11th Meeting of Forum of the Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA)

COUNTRY PAPER

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AFGHANISTAN

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Background

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) is the constitutional body responsible for administering and supervising all elections and referenda in Afghanistan. In fulfilling its legal mandate, the IEC has successfully conducted six elections (presidential, parliamentary, and provincial council elections) between 2009 and 2019. The population of Afghanistan is estimated to be 34 million people with 12 million eligible voters.

In order to promote meaningful participation of electoral stakeholders and build their trust and confidence in the electoral process, the IEC, during the 2019 Presidential Election, organized nationwide outreach campaigns using multi-media (i.e. print, electronic and social media) and door-to-door strategies; also convened face-to-face stakeholder consultive meetings and dialogue fora to secure feedback on critical electoral issues and share key electoral decisions through the National Election Forum, bilateral meetings and press briefings. IEC established a national call centre to address public queries; to further enhance the credibility of the electoral process and the election results, the IEC introduced reforms, including Biometric Voters Verification (BE) devices on Election Day and registration of 9.6 million voters on the voter list.

Taking into account the social context, geological constraints, security challenges and diversity of Afghanistan population and consider the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and impartiality, the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC) has used technology and media tools beside face-to-face interactive field activities to inform and motivate majority of the Afghan population. While the public awareness campaigns focusses on first time voters, special attention is given to women, youth, influential, illiterate and rural areas, nomads and minorities.

IEC Afghanistan has used the following technologies for voter awareness:

1. **Call Center (IEC Afghanistan Voter Information Call Center with short code of 190)**

The IEC Call Center or Electoral Information Center with a short code 190 is located in IEC HQ and has been operating during election period since 2008. In 2019 presidential elections, 60 operators were working in two shifts in this center.

Afghans could call and ask questions from any telecommunication phones to learn about elections in Afghanistan. About 214,761 calls were received during the 2019 presidential election.

This center was equipped with IVR system where callers could receive electoral messages when the lines were busy and after working hours.

The center is connected with HQ and provincial departments of the IEC where the operators could contact and seek accurate technical information. In addition, the call center was a good medium for the voter educators to refer challenging public questions.

According to the recent approved electoral reform policy of the IEC, this center must operate continuously to cover non-electoral period as well. As soon as the resources are available, the center will start its operation.

2. **Short Mobile Message Service (SMS)**

IEC Afghanistan has texted short messages to the public through most of the telecommunication companies directly to mobile phones as an effort to inform/educate non reachable areas through other tools.

These messages are short, quick and encouraging and have been effective when close to the election event. Around 22 million people are using mobile phones in Afghanistan.
The challenges of using this tool for public awareness is its high cost, high literacy and limited number of characters.

3. **IEC official website**: **https://www.iec.org.af/prs**

IEC official website portal is an effective public awareness tool where Afghan public can access electoral information such as regulations, procedures, IEC bord decisions, news, public outreach visual videos, printed materials, etc. In addition, voters can check their registration information by their voter ID to confirm their polling center information/location. Election Day countdown is also used to inform and encourage the voters to go to polls and vote.

4. **Use of social pages**

IEC is using social media as a medium to inform and motivate the public about voter registration and elections. IEC is currently using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube. Public awareness videos, visual materials, factsheets, posters, leaflets, activities progress and news is published through these tools. As social media is changing, IEC may use additional social media tools in the future. Following is links for IEC social media pages:

- https://www.facebook.com/AfghanistanIEC
- https://twitter.com/AfghanistanIEC
- https://www.youtube.com/AfghanistanIEC
- https://www.instagram.com/AfghanistanIEC

Facebook Live has also been used to cover press conferences and meetings with stakeholders.

The advantages of using social media include easy and consistent access, saving on advertising costs, sending messages to specific audiences, receiving feedback, and the ability to monitor and edit online. The disadvantages include the limited number of followers.

Potential additional public awareness technologies that might be used future elections

1. **Information/infographic IOS and android applications**

IEC is reviewing to use mobile informative/infographic applications for voter awareness in the future. After the pilot project is completed, IEC will launch these applications.

These applications are cost effective, easy to use and can send notifications to the public when needed. In addition, the stakeholders can receive updates faster and could use and pass it on. It can collect feedbacks and IEC could send answers to FAQs. Furthermore, IEC field staff and civic educators can receive updated materials to educate the public.

2. Use of Warden SMS and Bulk SMS

Warden SMS is one of the cost-effective tools that could be used for voter awareness in Afghanistan where other tools cannot reach.

It is working in a cascade messaging channel from HQ to 34 provincial offices from where it can be passed to provincial public outreach officers and trainers and then to civic educators and from civic educators to influential and public.

Bulk SMS could be used in two methods. First, to send text messages to all subscribers of telephone networks and second, to send it to a number of influential with multiplier impact.

The first method is expensive due to the large number of subscribers and could be only afforted with limited number of messages. However, with second method could be widely used and more messages can be sent. However, it may not reach every one holding mobile phones.

3. Using a robotic call system or Robo Calls

This system conveys short voice messages through direct calls to the public. A pilot project would be required to test the system. This system is also an expensive option.

4. Ringtones to transmit brand music or voice messages

The recorded brand music or voice message is transmitted to the contacts until the calls are connected. This option is also expensive and requires a costly budget.

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COUNTRY PAPER

BANGLADESH

Use of Technology in Election Management of Bangladesh

Country Paper of Election Commission of Bangladesh

Use of Technology in Election Management of Bangladesh

1. Introduction

The application of electoral technology in the process of elections is envisioned for improving efficiency, integrating various systems, lowering costs by curtailing manual procedures, and thus ensuring accuracy. The Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) started using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) before the 8th parliamentary elections. Since then, ICT is being used in parliamentary elections and local government elections of different tiers. The preparation of a digital voter list and issuance of NID cards came under two separate Acts of 2009 and 2010 respectively. The voter list is updated every year and preserved in a central database. The database has stored nearly 120 million registered voters by 2021.

