



ZESN and WCoZ Host Dialogue on Electoral Reform Through a Gender Lens

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), in collaboration with the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) and UN Women, convened a high-level dialogue titled '***Electoral Reform Through a Gender Lens: Insights from Malawi, South Africa, and Namibia***', at Monomotapa Hotel in Harare on 27 October 2025. The workshop brought together over 40 participants drawn from women's organizations, civil society, academia, media, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission and other electoral experts with the aim of examining regional experiences and best practices to inform gender-inclusive electoral reforms in Zimbabwe.



ZESN Executive Director, Mrs. Chipfunde-Vava outlining the workshop objectives at the Electoral Reform Dialogue

ZESN Executive Director Mrs. Rindai Chipfunde-Vava opened the workshop by outlining the objectives, which included identifying best practices in gender-inclusive electoral strategies and policies from other jurisdictions towards enhancing women's participation in the electoral process locally.

UN Women Representative Mrs. Fadzai Traquino, made introductory remarks, framing the discussions within the regional electoral reform landscape. In her presentation, Mrs. Traquino provided a comparative overview of recent electoral legal reforms in Malawi, South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique, highlighting both progress and persisting gender gaps. She noted that while many of the 2023–2025 legal amendments in these countries aimed at strengthening procedural fairness, transparency, and administrative efficiency, most lacked explicit gender provisions.



Mrs. Fadzai Traquino, UN Women Representative giving introductory remarks at the Electoral Reform Workshop

Mrs. Traquino also provided an overview of quota systems for women across various regions, underscoring their significance in accelerating gender parity in decision-making. During her presentation, ZESN Executive Director contributed by discussing the influence of electoral systems on women's representation. Through a global comparative analysis, she noted that countries employing Proportional Representation tend to achieve higher levels of women's representation in Parliament. This is particularly the case within the African context, Mrs. Sakhile Sifelani Ngoma, Director of Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU), presented on the Current State of Gender Representation in Zimbabwe, pointing out the declining number of women candidates in the 2023 Harmonised Elections and the need for affirmative measures beyond quotas, including gender-responsive political financing and reform of party nomination procedures.



WiPSU Executive Director, Mrs. Sakhile Sifelani-Ngoma presenting at the Electoral Reform Dialogue

Zimbabwe Gender Commission Consultant, Aminata Chatira Ruwodo, enriched the dialogue with an insightful presentation on **‘Alternative Strategies to Increase Women’s Participation and Representation.’** Drawing from her comparative legal research, she highlighted six strategic priorities for Zimbabwe namely alignment of the Electoral Act with the Constitution; adoption of a comprehensive Gender Equality Act; expansion of proportional representation systems at all levels; establishment of an independent political party regulator to enforce gender provisions; creation of a public fund to support women candidates; and, addressing structural, cultural, and institutional barriers through continuous civic engagement and leadership training.



Group photo of participants at the Electoral Reform workshop

The afternoon session explored Best Practices in Gender-Inclusive Electoral Strategies, with speakers drawing lessons from Malawi, South Africa, and Namibia. Jesca Chihota of Women Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence (WALPE) reflected on Malawi's 2025 electoral preparations, noting that while the reduction of nomination fees improved accessibility, absence of quotas remains a limiting factor. Emma Chiseya of ZESN unpacked South Africa's Electoral Amendment Act, emphasizing its potential to open independent pathways for women outside male-dominated party politics.

Ian Goredema (ZESN) noted that the Namibia case study was particularly fascinating because the gains in gender equality witnessed have largely been driven by political will. The governing party in Namibia institutionalised equality by amending its Constitution in 2013 to make it a requirement that men and women are equally represented in both leadership structures and parliamentary lists. The Namibian case study demonstrated that party-level reforms can reshape national politics when consistently applied and that Political parties are gatekeepers of representation. When they commit to gender equality, national politics follows. The workshop concluded with a joint reflection and action planning session, from which the following key recommendations emerged:

1. The need for urgent review and alignment of the Electoral Act with the Constitution's gender equality provisions, particularly Sections 17, 56, and 80, to ensure enforceable parity measures.
2. Establishment of an independent political party regulatory framework to enforce gender balance in candidate nomination, funding, and internal decision-making.
3. Introduction of a public funding mechanism or incentive structure to support female candidates and political parties that meet gender parity thresholds.
4. Consideration of a mixed or full PR system to improve women's representation in the National Assembly and local authorities.

5. Strengthening coordination among the Parliamentary Legal Committee, Law Development Commission, Ministry of Justice, and Attorney General's Office to ensure that reforms are legally robust and politically feasible.
6. Promote issue-based politics, tolerance, and positive political culture that values women's leadership and discourages violence and discrimination.
7. Develop a national gender and elections observatory to track implementation of gender-related reforms, similar to Malawi's Gender Inclusion and Child Rights Elections Situation Room.
8. Institutionalise peer learning platforms within SADC to share reform experiences, case studies, and progress reports on gender inclusion in electoral processes.

In her closing remarks, Kumbirai Kahiya, representing the Girls and Women Empowerment Network (GWEN) and speaking on behalf of WCoZ, commended participants for their commitment to advancing gender equality in electoral reform. She called for continued collaboration between civil society, political institutions, and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to transform insights into actionable policy change.

The workshop concluded with a shared resolve to ensure that gender equality becomes a cornerstone of Zimbabwe's democratic renewal, moving beyond rhetoric to measurable reform outcomes.