



**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE ELECTORAL
COMMISSIONS FORUM OF SADC COUNTRIES (ECF-SADC)
ON THE GENERAL ELECTIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF
BOTSWANA**

23RD OCTOBER 2019

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. The Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries (ECF – SADC) received an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Botswana dated 5th September 2019 to observe the General Elections scheduled for 23rd October 2019. In line with its mandate of strengthening co-operation amongst Electoral Commissions in the SADC region, the ECF-SADC deployed an observer mission for these elections.
2. The ECF-SADC Election Observer Mission comprised seventeen (17) members from the Electoral Commissions of Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe. The Mission period was 14th -26 October 2019.
3. This Mission was led by Ms. Winnie Magagula who is the Deputy Chairperson of the Elections and Boundaries Commission in the Kingdom of Eswatini. The Deputy Mission Leader was Mr. Glenton Mashinini, who is the Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa.

GUIDING ELECTION OBSERVATION INSTRUMENTS AND VALUES

4. ECF-SADC election observation missions are guided by the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO, 2003), the Revised SADC Principles and Guidelines for Governing Democratic Elections in the SADC Region (2015) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007).
5. Furthermore, ECF-SADC Election Observer Missions are guided by the values of impartiality, neutrality, transparency, and objectivity. These are consistent with the above-mentioned instruments.

MISSION OBSERVATION APPROACH

6. The observation mission utilized complementary data collection methods including (i) documentary review (ii) electronic and print media (iii) paying courtesy visits to the host Commission (iv) conducting refresher training for

the members of the Mission (v) observing campaign rallies (vi) hosting a seminar with local stakeholders (vii) deployment to the polling stations and counting centres.

7. The Mission interacted with domestic stakeholders and international observer missions in order to exchange information. The various activities undertaken enabled the Mission to gather strategic and comprehensive information so as to assess the administration and management of the 2019 General Elections in Botswana.
8. The deployment period of the teams was from 20th to 24th October 2019. The deployment considered random sampling of polling stations in the rural and urban areas for a balanced observation resulting in six (6) teams deployed to cover Gaborone North, Gaborone Central, Gaborone Bonnington North, Gaborone Bonnington South, Mochudi East, Mochudi West, Moshupa-Manyana, Kanye North, Kanye South, Tlokweng, Ramotswa and Lobatse Constituencies.
9. The Mission managed to undertake the pre-election assessment which enabled it to establish the state of preparedness of the IEC Botswana. Engagement with Stakeholders, Advance voting and polling day observations enabled the Mission to assess the overall conduct and conditions relating to elections in Botswana.

PRE-ELECTION PHASE ; MISSION ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

10. Pre-Election Assessment Mission

The ECF-SADC undertook a pre-election visit to Botswana on 29-30 August 2019. The purpose of the visit was to assess the preparedness of IEC-Botswana, to hold credible elections. The Mission also explored the degree of implementation of 2014 Election Observation recommendations.

11. Engagement with Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana

The Mission interacted with the IEC Botswana to gather information related to the 2019 General Elections and assessed its state of readiness. The Commission confirmed its readiness to conduct these elections, highlighting challenges they faced in the build up to elections, including -

- Voter registration was a successful exercise, the IEC however did not achieve the desired target of 1 273 880 but managed to capture 925 478 comprising 55% female voters and 45% male. Out of this number 41% are youth.
- The logistical challenges caused by the overwhelming number of Independent Candidates, illegal voter registration objections and the abuse of Social Media to proliferate ‘fake news’.

12. Visit to the IEC Warehouse

As a technical mission, the Mission had an opportunity to visit the main warehouse of the IEC Botswana to observe the systems and processes of handling, packaging and dispatch of election materials.

13. Consultation with other Stakeholders

The Mission held a seminar with stakeholders representing different sectors of society. These included, but were not limited to, the legal fraternity, the media, Communications Regulator, academia, political parties and non-state actors. This accorded the Mission an opportunity to understand the conditions in which the elections would take place.

14. Issues raised by stakeholders:

- The Electoral Amendment Act of 2016 provided for the utilization of the Election Voting Machines (EVM). However, due to insufficient stakeholders consultation, the Act was repealed and this was generally appreciated by the stakeholders
- IEC Botswana was not optimally engaging stakeholders and did not adequately conduct voter education.
- There was insufficient youth engagement in the build up to elections.
- There was improvement in media coverage of political parties , resulting in fair and balanced reporting.
- There were concerns on lack of political party funding. .
- The public broadcaster's civic and political programs on radio, television and print media were highly commended for contributing to the strengthening of democracy.
- Civil society organizations felt that they must be strengthened to be able to play a critical role in electoral matters.
- Concerns were raised on the role, effectiveness and integrity of observer missions.

