

Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa

GENDER CHECKLIST

FOR FREE AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN SADC

EDITED BY
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Source: © Zimbabwe Electoral
Commission

Gender Checklist for Free and Credible Elections in SADC

PUBLISHED BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



Foreword.....	I
Acknowledgements.....	II
About the Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN-SA).....	III
Vision.....	III
Mission.....	III
Introduction.....	1
Research Findings.....	2
Progressive Instruments Promoting Women's Participation.....	4
Key Gender Concepts.....	7
Why the Checklist for ensuring gender equality in free and credible elections is key.....	8
Checklist To Guide Gender Mainstream in All Electoral Processes.....	9
International, regional, sub-regional and national frameworks for gender equality in elections.....	9
Electoral Act.....	11
Political Parties.....	12
Women Candidates.....	13
Election Management Body (EMB).....	14
Campaign Finance.....	15
Voting Rights.....	15
Voter Registration.....	16
Voter Education (VE).....	16
Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWIE).....	17
Procedure for Voting.....	18
Institutionalised Monitoring and Evaluation.....	19
Civil Society Actors.....	19
Media and New Technologies.....	20
NGOs and CBOs'.....	21
Development Partners.....	21
Gender in Election Analysis.....	22
Recommendations on Enhancing Women's Political Participation.....	22
Important References.....	23
Relevant Institutions.....	23
Works Cited.....	23

FOREWORD

In an era where democracy is celebrated, the significance of inclusive electoral processes emerges as a bedrock of democratic societies ensuring every voice is heard, regardless of gender. However, the quest for gender equality within electoral frameworks continue to pose critical challenges, particularly in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. A retrospective examination of recent decades reveals that although significant strides have been made, the path towards attaining gender equality remains far from complete.

The stark reality in SADC is that women continue to face significant barriers that hinder their full participation in political life despite representing the majority of the population, with their numbers ranging from 52% and 54% in several of SADC countries. Also, notwithstanding the existence of progressive legal and policy frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality, including commitments under the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, many countries in the region still grapple with entrenched challenges in advancing women's political participation.

Cognizant of the fact that the right to vote and stand for public office constitutes a fundamental democratic right rather than a mere privilege, the Electoral Support Network for Southern Africa (ESN-SA) has taken steps to integrate gender perspectives into election observation and monitoring.

ESN-SA developed a Gender Checklist for Free and Credible Elections, which is a strategic instrument for use in assessing critical issues, essential for advancing gender equality in the region. The Gender Checklist is not merely a procedural guide; it embodies a comprehensive framework towards ensuring that gender considerations are integrated at every stage of the electoral cycle. It underscores the importance of moving beyond mere quantitative to a more thorough qualitative assessment of women participation and representation in electoral processes. The ESN-SA's commitment to ensure the multifaceted challenges faced by women, including the alarming prevalence of Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWIE) is both timely and necessary. Through this Gender Checklist, the ESN-SA realises the necessity of embracing the principles of equality, and inclusivity that underpin democracy and working tirelessly to ensure that gender equality is not just an aspiration but a reality in our electoral landscapes. Together, we can pave way for a future where women not only participate in elections but thrive as leaders and decision-makers, thereby enriching democratic processes and strengthening societies.

Rindai Chipfunde-Vava
ESN-SA Host Director

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Special acknowledgement is extended to the contributors of the Second Edition of the Gender Checklist for Free and Credible Elections in SADC. Their efforts in reviewing the First Edition and compiling background information before the incorporation of comments from ESN-SA member organisations cannot go unnoticed. We particularly highlight the efforts of Rindai Chipfunde-Vava, Ellen Dingani and Ethel Muchena whose unwavering dedication has been crucial in ensuring the second Edition of the Gender Checklist reflects contemporary gender dynamics and aligns with various global and regional targets and emerging issues as well as ongoing developments in pursuit of gender equality within the region.

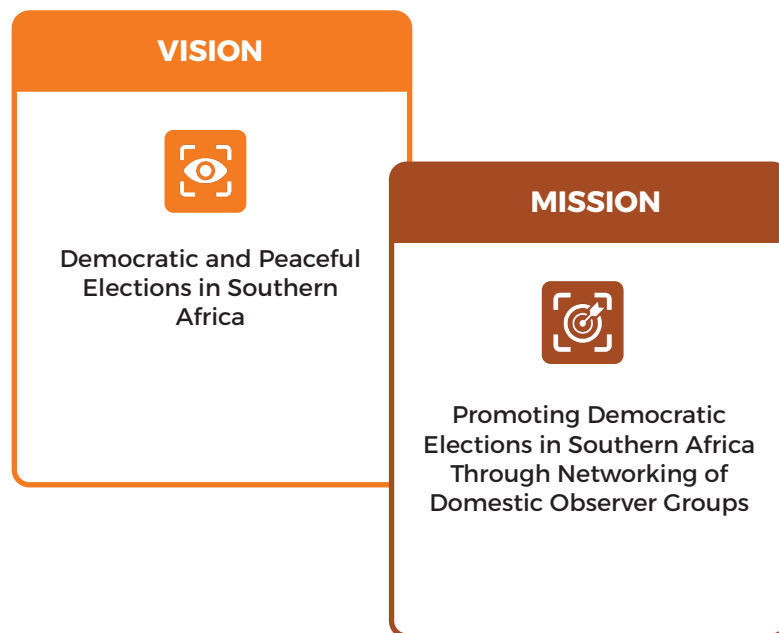
Sincere appreciation goes to Glenda Fick of the Electoral Institute for Southern Africa (EISA) for her significant work in compiling background information used in drafting the First edition of the Gender Checklist. Her efforts provided a foundational framework for the First Edition. We also express our gratitude to the secretariat of SADC- Electoral Support Network (SADC-ESN), now known as the ESN-SA, for its invaluable support in coming up with the First Edition. Additionally, we recognise Athalia Molokomme and Christine Warioba of the SADC Gender Unit for their vital contributions, which significantly enhanced the quality of the Gender Checklist.

We would like to acknowledge the insightful critiques to the First Edition, provided during the Regional Roundtable on Gender Mainstreaming in Elections, organised by Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) on behalf of SADC-ESN. This collaborative session brought together a diverse group of resource persons from the region to review the draft document, facilitating its operationalisation within relevant structures in the Southern African region. The contributions of several TGNP staff were critical to this process, particularly those of Mary Rusimbi, Aggripina Mosha and Miranda Johnson.

