.”, says a youth organisation leader. There have however been a number of media reports that the RG’s office is assisting in mass registering perceived Zanu PF voters.

All point to the need for ZEC to take fully charge of an impartial and thorough campaign to both clean the roll and add interested new voters to it. This is of particular importance for youth as a large majority (87%) of potential first-time voters are not yet registered (Table 9 above).

#### **4.2. Zimbabwe Election Committee**

Although commissioners are appointed by the three main political parties to the ZEC, the MDCs and civil society place little trust in the organisation’s operational impartiality. Indeed, in January Prime Minister Tsvangirai iterated an oft-proposed civil society demand that the entire staff of ZEC be vetted and large-scale changes introduced, as a substantial proportion of the staff is former army personnel or Central Intelligence Organisation agents, popularly regarded as Zanu PF supporters or instruments. These are mainly the same staff that manned the commission during the 2008 presidential elections, whose results were considered by the opposition parties and civil society as fraudulent and manipulated. Tsvangirai has on earlier occasions included such changes in the necessary electoral reforms crucial to establishing conditions for free and fair elections. The demand is rejected by Zanu PF and by the management of ZEC.

ZEC is also the government agency charged with voter education, and NGOs need accreditation from ZEC to do voter education. Further, they’ll need ZEC accreditation for all material to be used or utilize ZEC material. They are not allowed to use donor funding for this. It is however a widespread practice for CS organisations to approach such issues through “civic education” or “social studies” for which they have no legal constraints.

On ZEC, the umbrella civil society organisation Zimbabwe Election Support Network, ZESN, in a January 2013 report concluded, that:

“Over the years, the reputation of the ZEC (and its predecessor) has never been above mediocre, thanks to its performance that has never been perceived as laudable. Though there have been changes at the governance level, to date there is no convincing evidence that it has become more autonomous, impartial and professional. The new ZEC should change the way it does business and needs to be assisted to do so. The fact of ZEC being inadequately resourced, understaffed and undertrained is a legendary historical fact... It will not obtain the good will from the political stakeholders and the public unless it exhibits professionalism at all levels of its structure and operations.”

And, “ZEC must, without undue delay, begin the critical process of voter education. Indeed, education of voters should be taken as a continuous process; it must not be tied to electoral cycles. Voter education should be regarded as a collective and national effort.”<sup>12</sup> Youth in particular, especially first-time voters, has only limited experience with democratic procedures and are obviously the most needy of learning how the electoral system works – this is also a measure against young people accidentally spoiling their own ballot when finally in the election booth.

#### **4.3. Electoral reforms**

The long-awaited adjustment of the country’s electoral laws were passed by parliament in 2012 and signed into law by the president during September 2012. A contentious issue was whether voters should be able to vote at any polling station within their ward or should be consigned to a specific polling station. The latter procedure is perceived as the one giving least room for fraud – but may also, as was seen in the run-off presidential elections in 2008 provide the basis for violent retaliation towards those who “voted wrongly” in the first round. Consequently, the act will allow voters to cast their vote at any polling station within their ward.

Further changes to the electoral law will have to be introduced and passed by parliament after the expected approval of the new constitution to align the laws with

<sup>11</sup> During December-February, a number of Zimbabwe Human Rights Association and one National Youth Development Trust staff were arrested. The former organisation’s cases are still pending. Further, police raided the offices of the Habakkuk Trust, the Zimbabwe Peace Project and ZESN looking for what they called subversive material.

<sup>12</sup> “Zimbabwe’s Electoral Preparedness for the 2013 Harmonised Elections: Ready or Not”, p. 26. ZESN, January 2013.



the new constitution. Among important changes is the introduction of a semi-proportional system with a number of seats reserved for women in parliament. Preparations for these revisions have already been initiated, according to the responsible minister.

#### **4.4. Creating a climate conducive for free and fair elections**

Outside these institutional shortcomings, the authorities are apparently intended on putting a heavy lid on any discussion in civil society of the merits of the draft constitution. A meeting in Harare scheduled for February debating the draft constitution was cancelled by police for a number of reasons including the issue of the selection of panellists. Even more worrisome, the police on this occasion said they are “no longer allowing public meetings to be convened by NGOs outside the arrangements of government.”

In addition to the police harassment of civil society and youth organisations mentioned above, police also in February banned citizens from owning or using radios able to pick up short wave signals from radio stations outside the country. The broadcasts are produced by exiled Zimbabwean journalists based in Europe and the US.

