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**Workshop on Information and Communication Technologies in Electoral Processes :
Assessing experiences over several electoral cycles**

**CONCEPT NOTE**

*Praia, Cape Verde*

*22-23 November 2017*

**1. Introduction**

Over the past decade, new technologies have played an increasingly integral role in the organization of elections around the world. A number of countries have turned to a variety of technological solutions in a bid to make elections more efficient, more cost-effective and to strengthen stakeholder trust at each stage of the electoral cycle. The solutions range from the use of geographic information systems to conduct boundary delimitation and the establish polling stations; the use of sophisticated databases to maintain the voter registry; the use of mobile technology for the transmission of election results; and the use of electronic voting machines for citizens to cast their ballots. In particular, biometric technology has come to play a large role in a number of electoral processes around the world during voter registration as well as during the identification of prospective voters at the polling station on election day.

The introduction of information and communications technologies (ICT) into the electoral process is generating both interest and concern among voters, as well as practitioners across the globe. Technology has undoubtedly assisted Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) in making their processes more efficient. Increasing internet penetration – even in developing countries with poor communication infrastructure – is enabling EMBs to be more effective in communicating both internally as well as with all stakeholders involved in the process.

Increasingly, technology is also playing a role in enhancing the integrity of electoral processes and strengthening trust between stakeholders. The use of biometric technology in voter registration has enabled EMBs to improve the accuracy of voters’ rolls by providing an effective mechanism to identify duplicate entries into the voter registry. The use of biometric technology to verify voters’ identities on election day has also contributed to enhancing trust in the electoral process. Similarly, technology is also providing EMBs with ways to count, tabulate and transmit elections more quickly through measures such as electronic voting or transferring election data through mobile technology. This enables election results to be announced sooner, potentially diffusing tension in closely contested elections and strengthening trust in the process. According to some research, despite its cost, biometric technology can be a worthwhile economic investment for a country even if it only decreases the likelihood of serious post-election violence by even a few percentage points.

Paradoxically, some of the earliest and keenest adopters of new electoral technologies tend to be poorer countries, often without a long history of conducting democratic elections. In these contexts, adopting new and sometimes costly technology is specifically designed to address the trust deficit between electoral stakeholders. Yet in many cases, the technology does not necessarily improve trust in the process or address the problem it aimed to resolve. In other contexts, technology has been introduced with inadequate research, planning, testing, training and voter education – resulting in either decreased trust in the process and/or increased costs to the electoral budget. Many EMBs are also faced with the challenge of maintaining and replacing software and hardware, which is raising concerns about the sustainability of some electoral technology.

With the rapid adoption of new technology by EMBs having taken place over the past decade, now is an opportune time to take stock and reflect on how technology has affected electoral administration around the world. The lessons of the past decade show that technology carries a great potential to strengthen electoral integrity, but its introduction and use must be grounded in well-designed policies, surrounded by adequate safeguards and supported by legislation that is adequate to deal with the issues that it raises. Otherwise, technological applications may lead to erosion of public confidence in electoral processes.

Though technology is a rapidly changing field, now is also an opportune time to assess emerging trends and speculate on how they may affect electoral process over the next decade. There is a need to examine how recent technological advancements could contribute to further enhancing electoral integrity and participation and how they can be integrated into the process in a sustainable manner. Similarly, cyber security is emerging as an important topic in the discussion on how to prevent electoral interference or fraud. There is a need for EMBs to share strategies and practices to deal with some of these emerging trends.

It is to reflect on these critical issues that the organizing partners have convened a workshop on New Technology in Electoral Processes in Praia, Cape Verde from 22-23 November 2017.

**2. Objectives**

The overall objective of the workshop will be to enhance participants’ capacity to ensure that ICTs contribute to strengthening the credibility, transparency and credibility of electoral processes.

Specific objectives include:

* Examining the trends related to the new technology over the past decade and assessing their impact on electoral processes;
* Providing a platform for EMBs to share lessons learned on the introduction of ICTs in elections;
* Identifying strategies to support EMBs in ensuring the sustainable introduction of new technology for elections;
* Examining emerging trends and potential risks related to new technology in elections; and
* Reflecting on possible advances in electoral technology over the next decade.