ESN-SA also recognises its partners, specifically the European Union through the AHEAD Project under the coordination of the European Partnership for Democracy, for their support, which made the compilation of the Second Edition possible. Without this essential financial support, the development of the Gender Checklist would have faced significant challenges.

ABOUT THE ELECTORAL SUPPORT NETWORK OF SOUTHERN AFRICA (ESN-SA)

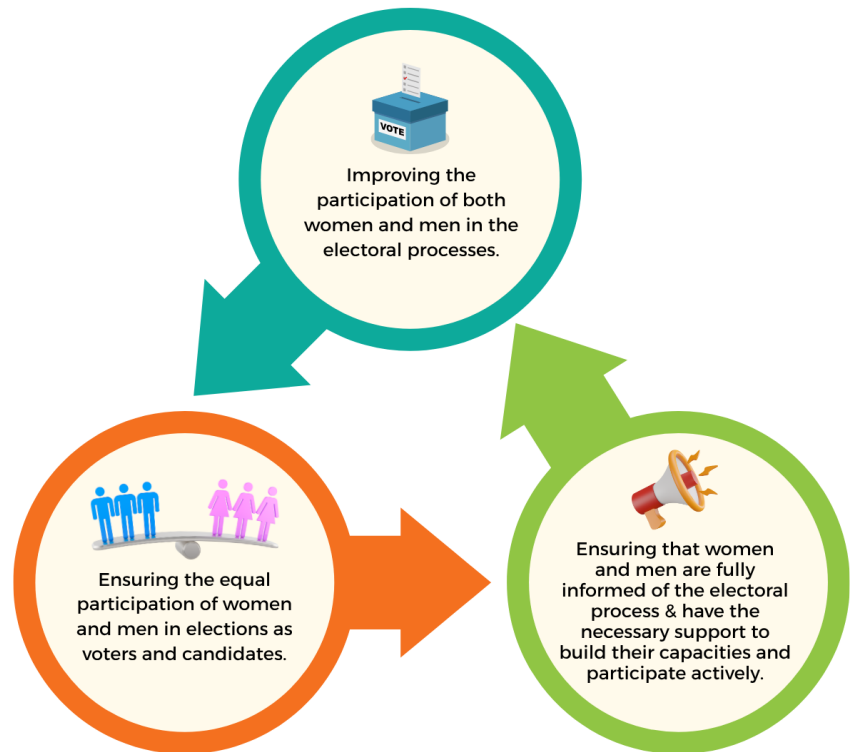
The ESN-SA, launched in January 1998 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, focuses on enhancing democratic elections in Southern Africa. Initially hosted by the Electoral Institute of Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) for 12 years, it transitioned and is now hosted by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) since 2010. The Network began its work focusing on election observation and expanded to include capacity building for civic education, advocacy for electoral reforms and EOMs Recommendations follow-ups. Its scope has further evolved in response to electoral developments, including technology use. ESN-SA membership includes Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs), and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) dedicated to human rights, domestic election observation and democracy work in general.



INTRODUCTION

The ESN-SA bears the responsibility of advancing the integration of gender considerations in election-related activities undertaken by network members in the SADC countries. Central to ESN-SA's gender and elections initiative is the recognition of inclusive elections that champion an equal exercise of democratic rights. These rights encompass the right to vote and the right to stand for public office by women. Acknowledging the significant challenges that women face in attaining political power, ESN-SA feels it is imperative to recognise the multifaceted challenges women face, including social, economic, cultural and political obstacles. Additionally, ESN-SA considers the pervasive issue of Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWIE), which poses substantial challenges to electoral participation. VAWIE has become widespread, undermining democracy, human rights and gender equality.¹ Several factors predispose women to politically motivated violence² affecting their participation. Understandably, men are also victims of violence, but women are more victims of political violence because of gender factors and other identity-based norms of patriarchal societies that disadvantage and oppress them.³ Furthermore, the advent of new technologies currently presents a dual impact on women's participation. While new technologies have the potential to enhance women's participation, they have also exacerbated existing disparities.

The Beijing Declaration (signed in 1995), among other progressive policies and protocols such as CEDAW, ACDEG, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and ICCPR, already expressed the need to coordinate actions from all sectors to increase women's participation and access to decision-making roles. In pursuit of this, there is need to foster a favorable, dignified, balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in all spheres. With this Gender Checklist, the ESN-SA seeks to assess and navigate the complexities to women's participation and promote a more inclusive electoral landscape in SADC by:



Inclusive elections are at the heart of the ESN-SA because they are an important component of democracy. An election is free and credible when there are no unreasonable or arbitrary limitations imposed on the rights of adult citizens, women and men, in expressing their political will either as electoral candidates or voters. For citizens in the SADC region, it is generally easier for men to be active in political life and to exercise their political will than it is for women; hence, spheres of decision-making are male-dominated, and women remain under-represented.

While they constitute more than half of the population and the electorate in their member states, they continue to be seriously under-represented in political and public decision-making in most countries within the region⁴.

Disparity arises from both formal and informal factors. Whereas formal factors include electoral systems, gender quotas, financial resources and media, informal factors encompass socialisation practices, cultural norms, and prevailing attitudes. These elements collectively serve as significant barriers to women's political participation and the implications of this gender disparity are profound for democracy.

Over the past few decades, strides have been made toward achieving gender equality; however, the region remains off the course to attain a 50-50 gender balance by 2030. Legislative representation by women at the regional level has shown a gradual increase, rising from 24.5% in 2013 to 30.4% in 2018, and further to 30.9% in subsequent years⁵. As of January 2025, only two countries Namibia and Tanzania in the SADC region had female presidents out of the sixteen member countries. Women under-representation also permeated the local levels as of January 2024, with 26% of women in sub-Saharan Africa⁶ occupying the local level roles.

The gradual progress towards gender equality in the region highlights the need for an assessment of both advancements and obstacles encountered in the pursuit of gender equality. At the current slow rate, achieving gender equality in political leadership is projected to take 130 years⁷.

