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Evaluation of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network Project 2016–2018

Final Report

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Final Report
September 2019

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The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BVR	Biometric Voter Registration
CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DFID	Department for International Development
ERC	Election Resource Centre
EISA	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa
EMB	Election Management Body
EU	European Union
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-Alliance	Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance
NASCOH	National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped
NDI	National Democratic Institute
PVT	Parallel Vote Tabulation
SBO	Sample Based Observation
SMS	Short Messaging System
TRACE	Transparency, Responsiveness, Accountability, and Citizen Engagement
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network

Preface

This evaluation was conducted by a NIRAS team consisting of Ian Christoplos, Victor Shale and Matilda Svedberg during the period of June-September 2019. Quality assurance for the evaluation was provided by Niels Dabelstein. NIRAS was contracted by the Swedish Embassy in Zimbabwe. The evaluation team wishes to express its appreciation for the very strong support from the Zimbabwe Election Support Network –both from the secretariat and the members.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this evaluation of the work of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) has been “to assess the results of the project as well as providing lessons learned and recommendations for a possible second phase of the support”. ZESN is a non-partisan network consisting of 36 civil society organisations (CSOs) with wide geographical presence across Zimbabwe. The overall goal of ZESN is to facilitate the participation of civil society in elections and by-elections in order to promote democratic values, transparent, free and fair electoral environment and processes in accordance with set international standards. ZESN is universally acknowledged and respected as the most important CSO electoral actor in Zimbabwe. In the past it was often perceived as being biased against the government (together with CSOs in general), but in recent years ZESN has come to be seen as having critical but supportive role, most notably in its relations with the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

ZESN’s four outcomes (Increased citizen’s access to and participation in electoral processes; Improved transparency in electoral processes; Strengthened democratic institutions and processes; and Enhanced effectiveness of CSOs’ election related interventions) are comprehensive in relation to electoral needs. These electoral roles also provide a good bridge to the wider democratisation efforts that ZESN members undertake on their own. As such, the outcome areas are appropriate, without overstepping ZESN’s core competencies, mandate and niche.

ZESN’s methodological rigour has led it to be almost universally recognised as having a central role in enhancing the credibility and confidence in electoral processes through impartial monitoring and observation. They have extraordinary power to mobilise volunteers from among (and via) the membership. During elections the ZESN secretariat generally designs programmes that its member task forces at national, provincial and local levels then adapt to their contexts and implement. ZESN also maintains its commitments and performs well across the electoral cycle, but experiences inevitable challenges due to donor support being heavily focused on election periods. Furthermore, the engagement of its members is energised during elections, only to wane somewhat afterwards.

Members are thinking critically and adapting their work accordingly. This is central to how ZESN innovates. However, the more ‘technocratic’ aspects of ZESN’s work, led by the secretariat, tend to overshadow these subtle, often local or sectoral innovations. This is a point of contention. Outside observers refer in various ways to ZESN’s need to shift more efforts to innovation. The evaluation team judges that ZESN is innovating, but is also well justified in being cautious with untried approaches due to potential loss of credibility in relation to its more ‘technocratic’ work. This is recognised to be a difficult balance.

Conflict sensitivity prevails across the ZESN approach. A tacit ‘do no harm’ awareness is strong in the secretariat and among the members as they work to find ways to shift conversations from political positions to facts about the electoral process. These

are extremely difficult tasks in the acutely polarised Zimbabwean political context, but ZESN has performed in a nimble, strategic and effective manner in this regard.

Interviews with Board members have shown that they are very engaged, committed and are thinking critically about the work of the network. This has created fertile ground for the membership to in turn act in an innovative manner and engage well with the secretariat.

The secretariat has appropriate skills and provides an efficient management structure for ZESN's work. The leadership is widely respected. Staffing is very lean though. This suggests that any reduction of core funding could seriously affect ZESN's work. A critically important aspect of the secretariat's work is that of coordinating and supporting the ZESN task forces that are key to ZESN undertaking its responsibilities through the network.

With regard to overall outcomes, ZESN plays an essential role in ensuring the quality and scale of monitoring and observation efforts. Its effective and steadily improving relations with ZEC have resulted in major contributions to transparency around elections. ZESN has furthermore demonstrated strong commitment and significant innovation in efforts to influence institutional structures. This has sometimes been done through dialogue with progressive actors. Other efforts have involved more public advocacy. However, the approach to policy influence and working with policy analysts for advocacy is somewhat ad hoc. ZESN's current approach does not sufficiently ensure continuity in policy analyses and advocacy. Neither does it take full advantage of the skills of the members in the media in integrating communications perspectives within policy reform efforts.

The diversity and strength of the membership are central to ZESN's commitments to 'leave no one behind' in the electoral process. Their promotion of gender equality and efforts to overcome discriminatory structures facing people with disabilities, former convicts, different ethnic groups and isolated rural populations have been exemplary. Between elections, dialogues among the membership continue, making use of extra resources that appear in conjunction with by-elections and small additional projects. Voter education and mobilisation of citizens for registration efforts are kept active and are the activities that most engage the membership outside of election periods.

ZESN will remain reliant on international funding for the foreseeable future, which is concerning given the declining and uneven levels of donor support to Zimbabwe. Alternative income sources are being explored, but these have thus far yielded minimal returns.

The evaluation team has identified four levels of impact that ZESN has achieved:

Impact on citizens: ZESN has enhanced the democratic and human rights of a significant proportion of the population in an inhospitable environment. Many problems remain, but elections would have been significantly less transparent and voter awareness and engagement would have been more restricted without ZESN's Swedish supported work.

Reaching the grassroots: Via its task forces, ZESN has been quite effective in overcoming geographic and political barriers. The breadth and size of the ZESN membership, and the efficient and effective support provided by the secretariat have enabled outreach to isolated grassroots areas.

Inclusion: Through its diverse membership and its diverse Board, ZESN has been able to effectively target and enhance the human rights of women and men, people with disabilities, former convicts, victims of violence and torture, and different ethnic groups.

The big picture: In considering impact, it is important to frame this in relation to the ‘so what’ question regarding the efficacy of electoral support in countries where regimes are loath to relinquish power and have effective machines in place to retain control. Informants have presented credible arguments regarding how ZESN has demonstrated the potential to work with principled technocrats in the government, local authorities and parliamentarians who accept the need for tolerance and strengthening of democratic principles.

Support to ZESN suggests the following lessons learnt for electoral support more generally:

- With careful steps to ensure impartiality, even civil society institutions that would otherwise be branded as part of ‘the opposition’ can build trust and position themselves to play a strategic role within a polarised environment.
- Electoral support through a network such as ZESN can yield results both for the direct ‘ends’ related to elections, and also for using this as a ‘means’ for CSOs to develop their efforts to achieve broader democratisation goals.
- Good network governance is key to connectivity among stakeholders, and also can ensure that the membership contributes to vitality and innovation.
- Ensuring impartiality in electoral efforts requires a strong secretariat that is able to undertake due diligence while not stifling the passion of the members in the field –this is not an easy balance to maintain, but ZESN shows that it is possible.
- Policy analysis for advocacy is challenging for networks to manage. It may require some ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking, particularly with regard to integrating ideas on communications for policy influence at different levels from the outset of any initiative.

ZESN is firmly on course and requires relatively few adjustments to its current work. The overarching recommendation of the evaluation is thus that the network should largely continue with its current structures and approaches. Furthermore:

- Sweden should support ZESN’s secretariat with flexible and consistent funding, and should actively encourage other donors to fund ZESN across the electoral cycle.
- ZESN should revisit communications to better recognise and encourage the innovative work of the members.

- ZESN should rethink relations with policy research institutions for institutional reform and advocacy, and also better leverage advice from media members.
- This could include finding new fora for public debate that bring together the considerable evidence that ZESN collects, with analyses of that data undertaken by policy research institutions and outreach efforts of advocacy groups. This may involve face-to-face events, and also rethinking the use of publications and social media.
- The current draft strategy is largely appropriate, but should be ‘tweaked’ to better highlight the respective roles of members and the secretariat, with particular attention to specifying the responsibilities of the task forces at different levels.
- ZESN’s theory of change should include forceful arguments for why capacity development of its CSO members needs to be pursued consistently and across electoral cycles. ZESN should sharpen its presentation of its ‘value proposition’ in this regard.
- In addition to revisions to the strategy, ZESN should revisit its reporting to enhance the clarity of its critical analyses of challenges facing the network and the secretariat in maintaining continuity and advocacy at key points in the electoral cycle.

1 Introduction

1.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of this evaluation has been “to assess the results of the project as well as providing lessons learned and recommendations for a possible second phase of the support”

The scope of this evaluation of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) Election Support Project 2016-2018 relates to results in the following objectives of the Strategy for Sweden’s Development Cooperation with Zimbabwe 2017-2021 for *human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality*.

- Improved conditions for democratic governance, reduced corruption, responsibility and accountability in public institutions.
- Increased capacity of civil society and independent media to perform their democratic and scrutiny functions.
- Strengthened conditions for gender equality and respect for human rights, with a focus on women and girls.

The scope of the evaluation has encompassed the relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of Sweden’s support to ZESN. The financial assistance started in May 2016 and the original activity period was until 31st December 2018, after which the agreement was amended with a no-cost extension up until 30th June 2019. The Swedish Embassy in Zimbabwe has provided a total of SEK 21,300,000.

The evaluation questions from the Terms of Reference are:

Relevance

1. Evaluate the relevance of the project {i.e., Swedish funding} and the four main outcomes identified in the field of elections in Zimbabwe. What is lacking? What could be improved?
2. Is the expertise of ZESN relevant for bringing the agenda on electoral reform in Zimbabwe forward? What could be improved?
3. To which extent has the project conformed to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?

Effectiveness

4. To which extent has the project contributed to intended outcomes? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. Examine effectiveness of the governance and management set up of ZESN. How effective has the ZESN network been in cooperating on reaching the expected outcomes? What has worked well? What could be improved?

6. Evaluate the effectiveness of ZESN in the field of elections in Zimbabwe looking specifically at the degree the four main outcomes of the project been reached. What difference has ZESN made in these areas? What could be improved
7. Roles played – positive and negative – of donors to ZESN and donor coordination. What can be improved?

Impact

8. What is the overall impact of the project in terms of direct or indirect results?

Sustainability

9. Is it likely that the benefits (outcomes) of the project are sustainable?

1.2 BACKGROUND

ZESN is a non-partisan network consisting of 36 civil society organisation (CSO) members with wide geographical presence across Zimbabwe. Many of the members are themselves networks of community based organisations (CBOs), which greatly extends ZESN's reach. For example, since 2016 ZESN has provided training to 286 CBOs across the country. ZESN was formed in 2000 to coordinate civil society activities and advocacy pertaining to elections. Democratic elections and credible electoral processes in Zimbabwe are the focus, as well as some other modest engagements in the region including serving as the Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa Secretariat. ZESN observes elections with the aim of ensuring that all citizens, including potentially marginalised groups, can exercise their fundamental right to vote. As part of this, the network provides civic education as well as voter education for the voter registration process and polling. ZESN shares independent, non-partisan information on the conduct of elections to political contestants, the public and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and advocates for reforms based on their analyses of the electoral process.

The **vision** of ZESN is that of a Zimbabwe where principles of free and fair elections are upheld in a transparent, credible and non-partisan electoral process. ZESN works to deepen democracy through strengthening electoral processes and advocating for electoral reform in Zimbabwe. It works together with its members and other stakeholders to develop support systems for enhancing the conduct of elections, with a mission to enhance a democratic, transparent, free and fair electoral process and environment through coordinating activities of member organisations.

The **overall goal** of ZESN is to facilitate the participation of civil society in local authority, parliamentary, presidential elections and by-elections in order to promote democratic values, transparent, free and fair electoral environment and processes in accordance with set international standards.

