

#ICOUNT: PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS 2019

JUNE 2018

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In 2019 South Africans will be voting in the sixth democratic General Elections. The elections will take place in the midst of general dissatisfaction amongst the majority of voters. Political parties will have to work very hard to win the support of the first time voters the majority of whom are apathetic.

#ICOUNT seminars took place in May 2018 at 20 schools in Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg and Soweto in Gauteng province. It was done in cooperation with HDI for Good. Over 2000 grade 10 and grade 11 learners attended the seminars.

Most of the schools are in the townships, some are in the suburbs. The seminar started with a theatre play by two actors with the stage names of Thandi and Sipho. Discussions followed after the play.

The presentation was done in a mix of English and local African languages.

The script was divided into 3 phases:

- Where do we come from (pre-1976) - looking at South Africa during Apartheid times, when black people did not have the right to vote;
- Where are we now (post-1994 to date) - looking at how far South Africa has come, whether life has improved as compared to pre-1994;
- Where are we going (2019 elections) - the discussion was about what kind of impact can the learners make when they actively participate in the democratic process.

At the majority of schools, everything went smoothly. When the team arrived, the venue was prepared and the

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learners were informed about the event. However, at other schools, plans were derailed because of lack of communication between the principals and teachers. At times, there were postponements and cancellations due to the bus strike and service delivery protests.

The theme #ICOUNT is aimed at affirming the youths, to show them that they are valuable and that they have a contribution to make in society. It is also to remind them that their vote carries the same weight as everybody else's. They must not underestimate their power as voters. South Africa, like most democracies, experience youth voter apathy. The majority of youths, especially first time voters, are not interested to participate in elections and general civic duties. The youths are the future; the future of South Africa is in their hands. While the youths are able to make their own decisions about which party to vote for, however, as a result of their lack of interest, they end up voting for the parties of their parents' choice. They don't take time to read the manifestoes of the political parties to see which party represents their interests best.

#ICOUNT encouraged them to participate actively in the democratic processes by voting for the political party which represents their interests best.

To vote or not to vote

Some of the reasons given for not voting were:

- our parents have been voting since 1994, but they still live in shacks;
- our parents are unemployed;
- we won't have money to pay for tertiary education when we pass grade 12;
- we live in poverty;
- there is no service delivery in our areas;
- there is high crime rate and the police doesn't help us;
- we don't get proper health care.

Some of the reasons given for voting were:

- I believe that my vote is important and I can make a difference;
- I vote for a better future;
- I vote to honour the memory of the freedom fighters that died for my freedom;

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-I vote for change.

The learners were actively engaged during discussions and they substantiated their views with good arguments. They were socially conscious, highlighting the ills they see in their community and in society in general. Some had critical views about how they can bring change in their communities. It is worth noting that as a result of peer mediation some of the learners who were initially not interested in voting had changed their minds after discussions.

The report is accessible online.



Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.
Europäische und International
Zusammenarbeit

Auslandsbüro Südafrika
60 Hume Road, Dunkeld 2196/
Johannesburg

P.O. Box 55012, Northlands
2116/ Johannesburg, Republic of
South Africa

Phone: +27 11 214 29 00
Fax: +27 11 214 29 13
info.johannesburg@kas.de