



MALAWI ELECTORAL COMMISSION

**PRESENTATION BY MR ANDREW MPESI, MALAWI ELECTORAL
COMMISSION CHIEF ELECTIONS OFFICER DURING ACCESS TO
INFORMATION NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

THEME:

The Principles and Values of Electoral Integrity: The Role of EMBs in Ensuring
Citizens' Right to Access Electoral Information and Voter Education

Introduction

Electoral integrity is the foundation of a healthy democracy, providing a means by which citizens can trust that elections are free, fair, transparent, and inclusive. For elections to possess integrity, they must adhere to core democratic principles and values, which include transparency, impartiality, inclusiveness, accountability, and respect for human rights. In this context, Election Management Bodies (EMBs) play a pivotal role in safeguarding electoral integrity by ensuring that citizens have access to electoral information and voter education. In Malawi, the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) is the EMB responsible for overseeing elections and upholding these critical principles and Integrity is one of our core values.

This presentation explores the principles and values of electoral integrity, the role of EMBs—specifically the Malawi Electoral Commission—in ensuring citizens' right to access electoral information, and the importance of voter education in fostering a transparent and inclusive electoral process.

1. The Concept of Electoral Integrity

Electoral integrity is concerned with ensuring that elections are conducted in a manner that is free from manipulation, coercion, or fraud. It encompasses all stages of the electoral process, from voter registration to the declaration of results. The concept is rooted in fundamental democratic principles, such as the rule of law, respect for human rights, and equal participation in the political process.

According to the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy, and Security, electoral integrity is defined as *"any election that is based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as reflected in international standards and agreements, and is professional, impartial, and transparent in its*

preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle." This definition underscores the importance of ensuring that elections reflect the will of the people and that the process is transparent, inclusive, and accountable.

2. Principles and Values Underpinning Electoral Integrity

To ensure electoral integrity, elections must be conducted according to several key principles and values, including:

- **Transparency:** Elections must be open and observable by party and candidate representatives, citizens and electoral observers to build trust in the process. Transparency ensures that electoral processes are conducted in a manner that allows for public scrutiny, which reduces the likelihood of fraud or manipulation.
- **Inclusiveness:** The electoral process must be accessible to all eligible voters, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic status. This principle ensures that every eligible citizen has an equal opportunity to participate in the election.
- **Impartiality:** The EMB must operate without bias, ensuring that no political party, candidate, or group is favored over others. Impartiality is essential for building public confidence in the fairness of the election.
- **Accountability:** The electoral commission and other electoral actors must be held accountable for their actions throughout the electoral process. This includes the responsibility to provide accurate information to the public, manage elections fairly, and address any grievances that arise.
- **Rule of Law:** Elections must be conducted in accordance with the laws of the country and international standards. The legal framework for elections provides the foundation for ensuring that the electoral process is fair,

transparent, and inclusive. In Malawi, the legal framework, includes the Constitution, the Malawi Electoral Commission Act, the Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Act, the Political Parties Act, National Registration Act and Persons with Disabilities Act, 2024, among others.

- **Respect for Human Rights:** Elections must be conducted in a manner that respects the fundamental rights of all citizens, including the right to vote, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to participate in the political process and freedom of assembly.

These principles are not only vital to ensuring that elections are free and fair, but they also provide the basis for upholding the legitimacy of the electoral process. Without these principles, elections are likely to be viewed as illegitimate, which can undermine public confidence in democratic institutions.

3. The Role of the Malawi Electoral Commission

The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) is the EMB tasked with ensuring that elections are conducted in accordance with the Constitution and relevant electoral laws. MEC's mandate includes managing the electoral process, promoting public awareness of electoral matters, and ensuring the participation of all eligible citizens.

The role of the Electoral Commission in promoting electoral integrity can be summarized in the following areas:

3.1. Organizing Free and Fair Elections

One of the primary responsibilities of the MEC is to organize elections in a manner that is free, fair, and transparent. This involves managing all aspects of the electoral process, from review of boundaries, voter registration and candidate nomination to

the conduct of voting and the counting of ballots. By ensuring that each step of the process adheres to the principles of electoral integrity, the MEC helps to maintain public trust in the outcome of elections.

3.2. Ensuring Access to Electoral Information

Transparency in elections is largely dependent on citizens' ability to access accurate and timely electoral information. The Electoral Commission plays a crucial role in disseminating this information to the public, ensuring that voters are well-informed about the electoral process, their rights as voters, and the candidates or political parties contesting in the election. In Malawi, the MEC is responsible for providing information on the following:

- Boundary demarcation
- Voter registration processes.
- Locations of registration centres and polling stations.
- Registration and Voting procedures, including any new technologies being used (e.g., Election Management Devices).
- Information on nominated candidates
- Total registered voters including transfers in and out, duplicates removed in the register
- Electoral laws and regulations.
- Election results and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Ensuring access to electoral information is not only a legal obligation for the MEC but also a fundamental aspect of promoting transparency and accountability in elections.

3.3. Voter Education and Voter Information

Voter education and voter information is a critical component of ensuring that citizens are well-informed about their rights and responsibilities in the electoral process. Voter education programs are essential in fostering a well-informed electorate. They raise awareness about the importance of voting, explain the mechanics of the electoral process, and emphasize the critical role of civic participation in a functioning democracy. Through these programs, voters understand their rights, the electoral system, and the implications of their choices on governance and public policy.

On the other hand, voter information focuses on providing specific details about candidates, voting locations, and election day procedures. It helps citizens make informed decisions by supplying the necessary facts about who is running for office, where to cast their vote, and the timeline for electoral activities. Both voter education and voter information are key to ensuring active, informed participation in elections and maintaining the integrity and credibility of the electoral process.

