



Participants of the Programme in Management of Democratic Elections in Africa – July – August 2015

Management of elections in Africa remains a challenge

Africa continues to face hurdles towards making the leap into Electoral Democracy. The challenges are multifaceted – ranging from an absence of the culture of political succession through the ballot box, incumbents not prepared to leave office, even after serving the generally constitutionally mandated two-terms and finally, the weakness of existing institutions including those responsible for Managing Elections – the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs). Today, electoral difficulties manifest in the political crises in South Sudan, Sudan (Khartoum), Lesotho and Burundi – resulting in spirited interventions from the United Nations, the African Union and its sub-regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC) – Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) amongst others.

Acceptance of political succession to result in significant progress towards electoral democracy in Southern Africa remains tenuous. One-party-state dominant systems have largely unchecked, executive power continue to exert power over all branches of government. Dominant political parties emerging from militaristic, liberation movements have also been witnessed entrenching themselves through regular but deliberately poorly a managed, electoral process that allows them to continue in office. In this atmosphere, where confidence towards “electoral autocracy” has come under serious scrutiny, elections can be de-legitimized in a multitude of ways, with electoral commissions facing the majority of the criticisms from all sides.

As part of assisting the continent to overcome this challenge, the University of South Africa (UNISA), through the Institute of African Renaissance Studies (IARS) has launched a dedicated programme – the Management of Democratic Elections in Africa (MDEA) to provide special and focussed training and capacity building to government officials, non-governmental organisations, media, civil society groups, researchers and academics to better understand and be individually equipped to undertake MDEA related tasks in their workplaces.

On 13th July, the Institute welcomed 33 Election Management Board Officials drawn from 19 EMB across the African continent. This extensive reach into 31% of the 54 African Member States demonstrates the effectiveness and positive collaboration that the programme and the Institute enjoy. In time, this is certainly going to impact on the work by the participants and the outcomes of different electoral processes in their respective countries after they have attended and qualified on the Programme in Management of Democratic Elections in Africa. This Cohort is the 3rd Intake for 2015 that began on 13th July and will run until 7th August.

The key themes being dealt with and broad focussed subject matter includes: Democratisation and Elections; Human Rights and Gender in political processes; Constitutional challenges including reforms to enable electoral democracy to take hold; the troubling question of Funding of Political Parties; Security challenges in maintaining the integrity of the process as well as the challenging roles and function of the Security establishment in the era of a country undergoing elections? To cap it all, the participants are also exposed to practical learning opportunities in situ by the South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

The following countries are participating in the four weeks programme taking place in Unisa, Institute for African Renaissance Studies

- Angola
- Botswana
- Cameroon
- DRC
- Kenya
- Lesotho
- Liberia
- Malawi
- Mauritius
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Nigeria
- South Africa
- South Sudan
- Swaziland
- Tanzania
- Uganda
- Zanzibar
- Zimbabwe

Activities implemented under this program area will strengthen the capacity of electoral commission members and other individuals who serve a role in the electoral process to develop into a professional and independent electoral commission who has the ability to impartially monitor and adjudicate electoral processes, including areas of party and voter registration, knowledge management, review of electoral laws, voter education and dispute resolution mechanisms.

This flagship programme is generously funded by USAID, an organization that remains committed to support UNISA to implement its Memorandum of Understanding with the African Union as part of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

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