In a move directly targeted at youth organisations, the Zanu PF minister for Youth Development, Indigenization and Empowerment recently had regulations introduced that compel youth organisations to register with the government-run Youth Council or risk being shut down.<sup>13</sup>

The regulations also dictate that youth groups should submit annual reports and accounts, as well as work plans and budgets to the Youth Council, which is largely viewed as an extension of President Robert Mugabe’s Zanu PF party. In addition, youth organisations are also compelled to pay an annual levy to the council. The regulations were mooted by the minister last year and then apparently shelved. However, they were without warning or publicity suddenly gazetted early this year with very little time for youth organisations to react. The organisations generally regard the measures as an attempt to discipline and control youth organisations presently not under the control of the ministry.

As demonstrated above, government is not at present involved in any activities targeting youth for increased participation. The political parties are rallying their supporters, but youth will find themselves marginalised in this, apart from being urged to vote for their party.

<sup>13</sup> Zimbabwe Youth Council (General) Regulations [SI 4/2013]

# 5. The Political Parties' efforts to include youth

## 5.1. Political parties marginalise youth

The optimistic Zimbabwean youth risk being disappointed in regards to their induction into the realm of political participation. The present political field with its elected representation in parliament and local councils is hotly contested with individuals and parties loath to give up whatever positions have been conquered.

Zimbabwe's political parties are not very open to recruiting active youth. In preparations for the coming elections, MDC-T has decided to "spare" incumbent MPs and councillors for contesting primary elections, in effect ring fencing these positions for the age group already represented. This has prompted MDC-T youth to demand a quota system that would ensure they are represented at every level of the party.

"We demand a quota system along the lines of gender parity system and our leadership should be aware this is our right," said MDC-T Youth Assembly national secretary for information Clifford Hlatshwayo recently. "We will persuade our leaders and tell them a peaceful and smooth transition in the future can only be realised if the youths have practical experience now."

Similarly, Zanu PF has always gone for tried and trusted candidates and is seen as even more exclusive to youth participation. It is indicative that a raft of established Zanu PF politicians known as the party's "young turks", eager to take over from the old guard, are all in their 40'ies or 50'ies. Consequently, it has become practice in the party to relegate eager younger candidates to constituencies where they have no chance of winning. Deliberate moves to inject new blood into the

structures are further likely to widen the party's factional cracks as youths' parliamentary aspirants are currently pushing for wholesale leadership renewal, fuelling divisions with the old guard which still prefers the seniority and hierarchical approach. Overall, the party is faced with the fact that tying its agenda to the liberation and anti-imperialism history and rhetoric does not appeal to youth.

In reality, none of the parties seems really interested in youth as active participants, but are happy to have their backing as voters, vigilantes, and campaigners. In all main camps these practices is bound to limit youth's enthusiasm for political participation.

# 6 ■ Civil Society's efforts to include youth

A large number of civil society organisations are involved in projects targeting youth. They are aiming at the group from many different angles and with various tools: income generating projects, livelihood projects, small loans schemes, sports, youth activities and much more. And yet, youth still feel marginalised.

One reason could be that a number of youth organisations are not that effective. Zimbabwe has a large number of youth organisations<sup>14</sup>, so large actually, that the sector appears fragmented with most of the organisations unable to perform their mandate due to lack of capacity. "There's a lot of repetition with too many organisations too small to do anything of measure," comments one youth organisation leader.

In the remaining 'serious' organisations, advocacy and inducements to political participation play a prominent role, explaining the nature of democracy, the role of elections, the need for youth to be active in these, not least local elections. Yet, some youth organisations involved in advocacy and providing platforms for youth find youth uninterested or outright apathetic. They look at youths as a slumbering group who needs to be woken up.

To civil society organisations working with youth, this survey's findings of a politically interested and engaged youth should come as encouraging news. Perhaps civil society organisations need to reflect over the discrepancy between the expressed wish of youth to be involved and their own perception of youth as being apathetic. This should have implications for their style or content of communications and cooperation

with youth. The most immediate interests of youth may not be national politics but other areas such as (lack of) education, the (lack of) platforms allowing youth to be heard, the lack of 'freedom' – and this is where youth may be reached.

