

MATSOUTH BULLETIN



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EDITOR'S NOTE

The build up to this year's August elections has been a joy to follow across Matabeleland South province. What makes this election special is the number of young people that have registered to vote and those that are running as candidates for vacant council and MPs positions. Considering the fact that youth participation has been missing in the previous electoral processes, their massive show of interest in this election is something to be proud of as an organisation that champions their effective and meaningful participation

in civic processes. In this newsletter, we document the challenges faced by the youths to participate in electoral processes as well as the strategies that improve their meaningful participation. We also highlight key successes such as young people running as candidates in the upcoming August 2023 elections.

Happy Reading

Bongie!

#ZwakalaNtanga

Demystifying Myths about Youths Participation in Civic Processes



The limited participation of youths in the past electoral processes gave birth to many misinformed assumptions about youths' interests in elections. Unfortunately, these assumptions continue being spread by people who lack understanding while others simply follow these misconceptions to prevent youths from participating in electoral process.

Since last year, the organisation has been working closely with young people in activities meant to increase their involvement and participation in civic processes such as the Virtual Talk Shows and the Civic and Voter Education Forums. It was during these activities that young

people managed to show that the many assumptions about their involvement in civic spaces are misinformed. The following are some of the **questions** linked to the myths about youth participation in civic spaces.

1st Question: *Are Young People Apathetic about electoral processes?*

Many people and community leaders assume that young people are apathetic about electoral processes. This means that despite having elections, young people do not bother to register to vote and do not care about the candidates running for council positions in their respective communities.

Answer: *Young People are not Apathetic about Electoral Processes!*

The Virtual activities in which young people aspiring to be Councilors and MPs participated in showed that young people are more than willing and happy to participate in electoral processes as long as the environment is pro-youth. Also through the civic and voter education programs, young people showed that they wanted to learn more about electoral processes; what is needed to participate as voters and candidates. This meant that the assumption that they are politically apathetic was not entirely true and misinformed. In other words, there is always a reason for the limited participation of youths in elections for example there is a good number of youth that failed to register to vote as they did not have IDs while others were turned away by ZEC officials for carrying IDs which they claimed had blurry features.

2nd Question: *Are the youths too Young to Lead?*

Misinformed people often assume that young people lack maturity, knowledge and experience to lead. Some community leaders believe that young people do not have the capacity and intelligence to make informed decisions hence they continue denying young people leadership positions in favour of those that are over 35 years old.

Answer: *Young people are capable of participating in leadership spaces!*

During our Youth Leadership Bootcamp, young people showed that they are actually

capable of making informed decisions. It is true that they lack the experience however; the leadership trainings they received prepared them to be better leaders and decision makers. In other words, young people are not too young to lead but rather need the support and experience of the old generation as well as the leadership trainings to be able to become better leaders of today and tomorrow.

3rd Question: *Are young people violent and barbaric?*

Young people are believed to be the perpetrators of violence during elections and demonstrations/protests. As a result of this assumption, young people are seen as a threat to societal security and stability.

Answer: *Young people are not violent but rather participate in processes that are peaceful and non violent.*

Young people are actually the agents of peace who are scared of taking part in processes that threaten their wellbeing. This is the reason many young people avoided participating in the previous electoral processes that were marred by violence. In all the activities conducted by CYDT such as the Youth Civil Rights Competitions, young people participated peacefully. In cases where young people are involved in violence, the organisation learnt that young people are usually the victims lured into acts of violence by certain candidates to fulfil their own political agendas.

Identified Strategies that Promote Meaningful Youth Participation in electoral Processes

What is Meaningful Youth Participation?

Meaningful Youth Participation is when young people are equally and equitably represented and engaged as key stakeholders or partners in the making of decisions and policies that impact on their wellbeing. It means that young people are included in activities with the potential of affecting their lives; for example, taking part in electoral processes that includes: registering to vote and the eventual voting process, running as candidates in elections and being part of election observers or polling officials.



Meaningful youth participation also entails that young people are involved in the problem identification process (need assessment), planning (development of strategies to deal with the problem), and implementation of planned strategies/activities of dealing with the identified problem as well as taking part in the evaluation of the executed strategies/activities. In other words, meaningful youth participation means that

young people are involved throughout the whole process in both local and national governance.

In the past elections, the realization of meaningful youth participation has been problematic in Matabeleland South province compared to the old generation. The older citizens have been dominating as candidates and voters while young people's voter turn out has been relatively low; a situation linked to the volatile political environment that tends to scare or intimidate many young people from participating in electoral processes. The lack of support or encouragement from the older citizens and leaders who have been viewing youths as a threat to their public office positions is another explanation of limited youth participation in the past elections.

However, the upcoming August 2023 elections seem to have turned the tide in favour of youth participation in electoral processes. With thousands of youths managing to register to vote and taking part in by-elections held in Matabeleland South, young people's participation has significantly improved compared to the previous years. As a result, the fast approaching 2023 elections promise to be a hugely youth affair as youths are also running as council candidates while

thousands are promising to turn out to vote on election day across Matabeleland South.