ZESN's theory of change follows the logic that if there is/are: *Strengthened* national democratic institutions; *Improved* transparency in electoral processes; *Increased* citizen access to and participation in electoral processes; and *Enhanced* effectiveness of CSOs' election-related interventions; then the desired impact, of "*a Zimbabwe where citizens are empowered to hold the State to account for the respect of human rights, good governance and democratic principles*" will be realised. The role of the ZESN secretariat is to maintain and coordinate the network to ensure the project outcomes are reached. The secretariat is also key in advocating for electoral reforms, and hold education and capacity building on electoral issues for network members and partners.

Assistance to the project evaluated here has consisted of funding from Sweden and the Transparency, Responsiveness, Accountability, and Citizen Engagement Fund (TRACE)¹. The impact goal of the support is:

A Zimbabwe where democratic electoral environment and processes are upheld.

The main outcome goals are:

1. Increased citizens access to and participation in electoral processes
2. Improved transparency in electoral processes
3. Strengthened democratic institutions and processes
4. Enhanced effectiveness of CSOs' election related interventions.

1.3 CONTEXT

The context in Zimbabwe is one of intensely contested elections with varying gradations of both election disputes and election-related conflicts. Over the past fifteen years Zimbabwe has struggled with political polarisation and social cohesion as well as a severely deteriorating economy. In addition, there has been a systematic constriction of democratic space for citizen participation, together with human rights violations by security police and ruling party militia. Freedom of speech has been constrained, and there have been arbitrary arrests (and at times abductions), torture of civil society activists and extra judicial killings of opposition parties' supporters, especially before and after the 2008 elections. In recent years, especially since the 2013 harmonised elections, Zimbabwe has faced numerous challenges including and not limited to, factionalism within the ruling party and proliferation of opposition parties, leading to as many as 112 political parties registered with ZEC by March 2018. There have also been unprecedented levels of citizen unrest, especially during 2016 and 2017. There is a growing demand for electoral reforms from a number of electoral

¹ TRACE is a fund that has, over the years, been supported by the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Ireland and Denmark, focusing on governance and human rights in Zimbabwe. It is presently supporting ZESN with an activity grant of USD 250,000 for a period ending in 2021.

stakeholders, among which CSOs have played a leading role. There has also been relentless pressure on ZEC to be accessible and responsive, as well as to administer elections in a transparent way. Therefore, the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Project 2016- 2018 was a direct response to the need to support ZESN to bolster the legitimate citizens' and civil society aspirations for a functioning electoral system and achievement of credible elections.

1.4 APPROACH AND METHODS

1.4.1 Approach

This evaluation has applied a contribution analysis approach with strong recognition of the factors in the volatile political context that frame the opportunities and constraints ZESN faces in making significant contributions to its four overarching goals. This has been complemented by specific methods for evaluating a network such as this. The latter methods emphasise three pillars:

Network results: The evaluation has looked at contributions to the electoral processes as described in the four main outcome goals, *Increased citizens access to and participation in electoral processes; Improved transparency in electoral processes; Strengthened democratic institutions and processes; and Enhanced effectiveness of CSOs' election related interventions*. Particular attention has been paid to the contrasts between results during electoral periods and those achieved across the electoral cycle. Furthermore, the evaluation has sought to uncover and describe examples of innovative initiatives, and assess if/how such innovation has been fostered, where in the network innovation emerges, and the extent to which it actually occurs in ZESN's work.

Network connectivity: The evaluation has explored two aspects. First, what is the 'glue' that holds the network membership together, including how the values of ZESN are actively shared and applied within the different tiers and categories of member organisations and among the task forces. Second, the evaluation has looked at the structure of the ZESN network, i.e., how interactions and communications are managed and the extent to which this is fit for purpose. The role of governance in ensuring this connectivity was given particular attention.

Network health: We have looked at the extent to which, utilising the project support, ZESN has been able to assemble relevant capacities and sustain practical engagement among the diverse geographies and types of member organisations. This has included internal communications and sustained commitments to shared values and joint actions. The roles of governance and leadership have been central to the analysis (including possible plans for leadership transition and Board selection/renewal), as well as the capacity of ZESN to overcome conflict risks related to the highly polarised political environment.

Networks are commonly perceived to go through life cycles involving start-up, growth, maturity and either renewal or decline. ZESN was founded in 2000 and can therefore be seen as a mature network that now presumably faces a need to either renew or face decline. Already in the inception phase, interviews highlighted these life cycle concerns facing a mature network. Evaluation analysis, conclusions and recommendations have focused on the factors driving either renewal or decline in relation to the different roles that ZESN plays in the Zimbabwe electoral community. Special attention has been given to contrasting its ‘technocratic’ and innovation roles, with respect and recognition of the importance of both.

1.4.2 Methods

Methods have focused on providing evidence and analyses that can contribute to both the ZESN strategic planning process (including deliberations in the ZESN Board and among the membership) and for Sweden’s plans for future support. It is apparent that other donors may also have interest in the evaluation findings.

During a one-week inception mission to Harare in early July the evaluation team undertook interviews with secretariat leadership, the Swedish Embassy, four other donors, ZEC (undertaken as a focus group) and four members (primarily those in the ZESN Board), plus the Board chair. This included a review of ZESN documentation. The evaluation used these interviews and document review to obtain an overview of internal strategies and plans with regard to strategic communications, leadership development/transition, and membership development/support.

An e-survey was sent to the ZESN membership to attempt to gain an overview of their views on the results, health and connectivity of their network. The response rate was poor (six of 36 members responding), perhaps partially due to internet connectivity factors. It has nonetheless provided a small measure of triangulation in relation to other data collection.

The main evaluation mission was undertaken over a period of ten days. This mission included twelve additional in-depth interviews out of which 2 were focus group discussions with the Board and local, regional and international organisations that work in the area of elections. There were also case studies of ZESN’s different areas of work. Within each case study, initiatives identified as being innovative were given particular attention to better understand what innovation means at ZESN. Four of the case studies were structured around different pillars of ZESN’s work (election monitoring and observation, advocacy for election reforms, electoral education and capacity building, and communications). A trip was also made to Bulawayo for the fifth case study that brought together Bulawayo-based initiatives to obtain a deeper understanding of activities outside of Harare. The field work was used to better understand the following aspects of ZESN’s work:

- How ZESN works ‘as a network’, i.e., the respective roles of the secretariat and the members (and also the members of the members), with particular attention to the different tiers of the ZESN task forces at national, provincial and local levels. Communications flows were analysed, as well as the membership’s and task forces’ capacities to ensure democratic and transparent processes within ZESN itself.
- Contextual factors influencing connectivity in the network, including, e.g., how polarisation impacts on efforts to maintain impartiality and apply conflict sensitivity.
- What supports or creates obstacles to innovation in the network activities, including the risk of ‘path dependency’ related to factors such as deeply rooted ‘rituals’ and possible distorted priorities related to provision of volunteer incentives during elections. Also, we looked at what aspects of innovation are seen to be within the ZESN mandate and capacity, and which aspects may be more appropriately pursued independently by ZESN members in their work outside of the network.
- The extent to which the ‘boom-bust’ nature of funding and excitement inherent in the electoral cycle has been managed.
- The balance between central level advocacy for electoral reform and grass-roots mobilisation.
- The roles of governance and the secretariat in managing the issues that have arisen in undertaking the initiative.

Furthermore, within the case studies the evaluation has traced internal and external information flows to assess the challenges (and innovative efforts) that exist in communicating results within the network and to outside stakeholders.

At the outset it was recognised that the case studies would not provide a representative sample of the broad range of ZESN initiatives underway, but it has been found that they provide a basis for better understanding the drivers and obstacles to innovation, effectiveness and a healthy network.

1.5 LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation to the evaluation has been the reliance on perceptions of interviewees. These perceptions diverge, and the evaluation did not always find consensus on various aspects of ZESN’s work. Instead, the evaluation has contrasted these different perceptions and analysed how they frame types of commitments to ZESN and the electoral reform process more generally. This has provided a basis for better understanding the trust and credibility that exists within and outside the network and analyse what this implies for the dynamism and influence of the network, now and in the future.

A second limitation in the evaluation is that we recognise the risk of a positive confirmation bias in the selection of initiatives analysed. We relied on ZESN's recommendations for initiatives within these cases in order to unpack what innovation and effectiveness mean for ZESN. As noted above, the examples that were described in the case studies were perhaps not representative of ZESN's overall portfolio of initiatives. Nonetheless, interviewees were very open about areas where they felt that innovation was insufficiently encouraged, so this bias has been deemed to be effectively mitigated.

The evaluation team reviewed the ZESN monitoring reporting² and has found it to be very useful for obtaining a general sense of how the secretariat works with the membership in electoral activities. However, it has not been structured in such a way as to provide a basis for obtaining an aggregated view of outcomes achieved. As such, the monitoring reports reviewed have been useful, but have primarily been used in the evaluation to provide perspective on the data gathered in interviews.

² See Annex 5.3

2 Findings

2.1 POSITIONING IN A PROBLEMATIC ENVIRONMENT

The relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of ZESN's work can only be understood in relation to a problematic and in some respects deteriorating democratic environment. We therefore start this presentation by looking at the roles of ZESN and international donors within this environment.

2.1.1 Role of ZESN in the electoral landscape

In order to understand ZESN's relevance and results it is important to first understand the role it plays in the electoral landscape. ZESN currently has 36 members (Table 1), many of which are themselves networks with local members. With the exception of some areas deemed to be 'no-go' (largely prior to 2018) such as Mashonaland Central Province (where supporters of the governing party ZANU-PF are alleged to prevent CSO electoral efforts at times), it is active across all the wards in the country. ZESN's work is structured through task forces consisting of member organisations at national, provincial and local levels, coordinated and with technical support from the secretariat.

Table 1: ZESN Member Organisations

Association of Women's Clubs (AWC)
Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association (BPRA)
Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Zimbabwe (CCJPZ)
Civic Education Network Trust (CIVNET)
Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA)
Community Tolerance Reconciliation and Development (COTRAD)
Christian Alliance of Zimbabwe
Counselling Services Unit (CSU)
Chitungwiza and Manyame Rural Residents Association (CAMERRA)
Evangelical Fellowships of Zimbabwe (EFZ)
Gender and Media Connect (GMC)
Habakkuk Trust
Legal Resources Foundation (LRF)
Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)
Media Monitors (MM)
National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH)
National Youth Development Trust (NYDT)

Organization for Rural Association for Progress (ORAP)
The Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCOZ)
Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ)
Rooftop Promotions
Transparency International Zimbabwe (TIZ)
Women's Action Group (WAG)
Women Institute Leaders for Development (WILD)
Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT)
Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Offender (ZACRO)
Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET)
Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU)
Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC)
Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights)
Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR)
Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU)
Zimbabwe Students Christian Movement (SCM.Z)
Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ)
Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP)
Zimbabwe Woman Lawyers Association (ZWLA)

ZESN's operations are led by a secretariat consisting of 17 staff. This includes two senior leadership positions, a finance manager, eight mid-level staff (programme managers/officers) and six support staff.

This network is unique in Zimbabwe. Interviews overwhelmingly demonstrated that ZESN is universally acknowledged and respected as the most important CSO electoral actor. One informant referred to them as "the big dog". Its work effectively dwarfs that of the other actors due to its extraordinary network across civil society and its operational capacity, both at the secretariat and among the task forces. For this reason ZESN is naturally well placed (despite some competition) in relation to the overall range of electoral actors. Some observers noted that the Election Resource Centre (ERC) was able to act more quickly and therefore more innovatively, but even they themselves acknowledged that this flexibility was due to their lack of accountability to such a broad network structure, and that there is a need for both types of organisations. It has been noted that ZESN's strengths in being owned by its members and representing such a broad consensus are largely positive, but not without certain negative aspects and inevitable occasional dissonance among members.

