



NEWSLETTER

Elections Bulletin



STRENGTHENING ELECTORAL INTEGRITY: ESN-SA AND CCJP-MALAWI EMPOWER TRAINERS AHEAD OF 2025 ELECTIONS

In a strategic effort to promote peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections, the Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN-SA), in partnership with the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Malawi (CCJP-Malawi), convened a four-day Training of Trainers (ToT) on Electoral Conflict Management and Civic Voter Education from 7 to 10 July 2025 in Lilongwe.



Pic: Participants at the ESN-SA & CCJP Malawi Training of Trainers Workshop



exercises, group work, and reflective dialogue. The sessions covered a range of themes, including:

- Root causes of electoral conflict, conflict mapping, and Malawi's electoral history;
- Negotiation and mediation strategies, electoral standards, and early warning systems;
- Roles of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) and non-state actors in fostering peaceful elections;
- Civic and voter education principles, including the development of peace messaging for diverse audiences



Group photo of participants at the Malawi ToT on Electoral Conflict Management and Civic Voter Education

The training brought together 32 participants from civil society, media, and development partners, aiming to enhance their capacity to prevent and manage electoral conflict while strengthening civic and voter education (CVE) efforts ahead of Malawi's general elections on 16 September 2025.

Opening the training, the CCJP-Malawi National Coordinator highlighted the rise in electoral tensions and stressed the urgency of community-based interventions. A representative from the European Union in Malawi praised the initiative, noting its relevance amid a regional decline in public trust in democratic institutions.

The ESN-SA Host Director Rindai Chipfunde Vava lauded the workshop as a milestone, the first country-level customised training under the network's regional support programme.

The curriculum was delivered using participatory adult learning methodologies, including scenario-based

A practical component on Day Three allowed participants to apply their knowledge through group presentations, reinforcing their ability to translate concepts into action.

The training concluded with a certification ceremony and a vote of thanks, where participants expressed appreciation for the empowering experience. With the general elections approaching, the ToT marks a critical step in building a cadre of local actors committed to promoting electoral integrity, peaceful participation, and democratic resilience across Malawi.



Pic: ESN-SA Host Director Rindai Chipfunde Vava

Q: What is the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG)?

A: The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) is a legal framework adopted by the African Union (AU) in 2007 to promote democracy, rule of law, human rights, credible elections, and good governance across AU member states.

Q: What is its importance in elections?

A: ACDEG plays a vital role in strengthening electoral processes in Africa by:

- Promoting free, fair, and transparent elections.
- Setting standards for democratic governance and the rule of law.
- Encouraging inclusive citizen participation and political tolerance.
- Condemning unconstitutional changes of government.
- Strengthening electoral institutions and enhancing the credibility of election observers.
- Supporting accountability and peaceful transfers of power.

Q: What electoral provisions does ACDEG contain?

A: ACDEG outlines several electoral provisions to ensure democratic and credible elections:

1. Free and Fair Elections (Article 17[1])

- Elections must be regular, transparent, free, and fair, reflecting the will of the people.
- Conducted by independent, impartial electoral bodies.

2. Electoral Institutions (Article 17[2])

- Member states must establish independent, impartial, and well-resourced electoral bodies.

3. Participation and Inclusion (Articles 3, 10, 17[3])

- Citizens have the right to participate in electoral processes without discrimination.
- Promotes equal access for women, youth, and marginalized groups to vote and run for office.
- States must foster an environment for inclusive political participation.

4. Electoral Observation (Article 18)

- States should invite and facilitate impartial electoral observation missions.
- Observers must have freedom of movement and access to relevant information.
- Observations help improve practices and enhance transparency.

5. Media Coverage (Article 27[8])

- States must ensure equitable media access for all parties and candidates.
- Media should operate freely and ethically, supporting informed public debate.
- Governments must protect journalists and uphold media freedom.

6. Electoral Integrity and Transparency Article 3(7)

- Elections must follow proper legal procedures.
- Emphasizes the use of independent observation and respect for due process.

7. Political Tolerance and Peaceful Competition Article 2(3) Article 8(1)

- Encourages political pluralism and discourages violence or intimidation during elections.
- Discourages violence and intimidation by promoting peaceful and legitimate transitions.

8. Prevention of Electoral Malpractice Article 3(8) (Article 17)

- Prohibits fraud, manipulation, and misuse of state resources.
- Promotes accountability for electoral violations.

9. Peaceful Transfer of Power (Article 23)

- Condemns unconstitutional changes of government, including those from falsified elections.
- Reinforces peaceful and legitimate transitions of power.

These provisions aim to build trust in electoral systems, promote inclusive governance, and ensure that political authority genuinely reflects the will of the people across the African continent

ESN-SA HOST SECRETARIAT, ZESN CONVENES INCLUSIVE ACDEG WORKSHOPS TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT IN ZIMBABWE

As part of efforts to promote inclusive democratic governance, strengthen democratic principles and electoral integrity, ESN-SA host Secretariat ZESN convened a series of seven civic engagement workshops between 11 and 8 July 2025. These half-day sessions were held in Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Masvingo, and Mutare, bringing together a total of 198 participants from across Zimbabwe's diverse civil society spectrum. Attendees included representatives of women's organisations,



Pic: Law Society of Zimbabwe's Dr Patience Ndlovu facilitating the youth workshop in Harare

youth, persons with disabilities, and community-based media, the informal sector, residents' associations, and organisations. The primary aim of the workshops was to...

deepen public understanding of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) and to encourage its integration into civic programming and advocacy efforts.

ZESN Advocacy Officer Ethel Muchena said, "The workshops served as a platform to demystify the provisions of ACDEG, fostering informed dialogue and strategic advocacy around its implementation at national, regional, and continental levels."