The Covid pandemic could not deter the BEC from performing day-to-day activities. The BEC has conducted about 434 elections of different tiers during the crises of the Covid pandemic. The EVM has been used in 7 parliamentary by-elections. The BEC has also conducted elections of 3 City Corporation, 104 Pouroshava (Municipality), 3 Upazila Parishad (Sub-district Council), and 21 Union Parishad (Union Council) by using EVM. In addition, elections in the District Councils and a large number of by-elections in the vacant positions of these local government bodies have been conducted during the covid situation since March 2020 when this deadly virus started surging in Bangladesh.

2. Contribution of BEC in FEMBoSA

The Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia (FEMBoSA) started its journey with the initiative of BEC in 2010. The BEC was given the opportunity of creating a logo for the Forum and it has made the logo on time. The FEMBoSA has approved in 2013. The BEC started celebrating the Voters' Day every year on 2nd March since 2019. The BEC undertakes voter education in the school-level textbook, establishes special provisions for persons with disabilities where possible, adopts and develops modern technology for managing free and fair elections, addresses election disputes and other activities.

The BEC was given the responsibility to develop a website for the Forum. It has designed & developed the website and hosted it as named www.fembosa.org.

3. Principles on Technology Adoption

The BEC follows guiding principles for adopting technologies in the electoral process:

- maintains transparency,
- builds up trust and confidence of stakeholders,
- considers the impact of introducing technologies,
- ensures security issues

- addresses ethical behavior,
- ensures accurate results, efficiency, and sustainability
- reforms election regulations to adapt to technology
- protects justice & equality

4. Use of Technology in Pre-Election

4.1. **Voter Registration**

The constitutional responsibility of preparing a single electoral roll of the voters of the country is bestowed upon the BEC. The BEC has maintained an electoral roll database with voter information, photograph, and biometric features since 2007. The BEC uses ABIS (Automated Biometric Identification System) to check each new registration, de-duplication processed first and then endorsed in database. All field offices are connected to Data Center (DC) and Disaster Recovery System (DRS) through VPN and are fully equipped with Registration Kits (i.e. laptops, desktop, scanner, fingerprint scanner, signature pad, HD digital camera, etc.). The BEC has also established an SMS gateway to provide necessary services to voters.

Voter registration is a continuous process. Any citizen can be registered as voter at any time at his/her place of residence. The enumerators visit door to door for updating the electoral roll to find the eligible person for getting registered as voter. Inclusion of new voters, correction and migration of existing voters, omission of deceased voters, etc. are also accomplished. Major works of voter registration and national identity registration have come under a digital system.

4.2. **GIS-Based Delimitation Tool**

Bangladesh Parliament consists of 300 constituencies. The delimitations of the constituencies are done after each population census under the provisions of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Delimitation of Constituencies Ordinance, 1976 applying GIS-based solution.

4.3. **Polling Center and Polling Personnel Management System**

The BEC manages the polling center through Polling Center Management System. This database contains information of 42000 polling centres used in the elections. The information of polling centre is used in the Result Management System. The BEC also maintains a database of polling personnel for locating them in future elections.

4.4. **Election Schedule Management System**

The BEC uses the Election Schedule Management System (ESMS). This system automatically generates an election calendar. The date of swearing-in of the winning candidate, the date of publication of the gazette, the date of the first meeting, lawsuit information (if any), and delimitation information (if any) are added after the publication of the results of elections.

4.5. **Online nomination paper submission**

A candidate can submit nomination papers online and can collect the required documents through the Online Nomination Submission System (ONSS). This system was considered useful during the corona situation. A candidate, under this system, needs to enter the link to submit nomination papers online from the Election Commission Secretariat website (www.ecs.gov.bd) and get them registered. The Returning Officer performs other functions to ensure receipt, confirmation, verification, selection, appeal, withdrawal of candidature, and allotment of symbols. The candidate can see the information from the web portal.

4.6. **Candidate Information Management System (CIMS)**

Information of candidates can be collected and preserved by CIMS. Scrutiny of nomination papers, verification of candidate information through an electoral database, candidacy withdrawal, appeal information, and symbol allocation information, etc. have to be entered in CIMS from the Returning Office within the stipulated time.

The Basic features of CIMS:

- Candidate Information
  - basic information with the photograph
  - personal information
  - asset information
- Electronic File Management of Candidates
  - storage and retrieval of documents like nomination paper, asset disclosure, Income tax return, etc.
- Tracking decisions such as acceptance and rejection of candidate, appeal, etc. made by EC
- NID Verification

The system automatically communicates with the National Identification database service and compares the candidate, proposer, and seconder information which helps the authority to take a decision

The CIMS helps the BEC work efficiently by generating official forms and Management Information System (MIS) reports. The CIMS ensures transparency in the election process by publishing candidate's disclosures on the website.

4.7. **Polling Center Information through SMS, Website, and Call-center**

Polling centres are set on the basis of the proximity of voters' places of residence. A voter can get the polling center information through SMS, website, and call-center. A voter can send their PIN through SMS or can log into the website and provide their PIN on a particular webpage with relevant particulars. In return, the telecom operator/service provider provides the name of the voter, voter number, serial number, and name of the polling centre.

5. Use of Technology on Election Day

5.1. **Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)**

The BEC is using EVM in elections. The BEC has two units: the control unit and the ballot unit. In addition, a monitor is set with the control unit for verification of voters to display their particulars with photographs. These units are joined together by a cable, not through Internet devices. It is therefore an offline system. A voter is identified by fingerprint which prevents fake voting. The polling officer electronically transmits the ballot to the ballot unit kept inside a secret voting compartment for the voter.

Features of EVM

- sophisticated and upgraded software and hardware,
- voter identification through fingerprint, NID number, smart card or voter number, and issuance of the ballot through Control Unit for casting vote,
- showing only the symbol of the candidate on the ballot unit to whom a voter chooses to vote for,
- The EVM cannot be operational before the time programmed in,
- being offline system no hacking is possible,
- password and fingerprint protected-can only be operated by an authorized person,
- the biometric verification system allows only eligible voters to cast vote and none else,
- the results of the poll can be made public immediately after closure of voting, and
- use of VVDAT (Voters Verifiable Digital Audit Trail) for storing the electronic ballots for legal verification or audit, if any.