15. Mission key observations

- There was generally a calm political mood in the country and a conducive environment existed to hold elections.
- A highly contested election and increased interest by the citizens on political activities
- Contesting political parties and candidates displayed a good culture of tolerance
- The participation of women as electoral candidates remains low.
- The IEC had an improved system of storage, handling and deployment of election materials as compared to the previous elections.
- The IEC made efforts to share election updates through the media centre.

16. Advance Voting

Section 5 and Section 61(4) of the Electoral Act of Botswana provides for the voting of the diaspora and early voting for the electoral staff and security personnel who will be engaged in the electoral process. The Mission noted that the diaspora voting took place on the 12th October 2019 and learnt that it went on well as planned.

The Mission observed the advanced voting of poll staff and security personnel on the 19th October 2019 .The Mission noted administrative challenges which it brought to the attention of IEC Botswana. These included the slow voting process, and the challenges around the management of the voters roll.

17.The Mission attended a number of consultative meetings including : International Heads of Missions convened by the Chairperson of IEC Botswana, Heads of International Observation Missions meeting organized by the SADC Electoral Observer Mission (SEOM) and African Union (AU) Election Observation Missions on the 22nd and 24th October 2019 respectively. The Heads of Missions meetings facilitated sharing of observations on the pre-polling, polling, and post-polling phases.

18. The Mission attended some media briefings at the IEC Media Centre.

ELECTION PHASE

The Mission made the following general observations on polling day:

- a) Generally, polling stations opened on time and opening procedures were followed
- b) Party Agents were present at all polling stations visited
- c) High density areas were characterized by very long queues and in one incident voters were rowdy and disorderly
- d) Some polling stations, especially in tents, were considered to be small. In cases where the verification of the voters roll was done inside the tents, there was congestion. However, the layout of the polling stations did not compromise the secrecy of the ballot.
- e) The voters roll was managed effectively in most polling stations visited. However, the execution in some polling stations of streaming and the verification processes created bottlenecks
- f) At most polling stations visited, women formed a substantive part of the polling staff component
- g) Youth were visible as voters in some polling stations visited
- h) In some polling stations visited, priority was not given to eligible voters, for example the elderly and expectant mothers .
- i) Security personnel was visibly present, courteous and did not interfere with the polling process.
- j) Both the local and international observers were present at most polling stations visited
- k) At most polling stations visited, voting took place in a calm and orderly manner.

19. Closing, Counting and Results Management

The Mission observed that the polling stations visited closed according to the laid down procedures:

- a) The closing processes were done in a transparent manner, in the presence of party agents and observers
- b) The transportation of ballot boxes to the counting centers was done under adequate security.
- c) The counting proceeded in line with the provisions of the law
- d) Where the counting was complete, results were verified and announced by the Returning Officer at the counting centre

20.LESSONS LEARNT

The following lessons drawn from the General Elections of the Republic of Botswana stand out as good practices in the SADC region:

- Culture of tolerance and peaceful environment in the electoral period
- Robust role by media in the build- up to elections
- Gender balance in the recruitment of Polling Staff
- In-house IEC Media and Outside Broadcasting capacity

21. RECOMMENDATIONS

The ECF – SADC Mission makes the following recommendations for consideration:

A. To the Independent Electoral Commission

- Standardize the training of all polling staff to ensure that processes are actioned uniformly.
- Develop a dedicated communications strategy for stakeholders.
- Segment the voters roll according to the voting streams and provide adequate personnel to manage the process
- Introduce application procedures for eligible special (advanced) voters

- Press conferences could be supported by press releases with statistical information especially on key issues such as voters roll and late opening / closing of polling stations .
- Consider provision of additional polling tents for administrative purposes
- Explore the Polling station based counting of votes
- Provide mandatory guidelines to facilitate priority voting for the elderly, disabled, etc
- Improve signage to polling stations
- Identity for party agents (stickers / labels / uniform)
- There is a need to strengthen the voter education programmes
- Consideration for recruitment of Marshals to manage the queues
- Make public the results management system (transmission)

B. On the Legal Framework

- To consider political party funding.
- To consider the establishment of an oversight body for registration and regulation of political parties

CONCLUSION

- i. The ECF- SADC Mission commends the Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana for ably managing the 2019 General Elections.
- ii. The Mission congratulates the people of the Republic of Botswana on the manner in which they conducted themselves during the electoral period. They were able to exercise their democratic right to vote.
- iii. As the electoral process is not yet complete, the ECF-SADC encourages the people of the Republic of Botswana to remain tolerant, peaceful and to accept the outcome of the election results.

Signed on this 25th October 2019 in **Gaborone, Republic of Botswana**

Ms Winnie Magagula

Mission leader

Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC Countries.