

Country: Uganda

Theme: Role of Information and Communication Technology for Voter Education & Feedback

Title of The Best Practice / Case Study: Role of Information and Communication Technology for Voter Education and Feedback; The Electoral Commission Uganda's path to effective utilization of communication systems. Best Practice Presentation

Area of Coverage: Country Wide (Administrative Units; 112 Districts, 290 Constituencies, 1403 Sub countries, 7431 Parishads and 28,010 polling stations. Voter Population 15,277,196)

Period of implementation: 2015-2016 General Elections

Background: Due a continuous decline in voter turn-up in previous general elections (2011, 2006 and 2001) the Electoral Commission devised alternative means of reaching out to the voting population. Different ICTs mediums were used to enhance participation of voters in the electoral process. The outcome of this strategy was a high voter turn out of 62% for 2016 general elections, active citizen participation on the ICT discussion forums setup and an increased awareness on elections.

Brief Description of Best Practice: Election practitioners are often concerned with how to use unique Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) for effective Voter Education. ICTs support, speedup and streamline several procedures in the electoral process. For example, voter education, voter registration, voting, processing/tallying and transmission of results and handling electoral queries among others. When ICTs are correctly used they enhance voter education on the various electoral activities. The Electoral Commission (EC) in Uganda has re-strategized and through its voter education unit, deliberately conducted workshops with all stakeholders before commencement of an electoral activity. For every aspect of an ICT, there was voter education. The EC, during the 2015-2016 general elections used a number of ICTs, namely:- 1. Biometric Voter Verification System (BVVS) 2. Electronic Results Transmission and Dissemination System (ERTDS) 3. Online discussion platforms (Facebook page and Twitter handle) 4. EC web page and Official Email to handle queries real-time 5. Short Messaging Service (SMS) platform, Use of caller groups 6. Voter Location Slips (VLS) (Barcoded to link bio data with BVVS) 7. Electronic Mediums (Radio (FM), Television and Voter Education Drives) The Voter Education unit rolled out a strategy to use the ICTs in educating the public on various electoral activities so as to enhance/increase participation in the electoral process. Stakeholders were educated on the use of the BVVS, ERTDS, VLS, SMS and Online platforms in different workshops at various levels (National, Regional and District). Demonstrations were conducted at the district level and the EC sent out open invitations to the public all over the country. It deployed its staff to conduct the demonstrations. Based on a walk in approach, the public was able to test the BVV system. The media also picked up on this aspect and widely

publicised it. The public was urged to participate and appreciate the usability of all the ICTs. The EC aggressively publicised the exercise through electronic and print media. In addition radio talk shows, voter education drives, television skits and the EC webpage broadcasted voter education messages. This boosted voter confidence and augmented participation in the 2015-2016 general elections. It also positively impacted on the voter turnout in the various election rounds. Furthermore, electoral caller groups with staff on user platforms was established. This was purposely for easy conveyance of messages/consultation between EC officials and voters, backing up voter education. A training component; employing a Cascade Methodology with strict timelines as per the electoral road map was in addition designed for the various stakeholders (Adhoc election Officials, Voters, Political Parties, Civil Society, the Media, Government Representatives, Development Partners, INGOS/NGOs and Security). Implementation commenced at the national level with a Training of Trainers (ToT) for officials working with the EC on the ERTDS, BVVS and VLS. These trainers later trained Returning Officers (ROs) at district level in 112 locations. The ROs, thereafter trained District Information Technology officers (DITOs) and tally clerks on the ERTDS. Transmission of results (ERTDS) was real time from the district Headquarters (112 locations) to the National Tally Centre (NTC). The result of the training was that at no single time had an entity built capacity of persons in ICT platforms as during the massive training of persons in the electoral process. The training enlisted a lot of excitement within the public especially in verifying voter locations using the EC web portals and SMS services. Clearly the impact of voter education using ICT was evident.

Challenges : Limited time for training on use on the new acquired ICTs Logistical issues - retrieval of kits and loading of relevant data for the different rounds of elections Coping with skepticism and doubts of voters towards the technology Sustainability of engaging stakeholders before commencement of every electoral activity. Changing electoral laws that affect Voter Education practices

Outcome: Voter turn out of 62% from 58% in 2011 Quicker result transmission and dissemination Increased discussions on various electoral activities due to the online interactive forums activated. Prompt response to queries raised on the official Electoral Commission Email Easy location of polling station due to the availed Voter Location Slips and Bulk SMS sent out The online National Voters Register quickened verification status of voters