**Malawi Electoral Commission**

**Communication Strategy and Implementation Plan**

**2015 – 2019**

**v 2.1 (updated for final comments)**

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## Acronyms

CVE Civic and Voter Education

FBO Faith Based Organisation

FEDOMA Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi

MBC Malawi Broadcasting Corporation

MDA Ministries, Departments and Agencies

MEC Malawi Electoral Commission

MISA Media Institute of Southern Africa

MoI Ministry of Information

MPLC Multi-Party Liaison Committee

NECOF National Election Consultative Forum

NICE National Initiative for Civic Education

SADC Southern African Development Community

TPE Tripartite election

## Executive summary

The MEC Communication Strategy has been developed to address the communication needs and concerns of both MEC and its stakeholders. These were identified through considering MECs own mandate, vision and strategic plan, and by consulting with MEC staff and commissioners, its implementation partners, and with commentators and stakeholders on the electoral process such as the media and interested CSOs.

From MEC’s perspective the strategy needs to project an image of the organisation in line with its mandate and vision, and its organisational strategy; thus MEC needs to present itself to the public as professional, independent, law-abiding, impartial and efficient.

As far as stakeholders are concerned, the voting public and the political parties clearly need to have confidence in MEC but so also do the media, organisations that deliver CVE on behalf of MEC, other government agencies plus groups with special interest in electoral matters such as women’s pressure groups.

Taking this context into account, the outcome of the strategy is to position *MEC as an impartial agency that encourages continued engagement in the electoral system.* The communication strategy aims to achieve this through four components, each consisting of activities or communication approaches. Each component has a defined objective, the components are:

*1. Promote MEC as the overseer of the electoral cycle.*

The objective of this component would be to restore public confidence and trust of the electorate in the electoral process as overseen by MEC. This component addresses the widely held view that the credibility of MEC was damaged by the results management of the May 2014 election.

*2. Confidence in Fair Elections through MEC*

The objective of this component would be to demonstrate the measures MEC takes to guarantee a fair election procedure so that there is confidence in how the vote is organised.

Clearly civic and voter education has an important part to play here, since this demonstrates exactly how elections should work. But the strategy also needs to demonstrate MEC’s professionalism in organising elections themselves.

*3. MEC Financial Independence*

The objective of this component is to help mobilise government and development partner resources to support MEC operations throughout the electoral cycle.

The point here is that as a result of unpredictable yearly funding, MEC finds itself managing elections as events rather than as part of the electoral cycle. This has an impact on CVE but also on the MEC profile more generally, as it leads to a focus on elections themselves and thereby increases the risk of politicisation of the process. So MEC needs to make a case to government and development partners for consistent funding throughout the five-year cycle.

*4. MEC access and accountability*

The objective of this component would be to encourage MEC staff and commissioners to collectively uphold the principles of the organisation including being responsive to stakeholders*.*

The point here is encourage both MEC staff and commissioners to take collective responsibility for MEC’s independent, technical mandate to manage free and open democratic elections for Malawi. This means, for example, speaking and acting in unison when MEC is put under stress by politicians and the media. But also includes making sure that the disadvantaged and marginalised have access to the electoral process. It therefore entails making sure internal communications also work well.

For each of these four components key messages are developed that will guide the content of the communications strategy. Also included in the strategy are budget guidelines and a monitoring and evaluation framework.

## 1. Context

1.1 Institutional context

1.1.1 Mandate

The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) is a constitutional body created under Section 75 of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi to supervise and direct the conduct of all elections in Malawi i.e. Parliamentary, Presidential, By-Elections, and Local Government. The Commission conducts these elections in line with the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act No. 31 of 1993 (PPE), Local Government Elections Act No. 24 of 1996 and Electoral Commission Act No. 11 of 1998 (ECA). The mandate of MEC includes making sure that the electorate is well informed.

1.1.2 Institutional Set Up

The Commission is composed of a Chairman who is a judge nominated by the Judicial Services Commission and such other members, not less than six, appointed by the President in consultation with political parties that are represented in Parliament. Currently, there are ten Commissioners including the Chairman. Of these three are women.

The day-to-day management of operations of the Commission is carried out by the Secretariat, headed by the Chief Elections Officer. The Commission has its headquarters in Blantyre and maintains three Regional Offices in Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu. In addition, the Commission has District Elections Clerks that are stationed in all the Cities, Municipalities, and District Councils.

1.1.3 The Duties and Functions of MEC

The provisions in the Act state that the duties and functions of the Malawi Electoral Commission shall include:

1. to determine constituency boundaries impartially on the basis of ensuring that constituencies contain approximately equal numbers of voters eligible to register, subject only to considerations of:
   1. population density;
   2. ease of communication; and
   3. geographical features and existing administrative areas;
2. to review existing constituency boundaries at intervals of not more than five years and alter them in accordance with the principles laid down above;
3. to determine electoral petitions and complaints related to the conduct of any elections;
4. to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Constitution and any Act of Parliament; and
5. to perform such other functions as may be prescribed by the Constitution or an Act of Parliament.

1.1.4 Goals and Objectives of MEC

Under the current Strategic Plan (2013-17) the vision of MEC is:

*To be a professional organisation that delivers credible elections in accordance with national laws and international best practice to strengthen genuine democracy and peace in Malawi*

And the Mission is:

*As an independent constitutionally mandated and impartial institution, the Malawi Electoral Commission shall professionally deliver credible, transparent, inclusive, efficient and cost-effective elections to promote and entrench democratic values and peace in Malawi*

Thus MEC should represent itself to the public as *professional, law-abiding, independent, impartial and efficient.*

The current MEC Strategic Plan has identiﬁed ﬁve strategic pillars with a total of nineteen (19) strategic goals. Under the ﬁrst pillar, electoral environment, MEC addresses ﬁve strategic goals with respect to the legal framework, level playing ﬁeld, stakeholder relationships, election observation, and the independence of MEC. The second pillar concerns MEC as an organization and addresses issues related to organizational culture, human resource management and administration, ﬁnancial management and procurement. The third pillar, electoral operations, addresses the operational plan, civic and voter education, boundary delimitation, voter registration and results management. The fourth pillar concerns crosscutting issues. This pillar anchors two strategic goals: security, infrastructure, and equipment as well as questions concerning gender, youth, elderly and physically challenged in the electoral process. Finally, the fifth pillar deals with implementation mechanisms, research, monitoring and evaluation. Strategic goals under this pillar include the implementation of strategic plan itself, resource mobilization and research, monitoring and evaluation.

1.1.5 The Use of MEC Communication Strategy

MEC has developed this communication strategy for the following reasons:

* MEC has limited resources for doing communications as in all its work. A communications strategy will allow it to focus those resources, human and material, on the areas of most importance.
* MEC commissions partners to implement its civic and voter education programmes, the strategy should ensure that information from MEC is deemed credible by the electorate
* Planning imposes discipline that will help MEC to think clearly about its objectives, the messages that it wants to get across and the different audiences for those messages. From there it can determine the most effective media for conveying those messages.
* Communications planning will ensure that all staff and commissioners communicate a consistent message to target audiences.
* The Strategy will also help MEC to marshal its resources through proactively preparing materials for distribution to the media. It will also be able to put in the work preparing these materials at a time of its choosing, rather than in the busy period just before elections.
* A communications strategy will help MEC to develop a toolkit of techniques and measures that it can use in its media relations including times of crisis.
* The strategy will also assist MEC internal communications to ensure that all staff, regardless of where they are stationed, are kept informed of what is happening within the organisation

1.2 Stakeholder Context

1.2.1 MEC understanding of its context

According to **MEC Commissioners, management and staff** most stakeholders felt that MEC did a good job of engaging the electorate during the May 2014 Tripartite Elections (TPE). The Commission kept the stakeholders updated on each step that was taken and whenever there were challenges the Commission took care to meet with stakeholders to brief them. Nonetheless the Commission is aware that it needs to further improve its engagement with stakeholders and the general public. This is particularly important because of the way that the parties mounted legal challenges to the May 2014 election results. Even though MEC was intent on providing a results management process that was satisfactory for all parties, a flurry of court injunctions regarding counting and release of the meant that MEC’s technical role appeared to become part of the political dispute. So, for example, although MEC followed the law in releasing the results within 8 days, this was interpreted in some quarters as favouring the eventual winners of the elections by curtailing the process.

In any event, the fall out from the announcement itself and the preceding injunctions is that the public trust in MEC took a knock as a result of the last election. MEC is sensitive to the views of stakeholders and is aware that their image has been tarnished somewhat. However MEC believes that at the end of the day, public expectations need to be tempered by an understanding that MEC has limitations it has to work within, and that not all failings can be laid at MEC’s door.

More generally MEC tries hard to be as transparent as possible, even in the knowledge that though many of the issues are apparently trivial[[1]](#footnote-2) and may apparently damage MEC’s image. The consensus is that it is better to be seen to be open rather than risk being accused of hiding information from the public. As one Commissioner put it “MEC has nothing to hide” and so is committed to transparency.

MEC also tries, as a policy, to increase participation of women in elections and to improve access to the disabled. It does this by engaging specific and accredited CSOs to help engage through CVE women, the vulnerable, youth groups and the disabled. Also specific provisions such as tactile voting machines for the blind and lowered nomination fees for women have been introduced. MEC is interested in working outside the election themselves with CSOs to see how these kinds of measures can be improved. However it is also the responsibility of interest groups and the political parties themselves to increase the participation of marginalised groups.