It is expected that following this activity, the organizing partners will develop a policy paper intended to provide the target audience with a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring the sustainable use of technology in electoral processes.

**3. Participants**

The workshop will bring together approximately 40 participants from Africa and the rest of the globe. Participants will include:

* Representatives of Electoral Management Bodies
* IT staff of Electoral Management Bodies
* Electoral technology experts
* Representatives from International organizations

**4. Methodology**

The workshop will take place over a two-day period and will consist of five/six thematic panel discussions. Each two-hour panel will have a dedicated theme and will include 3-4 presentations of approximately 20-30 minutes by experts to share thematic knowledge and/or experiences from selected case studies. At the end of each panel, the plenary will be invited to participate in discussions and debates on the issue concerned.

Illustrative examples of potential panels include:

1. Overview of the past decade of technology in electoral processes;
2. Utilizing ICTs in elections in the mid and long term: taking stock of experiences regarding effectiveness, sustainability, maintainability and overall impact on the electoral process over time;
3. The decision-making process of adopting new technology in the electoral process: feasibility studies, needs assessments, security, evaluation and other factors informing a final decision;
4. Procurement process: market research (including the use of open source technology), developing specifications, tendering process and drafting contracts with the vendor;
5. Building domestic capacity to manage and maintain technological solutions – lessons learned;
6. Elections & technology in the next decade: emerging trends and innovations.

Prior to the workshop, the organizers will invite EMBs from selected countries to prepare case studie presentations.

**5. Language**

The workshop will be conducted in several languages to ensure broad participation. Simultaneous interpretation will be available in English, French and Portuguese.

**6. Venue**

Praia, Cape Verde.

**7. Partners**

At present, the proposed organizing partners include:

* Comissão Nacional de Eleições (CNE) de Cabo Verde ;
* International IDEA;
* Réseau des compétences électorales francophones (RECEF) ;
* Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF).

**8. Materials**

For interested participants, background material developed by International IDEA on the topic area of elections and technology is suggested:

* International IDEA: [Introducing Electronic Voting: Essential Considerations](http://www.idea.int/publications/introducing-electronic-voting/index.cfm)
* International IDEA: [The Use of Open Source Technology in Elections](http://www.idea.int/publications/open-source-technology-in-elections/index.cfm)
* International IDEA: [Certification of ICTs in Elections](http://www.idea.int/publications/certification-of-icts-in-elections/index.cfm)
* International IDEA: [Electoral Law Reform in Africa: Insights into the Role of EMBs and Approaches to Engagements](http://www.idea.int/publications/electoral-law-reform-in-africa/index.cfm)
* International IDEA: [Open Data in Electoral Adminstration](http://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/open-data-electoral-administration)
* International IDEA: [Introducing Biometric Technology in Elections](http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/introducing-biometric-technology-in-elections.pdf)
* EC/UNDP JTF on Electoral Assistance & International IDEA: [Procurement Aspects of Introducing ICT Solutions in Electoral Processes - The Specific Case of Voter Registration](https://www.ec-undp-electoralassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/undp-contents-publications-procurement-aspects-of-introducing-ict-solutions-in-electoral-processses-English.pdf)
* [ACE Topic Area: Results Management Systems](http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/vc) (also available in [French](http://aceproject.org/ace-fr/topics/vc))
* EISA: [Voter Registration in Africa: A Comparative Analysis](https://www.eisa.org.za/pdf/vrafrica.pdf)
* [Biometric Elections in Poor Countries: Wasteful or a Worthwhile Investment](https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/biometric-elections-poor-countries-wasteful-or-worthwhile-investment.pdf)?, Center for Global Development Working Paper 435, August 2016

Additional material on elections and ICTs can be found on the ACE website in [English](http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/et/default) and [French](http://aceproject.org/ace-fr/topics/et/default).