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ACDEG is a key African Union instrument designed to promote democratic consolidation, rule of law, and credible elections across the continent.

“They also provided a platform for civil society organisations (CSOs) to explore the Charter’s relevance to Zimbabwe’s democratic course and reflect critically on their role in promoting its principles,” Muchena said.

Participants discussed, in accessible terms, the Charter’s key provisions, including Articles 44 and 45 of Chapter 10, which oblige Member States to domesticate the Charter through legislative, Executive, and administrative means. It was noted that the African Union Commission is also mandated to support States in implementation, monitor progress, and develop performance benchmarks.

ZESN Research Officer Heather Koga weighed in, “despite Zimbabwe’s ratification of ACDEG, a recurring theme across all five sessions was the clear gap between formal adoption and public awareness. While some participants were already conversant with ACDEG’s core principles, many particularly those from the informal sector expressed concern that the Charter remains largely unknown at grassroots level. They emphasised that, as a sizeable demographic in Zimbabwe’s socio-economic landscape, informal sector voices must be more intentionally included in democratic discourse.” Each city’s workshop offered unique perspectives but echoed common concerns around implementation, participation, and accountability.

In **Harare**, participants engaged in an in-depth analysis of the Charter’s legal obligations and its relevance to national governance structures.



Pic: Some of the Participants at the Bulawayo Workshop

Discussions centred on whether Zimbabwe’s existing legal framework aligns with ACDEG and how civil society might contribute to shadow reporting to the African Union, in order to highlight

Participants in **Bulawayo** observed that public awareness of ACDEG remains minimal, with both the government and civil society falling short in efforts to popularise the Charter. Media practitioners in attendance committed to increasing coverage of ACDEG through diverse formats, including fact sheets, infographics, and radio programming. The Church was also identified as a key stakeholder with the potential to convene communities and bridge the information gap.



Pic: Participants following proceedings at the Masvingo Workshop

In **Masvingo**, participants voiced frustration at what they described as a superficial approach to implementation. Concerns were raised about the persistently low participation of women in governance and the inaccessibility of the state’s biannual ACDEG implementation reports, which should ideally be made public to enhance transparency and accountability.

Mutare’s deliberations focused on developing concrete strategies for mobilisation and education. There was strong consensus on the need to engage parliamentarians and political actors more robustly and rigorous civil society-led research into the barriers affecting women’s political participation.

In **Gweru**, although familiarity with the Charter was relatively low, enthusiasm for advocacy was high. Youth participants proposed the creation of forums dedicated to promoting democratic participation and good governance. Women leaders advocated leveraging social media to enhance outreach, while residents’ associations and church groups committed to using town halls and public forums for community sensitisation. Persons with disabilities highlighted the need for materials to be produced in accessible formats and reaffirmed their commitment to advocacy around the Charter’s full domestication.

Muchena highlighted that, many CSOs pledged to mainstream ACDEG into their programmes.

Women’s organisations committed to incorporating Charter principles into leadership training and social entrepreneurship initiatives. Disability rights advocates called for deliberate inclusion in awareness efforts, while youth-focused groups promised to push for increased electoral participation.

She added that, “the youth elevated their perspectives on ACDEG and democratic governance and emphasised the necessity of access to information and documents that facilitate effective participation.”

The workshops concluded with a unified call to both government and civil society to move beyond policy declarations and towards tangible action. Participants called for regular national dialogue sessions to assess implementation, and for inclusive strategies to ensure that marginalised voices are represented in electoral processes.



Pic: Participants at one of the youth workshops held in Harare



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ESN-SA SECRETARIAT LEADS KEY DIALOGUE ON ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AT ELS2025

The ESN-SA Secretariat made a strong contribution to regional electoral discourse at the Experiential Learning Seminar on Electoral Integrity and Advocacy (ELS2025), held in Kenya in April 2025. Representing the Secretariat, Host Executive Director Rindai Chipfunde-Vava and Programmes Director Ellen Dingani played a central role in shaping conversations around conflict prevention, electoral transparency, and inclusive democratic practices.

During a session on Conflict Resolution and Prevention, Rindai Chipfunde-Vava shared critical insights on the role of regional organisations and election observer networks in managing electoral tensions. She outlined tools commonly used by the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, SADC Electoral Advisory Council, and the United Nations to prevent and resolve conflict including mediation, facilitation, arbitration, shuttle diplomacy, early warning systems, and preventive diplomacy.

Chipfunde-Vava emphasized that credible election observation is essential for deterring violence, enhancing transparency, and building public trust. She also stressed the importance of multi-level collaboration between domestic and regional actors in sustaining electoral peace and legitimacy.



Pic: ESN-SA Host Executive Director Rindai Chipfunde-Vava

In another key session, Ellen Dingani presented an analysis of the 2024 general elections in Botswana and Namibia, offering practical lessons for strengthening electoral integrity across the continent.

She noted commendable achievements such as Namibia's high voter registration rate (90%) and Botswana's efforts to improve accessibility through increased polling stations.

However, Dingani also highlighted ongoing challenges including logistical issues, ballot shortages, and low youth participation. She proposed actionable recommendations such as strengthening civic engagement among youth, women, and persons with disabilities, advocating for gender-inclusive policies, improving electoral logistics, and tightening campaign finance regulations.

The presence and thought leadership of the ESN-SA Secretariat at ELS2025 underscored the network's continued commitment to supporting peaceful, transparent, and inclusive electoral processes across Southern Africa and beyond.



Pic: Ellen Dingani presenting key lessons on Botswana and Namibia 2024 elections