Indeed MEC needs to recognise that it needs to work in strategic partnership with CSOs and other government agencies through the electoral cycle, so that it can deliver the elections themselves successfully.

According to **MEC staff** long-term approaches are needed to support CVE. At election periods MEC is able to find resources to conduct its CVE activities e.g. at the last election some specific CVE initiatives included:

* Deployment of Stringers and Civic and Voter Education Assistants (included training)
* Training of journalists on elections reporting
* Engaging with Multi-Party Liaison Committees (MPLC)
* Working with the Ministry of Information and Civic Education
* Borrowing and using the National Road Safety Council mobile screens

Other methods were also considered, such as messages on water bills and SMS use.

However, outside election periods the resources available to MEC are far more limited, so continuous CVE is much harder to do. Thus what is required is communications consistency: this might come from:

* Building CVE into the school syllabus
* Working with traditional leaders, CSOs and churches so they explain issues in a very simple way to ordinary people
* Making registration a continuous process at district level (and adding CVE at the point of registration)
* Using SMSs to validate registration (and replying with CVE messages)
* Training all election officers including election monitors together (and far in advance) rather than using a cascade method which has proved not to be very effective
* Developing the MEC District Elections Office capacity and providing it with adequate resources
* Using the District Commissioner (DC) to reactivate the MPLC’s outside of elections so that they could do more on CVE

All these activities would contribute to building an informed citizenry that could participate in elections in a mature and considered way and would be less likely to be influenced by inaccurate rumours and misinformation during the elections the themselves. CVE done well would sustain MEC profile outside election times.

MEC thus observed that a question that many stakeholders keep on asking is “what are you doing between ballots”. In this context, there may be an opportunity to make better use of permanent district level staff as a resource that could be used to sustain MECs profile at times between elections when resources are scarce. There may also be opportunities to provide an independent electoral service to other organisations.

MEC should maintain a presence on everyday local administrative decision-making bodies, so that its other activities such the marking of electoral boundaries becomes less contentious. In general the district offices of MEC need to be properly equipped to do their work, and should have their own offices perhaps as part of a constituency office for MPs. Also, the election procedure should be rehearsed before the election event to make sure that the systems are able to cope.

In summary, the external communication strategy needs to promote:

* MEC funding across the electoral cycle
* Continuous CVE communications
* Provision of a feedback avenue from local stakeholders
* Incorporation of CVE into the schools curriculum

The target audiences are:

* Government Departments and Ministries
* Development Partners
* Traditional leaders
* Political parties
* Civil Society Organisations
* Faith congregations and communities
* Youth and students
* Eligible voters
* First time voters

According to **MEC staff** internal communication is adequate but there is room for improvement. MEC management needs to:

* Find a way to share technical information from training events as not everyone can attend
* Share medium term planning (the electoral calendar) with all staff, so they can plan their own work around organisation objectives
* Hold all-staff meetings so that everyone is involved
* Provide all staff (including districts) with email access so they are part of the system
* Create a bottom-up platform to make use of grassroots experience

1.2.2 MEC stakeholder perceptions

According to **Development Partners,** regional perceptions of MEC are good. So although MEC may have suffered a dent in domestic public confidence because of the results management in the May 2014 elections, in SADC, there is admiration that a difficult poll was concluded peacefully and recognition that MEC’s strict adherence to the law prevented the election process from being discredited. Also this is the first time an incumbent Malawi president has been replaced whilst in office demonstrating that the democratic process in Malawi is robust. Thus the situation is actually much better than some would say.

MEC accredited 107 CSOs, of which 12-25 managed to do CVE for the 2014 elections. Because MEC is not an outreach organisation itself, it needs to work through these CSOs to do CVE, so its important to make sure that this is consistent across the board. The donors put their resources directly behind bigger CVE organisations, EU supports NICE, DfID supports National Democratic Institute, and Norwegian Aid supports Norwegian Church Aid in CVE.

Some of the key targets from the CVE strategy were met e.g. null and void ballot papers dropped from 4.5 to 2.5% for 2014, exceeding the indicator.

The communication strategy needs to be aware of the context within which MEC operates. Malawi is prone to wildfire rumours, especially at election times. These can circulate very quickly through the social and online media. For example, during the May 2014 election a rumour on Facebook took only two hours to get people onto the streets. This demonstrates that social media has a direct and relatively uncontrollable power even in Malawi where access to internet media may appear limited.

The febrile atmosphere around elections led to unfounded speculation about apparently trivial details such as that MEC had printed ballot papers in Harare which came with the borrowed lamps from Zimbabwe or that the there were rigging experts from the Israeli company Nikuv at MEC. So MEC needs to be very pro-active and to react very quickly to deal with rumours and misinformation that might undermine the process. In contrast, the MEC website was not updated regularly to show election materials during the last part of the election, and its “static” nature led to lack of certainty about election details.

This all suggests that the strategy needs to be aware of the profound impact media can have, even though access to information may not be as developed in Malawi as in more prosperous countries. For example newspapers have more penetration than would be expected since they are read out by some radio stations, so reaching a wider audience including farmers and the illiterate. On the other hand community discussions led by local authorities proved to be one of the most effective way to reach people for CVE purposes.

It is important that the Commission sends out one voice especially concerning issues where there is some uncertainty. If different officers from the Commission send out different comments on the same issue it can impact on the Commission’s image as it gives the impression of disorganisation. So where there is uncertainty about what to say Commission members should revert back before making a statement. There therefore needs to be a clearly defined communication protocol regarding who speaks for the Commission and at what level. This would also help avert confusion in a crisis situation. This principle should apply both to Commissioners and the MEC staff.

Although parties challenged the 2014 results in the courts, ultimately the outcome has been accepted by the major parties even though some legal petitions have still not yet been resolved.

Thus Malawi currently finds itself in a period of electoral reform., this provides an opportunity to take stock of the 2014 TPE and make improvements before the next national elections. With this in mind a Task Force has recently started working on the reforms. The National Election Consultative Forum (NECOF) is the lead committee for considering changes to the electoral system but all such committees need support outside the elections and this is lacking outside the pre and post-election phase since government reprioritise funds at other times.

More broadly Development Partners are promoting the election cycle concept to both MEC and other development partners that pool money in the UNDP “basket fund”. This moves MEC away from being event driven, and would allow it to deepen the development of the democratic process in Malawi.

*Since MEC is adopting the electoral cycle approach to elections, there is need for this to be extended to the way it communicates with stakeholders.*

**The Media:** According to the national press, MEC makes most of its effort to raise its profile around the months before and then during elections and activity drops sharply off after polls. However, CVE should be an on-going activity since democratic awareness needs to be built consistently. At the moment, according to the newspapers “no one knows anything” about how the next election will be conducted. However this doesn’t mean that MEC needs to be out of the news now; changes to constituency boundaries, CVE events etc. can still make it into the news. Indeed other agencies and organisations may not have a clear understanding of what MEC does after elections, so explaining what MEC does outside elections will help build its profile.

The management of result of the May 2014 has damaged the public image of MEC. And although the Chairman of the Electoral Commission has admitted publicly that there were some voting irregularities the notion that the 2014 elections were “largely” free and fair anyway is not totally convincing. Critically, if MEC lets the level of publicity drop this does nothing to counteract the damage to their public credibility nor does it address dissatisfaction with the way in which the results were managed.

More generally, MEC should think more about mobilising resources for themselves so they can continue to be active outside polling periods. In the short term MEC can maintain its profile by prioritising less costly activities when they have fewer resources outside election year. For example, there are governance supplements in The Daily Times and The Nation that MEC might contribute to. The media houses indicated a willingness to provide free space for MEC to run a CVE column to inform the nation about elections.

In these ways MEC can be more proactive than it is at the moment.

*It is important that MEC addresses the issue of voter dissatisfaction with the election process before 2019, otherwise it will change the way the election itself is perceived. This can be done by showing what MEC does to prepare Malawi for elections outside the elections themselves, and by finding ways to publicise its work by leveraging opportunities in the print media. MEC needs to make the financial case for predictable funding outside the immediate election period.*

At editorial level the print media’s position is that the press prefers to keep its independence through covering stories using their own resources than being facilitated through organisations – although accepting transport and lunch is necessary sometimes when there is no time to make proper arrangements. Public announcements can always be taken out through the marketing department but the media are ready to cover electoral issues freely as part of news. [[2]](#footnote-3)

In general the press feel MEC is doing a good job in promoting itself through the news media however there is a need to put in place a protocol to ensure that MEC speaks with one voice and avoids public contradictions. For example, in the media’s opinion, a Commissioner may say one thing whist the MEC PRO may say another, and Commissioners are not always consistent across the board, and this can lead to confusion or interpretation of inconsistencies as politically motivated.

Although MEC tries to be transparent, they are not always forthcoming around funding issues and in particular how they spend the money of donors from the basket fund.

**MBC** sees part of its role as providing a platform for government institutions, including MEC, to explain their work to the radio and TV public. As part of this there is a space here for the broadcasters to put difficult questions to the Heads of the institutions whilst at the same time as giving organisation coverage.

