



**NO VOTER TO BE
LEFT BEHIND**

CONCEPT PAPER

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON VOTER EDUCATION FOR INCLUSIVE, INFORMED & ETHICAL PARTICIPATION 19TH - 21ST OCTOBER 2016, NEW DELHI, INDIA



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

BACKGROUND

“I have the power”, this realisation of the importance of the power of the fundamental right to vote and the difference it can make to their lives and the nation makes the Voter the central actor in democratic election process. Is voting just a right, a duty, a voluntary action or an empowering collective journey taken by a huge number of people deciding not the fate of the candidate but their own? Who the voter decides to vote for is their individual choice and decision, but the voter should surely and definitely participate in the election process. Can we empower, inform, engage, and facilitate the voter to do so? Can we understand their reasons and perceptions, beliefs and motivations, barriers and challenges, experiences (good, bad, ugly) and their habits, contexts and contours that shape their decision to cast or not to cast their vote? Can we motivate the voter to realise the power, feel the power, believe in that power and energise him/her to take that call that their one vote can and does make the difference. It is an immense challenge given the diversity, geography, socio-culture-faith factors, family- community dynamics, gender bias, disability and sometime just the habit of apathy, indifference and laziness. Voting is not just a physical action; it is not just a management or logistic issue; it is not just a matter of right or duty; it is harnessing “the power of one”.

Voters’ Participation in the democratic and electoral processes is integral to the successful running of any democracy and the very basis of wholesome democratic elections. Thus, it becomes an integral part of election management.

‘Inclusion’ is prioritised in article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) which stipulates that every citizen must be provided the right and opportunity, without discrimination based on distinctions of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status and without unreasonable restrictions, to vote and to be elected.

Abuse of money and muscle power in elections, destroys the level playing field. It distorts the spirit of democracy. ‘Quality electoral participation’, in terms of making an informed choice without consideration of any inducement, is the bedrock of a vibrant democracy.

Thus Inclusive Voter education needs to be given due and strong emphasis with the kind of seriousness and depth it deserves by the election management bodies. Voters’ education is not only the correct but also the most appropriate way to improve participation in a democracy

compared to any other alternative. Realizing this, several countries in fact have voters' education as part of their constitutional mandate.

Voter Education is a continuous process and has an important role in all phases of the Electoral Cycle

Stakeholders

Election Managements Bodies

All Eligible Citizens

Prospective Electors

Political Parties

NGOs and CSOs

Media

Corporate Sector

International Community

In the aforementioned backdrop, Election Commission of India proposes to organise an international conference on '**Voter Education for Inclusive, Informed and Ethical Participation**' from 19-21st October 2016.

Objectives

- to study the best practices by EMBs towards promoting inclusive, informed and ethical electoral participation; identify the roles that different stakeholders can play ; assess challenges related to voter education – and ways to tackle them
- to explore ways and means to impart electoral literacy through curricula and extra-curricula in educational institutions
- to explore successful methods of imparting electoral literacy to population outside formal sector of educational institutions
- to explore role of technology in voter education
- to look at policies and practices that can support inclusive, informed and ethical electoral participation
- to assess the impact of voter education in supporting informed and ethical participation in electoral democracy

Structure of the Conference

In order to allow for a successful Conference, the participants present experiences and successful practices in the field of voter education leading to inclusive and informed electoral participation

in their areas of work. Special initiatives for reaching out to special group of voters like defence forces, overseas citizens etc may also be presented. Other actors that are involved in electoral processes, like CSOs, Media representatives, partner departments who have worked towards participation of women, marginalised groups (e.g. people with disabilities, indigenous peoples etc) would also be able to give a perspective.

The Conference aims to showcase and elicit good practices – as well as their potential for replication in other contexts – and to provide EMBs with comparative information, data, experiences and examples to mainstream electoral literacy. Moreover, the Conference will aim at coming up with conclusions emerging from the experience of all participants on how to strengthen informed and ethical electoral participation, be it through legal frameworks or different policies.

Topics:

- I. **Electoral Literacy in formal education** : Voter education in curricula and extra curricula
- II. **Inclusive Electoral Literacy through informal education channel**: Reaching out to those outside schools and other marginalised groups i.e. Persons with Disability (PwDs), women, people working in unorganized labour sector, tribals etc)
- III. **Enhancement of participation by special categories of voters**: Outreach for defence personnel, diplomatic mission personnel, polling personnel and overseas citizens
- IV. **Role of Information and Communication Technology for Voter Education & Feedback**: Technology use for dialogue with the stakeholders including feedback, surveys etc
- V. **Voter Education for Informed and Ethical Voting**: Building awareness for quality electoral participation among voters and other stakeholders like political parties, candidates, CSOs etc

Papers on the topic are invited on select theme so as to group the participants into different thematic groups for sharing of their best practice. The papers shall also be documented in the form of a Conference Reader and shared ahead of the Conference.

A display section shall also be provided at the venue to exhibit the material being used across countries for Voter Education. Participants are required to bring along literature and tool kits that they would want to showcase and share besides the exhibits and audio-visuals for display.

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