Given the aforementioned context, comprehensive assessments of women's participation in the region become imperative. Equally important is the creation of a robust assessment tool to facilitate the assessments. In this regard, the ESN-SA, as part of its AHEAD project funded by the European Union, has revised its regional "Gender Checklist for Free and Credible Elections." This tool aims to enhance the assessment process and ensure that women's participation is effectively measured and promoted.

The Gender Checklist specifically targets key election stakeholders, including SADC regional institutions, national parliaments, Election Management Bodies (EMBs), political parties, CSOs, Election Observation Groups, political candidates (with a particular focus on women), the media, donor agencies, and other electoral stakeholders. It is envisioned that this regional checklist will serve as a foundational tool for adaptation and use at the national level.

The Gender Checklist is informed by extensive research findings that identify the principal barriers to gender equality impacting women's political participation within SADC. It serves as a mechanism to ensure that considerations for equality are integrated at different stages of the electoral cycle. The primary objective is to facilitate the realisation of women's political rights, including the right to vote and to stand for public office. Moreover, the Checklist aims to promote equal representation of men and women within SADC member states and structures at all levels, aligning with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

This protocol is focused on advancing gender equality, particularly through Articles 5, 12, and 13, which emphasise special measures, representation, and participation, respectively. The checklist will serve as a valuable resource for those involved in assessing the credibility of elections while considering gender equality.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Despite the signing of the Gender and Development Declaration by all SADC Heads of States and the formal recognition of disparity between women and men in areas, which include power sharing and decision making, women remain under-represented in political decision-making in the region. The existence of international and regional protocols such as the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (Maputo Protocol) has not translated into meaningful gender equality.

At the backdrop of low levels of women participation, the Revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, intrinsically aligned to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 and the Beijing plus 20 Report urge member states to domesticate and institutionalise Articles 5, 12 and 13 of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development to adhere to the gender equality principles enshrined in the Protocol⁸. The adoption of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) in 2007, which, among other things, recognises women's rights is also a positive effort towards gender equality.

National constitutions have also been crucial mechanisms for institutionalising a country's commitment to gender equality in political processes as the highest law of the land. There is a correlation between the existence of explicit guarantees for gender equality in national constitutions (for example, in Tanzania, Mozambique, Namibia, Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa) and progress towards the achievement of gender equality, including in the area of decision making⁹.

While it is important to recognise the advancements so far, the overall landscape for women's participation in key positions remains concerning. Efforts to achieve the target of 50% female representation in political decision-making structures by 2030 have not substantially altered the landscape in favour of women.

Ongoing challenges to integrating women into mainstream politics continue to persist, highlighting a critical and urgent concern within the region. As of March 2025, a regional average of 27.1% seats in the Lower Chamber and 27% in the Upper Chambers continued as concerning. It indicates persistent gaps in political representation within the region¹⁰. Buttressing the above, a synopsis of various barriers that hinder women's access to politics and decision-making roles across social, cultural, economic, and political domains show that there is a long way to go in achieving gender equality.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION



- **Overall environment in the region:** Continuing barriers to democracy, insufficient accountability, transparency and engagement in politics by the public make it more difficult for disadvantaged and marginalised groups to gain access to political power. Political instability including conflicts and electoral violence are constraints to women obtaining political office.
- **Electoral systems in the region:** According to the SADC Gender and Development Monitor 2022, the choice of an electoral system has a major bearing on the level of representation of women in governance and political decision-making. The prevailing picture in the region is that of male oriented and chauvinistic nature of elections: they tend to be focused on competition and winning rather than balancing the power relations. Proportional representation (PR) versus 'first past the post' (FPTP) electoral systems: experiences have found that PR systems are often more conducive to women than FPTP, yet FPTP is predominantly used in more than half (56%) of SADC member states and PR system is used in 25% of SADC member-states. A combination of electoral systems and the quota systems significantly increase women's representation.
- **Political parties:** Orientation of political parties, male-domination, patronage and bureaucracy within the parties generally serve to alienate women; and lack of funding, particularly by opposition parties, particularly disadvantages women candidates. The absence of political party regulations and the failure to implement mandatory inclusive policies to include quotas at the party level exacerbate the challenges women face.
- **Social/cultural discrimination and disadvantaged social status of women:** Stereotypes, attitudes and prejudices against women as leaders within patriarchal systems;
- internalisation by women of patriarchal system norms and non-recognition of roles that women are playing; women's double burden and limited opportunities and low levels of self-confidence, assertiveness, interest in politics, leadership skills and knowledge of campaign techniques/electoral processes, due to inadequate capacity building initiatives, mentorship and training.
- **Institutional barriers:** Insufficient gender-positive national constitutions, policies, laws, frameworks, and other election-related bodies and instruments, including lack of domestication of international and regional treaties and agreements related to gender equalities; and insufficient coordinated and continuing support for potential women candidates and gender-sensitive civic and voter education by civil society organisations and the media.
- **Economic barriers:** Lack of economic independence and financial autonomy as a deterrent factor in meeting campaign costs, nomination fees among other important things that require financial backing. Lack of control by women over the means of production usually result in the poverty/low resource base of women.

PROGRESSIVE INSTRUMENTS PROMOTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Informed by the imperative to promote and institutionalise democratic values of justice, equality, and inclusiveness, various international and regional bodies have established a range of human rights instruments and developed mechanisms that compel state parties to ensure gender equality across all spheres of life. Each of these instruments underscores the principles of justice, gender equality, and non-discrimination. The instruments are widely recognised for explicit provisions regarding women's inclusion and representation in political processes.

TABLE 1: REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS GOVERNING WOMEN PARTICIPATION.

INSTRUMENT	PROVISION	OBLIGATIONS
Convention on the Political Rights of Women (CPRW)	Articles 1, 2, 3	Women are entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men. Women shall be eligible for election and public office.
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	Article 5, 7, 18	Eliminating prejudices, customary and all other practices which are based on the inferiority or the superiority of either gender or the stereotyped roles for men and women. To eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life
Protocol to the African Charter on the Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol 2003)	Articles 2, 8(f), 9, 11	Takes positive action to promote participatory governance and ensure participation of women through affirmative action, enabling legislation and other measures.
African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG)	Articles 2, 8, 29, 30	Promotes participation and representation of women. Promotes representative systems of government.
SADC Protocol on Gender and Development	Article 5, 12, 13, 30	Enshrines gender equality and equity in the Constitution, States are to ensure that these rights are not compromised by any provisions, laws or practices. Member States to improve the representation of women in government and all decision making in public, private and social spheres to at least 50%.
Revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development	Articles 5, 12 and 13	Focuses on special measures, participation and representation of women.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	Article 6, 18, 19, 20, 21	Respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

INSTRUMENT	PROVISION	OBLIGATIONS
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	Article 3, 25	Ensures men and women's equal participation in public life.
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action	-	Takes all measures that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and at the same level as men.