According to MBC, the 2014 election saw fewer broadcasts of CVE programmes than hitherto. According to MBC this was mainly because MEC was unable to financially support MBC production costs as much as they would have liked. Ideally there should be a 50-50 split where MBC, the public broadcaster, contributes free airtime and MEC cover the production costs. In the event, MBC were unable to develop some of their programme ideas on CVE issues for broadcast. However when it came to election time itself MBC found themselves stretched by demands from MEC to cover the elections in different parts of the country.

To prevent intermittent coverage of election issues according to MBC, MEC needs to develop an on-going partnership with the media that consistently promotes the electoral process outside the immediate time of the election itself. This could include radio and TV programming but also includes training reporters and journalists on election reporting so that they can give an informed account of the process. This should not be a last minute exercise but something that can be done even now, when the election are still some years away..

By starting the communication strategy now, MEC can begin to rebuild public confidence in the electoral process. If people believe that an election has not been fair it is possible that voter engagement will diminish the next time.

According to **MISA** (Media Institute of Southern Africa), many aspects of MEC are very good; in fact MISA recently recognised MEC with an award for transparency during the 2014 TPE.

MEC was exceptionally good in public engagement: officials were available even when the news was adverse. However the management of the results seriously eroded public confidence, and Indeed the independence of MEC is always prone to be questioned where the Chair of Commissioners is “independent” but the board is politically appointed.

In response to perceived failings of the 2014 results management, MEC needs to follow through on electoral reform, if MEC can show that the system has improved then voters will have renewed confidence in the process. Thus the big issue for the next election is “does my vote count?

MEC must move away from being event driven, towards an electoral cycle approach. But this needs to extend to resource mobilisation too, so that MEC can be proactive outside the election run-up. Government, donors etc. all need to ensure consistency of funding to help electoral reform and CVE.

1.2.3 MEC CVE partners

The **Ministry of Information** has a mandate to provide information to Malawians. It works by responding to requests from government MDAs, who are expected to bring a budget for implementation and MoI will provide the necessary expertise. The MoI has district level staff ready to assist government agencies and as well as mobile cinema vans, there is a quarterly newsletter distributed to districts, special event magazines and the government website. The MoI provides the template for MDAs to use and maintain as they wish. MoI can also organise press conferences on behalf of MDAs.

MEC has used the MoI consistently.

NSA mobilisation and sensitisation partners: **NICE** (National Initiative for Civic Education) is the second largest non-state agency after the church in Malawi, and has been a key partner for MEC for CVE. NICE is a trust under the MoI.

NICE has a permanent outreach system in place that can be used by any government MDA to disseminate information to citizens. It has an office in each district and a further network of around 8000 volunteers that are able to sensitise rural communities. In addition, NICE will organise radio and TV broadcasts of various kinds, posters, and will also enter into MoUs with FBOs to further disseminate information. These kinds of activities can be supplemented by road shows and travelling advice centres according to need. NICE has 169 rural libraries and 31 district libraries that citizens can use to access governance documents including information about their own locality. It is possible to add a BI corner to their centres, where officers from a particular institution can more readily meet the public and provide advice and information.

NICE are currently piloting e-based libraries in 6 schools. The choice of communication activities for any particular organisation depends on needs, MICE likes to ‘scratch where there is an itch”. But for some situations NICE uses a 360 degree approach, and tries to “fight the enemies of governance on all fronts”

According to NICE, civic education is a developmental issue, so the Chiefs in villages have legitimate role to play in informing their communities. The Chief is the custodian of government information for the citizens.

The impact of a particular communication initiative can be measured by seeing how it has a desired outcome e.g. the decrease in the number of null and void votes in the recent election in a particular district.

Reaching a specific target audience is not always directly possible in Malawi because the state is less able to reach individuals. However in Malawi everyone is part of a clan, and knows every other member. So if a message reaches me but is applicable to my fellow clan member I will pass it on. In this way specific segments of society can be reached more readily.

*MEC should continue to use the major civic education agencies as they have the most developed outreach capacity, and by doing CVE outside elections public confidence in MEC as an organisation is also deepened.*

Other **CSO sensitisation partners** perceive MEC as event driven since they are typically engaged around election times, in this respect, CVE is commissioned as if it were an event not as a process.

For example, **NEST** has been commissioned by MEC to do CVE for the last three elections (’04, ‘09’ and ’14). At the last election NEST worked in two constituencies and had up to 18 months funding. But since NEST solely concentrates on CVE it is severely constrained by the event driven approach MEC has had to take. Thus according to NEST, MEC should be putting out CVE messages all the time not only when MEC is “in season”.

*MEC’s event focussed funding impacts on the capacity of its CVE partners to deliver messages on its behalf, longer term funding for partners would improve the delivery of MEC CVE messages and in turn maintain its profile outside elections.*

**Gender** **perspectives:** According to women’s pressure groups, MEC should be commended for reducing the nomination fees for women candidates for Parliamentary and Local Government Elections. However, from the elections results, this did not necessarily help increase the proportion of women leaders. Thus MEC should come up with other creative communication strategies that will encourage women participation as candidates in elections. The electoral commission should also ensure that its publications and messages are always gender aware.

**Disability issues: FEDOMA** (Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi): People with disabilities were not always well served when it came to voting in the May elections, for example the tactile voting boards although distributed to polling centres, were at times left in the back of vehicles, and thus did nothing to help disabled access. Also the voting places and booths were not easily accessible to wheelchair users.

*MEC needs to make its instructions to local election staff match its national commitment to making elections more accessible.*

Messages on CVE needed to be put in braille for those in print and televisions messages needed to including the results need to be signed for the deaf, and posters need to be in large print. And the launch of the election campaign needs to have a disability presence.

MEC needs to bring in disability much earlier in the run up to election, it is a challenge to include all the necessary special provisions in the short time-scale they work to.

*Disability needs to be mainstreamed; the organisations doing CVE for MEC should demonstrate their disability provisions, as disability organisations do not have the reach to do it all.*

1.3 Situation Analysis

1.3.1 Mapping

The communication strategy needs to be linked to MEC strategic goals and objectives but at the same time reflect the context in which it works.

The following matrix maps the MEC *goals and objectives* from its Strategic Plan (SP) against the information gathered during research as described above (*stakeholder perceptions*), describes the evidence for a positive *communications outcome* (result) and indicates the *target audiences* that need to be engaged.

The key areas of focus are thus:

* What is the organisation supposed to do*?* — the organisation *goals and objectives* as spelled out in the MEC Strategic Plan;
* What do stakeholders say or see? — *perceived communication successes and challenges*; as revealed through consultations with stakeholders.
* What is expected and by who? *communication outcomes and target audiences* — what the results of the communication strategy should be for the people it is trying to influence.

Where the appropriate response is not amenable to communications, it is bracketed.

