**Violence Against Women In Elections**

**FACTSHEET: INTEGRATING GENDER INTO ELECTION OBSERVATIONS**

Elections present an important opportunity for strengthening women’s participation in public life. For an election process to be democratic, it should include the participation of both men and women—as voters, candidates, election administrators and observers. Citizen election observers can play an important role in assessing the quality of women’s electoral participation as they evaluate the quality of an election generally. The broad scope and localized knowledge of these groups put them in a particularly strong position to identify obstacles to women’s electoral participation.

**Pre-Election Monitoring:**

Pre-election monitoring can assess some or all of the following areas: political context, electoral framework, voter registration process, composition and effectiveness of the election administration, candidate registration, campaign media coverage and the election complaints system. Gender considerations should be explored in all aspects of the process. In some cases, pre-election conditions directly impact women’s participation on and after Election Day. Pre-election gender analysis may include:

* Voter Registration: Election observers should determine whether women are disproportionately affected by problems with the voter registration process or errors on lists.
* Election Administration: Observers should take note of the percentage of women represented in the election administration at the central, regional and polling station levels, as well as the number who are in leadership and decision-making roles. Election observers can also assess the election administration bodies’ awareness of gender issues, evaluate gender policies or explicit gender commitments, and gauge the responsiveness of those bodies to related issues that arise—for example, through the resolution of complaints.
* Voter Education: Observers can analyze voter education programs conducted prior to elections and determine who is responsible for them, what the key messages are, whether they address the specific needs of the electorate and whether they are effective in reaching women throughout the country. Observer reports should highlight any gaps or recommend improvements to ensure that all segments of society have access to information about the process. They should also determine whether women have particular voter education needs, and if so, how they can be addressed.
* Electoral Dispute Resolution: Observer groups should examine the procedures for filing electoral complaints and determine whether there are particular obstacles to women’s awareness of or access to electoral dispute resolution complaint mechanisms.
* Media Coverage: Observers should assess the media campaign and election coverage as part of their overall observation efforts and should determine whether women candidates are portrayed fairly.

**Choosing Observers and Observer Teams:**

The composition of observer teams can have an impact on the integration of gender into the observation process. To ensure gender representation and a focus on gender issues, consider that:

* At a minimum there should be gender balance among members of observer teams.
* Observation efforts can benefit from the inclusion of or consultation with a gender expert. This individual would ensure attention is paid to the different constraints and opportunities that men and women face, that the data collected is gender disaggregated, and that there is a detailed analysis of women’s participation in all aspects of the election.
* If it is not possible to include a gender analyst, then a qualified and trained observation staff member may be designated as the gender focal point and have responsibility for ensuring a gender perspective in all stages of the observation efforts.

**Trainings for Observers:**

Briefing materials, observer manuals, and all forms and templates distributed to observers should ensure that gender is effectively integrated. For example, observer trainings and briefings should include:

* Information on the importance of monitoring both men’s and women’s participation and the particular barriers that marginalized men and women face, as well as how to monitor these issues during various stages of the election process;
* Background information on the overall situation of women in the country;
* Questions related to women’s participation and gender equality when monitoring all stages of an election process, including on Election Day; and
* An emphasis on the importance of gender in the observation effort and gender-sensitive training techniques.

**Election Day Observers:**

Observers on Election Day should be trained on the importance of women’s participation in elections and on how to observe gender-related issues and possible irregularities. They should be provided with a reporting form template that includes relevant questions on gender issues. While exact questions and focus areas for monitoring should be determined based on the citizen observation group’s analysis and methodological design, in particular Election Day observers should consider:

* The atmosphere inside and outside of the polling station and whether there is evidence of intimidation;
* The security arrangements for the polling station and whether unauthorized persons are present;
* The percentage of women on the polling station committee and the gender of the chairperson;
* The representation of women among party poll-watchers;
* Women voters’ level of understanding of voting procedures;
* Sex-disaggregated data on those who have voted;
* Whether any voters have been turned away from the polling station and why, including how many women;
* Whether the voting arrangements protect the secrecy of the vote;
* Any incidents of “family voting”[[1]](#footnote-0) and the reactions of officials to such incidents;
* Any incidents of “proxy voting”[[2]](#footnote-1) and the reactions of the polling officials; and
* Any instances of gender-based electoral violence.

At all levels, election observer groups should request the participation rates disaggregated by sex and check for any discrepancies. They should also report on the percentage of women candidates elected.

**Election Observation Statements and Reporting:**

All public statements and reports should include information assessing the participation of women in the election process and make recommendations on how to improve it. Observer statements or final mission reports should automatically include the participation rate of women as voters, if known, the percentage of women elected (compared to previous elections) and the number of women in all levels of the election administration.

**Additional Resources:**

Fick, Glenda. Gender Checklist for Free and Fair Elections. Johannesburg: EISA, 2000.

<http://www.eisa.org.za/PDF/gc.pdf>.

Handbook for Monitoring Women’s Participation in Elections. Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2004. <http://www.centaronline.org/postavljen/60/OSCE%20Handbook.pdf>.

Mawarire, Jealousy. Election Observation: A Gender Perspective. Harare: Zimbabwe Election Support Network. <http://www.zesn.org.zw/wp-content/_protected/publications/publication_122.doc>.

1. “Family voting” can be defined as when one member of a family casts votes on behalf of an entire family, or in some cases, where a family member places pressure on other members of the family to vote for a certain party or candidate. (Adapted from “Consolidated Response on the Prevention of Family Voting,” available <https://www.ndi.org/files/Consolidated%20Response_Prevention%20of%20Family%20Voting.pdf>) [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. “Proxy voting” can be defined as when voters appoint a “proxy voter” to vote for them. (Adapted from “Consolidated Response on the Prevention of Family Voting,” available <https://www.ndi.org/files/Consolidated%20Response_Prevention%20of%20Family%20Voting.pdf>) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)