Of particular importance to understanding the electoral landscape, ZESN has made a gradual shift in its relations with ZEC from a perception in the past of being biased against the government, to what has more recently become significant and steady improvement in quality and effectiveness of relations. ZESN is now seen as having a

critical but constructive role as both watchdog and technical support institution. Although some hold the view that this could represent a loss of independence, most see this as a positive way to enhance ZEC's effectiveness and to maintain its own independent role. Due to political polarisation, these shifts in relations with ZEC have required constant and careful efforts to maintain perceptions of impartiality. In the view of the evaluation team, this has been managed well, but some observers stated views indicating that ZESN has sometimes been 'too cautious' in its calls for electoral reforms, where a stronger position has been warranted. The relationship between ZESN and ZEC is complex, so a divergence of views about the stance and roles of the two institutions is to be expected. ZEC representatives have expressed some reservations, but largely acknowledge the very strong support ZESN provides that enhances the quality and reach of their work. The relationship with ZESN may also enhance ZEC's credibility since, as one observer stated, "people would rather listen to a CSO".

2.1.2 Role of international donors

This section responds to evaluation question seven: Roles played – positive and negative – of donors to ZESN and donor coordination. What can be improved?

Another important aspect of the electoral landscape is that of international donors in Zimbabwe in general and in relation to elections in particular. After an earlier period of broader support to civil society in conjunction with the constitutional process in 2012-2013³, aid to civil society's involvement in democratisation in Zimbabwe in recent years has been increasingly tied to electoral cycles (and perhaps even periods of civil unrest and repression). Important Scandinavian donors (Denmark and Norway) and others that in the past provided more stable support have withdrawn. Other donors interviewed consistently regret that they have been unable to provide the stable financing they themselves see as most appropriate. One international study provides a possible explanation to this narrow focus on elections noting that "...because of the pressure to show 'results', donors continue to pursue forms of democracy promotion that are too short-term, focusing on the tangible and high visibility elements such as elections, for example, rather than the long-term strengthening of other key institutions"⁴. The evaluation team judges that ZESN has managed the challenges of the imbalanced donor funding cycles well so far. However, reductions of donor support after elections have, in particular, made it more difficult to pursue electoral reforms. It is at such times that awareness of the deficiencies of the most recent election is

³ Christoplos, I., et al. (2014) Review of the Strategy for Swedish Aid Initiatives in Zimbabwe: January 2011-December 2014, Sida Decentralised Evaluation 2014:31

⁴ Rakner, L. et al. (2008) Assessing international democracy assistance: Key lessons and challenges. Project Briefing No.14, Overseas Development Institute

strongest and the opportunities thus greatest for institutional reform, but resources are insufficient.

Even though their financial support diminishes significantly during the in-between elections period, donors expect ZESN to follow the election cycle approach in its work. The evaluation team judges that there is insufficient coordination and self assessment among donors regarding how well they contribute to the balance between the ‘election focus’ and ‘election cycle focus’. Some of the respondents indicated that there has been coordination among donors to encourage complementarity as well as a regular consultative forum between donors and electoral actors (including ZESN) called the Election Support Group. However, the evaluation found that these have been ad hoc and not part of a systematic programme coordination design.

The role of donors in the electoral process is controversial in Zimbabwe. There is a tendency among the political parties and parts of the media to focus very heavily on who is funding ZESN and other organisations involved in the electoral process in order to challenge their impartiality. Claims that ‘he who pays the piper calls the tune’ are common and not always based on facts about how international aid is structured. The apparent biases of some donors and their openness about supporting the opposition have fuelled these tendencies and created a funding landscape wherein ZESN has had to tread with care. ZESN’s ‘technocratic’ image (described further below) has helped it to avoid these pitfalls through a focus on data and credible reports.

Despite increases during electoral periods, overall assistance to Zimbabwe is reported by all interviewees to be declining over time⁵. Furthermore, as the number of donors decreases, and as some of the major remaining donors have highly restrictive financing priorities (noted by a few interviewees), the risk of gaps appearing in electoral funding is increasing. Pressures on using the funding from Sweden, as one of the very few current flexible donors, to fill such gaps have also inevitably increased. Sweden is currently the only donor providing core, long-term funding to ZESN. Other recent financiers have been TRACE, the European Union, the Netherlands and Norwegian People’s Aid. Sweden stands out in that has maintained its principled commitments (in practice) to provide impartial support to democratisation processes through funding across the electoral cycle. ZESN is therefore evermore reliant on this support in order to maintain activities and retain secretariat staff between election periods.

⁵ This reported trend is not clearly reflected in OECD/DAC data (<https://stats.oecd.org/>, Dataset: Country Programmable Aid (CPA), Zimbabwe), which show a modicum of stability. This discrepancy may be a reflection of an emerging shift of resources to government institutions, with reductions of aid to civil society. The more recent apparent donor disillusionment (after initial guarded optimism) surrounding the current government has not yet been visible in the OECD/DAC figures.

2.2 RELEVANCE

This section responds to evaluation questions one through three: Evaluate the relevance of the project and the four main outcomes identified in the field of elections in Zimbabwe. What is lacking? What could be improved?; Is the expertise of ZESN relevant for bringing the agenda on electoral reform in Zimbabwe forward? What could be improved?; and To which extent has the project conformed to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?

The evaluation team judges that relevance is clear in relation to the Strategy for Sweden's Development Cooperation with Zimbabwe 2017-2021, in particular as related to human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality, which includes the following objectives:

- Improved conditions for democratic governance, reduced corruption, responsibility and accountability in public institutions.
- Increased capacity of civil society and independent media to perform their democratic and scrutiny functions.
- Strengthened conditions for gender equality and respect for human rights, with a focus on women and girls.

ZESN's four outcomes, *Increased citizens access to and participation in electoral processes; Improved transparency in electoral processes; Strengthened democratic institutions and processes; and Enhanced effectiveness of CSOs' election related interventions*, are comprehensive in relation to electoral needs. They also provide a good bridge to the wider democratisation efforts that members undertake outside of ZESN. As such, they are appropriate without leading to overstepping ZESN's core competencies, mandate and niche. ZESN has appropriate capacities within the secretariat and among the members to manage these four areas.

It is of particular importance that the task forces feed the network with perspectives from the grassroots and ensure relevance to citizen needs, including those from otherwise potentially marginalised groups. The ZESN reporting⁶ includes numerous statements illustrating how the secretariat listens to what is happening at field level and pays critical attention to the implications for the work of the network. The task force structures are also essential to generate and sustain ownership and engagement outside of Harare, as illustrated in the observations from Bulawayo in Box 1 below.

⁶ See Annex 5.3

Box 1: Views on task forces from Bulawayo

The provincial task forces are not only peer review structures for the network, but they are also an accountability mechanisms through which we successfully ensured that the ZESN Secretariat and the Board cannot do as they wish but respond to the needs and aspirations of the people through the members (Board member)

The task force is an inclusive policy implementing arm of the network. In the province, we regularly convene the task force members to plan and execute ZESN Secretariat initiated programmes such as the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) awareness ahead of the registration process or our own programmes during the 2018 elections, such as holding manifesto meetings in communities and organising sports tournaments between security agencies and the communities as a way to inculcate trust because the security agencies have always been seen as partisan during elections in Zimbabwe (Bulawayo task force member)

One of the benefits of being a ZESN network member is the capacity provided to the network members through task forces. As task force members, we are trained as trainers for the network and for our own organisations. The capacity building is ongoing and there is also a WhatsApp platform where as task force members from Bulawayo, and Matebeleland North provinces we discuss electoral developments in our regions (Bulawayo task force member)

The task force has contributed to the BVR process and continues to mobilise citizens to register because registration is continuous. Individual network members who are also in the task force such as the faith based organisations used to invite the ZEC to register people at the churches. We also invited the ZEC to our events such as roadshows and ensured that people were registered while also having fun (Bulawayo task force member)

2.3 OVERALL OUTCOMES

This section responds to evaluation question eight: What is the overall impact of the project in terms of direct or indirect results?

The evaluation has given primary attention to five aspects of outcome achievements, the results of which are summarised as follows:

During elections: ZESN has an almost unquestioned central role in ensuring impartial monitoring and observation with extraordinary power to mobilise volunteers from among (and via) its members. This is where the essential ‘technocratic’ skills and vitality of the network primarily come to fore. In the July 2018 elections 7240 observers were selected and trained. Of these, 750 had special training in short-term parallel

vote tabulation (PVT) using a sample based observation (SBO) (see Box 3 below)⁷. The other 6490 more long-term observers ensured that, over and above the sampled polling stations, the largest possible number of polling stations were covered. A further added value of this large scale traditional observation was that, by virtue of having a presence in all constituencies ZESN could observe the electoral process over an extended period and was able to make substantive and qualitative observations. It was also able to issue regular election updates prior to the elections when no other local or foreign observers were present on the ground.

In general during elections the ZESN secretariat either designs programmes that the task forces then implement or supports the task forces' own initiatives. The members have a voice in this design, particularly with regard to how to ensure awareness of needs and inclusion of the different sets of stakeholders that they represent, but to a large extent the secretariat leads on the technical aspects of monitoring and observation, including approval of candidates for observers, training-of-trainers and provision of materials.

Across the electoral cycle: ZESN maintains its commitments, and performs well across the electoral cycle, but experiences inevitable challenges due to uneven funding. Furthermore, the engagement of its members was acknowledged by several interviewees as being energised during elections, only to wane to some extent afterwards. One interviewee noted that all ZESN members were active during electoral periods, but some were passive in the periods in-between as they were not interested in advocacy for policy reform or other activities underway during those periods.

Relatively 'creative' initiatives, such as the roadshows to educate voters and mobilise registration during periods between elections are seen as being quite effective, especially in reaching the youth. This is an area where the secretariat and the membership find synergetic roles, brought together through the task forces and building on the resources and voluntarism of the members.

An often cited aspect of ZESN's work across the electoral cycle is that of engaging during by-elections. Zimbabwe's first-past-the post electoral system is prone to by-elections. There are 1958 Ward Councils, 63 Rural District Councils and 210 Constituencies in the whole country. Due the sheer number of the elected representatives at every sphere of government, there is literally a by-election every month either at the national (Constituency) or local Ward and Rural District Council levels due to death or expulsion of Members of Parliament or councillors. From January 2019 to August 2019 (the time of this evaluation), a total of 26 by-elections had been held across the

⁷ ZESN, 2018, Report on the 30 July 2018 Harmonised Elections

country and the number is increasing. The by-elections serve to keep the ZESN network members engaged, to some extent, and are also a way to ‘pilot’ different reform efforts. One secretariat interviewee stated that “by-elections are a way to test, and make noise if there are problems”.

Applied technical competence: ZESN’s methodological rigour and ability to apply these skills in difficult contexts has led it to be almost universally recognised as having a central role in enhancing the credibility and confidence in electoral processes. The only exceptions to this consensus have been some journalists and members of the opposition who have failed to grasp the details of the methods applied and have criticised ZESN’s findings on largely political grounds (see Box 3 below).

Innovation: Membership (supported by the secretariat) are thinking critically and adapting their work accordingly. This is central to how ZESN innovates. However, the ‘technocratic’ aspects of ZESN’s work tend to overshadow these subtle, relatively inexpensive, often local or sectoral innovations that are furthermore not consistently well communicated. To some extent this is perhaps inevitable due to the excitement and interest levels associated with the monitoring of actual election results.

However, outside observers often refer in various ways to ZESN’s need to “come out of their comfort zone”, with one referring to this as their “safe space”. The evaluation team judges that ZESN is already breaking out of their safe space, to a significant extent. Monitoring reports and publications include many examples of descriptions of ‘lessons learnt’ for adapting future work, and even if it is not always clear how well these lessons have indeed been ‘learnt’, i.e., applied in practice, it is apparent that critical thinking is encouraged within the secretariat as well as the network as a whole. ZESN is also well justified in being cautious when their desire for ‘comfort’ is due to concerns about potential loss of credibility if they take on untried approaches. Opportunities for supporting members as they test new approaches have emerged through the European Union financed sub-granting support, but resources have not been available to subsequently scale-up lessons learnt from these pilot experiences to produce broader outcomes.

