ELECTION POST-MORTEM 2021 ELECTION ZAMBIA

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Executive Summary

The PYPA election post-mortem was conducted with the intent of revealing and assessing the various issues that faced young politicians – specifically PYPA Alumni – during the recently ended elections in Zambia. Twenty-four PYPA alumni attended the event and provided valuable insight into their experience as young politicians participating in the election processes. The program was designed to be a response to the pleas of PYPA alumni to have more support rendered to them in their plight to become more relevant in the Zambia political sphere.

During the meeting, the participants were divided into three groups. The first group assessed the challenges, strengths and opportunities experienced prior to election day. Their insights showed the primary issue facing PYPA alumni is financial support. However, they did highlight some advantages, such as the increase in the prevalence of social media as a tool for information dissemination, especially for politicians.

The second group assessed election day. Their insight focused on most of the challenges that they faced on the ground as people voted. Participants highlighted that their major perceived opportunity was the high voter turnout, indicating a healthy interest in the country's political issues, particularly by the youth.

However, participants also pointed out that one of the major challenges was a lack of voter education both on the part of voters and the election personnel. Due to this perceived illiteracy, PYPA alumni highlighted that polling stations were plagued by late opening/closure and general disarray. Some voters were also disillusioned from participating because of the long queues and general dismay that characterized the process.

The third group assessed what occurred post-election day. Most of the polling stations were understaffed and youth candidates lacked human resources and finances to sustain their polling agents. This made it more difficult for them to ensure that the election process was free and fair. It was also evident that there was low civic education among polling agents and there were several recorded cases of electoral violence.

Afterwards, a plenary session was held to share and discuss the findings. As part of the election postmortem Four key participants were selected – two of whom were contesting in the election, two of whom were managing campaigns – to participate in a panel discussion and asked a series of questions pertaining to their experience. The key themes were the lack of representation due to challenges in the adoption and nomination processes, the commercialization of politics, the electoral system and the electoral commission.

After the panelists had concluded their remarks, a session was conducted where PYPA alumni were encouraged to provide recommendations on what could be done to alleviate the challenges and exploit the opportunities highlighted during the post-mortem. The participants

urged CYLA to create an election fund that would help fund youth candidates' campaigns. A working group was put in place to write a technical proposal on how to develop and manage the fund.

Background and rationale

Monetization of politics has been a consistent challenge for young politicians. The PYPA project has concurrently received persistent pleas from participants for financial assistance during election campaigns. This was reiterated by all participants of the networking event held in July after the election campaign training for candidates at the start of the campaign season. This shows that youth candidates entered the campaign season with financial challenges, which hindered the progress of their campaign efforts.

CYLA and Green Forum responded to this challenge by conducting an advanced training for PYPA alumni in fundraising a year prior to the campaign season. Nonetheless, participants still highlighted challenges in practically implementing the skills taught during this training. This highlighted the importance of conducting a post-mortem to determine the gaps and missed opportunities, as well as strengths and practical steps to take in terms of tackling financing and other challenges faced by young politicians.

Description of activity

The activity was executed as planned, 24 PYPA alumni attended the activity 14 male and 10 female participants. All who actively participated in the election processes in their various political parties. The postmortem was facilitated by CYLA through the PYPA program manager with assistance from CYLA secretariat interns as rapporteurs. The facilitator took the participants through the objectives of the postmortem which were;

- To review the 2021 general election through a youth lens, identifying gaps and unexploited opportunities

- To use the post-mortem results as a basis for creation of a technical paper that will be used to respond to recommendations from the post-mortem.

- To identify existing strengths that can be reinforced for the next election

The facilitator also shared the methodology to be used which was group discussions that would lead to plenary session presentations and discussions. Three groups were put together to assess and determine the strengths, unexploited opportunities and challenges faced by young politicians in the pre, during and post-election phases.

Zambia's primary demographic is young people. This has its advantages and disadvantages, especially for young politicians.

FINDINGS

Young people seem to show considerable hesitance to engage in conventional democratic politics. At the same time, new forms of social and political involvement seem to be emerging among young people. In respect of both social and political development, youth political participation may well indicate a more fundamental renovation of modern democracy over the years to come.

