

Preliminary Report of BESNet (The Botswana Electoral Support Network) Local Observer Mission on Botswana Elections held on 16 October 2009

Who comprises BESNet?

BESNet comprises The Botswana Council of Churches (BCC), The Botswana Council of Non Governmental Organisations (BOCONGO), The Botswana Federation of Trade Unions (BFTU), The Botswana National Youth Council (BNYC), DITSHWANELO – The Botswana Centre for Human Rights, Emang Basadi, Lentswe La Basadi Ba Botswana (LLBB) and Worldview Botswana. Emang Basadi is the Secretariat of BESNet.

How many BESNet observers in how many constituencies?

Due to the limited funding which was eventually raised from within the civil society movement, BESNet fielded more than 250 observers in only 21 of the 57 constituencies. We had intended to cover 30 constituencies. The constituencies in which BESNet observers were fielded were the following:

1. Ngami
2. Nkange
3. Maun West
4. Maun East
5. Francistown West
6. Francistown East
7. Francistown South
8. Mahalapye West
9. Kgatleng West
10. Kgatleng East
11. Gaborone Central
12. Gaborone West North
13. Gaborone West South
14. Gaborone North

15. South East South
16. South East North
17. Mogoditshane
18. Lobatse
19. Kweneng South East
20. Kanye South
21. Kanye North

What was BESNet observing?

As observers, the role of BESNet is to observe the electoral process to ensure that there is an adherence to ethics, laws, regulations and codes of conduct governing the electoral process. We note matters of concern during the election process and attempt to resolve such matters immediately, through the intervention of the appropriate authority. The aim of our observation is to ensure that conditions exist for free and fair elections.

On three occasions during the voting process, BESNet contacted the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to draw their attention to matters of concern.

One related to the South East South constituency at **Nazareth Church** polling station. There was a serious risk of chaos developing, following the arrival of large numbers of voters who pushed into the line. Police on duty risked being overwhelmed, so the BESNet observer went to the police station to report the matter to The Station Commander. He went to the polling station to assess the situation and called for reinforcements. Voting was then able to continue as expected.

In the Mogoditshane constituency at **Nkoyaphiri** polling station, a political candidate was reported to be refusing to respect the instructions of the police on duty as he seemed to be causing a disturbance. The police appeared to be experiencing difficulties in controlling the situation.

In the Gaborone West South constituency at the **Marulamantsi Customary Court** polling station, the queues were moving very slowly and BESNet was concerned that not all the registered voters would be able to exercise their right to vote. BESNet reported this to The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and recommended that both the number of polling

officers and polling booths be increased to ease congestion and improve the pace of the voting process.

In the Gaborone Central constituency at **Lesedi Primary School** polling station, a young woman was informed that she could not vote because her registration had not been accepted. She asked the BESNet observers for assistance. We drew her matter to the attention of the Presiding Officer who advised her to go to the IEC office at the Gaborone Village for the verification process.

Which are the key issues observed?

1. Access to the polling stations by political agents and accredited observers – this was done. There were no reports of political agents who had been properly accredited, being refused entry.

Wheel-chair bound voters found the ballot table inaccessible because it was set high from the floor.

2. Secrecy of the ballot – there were two cases observed in which the assistance of the polling officer was required to assist voters. In one of those, the voter was visually impaired and was unable to understand how the specially designed voting material for people with visual impairment was meant to operate.
3. Absence of intimidation of voters – In two constituencies, situations arose which could have led to the intimidation of voters. In both cases, political party agents delivered their voters to the polling station, where they proceeded to push their way into the queues and disturb voters who had arrived before they had.
4. Effective design of the ballot papers – this was generally not a problem except in the case observed of the visually impaired voter who need to be assisted because the ballot-paper was not user-friendly. This, despite the fact that IEC had a specifically designed ballot paper for the visually impaired.
5. Proper ballot boxes – the ballot boxes were acceptable. The polling agents all showed the voters before the voting began, that the boxes were empty and they then sealed them in their presence .
6. Impartial assistance of voters – voters were assisted in an impartial way by the polling officers.

7. Proper counting procedure – we have not yet received reports from our observers about this process. Counting is still underway in some constituencies.
8. Proper treatment of ballot boxes – we have not yet received reports from our observers about this process.
9. Proper precautionary measures when transporting election material – we have not yet received information from our observers about these measures.

Our overall general impressions?

The voting process appears to have proceeded in accordance with the accepted procedures. Some aspects of note are:

1. The slowness of the queues at some polling stations was of concern to us. This was due to:
 - polling stations with A and B points for voting were intended to ease congestion. However due to some voters not being aware of the specific voting point to which they had been allocated, some joined long queues and then found out when they reached the voting point that they had been in the wrong queue. Not all the voting registration cards indicated to which voting point the voter should go where there were A and B points. The polling officers allowed voters to vote in such circumstances because they were at the correct polling station even though they did not know to which point they had been allocated
 - the amount of time taken to deal with discrepancies e.g. voters who had valid Omang Identity Cards and voter registration cards and yet were told that their registration had been rejected or had been marked 'unused' (this happened due to double-registration of the voter or a clerical error); non-appearance of a voter on the voters' roll; non-sequential numbering on voters' roll which led to time taken to locate the voter's name on the voters' roll, etc.
 - voters being in possession of expired Omang Identity cards and the voting requirements being explained to them
 - the need to explain the voting procedure repeatedly to those who did not know how to vote
 - the slowness of polling agents who had been on duty for several hours and were exhausted

- polling agents who had not been properly trained
- 2. Many youth were observed voting this year.
- 3. Some businesses had ensured that their staff were released from work for them to exercise their right to vote.
- 3. Some of the voters came to the polling stations under the influence of alcohol.

BESNet Local Observer Mission
Gaborone, Botswana
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