Identified strategies for Meaningful Youth Participation

The positive number of youth that registered to vote and those that are running as candidates for the 2023 elections can be credited to the several strategic activities carried-out by CYDT and young people during the voter registration campaign for the 2023 elections. The organisation conducted activities like the Civic and Voter Education Forums and a Youth Leadership Boot camps in which young people gained information and knowledge on how to mobilise their peers to register to vote and what they needed to do to run as candidates. It was through these activities that the organisation identified strategies that promote meaningful youth participation in Matabeleland South. The following are some of the key strategies:

- **Youth Led:** Activities meant to improve youth participation should be started and led by the youth. This was learnt through the different activities conducted by CYDT in which after gaining information on the importance of participating in electoral processes, young people managed to register to vote as well as take it upon themselves to go around their communities, mobilising their peers to register to vote. These activities proved that young people are more than capable of taking charge of their future as they used the information gained to mobilise their peers to register to vote on their own.

In a sense, when young people are capacitated with skills and information, they do not need to be led or pushed to do something but rather need to initiate their own processes which gives them a sense of ownership of those processes.

- **Consultative Approach:** Before implementing activities meant to improve youth participation, there is need to engage and consult young people as key stakeholders. Many times, strategies and policies meant to improve youth participation are established without the input of the youth. Lesson drawn from engaging youth leaders as key stakeholders was that, when young people's voices are heard before the execution of initiatives meant to improve their participation in civic and electoral processes, the chances of those initiatives succeeding are high. In a sense, young people are likely to adopt or follow an initiative/policy which they were consulted on rather than the one which was forced on them.
- **Collaborative Approach:** Through CYDT activities, we learnt that young people appreciate working together to achieve positive results. They are in favour of teaming up with local leaders in dealing with issues affecting their communities. This means that young people are more than ready to be at the decision making table alongside community leaders.

- **Youth-friendly:** Efforts meant to improve youth participation must be pro-youth. They must be relevant, voluntary and safe for them to participate without fear which leads to them contributing meaningful ideas.
- **Training and Capacitating Youth With Information:** Youths also need to be trained and capacitated with information to be able to

effectively and meaningfully participate. In our case, the Youth Leadership Bootcamp was key in preparing youths to be effective decision makers. It was through this Bootcamp that young people got to understand the concept of leadership which inspired some to run as candidates in the upcoming 2023 elections.

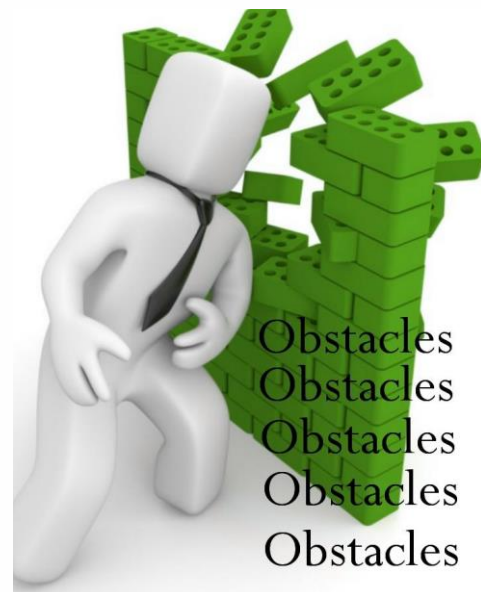
Obstacles to Youth Participation in Electoral Processes

There are several obstacles that often block young people's meaningful participation in civic processes. These are the challenges that have prevented young people from participating as voters and candidates in the previous elections in Matabeleland South province. The following are some of the obstacles to youth participation that were identified by the youths during the course of the project :

Increased Entry Costs:

The candidate nomination fees prevented many young people from participating as candidates in the upcoming 2023 elections. With many of them unemployed, they were not financially capacitated to be able to pay the nomination fees required to run as MP candidates across Matabeleland South. It was this reason that many young people only managed to file their nomination papers in the council positions category that did not require a nomination fee. This entails that when

the entry requirements are affordable and pro-youths, the number of youths that would participate as candidates in



electoral processes would be high.

Social-cultural blocks:

In Matabeleland South, it is still elusive for young people to break into leadership spaces as those spaces are said to belong to those that are wealthy and old. In other words, if one wants to be a leader, he or she should be rich. This is the reason young people usually lose to the older

generation during elections as most of them are financially incapacitated. In a sense, the day people understand that leadership should not be judged according to wealth standards especially when speaking about young people, it would be the day they understand that young people are more than capable to lead their communities.

Discrimination based on Gender:

At local level, community and traditional leaders continue to sideline women participation in civic spaces. While both young women and men suffer discrimination when it comes to their involvement in electoral processes, young women have additional obstacles compared to men. During the voter registration campaign for the 2023 elections, young women faced challenges linked to social and cultural stereotypes that prevented them from registering as voters. For example, there were young people who failed to register to vote during the mobile voter registration blitz as a result of the many chores they were supposed to do at home that made them fail to visit the mobile ZEC voter registration centres.

