



Concept Paper

For the Regional Workshop on Strengthening Independence of Electoral Commissions in the SADC-Region

13rd – 16th March 2006

Safari Cout Hotel, Windhoek

Namibia

1. INTRODUCTION

About the Forum

The Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries is an autonomous body of Electoral Commissions in SADC countries. It was launched in 1998 with the main aim of encouraging cooperation and support on electoral issues amongst member countries. To date, all the 14 Commissions in SADC countries are members. The broad goals of the Forum include;

- Encouraging cooperation and support among member countries on electoral issues and democracy building;
- Promoting conditions conducive to the conduct of free and fair elections in the sub-region
- Promoting democracy as a political system of responsive and accountable government through the electoral process;
- Encouraging active participation of a citizenry which is well informed about the electoral process.

The ECF- SADC has a constitution (adopted in 1998) which outlines the details of its establishment, membership and the objectives. Since its establishment, the Forum has had EISA (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa) as its interim Secretariat. The year 2005 saw the establishment of ECF-SADC permanent secretariat, housed by IEC-Botswana and manned by a Programme Officer.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Electoral Commissions play a very important role in the preparation and conduct of elections. All Electoral Commissions in the SADC region have been established under a legal framework which spells out their duties and other related functions. However, with all the experiences drawn from the ongoing elections related activities, it continues to emerge that the establishment, composition, independence and general functioning of many Electoral Commissions indicate that they do not seem to be as Independent bodies as they ought to be.

3. OBJECTIVES

- ✓ This workshop can bring all SADC Electoral Commissions together to deliberate on the legal framework under which they function and explore how they can enhance their independence and impartiality.
- ✓ From the workshop, it is expected that members will identify critical elements emanating from the deliberations and explore how they can come up with a framework of common standards that can be used in the SADC Region.

This workshop forms part of the project which is divided in three phases: Phase 1 is intended for member Commissions to take stock of their legal frameworks and identify the bottlenecks that exist within their functioning (March 2006). Phase 2 will give an opportunity for Electoral Commissions to develop common standards under which they wish to function (October 2006). Phase 3 will be a consultative workshop to familiarize the other stakeholders with the standards (2007).

METHODOLOGY

- ✓ The workshop participants will be Legal Officers for Electoral Commissions and administrative heads and/or Commissioners whose role is supervisory.
- ✓ Each Electoral Commission will give a brief summary of its legal status, share the problems encountered and make some recommendations for the improvement of the legal framework.
- ✓ Participants will be taken through an international perspective (by International IDEA) on the legal framework of Election Management bodies.

EVALUATION

The workshops (in their order) are intended to enhance the independence and impartiality of the Electoral Commissions. It is anticipated that a series of such workshops would go a long way towards strengthening the functioning of Electoral Commissions. The envisaged workshop is an initiative towards the harmonization of standards for Electoral Commissions.