One youth organisation leader broadly place youth in two major categories, 'the youth voice, in reality those active' and 'the rest': "The first group is look-

## Box 3

### Experienced organiser of youth activities: Listen to the Youth!

*Young people first and foremost need to feel that they are listened to and respected. For any organisational work with them you have to depart in ideas to activities that makes sense to them – and this they ultimately have to define themselves, be it sports, theatre, expressing themselves and above all: To make money.*

*At beginning of meetings you might be quite demoralised: They sit there with blank eyes, seemingly apathetic. Then you start asking them what they find interesting or how they spend their days and suddenly you notice that eyes light up! They see they are listened to; they start conversing amongst themselves and soon you might have a notion of, yes! We can do something!*

*It may be difficult beforehand to imagine what will actually be a motivating factor. Relax; you'll get there. They don't mind being motivated, but they prefer themselves to be the motivator! And don't worry; if you get the process going there'll always emerge a 'natural leader' out of the groups so that there's someone to rely upon for the follow-up.*

<sup>14</sup> The SIDA analysis of the youth sector mentioned above counts more than 600 organisations.

ing forward and wants to be enthusiastic. They find that being active gives them a chance to be heard and they aim to spread this enthusiasm. The majority however, is immobilised - they want to see an end to poverty and misery. For them elections is understood not of opportunity, but of threats. They do not see the connection between 'politics' and their private situation of lack of opportunities."

Furthermore, there is obviously a special challenge for civil society in general and youth organisations in particular to reach out to young women, given their description of the lack of space available to them. Only few civil society organisations cater for this. One important entry point to connect with young women could be social media especially mobile phones. Another entry point could be civic organisations other than youth organisations e.g. church related activities.

Overall, experience from the interviewed youth organisations demonstrate that bringing together youth, in itself is a starting point to help breaking down barriers and create space for "breathing freer". This is where youth may discover their individual strength as they involve themselves in collective activities. Youth organisations provide frameworks for this, but they and civil society organisations in general need to find alternative ways of engaging with the youth in order to tap in to the pool of engaged young women and men.

## 6.1. Youth organisations and the challenges before the elections

Even before the announcement of the short campaign period ahead of the referendum, youth organisation leaders interviewed for this report did not regard this as an important event. "It will come and pass as a non-event," comments one. "It could be utilised as a step to hype up interest for voting as such, but I don't think it will work, as the 'no'-vote will not be able to mobilise. It will just be yes-yes-yes."

Enthusiasm is likely to grow considerably when the elections draw nearer. In contrast to the referendum, where all major parties are advocating a 'yes' vote, the elections are seen as involving a real contest between the camps. This will present considerable challenges to the youth organisations overcoming their perception of the majority youth as being "immobilised".

There is however, optimism too: "Youth is more easily swept by excitement than older groups, and this is our chance", says one youth organisation leader. "Youth is more susceptible to peer pressure and popular culture, so if we can manage to get out there in a stylish, fashionable way, we will improve our chances of breaking through."

As the survey shows, there is a real opportunity for reaching youth through social media, not least via mobile phones and the internet. A few politicians have shown

Table 11

How often do you access a cell phone?	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
Daily %	64	90	72	74	71	74	73
Once or twice weekly %	19	7	16	14	17	14	15
A few times a month %	3	7	3	1	2	2	2
No Answer %	14	3	10	10	10	10	10

Table 12

Do you use a cell phone to access news on the internet?	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
Yes %	16	45	23	29	25	27	26
No %	7	17	9	11	13	8	10
No Answer %	77	39	68	60	63	65	64



themselves to be deft users of especially Facebook, two of them (both representing Zanu PF) even racking up a similar number of 'friends' as prominent pop stars (app. 5,000). Though this number seems small in the national context, one youth organisation leader offers this perspective: "Given that many youth feels marginalised they are often extremely grateful for any contact with people of influence. If they get a response through Facebook from a politician – who might even respond to their name, they feel respected, attracted, attached. And who-ever appears to be close to someone of influence has influence themselves in their peer group."

One youth organisation leader warns however against civil society's tendency to focus on negative and adverse conditions in their communications – "do we use the social media platforms to enforce hopelessness if we keep hammering on how much 'the system' is clamping down?" he asks.

# 7 ■ Conclusion

The above analysis of youth's perception of political participation along with the role that government, political parties and civil society play in engaging youth politically, presents both hope and risks regarding the future of Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwean youth displays a striking optimism regarding the future in five years' time, they embrace democratic values and they show eagerness to participate in decision-making. As for their space to participate, the two electoral events could hold hope for youth if they are given the opportunity to make their own choices. Also, the proposed constitution includes specific government obligations to youth.

Regarding the unity of the youth voice, it should be noted how the wishes expressed by the Zanu-loyal 21<sup>st</sup> February movement youth representative resonate with those of a huge number of their peers, regardless of political affiliation: Even amongst the most privileged of the Zimbabwean youth, those closest to Zanu PF power and patronage, the sense of exclusion, of marginalisation is clear. This is quite remarkable and might point towards the possibility of youth uniting on a platform reaching across party divisions to strengthen their collective voice.