Limited electoral processes knowledge and information:

Young people without knowledge and information are disempowered. This is a common challenge among youths from

marginalised rural communities of Matabeleland South that only access information from people coming from urban areas. In addition, the percentage of young people that did not attend school due to different reasons and those that dropped out of school is very high in Matabeleland South. According to the organisation's observations this also affects their participation in civic processes negatively. The explanation behind this is that, when uneducated youths receive media products like flyers and posters with information on electoral processes, many of them cannot read to successfully comprehend the information on those media products hence they remain in the dark about the ongoing electoral processes.

Job Hunting as Priority Number One:

The main priority for young people across Matabeleland South is looking for sustainable jobs to survive the financial challenges faced. Many of them are copying on hand to mouth activities that usually force them to work 24/7 despite the money being unsustainable. As a result of the current situation, the youth have limited or no-time at all to be able to talk about as well as participate in electoral processes. In as much as they want to actively participate in these processes, bread and butter issues force them to spend more time looking for ways to fend for their families.

The Power of Hashtags in getting youth to participate in electoral processes

“#Nothing4UsWithoutUs”

“#MyVoteIsMyVoice”

“#YourVoteYourRight”

These are some of the most used hashtags on Twitter and other social media platforms by Matabeleland South young people as they made their voices heard during the voter registration campaign for the August 2023 elections.

It was through these hashtags that the voter registration campaign went viral in the province as they got young people talking; sharing their perceptions on electoral processes while mobilising their peers to register to vote.

As an organisation that strives for improved youth participation in electoral processes, social media hashtags were a great strategy that linked us to the youths. The more people that used some of the hashtags on electoral processes, the more the hashtags grew and became popular across Matabeleland South.

The power of hashtags proved to CYDT that social media is changing the political landscape in a positive way for the youths especially those that are less found in physical spaces as shown by young people that utilised the innovative



skills and tools of social media applications to develop and share hashtags that helped mobilise young people to register to vote during CYDT initiatives like the Youth Civil Rights Competitions. In a sense, the popularity of hashtags is emancipating the once silent voices of the youths in electoral processes as compared to the previous years where youth participation has always been relatively low.

It is however important to note that while social media and hashtags have been key in helping the organisation reach out to an improved number of youths from Matabeleland South, social media also comes with the spread of disinformation or fake news that actually scare away many young people from participating in electoral processes. In addition, not all social media hashtags promote the participation of youths in civic spaces. There are other hashtags designed with the aim of distracting young people from focusing on electoral processes. These

hashtags usually emanate from the entertainment industry and are also usually on celebrity scandals. From this, the organisation learnt that there was need for young people to receive media literacy training so that they are well informed on ways to stay focused online if they are to be able to effectively participate as there are authorities who usually use tabloid content to distract youth from paying attention on urgent current issues like the ongoing 2023 electoral process.

In conclusion, social media and hashtags continue to grow and gain popularity. Many young people have access to smartphones and the internet. It is through their internet connected smartphones that they are keeping themselves informed on what is happening around elections and other current issues. This means that it is now difficult to ignore the presence of social media and hashtags in influencing the participation of youths in electoral processes.

Focus on Elections: Youth ready to serve as they run for council positions across Mat South

“Tomorrow is not promised”

This is the message of the youths that successfully filed their papers to the Nomination Courts as they aimed to be elected as Councilors when the August 2023 elections results are announced.

For a longtime, young people have been viewed as leaders of tomorrow and the future which they now believe does not suit their interests as tomorrow is not promised. This comes after young people from Matabeleland South attended a youth leadership bootcamp in which they were capacitated with leadership skills and information. It was

through this initiative that young people realized they were more than ready to lead and serve their communities hence their participation as candidates in the fast approaching 2023 elections.

The data presented and published by ZEC shows that a significant number of youths successfully submitted their nomination forms on the 21st of June 2023, the day in which the Nomination Courts sat to select candidates to participate in the 2023 elections.



While there are youths that failed to realise their dream to run for MP positions as a result of the Nomination fees which they believed were beyond their reach, many young people were able to successfully file their nomination papers to run as candidates for council positions that did not require nomination fees. This showed the organisation that young people's attitude towards elections had changed for the better than the previous years where young people seemed to have lost interest in electoral processes.

The fact that many young people between the ages of 21 and 35 years of age are running for

vacant councillor positions shows that when the structures are youth friendly, a good number of young people would participate as candidates. This is a reason enough for decision makers to review the candidate nomination fees and other entry requirements that prevented youths that were interested in participating as candidates in this year's elections from running.

The organisation also hopes that in future elections (after the August elections), those in better financial positions especially local business people have the courage to support youth wanting to run as candidates. In sense, there is also need for regular meetings with business people in which they are informed of the youth potential in leadership spaces; that young people have the capacity to develop and expand an environment that suits their local businesses to grow in Matabeleland South.