



**GLOBAL
DEMOCRACY
COALITION**



CIVIC TECH FOR ELECTORAL REFORMS

P4D - iVoting Event Report:

Tuesday: March 19, 2024

Kelvin Njoroge – [CEO and Founder iVoting](#)

Benjamin Kimwei – [IEBC](#)

Collins Kibet – [Software engineer based in UK](#)

Pamba Elsie - [The Youth Café](#)

Introduction

The P4D event, held on March 19, 2024, convened a diverse panel of experts for a successful discussion on the vital role of civic technology in bolstering electoral reforms. Through engaging dialogue, the event explored how advancements in civic tech can be harnessed to enhance the participation of youth, women, and people with disabilities (PWDs) in the electoral process.

IEBC: Electoral transition Adopting Civic Tech.

A compelling illustration was presented by Benjamin Kimwei, showcasing the Kenyan Electoral Commission's (IEBC) remarkable transformation of its electoral process. From the early days with no voter register to the modern-day biometric voter register created by advanced technology for voter registration, voter identification and electronic transmission of election results. and The IEBC utilize the latest electoral technologies from vendors, ensuring the capacity for proper maintenance and implementation.

However, reports also acknowledges that the new constitution, while successful in some aspects, hasn't fully achieved the goal of optimal youth, women, and PWDs involvement. Existing laws haven't entirely addressed the needs of a broader voter base. Challenges include low youth engagement, low voter turnout, lack of motivation to participate, and insufficiently inclusive voter rights. Additionally, economic barriers continue to hinder civic participation among minority groups.

The Youth Café: Challenges and Opportunities

The Youth Café session delved into key areas of focus in youth advocacy and policy, highlighting numerous challenges that demand attention. A concerning trend of authoritarianism taking root in governments was identified, straining democratic systems globally. Despite this, the session also noted a positive development: increased youth involvement in political processes.

The discussion emphasized the critical role of civic technology in the electoral system. By creating a more inclusive environment, civic tech can foster greater youth participation, encourage women and PWDs to embrace political and civic engagement, and bridge social and economic barriers that currently limit their involvement.

Collins Ruto: Security and Civic Engagement

Collins Ruto, a software engineer based in the U.K., addressed the critical topic of enhanced security systems in software development for elections and other essential online services. He highlighted the importance of using secure platforms like mainstream browsers, such as Chrome, which is employed by iVoting to deliver its mission of inclusive voting rights.

Ruto emphasized that advancements in software security and data protection are not only crucial for online services but also extend to voting systems. By prioritizing security, civic tech can become a powerful tool for boosting youth involvement and engagement, fostering active citizenship, and ultimately promoting greater democratic participation.

iVoting: A Catalyst for Active Democracy

Kelvin Njoroge, CEO at iVoting, underscored the potential of civic tech to cultivate a more active democracy. He shared his experience with iVoting's online platform, highlighting a notable surge in voter turnout, particularly among youth and women. Over the past seven years, the platform has attracted over 100,000 unique voters, demonstrating the significant potential of civic tech to engage young people in democratic processes.

Njoroge pointed out critical challenges hindering full democratic participation, including a lack of reforms to address low voter turnout, inefficiencies in vote counting that erode trust, and traditional methods that exclude a significant portion of the population. He emphasized that embracing new reforms focused on civic tech can significantly increase participation among youth, women, and PWDs.

Njoroge showcased the user-friendly nature of the online system, demonstrating how voters can register and cast their ballots conveniently through USSD, a mobile phone technology. This innovative approach presents a powerful and exemplary model for conducting modern elections.

Panelists and Key Points

1. [How can we ensure that the adoption of online voting systems does not disenfranchise any segment of the population?](#)

Ensuring that the adoption of online voting systems does not disenfranchise any segment of the population but requires multifaceted approaches. Firstly, introducing mobile voter registration to communities with mobility challenges ensures accessibility for those unable to settle in one place. Additionally, providing accessible voting rights to PWDs by accommodating their diverse capabilities is essential for inclusivity. Engaging the youth involves addressing various barriers to their participation, including economic constraints and social norms.

Conducting comprehensive voter education programs is crucial to facilitate a thorough understanding of the need for electoral reforms, particularly towards online voting. These educational initiatives must be adaptable to diverse demographics, including different age groups, work settings, locations, cultures, and religions. For instance, incorporating mobile money platforms can underscore the importance of democratic and civic engagement, promoting widespread participation.

2. [How can we effectively engage young people and women in discussions about online election reforms?](#)

Benjamin Kimwei emphasized the necessity for user-friendly civic tech solutions accessible to all demographics, including youth, women, and PWDs. Engaging young people and women in discussions about online election reforms requires proactive educational programs tailored to different learning institutions. Utilizing various platforms, particularly those accessible to marginalized groups, is crucial. Providing concrete materials explaining how their participation enhances democracy through online

election reforms is essential. Moreover, implementing localized solutions that cater to the specific needs of diverse communities, such as pastoralists in arid and semi-arid areas, ensures accessibility to democratic rights.

