

Building Strong Organisations:

MACUA Electoral Procedures:

Check List 1:

Qualities of an effective leader:

Members who chose to stand for elections within the organisation should ask themselves the following questions:

I AM	✓
Committed to organisational objectives, policies and values.	
Committed to serving the interests of the members.	
A person who understands and is close to the members.	
Honest and sincere.	
Respectful of other peoples' opinions.	
Fair when dealing with people of different sex, religion, colour and politics.	
A person who listens to what members say and acts on their mandates.	
Able to work collectively and contribute as part of a group.	
Able to inspire and influence others.	
Willing to accept responsibility.	
Ready to admit mistakes and to learn from them.	
Gender sensitive and committed to the empowerment of women.	
Confident of myself and the members.	
Cool, calm and composed under pressure.	
Tactful, diplomatic and humble.	
Brave, and able to defend myself and my organisation.	
Full of initiative, drive and energy.	
I do not...	
Talk too much.	
Consider myself an expert on all subjects.	
Dominate other peoples' way of thinking.	
Manipulate to serve my own interests.	
Misuse the resources of the organisation.	
Consider myself a leader for life!	

(Adapted from IFWEA, 2006, Building Democratic Worker Organisation and Representation in the Informal Economy. A manual in two parts)

A Strong Foundation

A strong organisation has a strong foundation, made up of:

- an active membership,
- a representative and collective leadership
- and democratic decision-making.

To make these elements work together an organisation needs:

- clear objectives,
- structures
- and rules.
- It needs policies and procedures.

These should be in writing and formally adopted.

The constitution is a body of rules mutually agreed to by the members to guide the conduct of the organisation. It is binding on all members, leaders, and staff.

The constitution:

- Guards' democracy
- Stores the organisation's principles and values
- Educates and empowers members
- Protects against mismanagement, ill-discipline, and corruption
- Guides in times of conflict.

A constitution should be:

- Known and available to all the members
- Drawn up, reviewed from time to time, and amended, if necessary, through democratic processes.

A constitution is a legal document. Where possible it should be registered with appropriate authorities.

Procedures

Together with the constitution and policies you will have a set of procedures that lay down how things are done and the steps that should be taken. The procedure for running elections is usually contained in the constitution to safeguard democracy in the organisation. It is something that all members must be clear about. A procedure for ordering stationery, however, might be contained in an office manual.

This guide is aimed at clarifying procedures for elections.

Choosing Leaders: The Election Process:

In a democratic organisation, the members have a right and duty to choose their own leaders through an election process. Elected leaders in turn appoint others, such as paid staff who play leadership roles. Such “secondary” leaders are accountable to the elected leaders and through them to the members.

Election Principles

- Members elect their own leaders
- Free from harassment or victimisation
- One member-one vote in a branch election or a proportional vote at Provincial and National elections. A branch of 50 members that has undergone proper electoral processes will have one vote at National Conference.
- No gender, race, religious, sexual orientation or other discrimination
- Confidentiality (unless otherwise agreed by voters or in terms of constitution).

Organising an Election

Step One: Prepare for the election

- Know the rules and procedures
- Check your constitution and /or election rules.
- Define constituencies or members who are eligible to participate in elections at branch level.
- Define Branches that are then eligible to participate in the national election. (a branch must have held a valid election of a BEC)
- Educate leaders and members on the procedures.

What is an election? Significance of the election for members, the organisation and for democracy.

Prepare practicalities:

- Arrange the date and venue well in advance
- Organise ballot papers and ballot boxes (if secret ballot)
- Arrange who will oversee the election
- Arrange who will count the votes and confirm results
- Make sure members are informed in good time
- Collect nominations and inform members.
- hold special meetings and election practice runs.
- You could train a group of volunteers as voter educators.
- Encourage open and healthy discussion on the kind of leader that the organisation needs.
- Don't try to influence or put pressure on members to vote for you or your candidate.
- Do challenge assumptions and myths about leadership.
- Use some of the ideas below to help your discussions, together with Checklist 1 above.

Choosing leaders: do you agree?

Leadership Myths?

- A leader must always be well educated.
- A leader must speak English (or other colonial language).
- The most important leaders must be men.
- A leader must be someone forceful and who speaks a lot in meetings.
- A leader must have economic and/or political status.

Key Leadership Criteria?

- A leader must show strong and genuine commitment to the organisation.
- A leader must always be true to the organisation's mandate.
- A leader must be able and prepared to work collectively.
- A leader must be honest, open and principled.
- A leader must be genuinely gender sensitive.

+ TIP:

Don't assume that women and men have an equal chance of being elected. Look beyond the obvious. Check for hidden discrimination or factors that block women from standing for election. Point out that women can and should be elected to leadership positions. Give lots of encouragement to the women so that they agree to stand for election, and assure them of support.

