**Training Material**

 **Secrecy of the Ballot**

The secrecy of the ballot is one of the great pillars on which free and fair, credible and legitimate elections rest. To avoid suspicion, mistrust, political violence, intimidation and fear of political retribution and victimisation voters, election officials, party agents and party supporters need to be assured that their vote will be secret. The Electoral Commission strictly observes the secrecy of the ballot in all elections.

**Recommended Principles**

• The voting station should be laid out in such a way that no one is able to see how voters are marking their ballot papers.

* Place the voting booths in such a manner as to ensure that:
* The secrecy of the vote is preserved (MEA s47 (6) (b))
* No person from inside or outside can see how a ballot is being marked

• There should be clear procedures for the provision of necessary assistance to disabled, illiterate and elderly voters that protect, as far as possible, their right to vote secretly.

* A voter with a physical disability may ask for assistance from a companion in marking the ballot papers. Such a companion must be 18 years or older; and cannot be a party agent or candidate. No witnesses are necessary when a companion assists a voter. The Presiding Officer must remind the companion that he/she is not allowed to disclose any information that may compromise the secrecy of the vote cast by the voter.
* An illiterate voter who needs assistance may only be assisted by the Presiding Officer; and this must be done in the presence of two party agents from different parties; and one accredited observer, if they are available. The Presiding Officer must remind any witnesses that they are not allowed to disclose any information that may compromise the secrecy of the vote cast by the voter.
* When assisting a voter:
* Never suggest which party or candidate the voter should vote for.
* Never explain to the voter the difference between parties.
* Never provide any additional information to the voter except to read the list of parties or candidates.
* Never allow a party agent/observer to speak to; or influence the voter on how to vote, at any time
* Always treat all voters with dignity and respect