Conflict sensitivity: Although almost never explicitly referred to, interviews showed that conflict sensitivity prevails across the ZESN approach. A tacit ‘do no harm’ awareness is strong in the secretariat and among the Board and members as they work to find ways to shift conversations from political positions to facts about the electoral process. Applied conflict sensitivity is extremely difficult in the acutely polarised political context in Zimbabwe, and in itself leads to controversy. Some observers interpret ZESN’s cautious approach to conflictual issues as bordering on self censorship. Nonetheless, the evaluation team judges that ZESN has performed in a nimble, strategic and effective manner.

Attention is given to issues where political conflicts run the risk of turning into violent conflicts. One example is a controversy that arose around the voters roll, where

the secretariat conducted an audit that gave credence to the voters roll while noting areas that needed improvement⁸. The findings on the voters roll put to rest what was fast becoming a volatile election issue with the potential to derail the process. Similarly, ZESN has undertaken detailed analysis of the impending boundary delimitation⁹, which is already attracting political controversy even before it begins. In this way, ZESN's work has become a reference for factual stakeholder discussions on delimitation (see Box 5 below).

Task forces are also vigilant about potentially volatile situations at specific polling stations. The Election Situation Room, which coordinated ZESN's long-term and short-term observers, was set up at the secretariat in Harare monitors potential flash points during elections related to the spread of distorted information. This is an innovative approach which, according to one respondent, "has capacitated ordinary citizens to observe and report election incidents using mobile phones".

2.4 GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

This section responds to evaluation question five: Examine effectiveness of the governance and management set up of ZESN. How effective has the ZESN network been in cooperating on reaching the expected outcomes? What has worked well? What could be improved?

Interviews with Board members have shown that they are very engaged, committed and are thinking critically about the work of the network. This has created fertile ground for the membership to in turn engage well with the secretariat. The Board members are well aware of the constitutionally designated systems and norms governing Board participation and succession and they apply these norms in practice. They are also aware of the challenges in representing such a diverse and dispersed membership, while also achieving consensus on priorities. Overall the evaluation team judges that the ZESN Board has achieved a level of professionalism that is rare in CSOs internationally.

The secretariat has appropriate skills and provides a well structured and efficient management structure for ZESN's work. Senior programme officers interviewed in the evaluation displayed clear perspectives and deep insight into their work. Their ability to maintain regular contact with the task forces, even between elections, was repeatedly attested to by the Board and task force members. Their capacity to scale-

⁸ ZESN, 2018, Sida 4th Quarter October-December 2018 Progress Narrative Report

⁹ ZESN, 2019, Key Consideration for Delimitation in 2023

up rapidly, engaging temporary staff as required, during electoral periods was also praised. Interviews with the leadership showed strong vision and self critical analyses of the tasks and challenges being faced. As will be discussed below, there are some areas where systems are insufficiently structured to stimulate innovation, but overall the secretariat implements its ‘technocratic’ tasks very effectively and has a healthy relationship with the Board where they work together within sub-committees. One Board member attested to this saying that “the network utilises the sub-committee approach to its work and this enables a peer-to-peer appraisal and capacity building.” Staffing is stable, with modest turnover. The leadership is widely respected. There are currently no plans for a leadership transition at the secretariat and the Board is satisfied with the current structure. Staffing is very lean, with most core functions managed by departments consisting of only one person (in some cases scaling up in election periods). This suggests that any reduction of core funding could seriously affect ZESN’s work.

Coordination of member activities is undoubtedly the secretariat’s main work, and five of six respondents to the e survey conducted as part of this evaluation saw the secretariat as playing a very appropriate role in this regard. A perhaps ‘unsung’ but critically important and huge aspect of the secretariat’s work is that of coordinating and supporting the ZESN task forces. The task forces are key to ZESN undertaking its responsibilities and holding the network together. Through the task forces volunteers are trained, utilising high quality materials produced by the secretariat¹⁰. Interviews showed that they are genuinely empowered and are innovating. Bulawayo task force members report a healthy and supportive relationship with the secretariat, as illustrated in Box 2.

Box 2: Views on secretariat support from Bulawayo

“We can talk to them {the secretariat} anytime. The person in charge is always there...Don’t keep us guessing” (Bulawayo task force member)

“The Secretariat shares publications with us so much that every time we meet with communities we have something to give them to read” (Bulawayo task force member)

“We enjoy good support from ZESN officials whom we invite to our member activities to make expert election input” (Bulawayo task force member)

“The Secretariat is always responsive to our requests and suggestions. One of the task force initiatives is that we have called on ZESN to urgently carry out a voter education drive in Bulawayo given a growing concern that the delimitation of

¹⁰ For example, ZESN Civic and Voter Education Manual for Facilitators

*boundaries may lead to certain areas in the province losing their constituencies”
(Bulawayo task force member)*

While some of the network members have their own funds for election related work, ZESN has always chipped in to cover some costs when requested (Bulawayo task force member)

There are inevitably different types of members with broader/narrower and greater/lessor levels of engagement in the network, but the task forces provide them with a way to take part according to their interests and capacities. As pointed out by one Board member, the challenge for the Board and Secretariat is that: “when meetings take place, members are often less interested in the story of the Board and the Secretariat. They are instead burning to tell their own story... Consequently, an opportunity is missed to collectively introspect on challenges that are mutual and explore solutions that are holistic.” The secretariat has therefore always striven to enable joint problem solving and keep watch on risks of politicisation, without trying to exert too much control, which could stifle engagement and creativity.

2.5 EFFECTIVENESS

This section responds to evaluation question six: Evaluate the effectiveness of ZESN in the field of elections in Zimbabwe looking specifically at the degree the four main outcomes of the project been reached. What difference has ZESN made in these areas? What could be improved?

2.5.1 Transparency

ZESN plays an essential role in ensuring the quality and scale of monitoring and observation efforts. In the survey conducted for this evaluation, five of six respondents stated that ZESN makes a major contribution to transparent elections through its observation role. Four of six saw this as contributing to confidence in electoral processes and stakeholders’ understanding of electoral processes. In particular, ZESN’s effective and steadily improving relations with ZEC have resulted in major contributions to transparency around elections. This stems from the quality of technical support from the secretariat and commitment from task force members.

This has not been easy in the highly polarised political environment where findings are often judged by how well they align with a given actor’s political views rather than their factual accuracy. The evaluation team judges that ZESN has managed well to consistently shift the conversation back to ‘the facts’. However, this has been a perpetual and difficult struggle, and indicates the need to give constant attention to changing communication needs and opportunities. Some observers felt that ZESN

should be more ambitious in its communications efforts and the evaluation team judges that it may be possible to better leverage the skills of its members in the media sector in this regard. Pressures on free and independent media are considerable in Zimbabwe, and enhancing the quality and credibility of media reporting was noted as an area where ZESN should take a somewhat more ambitious stance¹¹. Box 3 below describes the difficulty of communicating the intricacies of sample based observation, leading to some misunderstandings and suspicions about ZESN's intentions.

Box 3: Parallel vote tabulation and communication

ZESN undertook a parallel vote tabulation (PVT) using a sample based observation (SBO) during the 2018 harmonised elections. PVT is an internationally recognised election observation methodology that is used alongside the traditional observation to broadly assess the electoral process and to verify official election results. A major distinction between the two methodologies is that PVT is short-term, as it focuses on election day processes and results, while the traditional observation is longer term and takes into account the rest of the election cycle. The PVT makes use of specially trained observers who are deployed in selected polling stations in various constituencies and provinces. They observe how the opening of polls, voting and counting processes, as well as announcement of results are conducted by the Election Management Body (EMB). According to the ZESN secretariat, out of the 7240 recruited observers, 750 were designated as sample based observers to assess the elections, especially the results for the presidential ballot. Deployment considerations included the geography of the country, distribution of polling stations, and the distribution of registered voters.

An important aspect of the PVT is that as soon as results have been announced at randomly selected polling stations, the SBO results are sent to the observer command centre through mobile networks for analysis and formulation of a precise projection of the election results on a national scale. Therefore, by the time the EMB announced the results, ZESN already had a representative sample of the results (from a 100% response rate) making the methodology timely for observer analysis of results. The ZESN 2018 PVT results showed that for the two leading presidential contenders, Nelson Chamisa (MDC-Alliance) obtained 45.8 per cent of the vote, against 50.7% for Emmerson Mnangagwa (ZANU PF). The official ZEC results were 44.3 per cent against 50.8 percent respectively. This represented +/- 2.0% error margin for both Chamisa and Mnangagwa's results. The PVT result affirmed Mnangagwa's victory and the credibility of the official ZEC results tabulations.

However, this created twin problems for ZESN. First, the opposition parties, especially the MDC-Alliance, accused ZESN of being pro-ZANU PF. It was not the

¹¹ This media engagement is also an area where ZESN has a potential to assume greater relevance in relation to the Swedish Strategy for Development Cooperation in Zimbabwe.

first time that a political party that does not like the outcome of ZESN's work claimed that it favours its counterpart. In the past, especially in reaction to the 2008 SBO outcome/projections, ZESN was accused of being pro-MDC by ZANU PF, leading to some of its members being arrested and tortured by the security police.

Secondly, some ZESN member organisations felt blind-sided by the PVT result announcement by the leadership. According to one interviewee, "The PVT operation was not adequately discussed within the membership due to security considerations. Consequently, when ZESN was under attack, none of the members could defend the network on the matter." One Board member also indicated that "The SBO report created problems both within the network and with the communities because the SBO tool was problematic, the methodology problematic and this led to a perception that ZESN was partisan." Some interviewees also noted that ZESN was also unable to communicate the SBO workings to the election contenders, members and partners as well as the media and general public. As a result, the whole initiative was vulnerable to uninformed criticism.

2.5.2 Strengthened institutions

ZESN has demonstrated strong commitment to influence institutional structures. This has sometimes been done through dialogue with progressive actors and is therefore 'under the radar' of public awareness. Other efforts have involved more public advocacy, either on a broad-based approach with the membership or in a more technical manner by producing advice directed at a more limited range of stakeholders. Approaches have included letters, meetings and discussions. These stakeholders include Parliament, the Ministry of Justice, ZEC and other institutions supporting democracy.

Box 4: ZESN self assessment of advocacy results¹²

In a recent self assessment of its advocacy results ZESN identified the following as areas where effectiveness has been improved:

- ZESN has managed to bring together CSOs working in the Democracy and Governance sector under the electoral reforms working group and has managed to achieve consensus on the key demands for free and fair elections.
- ZESN has also managed to keep the Electoral reforms issue on the national agenda through the continuous awareness-raising of the reforms that need to be instituted through vigorous social media campaigns, engagement with the Government and collaboration with civic society.

¹² ZESN Advocacy assessment, 2019

- ZESN has also better utilised political economic analysis to inform its advocacy initiatives by delineating the political dynamics surrounding a reform issue and the proponents and opponents within a certain reform issue.

As noted above, there are inevitable challenges in advocating for institutional reforms after elections, when awareness of dysfunctions is most apparent, but when momentum and funding declines. One example of what was reported to have been an effective effort to overcome this drop in attention was a compendium of recommendations from electoral observers prepared after the 2018 elections¹³. The evaluation team judges that ZESN has performed as well as can be expected, and also notes that this is heavily reliant on its Swedish financial support across the electoral cycle.

However, the evaluation team also judges that the approach to policy influence and working with policy analysts for advocacy is somewhat ad hoc. Members report that they lack regular opportunities to jointly pause and reflect on the results of electoral efforts, and are insufficiently supported in this regard. Furthermore, the approach of contracting individual consultants to undertake policy research initiatives does not sufficiently ensure continuity in policy analyses and advocacy. Neither does it take advantage of the skills of the members in the media sector in integrating communications perspectives within policy reform efforts. Two informants noted (and the evaluation team concurs) that contracting of individuals rather than policy analysis organisations has hindered continuity, dialogue and opportunities for broader membership input. This has been justified by a desire to reduce financial and transaction costs associated with more institutionalised CSO-think tank collaboration. It is also related to caution regarding the outspoken political stances and poor communications skills of many academics. These are valid concerns, but it appears that tendencies towards ‘path dependency’ have meant that opportunities for greater impact through more ambitious approaches have not been explored.

