

The New Age Voices

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First Time Voters key to societal change

YOUNG people have been warned to be wary of being ambushed into early elections by politicians and have therefore been urged to ensure that they are registered as voters and not leave anything to chance.

Despite the fact that youth form the bulk of the Zimbabwean population, it is a matter of regret that most of them have always been found napping in key national processes such as elections where most of them have not been able to vote because they are not registered.

Following efforts by various civic society organisations in conscientising youth that voter registration is an on-going process and not a once off thing as many have been made to believe, deliberately or otherwise, some young people have already started to respond positively.

An increased number of young people in different districts of the country have been visiting the registrar general's office where they have been met with mixed fortunes. Almost half of the youth who were interviewed by *The New Age Voices* in Murehwa, Wedza, Makonde, Lupane and Tsholotsho said that they have been able to register themselves as voters whilst almost the same number was turned away for various reasons.

Although SADC has poured cold water on maneuvers by some politicians to force through the holding of elections this year, youth leaders have remained skeptical of the former ruling party's sincerity to adhere to the regional bloc's recommendations.

The politicians have seized every given opportunity to daringly declare that elections will be held this year without fail despite rebuke by SADC who say that elections can only be held in line with the roadmap that was crafted in Livingstone, Zambia and endorsed in Sandton, South Africa.

The voter registration process has always been kept under tight wraps by the government which has failed to properly and adequately carry out voter education especially among young people who constitute the bulk of the Zimbabwean population.

The deliberate blackout on the exercise has been attributed mainly to fears by some politicians of losing national elections because of their known black past and unattractive manifestos which do not identify with young people's day to day struggles but with their violent nature of their rigid leadership and its passive membership.

Voter registration is conducted by the Registrar General's office throughout the year. The majority of the Zimbabwean population is made up of youth who constitute over 60 percent but what is surprising is that they make up the smaller percentage of the voter's roll.

Youth have the keys to decide elections and they have the answer to solving the problems that are currently bedeviling the country. Their vote is crucial.

For someone to be able to register to vote, one must take with him/her their national identity documents as well

as proof of residence to their nearest Registrar's office. It is an ongoing exercise which means that anyone can be able to get registered to vote anytime during weekdays. Contrary to popular thinking among many that the process is only open prior to elections, the process does not stop. SADC, through its mediation role has drawn a roadmap which is expected to eventually usher in a new voters roll which will give young people an opportunity to register as voters.



Guinea summit on youth: wake up call for African Leaders

THE just ended African Union summit that was held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea was a wakeup call for African leaders across the continent to swiftly attend to issues affecting young people and to acknowledge that youth are key to Africa's development.

AU in April reaffirmed its commitment to the effective implementation of the African Youth Charter, International Year of youth development and to devote the Malabo summit to tackle issues concerning youth. The summit ran under the theme "Accelerating Youth Empowerment for sustainable development."

The summit agreed that youth aged 15-35 constitute the majority of the African popu-

lation and that they are the key driving force for Africa's sustainable development. The heads of state and government there noted that African Youth still face a lot of challenges including education and skills development, sustainable livelihoods and youth unemployment, vulnerability and inadequate participation in decision making processes.

They also acknowledged the desire of African youth within and outside the continent to be directly engaged in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of youth-related projects and programs implemented by various stakeholders.

The African leaders also noted the desire of African youth within and outside the continent to break the cycle of underdevelopment in Africa.

Young people across the continent are faced by numerous challenges such as HIV and Aids, unemployment, political participation and decision-making among others.

In Zimbabwe, unemployment is hovering above 90 percent and the most affected have been young people who constitute the majority of the population but there have been no meaningful progress towards addressing this chronic problem.

During the youth summit that was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in April this year,

young people challenged African leaders to show commitment in attaining the goals and objectives of the African Youth Charter, the 10 year action plan and the Medium Term Priority Actions and strengthening partnerships for Accelerating youth empowerment for sustainable development.

The youth also challenged their leaders to promote youth participation in all processes for attaining the objectives of the African Youth Charter, International Year of Youth, Decade of Youth development and its Plan of Action.

New Junior Parliamentarians sworn in

NEW members of the Junior parliament were officially sworn in at the official opening of the 19th session of the parliament that was held on Saturday 16 July at the Harare International Conference Centre. The new child President is Anesu Rangwani who took over from Nigel Gwanzura. In his inaugural speech, Rangwani urged government departments including the ministry of Youth, Indigenization and Empowerment to help children realize their dreams.

