



ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ELECTION OBSERVATION ACADEMY

The Electoral Support Network of Southern Africa (ESN-SA) hosted a three (3) day Election Observation Academy at the Capitol Hotel in Johannesburg from 10 to 12 of April 2024. The academy sought to enhance the capacity of ESN-SA members to engage in interventions related to Election Observation, including campaign finance, media and social media monitoring as well as to promote cross and peer learning across domestic observer networks in Southern Africa. In attendance at the academy were 26 representatives from ESN-SA member organisations from Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



Picture 1: Group photo of Conference participants

Officially opening the academy, the ESN-SA Host Executive Director Rindai Chipfunde Vava, expressed her gratitude to the participants for attending the Election Observation Academy. She also intimated her hope that the academy would be a platform that will foment learning and exchange of ideas in the aspects of Election Observation; Campaign Finance; Media and Social Media Monitoring; Standards and Obligations, the new challenges that domestic observers face in their work among other topics. Vava then highlighted the need for domestic observers to be equipped with adequate skills to observe several impending elections in the region this year, with South Africa scheduled to go to the polls on 29 May 2024.

She further explained that the ESN-SA is part of a consortium for an EU funded project led by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) which will run from 2024 -2027. The project aims to contribute to higher levels of electoral integrity in African Union member states and to have a civil society across Africa, including citizen observers, empowered in strengthening electoral systems and processes. Vava also highlighted that it was the ESN-SA's hope that the academy would enable all members represented to have the capacity to train and deploy observers for elections to be held in the participants' respective countries.

Day 1 of the Election Observation Academy

During the first day of the Academy various facets of the observation of electoral processes were covered in great detail. Under the topic, *what is election observation?*, various elements such as the reasons for election observation; the history of observation; the roles of international and domestic observers and the principles of observation; Election Observation Methodologies and approaches involved in short-term, long-term and sample based observation were discussed. The participants then broke into two (2) groups to brainstorm the scope of work and responsibilities of a long-term observer under the pre-electoral and post-electoral segments of the electoral cycle. Afterwards both groups presented their thoughts to the academy prompting in-depth discussions on the roles of long-term observers. To wrap up the day a highly insightful presentation on campaign financing was made covering the methods of observing campaign finances.



Picture 2: ESN-SA Host Executive Director presenting a session on the legal framework for elections

Day 2 of the Election Observation Academy

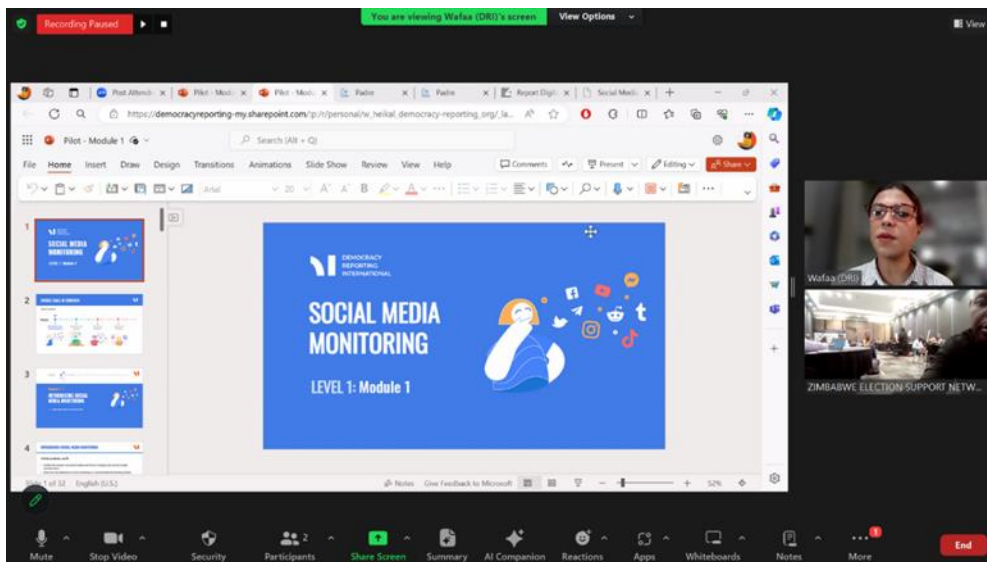
The second day of the academy kicked off with an interactive session on *The Legal Framework for the Elections*. Key elements that make up the legislative environment of elections which included the Constitution; Electoral Laws; regulations and related laws along with the International and regional obligations and standards; key requirements for Inclusive Electoral Processes, the various facets and nuances of stakeholder relations during an election observation mission and the formulation of codes of conduct for election observers were discussed.



Picture 3: ZESN Programmes Director Ellen Dingani takes the academy through the responsibilities of short-term observers

Day 3 of the Election Observation Academy

On the final day of the academy, an engaging online session focused on Media and Elections (with a spotlight on Social Media & Media Monitoring), delving into the influence of media with a particular emphasis on the distinct roles of various social media platforms, civic education, and voter engagement. This was followed by discussions on evaluating the fairness of elections and an overview of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG). The last session encompassed topics including election reporting, the structure of election situation rooms/observation missions, deployment plans, and report compilation.



Picture 4: Social Media Expert Wafaa Heikal's online presentation on social media monitoring

Certificates were awarded to the academy participants by Reverend Dereck Marco, Vice Chairperson of ESN-SA; the Host Executive Director of ESN-SA and Andrew Songa, Regional Advisor of European Partnerships for Democracy (EPD); together with Henry Muguzi, Coordinator of the African Election Observer Network (AFEONET).

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