5.2. **Using of Tab (App)**

An online system has been introduced for collecting the instant situation of a polling centre, voter turnout, and results through a portable device (Tab). It has provided a facility to the Election Commission for taking immediate remedial action.

- In case of any incident, the presiding officer at the polling booth can send details of the incident with photograph or video to the central system using App in Tab
- The BEC, RO, and ARO can monitor all polling stations from the dashboard through a monitoring software system and take necessary steps
- The polling stations are connected with secured VPN to operate the App to avoid unauthorized user access, and

- The App is incorporated with the Result Management System (RMS) to create and publish election results quickly and accurately and send the result to BEC.

6. Use of Technology in Post-Election

Result Management System

A web-based Result Management System (RMS) has been developed for making results available in public. The center-based results of the election are transmitted through RMS to the office of the Returning Officer.

Basic features of the system:

- Entry of data attached with a scanned image of result sheet,
- Elimination of manual calculation and aggregation,
- Automatic generation of "Barta Sheet" a progressive result sheet
- Monitoring of progression of results
- Detection of errors and efficient resolution
    - Automated checks
    - Manual checks
- Tracking and auditing user activities
- Automatic offline and online operation mode
- Consolidation of results

7. Use of Technology round the year

7.1. General Administration

BEC has its secretariat located in Dhaka and field offices in 10 regions, 64 districts, 519 sub-districts (Upazilas/Tanas offices). All field offices are connected with the Secretariat via a secured VPN. The BEC uses an optical fiber network at the district level and a mobile data network at the Upazila level as a VPN. The offices on the grounds are equipped with ICT tools. The BEC has established Server Stations in the field offices for providing operational facilities of voter enrollment and National Identification Card (NID) related activities

7.2. Smart NID Card

The BEC has created a database of 80 million voters in 2007. The NID card came into generating as a by-product of digital voter enrollment. The NID became an important document for the citizens to use for various social and government purposes. Subsequently, the NID cards have been improved into Smart Cards based on advanced technology.

Features of Smart NID

- 25 different security features are incorporated in 3 layers to prevent forgery and to attune the internationally recognized standards;
- 100% polycarbonate materials in 5 layers are used to safeguard 10 years lifespan.
- Personal information engraved by laser to protect replications through normal printers
- Transparent hologram produced by electron method is embedded
- Personal information with the bearer's biometrics and photograph is stored inside the chip digitally. The operating system of the smart card can run standalone applications too.
- Information stored in the smart NID can be retrieved through chip readers, 2D Barcode, and Machine-Readable Zone readers.
- Data stored in compliance with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).
- Around 20 certifications have been achieved to maintain international standards and compliances.

7.3. **Interactive SMS service**

BEC introduced a toll-free SMS Number (105)**.** Voters can have their polling station information by sending voter number/NID number. Voters are informed through SMS about their registration status and status of different stages of corrections/re-issue of NID.

Conclusion

The BEC applies modern technologies in the processes of elections to make sure transparency and for achieving the trust and confidence of the citizens. Conducting elections amid the Covid pandemic has been challenging for countries across the world. The BEC made some adjustments by applying ICT and increases online activities to address the challenges. Moreover, the BEC is working on alternative voting procedures like applying postal voting system based on technology, online voting, and others to protect voters and polling personnel from affecting the virus.

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COUNTRY PAPER

INDIA

Use of Technology in Elections

Election Commission of India

Concept Note for 11TH FEMBoSA Meeting

The election to the Bihar legislative assembly in 2020 and followed by 5 states assembly elections in 2021 was unprecedented in several ways. First, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was apprehension whether the polls would be possible at all. Later, several political parties clamoured for postponing the elections.

The Election Commission of India (ECI), after initial doubts, was inspired by the successful experiences of many countries, especially South Korea, which conducted its national elections in the midst of the pandemic with great success — and the highest-ever turnout. As many as 34 countries have conducted elections to their national assembly or presidential post while being engaged in the battle against the novel coronavirus.

To leave nothing to chance, the ECI consulted its counterparts in several countries and asked them to share their experiences before deciding to overrule all objections and go ahead with the elections. It did well to test the ground with Rajya Sabha polls as well as legislative council elections in various states under COVID-specific guidelines.

Equipped with such knowledge as well as its own experiences, the ECI issued COVID guidelines in August for the Bihar assembly polls. Besides the usual norms related to sanitizing and social distancing, these guidelines included a reduction in the limit of electors per polling booth to 1,000, from the current 1,500, in order to prevent overcrowding.

The consequent addition of nearly 40,000 extra polling stations meant as many additional EVMs. To avoid crowding at the counting centres, the counting tables were reduced to seven per hall from 14.

Door-to-door canvassing was restricted to groups of five persons. Convoys of vehicles were to be broken after every five vehicles, instead of 10. The number of participants at the public meetings were restricted to that prescribed by the disaster management authority. Online facilities were provided for nominations, filing of affidavits and security deposits.

The Opposition parties highlighted the possibility of voter turnout going down due to the pandemic. The ECI's answer to this was the decision to extend the postal ballot option to senior citizens over the age of 80, COVID-positive patients, persons with disabilities and voters employed in essential

services, along with making use of its now famous SVEEP (Systematic Voter Education for Electoral Participation) programme. A satisfactory voter turnout proved the commission right.

Technology also played a major role in conducting free, fair, participative and safe elections during pandemic. The Election Commission of India took several new initiatives in the field of Technology to avoid mass gathering and follow Covid-19 guidelines for social distancing. Same as has been described below

Use of Technology in Election during pandemic

Web Application for Online Nomination

A facility has been provided for the Candidates to make online data entry of their personal details in the nomination form and the affidavit (Form-26) through ECI suvidha portal. Validation checks at each step of the process will help the candidates to fill the form in proper format and without errors. The facility for online payment of security deposit by the candidates is also available through the same suvidha portal.