The event was organised by the Zimbabwe Youth Council (ZYC) in conjunction with UNICEF.

UNICEF Country Representative Dr Peter Salama praised the Inclusive government for fighting for the rights of children. He also paid tribute to the parliament saying it was the best in the world.

The swearing in ceremony saw junior ministers and their deputies and the junior Attorney General taking their oath of of-

fice.

However, prior to the swearing in, the junior parliamentarians had to go through a stiff and rigorous round of elections where 41 Junior Ministers, 29 Deputy Ministers and one Attorney General were elected.

The parliamentarians attended an orientation workshop before being sworn in, while rehearsals were also done in preparation of the official opening of the parliament at the HICC.

Cabinet ministers, African Diplomats, youth, children, media and UN agencies were invited to come and attend the official opening of the Children's Parliament.

The Junior parliament has played a pivotal role in advocating for the inclusion of the rights of children in the new constitution that is being currently crafted by Copac..

The outgoing parliament during its term of office managed to lobby the ministry of youth and other

stakeholders to attend to issues affecting children albeit with little success.

Issues affecting children have failed to get the attention they deserve and as the nation

continue to reflect on the Day of the African Child calls have grown louder for the government to walk the talk and desist from the attitude of giving false promises.



Members of the outgoing Junior Parliament led by Nigel Gwanzura (centre)

Children living in the streets: Defining the youth agenda

"Please help me, I am hungry, I have not eaten for days. Give me anything even one rand," says Chenai probably 8, years old with a shrill voice. She does that to everyone who passes through the busy footbridge in central Harare.

Getting material help and support from passersby is always difficult to such an extent that she goes without a proper meal for days except from nearby bins servicing a fast food outlet at the Old Fantasyland building.

Although scavenging for food is key in her daily struggles, Chenai is faced with many other ills and she says that life is particularly difficult during winter because she has no blankets and neither does she have somewhere to put up.

Chenai is the second born daughter to blind parents who also live in the streets hence she also doubles up as the "breadwinner" because she has to bring "food" "home".

This is the life of young Chenai and many other young people living in our streets on a daily basis. The circumstances of these children are varied but they all point to a system which somehow has failed to decisively deal with the increase on the number of "street kids" as they are known.

The plight of children living in the streets has never featured prominently in the planning and implementation of key national programmes since we attained independence in 1980.

Each year, the number of children living in the streets has been increasing but surprisingly, the government has turned a blind eye to the plight of sons and daughters of this country who because they were not privileged enough not to have a decent house in Mbare or a mansion in Borrowdale, they continue to live as slaves and outcasts in their own country. More often than not some of these unfortunate citizens have had their makeshift homes destroyed through being labeled squatters.

The silence by our parliamentarians whom we bestowed the responsibility of tackling issues such as these is worrisome. Actually most of our Parliamentarians and Ministers see these kids day in and day out but they do not care to seriously look into the issue. Some of them actually have the temerity to wind up the windows of their cars because they do not want to be bothered by these young boys and girls.

Our legislators have been sleeping on duty for far too long, hence it is imperative that an urgent inquiry be instituted on past and present ministers of social welfare and the ministry as a whole and a shared national position

must be formulated and a decisive national plan be immediately instituted to avert the social crisis in our midst.

This year's Day of the African Child commemorations were held under the theme "All Together for Urgent Actions in favour of Street Children"

In a joint statement, the government of Zimbabwe and UNICEF said, "In Zimbabwe, the growing population of children living on the streets is a reflection of the high orphan population in the country. There are over 1.6 million children who have been orphaned, most of them due to HIV and Aids. Undoubtedly, many of these young people immense challenges and deprivations and struggle to access even the most basic social services, forcing them into undesirable situations such as living on the streets.

As we continue to reflect on the Day of the African Child, we need to take stock of what our own government has done to solve problems and challenges affecting our young people especially the underprivileged.

A nation that knows that empowerment is broad based is a progressive nation. All youth organizations must come together and push for the State to take responsibility of all the young people living in our streets today.

These children need food, clean water, decent shelter, education and economic empowerment like everyone else.

long as issues affecting these young people are not addressed, efforts of trying to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 will remain a pipe dream.

In fact, the reason for the presence of children on the streets is always linked to trampled basic rights, and the condition of the street children should be seen as a response to a chain and accumulation of factors which are diversified and at different levels.

