

**MANAGEMENT OF DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN AFRICA (MDEA) JULY 2015:
UNISA/USAID TRAINING FOR AFRICAN ELECTION OFFICIALS IN PRETORIA
SOUTH AFRICA**

The Institute for African Renaissance Studies (IARS), University of South Africa (UNISA) and its international partners, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), as part of their capacity building programmes for election officials in Africa, organised a one month MDEA (Management of Democratic Elections in Africa) training for thirty three participants from nineteen African countries. The training which took place at the prestigious and serene Institute for African Renaissance Studies (IARS), University of South Africa from 13th July to 7th August, 2015 was the last in the series of 2015 programmes.

In retrospect, improving electoral quality has drawn the attention of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN-ECA) and to crystallise the aspiration, IARS introduced the specialised credit-earning certificate course in the management of democratic elections in Africa in the second half of 2011. This was premised on the fact that the study of elections in Africa has become so important and a pool of professionals needs to be raised to effectively manage democratic process.

The choice of IARS as the venue for the training underscores the fundamental principles of the training which is based on adult learning, activity based and participatory engagement. It also provided the enabling environment for research and robust interactions for peer review and experiential sharing.

The residential training was put together by the sponsors in order to further upscale the skills and competencies of election administrators in Africa and establish a harmonious relationship between and among various officers in Africa with the view to identify the various challenges that confronts democracy and democratic process in Africa and sought for possible mitigating factors.

Participants at the training want to appreciate the organisers of this programme, most especially IARS, UNISA, IEC and USAID and particularly, the initiator of the MDEA programme, Prof. Shadrack Gutto and materials for enriching the not so available literature on democracy, election and governance in Africa. The programme is structured to bring out the best from participants and it is compact,

loaded, down to earth, with do-it-yourself exercises that are flexible and adaptive to local environment and at the participants pace. This is worthy of note because most of us may have left the academic environment for some time now. We cannot ask for more than we have gotten as the training has exposed us to the need to partner with each other while providing us the necessary tools, procedures, mechanisms and research methodology to carry out our duties qualitatively.

The training topics traverse all activities of the electoral process and it covered Democratic elections in an African context, the normative and legal framework of democratic elections, managing electoral democracy education, Ethics & Code of Conduct for Elections, managing Voter Registration and Voter Education, the legislative framework for funding of political parties, understanding population census and demarcation of electoral constituencies, the role of the media during the electoral process in an African context, managing voting in an African context. The research related issues includes managing research and knowledge management for elections in Africa and the MDEA research projects. The course ultimately re-invigorated the participants' faculties and brought out the innate potentials in writing and building institutional memory as many could not have put down their experiences if not for the opportunity provided by the course through port-folio assignments.

The experiential learning process, the visits to strategic historical sites, Cultural Village, Traditional Ruler house, House of Assembly, the tree planting exercise for Mandela 61 minutes charity work, the opening and closing ceremonies, all lend credence to the philosophy of IARS's and UNISA's Learn without limits. The convivial atmosphere provided by these activities enabled the participants to unwind and bond together. Permit me at this juncture to salute the courage, the temerity, simplicity and the moral rectitude of the July 2015 set of MDEA programme. Bravo for you are worthy of emulation

As we march towards 2015 and 2016 General and Parliamentary Elections in most African countries, we are poised to illuminate the electoral environment with professionalism in terms of managing and administering elections using the instrumentality of the MDEA rich literature.

To the plethora of facilitators which included but not limited to the soft spoken but fact laden Professor Gutto who coordinated the course to the Gender mainstreamer, Esther De Wet, we salute your courage in developing the context of treating African electoral challenges with African solutions through African Renaissance. For managing also, our different socio-cultural idiosyncrasies, we appreciate all of you. The entire backroom and administrative staff who work assiduously to make our stay memorable and eventful, we salute your administrative ingenuity.

To the sponsors of the programme, USAID, we owe a lot of gratitude for financing the African electoral renaissance platform. The enabling environment in these third wave of democratisation, a new crop of election administrators have been produced that will take the management of elections in Africa to a greater height.

Kudos, IARS and their facilitators

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MDEA Trainee: July/ August 2015