Yet, there is also a risk of serious disillusion and disappointment among the youth. Given the depth and the magnitude of the last decade's economic

crisis, it will be nearly impossible to create enough jobs in the next five years for the huge number of youth without a regular source of income. Furthermore, the lack of space for young people in the political parties and government structures threatens to exclude the youth from decision-making instead of tapping into the potential.

How will this generation of Zimbabwean youth react to such disappointing developments? What will happen if the past five years of getting nowhere is perpetuated? It was long-term disappointment, build up over many years that sparked recent uprisings in the Arab world. Years of bitterness over getting no-where and living with the prospect of no jobs, no money, no freedom, not even space to express all that disappointment. Such sentiments may turn to anger and revolt. On the one hand such developments carry the risk of cementing authoritarian or violent methods. But on the other hand a Zimbabwean youth uniting across the country and bridging political affiliation could usher in change.

## **Recommendations**

Zimbabwean youth seems to be willing and eager to participate in decision-making at different levels, but a variety of institutional and structural barriers block their actual involvement. All actors can do much more to facilitate a higher degree of youth involvement.

### **The Government**

- Should act speedily to facilitate youth's access to crucial documents (e.g. national ID) allowing them to participate in the referendum and facilitate their access to be registered as voters.
- ZEC should assist with campaigns targeted directly at registering young voters, including sending mobile registration units to rural areas.
- Voter education should be carried out extensively and non-biased e.g. via civil society organisations.
- The demands for electoral reform should be met speedily and the harassment of civil society organisations halted immediately.

### **The Political Parties**

- Should take heed of youth's sense of exclusion from the political sphere. Thus they should invite youth to have real influence within the parties' own structures and give access for them to take up positions of importance.
- Should encourage young women to become candidates for positions of importance in parties and as duty bearers.
- Could increasingly utilise social media e.g. Facebook to interact with youth. Not only to profile older politicians but to listen to the voices of youth.

### **Civil Society Organisations**

- Must change the form and content of outreach activities in order to overcome the difference between youth's own expressed wish to be recognised and to participate actively, and the perception in many (not all) civil society organisations of youth as being passive and apathetic.
- Should analyse more in depth, 'what stops the youth?'/ 'what really gets them started?' in order to tap in to the pool of engaged young women and men.
- Youth organisations need to constantly revise their ways of communicating with youth. Social media and the utilisation of mobile phones as platforms for communications seem to be an opportunity to reach new and large groups of youth.
- Civil society organisations in general should do more and find alternative ways to accommodate young women, since the young women don't feel the traditional ways of organising and meeting are embracing them.

Table 13

Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?

<b>A</b>	<b>Attended a community meeting</b>	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
	Would never do this	3	9	6	4	5
	Would if had the chance	22	45	32	27	30
	Once or twice	26	55	24	25	24
	Several times	31	50	26	29	27
	Often	18	5	13	14	14
	Don't know	-	0	-	0	0

<b>B</b>	<b>Got together with others to raise an issue</b>	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
	Would never do this	11	16	16	9	13
	Would if had the chance	34	55	42	40	41
	Once or twice	25	17	21	23	22
	Several times	21	9	15	19	17
	Often	11	3	6	10	8
	Don't know	-	-	-	-	-

<b>C</b>	<b>Attended a demonstration or protest march</b>	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
	Would never do this	62	68	73	55	64
	Would if had the chance	30	26	22	35	29
	Once or twice	6	5	4	8	6
	Several times	1	0	0	1	1
	Often	1	-	0	0	0
	Don't know	1	0	1	1	1

Table 14

How often do you get political news from the internet?	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Never	85	56	79	71	75
Less than once a month	4	8	6	4	5
A few times a month	3	9	5	5	5
A few times a week	5	15	6	10	8
Every day	4	12	4	9	6
Don't know	0	0	0	0	0

Table 15

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like you cannot really understand what is going on.

	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
Strongly agree	27	25	34	18	33	21	26
Agree	29	30	28	30	29	29	29
Neither agree nor disagree	16	18	16	17	15	17	16
Disagree	14	13	10	17	10	17	14
Strongly disagree	11	13	9	15	9	15	12
Don't know / Don't understand	3	1	3	2	3	2	3

Table 16

Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
STATEMENT3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have	12	8	13	8	14	7	10
STATEMENT 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.	11	12	10	13	11	12	11
STATEMENT 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.	73	78	72	77	71	78	75
Don't know	5	3	5	2	5	3	4

Table 17

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?