Despite the existence of progressive international, regional, and national frameworks aimed at enhancing women's participation, prospects for the realisation of 50-50 gender equality by 2030 are low. Acknowledging strides towards gender equality, it is, however, significant to state that the pace is slow to guarantee the achievement of a 50-50 balance by the set time. The Africa Gender Barometer (2024) indicates only minimal increases in women's involvement across various levels within the SADC region and Africa as a whole. This highlights a significant disparity between policy intentions and actual outcomes.

The data presented in Table 2 illustrates that representation of women in various roles across Africa and Southern Africa reveals a complex landscape. An analysis of the trends from 2021 to 2024 indicates a mixed picture of gender representation in roles occupied by women. Notably, while there have been significant advancements in certain areas, persistent challenges have led to decline or stagnation of women participation and representation. Commendable progress, particularly in Top Executive Positions, Local Governance and Cabinet for Africa and Southern Africa has been observed.

A great increase in Africa and Southern Africa was recorded on Top Executive Positions with an increase margin of 6% and 12% respectively. However, hurdles remain at continental level, particularly in roles such as political party leadership where a decline of 3 percentage-point gap was noted between 2021 and 2024. In Southern Africa, while a steady increase in representation across all levels was observed, there is an exception on EMBs which experienced a decrease from 40% in 2021 to 39% in 2024.

TABLE 2: LEVELS OF INCREASE IN WOMEN PARTICIPATION BETWEEN 2021 AND 2024 ¹¹

LEVEL	AFRICA		SOUTHERN AFRICA	
	2021	2024	2021	2024
Lower House of Parliament	25%	26%	28%	29%
Upper House of Parliament	20%	21%	29%	31%
Parliament Overall	24%	25%	28%	29%
Political Party Leadership	12%	9%	14%	19%
Election Management Bodies	28%	29%	40%	39%
Local Government	21%	25%	20%	25%
Speakers	21%	25%	20%	25%
Mayors of Capital Cities	19%	29%	35%	43%
Cabinet	22%	24%	26%	30%

Source: WPP- Africa Gender Barometer-2024

Several countries in the SADC region continue to hold elections in accordance with laws that have failed to guarantee women's electoral success. Even in countries with progressive Constitutions, there often exists a significant disconnect between the constitutional provisions and their actual implementation. Women are generally denied the full benefits of citizenship due to gender stereotyping and attitudes that are strongly reinforced, socially, economically and culturally. Consequently, men enjoy greater credibility as political leaders. Men and women vote for men more readily than they vote for women, further perpetuating the challenges to achieving electoral parity. Lack of economic resources also contributes to the absence of women in the political sphere.

Importantly, voter and civic education programmes lack a gender-sensitive niche. Rather, voter and civic education programmes should strive to undo the long-standing and deep-rooted gender stereotypes and attitudes held about women. Voter education programmes need to place emphasis on gender equality as a crucial democratic value and a basic human right.

Voters should be informed about why it is necessary to vote for parties and candidates who are responsive to gender equality. Voter education programmes also need to emphasise why it is necessary for the electorate to hold political parties and government structures accountable to gender equality. An emphasis on gender equality should also be developed and strengthened in ongoing civic education programmes¹². Considering the above, this Gender Checklist aims to ensure that gender equality is taken into account at all crucial stages of the electoral cycle.

KEY GENDER CONCEPTS

To address major gender gaps in electoral processes, it is important for the target groups of this checklist to have a shared understanding of key concepts relating to gender in elections.

- **Gender.** Refers to socially constructed and culturally variable roles that women and men play in their daily lives. It refers to a structural relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets, in political structures, and in the household. It is reinforced by customs, laws and specific development policies¹³.
- **Gender equality and equity.** Gender equality means that there is no discrimination on the grounds of a person's sex in the allocation of resources or benefits, or in access to services. Gender equality can be measured in terms of whether there is equality of opportunity or equality in results. Gender equity is about ensuring that development policies and interventions leave women no worse off economically or in terms of social responsibility than before the intervention. This approach tries to ensure that women have a fair share of the benefits, as well as the responsibilities, of the society, equal treatment before the law, equal access to social provisions, education, and equal pay for work of equal value¹⁴.
- **Gender mainstreaming.** Paying attention to gender equality in relation to policies, planning processes and institutional practices that set the overall conditions for democracy and development. Mainstreaming involves utilising available resources to correct gender imbalance and ensuring that policies are substantive and implementable with regard to gender issues.
- **Patriarchy.** Patriarchy is a system that is both an ideology and a practice, entrenched in the attitudes, culture and values of any given society. It is part of the economic, social and political systems and presents itself in different ways within democracy and capitalism. Patriarchy is based on the household level and the ways in which roles are defined within the family. It extends to different institutions throughout society, including schools, religion, and the state and laws that are constructed by it.
- **Women's empowerment.** The process by which women and young girls become aware of structural gender inequalities to which they are subjected and take action to obtain equal opportunities and rights.

WHY THE CHECKLIST FOR ENSURING GENDER EQUALITY IN FREE AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IS KEY

One formulation¹⁵ of the international standards for free and credible elections developed against the background cast by various international instruments which recognises, inter alia: (i) The right of the individual to vote on a non-discriminatory basis in parliamentary elections; (ii) Limitations on candidature, the creation and activities of political parties and campaign rights should not be applied so as to violate the principle of non-discrimination on grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, social origin, property, birth or other status.