Youth face so many challenges in the political field, especially if they are trying to make a difference and stand out for themselves or fellow youths. During this post-mortem, the participants identified the strength, opportunities and challenges they faced prior, during and after election day. Candidates and the other participants shared their own personal experiences and highlighted the challenges they faced contesting and managing /chairing election campaigns and being a youth in politics.

PRE-ELECTION

Strengths

The lead up to the election was characterized by a noticeable increase in interest from the general public. This presented a unique advantage for young politicians, especially those who were directly involved in the electoral processes. This was increased by the prevalence of social media, which made information dissemination much easier.

Young politicians also noted the increase in awareness of online voter registration platforms. This can be attributed to a positive turn in voter education and awareness efforts from both ECZ and private citizens. This increased awareness translated into record numbers of registered voters, both young and old. It also made it easier for PYPA alumni in campaign teams to create traction for their candidates. The increased inquisitiveness of voters made them more receptive to their campaigns.

Participants also highlighted how the dissolving of parliament gave room to aspiring candidates to contest. Those that did not stand but participated in campaigns were presented with unique opportunities to increase their experience and expertise. It also gave them unique perspectives they otherwise wouldn't have had had they not participated, allowing them to gauge their capabilities through the lens of their fellow young politicians that choose to contest. The lessons that were learnt were invaluable.

During the adoption stage, adoption fees were waived for young politicians from small parties. This made it more affordable for young politicians looking to stand at the local government level to contest. It removed the often-daunting financial barriers that inhibit young politicians from contesting. Ample time was also allocated for the filling in process, further smoothening the process.

Opportunities

To raise resources, several participants that choose to contest opted to entrepreneurial ventures to finance their efforts. This can be seen as an underutilized opportunity to only increase young politicians' financial muscle but to strengthen their communities' well-being. Well-organized ventures can be turned into social enterprises that can directly translate into increased revenue for the communities of youth that choose to establish them. This will translate into increased visibility for these youth should they choose to contest within those communities.

The increased internet penetration can also be seen as an opportunity for aspiring young politicians looking to garner more traction for their campaigns. This can be seen in how the then-opposition party (UPND) capitalized on social media and its influence on Gen-Z voters, who dominate Zambia's demographics.

Challenges

There are several activities that occur prior to election day; from voter registration, to dissolving of parliament, to adoptions, filing in and campaigns. While the election was characterized by a healthy turnout, there were some pain points that proved to be challenging, especially for the youth. Primarily, the voting process was too slow. Sensitization on the online registration was not properly done, meaning people were less knowledgeable about how to utilize the system.

Additionally, the dissolving of parliament presented a challenge in itself. Young politicians willing to contest were often stifled by older sitting MPs with more financial muscle. Their financial muscle made it easier to endear themselves to their voters, rendering the campaign efforts of the under-funded young politicians almost useless.

Furthermore, there were issues with the adoption process. To make this process easier for young politicians, the adoption fee was waived for young politicians. Despite this, corruption still plagued the adoption process. Financially capable participants often used their financial muscle to make the process easier for them. Nomination fees were also made unreasonably high, making it harder for young politicians to participate.

Because of these challenges, young politicians often opted out of contesting, choosing rather to participate in campaigns in other capacities. This presented an entirely unique challenge, however. The few young politicians that had persevered through the challenges mentioned above were already being used as proverbial shields to protect older, more senior party members during the filing process. Those that opted for other positions in the campaigns were almost exploited in this capacity. This was made worse by the presence of cronyism. This made young politicians more vulnerable to acts of violence.

ELECTION DAY

We like to think of elections as a one-day activity, which isn't the case. However, polling day does carry the most weight of the entire period. The activities that take place on this day include casting of votes, opening and closing of polling stations, election monitoring, vote protection, vote counting and declaration of results.