Voter education in Malawi includes:

- Informing citizens about how to register to vote and how to cast their ballots.
- Educating voters on the importance of elections and their role in shaping the future of the country.
- Providing information on election-related laws and regulations, such as voting rights and the consequences of electoral misconduct.
- Promoting inclusiveness by targeting marginalized groups, such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

- Voter education is not only important for increasing voter turnout but also for ensuring that citizens make informed choices when casting their ballots. An informed electorate is essential for the functioning of a healthy democracy.

3.4. Building Trust through Inclusiveness and Participation

The Electoral Commission is responsible for ensuring that the electoral process is inclusive and accessible to all eligible citizens. This includes making special provisions for marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities, women, and rural populations, to ensure that they can participate fully in the election. By promoting inclusiveness, EMBs help to build trust in the electoral process and ensure that the results of the election reflect the will of the people.

3.5. Dispute Resolution and Accountability

In the event of disputes or allegations of electoral fraud, the Malawi Electoral Commission plays a crucial role in resolving these issues in a fair and transparent manner. This involves investigating complaints, addressing grievances, and ensuring that the rule of law is upheld throughout the electoral process. By providing a clear and impartial mechanism for resolving disputes, the Commission helps to maintain the integrity of elections and ensure that the results are widely accepted by the public. To that extent the MEC always announces any complaint it has received and also its resolution on the same.

4. The Role of MEC in Ensuring Citizens' Right to Access Electoral Information

In Malawi, the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) plays a vital role in ensuring that citizens have access to the information they need to participate fully in the electoral process. This includes proactively disseminating information on the

electoral process, the candidates and political parties contesting the election, and the results of the election.

4.1. Promoting Transparency

MEC promotes transparency in the electoral process by making information about the election publicly available. This includes information on boundary delimitation, voter registration, the location of registration centres and polling stations, and the results of the election. MEC also provides information on the rules governing the conduct of elections, including the procedures for filing complaints or disputes.

Transparency is critical to building trust in the electoral process, and MEC plays a key role in ensuring that citizens have the information they need to understand how the election is being conducted and to make informed choices when casting their votes.

4.2. Use of Technology in Information Dissemination

In recent years, technology has played an increasingly important role in the dissemination of electoral information. MEC has adopted various technological platforms to ensure that information reaches a wider audience. This includes the use of websites, social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube etc), and to provide real-time updates on election processes and results.

These platforms have proven particularly useful in reaching youthful voters and those in remote areas and The Diaspora who may not have access to traditional forms of communication. Technology also enhances the transparency of the electoral process by allowing for live updates on key events, such as the counting of votes and the announcement of results.

4.3. Ensuring Inclusiveness in Information Dissemination

One of MEC's key challenges is ensuring that electoral information is accessible to all citizens, including marginalized groups. To address this, MEC has developed voter education programs that are delivered in local languages and tailored to different literacy levels. This ensures that even citizens in remote or rural areas, where access to information may be limited, are informed about the electoral process. The Commission has used village criers to pass on voter education messages to the people in the confines of their community and in a language and dialect of the area.

In addition to language considerations, MEC also works to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to electoral information. This includes providing materials in accessible formats, such as Braille, and ensuring that information is available through audio and visual channels for those with hearing or visual impairments. All MEC messages on television and all its meetings have an embedded component of sign language translation

5. The Importance of Voter Education in Electoral Integrity

Voter education is essential for promoting electoral integrity because it empowers citizens to make informed choices and participate fully in the electoral process. In Malawi, voter education has been identified as a key priority by the MEC, given the critical role it plays in ensuring that elections are free, fair, and credible.

It empowers citizens by providing them with the knowledge they need to participate in elections effectively. **Voter education** covers a wide range of topics, including how to register, how to vote, and what to expect at polling stations.

In Malawi, the **MEC** prioritizes voter education because it is essential for:

- **Promoting informed voting:** Ensuring that citizens understand the candidates and issues they are voting for.
- **Increasing voter turnout:** Well-informed citizens are more likely to participate in elections.
- **Reducing electoral fraud:** Educating voters about common forms of electoral malpractice and encouraging them to report fraud.
- **Ensuring peaceful elections:** Voter education programs emphasize the importance of peaceful participation and respect for election outcomes.

6. Challenges in Voter Education and Access to Information

Despite the importance of voter education and access to electoral information, several challenges persist, like:

- **Limited resources:** The funding may not be always adequate, and it limits ability to conduct widespread voter education campaigns.
- **Geographical barriers:** Rural and remote areas may not have access to the same level of information as urban centers.
- **Low literacy rates:** In countries with high illiteracy, traditional forms of voter education may not be effective, requiring alternative communication strategies such as radio broadcasts.
- **Misinformation:** The rise of fake news and misinformation can undermine the effectiveness of voter education efforts, making it difficult for voters to distinguish between facts and falsehoods.

7. Best Practices for Ensuring Electoral Integrity

To address these challenges, the MEC has measures to ensure all citizens have equal access to electoral information and voter education. Some effective strategies include:

- **Collaboration with civil society organizations:** We have accredited 116 CSOs to conduct voter education for 2025 General Election. These will also help to reach out to special needs groups.
- **Tailored education programs:** Designing voter education materials that are accessible to people of different literacy levels, languages, and locations.
- **Independent observation:** Allowing election observers to monitor the process and ensure it aligns with democratic standards.

8. Conclusion

Electoral integrity is crucial for maintaining public trust in democratic institutions. EMBs, such as the **Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC)**, play a vital role in upholding this integrity by ensuring that citizens have access to electoral information and voter education. By prioritizing transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability, EMBs can foster a fair and credible electoral process that reflects the will of the people. However, overcoming challenges like misinformation, resource limitations, and geographical barriers remains key to further strengthening the electoral system.

9. REFERENCES

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