These standards do not expressly mention non-discrimination on the grounds of gender. Non-discrimination on grounds of gender entails a different inquiry from one focused on non-discrimination on grounds of sex. An enquiry into the former would be concerned with addressing economic empowerment of women, education and training, and the political participation of women. Meena defines “gender as being socially constructed and culturally variable roles that women and men play in their daily lives. It refers to a structural relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets and in political structures, as well as in the household. It is reinforced by customs, law and specific development policies”¹⁶

A gender responsive check seeks to comprehensively deal with long standing deep-rooted practices of gender discrimination that are difficult to address through recognition of formal equality alone, which does not take social, economic and other disparities between women and men into account. The gender-responsive check is informed by an understanding of citizenship strongly committed to substantive equality or ‘equality of result’ in relation to gender. Substantive equality requires collectively examining the formal and informal factors that serve as significant barriers to women’s political participation.

The social, economic and political conditions of women and men, as well as socialisation practices, cultural norms and prevailing attitudes should be examined to determine whether a commitment to gender equality is being effectively implemented. A commitment to the latter form of equality is necessary to address such disparities and the ensuing gender discrimination many women experience.

The Checklist also recognises that the electoral process is largely the domain of men and that men are accommodated more readily than are women. Although realising that men and women share the same political rights and that they must work together to eradicate gender imbalances in the electoral environment, the checklist is intended to serve as a mechanism for ensuring that women are not left out of the electoral process. This Checklist serves multiple functions. Governments may use it when they formulate electoral policy. It can also be used by parliaments to ensure that gender equality is reflected in electoral laws.

Furthermore, it is intended to serve as a guide to achieving gender equality before, during and after an election, by electoral authorities, political parties, election observers, monitors, gender activists, researchers and others concerned with assessing whether an election is free and credible, taking gender equality into account. Although not intended to be exhaustive, the checklist considers the conditions necessary for guaranteeing the involvement of women in free and credible elections in an environment of gender equality.

CHECKLIST TO GUIDE GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN ALL ELECTORAL PROCESSES

POLICY: INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL, SUB-REGIONAL AND NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN ELECTIONS

SADC countries have committed themselves to various international, regional, sub-regional and national frameworks that promote gender equality in political processes. At the international level, such treaties include the CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action ICCPR. These international instruments collectively ensure equal participation of men and women in public affairs. At the regional level, such instruments include the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (Maputo Protocol), ACDEG and the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. At the national level, countries that are signatories have been given the responsibility to domesticate these instruments into national policies and laws. In this way, it is important to ask the following questions regarding the extent to which the country under discussion has agreed to and complied with such international, regional, and sub-regional frameworks that help to ensure access to political office and political rights by women and other marginalised groups.

1. Has the country signed, ratified, acceded to, or adopted international, regional, sub-regional and national instruments on gender equality?

YES (1)

NO (2)

2. What international, regional and sub-regional instruments and protocols on women's political participation has the country ratified?

1. ACDEG

2. ICCPR

3. CEDAW

4. CPRW

5. MAPUTO PROTOCOL

6. OTHER

3. What provisions do these make for women's representation and effective participation in political processes?

4. Have these instruments been put into domestic laws?

YES (1)

NO (2)

5. Have these been summarised, popularised and made accessible to the public in easy-to-understand formats? Are there formal ways of monitoring the implementation of the instruments?

YES (1)

NO (2)

6. Has there been any significant and notable increase in women's participation, illustrating a 'positive correlation' between ratification and actual implementation?

YES (1)

NO (2)

7. Is there an institutionalised mechanism/body for ensuring that international, regional, and sub-regional instruments that each government has signed are domesticated within national policy frameworks?

YES (1)

NO (2)

8. What processes are in place and how does the government ensure alignment of national laws with international commitments?

YES (1)

NO (2)

9. Are there government bodies or agencies to follow up on domestication and progress?

YES (1)

NO (2)

10. Are they effective?

YES (1)

NO (2)

National constitutions are crucial mechanisms for institutionalising a country's commitment to gender equality in political processes as the highest law of the land. There is a strong correlation between the existence of explicit guarantees for gender equality in national constitutions (for example, in Tanzania, Mozambique, Namibia, Malawi and South Africa) and progress towards achieving gender equality, including in the area of decision making¹⁷. Some Southern African countries have already adopted constitutional provisions guaranteeing women's equality before the law and protections for women to participate as voters; however, very few clearly protect women's political rights.

11. Have the above-mentioned international, regional and sub-regional instruments been incorporated and aligned with the national constitution and enforced accordingly?

YES (1)

NO (2)

12. Does the national constitution have statements on equality between women and men in matters pertaining to elections

YES (1)

NO (2)

13. Example of statements on equality

- i) Right to vote
- ii) Right to stand for public office
- iii) Right to have access to information related to elections
- iv) Right to participate in all activities pertaining to elections
- v) Right to freedom of assembly
- vi) Right to freedom of expression
- vii) Other (specify).....

14. Is there a conflict between customary law and the national constitutional framework?

YES (1)

NO (2)

15. Are there clearly defined mechanisms to ensure that these rights are protected?

YES (1)

NO (2)

16. Does the national constitution incorporate a provision mandating affirmative action for women in political and decision-making positions at all levels?

YES (1)

NO (2)

17. What other provisions are incorporated in the national constitution that demonstrate a long-term and sustainable commitment to gender equality?

.....

.....

18. Does the Constitution provide for an independent body/body to promote gender equality?

YES (1)

NO (2)

19. Are there any special measures provided for in the Constitution to enhance women's political participation

- i) Legislated quotas
- ii) Safe Constituencies
- iii) Waiving of nomination fees
- iv) Voluntary party lists
- v) Mandatory party lists
- vi) Other (specify).....

ELECTORAL ACT

Regarding the promotion of gender equality in political processes, the national Electoral Act is a crucial instrument that governs all aspects of the electoral process, including the independent electoral body or structure, political parties, and all other electoral stakeholders and processes. It is therefore crucial that every major section of the document is gender responsive.

20. Does the Electoral Act provide for equality in opportunity between women and men in the selection and appointment of office bearers and decision-makers at all positions within the organization (IEC) and at all levels?

YES (1)

NO (2)

21. Is the Electoral Act consistent with the national constitution and its provisions, on gender equality and women's rights to participate in elections as voters or candidates?

YES (1)

NO (2)

22. Does the Electoral Act ensure equal representation and non-discrimination as guaranteed by national constitutions?

YES (1)

NO (2)

23. Does the Electoral Act provide the right to every woman and man to participate in all activities of the election process?

