

## **Transcribed Interview with Notemba Tjipueja, Election Commission of Namibia**

00:00

Erik: Hello and welcome to International IDEA's session on budgeting and financing in elections. My name is Erik Asplund, working as a programme officer at Electoral Processes team here at International IDEA. Here with me today by a video conference I have chairperson of the Election Commission of Namibia, Notemba Tjipueja.

00:23

Q (Erik): Chairperson, before we begin with the questions, could you please let me and the audience know how long you have been with the commission and what your professional background is?

00:32

A (Notemba): Good afternoon, Erik. It is a pleasure to have this interview. I have been with the Electoral Commission for over 15 years. My professional background is that I am a lawyer. I have been in the commission in the position of commissioner, and lately as the chairperson of the commission. I am serving my second term as chairperson.

01:06

Q (Erik): Thank you. Notemba. Could you please describe the type of election management body arrangements that are in place in Namibia?

01:17

A (Notemba): The Election Commission of Namibia has a constitutional mandate. In terms of our constitution, it is an independent organization. The commission has five commissioners, including the chairperson; but only the chairperson is permanent and works in a permanent capacity. The other four commissioners are working on a part-time basis. Though it is an independent commission in terms of the constitution, our functions and powers are also determined by an electoral act.

02:05

Q (Erik): Could you also please describe the way that the Election Commission of Namibia obtains funds to run the commission and to run elections and referendums? For example, where do the funds come from and how are they obtained?

02:25

A (Notemba): We are fully funded by government, therefore the state revenue fund is the primary source of our funding. We have an electoral and a capital budget, which form part of the annual national budget. The approach of comparing the budget is bound by the general public sector's financial rules that come from the state. We at ECN compile our own budget which then have to be submitted to the ministry of finance. The ministry of finance conducts budget hearings with different ministries; we are also a part of that budget hearing. Once the budget is discussed, it is then subject to the parliament. The parliament is then the one that approves the national budget of which the electoral budget is a part of. Our budget is hence tabled and motivated by the speaker of the National Assembly.

03:44

Q (Erik): What is the key mandate of the Electoral Commission of Namibia?

03:50

A (Notemba): Our key mandate is a constitutional mandate, and also statutory mandate. We have the exclusive authority to direct supervision, management and control of the conduct of elections and referendums in Namibia. Although, at this stage we have not conducted any referendum. Our mandate also includes civic and voter education.

04:18

Q (Erik): Do you think that you have enough funds to fulfill your mandate?

04:24

A (Notemba): In the past, we have always received sufficient funding from our government. However, with the economic slowdown and downturn, which I think has affected many countries including our own, there have been severe budgetary cuts in the last two or three years. This has affected our budget provision. Particularly during the off-peak periods, we find that we are having a shortage of funding which affects our ability to procure and accomplish some important activities in terms of our strategic plan. This can for example be the case of voter and civic education. We find that we are having some serious constraints in fulfilling our strategic objectives in terms of our strategic plan as funding is coming in a much slower rate and is not complete. However, we believe that for the upcoming election in 2019, we should receive the full funding that we require. Although, it might be a bit late; which could affect our procurement and also the rolling out of voting and civic education.

06:02

Q (Erik): What are the challenges of not having full financial independence, in your view?

06:09

A (Notemba): Firstly, the challenges are that the execution of our mandate is impeded. For example, it affects the rolling out of continuance voter registration; which we can of course suspend by our law, but this has an effect on that specific activity. Secondly, it has an effect on us being able to create an organizational structure. In terms of our act, we are able to determine our own organizational structure; but because of this lack of financial autonomy, we are not able to implement this organizational structure to the extent that we would want to. This means that we have shortage of staff. Thirdly, it confines us to the public procurement and treasury instructions of the government; which then affects our ability to pertain certain electoral goods and materials within the framework of the electoral cycle. We are restricted by certain state treasury instructions, which limit our ability to fully implement our electoral calendar in terms of the electoral cycle. Forth, we are also hampered in the sense that this impinge on the principle of independence. This means that to an extent, we are not fully independent. If we for example had money that were appropriated directly by an appropriation bill, that would probably give us more financial autonomy. That is the present status quo that we find ourselves in.

08:20

Erik: Thank you very much chairperson of Election Commission in Namibia, Notemba Tjipueja, for taking part in this session on budgeting and financing of elections. A thank you to the audience for watching.

08:35

Notemba: Thank you.

*The interview was carried out in November 2018*

*This transcript has been lightly edited to enhance readability and clarity without changing the sense of the points made by the discussant.*

*Disclaimer: Views expressed in this interview do not necessarily represent the institutional position of International IDEA, its Board of Advisers or its Council of Member States.*