

Chapter 8

Election Observers

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Key points

- International election observation teams must be gender-balanced.
- Women and youth as categories should be separated within the observation analysis and reporting.
- Regional and international bodies can contribute to gender-inclusive elections by highlighting and promoting best practice in their reports and related advocacy.
- Through the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and its accompanying Code of Conduct (OSCE 2005), major regional and international observers have committed to examining barriers to credible and inclusive elections. However, gender issues, which feature in general terms, could be magnified in the declaration.



Openness to observation is a sign of institutional transparency. There is always a great deal to learn from *bona fide* election observation initiatives, both on the part of the observer and on the part of the EMB. Such initiatives provide an excellent mechanism to help propagate good practice. They can contribute to strengthening the independence of the EMB, rather than undermining its authority.

Observers can also play an important role, especially where there are tensions, in helping build confidence in the electoral process. For that reason, it has become an international good practice to invite and accredit citizen and international observers to follow all aspects of the electoral cycle. Observers, who must respect the laws of the country and not intervene in the electoral process, should abide by the relevant codes of conduct.

Decisions about which international observer groups to invite, as well as regulations governing such observation, can prove controversial. The onus should be to welcome all those who are willing to abide by the rules. It is important that timely invitations are issued, and accreditation completed, in a manner consistent with clearly articulated criteria drawn up in line with international good practice. Increasingly, there is a mix of domestic, regional and international observer missions on the ground during elections. This is common practice in Commonwealth African countries.

8.1 Gender balance in election observer missions

Gender balance within election observer missions remains a major concern. In total, research for this handbook examined 32 Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) reports in Commonwealth Africa to identify trends on good practices on women's political participation for this report. Only four women had chaired an election observation mission in Commonwealth Africa as at the time of publication. Only 11 women have chaired COGs in the Commonwealth's 25-year election observation history. COGs are usually chaired by former Heads of Government or other senior leaders. This disparity in itself reflects imbalance of women in political leadership across the Commonwealth.

8.2 Regional and international co-operation

The election management body should co-operate closely with similar institutions at the regional and global levels, with the objectives of:

- i. *raising standards through the exchange of information and experience;*
- ii. *ensuring consistency in approaches to improve the electoral process;*
- iii. *providing practical assistance (for instance, through the mutual observation of elections); and*
- iv. *providing moral support and solidarity in periods of difficulty.*

Commonwealth Electoral Network Working Group

There are considerable benefits to be gained from co-operation among EMBs at both the regional and the global levels. The Commonwealth Electoral Network (CEN) was established in 2010 to promote contact between national election management bodies and collaboration between them, especially in developing models of electoral best practice. The CEN also collaborates with regional and other groupings of EMBs where possible.

On 27 October 2005, a broad cross-section of election monitoring bodies adopted the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers* (OSCE 2005). Although gender is implicit in the 24 principles, it is not directly referred to in any of them. The *Code of Conduct* also makes no reference to gender considerations. There is clearly scope for collaboration around gender standards and a gender checklist for election observers.

8.3 Checklist



- ✓ What percentage of the election observer missions are led by women?
- ✓ Is gender a consideration in the criteria of all the election observer missions?
- ✓ Based on the assessment, what recommendations can be made for enhancing women's political participation? These may include:
 - Introduction of special measures (legislative and policies)
 - Electoral reform
 - Legislative reform
 - Political party reform
 - Gender-sensitive civil and voter education
 - EMBs
 - The media (including new media)

Reference

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (2005), *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*, UN, New York, available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/16935?download=true> (accessed 15 December 2017).