The above notwithstanding, there are tangible results from initiatives underway at the time of this evaluation. Two different albeit related electoral reform initiatives are described in Box 5 below, advocacy on delimitation of election boundaries and electoral reforms through the national assembly.

¹³ ZESN, Zimbabwe Harmonised Elections 30 July 2018: Compendium of Election Observers Recommendations

Box 5: Delimitation¹⁴ and post-election petitions¹⁵**Boundary delimitation**

A central aspect of institutional reform during the post-2018 election phase will be the delimitation of election boundaries. In early 2019 ZESN undertook research on the delimitation of electoral boundaries. The objectives of the research were to ascertain citizens' knowledge, attitudes and opinions on delimitation of constituency boundaries in Zimbabwe; to analyse the current framework for determining and reviewing electoral boundaries; and to recommend the redrawing of the boundaries of the 210 Constituencies based on the current voter register and population statistics. In their comprehensive research report, ZESN calls for a delimitation process that adheres to the principles of transparency, non-discrimination, representativeness, equality of the vote and impartiality. It also advocates for inclusivity of the process to ensure public trust.

ZEC has acknowledged the contribution of ZESN to promotion of credible elections, but feels that ZESN should consult more with ZEC and other statutory bodies. The delimitation research by ZESN was cited as an example where ZESN disseminated information that may later be contradicted by the official information by ZEC. The evaluation team concurs that there is a need for more consultations, but also finds that the fact that the public reacts to sometimes diverging statements issued by both ZESN and ZEC is an affirmation that ZESNs work is used by the public to make informed decisions on electoral matters.

Petitions on Electoral Reforms

As part of its post-election programme and in a quest to influence the electoral reform agenda, ZESN submitted a petition to parliament in December 2018 in which it highlighted shortcomings in the existing legal framework and electoral processes and urged parliament to prioritise legislation on these. In response to the petition, parliament invited ZESN to an oral hearing before the Parliamentary Portfolio on Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs in March 2019. Based on this hearing the two parties agreed to hold a joint workshop. While the workshop programme focused on electoral reforms in general, specific issues that were addressed included diaspora voting, inclusivity, legal frameworks, election dispute resolution and the role of the media.

¹⁴ ZESN, 2019, Key Consideration for Delimitation in 2023

¹⁵ ZESN, 2018, Parliament of Zimbabwe Form of Petition

Subsequent to the workshop, parliament invited ZESN to develop a model law on a number of areas raised in the petition. To this end, at the time of the evaluation ZESN was commissioning position papers on diaspora voting, boundary delimitation, election dispute resolution, political party regulation and traditional leadership.

Both initiatives demonstrate ZESNs resolve to be a leading advocacy organisation. While in other country contexts these kinds of initiatives may not be seen to be innovative, in Zimbabwe efforts to engage with parliament in the way described above is actually a new approach and therefore a good example of how the ZESN secretariat is finding new ways to channel the voice of its members while also providing technical advice.

2.5.3 Citizen access and participation

In the e survey conducted for this evaluation five of six respondents described ZESN as having a major or modest contribution to citizen access to and participation in electoral processes. The evaluation team judges that contributions to access and participation are most striking in relation to ensuring broad inclusion. The diversity and strength of its membership are central to ZESN'S commitments to 'leave no one behind' in the electoral process. Awareness and commitments to promoting gender equality and overcoming tendencies towards discriminatory structures facing people with disabilities, former convicts, ethnic groups and isolated rural populations have been exemplary. Task forces hold these inclusion efforts together, particularly during election periods when resources are more readily available. Even between elections dialogues about how to promote access continue, facilitated by WhatsApp groups and making use of extra resources that appear in conjunction with by-elections, small additional projects and voter education/registration initiatives. The task forces also identify gaps that need to be addressed. For example, the Bulawayo task force identified the need to register young people. They mobilised some resources locally and requested support from the secretariat to expand these efforts.

Voter education and registration efforts are kept active across the electoral cycle. For grassroots membership, apart from monitoring and observation, voter education and registration are their most important roles in the network, and commitments are strong. This is also an area where the membership and the secretariat and the members work together in intensive and innovative ways, as illustrated in Box 6 below.

However, some interviewees noted (and the evaluation team concurs) that the communications efforts of ZESN to promote citizen awareness and participation are not optimal. Although ZESN has a well-structured approach to communications, using

different media, the process is seen as somewhat rigid¹⁶. For example, different approaches are needed for reaching urban youth (e.g., constantly enhancing social media efforts) and rural youth (who may lack similar access to social media). Furthermore, there is a view that many of the communications outputs are too “wordy” to function as effective advocacy.

Box 6: Innovation in voter registration mobilisation

Enhanced voter registration was one of the major election reforms after Zimbabwe adopted a new constitution in 2013. Of particular importance was the biometric voter registration (BVR) system introduced by ZEC. ZESN and its network members were at the centre of the national discussions on the merits and limitations of the BVR. ZESN also played a leading role in public outreach where it explained how the system was going to work in terms of the fingerprint and the facial recognition technology. ZESN was invited by the ZEC to observe the procurement process of the BVR kits, which included advertising the tender, opening of bids, evaluation of submitted bids, demonstration of kits and final tender awarding. It was able to give feedback on the technical aspects of the equipment to ZEC before awarding of the tender.

Conducted in four phases comprising 16 days each, the BVR process was a mammoth task. To illustrate the magnitude of the registration process, out of a total of 3000 BVR kits procured by the ZEC, 2585 were designated as mobile BVR kits and were deployed across the country from September 2017 to February 2018. This meant that ZESN members and partners had to be at every registration centre prior to the arrival of the registration teams. Throughout the entire BVR process including the provisional voters roll inspection period from 19 to 29 May 2019, ZESN provided feedback to the ZEC and engaged in publicity and awareness campaigns through various communication mediums.

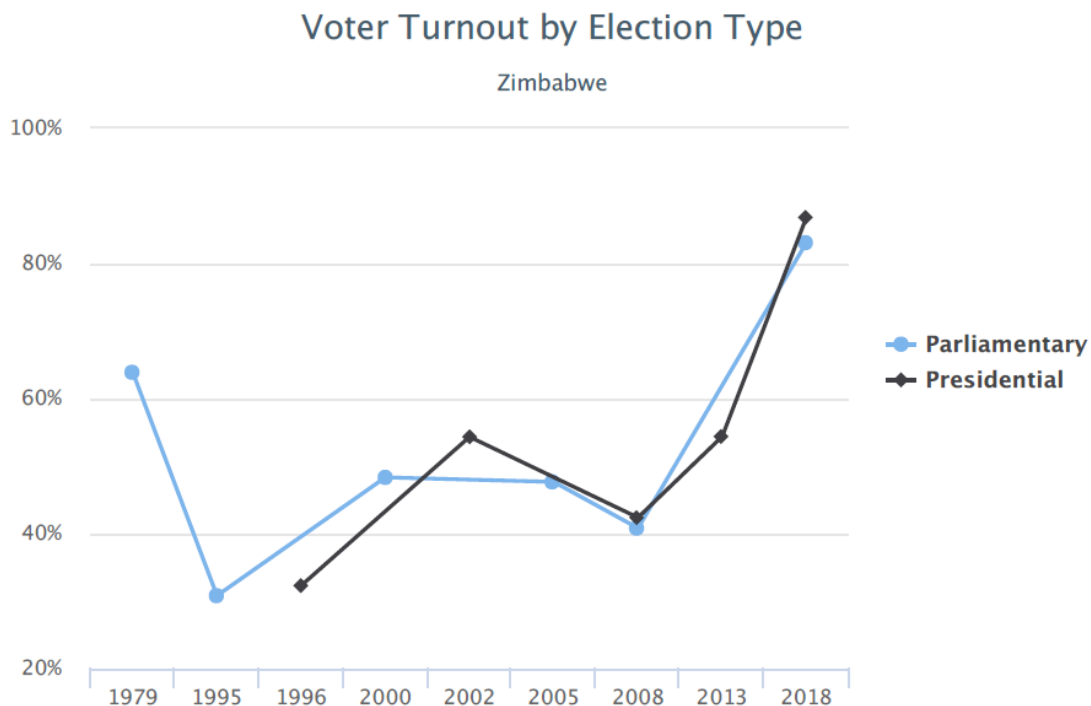
Interviewees indicated that roadshows were particularly popular for registering the youth since leading musicians and artists were engaged. The roadshow programme included quizzes with prizes, delivery of key BVR messages by ZESN and ZEC, distribution of pamphlets and other written materials, as well as entertainment by musicians. ZESN reported to have reached over 639,000 people through roadshows. Besides the roadshows over 4 million citizens were reached through radio

¹⁶ This has been justified by the need for great caution due to tendencies in the broader media and among politicians to look for ways to question ZESN's impartiality and credibility. Strict control over messaging is thus justified to a significant extent, and one member of the secretariat was notably proud that “we have never had to retract a report” due to inappropriate claims. However, overly strict control can also stifle creativity and adaptability.

and television adverts, while 147,000 people were reached through bulk short messaging systems (SMS). As a result, over 5.6 million voters were registered and voter turnout was the highest since independence (see Box 7 below).

Despite the important role of media highlighted in Box 6 above, ZESN has not fully and flexibly utilised the skills of its media members to design and tailor messages and media to its wide range of potential audiences and cover the full range of technical and political economy issues that ZESN is dealing with. The ZESN members from the media have strong skills and their own networks that could potentially facilitate this, but in the view of the evaluation team the secretariat has not reached out sufficiently. Some informants referred to examples indicating that the ERC had been more innovative and effective in this regard, e.g., in the production of high quality radio programmes. Describing the limitations to ZESN's communications efforts, one interviewee summarised her concerns by stating, "We like pamphlets, but we don't read them a lot".

Box 7: Voter turnout by election type



Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)¹⁷

¹⁷ Available online: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/312/40>

2.5.4 Effective CSO interventions

ZESN is the ‘go to’ network for design and mobilisation of CSO electoral interventions. The scope and scale of the network is extraordinary. It is hard to picture what the electoral landscape would be like without ZESN. Their disciplined and well trained membership has been central to establishing a key role for civil society. In discussion of training and capacity development more generally, interviewees consistently referred to well structured “cascading” of support, combined to a readiness to listen and adapt to local priorities and needs. Interviewees cite three notable aspects of how ZESN mobilises civil society:

First, especially (but not entirely) during election periods, the network provides allowances and other modest material incentives to ‘volunteers’. There is a consensus among interviewees that this may be a major motivation for a minority of ‘volunteers’ to engage, but that for the majority it is their personal commitments to the democratic process that dominate. One interviewee stated “There can never be purity. There are always going to be different interests and agendas. Some want an income, but most want to make a difference.”

Second, ZESN has gentle but sufficient structures in place to guard against the risk that members fail to maintain sufficient impartiality. This is a delicate balance to ensure that reputational risk is managed among members (most of whom presumably have strong political views), while not stifling their drive and level of engagement. Interviewees described this as an inevitably ongoing and sometimes uncomfortable task, which the secretariat manages well through training as well as close and constant dialogue with the members.

Third, with support from the European Union ZESN has been experimenting with using sub-granting to its members and other partners to give them opportunities to pursue their own priorities. Twenty-one organisations received support, approximately 70 per cent of which were ZESN members. This pilot effort was difficult for the secretariat and the members to implement, due to the need to invest considerable resources in training the recipients of the grants and performing fiduciary due diligence. One sub-grant recipient noted that the grant involved “microscopic oversight” but that this was ultimately healthy as a form of capacity development to strengthen their internal systems. Despite challenges, the sub-granting programme has demonstrated the potential to both empower and capacitate civil society. Recipients of these grants who were interviewed were enthusiastic about these outcomes.

In all of these three areas, the quality that was most emphasised by interviewees was how close the secretariat worked with the wide range of CSO members. The ability of the small secretariat to manage this constant dialogue across these different sectors and geographies is evidence of both the dedication and skills of the secretariat staff, and also the effectiveness of the task force structures.