Voter Helpline Mobile App

Android and iOS based mobile App called Voter Helpline App helped electors to enroll for New Voter Registration. Users can track the status of the application with the provided reference number. Users can also apply for transfer/shitting/objection/transposition. Electoral search helps users to search their name in the electoral Roll. Users may also lodge complaints and track the status of their complaint.

Result has been disseminated through this App on counting Day in real time round wise through data entered by returning officers from counting centers.

Booth App

Mobile App facilitates faster identification of Voter using encrypted QR code from the digital marked copy of the electors. This reduces the queue, helps in faster polling and allows error-free recording of poll turnout without manual intervention.

The process consists of the creation of encrypted QR code which is printed in the Photo Voter Slips. The voter presents with the QR coded slips at the reception of the polling centre. The Booth level officer scans the QR code and allows entry of the voters whose names are listed. Inside the Polling

Station, the polling official again scans the QR code to verify the identity of the voter before allowing the voter to poll. Polling Official marks the entry of the voter inside the polling station using the booth app in the mobile phone.

The recorded entries are then transmitted back to the central server of the ECI. The returning Officer gets to view the information rich dashboard in a real-time voter turnout, events and incidences and various poll events.

On the other hand, the Presiding Officer enters and records all the ancillary activities like dispatch details, mock poll, poll start and poll end. All types of incidents and events are also recorded from the mobile app.

The sector magistrate monitors the poll turnout in all his allocated Polling Stations and does the EVM replacement through the mobile app. He uses the reserve machines from his stock and replaces the deployed one due to malfunction/replacement requests.

GARUDA Mobile App for BLOs

Mobile App developed for BLO (Booth Level Officers) to verify and process the online submitted elector registration forms. Using this App BLOs may view the details of the application, view the uploaded documents for Address and Age verification. App was very useful during pandemic to avoid physical contact with users. App also includes features for BLO to verify AMF (Assured minimum facilities) and EMF (extended minimum facilities) for Polling Booth. App also capture Latitude and Longitude of Polling Station using Google Maps which helps electors to locate their polling stations through Mobile App to reach the Polling Booth.

COUNTRY PAPER

MALDIVES

Use of Technology for Improving Efficiency and Credibility of Elections

Country Paper of Election Commission of Maldives

Use of Technology for Improving Efficiency and Credibility of Elections

Introduction

In achieving efficiency and credibility of elections with the use of technology Elections Commission of Maldives (ECM) intended to enhance and develop some modules of our current Election Management System (hereafter referred as EMS) for modernizing the electoral process by progressively integrating appropriate technology in all areas from electoral registration to declaration of results. Besides increasing the efficiency of the election process, these modules of EMS is also intended for minimizing human intervention which is a very much needed scenario with the current pandemic situation. This also increased transparency and accountability within the electoral process.

With our current system, we are concentrating on implementing technology around the existing paper ballot system which is a very decentralized and trusted system with our voters in the Maldives. And well commended process by our international observed bodies. This method has shown the efficiency with comparison to the elections conducted from 2008 till now, electorates waited less time in at the queue to cast their votes. They know where they are registered easily through their mobile phones and web-based platforms. The quires that's been logged at 1414, hot line has been reduced with the new information published on the web site.

With a new online process of re-registration process which is on trial now to be used on the Bi-Election which is going to be held on 7th of August 2021. Along with these developments there are three specific areas on online enrolment portals for Observers, Monitors, Candidates and their representatives and ballot station Officials which are being collected through mail currently.
Since these processes is more of a manual process of retrieving the attachments and printing the documents and manual receiving of forms personally from the applicants now.

These applications are being developed using a modular approach, with the most critical modules being prioritized in to the development flow. And our goal is to implement these processes for the next Presidential Elections on 2023, and use these tools for testing with the upcoming small bi-elections in between.

Project Description

Management and administration of elections EMS is designed to provide an online web-based solution for the following areas of Elections Commission of Maldives (ECM).

- Voter Registration and re-registration
    - Online Voters re-registration portal
- Result processing
    - Authentication and entry of temporary results directly from ballot stations, and sending results to main headquarters, through mobile platforms.
    - Dashboard progress of results as being received (currently received acceptance been managed at HQ)
- 1414 hotline module to facilitate answering calls more efficiently and with accurate information. This module will also allow various division of the EC to easily disseminate timely information to the 1414 hotline staff.
- A Candidate online registration tool to handle the process of registration of candidates participating in an election.
- An online portal for recruitment of Elections Staff for election processes through all areas of the country.
- An online portal for recruitment of Observers and monitors locally and internationally.
- A real-time ballot progresses

OVERALL PROJECT GOALS

- To develop a web-online based infrastructure to automate elections related tasks.
- To develop a set of supportive software to sustain the collaborative work with the Election commission.
- To minimize human intervention with web online portals, for voter's re- registration.
- To develop online tool to help increase reliability and decrease error in electoral registry
- To enhance current tools for election coordination task.
- To enhance current candidate management system.
- To enhance existing result processing system and minimized the result processing time.
- To enhance existing way to manage elections complaints
- To enhance real-time ballot progress reporting system.
- To develop an effective elections hotline information portal.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

This project anticipated to:

- Facilitate in managing candidates, monitors, candidate's representative, observers for an election and also provide their history for previous elections, and management of multiple entries.
- Improve candidate, monitors, candidate's representative, and observers-based statistics.
- Improve management of voter's registry.
- Make re-registration process more accessible to electorates.
- Improve efficiency of voter identification at ballot station.
- Improve security of electorates' registry.
- Improve re-registration process with tools of tracing update events and logging every task.
- Improve efficiency of elections hotline service.
- Improve and enhance the political party registry with traceable history and event logging.
- Minimize result processing time.
- Provide executive level interface to be updated with all the election tasks and its progress.
- Last but not least minimizing human intervention and with the current pandemic situation that we are facing now through the globe.