1.3.2 Situation analysis matrix

| *MEC SP Pillar and Objectives[[3]](#footnote-4)* | *Stakeholder perceptions* | *Communications result* | *Target audience* |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Pillar 1: Electoral Environment** | | | |
| *Goal 1: Independence of MEC*  Objective 1: MEC’s commitment to and compliance with its guiding principles and values enhanced by the end of 2013  Objective 2: Public funding of MEC protected and predictable by the end of 2017  Objective 3: District level capacity of MEC enhanced by the end of 2013 | MEC is perceived to have been able to act independently up until ’14 election results management; at which point MEC appeared to come under the sway of political interests.  MEC financial need is recognised as “seasonal” and election oriented  District election offices are merely seen as post offices with no real technical role | Stakeholders agree that MEC needs to have political independence for it to provide a conducive election environment    Stakeholders agree that MEC funding needs to be decoupled from elections  Stakeholders accept the need for MEC district level capacity enhancement | Political parties and independent candidates  Media  CSOs  Law Commission  District election offices  Parliament  Ministry of Finance  Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs  Development Partners  Religious Bodies |
| *Goal 2: Legal Framework*  Objective 1: Gaps and inconsistencies in the electoral laws are addressed by the end of 2013  Objective 2: Capacity of MEC to deal with legal related matters including complaints handling is enhanced by end of 2013 | MEC is perceived to have done what it could have within the law but should recognise that problem areas need to be addressed.  Electoral reform process not fully inclusive as some key stakeholders like the Media feel side-lined | Stakeholders agree to engage in the electoral reform processes    (MEC ensures the electoral reform process is inclusive) | Political parties and independent candidates Electorate  Media  CSOs  Law Commission  Parliament  Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs  Development Partners  Religious Bodies |
| *Goal 3: Level Playing Field*  Objective 1: A platform for electoral contestants to market their agendas created by the end of 2013  Objective 2: A fair campaign process conducted by May 2014    Objective 3: Capacity of MEC to enforce laws and regulations strengthened by 2013 | Use and access to public media seem to favour the ruling party    MEC is perceived to have tried to act professionally in facilitating a fair campaign. But that the composition of MEC’s Board of Commissioners makes special treatment for some political parties and their candidates inevitable.  MEC is perceived as lacking legal and political independence and power to be able to stand by its own final decisions | Stakeholder accept that rules need to be introduced to balance coverage in the government controlled media  All political parties and their candidates accept that MEC should be a neutral player in the election process.  Stakeholders agree to respect the electoral system, so that party politics do not interfere with the technical management of the electoral cycle | Political parties and independent candidates Electorate  Media  CSOs  District Offices  Law Commission  Parliament  Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs  Development Partners  Religious Bodies |
| *Goal 4: Stakeholder Relationships*  Objective 1: Communication improved, professionalized and rigorously implemented by September 2013  Objective 2: Interaction and communication with stakeholders improved throughout the electoral cycle by the end of 2016  Objective 3: Electoral services offered on demand and on a cost recovery basis to those stakeholders in need | MEC is perceived to have successfully maintained effective stakeholder communications throughout, albeit that MEC’s communication sometimes appeared uncoordinated with different commissioners giving different answers to the same question.  On occasion mixed messages are communicated to external stakeholders from MEC management and sometimes staff | (MEC sustains its communication practices with stakeholders and implements the communication strategy, the communications policy and the CVE plan)  Organisations demand the services of MEC | Electorate  Media  CSOs  Law Commission  Parliament  Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs  Development Partners  Religious Bodies  Political parties and independent candidates  Organisations that need electoral services |
| *Goal 5: Election Observation and Election Monitoring*  Objective 1: Election observation / monitoring systematically and comprehensively conducted by end of 2014 | Observer mission are at liberty to apply varying principles and practices in their work.  Some political stakeholders not fully made aware of the number and origin of observer missions that participate in a specific election | Local and International observer missions are made aware of the dos and don’ts  Stakeholders accept the presence and the role of the local and International observer missions | Observer mission teams  Electorate  Media  CSOs  Development Partners  Religious Bodies  Political parties and independent candidates |
| **Pillar 2: Malawi Electoral Commission as an organisation** | | | |
| *Goal 1: Organizational Culture*  Objective 1: Trust and good working relationship between Commissioners and Staff established by ﬁrst quarter 2013 and corporate identity strengthened by end 2013  Objective 2: Efficiency in decision-making procedures, implementation, and follow up strengthened by 2013 and principles of corporate governance clariﬁed and entrenched by 2014.  Objective 3: Efﬁciency and cost-effectiveness is increased through appropriate IT-infrastructure and training by 2014  Objective 4: Responsiveness to stakeholders strengthened by 2014 | Communication between Commissioners and Management at the MEC Secretariat is perceived to be adequate however communication between MEC Management and Staff is generally top-down  Perceived absence of forums where key policies and messages can be communicated to Staff  Delayed and sometimes absence of communication to MEC Headquarters from District Offices due to lack of necessary equipment. | MEC staff agree that management makes efforts to keep them well informed and listens to the issues that they raise  (All district MEC offices have required  IT equipment)     (MEC adopts a communications standards policy) | Commissioners  MEC Management  MEC Staff  Media  Political Parties |
| *Goal 2: Human Resource Management and Administration*  Objective 1: Skills development and placement of staff based on systematically identiﬁed skills gaps by end of 2013  Objective 2: Staff satisfaction levels enhanced by the end of 2017  Objective 3: Highly competent and skilled personnel professionally recruited by the end of end 2017 | —    —  — | —    Staff accept that MEC is a good organisation to work for  — | —    MEC staff |
| *Goal 3: Financial management and procurement*  Objective 1: Capacity of MEC in ﬁnancial management and procurement enhanced by end of 2013  Objective 2: Conﬁdence and trust of stakeholders enhanced  Objective 3: To increase the efﬁcient use of resources and minimize wastage by 2016  Objective 4: Level of compliance with ﬁnancial guidelines and procurement procedures increased by end of 2013 | —  Stakeholders not fully aware of the financial and procurement guidelines resulting in increased suspicion and rumour mongering  MEC perceived not to be fully transparent and accountable in its financial management and procurement processes  —  — | —  Stakeholders agree that MEC practices prudent financial management and transparent procurement    —  — | —  Commissioners  Development Partners  Media  Electorate  Political parties and independent candidates  —  — |
| **Pillar No. 3: Electoral Operations** | | | |
| *Goal 1: Operational Plan*  Objective 1: The operational plan in place by Nov 2012 and is implemented according to the time lines throughout 2013 and 2014 | MEC is perceived to have generally been very effective in supporting the election operation plan.  However MEC operations are perceived to be overly event-driven and should also demonstrate process | Stakeholders accept that elections are the culmination of the electoral cycle | Political parties and independent candidates Committees Electorate  Media  CSOs  Law Commission  Parliament  Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs  Development Partners  Religious Bodies |
| *Goal 2: Voter Education*  Objective 1: Quality and delivery of civic and voter education improved by end of 2013  Objective 2: Maintain high-level voter turn-out and seek to achieve national rate of less than 3.5% null and void votes by 2017 | CSOs perceive that MEC is too event focussed and this compromises the success of CVE which should be continuous.  MEC CVE perceived to be lacking in schools  Civic and Voter Education perceived to have been very successful especially during the pre-voting period resulting in high voter turn-out across the country  However, voter education is not perceived as fully supportive of the campaign to increase women participation in politics, and not fully inclusive of people with disabilities | (MEC sustains its communication practices with stakeholders and implements the communication strategy, the communications policy and the CVE plan) | Political parties and independent candidates Electorate  Media  CSOs  Law Commission  Parliament  Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs  Development Partners  Religious Bodies |
| *Goal 3: Boundary Delimitation*  Objective 1: To review wards and constituencies and undertake boundary delimitation according to the constitutional requirement by 2017. | Some stakeholders perceive boundary delimitation as being intended to benefit a specific party, group or individual (gerrymandering).  Most stakeholders do not fully understand the legal provisions and guidance on demarcation. Often stakeholders have confused ward/constituency boundaries with traditional leaders’ boundaries. | Relevant stakeholders accept they have been consulted over boundary change decisions, and accept MEC decisions  Stakeholders understand the legal criteria used on demarcation and actively participate. | Electorate  Political parties and independent candidates Potential candidates  Development Partners  Media  CSOs  Religious Bodies  Traditional leaders |
| Goal 4: Voter Registration  Objective 2: To have an accurate, current and relevant voters’ register in place by 2014 | Stakeholders perceive the communication during voter registration to have been effectively executed, however; perceive voter registration as a one-off event every five years that would be better handled continuously.  However many are concerned that the result announcement was not consistent with the electoral roll. | (Continuous voter registration is adopted by MEC)  Stakeholders accept that election results are consistent with the electoral roll | National Registration Bureau  Ministry of Health  District Health Office  District Commissioners  National Statistical Office  Electorate  District Elections Offices  Media  CSOs  Political Parties  Religious bodies |
| *Goal 5: Transmission and announcement of results, complaints handling*  Objective 1: Results’ transmission and announcement processes are improved and well known to all stakeholders by March 2014 | Stakeholders understand the process but are critical of the way results management was managed by MEC | Stakeholders are engaged in improving results management in the run up to 2019 elections  Stakeholders accept the complaints procedure gives them a method for dealing with issues through MEC | Electorate  Political parties and independent candidates Observer Missions  Media  CSOs  Courts  Private Lawyers |
| **Pillar number 4: Cross cutting issues** | | | |
| *Goal 1: Gender, youth, the elderly and people with disabilities*  Objective 1: Gender in all policies, processes and activities is mainstreamed  Objective 2: The infrastructure, services and materials accessible to people with disabilities  Objective 3: Youth encouraged in participating in electoral processes in an informed manner  Objective 4: MEC ensures equal participation of elderly people through speciﬁc attention to elderly’s concerns in electoral operations | Stakeholders perceive MEC has made little progress in gender mainstreaming  Stakeholders perceive MEC election system not to have taken full consideration of the needs of people with disabilities  The lack of CVE in schools does not encourage youth participation  — | Stakeholders accept and participate in applying an affirmative action in gender balance in political elections  People with disabilities accept that MEC tries to include them in the whole election process  Stakeholders accept the need for inclusion of the civic education with a focus on voting rights in the formal education curriculum  Elections are brought closer to the elderly so that they can participate | Women  Citizens with disabilities  Youth citizens  Media  Elderly citizens  Political parties and independent candidates Ministry of Education |
| *Goal 2: Security, Infrastructure, and Equipment*  Objective 1: Security policy for the electoral process provided by July 2013  Objective 2: Secure and purposely built ofﬁces and warehouses either acquired or designed by 2017  Objective 3: Security of MEC Commissioners, Staff and MEC sensitive materials provided  Objective 4: Adequate and reliable equipment and systems available | —   Stakeholders recognise the security weaknesses in infrastructure and sensitive materials  —  — | —  Stakeholders accept that MEC is taking steps to improve security | Political parties and independent candidates Development Partners  National and District Elections staff  Media  Malawi Police Services  Malawi Defence Forces  Electorate |
| **Pillar No. 5: Implementation Mechanisms, Research, Monitoring and Evaluation** | | | |
| *Goal 1: Research, Monitoring and Evaluation*  Objective 1: The knowledge and expertise of MEC is continuously updated  Objective 2: Continuous learning and tracking of progress against targets undertaken  Objective 3: Systematic documentation, archiving of information and reports done | Some stakeholder are aware that MEC conducted post-election evaluation  However past experience in managing elections in Malawi appear to be forgotten as each election is looked at as if new and fresh | (Relevant stakeholders are aware of the areas and modalities for research)  (Monitoring and Evaluation processes and results are known by all relevant stakeholders) | Research Institutions  Political commentators  CSOs  Academic research institutions  Political parties  Candidates |
| *Goal 2: Resource Mobilisation*  Objective: 1 The resource base for MEC is broadened, predicable, and based on this strategic plan by 2017 | Stakeholders recognise that MEC is subject to periodic funding which pressurises MEC into implementing election over a short period of time | Stakeholders accept the case for consistent and broad based funding for MEC beyond election events | GoM Treasury  Development partners |

1.4 Conclusions

1.4.1 Communication Successes of MEC

The consultation process revealed that MEC has made major strides in maintaining effective communication with its stakeholders. Some of the key communication successes include:

* The MEC post-election evaluation indicates that the body politic were engaged and able to follow the election throughout.
* Maintaining and communicating a clear calendar of activities prior to conducting general elections
* Continuous up-dating of stakeholders on all activities being done during the period just before the election
* Maintaining its independent status up until the results management time
* Maintaining good and open relationship with the media throughout the pre-results management period
* Ability to respond in a timely way to the demands of the media and hence keeping all stakeholders well informed
* Providing the communications for and demanding a fair campaign process
* Reasonable communication effort between Commissioners and Management at the MEC Secretariat
* Effectively communicated voting processes and related requirements through Civic and Voter Education
* MEC facilitated a successful post- election review process, the results of which were effectively shared among stakeholders

1.4.2 Challenges for MEC

Elections are by nature political events thus MEC is always at risk of being politicised unless the electoral process is perceived to be transparent, free and fair.