YES (1)

NO (2)

24. Does the electoral system in the country help to enhance women's representation and participation in electoral processes?

YES (1)

NO (2)

25. Type of electoral system for the country in question

- i) Proportional Representation (PR)
- ii) First-Past-The-Post (FPTP)
- iii) Mixed (PR and FPTP)

26. Does the Electoral Act make provisions for political parties to register a gender positive constitution and manifesto to be eligible for registration as a political party?

YES (1)

NO (2)

27. Does the Electoral Act institute punitive measures for non-compliance with gender equality and inclusivity by political parties?

YES (1)

NO (2)

28. Does the Electoral Act prohibit sexual harassment and gender violence in all matters related to elections and contain a mechanism for the enforcement of such a provision?

YES (1)

NO (2)

29. Does the Electoral Act provide for clear and easily accessible means for both men and women candidates to contest an election result when their rights have been violated?

YES (1)

NO (2)

30. Does this provision allow for gender discrimination to be one of the criteria for contesting an election result?

YES (1)

NO (2)

POLITICAL PARTIES

Experience has shown that the extent to which political parties are gender sensitive are key determinants of the ability of women and

other marginalised groups to become active political actors at decision-making levels. Their commitment to gender equality must constitute more than paying lip-service to 'women's issues. Political parties must be alert to gender equality and must ensure that they advance the electoral opportunities of their governing policies and structures. Women candidates within nominations to presidential, parliamentary, provincial and local government positions should allow for gender equality between women and men.

31. Are the party leadership and nomination structures democratic, transparent, gender balanced and gender sensitive?

YES (1)

NO (2)

32. Do political parties have programmes to ensure an increased number of women in party decision-making structures at all levels

YES (1)

NO (2)

33. Have political party campaigns been conducted in a way that bar women participation?

YES (1)

NO (2)

34. If yes in what way?.....
.....

35. Have the parties themselves instituted special measures to enhance gender parity?

YES (1)

NO (2)

36. Do political parties have the following;

- i) Party quotas
- ii) Women's wing

Are they effective?

YES (1)

NO (2)

37. Do political parties include explicit commitments to promote gender equality and equity as a priority issue in their manifestos and campaign platforms? How and where is this reflected?

YES (1)

NO (2)

How are they reflected?

.....

.....

38. Do they have other special measures to increase the participation of women?

YES (1)

NO (2)

39. Do political parties have awareness-raising, training and capacity-building programmes, specifically for women members

YES (1)

NO (2)

40. Have the political parties set norms and standards aimed at promoting gender equality?

YES (1)

NO (2)

41. Do they have codes and conduct on all that include firm measures to address and prevent physical, sexual and verbal harassment of women?

YES (1)

NO (2)

42. To what extent have these been effectively implemented?

Wholly
Somewhat
To a lesser extent
To a larger extent
Not at all

43. Are procedures to select candidates for positions within the party structures as well as for participation outside the party structures clearly laid down?

YES (1)

NO (2)

WOMEN CANDIDATES

Women's participation as candidates in elections remains a significant concern, as various factors continue to impede their representation. The right of women citizens to present themselves as candidates is often not fully respected, despite existing legal frameworks that support their candidacy. Cultural norms and systemic barriers frequently discourage women from seeking office, resulting in underrepresentation in political arenas.

44. Is the right of women citizens to present themselves as candidates for election respected (YES/NO)

45. Is the right of women to join, or together with others to establish, a political party for purposes of competing in an election respected? (YES/NO)

46. How many women and men ran for office for each party? (STATE THE NUMBER AND PARTY THEY REPRESENT)

47. How does this compare with the last election? How is the variance explained?

- i) More
- ii) About the same (Equal)
- iii) Less

48. Have parties been called on to account for the gender composition of their candidates?

- i) More
- ii) About the same (Equal)
- iii) Less

49. How many women are running as independent candidates? Is this more or less than before?

- i) More
- ii) About the same (Equal)
- iii) Less

50. Are there any women candidates for the highest post, such as President? (YES/NO)

51. Are there any women candidates for the highest post, such as President? (YES/NO)

- Are they treated equally? (YES/NO)

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK: ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODY (EMB)

The achievement of gender equality within electoral processes depends a great deal on the nature of the institution that administers elections.

This structure governs and coordinates all aspects of the electoral process, including voter registration, campaign processes, civic and voter education, and logistics and procedures for voting. In this way, the gender balance and commitment to gender equality of decision-makers within the national independent electoral commission is very important, as is the inclusion of gender equality provisions.

52. Does the election law/Act establish that the EMB body or structure provides for equal representation of women and men at all positions and all levels?

YES (1)

NO (2)

53. Is the EMB committed to gender mainstreaming?

YES (1)

NO (2)

54. How and where is this reflected?

- i) Adverts for positions include an equal opportunity phrase and encourage women to apply.
- ii) Flexible enough to allow for either early or late times for Registration.
- iii) EMB has mechanisms and indicators to monitor implementation of gender-sensitive activities
- iv) Registration centres are easily and safely accessible to women

55. Does the EMB have a balance between men and women commissioners/staff, officials? Does it have a balance between men and women at all other levels?

YES (1)

NO (2)

56. What is the gender composition of the EMB?

MALES

FEMALES

57. Has the EMB engaged in gender-sensitive and gender-targeted interventions?

YES (1)

NO (2)

58. Does it collect disaggregated data along the gender divide in all parts of the electoral process?

YES (1)

NO (2)

59. Does the EMB have gender training sessions for the officials?

YES (1)

NO (2)

60. Is gender taken into account in election monitoring, before, after and during?

YES (1)

NO (2)

61. To what extent does EMBs' reporting reflect this gendered analysis of the elections?

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| i) Somehow | iv) Not at all |
| ii) To a lesser extent | v) Don't know |
| iii) To a larger extent | |

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign finance regulations play a crucial role in shaping the political landscape, influencing both the equality of participation and the integrity of the electoral process. By capping requiring transparency, these laws can help female candidates compete more effectively.

62. Are there campaign finance regulations? (YES/NO)
If yes, how do these regulations impact on the equal participation of women and men?

.....
.....

63. Is there adequate support in terms of funding/services/facilities that can influence equal participation?

.....
.....