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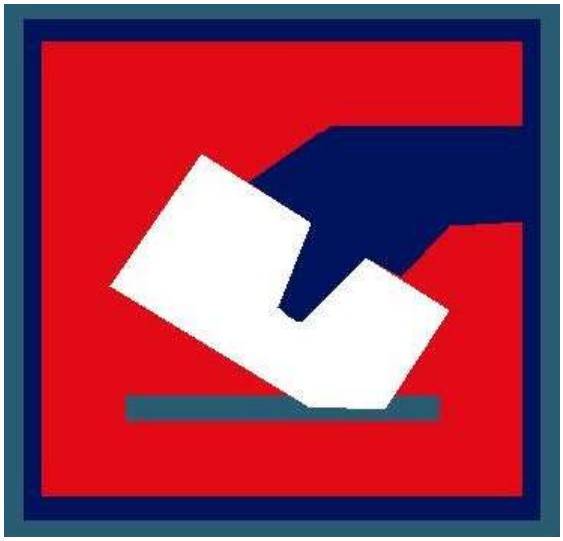
COUNTRY PAPER



NEPAL

Use of Technology to Improve the Capacity of Stakeholders in the Election Process

Country Paper of Election Commission of Nepal

Use of Technology to Improve the Capacity of Stakeholders in the Election Process

Election Commission of Nepal

The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) is a constitutional Election Management Body (EMB) in Nepal. It has a Chief Commissioner and four Election Commissioners supported by the secretariat to implement the functions, duties, powers and policy decisions of the Commission. The Constitution of Nepal has made arrangements about the Election Commission in Section 24, articles 245 to 247. The constitution has embraced a competitive multiparty democratic system, adult franchise, and periodic elections as fundamental guiding principles of democracy. Depending on the constitutional provisions, the Commission has the responsibility to conduct the elections of different tiers – federal, provincial, and local bodies – as per the stipulated electoral systems. Constitutionally the Commission prepares the electoral roll and conducts, manages, supervises, directs, and controls the elections to the President, Vice-President, members of the Federal Parliament, members of State Assemblies, and members of Local-level along with holding referendums on a matter of national importance.

Initiatives of the Commission to improve the capacity of Stakeholders

Participants in the election process such as the officials of the EMB, ministries/departments of the federal government, provincial government and local governments, security agencies, political parties, candidates, members of parliament, members of legislative assemblies, entities responsible for electoral dispute resolution, judicial bodies, voters and the media are the stakeholders of the election process. The Election Commission of Nepal has been working to enhance the sanctity of elections in Nepal by managing free, fair, impartial, credible, and economic elections with a special focus on promoting the participation of the voters in the electoral processes. For this, the arrangements on all the three dimensions of capacity development - at the policy, institutional and program levels are continuously in operation.

At the Policy Level

The Commission is implementing its third Strategic Plan while the Commission has already completed two Strategic Plans. The achievements and outcomes attained through the implementation of the first and second strategic plans have been of great significance. They are in the areas of institutional strengthening and capacity development through the use of technology

in the election. This enabled ECN to conduct periodic elections in a fair, free, impartial, professional, and credible manner. The two previous Constituent Assembly elections and the 2017 elections of the President, the Vice-president, the National Assembly, the House of Representatives, Provincial Assemblies, and the local level elections were all completed on time. The objectives of the Third Strategic Plan are to increase the participation of citizens, and coordination and cooperation of stakeholders in elections, and increasing the institutional capacity and professional skill of ECN. The Commission has used the Strategic Plan as a fundamental guiding document in its operation. Likewise, ECN has formulated Gender and Inclusion Policy,2021 and Social Media Policy, 2021 and is implementing those policies. Similarly, Social Engagement Policy is also being drafted which is aimed towards the capacity enhancement of stakeholders.

At the institutional level

The Commission has already set up and operated Electoral Education and Information Center (EEIC). Similarly, the commission has established five EEICs in five provinces of the country to impart both theoretical and applied electoral education to stakeholders focusing on human rights, civic rights and duties, election procedures, and mock polling. The Center also provides a knowledge management framework and electoral references for the stakeholders interested in studying in the area of democracy and elections.

At the program and project level

The Commission has used different approaches to operationalize the stakeholder capacity improvement at the field level and some of the initiatives include modern Information Technology (IT) based approach, curriculum approach, cascaded training approach, out-reach approach, social interaction approach and other approaches.

1. **IT-based approach**

    - **Technology for Registration of Voters:** The registration of voters is done using the Biometric Based Voter Registration System (BBVRS). This system captures the fingerprints, faces, and signatures of each voter for registration. Voter registration is done from each district and timely update is done at the central database. Likewise, voter registration is also done through Area Administration Office and District Administration Office. The registered voters get Quick Response (QR) Code Based Voter ID Cards. ECN is planning to implement an online voter registration system in the coming days.

- **Technology for Regulation of Party and Candidates**: ECN has already used software for the management of election-complaint expenses, and electoral dispute resolution software. Currently, ECN is in the process of preparing political parties regulation software.

- **Technology for Reaching Voters:** The use of a Mobile Application named "Election" and social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook has been prioritized for electoral education. The application also allows the users to get certificates from ECN after the completion of the quiz. This approach was experienced to be much effective in the election period. ECN has an official website where information regarding all the aspects of the election cycle is updated regularly. Users can search the "Voter Information" right on the website. Likewise, broadcasting of election-related education and information through radio and television programmes is done especially during the election period. The display system is in use in the secretariat and the provinces to disseminate vital information related to ECN.

- **Technology for Voting Operations:** During the election period, every task from candidate registration to vote-counting is captured by the information system. The processes might be physical but the data is stored in the online system as soon as it is generated. ECN employs SMS Based Event Tracking System to track the events related to polling. The Command-and-Control Centre at the ECN Secretariat can view the statistics related to election-day events by using this system. Likewise, ECN has an Election Result Information System (ERIS) for the management of election results.