But if the process appears to be flawed then it is inevitable that MEC will come in for criticism when things do not go well. Then, once MEC becomes drawn into politics, then the public will find it hard to distinguish between MEC and the election issues themselves. The success of the communication strategy thus depends on MEC demonstrating its competence and its impartiality.

Although MEC built up good engagement and trust during the run up to the 2014 TPE, this was effected by the management of the results. The MEC image therefore needs re-establishing. The **first** objective of the MEC communications strategy – already referred to in the MEC CVE strategy – is therefore to *build public confidence and trust of the electorate in the electoral process*.

Given that the parties have accepted the results of the election there is now an opportunity to move forward in a more considered way. It is important to start the process of restoring trust immediately.

Convincing the electorate and stakeholders that MEC is doing a good job—thereby building trust— can be done through demonstrating MEC activities *outside* the main election period:

* showing how MEC wants electoral law reform so that it can do a better job
* training of temporary election staff well before elections
* using continuous registration including biometric registration as an opportunity to do CVE, and to make it more difficult to tamper with results
* sharing good practice that may come out from bye-elections.
* making better use of regional offices for information dissemination

The electoral cycle should be adopted as the basis for the communication strategy as this already implies more continuity in communication activities.

Approached in this way, the remaining CVE objectives should follow on, thus:

* “increase voter turn out” – will depend on the perception that voting counts
* “participation of people with disabilities” – will depend on making good forward preparations to involve them
* “promote smooth and peaceful conduct” – will depend on long term engagement of parties, media, police, faith groups and candidates, and is dependent on public trust in the electoral process
* “improve implementation and quality of CVE” – will be included by reaching the other objectives

A **second** key point is that MEC needs to show that it is a truly transparent organisation – and has nothing to hide – by doing this MEC has a good chance of winning public confidence in the organisation and good engagement in the process. However some caution needs to be exercised here: telling the electorate absolutely everything about procurement and contracts may not always be appropriate as complete disclosure may only result in providing further material for speculation. So MEC needs to be clear and forthcoming when it counts but of course respond quickly when stakeholders request further information.

**Thirdly**, lack of consistent government and development partner funding not only has an impact on CVE but also on the MEC profile more generally, and makes it more difficult for MEC to pursue the electoral cycle approach. So the communication strategy needs to make the case for MEC support throughout the five-year cycle, rather than the current practice of funding elections as if they were events. Of course being able to work throughout the five-years will not only ease the peak MEC workload but would also mean that MEC is able to put a greater distance between itself and the politics around election time.

**Fourth**, to build confidence in the organisation itself it is important that MEC demonstrates how it is accessible to its users, is open to its staff and shows that it consistently works in the public interest by prudent use of its resources. For example, it is unlikely to be successful in securing predictable funding if government and development partners are unconvinced that its budget is well spent, and resources well managed.

## 2. Key issues to be addressed in the Communication Strategy

2.1.1 Four key issues

The communication strategy need only consider the MEC objectives that have a communications dimension, and, of those, should focus on the priority issues identified through consultations with stakeholders and implementation. The Communication Strategy therefore focuses on just four core issues that need to be addressed before the next tri-partite elections in 2019.

**Firstly**, the MEC communication strategy needs to address the situation following the May 2014 TPE. Although it is widely agreed that MEC did a good job in explaining the election process to voters prior to and during the campaign period itself, it is also widely acknowledged that MEC’s reputation took a serious knock because of the political arguments concerning counting and announcement of results.

Political arguments about the validity of the results were played out in the courts, and ultimately prevented MEC from conducting a recount and validating the returns. As a result MEC’s duty to conduct a fair election process was put into question, and placed MEC in a position of apologising for its management of results: “Our hands are tied”.

Thus, the positive perception of MEC built up in the run up to the 2014 TPE was quickly dissipated by political controversy over results management.

Therefore, the consensus amongst stakeholders is that MEC’s priority should be to re-establish trust in the election process by demonstrating how it is already addressing the failures identified in the 2014 elections in time for 2019.

According to stakeholders, rebuilding trust in the electoral process should start immediately otherwise is it likely that public engagement with democratic elections will diminish. Any lack of engagement in the next election might be manifested by a decrease in turn out, more disruptions during the campaign period and during voting itself, and would ultimately lead to a lack of legitimacy for whoever triumphed at the polls. In other words it would be a set back to the key objectives of the MEC CVE strategy.

An important lesson to be learnt from the May 2014 elections is that it is very easy for MEC to be at any moment drawn into the political arena. As soon as politicians and the electorate start to believe that the voting process is flawed then it is almost inevitable that MEC itself will come in for criticism when things do not go well. As soon as the parties began to obtain court injunctions whatever line MEC took was bound to be perceived as political. And once this happened, then the public found it hard to distinguish between MEC and the election issues themselves, and MEC suffered.

The approach recommended in the communication strategy is therefore based on constructing a perceptible distance between MEC and the elections themselves. This can be done by positioning MECs work as technical management of the entire electoral cycle rather than, as currently perceived, as “event driven” focussing primarily on voting itself.

Convincing the electorate and stakeholders that MEC is doing a good technical job should be done through publicising MEC activities outside the main election period such as:

* showing how MEC works to an electoral cycle, not only focussed on the elections itself
* showing how MEC wants electoral law reform so that it can do a better job
* showing how MEC is already working towards to improving election arrangements for 2019 including the introduction of biometric voter ID
* demonstrating how MEC is responsible for electoral boundaries
* making better use of regional and district offices for information dissemination
* using continuous registration including biometric registration as an opportunity to do all year round CVE, and to make it more difficult to tamper with results
* demonstrating the training of temporary election staff well before elections
* sharing good practice and any learning that may come out as a result of bye-elections
* showing how MEC makes early provisions for access for people with disabilities

The first objective of the MEC communications strategy is therefore to *restore public confidence and trust in the electoral process* *as overseen by MEC.*

A **second**, and related issue identified through consultations is that MEC needs to demonstrate that the conduct of the elections is above reproach. The May ’14 elections demonstrated that apparently trivial details could easily become the topic of wild speculation. For example it was said that the lamps borrowed from Zimbabwe to light polling stations had ballot papers hidden inside. Social media contributed further to rumour mongering, even purporting to show falsified ballot papers on the morning of the election. A related point is that MEC faced logistical and material difficulties in conducting the ballot, and this in turn diminished credibility of the ballot. Ultimately public confidence in the results was affected by reports that the forms from the returning officers had been doctored before being collated.

The point here is to show how MEC acts to guarantee the fairness of the procedure. Clearly civic and voter education has an important part to play here, since this demonstrates exactly how elections should work. But the strategy also needs to demonstrate MEC’s *professionalism* in organising elections themselves.

By making sure that the electorate get all the necessary information in a clear and unambiguous manner, MEC can do something to prevent rumours starting and so bring the people with them throughout the entire electoral cycle, there should be no “surprises”.

The second objective of the communication strategy is therefore to *demonstrate the measures MEC takes to guarantee a fair election procedure so that there is confidence in how the vote is organised.*

This can be done, for example, by:

* demonstrating how MEC recruits election support staff from a wide pool, and based on merit and independence
* showing how MEC has rehearsed the election procedure before the actual voting
* making facsimile election materials available for scrutiny before elections
* integrating the needs of all disadvantaged and marginalised groups in the election system
* publicising the role of independent local and international election observers
* making the election return forms available for inspection
* improving media management
* improving social media management

Ultimately the success of this element of the communication strategy depends on MEC being able to demonstrate both its competence and its impartiality. And this will only be possible if MEC is able to address the flaws in the electoral system before 2019. This objective therefore needs to be addressed after the current post-election phase of the cycle that includes reforms.

**Thirdly**, unpredictable government and development partner financial support throughout the electoral cycle not only has an impact on CVE but also on the MEC profile more generally, and of course makes it more difficult for MEC to pursue the electoral cycle approach per se. As a result MEC has little choice but to proceed as if it were event driven. This then leads to a focus on elections themselves and the associated risks of politicisation.

