



Promoting Transparency and Public Confidence through Open Election Data

*Summary of Remarks by Chairman Ahmed Issack Hassan
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What is election data?

- Data is defined as a collection of facts from which conclusions can be drawn.
- In the electoral area, **any information related to the electoral process** – before, during and after elections – qualifies as data and **should be made available**.
- Importantly, election data constitutes more than just election results.

How do EMBs ensure transparency?

- An EMB's **website** can be an important platform for and indicator of transparency – specifically with regards to the provision of accessible election data. Not all EMBs provide important information on their websites, while others provide carefully crafted information. Commissions should be encouraged to recognize the potential of their websites as a platform for enhancing transparency and public confidence.
- The selection process and **composition of an EMB** itself should be made transparent. Citizens should know how commissioners are selected and what composition requirements entail (ex. political party representatives, ethnic diversity requirements, etc.).
- **Voter registration** is a critical component of an election and significantly determines the overall credibility of the process. Transparency in voter registration is, therefore, a necessity. EMBs can bolster transparency in voter registration by:
 - sharing population / census data;
 - uploading information online regarding registration centers and instructions for enrollment;
 - providing SMS and/or online updates on registration statuses;
 - allowing for physical inspection or verification of the voter registry by citizens; and
 - making available electronic copies of the voter registry to political parties and citizen observers, including disaggregation according to relevant demographic fields (ex. geography, gender, age, etc.)
 - Note that that negotiations or special exceptions would need to be made in order to release (or not release) private voter information to interested stakeholders seeking to conduct analysis.
- **Procedures for observer and pollwatcher accreditation** should be simple and streamlined. Online accreditation could also encourage more active participation of watchdog organizations.
 - For example, Kenya's 2013 General Elections had over 20,000 accredited citizen and international observers, and close to 6,000 media watchdogs due to simplified accreditation procedures.
- Transparency in **election day** processes should include:
 - publication of the names of polling officials (as in Kenya);
 - publication of party lists and nominated candidates for elections;

- transparency in the collection, collation and transmission of election results; and
- publication of election results data at the lowest possible level to build confidence and better ensure that losing candidates accept defeat.
- **Technology** can bolster the integrity and transparency of pre-election and election day processes, but it can also **introduce complications**.
 - For example, Kenya's new electronic results transmission often did not function as anticipated in 2013.
- In the **post-election period**, EMBs could enhance transparency by:
 - releasing annual reports on commission activities; and
 - publicizing information regarding election dispute resolution mechanisms. This would include where/who complaints can be taken to and data on the outcomes/resolutions of official complaints.
- Principles and requirements for electoral **transparency should be provided for in legal frameworks**. Failing to publish open election for citizens could therefore become a legal offense.

What is the role of election observers? How can EMBs facilitate observer engagement?

- The management and implementation of elections can be seen as the business of mistrust, distrust and suspicion. **Election observers, both citizen and international, can help in bridging the trust gap and can discredit rumors perpetrated by sore losers.**
- Observers have played important **stabilizing roles** in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia and Malawi – among other places.
- **Parallel vote tabulations** (PVTs), Swift Counts or Quick Counts conducted by citizen election observers can significantly enhance credibility in the electoral process and build public confidence in official election results. PVTs are critical in allowing citizens to have their own mechanisms for checking an EMB's work.
 - In Kenya, a PVT in 2013 conducted by the Elections Observation Group (ELOG) served to verify the extremely close presidential election results and calm tensions. The IEBC was so confident in the PVT results as to invite ELOG announce its numbers. Cooperation between citizen observers and the IEBC was ultimately advantageous for the Commission, as the quality of their work was independently verified and citizens were more likely to accept the electoral outcome.
 - PVTs require open communication between EMBs and observers, including collaboration on the provision of critical electoral information, such as polling station lists.
 - *Broadly, "If an EMB has done its work well, a PVT will validate that."*
- EMBs should allow both citizen and international observers have **easy access to accreditation**. A failure to welcome observers often signifies foul play.
- Electoral **legal frameworks should explicitly allow for observation**.