- **Technology for polling stations and counters:** ECN is implementing a Geographical Information System (GIS) based system for the management of polling stations and counters.

2. **Curriculum approach**

This initiative is being used in the school level, the university level and the competitive examinations conducted by the Public Service Commission (PSC). At the university level, the election and democracy content is being discussed to be kept in the course of political science. Similarly, ECN had requested the PSC to incorporate election-related contents in the syllabus of Competitive examinations of various levels. The Commission feels this approach becomes effective as all the youths studying in schools and universities and those preparing for the competitive examinations have to compulsorily study the democracy and election-related contents.

3. **Cascaded training approach**

This includes first giving training to the teachers of Social Studies subject who then impart their electoral knowledge and information to the students. This approach seems to be more effective for imparting electoral education to the youths as the teachers usually remain as permanent goodwill and interactive agent of the Commission working in schools and they educate different batches of the students with updated electoral information. It has multiplier effects in imparting electoral education.

4. **Outreach education approach**

This initiative has especially been used to reach the unreached for electoral education. It has targeted mostly the youths studying in public schools who, due to resources and other constraints, cannot visit the Electoral Education and Information Center (EEIC) of the Commission for electoral education. This approach uses a team of educators with necessary contents and logistics such as brochures, television, touchpads, and polling materials who then visit the schools and impart education based on interactive learning along with conducting mock polling.

5. **Social interaction approach**

This is a holistic initiative of the Commission in which Voter Education Volunteers and community-based organizations at the local level are being mobilized to expand electoral education for all. They interact with the local people in the local communities. Similarly, ECN also conducts several capacity-building programmes to educate the representatives of political parties, journalists, members of constitutional bodies, officials of ECN, other government officials, and various other stakeholders regarding various aspects of the electoral cycle.

6. **Other approaches**

ECN has asked the District Election Offices to appoint gender and inclusion (GI) focal persons who are required to play an important role in the implementation of GI Policy. Likewise, the political parties having elected representatives at the federal, provincial and local levels were also asked to nominate GI focal persons with whom ECN shall communicate to implement the provisions of the GI Policy.

Concluding note

Election Commission of Nepal is an independent and constitutional body in Nepal and it has been focusing on developing the capacity of its stakeholders through its periodic Strategic Plans, GI Policy, Social Media Policy, institutional setup, and different educational and outreach programs based on the use of modern information technology, social interactions, training, and school curriculum. ECN is studying the possibilities of online voting systems for the voters staying abroad. ECN is in the formulation stage of its Civic Engagement Policy which will be of vital importance for the capacity development of its stakeholders. Electoral reform is a continuous process. Taking that into account, ECN is making efforts to adopt new technologies and globally applicable practices in the electoral system. The Commission will continuously focus on expanding the use of technology for the capacity development of its stakeholders in the future. ECN is looking forward to mutual collaboration with Election Management Bodies (EMBs) of South Asia to enrich the electoral system.

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COUNTRY PAPER

SRI LANKA

Use of Technology for Media Monitoring, Including Social Media during Elections in Sri Lanka

Country Paper of Sri Lanka

Use of Technology for Media Monitoring, Including Social Media during Elections in Sri Lanka

Introduction

Technology has infiltrated every aspect of citizens' lives, changing the way they work, learn and elect their representatives to the respective elected bodies. Technology has become the finest enabler of media. In fact, the evolution of media has been intrinsically associated with technology. Many modes of mass communication such as radio, television, print media and social media provide information that is fundamental to the political choices of many citizens.

In nations with long democratic traditions and a free media, a number of safeguards have evolved to protect freedom of speech, media freedom and right to information of citizens. It also presents a synthesis of lessons learned in the hope of providing useful assistance to those who are prepared to monitor the media under a wide variety of circumstances, with varying degrees of experience and resources.

The Election Commission of Sri Lanka has a primary mission of raising critical consciousness among all stakeholders, ensuring the protection of the rights of the people, conducting free, fair and credible elections efficiently and effectively, safeguarding the sovereignty of the people and universal franchise based on democratic principles. Therefore, the Election Commission is empowered to perform the duties and functions of conducting elections and carrying out annual enumeration for registration of electors for the purpose of elections in accordance with the relevant laws.

Use of Social Media in Elections

Nowadays, especially among those under the age of 40 years, social media seems to be becoming more and more important as news sources. In addition, there are about 6 million active Facebook users in Sri Lanka.

Those who need to register as electors for the first time and those who are interested to receive electoral information are the prime users of social media at the same time. Recognizing this phenomenon, the strategic plan of the Election Commission emphasizes the need to use social media at the Election Commission, also a monitoring mechanism for media during elections. Therefore, a Strategy for Social Media has been documented and gradually implemented in stages.

Furthermore, the Election Commission of Sri Lanka has an official Facebook page named as **Election Commission of Sri Lanka** which communicates important messages to the general public on voter registration as well as election related information when required. The link **Tell Commission** answers the queries of general public regarding the election domain providing an effective and efficient public service through Facebook messenger. It also receives complaints from the general public in Sinhala or Tamil, the two official languages and also in English. The **YouTube** channel is also used to disseminate election related information in a clear, easily comprehensible manner to educate more Sri Lankan citizens about voter registration, political party registration and voting.

Generally, the most elementary and popular election campaigns are public rallies and political party meetings, educating voters about the choices before them and mobilize citizen participation. Public campaigns are also useful to bring new players into the political arena. During the Parliamentary Election held in 2020 in Sri Lanka, it was not conducive for political public campaign amidst responding to the Covid-19 pandemic in a way to prevent the spread of the virus while protecting and respecting democratic practices. Public campaigning which usually uses multiple modes of public intervention such as meetings and greetings, door to door visits, speech events, had to be reconsidered to minimize the spread of the Covid 19 virus. Therefore, many traditional methods including public gatherings and written media had to be immediately replaced by social media campaigns, which were costlier than traditional campaigning methods.