So the communication strategy also needs to make the case for consistent MEC resourcing throughout the five-year cycle. Of course, being able to work throughout the entire cycle will not only ease the peak MEC workload but would also mean that MEC is able to put a greater distance between itself and the politics come election time.

A third objective of the communication strategy is therefore to *help mobilise resources to support MEC operations throughout the electoral cycle.*

This can be done, for example, by:

* Commissioners urging government and development partners to better resource MEC throughout the electoral cycle
* Publicising the MEC 5-year strategic plan, as a fundable proposal to attract new development partner money
* Holding financial mobilization forums where the election cycle and the funding modalities will be discussed

The case for consistent funding is likely to be most effective when coupled with demonstrating how MEC is taking measures to restore public confidence in the electoral process.

**Fourth**, MEC staff made the point that they need to be well informed about the directions that Commissioners and senior MEC staff are taking so that they can better contribute to the organisation’s objectives. Also they expressed a need to open up a bottom-up communications route so that experience on the ground could be acted upon. Not all MEC staff – especially in the districts – were felt they were well informed to fulfil their duties.

MEC management recognises that temporary election support staff need to be better trained so that they can more effectively support elections themselves, this requires adequate training but also implies building respect for the polling event itself so that they are both diligent and act ethically.

Just as MEC staff needs to collectively contribute to the organisations objectives, Commissioners also need to share collective responsibility for guarding MEC’s independent, technical mandate to manage democratic elections for Malawi. This means, for example, speaking and acting in unison when MEC is put under stress by politicians and the media.

A fourth objective of the communication strategy is therefore to *encourage MEC staff and commissioners to collectively uphold the principles of the organisation including strengthened responsiveness to stakeholders.*

This can be done, for example, by:

* formally adopting the draft communications policy
* promoting the MEC vision as a guiding principle for all MEC operations
* constantly exploring ways to make MEC more accessible to all stakeholders
* promotion of service standards for MEC
* adopting and implementing a proactive internal communication process

Lastly it needs to be noted that the post-election political debate has shifted from the outcome of the 2014 elections themselves towards asking the question if federalism would be a better political system for Malawi. This new interest is driven by the recognition that because parties are both tribal and regional then a first-past-the-post system is always likely to result in a majority that favours the most populous parts of Malawi, and thus also the biggest tribe. In this debate MEC needs to be prepared to provide its technical response to changes in the democratic system in Malawi.

## 3. Strategic communications

Four key issues that need to be addressed by the Communication Strategy have been identified in chapter 2.

However, as these issues play out in Malawi, the role of MEC must be to continue to offer the electoral process as the way to produce a legitimate government. The impact of the communication strategy should therefore be *continued participation by all stakeholders in elections through engagement in the electoral system.*

The outcome of the communication strategy should be to *position MEC as an impartial agency that encourages continued engagement in the electoral system.* This can achieved by responding, in turn, to each of the issues outlined in chapter 2 through a set of approaches grouped together as communication components.

3.1 Communication Components

**1. Promote MEC as the overseer of the electoral cycle.**

The objective of this component would be to *restore public confidence and trust of the electorate in the electoral process as overseen by MEC*.

The intended result of this component would be that:

* Stakeholders agree to engage in the electoral reform processes through MEC
* Stakeholders are engaged by MEC in finding ways to improve results management
* Relevant stakeholders accept they have been consulted over boundary change decisions, and accept MEC decisions
* Stakeholders agree that MEC needs to have political independence for it to provide a conducive election environment
* Stakeholders agree to respect MEC technical management of the electoral cycle
* Stakeholders agree that MEC promotes gender parity in the election process
* The marginalised and disadvantaged accept that MEC tries to include them in the whole election process
* Stakeholders accept the need for inclusion of the civic education with a focus on voting rights in the formal education curriculum

Success would be demonstrated by acknowledgement in the media, and in other public forums that MEC is working hard to make sure that the 2019 elections are better managed and will be free and fair. The means of verification would be through MEC media monitoring, and technical reports on the electoral cycle.

**2. Confidence in Fair Elections through MEC**

The objective of this component would be to *demonstrate the measures MEC takes to guarantee a fair election procedure so that there is confidence in how the vote is organised.*

The intended result of this component would be that:

* Stakeholders accept the complaints procedure gives them a method for dealing with issues through MEC
* Stakeholders accept that rules need to be introduced to balance coverage in the government controlled media
* Stakeholders accept the presence and the role of the local and International observer missions
* Stakeholders accept that election results are consistent with the electoral roll
* Stakeholders accept that MEC is taking steps to improve security
* Political parties and their candidates accept that MEC should be a neutral player in the election process.

Success in increasing public confidence would be shown by the degree of misinformation about electoral arrangements in the public domain. The means of verification would be through MEC media monitoring including the social media and the extent to which MEC has to make corrections to rumours.

**3. MEC Financial Independence**

The objective of this component would be to *help mobilise government and development partner resources to support MEC operations throughout the electoral cycle*.

The intended result of this component would be that:

* Stakeholders agree that MEC funding needs to be decoupled from elections
* Stakeholders accept the case for consistent and broad based funding for MEC beyond election events
* Stakeholders accept the need for MEC district level capacity enhancement

Success would be demonstrated by public commitments from GoM and development partners to consider a constant level of funding throughout a five-year cycle. The means of verification would be through MEC reports on resource mobilisation.

**4. MEC access and accountability**

The objective of this component would be to *encourage MEC staff and commissioners to collectively uphold the principles of the organisation including being responsive to stakeholders.*

The intended result of this component would be that:

* MEC staff agree that management makes efforts to keep them well informed and listens to the issues that they raise
* Staff accept that MEC is a good organisation to work for
* Stakeholders agree that MEC practices prudent financial management and transparent procurement
* Marginalised and disadvantaged people accept that MEC aims to be inclusive in its practices

Success would be demonstrated by routine information sharing within the organisation and access to MEC for stakeholders. The means of verification would be through MEC HRM reports and through media monitoring of reports on MEC’s performance.

3.2 Target audiences

Each of the four communication components needs to address the concerns of the “target audiences” or stakeholders as identified in the MEC strategic plan. The audiences can be characterised in the following way:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Segment** | **Profile** |
| The Public:  Malawi Citizens  Electorate  Registered voters  Malawians in the Diaspora  Disadvantaged and marginalised:  People with disabilities  The Elderly  Women | All Malawi citizens, including prisoners, over 18 are eligible to vote.    People with disabilities could be better included in elections through improved accessibility measures.  Women’s’ networks feel that MEC could do more to promote women candidates in elections without compromising neutrality of the process. On the other hand, women participated in large numbers in campaign events and according to the EU report, on election day, approximately half of the polling station staff and 30 per cent of presiding officers were women.  Women, the disabled, the elderly and youth all have single issue and umbrella organisations that represent their interests. They aim to make sure that women and disabled issues are mainstreamed into politics and CVE rather than being able to implement changes themselves. |
| Political parties | In the 2014 election, candidates from 17 political parties and 419 independent candidates, making 1,293 candidates altogether, competed for 193 parliamentary seats. For the 462 elected seats of Local Councils, candidates from 18 political parties plus 576 independent candidates had their nominations accepted, resulting in 2,412 candidates. Candidates for presidential elections were nominated by 12 political parties, the most prominent of which were the People’s Party (PP) of former President Joyce Banda, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of President Prof Peter Mutharika, the United Democratic Front (UDF) of Atupele Muluzi and the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) of Lazarus Chakwera. Following the elections the DPP became the largest party in parliament (51 seats) and holds the Presidency. However 52 seats are held by Independents, and the MCP holds 48.  Party divisions are not only ideological but also reflect the regional and tribal division in Malawi.  Despite legislation providing sound mechanisms to address election related disputes, the Multiparty Liaison Committees (MPLC) were the preferred forum for seeking timely and effective remedy when resolving election related complaints during the pre-election period.  All major parties are represented at the National Elections Consultative Forum. |
| Media | The press, TV and radio play an active role in political debate in Malawi. Not all parties have equal access to the media. In the 2014 elections the PP dominated the airtime on both state-owned radio and television. Galaxy radio allocated more airtime to DPP and Joy radio provided more coverage to UDF. Times TV afforded more airtime to the MCP. The Daily Times, The Nation and radio stations Zodiak and Capital FM provided adequately balanced coverage of political actors.  There is a lack of clear and enforceable regulations to prohibit the use of state resources for campaigning. |
| CSOs | MEC has identified non-aligned CSOs that it uses to conduct CVE on its behalf. For the 2014 elections, there was an unprecedented level of cooperation between MEC and civil society. But MEC funding means that CSOs are most active in the run up to elections rather than throughout the electoral cycle.  The major CSO engaged by MEC is NICE. NICE is public trust that specialises in community sensitisation. |
| Religious bodies | Mosques and Churches play an important role in Malawi communities in both rural and urban settings. FBOs run their own schools as well as holding prayers for their congregations. The Catholic Church has a powerful CSO role through the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. There are opportunities to make use of prayer gatherings for CVE. |
| Development Partners | All the major international donors are represented in Malawi and so have a potential interest in supporting governance programmes. The UNDP coordinates a basket fund. The EU directly supports NICE, DfID supports the National Democratic Institute, and Norway supports Norwegian Church Aid.  At the invitation of MEC, the 2014 election was monitored by international observers from a number of development partners, regional and international organisations. |
| GoM:  Ministry of Finance  Law Commission  Ministry of Information and Communication  Ministry of Local Government  Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs  Ministry of Education | Government agencies with a specific technical or administrative interest in MEC and the conduct of elections |
| Judiciary:  Courts  Lawyers | Called upon to make interpretations and judgements concerning electoral law |
| Malawi Electoral Commission: | |
| Commissioners | The Chair of Commissioners is a Judge and is considered to be independent. The remaining commissioners are appointed by the State President in consultation with leaders of political parties represented in Parliament. Thus Commissioner’s run the risk of being politicised in the media and in public perceptions and their statements are likely to be closely scrutinised. |
| MEC staff | The day-to-day management of operations of the Commission is carried out by the Secretariat, which is headed by the Chief Elections Ofﬁcer. The Commission has its headquarters in Blantyre and maintains three Regional Ofﬁces in Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu. In addition, the Commission has District Elections Clerks that are stationed in all the councils. |
| MEC Election Support Staff | MEC employed temporary support staff for the May 2014 elections. Many of these were teachers. MEC intend to recruit from a wider pool of applicants for the 2019 elections. All support staff will be recruited through a competitive process. |

3.3 Key Messages

A key message should speak to the perceptions of the target audience as identified in the situation analysis.

