

Country: Maldives

Theme: Voter Education for Informed and Ethical Voting

Title of The Best Practice / Case Study: Concepts followed in voter education for informed and ethical voting.

Area of Coverage: Whole country

Period of implementation: 2014-2016

Background: Elections Commission of Maldives mandate to hold elections that are democratically acceptable for all stakeholders, so that the results are considered a valid representation of the voters, while facing challenges in managing the different phases of the electoral process in an efficient way. Voter Education is an essential task to be carried out to achieve the goal. It is crucial for the right message to be received by the voters and stakeholders, where the effective and efficient concepts of voter education are required.

Brief Description of Best Practice: Voter Education programs has been conducted through various means like TV, Radio, newspaper, use of social media and conducting programs for the locals by travelling to the local islands. The program has been further extensive through road events, door-to door campaigns, use of print media (leaflets, fliers, brochures, etc.). These mechanisms have been practiced all over during the past years. With the increase in availability and usage of modern technological equipment's in daily life of people pushes Elections Commission of Maldives to introduce and expand the use of modern technology in reaching the target audience for imparting voter information and awareness campaigns. Hence the use of social media platforms came into effective. Though Maldives is a country with a comparatively small population, the people are well educated and more welcoming to the technological reforms. Middle aged people are also familiar with the new technological developments and use them in daily life works. TV/ Radio Programs Video and Audio spots about an assortment of areas on which voter education is required are broadcasted through local channels. Customized audio/video spots targeted to specific elections are also broadcasted during election cycles. The major areas which are covered in these spots include- Rights, roles and responsibilities of voters; Voters rights , No voter to be left behind campaign, Healthy campaign, Complaints mechanism , Vote busying , Gender balance and everyone's participation Use of Social Media Almost every eligible voter has a smart mobile phone on hand. Therefore ECM makes it mandatory to expand the voter information and voter awareness campaign to social media platform. Facebook ECM has it official Facebook page, via general information, voter information, awareness materials, and other election related campaigns are being promoted. This is done through the use of posters, fliers, video spots, awareness messages and banners. EC promo: A Facebook page created by elections commission of Maldives, which is used to give information as well, the pictures of the events conducted and participated are posted with the consent of the

people. This page is mainly used as a promotional page for specific awareness events hosted by ECM. Road Events Road events are conducted where leaflets and other awareness materials are distributed to the general public. Participation in events conducted by the stakeholders in the country makes the confidence level of the public towards ECM stronger. Democracy Week Democracy week is a week which was established to educate and increase the awareness of the public. During this week, there are several activities such as road events, media programs, door to door programs where representatives from Elections Commission of Maldives makes visits to every house of the specific area. Democracy Week events are broadcasted through the media channels of Maldives. In addition, it is being planned to introduce mobile application to conduct voter education and voter awareness programs. ECM introduced voter education content in its website and it is planned to introduce mobile for applications with the voter education contents. It is strongly believed that the electoral process can be improvised with technology easily, in a country like Maldives, which is welcoming to the new technological upbringing and also a large number of populations being familiar with the technological reform. Voters Day During the first Democracy week celebrated in Maldives in the year 2016, Voters day and Annual day of ECM was declared. Celebrating days like this would make the stakeholder's participation and contribution in conducting a credible election stronger.

Challenges : For voter education ECM has always faced the difficulty in reaching the all the voters and stakeholders with the information, due to budgetary issues. Maldives being a geographically dispersed country travelling throughout the country in person to deliver the messages of voter education has been a challenge faced. For the voters to cast an informed and ethical vote effective voter education is essential.

Outcome: Voter turnout has been maintained at a high rate Majority of the voters, specially the emerging voters are aware of the voting rights. The technological approach in delivering information reaches a greater population. The number of invalid votes reduced by elections.