64. Do these regulations include strategies to prevent corruption? How are these applied, and with what effect on women candidates?

.....
.....

VOTING RIGHTS

In many countries, women are legally permitted to express political opinions without interference. However, the practical realization of these rights can vary significantly based on cultural, social, and economic factors. Women usually face several challenges that hinder their full participation both as candidates and voters.

65. Are women citizens able to express political opinions without interference as permitted by the law?

YES (1)

NO (2)

66. Are the following equally respected for men and women

- i) Freedom of association
- ii) Freedom of assembly
- iii) Freedom of expression

- iv) Secrecy of the vote
- v) Accessibility of voting stations
- vi) Safety and security of voting stations
- vii) Right to human dignity and respect
- viii) Right of the individual's vote to be accorded equal weight to that of others

67. Is there provision of information about the polling process; venues, times, etc. in languages and formats accessible to all women and men, especially in remote rural areas?

YES (1)

NO (2)

VOTER REGISTRATION

Eligibility for voter registration should be equal for all citizens, with clear, objective criteria to prevent arbitrary disqualifications. The registration process must affirm women's rights, ensuring that it is effective, impartial, and non-discriminatory. Assessing equality of registration by both women and men is key in promoting inclusivity in electoral processes.

68. Is every eligible citizen, woman and man, registered as a voter, subject only to disqualification in accordance with criteria established by law that are objectively verifiable and not subject to arbitrary decision?

YES (1)

NO (2)

69. Are there any barriers to women's participation in voter registration?

YES (1)

NO (2)

70. Does the voter registration procedure affirm the right of women citizens to an effective, impartial and non-discriminatory procedure for registration of voters?

YES (1)

NO (2)

71. What is the gender breakdown of voters registered?

MALES %

FEMALES %

VOTER EDUCATION (VE)

Voter education (VE) materials vary widely in their gender awareness, often reflecting the cultural and political contexts of the countries in question. In many regions, there is a growing recognition of the need to address gender disparities in political participation, leading to the development of targeted VE programs for women.

72. Who conducts voter education in the country in question

.....

73. Is there gender balance among those who conduct voter education?

YES (1)

NO (2)

74. How gender-aware are voter education materials?

YES (1)

NO (2)

75. Are there voter education programmes specifically targeted at women?

YES (1)

NO (2)

76. Are the following statements true or false concerning voter education for the country in question?

- i) VE reflects the needs and concerns of women (True ☐ or False ☐)
- ii) Women have access to VE programmes (True ☐ or False ☐)
- iii) VE workshops take place at times that accommodate domestic roles by women (True ☐ or False ☐)
- iv) VE workshop venues are accessible by women (True ☐ or False ☐)

77. Does the electorate become familiar with gender equality as central to electoral issues and procedures through national programmes of civic and voter education?

YES (1)

NO (2)

78. Do voter education programmes explain complex electoral processes in a manner which will be understood by illiterate voters (the majority of whom are women in many countries)?

YES (1)

NO (2)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS (VAWIE)

Women participating in politics often face various forms of violence, which can deter them from engaging in the political sphere. This violence can manifest in both covert or overt ways. Violence can be physical, or it can be online but all forms impact women's physical safety, mental health, and overall participation in politics. In most cases, the right of women party members, candidates, and voters to campaign equally with men is often not fully respected, and violence remains a significant barrier.

79. What kinds of violence do women experience for participating in politics

- i) Physical, ☐
- ii) Labelling and name-calling ☐
- iii) Misogyny and Sexual ☐
- iv) Cyber harassment ☐
- v) Witch-hunt after elections ☐
- vi) Verbal abuse ☐
- vii) State and/or Militia-sponsored Violence ☐
- viii) Psychological Intimidation ☐
- ix) Social Sanctions and Punishment ☐

Please give examples of all forms of violence and the effects these have on women.

.....
.....

80. Who are the most common perpetrators of violence against women

- i) Political Parties, ☐
- ii) State actors, ☐
- iii) Traditional Leadership or Local influential men ☐
- iv) Police, ☐
- v) Family, ☐
- vi) Community Members, ☐
- vii) Religious Leaders, ☐
- viii) Fellow women ☐

81. Is the right of women party members, candidates and voters to campaign on an equal basis with their male counterparts respected and is violence free?

YES (1)

NO (2)

82. Do campaigns include protection from violence, including gender-based violence in all forms, which may affect women's participation?

YES (1)

NO (2)

83. Do security arrangements take account of the challenges that women face, such as misogyny, abusive language and GBV? Is this effectively prevented/addressed during the elections?

YES (1)

NO (2)

84. What support services do women victims of VAWIE usually get?

- I Legal Aid ☐
- II Medical and health check-ups ☐
- 3. Psychological counselling ☐
- 4. Recourse through courts ☐
- 5. Remedy following reporting to the police ☐
- 6. Other (specify) ☐

85. What can be done to ensure that women participate fully and effectively in a safe and secure environment?

.....
.....

86. Are there incidents of post-election violence that disproportionately target women? (YES/NO)

87. Do women perpetrate any of the violence? (YES/NO)

PROCEDURE FOR VOTING

The procedure for voting should ensure that all citizens, including women and individuals with physical disabilities, pregnant women, and those with children, can participate fully in the electoral process. Assessing whether there are special provisions to enhance accessibility and make the voting experience more inclusive is of paramount importance.

88. On the voting day, are special provisions made for women and men with physical disabilities, pregnant women and those with children/nursing mothers?

YES (1)

NO (2)

How are they treated?

.....
.....

89. What other considerations are done on voting day that allow for women's participation as voters

- i) Aged women take the shortest time waiting in line to vote
- ii) Voting centres are close to the majority of people to ensure women easily access them
- iii) Other(specify)

.....

INSTITUTIONALISED MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Institutional monitoring and evaluation forms an integral part in promoting gender equality. Achieving gender equality in electoral processes requires a comprehensive approach that includes setting clear targets, establishing monitoring mechanisms, engaging stakeholders, and ensuring continuous oversight. Assessing whether these are in place cannot be overstated because by prioritizing these elements, an EMB can promote a more inclusive and equitable electoral landscape.