Key messages are not the same as the secondary information that provides all the detail. Rather, the key message guides what kind of content should be included in messaging.

For each of the four communication objectives the following changes to perceptions are expected:

1. Increased confidence and trust in MEC as an overseer of the electoral process
2. Increased confidence in MEC management of elections increased
3. Increased agreement that MEC needs predictable funding to build engagement
4. Increased confidence in MEC access, accountability and inclusivity

The key message for each of the four objectives is therefore as follows:

For objective 1: *“With the engagement of all stakeholders MEC will continue to refine the electoral process. These are the concrete actions MEC is taking to address the technical failings in the 2014 TPE. By 2016 MEC wants to have a broad consensus about the foundations for the next election.”*

For objective 2: *“The 2019 elections will be more rigorous than ever before. These are the ways in which MEC makes sure that each vote counts equally.”*

For objective 3: *“To build a stable democracy requires committing resources year on year to organisations that build trust in the system, the legitimacy of any administration depends on foundations laid by MEC.”*

For objective 4: *“These are the ways in which MEC works together to provide an accessible, accountable and inclusive service for our stakeholders.”*

3.4 Generic Communication Approaches

It is convenient to group together the many communications tools available into communication *approaches*. Typically each communications approach will use a selection of mass media, social media, print and electronic communication, and inter-organisation forums such as meetings, workshops and conferences to reach a more or less specific audience.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Branding**  (to include development partner visibility requirements as necessary) | Organisation service statement/mandate  Organisation event identification (banners, pop-ups, desk-top name plaques)  Organisation visibility materials (caps, badges, T-shirts etc.)  Client reminders (calendars, pens and pads)  Logo and contact details  Logo on all major assets (vehicles, offices) |
| **Marketing** | Organisation brochure to market services for users  Organisation mission statement and vision in publicly accessible offices  Business cards  Proposals for projects  Website marketing pages |
| **Advocacy** | Organisation Reports  Policy statements  Task Forces  Media briefings  Representations to parliamentary committees  Independent opinion leaders  Elder statesman  Pressure groups and NGOs |
| **Media partnerships** | Conduct assessment of media channels including online  Build contact list of journalists including online and foreign correspondents  Orientation events for Malawi journalists  Select key journalists as special contacts  Offer exclusive access to stories  Press conferences  Press opportunities and coverage |
| **Access to information** | User guide to organisation procedures (print)  Online list of organisation documents  Downloadable versions of publications for users  Library  Requests for Information Policy |
| **Participatory communication and public debate** | Radio and TV discussion and debate programmes  Radio and TV documentaries  Town hall debates  Posts to social media and online forums  Website feedback forms  Helpline |
| **Community sensitisation** | Regional broadcast public service announcements  Communications using CSO local networks and outreach  Communications using MoI local networks and outreach  Open days for local communities  Road shows and pop-up advice centres  Outreach activities from institution  Village meetings organised by chief  Announcements at funeral gatherings  Announcements at faith gatherings |
| **State-citizen communication** | National broadcast radio and TV public service announcements  Newspaper notices  Notices in public government offices  Media houses briefings and engagement  Open days for public and the media  Press releases and national news items  Printed information (leaflets, booklets)  Posters in public locations  Website activities pages  Visibility materials |
| **Stakeholder consultation** | Joint committees  Workshops  Consultative conferences  Calls for written representations  Formal hearings  Media coverage of consultations  Social media reportage of consultations |
| **Stakeholder awareness** | Training workshops  Training materials  Publications for use with stakeholder clients/users  Website access to training materials  Social media reportage of training activities |
| **Crisis management** | Prepare agreed “scripts” for possible scenarios including response where all facts not known  Designate spokesperson(s) for 24/7 press access, and agree protocols including a “no comment” policy for non-designated individuals  Circulate communication policy within organisation and brief staff and associates  Press statements within 24 hours in response to issues  Press conferences within 24 hours in response to issues  Pre-inform partner stakeholders before statements released and conferences held  Update Website constantly with “news”  Update Twitter feed constantly with “news” and reference other hash tags |
| **Formal education** | Curricula for schools and colleges  Presentations from organisation in schools and colleges  Teaching materials  Student competitions |
| **Organisational communications** | Mission statements  Staff meetings  Emails  Internal newsletters  Communications policy guidelines  Service charters  Data and statistics pages on website |

The preceding elements are summarised below in 3.5, the Strategic Communications Framework.

3.5 Strategic Communication Framework

| Component 1: Promote Electoral Cycle  *Objective: Restore public confidence and trust of the electorate in the electoral process as overseen by MEC*. | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Targets | Key Message | Communication Approach[[4]](#footnote-5) | Means of verification |
| Political parties and independents  Non-aligned CSOs  The Public  Students and school children | **KM:** *“With the engagement of all stakeholders MEC will continue to refine the electoral process. These are the concrete actions MEC is taking to address the technical failings in the 2014 TPE. By 2016 MEC wants to have a broad consensus about the foundations for the next election.”* | * Stakeholder consultation * Participatory communication and public debate * State-citizen communication * Media partnerships * Formal education | - Media monitoring reports  - Technical reports on the electoral cycle. |

| Component 2: Confidence in Fair Elections through MEC  *Objective: Demonstrate the measures MEC takes to guarantee a fair election procedure so that there is confidence in how the vote is organised.* | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Target audience | Key Message | Communication Approach | Means of verification |
| The Public  Political parties and independents | **KM:** *“The 2019 elections will be more rigorous than ever before. These are the ways in which MEC makes sure that each vote counts equally.”* | * Community sensitisation * Participatory communication and debate * State-citizen communication * Media partnerships * Crisis management | - Media monitoring reports including the social media  - Extent to which MEC has to make corrections to rumours. |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Component 3: MEC Financial Independence  *Objective: Help mobilise government and development partner resources to support MEC operations throughout the electoral cycle*. | | | |
| Target audience | Key Message | Communication Approach | Means of verification |
| GoM  Development Partners | **KM:** *“To build a stable democracy requires committing resources year on year to organisations that build trust in the system, the legitimacy of any administration depends on foundations laid by MEC.”* | * Stakeholder consultation * Advocacy | - MEC reports on resource mobilisation |

| Component 4: MEC access and accountability  *Objective: Encourage MEC staff and commissioners to collectively uphold the principles of the organisation including strengthened responsiveness to stakeholders* | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Target audience | Key Message | Communication Approach | Means of verification |
| MEC management, staff and commissioners  The Public  Disadvantaged and marginalised | **KM:** *“These are the ways in which MEC works together to provide an accessible service for our stakeholders.”* | * Organisational communications * Participatory communication and debate | - MEC HRM reports  - media monitoring of reports on MEC’s performance. |

## 4. Implementation plan

4.1 Component 1: Promote Electoral Cycle

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Communication Approach | Responsibility | Priority | ‘15 | ‘16 | ‘17 | ‘18 | ‘19 |
| Stakeholder consultation | MEC | H[[5]](#footnote-6) |  | … | … |  |  |
| Participatory communication and debate | MEC with CSOs and Media | H |  |  |  | … |  |
| State-citizen communication | MEC with Media | H |  |  |  | … |  |
| Media partnerships | MEC with Media | H |  | … | … | … | … |
| Formal education | MEC with MoEd | M |  |  |  | … | … |

4.2 Component 2: Confidence in Fair Elections through MEC

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Communication Approach | Responsibility | Priority | ‘15 | ‘16 | ‘17 | ‘18 | ‘19 |
| Community sensitisation | MEC with CSOs | H |  |  |  |  | … |
| Participatory communication and debate | MEC with CSOs and Media | H |  |  |  |  | … |
| State-citizen communication | MEC with Media | H |  |  |  |  | … |
| Media partnerships | MEC with Media | H |  | … | … | … | … |
| Crisis management | MEC | H |  |  |  |  |  |

4.3 Component 3: MEC Financial Independence

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Communication Approach | Responsibility | Priority | ‘15 | ‘16 | ‘17 | ‘18 | ‘19 |
| Branding | MEC | M |  | … | … | … | … |
| Marketing | MEC | M |  | … | … | … | … |
| Stakeholder consultation | MEC | H |  | … | … |  |  |
| Advocacy | MEC (especially Commissioners) | M |  | … | … |  |  |

