

Inclusive Electoral Literacy through Informal Education Channel: Reaching out to Persons with Disabilities and Marginalized Groups

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Introduction

- Namibia has a population of 2.1 million : 1, 267, 335 registered voters.
- 98,413 people with disabilities (PWD's): **Disability Report of 2011**, representing an estimated 4.7 per cent of the total Namibian population.
- The legal framework provides for women participation at Local Authority level and the ruling party introduced the zebra system of representation at Parliamentary level.
- Women representation:
 - 2014 National Assembly - 41.6%
 - 2015 National Council – 23.8%
 - 2015 Local Authority – 48.2%
- Marginalized communities are groups disproportionately affected by poverty, compared to other groups in Namibia.
- The Namibian Constitution: makes provision for the establishment of the Electoral Commission of Namibia as an exclusive body to direct, supervise, manage and control the conduct of elections in Namibia.
- The Electoral Commission of Namibia is established by the **Electoral Act (Act 5 of 2014)** to **organize, direct, supervise, manage and control the conduct of elections and referenda in a free, fair, independent, credible, transparent and impartial manner.**

Introduction...

- Voter education is important to ensure maximum participation in all elections and should seek to achieve universal coverage of the electorate.
- Minority groups, internally displaced persons and other marginalized segments of society should be specially targeted.
- Important to launch special educational campaigns aimed at new voters, women, people with disabilities and marginalized communities.

Voter Education in Namibia

- **Voter education became a legal mandate of the Electoral Commission of Namibia in 2009**
- **People with Disabilities and marginalized communities are provided for in the Electoral Act No 5 of 2014**
- **Namibia conducts four elections using three electoral systems**
- Presidential elections: Majoritarian
- National Assembly: PR with Party Lists
- Regional Council: First Past The Post
- Local Authorities: PR and party list system
- Last two national elections conducted in : 2014 Presidential and National Assembly elections and 2015 Regional Councils and Local Authorities elections

Legal Framework

- **The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia:** Chapter 3, Article 17, provides for every citizen who has reached the age of 18 the right to vote,
- Article 10 of the Constitution confers equality of all persons in Namibia before the law.
- **Electoral Act (Act 5 of 2014):** Section 49 mandates the ECN to conduct Voter and civic education.
- The Namibian electoral process is aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and SADC principles and guidelines governing democratic elections.
- **The Act (National Disability Act no 26, 2004)** stipulates that the Government shall ensure that disability aspects are included in all relevant policy-making and national planning activities.
- Namibia has adopted the **Racial Discrimination Amendment Act No 26 of 1990 and the Racial Discrimination Amendment Act No 26 of 1998;**

Legal Framework

- Namibia ratified the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2008 and is **signatory member to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)** and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- **National Voter Education Policy (2014-2019)** that guides the conduct of Voter Education in Namibia
- The government of the Republic of Namibia formulated policies and legislations to address the needs of people with disabilities and marginalized communities.

Voter education in Namibia

- The Electoral Commission of Namibia conducts voter education through various modes such as:
- Face to face public meetings with communities;
- Use of various electronic communication mediums
- Distribution of various printed electoral messages such as posters, pamphlets, flyers
- Use of radio and television

Projects for PWDs and Marginalized Communities

Involving people with disabilities (PWDs), the youth and other marginalised communities in all electoral undertakings remains an unwavering commitment of the Commission.

To ensure full participation of these groups the ECN through its mainstreaming project has undertaken the following initiatives:

- Assessment on the understanding and accessibility of People with Disabilities in the Electoral Processes in Namibia (2012)
- **The main findings:**
- 60% PWDs' in Namibia cannot fully participate in elections unless they are assisted and certain infrastructure provisions are made to meet their specific needs.
- An estimated 53% of registered voters with disabilities have voted consistently throughout all the elections conducted in Namibia. “ Touch and Feel ” EVM Voter Education strategy implemented in 2014 – 96% voters reached
- “ Stop Waiting Campaign “ for special focus groups (Youth, Women, PWD's and marginalised communities)
- Mock elections for four by-elections and two local authorities elections in 2014.

Projects continued

- Production of the Braille and Tactile Ballot cover to ensure secrecy of the vote for voters with visual impairment before the introduction of the (Electronic Voting Machines) EVMs .
- Complemented by the braille print on the Ballot unit of the EVMs
- Recruitment of person from marginalised communities and PWD's and voter educators
- **Stakeholders' engagement:** continued partnerships and cooperation with organizations that deals with disability issues as well as marginalized communities.
- Translation and production of voter education information in user friendly formats such as braille, audio and sign language.

Proposed Reforms

- Cooperation with the Ministry responsible for education regarding the development of a syllabus for learners
- **Enhancing the informal education channel:** Develop inclusive strategies on voter education such the development of an **adult education** curriculum through the Ministry of Education to promote adult learning on voter and civic education.
- **Enhancing product packaging and services delivery:** (Production of voter education materials in braille, and sign language) for PWD's
- Hosting a national dialogue with other institutions that are providing services to these communities in order to adopt best practices in service delivery mechanisms.

Conclusion

Even though the ECN has made significant strides in ensure inclusive electoral literacy for PWD's and marginalized communities there is still room for improvement as advocated under the proposed reforms.

Recommendations

- There is a need for an overall assessment on the effectiveness of the ECN voter and civic education campaign with emphasis on inclusivity for special focus groups.
- Learning from other EMB's on best practices for inclusive voter and civic education.
- Review the National Voter education policy placing more emphasis on mainstreaming activities.
- Collect data on the number of PWD's and marginalized communities for planning purposes.

Thank you!



Visually Impaired persons familiarize themselves with EVM