Strengths

The primary advantage observed on election day was voter turnout. There were record levels of voter turnout, reflecting the high registration rate that was recorded pre-election. Most voters that turned out were young people. This indicates a high penetration rate in terms of voter awareness among young people. This is both an advantage and an opportunity. It is advantageous to young politicians as this is their primary demographic. It means the majority of voters empathize more with the vision of young politicians and are more likely to relate to their manifestos.

The presence of local monitors, party agents and international observers gave the process credibility and improved voter protection.

Opportunities

The level of voter education presents a unique opportunity. Voter education efforts were cut short because of the pandemic, meaning that there is room for increased awareness. If education efforts were scaled up, there would be reduced apathy, as seen in certain parts of the country. There was also increased empowerment for young politicians as certain political parties saw the need for their invaluable insight in the election process.

Challenges

While there were efforts made towards voter education, election day proved that it was poorly done due to an increase in the number of rejected votes. The high turnout also led to incredibly, sometimes unmanageably long ques. The queues made it dangerous for some voters, especially the old and those with preconditions, to spend a long time in the queues. Equally important was the issue of some polling stations opening and closing late because of geographical barriers and queues being too long, this contributed to voter apathy and in some cases death because there was no sign of medical personnel at most polling stations. Similarly, there was a noticeable shortage of poll staff and police/ security in some polling stations and several candidates campaigning and buying votes using money or food. Furthermore, the recorded rejected votes were more than the second runner up's number of votes depicting a gap in the voter education system. There were several political violence cases recorded on poll day, the shortage of security in polling stations could be one of the contributing factors for these incidents as well as the number of mal-practice cases that were happening.

POST-ELECTION

Once the votes are cast and polling stations are finally closed, post-election action activities now begin. These include vote counting, announcement of results, conflict management and transition of power.

Strengths and Opportunities

The digitization of the result management and announcement were a strength that allowed for the remote management of the election process. It helped quell the anxiety that comes with election counting. This also presents a unique opportunity for future election cycles. It can be imagined that an entirely digitized election system, including digital voting booths, may further smoothen the election process. It could allow for real-time election management, further removing the possibility of rigging and voter suppression.

At presidential level we witnessed a peaceful transition of power from the incumbent which is a strength that should be built on.

Challenges

To begin with, counting of votes is a very involving and tiring procedure, it requires adequate poll staff for the counting to be done smoothly and monitors for the verification of the recorded counted votes. But most of the polling stations were understaffed and youth candidates lucked human resources and finances to sustain their polling agents. Not only that, there was an evident lack of electoral processes knowledge among polling agents and party agents and a number of recorded electoral violence cases. Further social media was shut down for a long period of time and there was a delay in the announcement of results which increased anxiety and tension among candidates especially the youth. After the announcement of results, the feuds among political parties raised intolerance among party members which resulted to pockets of violence. Failure to manage such conflicts is a threat to national security. And finally, the last activity of this period was the transition of power in which the country experienced several petitions at parliamentary and local government levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the challenges identified and shared from different views during the election post mortem activity, the following recommendations were made to remedy the challenges faced by youth in elections.

1. CYLA to create a fundraising platform aimed at supporting youth candidates aspiring to contest elections with campaign financing
2. Youth should be encouraged to start working now in the areas they choose to contest.

- Youths should identify their communities
- partner with sitting leaders to create visibility

3. PYPA through CYLA should petition political parties to consider adopting PYPA alumni as electoral candidates so that their capacity is utilized.

4. CYLA should create a platform or space to converse as alumni: CYLA youth dialogue space (Physical and online sessions). This platform will be used to:

- Showcase the knowledge and capacity of PYPA alumni through panel discussions streamed online

- Discuss issues of concern to young people in the news
- promote or advocate for full domestication of the African Youth Charter
- To dialogue openly with stakeholder like the electoral commission

5. PYPA/CYLA should connect alumni with organizations working in communities to implement activities addressing agreed social causes and support alumni to carry out civic education activities in the communities through competitive alumni projects.

6. PYPA should offer financial and political mentorship classes to alumni's

7. PYPA should create a data bank linking alumni to resources.

8. CYLA should advocate for quotas at Local government.