2.6 SUSTAINABILITY

This section responds to evaluation question nine: Is it likely that the benefits (outcomes) of the project are sustainable?

ZESN will remain reliant on international funding for the foreseeable future. This is a considerable concern given the declining and uneven levels of donor support to Zimbabwe. Domestic funding for electoral activities is virtually non-existent, which stems from both the financial crisis facing Zimbabwe and the high profile of the international community during election periods. Alternative income sources are being explored, including renting out a gazebo at the secretariat¹⁸ and undertaking consultancy activities, but these have thus far yielded minimal returns. Cost cutting measures, such as relying on members' churches as inexpensive venues for activities are being employed, but the impact on overall finances is modest. Members contribute a massive amount of time and provide in-kind support to ZESN activities, but this also creates significant coordination burdens on the secretariat. Any reduction of core secretariat staffing could damage effectiveness and reduce ability to scale-up rapidly during election periods. Apart from the unlikely possibility of accessing a major endowment, it is doubtful that ZESN will achieve significantly higher levels of financial sustainability. For these reasons, the stability and sustainability of basic secretariat functions can be seen as being at risk, since Sweden is increasingly alone in covering these costs.

With regard to the sustainability of ZESN efforts to maintain credibility and influence, Zimbabwe is inevitably an environment with unpredictable risks, but the evaluation team judges that ZESN has the structure, skills and governance to maintain its credibility and influence in the future if donor support is maintained at approximately current levels. If funding decreases, it may become more difficult to maintain connectivity across the geographies where ZESN works, which suggests that additional investment in developing organisational capacities among the weaker partners would be required to ensure that they can continue. Furthermore, ZESN has systems in place and the strong governance required to manage a range of institutional risks, including provision of ongoing training, due diligence (e.g., as related to mobilising the capacities to manage the European Union sub-granting support) as well as keeping an appropriate range of members. One Board member stressed the importance for care in how membership and Annual General Meetings are handled due to the risk of bogus organisations trying to gain a seat at the table and distorting or diverting the work of the network. He also noted that the task forces provided an additional "peer review structure", where members could monitor each other and prevent predatory behaviour.

¹⁸ The gazebo was constructed as a base for the Election Situation Room during elections, but is largely unused during other periods.

With regard to the sustainability of ZESN's ability to maintain its current momentum given the unpredictable political climate and conditions, it is important to recognise that working with electoral processes in Zimbabwe will continue to be a high risk effort. In addition to the obvious political volatility, wavering donor commitments to Zimbabwe more generally are cause for concern. The evaluation team is cautiously optimistic that ZESN is well positioned to weather future risks, but the outcomes are uncertain.

2.7 IMPACT

This section of the evaluation report responds to evaluation question eight: What is the overall impact of the project in terms of direct or indirect results?

The evaluation team has identified four levels of impact that ZESN has achieved.

Impact on citizens: For a significant proportion of the population, ZESN has enhanced their democratic and human rights in an inhospitable environment. The electoral environment in Zimbabwe still has many problems, but the evaluation team judges that elections would have been significantly less transparent and voter awareness and engagement would have been more restricted without flexible and consistent support to ZESN. Central to this has been the scale and scope of ZESN operations, and this has been steadily increased during the past five years. One Board member stated that “nobody beats us in terms of deployment”, which has resulted in this powerful impact.

Reaching the grassroots: Via its task forces, ZESN has been quite effective in overcoming geographic and political barriers¹⁹, though there are inevitable limits with regard to certain ‘no-go areas’ especially in Mashonaland Central province. The breadth and size of the ZESN membership, and the efficient and effective support provided by the secretariat have led to support reaching many grassroots areas that would otherwise have remained out of reach.

Box 8: How residents' associations engage with ZESN

The ZESN membership includes residents' associations in Harare and Bulawayo which see their involvement as a way to both mobilise their communities to engage in the electoral process, and also (in doing so) as a way to advocate for quality services. Community members are trained and provided with voter education materials, with support from the secretariat, which in turn energises them for their ongoing work as watchdogs on public services. By being part of ZESN they are

¹⁹ This even includes physical barriers, described in Box 9 below regarding the work of NASCOH.

strengthened in their efforts to hold politicians to account for living up to their promises, even if this advocacy largely takes place outside of their ZESN activities per se. As such, this exemplifies how involvement in electoral activities contributes to members' involvement in working towards democratic accountability in a broader sense. Voting is linked to concrete citizen concerns about basic public services. A recent article (Palmer 2019) emphasises how such efforts to hold politicians to account for public services is central to the “everyday life structures of democratic development”. This example shows how ZESN contributes to this important sphere, albeit indirectly.

Inclusion: Through its diverse membership and its diverse Board, ZESN has been able to effectively target and enhance the human rights of women and men, people with disabilities, former convicts, victims of violence and torture, and different ethnic groups. This is a highly intentional aspect of ZESN's basic ethos. The member organisations have made clear that they feel empowered and capacitated to undertake a range of work with their constituencies that would otherwise have not been possible. In the e survey conducted for this evaluation, five of six respondents felt that ZESN was very effective or moderately effective in enhancing the participation of specific communities in electoral processes. This mostly relates to voter engagement, but some observers note that the involvement of women's organisations in the ZESN network may have contributed to greater numbers of women candidates in rural areas.

Box 9: How ZESN works with inclusion of people with disabilities

ZESN's engagement with the National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH) exemplifies how ZESN works in an adaptive and inclusive manner to support its members. The secretariat was praised for listening to NASCOH's priorities, which in turn has meant the need for adapting training, voting materials and election observation routines to NASCOH's diverse member organisations. For example, with ZESN/NASCOH support, ZEC has for the first time produced voter education materials using Braille, making it easier for visually impaired members to follow the electoral processes. ZESN has supported NASCOH to produce a weekly radio programme on disability with attention to the challenges facing people with disabilities in the electoral processes as perceived by the people with disabilities themselves. NASCOH's involvement also included travelling with ZEC to undertake barrier assessments and making recommendations for improvements at 522 polling stations in 2017. This is an example of how the growing collaborative relationship between ZESN and ZEC is yielding concrete results. This co-creation approach to “turning sympathy into action” was strongly praised. NASCOH reports both significantly higher voter engagement and awareness among people with disabilities, and also genuine interest from parliamentarians, political parties and ZEC to improve access. One interviewee stated that “it is easy to interface with ZESN on inclusivity especially regarding people with disabilities and ZESN in turn gets to amplify the voice through persuasion. Otherwise it would not be possible to achieve directly with ZEC”. NASCOH hopes that this opening of space for engagement can lead to awareness of the broader importance of ensuring

a proactive role for people with disabilities in public life. They also note that there is more that can and should be done, including collection of more disaggregated data so as to design more appropriate voter education and more specific evidence in ZESN reports on disability related aspects.

The big picture: In considering impact, it is important to frame this in relation to the ‘so what’ question recently posed by Nic Cheeseman and Brian Klaas²⁰ who have questioned the efficacy of electoral support in countries where regimes are loath to relinquish power and have effective machines in place to retain control. i.e., those who have no intention to ‘reform themselves out of power’. These concerns are largely beyond the scope of this evaluation, but informants have presented credible arguments regarding the potential to work with principled technocrats in the government, local authorities and parliamentarians who accept the need for tolerance and strengthening of democratic principles. The progress made in ZESN’s work with ZEC is a good example of how reform can be pursued. The ultimate results, however, remain uncertain. One informant expressed the view that both ZESN and its members and partners would benefit from greater reflection about the “state of the state”. The evaluation team sees this suggestion as being worth pursuing, but ZESN cannot address this ‘elephant in the room’ alone. A more open dialogue and systematic connectivity within the ZESN network; with other electoral actors (e.g., ERC); and with policy research institutions would be required to mobilise this important national conversation on the democratic process.

²⁰ Cheeseman, Nic, Klaas, Brian (2018) *How to Rig an Election*, Yale University Press

3 Conclusions and Lessons Learnt

3.1 NETWORK RESULTS

ZESN is highly effective at mobilising its membership to jointly achieve extraordinary outcomes. These results indicate a very high level of resilience in an inhospitable environment. A striking overarching contributing factor to achieving these results has been the network's ability to remain nimble and achieve a good balance between 'technocratic' and 'innovative' results while working with a very broad range of stakeholders. One Board member mentioned that "Too often innovation is an appendage rather than a part of our theory of change. A box to tick in a project proposal." The evaluation team judges that ZESN has been able to integrate innovation into systems and structures to a satisfactory extent and avoid ticking boxes. In interviews with ZESN membership an overall picture emerges of organisations being empowered to have a concrete contribution to transparent, free and credible elections, but also that they see this as means to position themselves to achieve broader goals related to greater public participation and a more democratic society.

This suggests the following lessons:

- With careful management and the credibility that comes with a long track record, a mature network can achieve major results.
- With due diligence to ensure impartiality, even civil society institutions that would otherwise be branded as part of 'the opposition' can build broad trust and position themselves to play a strategic role within a hostile environment.
- Electoral support through a network such as ZESN should be recognised as a vehicle that yields results both for the direct 'ends' related to elections, and also for using electoral engagements as a 'means' for members' to develop their efforts to achieve broader democratisation goals.

3.2 NETWORK CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity is strong across both the sectors and geographies covered by the network. A highly constructive, collaborative spirit prevails. This is to a large extent due to the strength of the task force structures, especially during elections and for voter education and registration. These task forces are able to work effectively due to the supportive role played by the secretariat and its strong relationship with the Board. Connectivity relies on healthy structures.

Technology and messaging are used reasonably effectively, but there are some concerns regarding unmet potential use of communications (more broadly than social media alone) for engaging youth and other target groups. Also, the approach to policy

analysis more generally displays a somewhat limited perspective. Greater proactive internal communications could help the membership to develop consensus on issues that arise and avoid the inevitable misunderstandings and dissonance that arise in any large network.

ZESN has made considerable strides in developing connections with key stakeholders outside of civil society. The new relationship with ZEC is of central importance, but this has also been complemented by developing trust with parliamentarians and some technocrats within the government, despite prevailing hostilities towards civil society.

This suggests the following lessons:

- Good network governance is key to connectivity –both as an attribute of a strong, mature network, and also to ensure that the membership contributes to vitality and innovation.
- Policy analysis for advocacy is challenging for networks to manage, and may require some ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking, particularly with regard to integrating ideas on communications for policy influence at different levels from the outset of any initiative. A broad network such as ZESN has a clear and essential niche (and should guard that role accordingly), but that does not exclude the importance of broad dialogue with smaller advocacy groups and policy research institutions that have complementary roles in the national discourse on democratisation.
- Credibility and ability to bring together a large constituency can be leveraged to enhance relationships with public institutions and contribute to building even broader networks of like-minded actors beyond civil society.

3.3 NETWORK HEALTH

The governance structures of ZESN are strong and appear stable. This has proven to be a pivotal factor in ensuring that the secretariat and the membership work together in a strategically coherent and visionary manner. Systems are in place to address risks related to potential partiality and ensure conflict sensitivity. Institutional and personal commitments to the work are the main drivers of the network, though access to income is inevitably a factor for some ‘volunteers’. The task force structure has been used effectively for both large-scale mobilisation during elections and more low-keyed efforts across the electoral cycle.

ZESN has been effective at maintaining strong engagement electoral processes, while not overstepping its role when members choose to undertake initiatives individually (primarily in the broader democracy and human rights spheres). A strong contributing factor to the health of the network has been the ability to innovate while avoiding risks of ‘mission creep’ (being pulled into areas outside of its skill-sets).

This narrow electoral focus has ultimately contributed to ZESN's 'technocratic' and even secretariat-driven image among some observers. The findings of this evaluation suggest that ZESN is a lot healthier than it sometimes appears. It is a genuine and strong network, and it needs to find ways to better highlight how much of its work is anchored in the ideas, efforts and inspiration of its members.