Step Two: Run the election

Equipment

- Make sure you have all the necessary equipment with you such as pens, ballot slips, ballot boxes, tape to seal boxes and large papers to write up nominations.

Time keeping

- Be early so everything is in place before the scheduled voting time.

Set up

- Make appropriate arrangements in the room, under the tree or in the place where elections will be held.

Voting “officers”

- Make sure they are ready and that they run the election freely, fairly and in an orderly manner.
- This is very important whether the election is by secret ballot, or by the less formal way of raising hands.
- The election must be genuine and free from influence by candidates or their supporters.
- Members must feel confident about this.
- If you are holding a secret ballot have you put in place a system to assist those who cannot read?

Ballot papers

- Where these are used, they should be kept safe until counted.

Step three: Process the results of the election.

Count the votes

- Where voting is by show of hands this is done straight away by people appointed to the task.
- The advantage of this system is that everyone can immediately see who has won and can verify the counting.
- The disadvantage is that people may feel pressure to vote or not to vote for someone.
- With the secret ballot vote counters will be appointed and approved.
- The advantage of this method is that every individual is free to vote for the candidate of her choice without feeling any pressure.

Record the results

- List the results showing the number of votes cast for each person.

Step Four: Communicate results

- As soon as possible communicate the results to the members and to those elected.
- Introduce the new leaders to the members.

After an Election

- Brief the new leaders
- As soon as possible give new leaders a briefing about their roles and duties.
- Make sure they have all the documents they will need e.g. constitution, policies, meeting schedule.

Educate

- Arrange an ongoing programme of education for leaders. Don't wait for a formal leadership education programme.

Set to work

- New leaders should learn by doing.
- They should get started immediately with their duties.
- Keep in close communication.
- Provide advice and support.

Keep records

- File and keep records of the election in a safe place (usually registered organisations have to keep records for five years). You never know when there is going to be a challenge or a conflict around leadership.

Dealing with difficult situations

- “Leaders did not want to go for elections, and often operated like a mafia because of lack of accountability and transparency”.
(International Transport Worker’s Federation, ITF, 2006, Organising Informal Transport Workers Global Research Project. Overview Report)
- You are likely to have to deal with difficult situations around elections.
- If members do not have a tradition of participation and democratic organisation, then you will have to help build this tradition. Below you will find some of the situations you might encounter. How would you deal with them? There is no single answer.
- To overcome such blockages to democracy you will need to understand the underlying issues and have skill in dealing with people. And, most importantly, you will need strong and informed members.

Experiences:

Undermining Democracy: what they say (but not always to you!)

- **Stuck in the past**
 - “I started the association. I have always been the leader. Why do I need to be elected? Don’t come with fancy new ideas. Our way has worked all these years”.
- **Reluctant to let go**

- “I was elected as leader 5 years ago. I am doing a good job. What does it matter if I run my own organisation now? My heart is with the movement. They do what I say because they trust me and want me to stay. No-one will stand against me, so why bother holding an election?”
- **Paid to stay**
 - “ I will make sure that I stay as the leader and get members to support your re-election. Give me something and help me give members something that they need. I want to show them that I have power and influence”.
- **Smearred**
 - “Mr. X from the NW province is trying to prevent me from being elected because I don’t support him. He has spread rumours in the community, and amongst the members that I am a spy for the police”.
- **“My husband won’t let me”**
 - “I can’t stand for election as a leader. My husband refuses to let me go to meetings. I am not allowed to mix with men when he is not present”.
- **Women can’t be leaders**
 - “We will never vote for a woman. Women are too weak to lead. No-one will listen to a woman”.
- **Leaders make money**
 - “Everyone wants to be a leader because leaders can control who gets access to the best resources. They keep the best for themselves. This will cause big fights”.

- The basis of a democratic organisation is active, informed and fully participating members who make decisions collectively using organisational structures and procedures. This is not easy to achieve.

Building a strong base

- The first building block of an organisation is usually a group of members within a community. These grassroots units will elect their own leaders and run their day-to-day affairs.
- When the organisation spreads beyond the local level it is usual for the grassroots units to elect representatives to the higher structures of the organisation.
- What happens at the grassroots therefore affects the organisation from top to bottom. For example, if one branch is not fully represented at the grassroots, then it is unlikely to be fully represented at the top.
- If women leaders are not elected at local level, then there is little chance of women being elected to national leadership positions.

Time spent building a strong base is time well spent.

Spend time:

- with members and local leaders
- developing suitable grass-roots structures
- establishing appropriate ways of doing things
- informing and educating members and leaders
- supporting leaders in their roles
- promoting the election of women leaders
- supporting women leaders
- training leaders to educate and train others
- keeping members mobilised and active
- helping members make concrete gains and drawing out the lessons.

Grassroots leaders are a vital part of any organisation. Their role is to recruit new members, educate members about the organisation, take up members' issues and problems, represent members in organisation structures, report back and give information from the organisation.