Furthermore, initiating electoral reforms from learning institutions, gradually transitioning to online voting, facilitates policy dissemination to other sectors and government leaders, fostering widespread adoption and understanding of democratic advancements.

3. What are your organization's current perspectives on the potential for online voting?

Benjamin Kimwei highlighted the significant challenges faced by Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in adopting online voting systems. The current Kenyan constitution mandates physical presence at polling stations, registration booths, and the use of paper ballots. This necessitates engaging policymakers to implement electoral reforms that support the use of civic technology in elections.

Direct online voting for all citizens could pose a significant risk, but also represents a potential milestone. A phased adoption strategy is recommended, starting with educational institutions like universities. Online voting could then be piloted with county assemblies in all 47 counties, followed by parastatals, government institutions, associations, and other organizations practicing democratic rights through electoral systems.

Based on his experience working for the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), Benjamin made several key recommendations:

- **Shift Leadership Culture:** Transition from authoritarianism to a political environment that embraces inclusion in decision-making.
- **Embrace Technological Change:** Foster a cultural shift within administrations, moving from traditional practices towards a technology-driven framework that promotes inclusivity.
- **Develop Flexible Policy Framework:** Implement a strong policy framework that prioritizes flexibility to facilitate the adoption of civic technology solutions.

These changes would create a more conducive environment for the responsible integration of online voting and other civic technologies into Kenya's electoral process.

4. What are the ethical considerations surrounding the use of AI in online voting systems?

Collins Ruto opened the discussion by highlighting the public's general understanding of AI – its ability to translate, generate, and manipulate voices, videos, and chat. He then contrasted this with the specific role of AI in elections, where the focus is on data scrutiny and inclusive democracy. He emphasized that AI should ensure all people can participate in elections according to their electoral rights.

Ruto highlighted use cases where AI can be beneficial, including for people with hearing impairments, physical challenges, and other Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). He challenged EMBs to embrace AI as a revolutionary innovation in the electoral world.

The Importance of Local AI Development:

Ruto advocated for the development and use of locally sourced AI technology. This has several advantages:

- **Personalization:** Local AI can be tailored to available resources.
- **Local Expertise:** Local engineers understand the specific needs of local citizens and data.
- **System Optimization:** Locally developed AI can be calibrated to existing systems and practices, avoiding compatibility issues.

Ruto cautioned against relying solely on external sources for AI solutions, pointing out potential challenges in system usage and calibration if not adapted to the local context.

Intelligent Systems in iVoting Data and Analytics within Civic Tech:

Kelvin Njoroge provided a valuable clarification. While iVoting does not currently employ AI, it utilizes an intelligent system that scrutinizes incoming and outgoing data. This system effectively removes unwanted and potentially intrusive external data. Njoroge's presentation serves as a positive example of how intelligent systems can benefit EMBs and tech companies involved in electoral systems.

Kelvin also addressed the potential of data and analytics in civic tech to improve voter education and outreach efforts. This approach can lead to more active solutions for civic education, particularly engaging young people with technology.

5. How can we ensure that online voting systems are user-friendly and accessible for young voters?

Pamba Elsie from The Youth Cafe emphasized the importance of fostering an environment that leverages civic technology to increase youth participation in civic and democratic practices. To achieve this, the electoral landscape needs more innovative civic tech solutions that cater to the needs of young people. These solutions should be accessible and integrate seamlessly with their daily social and economic activities.

Pamba highlights a positive outlook: youth and women are increasingly comfortable using the internet, social media, messaging apps, and mobile money transfers. This digital fluency presents an opportunity for civic tech to empower them to participate more actively in democratic processes, leading to increased voter turnout.

Discussion Highlights

The panel discussion generated a lively exchange of ideas, with several key themes emerging:

Bridging the Digital Divide: Participants acknowledged the existence of a digital divide and explored strategies to ensure equitable access to civic tech tools across all demographics. This included discussions on internet connectivity, digital literacy training, and the development of user-friendly interfaces for those with limited technological experience.

Promoting Inclusion: The discussion highlighted the importance of creating civic tech solutions that are inclusive of the specific needs of youth, women, and PWDs. Examples included voter registration platforms in accessible formats, translation services for multilingual communities, and tools that cater to different learning styles.

Data and Security Concerns: The ethical implications of data collection and usage in civic tech were explored. The discussion emphasized the need for transparent data practices, robust security measures, and user control over personal information.

Recommendations

- a. Based on the fruitful discussions, the following recommendations were put forward:
- b. Invest in accessible and user-centric design for civic tech solutions.
- c. Develop localized solutions that address the specific needs of diverse communities.
- d. Promote digital literacy initiatives to bridge the digital divide.
- e. Prioritize the inclusion of youth, women, and PWDs in the development and implementation of civic tech tools.
- f. Ensure transparent and ethical data practices within the context of electoral processes.
- g. Embrace mentorship approach in youth civic education programs

Conclusion

The P4D event provided a valuable platform for discussing the role of civic tech in fostering a more participatory democracy. By fostering collaboration and innovation, we can leverage technology to create a more inclusive and accessible electoral process for all.