This suggests the following lessons:

- Sweden's flexible funding and commitments to work across the electoral cycle can enable a national network to choose a 'healthy' path –ambitious yet giving members the space to pursue other democratisation goals outside of the network.
- In electoral efforts, ensuring impartiality requires a strong secretariat that is able to undertake due diligence while not stifling the passion of the members in the field –this is not an easy balance to maintain, but ZESN shows that it is possible.

4 Recommendations

This evaluation presents relatively few recommendations due to the fact that it judges that ZESN is firmly on course and requires relatively few adjustments to its current work. The overarching recommendation is thus that ZESN should largely continue with its current structures and approaches.

It must be stressed that these recommendations for further support are presented despite a high degree of uncertainty regarding the implications of trends in donor commitments to democratic processes in Zimbabwe and indeed internationally. Sweden is increasing its focus on democracy, but other (larger) donors are reducing their support and international assistance to Zimbabwe is declining more generally. Sweden is committed to working across the election cycle, but there are few signs that others are following a similar path. For these reasons, the evaluation has sought to provide evidence regarding the value and potential to contribute to democracy through civil society in Zimbabwe, but the implications of the analyses in a broader perspective of declining commitments will be somewhat uncertain. In turn, this may have significant impacts on the viability of ZESN in the future, as Sweden cannot shoulder this financial burden alone.

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SWEDISH EMBASSY

- Sweden should continue support ZESN at similar levels to that of the current phase.
- Sweden should continue to encourage the wider donor community to recognise the potential to achieve major results across the electoral cycle and coordinate assistance accordingly.
- As part of this, Sweden should specifically raise awareness of the importance of ensuring a modicum of stable financing to ZESN across electoral cycles to ensure that at least the core secretariat staffing remains in place to enable the expansion that occurs during election periods. One donor should not bear this burden alone.
- Pursuing basket funding arrangements could be an appropriate mechanism for this, but it is recognised that not all donors currently embrace the principles of aid effectiveness that would underpin such arrangements.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO ZESN

- ZESN should revisit how communications efforts are framed within its theory of change to ensure better recognition of how ZESN intends to share information internally within the network and among wider sets of stakeholders. This should include leveraging the sectoral skills (e.g., media, outreach to specific target groups such as youth) that exist within the membership. For example, in the current draft strategy²¹ social media issues are subsumed under the “technological environment”, but in the view of the evaluation team this should be seen as a broader concern that includes –but also transcends– technological aspects.
- ZESN should rethink relations with policy research institutions for institutional reform and advocacy, as well as including advice from media members to adopt a more comprehensive and coherent approach to policy influence.
- This could include, for example, finding new fora for public debate that bring together the considerable evidence that ZESN can (and does) collect, with analyses of that data undertaken by policy research institutions and outreach efforts of advocacy groups. This may involve face-to-face events, and also rethinking the use of publications and social media to be seen as part of a process leading to outcomes related to a more informed and critical awareness of the issues, rather than as outputs per se. The ZESN membership includes organisations and individuals with appropriate skills for this, and they could be encouraged to support the secretariat in these efforts.
- The current draft strategy is largely appropriate in describing the ZESN structure, but should be ‘tweaked’ to even better highlight the respective roles of members and the secretariat, with particular attention to specifying the responsibilities of the task forces at different levels.
- As part of this, the strategy (and especially the description of the underlying theory of change) should also present forceful arguments for why narrow one-off trainings and short-term investments are not likely to be effective if done in isolation, and therefore need to be pursued over time and across electoral cycles (led by a secretariat with stable funding). ZESN should sharpen its presentation of its ‘value proposition’ in this regard.
- In addition to revisions to the strategy, ZESN should revisit its reporting to enhance the sharpness and clarity of its critical analyses of challenges facing the network and the secretariat in maintaining continuity and advocacy at key points in the electoral cycle. Current reporting is comprehensive in describing activities and outputs, but readers have apparently sometimes ‘missed the forest for the trees’ with regard to key electoral cycle related issues and policy reform outcomes.

²¹ ZESN (2019) Strategic Plan 2019-2023 (draft)

- ZESN should explore opportunities to replicate the European Union sub-granting support to mobilise resources to invest in the institutional development of members and their innovative efforts.

5 Annexes

5.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of Election Support Project 2016-2018, Zimbabwe

Date: 2019-05-21

1. Evaluation object and scope

The Swedish Embassy in Zimbabwe is currently providing support to the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) for the 2016-2018 Electoral Support Project. The agreement between the two parties, signed on 19th May 2016, indicates that there shall be an independent evaluation regarding the impact of the programme carried out no later than 30th September 2019. The evaluation shall cover the time period from the start of the project, 19th May 2016, up until 30th March 2019. The total budget of the support from Sweden during the project time is SEK 21 300 000.

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network is a non-partisan coalition of 36 non-governmental organisations covering the whole of Zimbabwe, formed in 2000, to co-ordinate activities pertaining to elections within the NGO sector. The major focus of the Network is to promote democratic processes in general and free and fair elections in particular. ZESN observes elections so that citizens can exercise their fundamental right to vote and to provide independent non-partisan information on the conduct of elections to political contestants, the public and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

The vision of ZESN is that of a Zimbabwe where principles of free and fair elections are upheld in a transparent, credible and non-partisan electoral process. ZESN aims to design its projects to deepen democracy through strengthening electoral processes and enhance democratization in Zimbabwe. ZESN works together with relevant stakeholders to develop support systems for enhancing the conduct of elections and upholding the rule of law, with a mission to enhance a democratic, transparent, free and fair electoral process and environment through co-ordinating activities of member organisations.

In pursuing its vision and mission, ZESN is guided by the following values:

- Democratic, Free and Fair Elections.
- Secrecy of the ballot.
- Democracy.
- Mutual respect and tolerance.
- Respect for human rights.
- Transparency and Accountability.
- Peace.

- Informed citizen participation.
- Non-discrimination.

The overall goal of ZESN is: To facilitate the participation of civil society in local authority, parliamentary, presidential elections and by-elections in order to promote democratic values, transparent, free and fair electoral environment and processes in accordance with set international standards.

ZESN's **theory of change** follows the logic that if there is/are: Strengthened national democratic institutions; Improved transparency in electoral processes; Increased citizen access to and participation in electoral processes; and Enhanced effectiveness of CSOs' election-related interventions; then the desired impact, of "*a Zimbabwe where citizens are empowered to hold the State to account for the respect of human rights, good governance and democratic principles*" will be realized. The role of the ZESN secretariat is to maintain and coordinate the network to ensure the project outcomes are reached. The secretariat is also key in pushing the advocacy agenda for electoral reform, and hold education and capacity building on electoral issues for partners within the network.

The current project which is being supported by Sweden and TRACE (Transparency, Responsiveness, Accountability, and Citizen Engagement Fund)²² as its main donors has the impact goal of:

A Zimbabwe where democratic electoral environment and processes are upheld.

The main sub/outcome goals are:

5. Increased citizens access to and participation in electoral processes
6. Improved transparency in electoral processes
7. Strengthened democratic institutions and processes
8. Enhanced effectiveness of CSOs' election related interventions.

The scope of the evaluation encompasses to evaluate the relevance, effectiveness, the impact and the sustainability of the project and the results reached, by the project from the starting date in May 2016 up until March 2019. The original activity period for the project was until 31 December 2018, but the agreement has since then been amended with a no-cost extension up until 30th June 2019. The no-cost extension was requested by ZESN, based on a Bridge Funding Proposal, during which ZESN, while continuing its work on observation of by-elections and advocacy for electoral amendments, would do an extensive analysis of the previous electoral cycle, conduct a project evaluation and introspection of the 2016-2018 strategic plan, in order to guide future interventions and the next strategic plan.

²² TRACE is a fund supported by DFID, Netherlands, Ireland and Denmark focusing on governance and human rights in Zimbabwe.

2. Evaluation rationale

The evaluation to be undertaken is an end of programme evaluation to assess the results of the project as well as providing lessons learned and recommendations for a possible second phase of the support.

There is currently a no-cost extension of the agreement between the Swedish Embassy and Sweden which is valid until 31 December 2019, with an activity period ending 30th June 2019.

3. Evaluation purpose: Intended use and intended users

The purpose or intended use of the evaluation is to assess the progress of the Election Support Project 2016-2018 to learn from it what works well, and less well. The evaluation will be used as an input to discussions concerning the possible support of a new phase of the project, and to inform decisions on how project implementation may be adjusted and improved.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are the Swedish Embassy in Zimbabwe and ZESN.

The evaluation is to be designed, conducted and reported to meet the needs of the intended users and tenderers shall elaborate in the tender how this will be ensured during the evaluation process.

4. Evaluation criteria and questions

The objective of the evaluation is to evaluate the relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the Election Support Project 2016-2018, to formulate recommendations on how to improve and adjust implementation of the project, and be an input to upcoming discussions concerning the preparation of a new phase of the project.

For further information, the project/programme proposal is attached as Annex D.

The evaluation questions are:

Relevance

- Evaluate the relevance of the project and the four main outcomes identified in the field of elections in Zimbabwe. What is lacking? What could be improved?
- Is the expertise of ZESN relevant for bringing the agenda on electoral reform in Zimbabwe forward? What could be improved?
- To which extent has the project conformed to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?

Effectiveness

- To which extent has the project contributed to intended outcomes? If so, why? If not, why not?

- Examine effectiveness of the governance and management set up of ZESN. How effective has the ZESN network been in cooperating on reaching the expected outcomes? What has worked well? What could be improved?
- Evaluate the effectiveness of ZESN in the field of elections in Zimbabwe looking specifically at the degree the four main outcomes of the project been reached. What difference has ZESN made in these areas? What could be improved
- Roles played – positive and negative – of donors to ZESN and donor coordination. What can be improved?

Impact

- What is the overall impact of the project in terms of direct or indirect results?

Sustainability

- Is it likely that the benefits (outcomes) of the project are sustainable?

All questions are expected to be developed in the tender by the tenderer and further developed during the inception phase of the evaluation.

5. Evaluation approach and methods for data collection and analysis

It is expected that the evaluator describes and justifies an appropriate evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection in the tender. The evaluation design, methodology and methods for data collection and analysis are expected to be fully developed and presented in the inception report. A clear distinction is to be made between evaluation approach/methodology and methods.

Sida's approach to evaluation is utilization-focused, which means the evaluator should facilitate the *entire evaluation process* with careful consideration of how everything that is done will affect the use of the evaluation. It is therefore expected that the evaluators, in their tender, present i) how intended users are to participate in and contribute to the evaluation process and ii) methodology and methods for data collection that create space for reflection, discussion and learning between the intended users of the evaluation.

Evaluators should take into consideration appropriate measures for collecting data in cases where sensitive or confidential issues are addressed, and avoid presenting information that may be harmful to some stakeholder groups.

Main stakeholders to meet are the ZESN secretariat, a selection of the members from the network covering different geographical areas, Zimbabwe Electoral Commissions, donors active in the electoral support field (DFID, EU, USAID, Switzerland), the UNDP and of course the Swedish Embassy. It is also advised that the evaluators meets with other civil society actors involved in elections such as Electoral Resource Centre (ERC), TRACE and NDI. The inception report shall include a stakeholder mapping.

6. Organisation of evaluation management

This evaluation is commissioned by the Embassy of Sweden in Harare. The intended users are the Swedish Embassy and the ZESN. As the evaluation will serve as an input to the decision on whether the Swedish Embassy will continue to support the electoral process in Zimbabwe through ZESN, the intended user is the foremost the commissioner. The evaluand, ZESN, has contributed to the ToR and will be provided with an opportunity to comment on the inception report as well as the final report, but will not be involved in the management of the evaluation. Hence the commissioner will evaluate tenders, approve the inception report and the final report of the evaluation. The start-up meeting and the debriefing/validation workshop will be held with the commissioner and the evaluand, and the report and findings will be shared with ZESN.

7. Evaluation quality

All Sida's evaluations shall conform to OECD/DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation²³. The evaluators shall use the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation²⁴. The evaluators shall specify how quality assurance will be handled by them during the evaluation process.