Understanding what was happening across the country was the first fundamental step in safeguarding the universal franchise of Sri Lankan citizens. In the midst of the Covid-19 epidemic, the public should be allowed to learn as safely and securely as possible about the candidates' policies and plans through the media, in order to obtain adequate information and ensure a level playing field.

Media monitoring helped the Election Commission to stay up to date with the latest trends without utilizing much of the Election Commission’s resources. It also helped the Election Commission to manage the reputation of the organization as well as to respond to important situations pertaining to Elections. A media monitoring project was commenced by considering the possible factors that could lead to improper coverage of public matters such as direct censorship, media self-censorship that arises out of fear of being offended by government or private interests, or inadequate access to government or political sources.

Electronic Media/Social Media Monitoring in Sri Lanka

Giving the numbers (volume) and diversity of operators in both electronic media and social media and observing their content and activates during the election period are always tedious and challenging. However, during the past few elections, the Election Commission of Sri Lanka, with the support of different stakeholders, had made an attempt to involve in Electronic and Social Media observation.

Television and Radio

The current television monitoring process focuses primarily on News bulletins of popular free to air television channels. However, majority are left out including satellite and other direct to home channels, other than few numbers of channels monitored. Department of Government Information and Ministry of Media handled the responsibility of television monitoring on the instruction of Election Commission of Sri Lanka.

The main indicator used for observation is the time allocated for each political party/candidate during the news bulletin of each channel with the assumption that equal time distribution ensures fair opportunity for all contesters. Other than the time allocation, substances of the content of news bulletin have already been monitored to identify any content that is harmful or disadvantageous to any contender.

Though there are many loopholes in the process and scale is minute compare to whole operation it has been observed that this intervention is strategically advantageous as it create some psychological barrier in the news rooms for unfair and unlawful contents. To prevent such mistakes from happening again, tools such as 'naming and shaming' can be used as soon as the wrong media action is observed.

In the recent Elections, radio content has not been systematically monitored due to limited volume unless absolutely necessary.

Social Media

Due to the volume and diversity of involvements, social media monitoring becomes a task that no organization can do. However, the following different strategies were used to mitigate impact of social media to certain extent during the election period.

- Free and abundant distribution of official content on social media to prevent the publication of unconfirmed and baseless content.
- Monitoring contents on social media and direct/quick responding.

- Direct engagement with social media service providers to remove any harmful content from the platform.
- Encouraging the role of Fact Checkers.

Challenges of Electronic Media/Social Media Monitoring in Sri Lanka

- Deciding the realistic scope or framework of media monitoring without confining only to the News Bulletins.
- Financial resources to establish a comprehensive and realistic monitoring system (Hardware, Software and Human Resources)
- Continuously evolving dynamics of media landscape
- A Proper legal framework to provide legitimacy for the entire process
- Creating Stakeholder collaboration and awareness
- Capacity of human resources including election officials and other stakeholders
- Lack of Technical Capacities (Server Capacities, Retrieving limitations)

With the outbreak of Covid-19 Pandemic, there was room for novel concepts and innovations. Despite the existence of Social Media before this, ***defeat for the deadly virus and victory for Democracy*** was the catch phrase of the Election Commission of Sri Lanka during the Elections.

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COUNTRY PAPER

BHUTAN

Use of Technology for Enhancing Transparent, Accessible and Inclusive Voting

Best practices on the use of Technology for enhancing transparent, accessible and inclusive voting in the elections by the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB)

Background

The Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB), as per Article 24 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, is an independent constitutional entity established on 31st of December 2005 to supervise, direct and control elections in Bhutan. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan vests upon the Election Commission of Bhutan the authority and responsibility for conducting elections in a free and fair manner, registration of Voters and the preparation, maintenance and periodical updating of Electoral Rolls for all elections to Parliament and Local Governments in the country.

The Election Commission of Bhutan consists of the Chief Election Commissioner and two Commissioners supported by the Secretariat comprising Departments and Division. Besides, there are District Election Offices in the twenty districts across the country.

The Bhutanese elections consist of a single-member constituency with First Past The Post System in which 20 Members of the Gyalyong Tshogde (National Council) are directly elected, while 5 persons are appointed by His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo as its eminent members. 47 members of the Gyalyong Tshogdu (National Assembly) are directly elected through two rounds of elections - Primary Round contested by registered political parties and the General Elections contested by Candidates nominated by the two Parties who received the highest number of votes in the Primary Round.

A Bhutanese Citizen, having attained 18 years of age on the qualifying date of an election, enrolled in the Electoral Roll of a particular Demkhong/Constituency and possessing a Voter Photo Identity Card (VPIC) issued by the Election Commission can vote in an election either through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) or for those eligible, through the Postal Ballots.

Bhutan now has five registered political parties; the beginning of political party institutions began on the 30th of June 2007 when His Majesty the King of Bhutan commanded that interested individuals may begin the process of formation of political parties to contest the National Assembly in 2008.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan confers on the Bhutanese People the right to elect a government of our choice with equal opportunity to contest in an election individually or in association with others. The Election Commission of Bhutan has conducted 3 Parliamentary Elections, three Local Government Elections to Thromde Tshogde (Mayor), two Local Government Elections to 205 Gewogs and 16 Dzongkhag Thromde Ngotshab and numerous parliamentary and local government bye-elections since 2008.

The global pandemic has provided us with ample opportunity to re-think elections in the prevailing context and bring innovations and bright ideas to our electoral processes. Technology-driven activities have taken a great shape in almost every arena. It is not different in election management.

Therefore, harnessing the use of technology had become the need of the hour and would continue to remain so hereafter.

Technology plays a vital role in the electoral process. In fact, it is one of the solutions for rendering efficient electoral services and conducting credible, error-free elections. It not only lessens the burden of human tasks but also adds efficiency through the delivery of faster services and generating error-free information. Needless to say, about its benefit during a pandemic situation.