90. Does the EMB ensure that the set targets for gender equality are achieved?

YES (1)

NO (2)

91. Are monitoring indicators and mechanisms set for each activity pertaining to the election processes as criteria for declaring the elections to be free and credible

YES (1)

NO (2)

92. Are gender and/or women's activists' groups, civil society and machinery responsible for gender equality empowerment involved in this process?

YES (1)

NO (2)

93. Is monitoring a continuous process that is done prior to elections, during and after?

YES (1)

NO (2)

94. Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that internal and external monitoring reports are synthesised into a summary report that is broadly disseminated for public discussion and action.

YES (1)

NO (2)

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

CSOs have a watchdog role and by actively engaging in observing electoral processes, they ensure transparency and accountability. Their watchdog role is essential for identifying irregularities and advocating for fair practices.

95. Is Civil society active in its watchdog role in the country being assessed?

YES (1)

NO (2)

96. Are actors able to play a key role without fear of victimization?

YES (1)

NO (2)

97. Can they partner in the electoral process through conducting civic and voter education, analysing and advocating for transformation of relevant policies and structures, building capacity of political actors, and monitoring the process and its outcomes.

YES (1)

NO (2)

98. Are NGOs and CBOs able to independently serve the important function of influencing various election-related actors and structures to be gender responsive.

YES (1)

NO (2)

99. Do civil society organisations (CSOs) promote the 50/50 campaign as part of voter education?

YES (1)

NO (2)

MEDIA AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

100. Does the media have a code of conduct that (CIRLCE CODES THAT APPLIES)

i) Recognises gender equality as an important aspect of democracy and which includes a commitment to report on gender equality in relation to an election.

ii) Includes a commitment to reporting on all women candidates at least as frequently as it reports on men candidates.

iii) Provides for women and men to be accorded equal opportunity to present their campaign messages.

iv) Ensures women candidates get equal space/airtime/weight for election processes and campaigns?

v) Recognises gender issues, such as domestic violence and discriminatory customary laws and practices, as important electoral issues.

101. Do other parties in the election (the EMB, civil society, the media, election observer missions) use new media to highlight gender dimensions of the elections? (YES/NO)

102. Are women politicians on social media? (YES/NO) Do they use it for campaigns? (YES/NO)

Which social media platforms?

- i) FACEBOOK
- ii) X (Former Twitter)
- iii) INSTAGRAM
- iv) TIK-TOK
- v) WHATSAPP
- vi) LINKEDIN

How has this affected them? (Positively/ Negatively/ Don't Know) Give examples

103. Does the media try to profile women candidates?

YES (1)

NO (2)

104. Has the media fanned gender violence?

YES (1)

NO (2)

105. Does new media enhance transparency and responsiveness, e.g. bring to light abuses that may have gone unnoticed? Do these have gender dimensions?

YES (1)

NO (2)

106. Is there training for women politicians on making strategic use of the media, including new media? What action needs to be taken?

YES (1)

NO (2)

107. Are there complaints mechanisms for women politicians/ the public regarding unequal or unfair treatment by the media?

YES (1)

NO (2)

108. How have new technologies and social media affected women candidates?

YES (1)

NO (2)

109. How can new media be enhanced more effectively in the future?
.....

CSOs AND CBOs

CSOs and CBOs play an equally critical role in electoral processes by observing irregularities and gaps in electoral processes, flagging cases of inequality. They should also put mechanisms for operation in order for them to be effective and impactful.

110. Have CSOs and CBOs put in place clear mechanisms to influence the government and political parties to adhere to national commitments to fulfil gender equality objectives?en candidates?

YES (1)

NO (2)

111. Have CSOs and CBOs instituted mechanisms to promote national commitments to gender equality within their democratisation and election-related programmes?

YES (1)

NO (2)

112. Are these organisations sensitive to the need for gender balance of participants in their activities and, at times, the need for conducting programmes specifically targeted for women?

YES (1)

NO (2)

113. Do civic education programmes support the right of both women and men to be candidates and political leaders within the democratic process?

YES (1)

NO (2)

114. Do these organisations have training programmes aimed at building the capacity of women candidates, regardless of party affiliation

YES (1)

NO (2)

115. For gender-focused organisations, do they play the role of supporting the efforts of government, political parties, media and CBOs and CSOs to maintain gender within their respective institutions?

YES (1)

NO (2)

116. Are women's rights organisations among the civil society stakeholders consulted in the elections?

YES (1)

NO (2)

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

117. Are development partners that fund election and democratisation processes including gender-sensitivity as a key variable in their assessments of programmes to support?

YES (1)

NO (2)

GENDER IN ELECTION ANALYSIS

118. Is there a stand-alone gender audit of the election?

YES (1)

NO (2)

119. Who conducts this (civil society, statutory body, a consortium)?

120. Do gender considerations and data form part of the EMB and election commission reports?

YES (1)

NO (2)

121. What is the gender breakdown for the election result?

MALES %

FEMALES %

122. Is there room to dispute election results, with a gender dimension in the disputes?

YES (1)

NO (2)

123. Overall, to what extent do the elections contribute to women's equal and effective participation in political decision-making in the country?

YES (1)

NO (2)

124. Overall, to what extent do the elections contribute to women's equal and effective participation in political decision-making in the country?

YES (1)

NO (2)

RECOMMENDATIONS ON ENHANCING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

125. Based on the assessment, what recommendations can be made for enhancing women's political participation in the country?

- i) Introduction of special measures (legislative and policies) ☐
- ii) Electoral reform ☐
- iii) Legislative reform
- iv) Political party reform
- v) Gender sensitive civil and voter education
- vi) EMBs and inclusive policies and activities
- vii) Addressing traditional and new media coverage of women
- viii) Funding Support /facilities
- ix) Other (Specify).....

IMPORTANT REFERENCES

Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
www.unesco.org/most/rr4iccpr.htm
The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Beijing/platform/
The African Charter on Human and People's Rights www.oau-oau.org
The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG)

RELEVANT INSTITUTIONS

Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA) www.eisa.org.za
Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) www.tgnp.co.tz
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
www.idea.int
SADC Parliamentary Forum www.sadcpf.org
SADC Gender Department www.sadc.int

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Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Accessed May 2025

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UNICEF, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. New York, UNICEF, 1996

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UN Women calculation based on information provided by Permanent Missions to the United Nations. Countries with monarchy-based systems are excluded from the count of Heads of State.
Revised SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2016)



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