8. Time schedule and deliverables

It is expected that a time and work plan is presented in the tender and further detailed in the inception report. The evaluation shall be carried out in June-September 2019. The timing of any field visits, surveys and interviews need to be settled by the evaluator in dialogue with the main stakeholders during the inception phase.

The table below lists key deliverables for the evaluation process. Deadlines for final report must be kept in the tender, but alternative deadlines for other deliverables may be suggested by the consultant and negotiated during the inception phase.

Deliverables	Participants	Deadlines
1. Start-up meeting via VCT	Consultants, Swedish Embassy (Malin Krook) and ZESN (if available)	24 June (preferably earlier)
2. Draft inception report		Tentative 2 August
3. Inception meeting via VCT	Consultants, Swedish Embassy (Malin Krook) and ZESN (if available)	Tentative 12 August

²³ DAC Quality Standards for development Evaluation, OECD, 2010.

²⁴ Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, Sida in cooperation with OECD/DAC, 2014.

4. Comments from intended users to evaluators		Tentative 16 August
5. Data collection, analysis and report writing	Evaluators	Tentative 16 August – 16 September
6. Debriefing/validation meeting	Consultants, Swedish Embassy (Malin Krook)	Tentative 9 September
7. Draft evaluation report		Tentative 17 September
8. Comments from intended users to evaluators	Swedish Embassy and ZESN	Tentative 30 September
9. Final evaluation report		11 October

The inception report will form the basis for the continued evaluation process and shall be approved by Sida before the evaluation proceeds to implementation. The inception report should be written in English and cover evaluability issues and interpretations of evaluation questions, present the evaluation approach/methodology, methods for data collection and analysis as well as the full evaluation design. A clear distinction between the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection shall be made. A specific time and work plan, including number of hours/working days for each team member, for the remainder of the evaluation should be presented. The time plan shall allow space for reflection and learning between the intended users of the evaluation.

The final report shall be written in English and be professionally proof read. The final report should have clear structure and follow the report format in the Sida Decentralised Evaluation Report Template for decentralised evaluations (see Annex C). The executive summary should be maximum 3 pages. The evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection used shall be clearly described and explained in detail and a clear distinction between the two shall be made. All limitations to the methodology and methods shall be made explicit and the consequences of these limitations discussed. Findings shall flow logically from the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions should be substantiated by findings and analysis. Recommendations for a future phase and lessons learned should flow logically from conclusions. Recommendations should be specific, directed to relevant stakeholders and categorised as a short-term, medium-term and long-term. The report should be no more than 25 pages, excluding annexes (including Terms of Reference and Inception Report). The evaluator shall adhere to the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation²⁵.

²⁵ Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management, Sida in cooperation with OECD/DAC, 2014

The evaluator shall, upon approval of the final report, insert the report into the Sida Decentralised Evaluation Report for decentralised evaluations and submit it to Nordic Morning (in pdf-format) for publication and release in the Sida publication data base. The order is placed by sending the approved report to sida@nordicmorning.com, always with a copy to the Sida Programme Officer as well as Sida's Chief Evaluator's Team (evaluation@sida.se). Write "Sida decentralised evaluations" in the email subject field and include the name of the consulting company as well as the full evaluation title in the email. For invoicing purposes, the evaluator needs to include the invoice reference "ZZ980601," type of allocation "sakanslag" and type of order "digital publicering/publikationsdatabas.

9. Evaluation Team Qualification

In addition to the qualifications already stated in the framework agreement for evaluation services, the evaluation team shall include the following competencies:

- Experience from working with electoral support processes
- Good knowledge about the political and socio-economic situation and context in Zimbabwe

It is desirable that the evaluation team includes the following competencies

- Experience from evaluating electoral support processes.

A CV for each team member shall be included in the call-off response. It should contain a full description of relevant qualifications and professional work experience.

It is important that the competencies of the individual team members are complimentary. It is highly recommended that local consultants are included in the team if appropriate.

The evaluators must be independent from the evaluation object and evaluated activities, and have no stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

10. Resources

The maximum budget amount available for the evaluation is SEK 700 000.

The contact person at the Swedish Embassy is Malin Krook, Counsellor. The contact person should be consulted if any problems arise during the evaluation process.

Relevant documentation will be provided by Malin Krook and ZESN.

Contact details to intended users (cooperation partners, Swedish Embassies, other donors etc.) will be provided by Malin Krook (malin.krook@gov.se), counsellor at the Swedish Embassy, and ZESN, through Ms. Ellen Dingani (ellenk@zesn.net).

The evaluator will be required to arrange the logistics including any necessary security arrangements.

5.2 PERSONS INTERVIEWED

No.	NAME	ORGANISATION
ZESN BOARD		
1	Andrew Makoni	Independent Law Practitioner
2	Dumisani Nkomo	Habakkuk Trust
3	Sally Ncube	Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ)
4	Tinashe Gumbo	Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC)
5	Lovemore Rambiyawo	National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH)
6	Rosewita Katsande	Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT)
7	Abigail Matsvayi	Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA)
8	Marvelous Kumalo	Chitungwiza and Manyame Rural Residents Association (Camera)
9	Leo Chihwinya	Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU)
10	Blessings Makwara	Evangelical Fellowship Zimbabwe (EFZ)
ZESN SECRETARIAT		
11	Rindai Chupfunde Vava	ZESN
12	Ellen Dingani	ZESN
13	Emma Chiseya	ZESN
14	Ian Goredema	ZESN
15	Heather Goga	ZESN
16	Ndodana Ndlovu	ZESN
17	Victor Kahari	ZESN
DONORS		
18	Wonder Jekemu	Sida
19	Tsitsi Marilyn Dzinavane	Sida
20	Fortune Gwaze	Netherlands Embassy
21	Joost van der Zwan	UK DFID
22	Kathleen Lindner	GIZ
23	Katharina Guhr	GIZ
24	Perpetua Bganya	Norwegian People's Aid
25	Samantha Moyo	Norwegian People's Aid
26	Abel Chikomo	TRACE
27	Brenda Candries	European Union
28	Joyce Laetitia Kazembe	ZEC
29	Utloile Silaigwana	ZEC
30	Jane Chigidji	ZEC
31	Japhet Murenje	ZEC
32	Shamiso Shahuruva	ZEC
33	Pamela Mapondera	ZEC

34	James Chidamba	ZEC
35	Denver Mapenzwauswa	ZEC
36	Mavis Maduwakure	ZEC
37	Rejoice Sibanda	ZEC
38	Anthony Chikutsa	ZEC
39	Collins Muchenjekwa	
40	Antonetta Hamandishe	Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA)
41	Tawanda Chimini	Election Resource Centre (ERC)
42	Stephen Snook	International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
43	Peter Maregere	National Democratic Institute (NDI)
44	Azhar Malik	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
45	Henry Masaya	National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH)
46	Clemens Mupasi	National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH)
47	Maria Mapfumo	National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH)
48	Vimbai Mushongera	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU)
49	Tackler Masamba	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU)
50	Cecilia Mukondya	Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of the Offender (ZACRO)
51	Reuben Akili	Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA)
52	Zacharia Godi	Counselling Services Unit (CSU)
53	Chikomborero Mufurirana	Association of Women Clubs (AWC)
54	Tsitsi Chikonyora	Womens Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCOZ) Mashonaland East Province Task Force
55	Rev. Edgar Ziramba	Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) Mashonaland Central Province
56	Solomon Bobosibunu	Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET) Harare
57	Ishmael Nkandla	Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights)
58	Prosper Masibi	Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association (BPRA)
59	Esiko Nkarande	Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET)
60	Mationesa Nyabereka	Zimbabwe Association for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of Offenders (ZACRO)
61	Matsiliso Moyo	Student Christian Movement in Zimbabwe (SCMZ)
62	Beauty Mtendeleki	Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA)

5.3 DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

CBOS Capacitated to Roll Out Electoral Education at Grassroot Level

Cheeseman, Nic, Klaas, Brian (2018) *How to Rig an Election*, Yale University Press

Christoplos, I., et al. (2014) *Review of the Strategy for Swedish Aid Initiatives in Zimbabwe: January 2011-December 2014*, Sida Decentralised Evaluation 2014:31

Jeffrey W. Paller, Comparative Politics, October 2019, *Dignified Public Expression: A New Logic of Political Accountability*

OECD. *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action 2005/2008*. Available online at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm> Accessed 10/09/2019

Paller, J. (2019) *Dignified Public Expression: A new logic of political accountability*, Comparative Politics, October 2019

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Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Strategy for Sweden's development cooperation with Zimbabwe 2017 - 2021*

Thad Dunning et al. (2019) *Voter information campaigns and political accountability: Cumulative findings from a preregistered meta-analysis of coordinated trials*, Sci. Adv. 2019; 5: eaaw2612, 3 July 2019

ZESN, 1st Quarter Narrative Report for all Programmes Jan - March 2017

ZESN, 2016-2019 Electoral Support Project Basket Proposal

ZESN, 2018 Annual Report

ZESN, 2nd Quarter Narrative Report for all Programmes April - June 2017

ZESN, 2nd Quarter Narrative Report for all Programmes May - June 2016

ZESN, Civic and Voter Education Manual for Facilitators

ZESN, Field Validation Visits – Harare EU Sub-Grantees 4 - 5 June 2018

ZESN, IEC Materials Distribution Tracking Tool

ZESN, Impact Assessment Tool

ZESN, Key Considerations for Delimitation in 2023: Final Report: Citizen Perceptions on Delimitation of Electoral Constituencies and Wards in Zimbabwe, April 2019

ZESN, Monitoring and Evaluation Field Visit Report 28 March 2018

ZESN, Monitoring and Evaluation Field Visit Report for Manicaland and Masvingo on the Efficiency in the Distribution Mechanism for the Ballot Newsletter 26 - 28 September 2016

ZESN, Monitoring and Evaluation Follow Up Report to Matabeleland South and Midlands Province: Outcome Harvesting for CBOS Capacitated to Roll Out Electoral Education at Grassroot Level

ZESN, Monitoring and Evaluation Plan 2014 - 2018

ZESN, Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Procedures March 2016

ZESN, Monitoring and Evaluation Visit Report to Hwedza: Outcome Harvesting for

ZESN, Monitoring and Evaluation Visit Report to Mashonaland West Province: Outcome Harvesting for CBOS Capacitated to Roll Out Electoral Education at Grassroot Level

ZESN, Outcome Harvesting Exercise Report Midlands Province 25 - 27 April 2018

ZESN, Outcome Harvesting Tool

ZESN, Parliament of Zimbabwe Form of Petition, 2018

ZESN, Report on the 30 July 2018 Harmonised Elections

ZESN, Report on the 30 July 2018 Harmonised Elections

ZESN, Roving Observers Report Mashonaland West Province 18 - 20 December 2017

ZESN, Sida 2018 Log Frame Indicator Tracking Table for Zimbabwe Election Support Network

ZESN, Sida 2nd Quarter Narrative Report April - June 2018

ZESN, Sida 3rd Quarter Narrative Report July - Sept 2018

ZESN, Sida 3rd Quarter Report 2017

ZESN, Sida 4th Quarter Narrative Report October - December 2018

ZESN, Sida End of Project Evaluation – All Provinces

ZESN, Sida May to December 2016 Annual Narrative Report

ZESN, Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023

ZESN, Support to Civic and Voter Education for BVR and 2018 Harmonized Elections Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning and Technical Back-stopping and Tool – 2018

ZESN, ZESN Advocacy assessment

ZESN, Support to Civic and Voter Education Project Data Collection Tool

ZESN, Zimbabwe Harmonised Elections 30 July 2018: Compendium of Election Observers Recommendations



Evaluation of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network Project 2016-2018

This evaluation of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network has found that the network plays an essential role in ensuring the quality and scale of election monitoring and observation. It has made major contributions to transparent and inclusive elections and electoral reform in a difficult context. This has been due to the network's ability to maintain a good balance between 'technocratic' and 'innovative' initiatives, while working with a very broad range of members and other stakeholders. Strong governance has proven to be a pivotal factor in ensuring that the secretariat, the membership and the task forces across the country work together in a strategically coherent and visionary manner.

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