Youth Agenda Trust would like to particularly refer to the accumulation of structural factors such as poverty, demographic explosion, rural exodus, undesirable material and psychological conditions of urban families, injustices from the domineering nature of globalization, and of interpersonal factors such as subjection to violence on a daily basis: rejection, scorn, forced imitation, imposed deviant behavior, and so on."

Since the adoption of Millennium Development Goals by 192 nations for about a decade now, young people in Zimbabwe remain etched in poverty and squalor with unemployment hovering above 90 percent.

YAT calls on the government of Zimbabwe to urgently address issues affecting children especially those who are living in the streets and ensure that the country will be in a position to achieve the MDGs.



UNICEF Country Representative Dr Peter Salama. He expressed concern on the plight of street children.

Youth call for economic and political space

Youth dialogue discussion forums that were held by the Zimbabwe Independent Dialogue and the U.S. Embassy in Harare, Masvingo and Bulawayo have brought to the fore concerns of young people and the future of Zimbabwe as we head for the attainment of Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Objectives of the Dialogue sessions with Young African Leaders were to showcase young African leaders in civil society and business who are motivating youth and highlighting to global audiences a new generation of Africans who are shaping the continent's future.

They are also meant to emphasize the Administration's priority of mutual responsibility as the foundation of the U.S.-Africa partnership and reinforce the U.S. commitment to supporting African solutions to Africa's challenges and to help build networks between young American and African leaders that will lead to lasting partnerships.

Youth leaders in Harare called for more political space and recognition if they are to contribute meaningfully to the development of Zimbabwe.

"Rebuilding Zimbabwe has to do with the youth being able to define their roles. At the micro-level, we need to start asking ourselves what each individual can do to rebuild Zimbabwe," said Grace Chirenje, a social entrepreneur who works with Zimbabwe Young Women's Network for Peace Building (ZYWNP).

"When we are coming together to form political parties, trade unions, and civic society organizations, youth are involved. But the trend in our politics is that when it comes to eating the cake at the top table, youth are told to step aside," said Decent Collins Bajila, Secretary General of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Professor Welshman Ncube.

"One of the disastrous issues about the role of youth

in developing Zimbabwe is that we have run out of role models in Zimbabwe," said Bajila bemoaning the failure by Zimbabwean leaders in civil society and politics to hand over power. "Can you imagine what would have happened if President George Bush had said, 'I can't hand over power; I need to find Osama Bin Laden.' But look, power was handed over to someone and the role that was started by ex- President Bush has been fulfilled because there is a national agenda," said Decent Collins, Secretary General of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Professor Welshman Ncube.

"They are not owned by political institutions or establishments. They are our collective heritage as a people and as a nation, and we must make sure they are passed on apolitically from one generation to the next," said Bajila.

MDC-T youth assembly chairperson, Solomon Madzore noted that the challenges were bigger than actually stated. "Youth participation is key and pivotal if we are to move forward as a nation, but it is not an easy role. We fought for jobs, freedoms and good lives. Of the

mentioned, we have none," he said.

The dialogue sessions were supported by the United States Embassy Public Affairs Section as part of its youth engagement programs in Zimbabwe aimed at helping youth discuss and debate ways to bring about positive change.

"Across Africa, the U.S. State Department is coordinating similar programs as part of an ongoing engagement with young Africans stemming from the August 2010 President's Forum with Young African Leaders in Washington, D.C. President Obama has stated very clearly that the foundation of U.S.-African relations is our mutual responsibility to work together to create better societies," said Sharon Hudson-Dean, Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy. Three Zimbabwean youth leaders - Sydney Chisi, Cleopatra Ndlovu and Masimba Nyamanhindi - participated in the Forum.

The youth leaders emphasized the need to reclaim issues regarding patriotism, and nationalism; all basic issues from the liberation struggle.

Youth Agenda Trust Programmes Update

Youth Agenda on Saturday 16 July held a constitution discussion forum in Marondera where young people took time to scrutinize the progress that has been made by the Copac led process and see whether the aspirations of young people were being fulfilled. Young people also got the chance to revisit the contributions they made during the outreach process and got an insight into the much awaited 2nd all stakeholders' conference. On Sunday 17 July, a soccer and netball tournament organised by Youth Agenda will roar into life and will pit youth from diverse political backgrounds who will compete for various silverware and at the same time preaching the message of peace and tolerance and at the same time reflecting on the current constitution making exercise. Many youth who are going to grace the occasion have already expressed excitement at the prospects of the tournament.