4.4 Component 4: MEC access and accountability

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Communication Approach | Responsibility | Priority | ‘15 | ‘16 | ‘17 | ‘18 | ‘19 |
| Organisational communications | MEC | M |  | … | … | … | … |
| Participatory communication and debate | MEC with CSOs and Media | M |  |  | … | … | … |

## 5. Costing tables

The following table provides indicative costs for typical activities under each communication approach. The table can be used to develop a detailed budget to implement the Communication Strategy for each component.

| Communications Approach | Specification | Unit cost | Total MK | FY15/16 | FY 16/17 | FY17/18 | FY18/19 | FY19/20 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Branding |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Organisation service statement/mandate |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Organisation event identification (banners, pop-ups, desk-top name plaques) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Organisation visibility materials (caps, badges, T-shirts etc.) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Client reminders (calendars, pens and pads) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Logo and contact details |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Logo on all major assets (vehicles, offices) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Marketing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Organisation brochure to market services for users |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Organisation mission statement and vision in publicly accessible offices |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Business cards |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Proposals for projects |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Website marketing pages |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Advocacy |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Organisation Reports |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Policy statements |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Task Forces |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Media briefings |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Representations to parliamentary committees |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Independent opinion leaders |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Elder statesman |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pressure groups and NGOs |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Participatory communication and public debate |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Radio and TV discussion and debate programmes |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Radio and TV documentaries |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Town hall debates |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Posts to social media and online forums |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Helpline |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Community sensitisation |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Regional broadcast public service announcements |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Communications using CSO local networks and outreach |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Road shows and pop-up advice centres |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Village meetings organised by chief |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Announcements at funeral gatherings |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Announcements at faith gatherings |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| State-citizen communication |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| National broadcast radio and TV public service announcements |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Newspaper notices |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Notices in public government offices |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Press releases and national news items |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Printed information (leaflets, booklets) |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Posters in public locations |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Website |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Visibility materials |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Stakeholder consultation |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Workshops |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Consultative conferences |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Calls for written representations |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Formal hearings |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Media coverage of consultations |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Social media reportage of consultations |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Crisis management |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Prepare agreed “scripts” for possible scenarios |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Designate spokesperson(s) for 24/7 press access, |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Circulate communication policy within organisation and brief staff and associates |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Press statements within 24 hours in response to issues |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Press conferences within 24 hours in response to issues |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Pre-inform partner stakeholders |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Update Website constantly with “news” |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Update Twitter feed constantly with “news” |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Formal education |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Curricula for schools and colleges |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Presentations from organisation |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Teaching materials |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Student competitions |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Organisational communications |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Mission statements |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Staff meetings |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Emails |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Internal newsletters |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Communications policy guidelines |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Service charters |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Subtotal |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total MK |  |  |  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

## 6. Monitoring and evaluation

6.1 M&E for Communications

Monitoring of the Communication Strategy consists of checking implementation of the Communication Approaches outlined in 2.4. This is relatively straightforward and can be done through activity reports either from MEC itself or through the partner CSO’s that it uses for CVE.

In the classic model of communications that seeks to address: knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP), monitoring can be equated to making sure that the target audience has been made aware of the issues. However being made aware is not necessarily sufficient to show that the Communication Strategy has been effective.

In the MEC context, what is also required it that the target audience also change their attitude following being made aware. A change in perceptions is therefore the intended impact of the different components.

Whether this change in attitude or perceptions is sufficient to change practice is moderated by the deep-seated interests of stakeholders that may be beyond the influence of the MEC communication strategy.

In this strategy, the results of each component have a number of dimensions — see 3.1. By grouping these dimensions together in terms of confidence in how MEC operates it is possible to evaluate the success of the strategy as a whole.

Measuring the overall impact of communication strategies is often done through conducting a perception survey of the target population. However for many organisations this may be difficult unless they have access to the expertise and sufficient financial resources to undertake statistically sound data collection and analysis, and are prepared to repeat the survey more than once, so that it can demonstrate change. It is therefore often more practical to formulate a feedback questionnaire for stakeholders in its stead. This can be administered at intervals using the organisation contact database.

Measuring the outcome of the Communication Strategy is a question of finding out whether the selected approaches under each component are actually being effective. It is convenient to measure this in different ways so that at least the organisation can be sure that the messages are being disseminated to the target audience. A common way to evaluate the outcomes of communication strategies is to monitor the media (usually the newspapers but also the broadcast media and internet) for mentions of the organisation itself but also the issues that it deals with. This not only provides a evolving picture of the organisation’s public image but also provides opportunities for fine tuning the strategy in response to emerging issues. Media monitoring consists of more than a file of press clippings; it should also include a simple tally of mentions of different topics for each recording period. This will allow comparisons to be made over time. Media monitoring is essential for any communication strategy that has public information dimension. Where the focus of the strategy is on a closer group of stakeholders, media monitoring will not capture success, so other methods such as reports will need to be used.

These elements can be brought together in the monitoring and evaluation framework below.

6.1.1 MEC Communication Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **MEC Communication Strategy and Implementation Plan 2015 — 2019** | | | | | | |
| **Impact** | **Indicator** | **Baseline** | **Milestone** | **Milestone** | **Target** | **Assumptions** |
| Continued participation by all stakeholders in elections through engagement in the electoral system. | 1. Increased public confidence and trust in MEC as overseer of the electoral process |  |  |  |  | Continued commitment of stakeholders to representative democracy |
| Source: MEC stakeholders feedback form | | | |
| 2.Confidence in MEC management of elections increased |  |  |  |  |
| Source: MEC stakeholders feedback form | | | |
| 3. Increased agreement that MEC needs predictable funding to build engagement |  |  |  |  |
| Source: MEC stakeholders feedback form | | | |
| 4. Confidence in MEC access and accountability increased |  |  |  |  |
| Source: MEC stakeholders feedback form | | | |
|  | | | | | | |
| **Outcome** | **Indicator** | **Baseline** | **Milestone** | **Milestone** | **Target** | **Assumptions** |
| Position MEC as the non-partisan agency that sustains engagement in the electoral system. | 1. Change in the no. of items in the mass media that demonstrate interest in the electoral cycle led by MEC |  |  |  |  | MEC’s has a continuing mandate to conduct elections in Malawi.  Elections continue to be held on a five-year cycle. |
| Source: media monitoring | | | |
| 2. Change in the no. of items in the mass media that demonstrate that MEC takes measures to ensure fair elections |  |  |  |  |
| Source: media monitoring | | | |
| 3. Change in the no. of proposals that report on MEC’s need for predictable funding to build engagement |  |  |  |  |
| Source: MEC Progress reports | | | |
| 4. Change in the no. of items in the mass media that report on MEC accessibility and accountability |  |  |  |  |
| Source: media monitoring | | | |  |
|  | | | | | | |
| **Component** | **Indicator** | **Baseline** | **Milestone** | **Milestone** | **Target** | **Assumptions** |
| 1. Promote the electoral cycle | Selected communication approaches implemented |  |  |  |  | MEC has sufficient resources to implement the communications strategy |
| Source: set in annual plan | | | |
| 2. Confidence in fair elections through MEC | Selected communication approaches implemented |  |  |  |  |
| Source: set in annual plan | | | |
| 3. MEC financial independence | Selected communication approaches implemented |  |  |  |  |
| Source: set in annual plan | | | |
| 4. MEC access and accountability | Selected communication approaches implemented |  |  |  |  |
| Source: set in annual plan | | | |

## Annex 1: Selecting approaches and activities to implement

The MEC Communication Strategy recommends four components intended to address the communication needs of the organisation according its Strategic Plan and the perceptual context it operates within. Each component consists of several communication approaches (see 3.4) that should address the issues at hand.

However the implementation of the Communication Strategy has to deal with the realities of financial resources, institutional capacity, and available time, so it may not be possible to implement *all* the elements of each approach. The following decision tree can be use to help decide which activities should be prioritised.

**For each component:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Is the selected approach appropriate? | No! | Consider an alternative approach or only use the other approaches |
|  | Yes! |  |  |
| 2. | Is each activity within the approach within the capacity of the organisation? | No! | Not do-able, try a different activity |
|  | Yes! |  |  |
| 3. | Is each achievable activity well suited for reaching the target audience for this component | No! | Not appropriate here, try a different activity |
|  | Yes! |  |  |
| 4. | Is each selected activity affordable bearing in mind the size and type of target audience | No! | Too costly for this objective, try a different activity |
|  | Yes! |  |  |
| 5. | Can the activity be implemented within the time available? | No! | Too long to produce and disseminate, use this method at a better time |
|  | Yes! |  |  |
| 6. | Is there a simple way of checking if it the activity is achieving the desired result? | No! | Impossible to monitor impact and value for money, use another activity |
|  | Yes! |  |  |
| 7. | Commission the activity! | - |  |

1. e.g. borrowing lamps from Zimbabwe to light polling stations [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. However a common experience of all BI staff is that it is hard to get coverage without directly supporting the journalist assigned to cover the story. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The dates given in the MEC strategic plan now require updating [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The recommended approaches can be fine-tuned for MEC, see Annex 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. VH = immediate, H = high, M = medium, L = low, … continues onwards through this period [↑](#footnote-ref-6)