<b>A</b>	<b>Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.</b>	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
	Strongly agree	32	51	33	44	39	37	38
	Agree	32	24	31	27	28	30	29
	Neither agree nor disagree	9	5	9	6	9	7	18
	Disagree	14	9	13	12	10	15	12
	Strongly disagree	10	8	9	10	9	10	9
	Don't know	4	2	5	2	6	1	3

<b>B</b>	<b>The army comes in to govern the country.</b>	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
	Strongly agree	43	61	46	44	49	50	49
	Agree	28	22	31	27	28	24	26
	Neither agree nor disagree	15	9	9	14	11	15	13
	Disagree	7	6	13	5	6	7	6
	Strongly disagree	3	1	9	2	2	3	2
	Don't know	4	2	5	5	5	3	4

<b>C</b>	<b>Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the President can decide everything.</b>	Rural	Urban	Female	Male	18-24	25-30	Total
	Strongly agree	37	57	40	49	45	43	44
	Agree	32	26	32	28	29	31	30
	Neither agree nor disagree	15	8	14	12	13	13	13
	Disagree	6	4	6	5	5	6	5
	Strongly disagree	5	3	3	5	3	5	4
	Don't know	4	2	5	2	5	2	3

Table 18

A: Thinking about the last national election, did you try to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party?

	Total %
Yes %	17
No %	83
Maybe %	0

B: Do you intend to try to persuade others to vote for a certain candidate or party in the next national election?

	Total %
Yes %	25
No %	70
Maybe %	5

Table 19

Do you think that the youths have the same ability as others to exercise political influence or pressure through the voting process?

	Total %
Yes %	72
No %	10
Not sure/Don't know %	18

Table 20

Do you think your vote counts (i.e. affects policy and politics)?	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	74	71	70	76	73
No	13	17	16	13	15
Not sure/Don't know	13	11	14	12	13

Table 21

Which is the one most likely step you would take?

What would you do if you were violently and physically attacked by a supporter of another political party?	Rural %	Urban %	Total %
Report this person to the police	69	74	71
Get this person back (or plan to do this), using the same methods	10	9	9
Suffer in silence as I am not physically in the position to retaliate	13	13	13
Other (Specify)	8	2	6
Refused to answer	-	1	0
Don't know	1	0	1

Table 22

A. An identity document, such as a birth certificate, driver's license, passport or voter's card

Based on your experience, how easy or difficult is it to obtain the following services from government? Or do you never try and get these services from government?	Rural %	Urban %	Total %
Very Difficult	26	29	27
Difficult	30	29	30
Easy	30	30	30
Very easy	13	13	13
Never try	2	-	1
Don't know	0	-	0

B. Help from the police

	Rural %	Urban %	Total %
Very Difficult	12	15	13
Difficult	26	29	27
Easy	36	36	36
Very easy	17	10	15
Never try	9	10	9
Don't know	1	1	1

Table 23

In your experience in general, who in your community or with influence over your community, has the power to stop the violence that has affected Zimbabwe since 2000? Name as many as you think have this power.

Church leaders	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	6	10	9	6	8
No	86	78	81	86	84
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

Chiefs	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	16	1	12	10	11
No	77	87	79	82	80
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8



<b>Police</b>	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	56	56	53	58	56
No	37	32	37	34	36
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

<b>Headmasters</b>	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	1	1	1	1	1
No	92	87	90	91	90
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

<b>NGOs</b>	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	4	8	5	6	5
No	89	85	84	84	84
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

<b>War veterans</b>	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	10	3	7	8	7
No	83	86	89	90	89
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

<b>Local CIO</b>	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	2	2	2	2	2
No	91	85	84	84	84
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

ZANU-PF	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	15	14	13	16	14
No	78	78	77	76	77
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

MDC-T	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	5	13	6	9	8
No	88	75	84	83	83
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

Other community leaders	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	34	21	29	30	30
No	59	67	61	61	61
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

Radio	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	1	2	2	0	1
No	92	86	89	92	90
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8

Television	Rural %	Urban %	Female %	Male %	Total %
Yes	1	2	1	0	1
No	92	86	89	91	90
Other	0	-	0	-	0
Refused to answer	1	0	-	1	1
Don't know/Can't remember	7	12	9	7	8





Faelledvej 12  
DK-2200 Copenhagen N  
+45 7731 0000  
ms@ms.dk  
ms.dk