Use of Technology for enhancing transparent, accessible and inclusive voting in the elections

Recognizing the gravity of the risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the positive cases detected in different parts of the country, ECB facilitates all interested registered voters to exercise their franchise through conventional postal ballots and voting options. Extending the postal ballot facility to the voters would ensure the reduction of crowding at polling stations and reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Moreover, with the risk posed by the onset of monsoon for travelers, it is a viable option for the voters to opt for the postal ballot facility.

In the lockdown situation, voting in elections in Phuentshogling Thromde (City) was facilitated through Mobile Voting Booth for voters residing, both within and outside the city. Later, the same process was followed during the bye-elections of the national assembly constituency.

Under the pandemic situation, in the cities of Thimphu and Gelegphu, voting was facilitated on the poll day through EVM at designated polling stations for voters residing within the *Demkhongs*, in strict compliance with COVID-19 health safety protocols issued by the MoH. Given that the voters residing in dispersed locations with differing densities, the 5-day operation of the facilitation voting station was provided with sufficient time for ECB to effectively facilitate the voters to avail the facility with convenience and in keeping with the COVID-19 health safety protocols.

The ECB provided available audiovisual, posters and other awareness materials developed for use during the specific voter education sessions for these elections.

ICT in the Bhutanese Electoral Process

Considering the gravity of the risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulty in holding elections in such a situation the ECB had been exploring and trying various means to hold elections using various mechanisms in fulfilment of its mandate for ensuring free and fair and credible elections in the country. One such means is the use of technology

The vision of ICTization of the election process has persisted since the first election was held and was not an awakening of the pandemic. However, the wake of the current pandemic created a better opportunity for us to embrace technology as the most efficient mode of holding free and fair elections and at the same time accessible and transparent voting processes.

ICT Systems in the electoral process

Given the emphasis and importance given by the Commissioners in the evolution of the entire electoral process through the use of technology, the Election Commission of Bhutan uses the following ICT system and applications to enhance the electoral process.

Bhutan Electoral Roll Management System 2.1

The Bhutan Electoral Roll Management Systems (BERMS 2.1) is an online system based on open-source application development, which is used for the management of electoral information. This system manages the information of voters related to registration and deregistration, change of addresses, preparation of electoral roll and generation of Voter Photo Identity Card (VPIC) during any given elections.

As the system has undergone a rigorous up-gradation at different phases of its development and implementation, access to the current version (v2.1) is being decentralized to the Electoral Registration Officers in the districts. Using this system, the electoral registration officers can conveniently update the information of voters within their jurisdiction. Allowing the officials in the districts access to the system has immensely helped the ECB in maintaining the current and accurate database of voters in all the districts. This online system houses the database of more than 400 thousand voters as of date. With the up-gradation of the system, the modules have got better and user-friendly interfaces.

The process of the new voter information management starts with voter registration, where information of the voter is extracted from the census database via the Application Programming Interface (API). The voter information is then mapped to its respective parliamentary and local government polling stations before updating in the database.

If there is any change in voters to polling station mapping or address change (or as we call census transfer), the Electoral Registration uses the household number of the voter to remap all the information from the system. The system also has the diagnosis module to check if there are mismatches of information mapping in the database.

In addition to all necessary reports, including the electoral roll and VPIC, the system also handles multiple data extraction functionalities to enhance the Electoral Registration Officers in cross-checking voter information and making it correct if there are any mistakes.

All activities of this system are recorded for future reference with audit functionality in every form of the system.

Electoral Roll Search System

Electoral Roll Search System (ERSS) is a standalone system developed over macros in MS Excel. ERSS is used in the polling stations on the day of the poll to supplement the Electoral Roll generated by the BERMS.

Distributed in almost all polling stations during the poll day of the elections, this system enhances the search of voter information from the electoral roll. The system contains voter information like name, photograph, sex, date of birth, age, permanent address and voter serial number which is being displayed with VPIC number input. It also displays if the voter has already voted or if the voter is registered as a postal voter.

The voter information is updated when the user clicks on the 'Mark Voted' button of the system after all verification process has been completed and voter goes to vote. The button is disabled if the voter has already voted or is registered as a postal voter.

As voters get marked as voted, this system also calculates the voter turnout report segregated by sex and voter turnout report by age and can be viewed at a glance.

This system expedites the search of voters in the electoral roll by checking the list with the serial number displayed. It also ensures that there is no double voting.

Finding the beneficent of the system, modified versions of the system is also being used for the operation of Facilitation Booth and Mobile Voting Booth.

DRAMIG

To enhance the political parties in maintaining an accurate list of their registered members, the ECB has developed an online system named DRAMIG. This online system has been effective use in eliminating issues related to multi-party membership registration, standardizing the campaign finance accounting procedures and checking if a civil servant is a registered member of a political party.

This system checks if the member to be registered is already registered with the party or is registered with another party. With help of the data connection from the Royal Civil Service Commission database via API, the system also checks if the member to be is a civil servant. This is to ensure that the apolitical status of civil servants is maintained at all times as the prohibition imposed by the election laws.

With the fact that all members of the political parties need to be a registered voter, the system is linked to the BERMS database. The member information, including their photograph, is extracted from the voter database with a search using their VPIC number before their registration with a party. This also eliminates the chances of parties registering fraudulent members in their party. This system also has functionalities of deregistering members from their party.

This system also has modules to, record membership and renewal fee information, generation of receipt and reminders for renewal of membership.

Therefore, it helps both ECB and the registered political parties in maintaining clean membership records of political parties.

Besides, using the system, political parties and candidates can conveniently submit their campaign expenditure during an election providing an easy way of maintaining books of accounts for the campaign expenses incurred by them. For this, the head of accounts is predetermined and the users can just choose from the dropdown.

Although hosted at the ECB, the registered political parties are trained often on the usage of this system under the Bhutan Democracy Dialogue.

Dashboard of Returning Officer

The dashboard of the Returning Officer (RO Dashboard) is an online dashboard system used by the returning officers during the election period. This system allows returning officers to manage the information of nominated candidates, polling officials' information and the information related to postal ballots.

All information is linked to the BERMS database, hence making it easier for the Returning Officer to extract data for any updates. The Returning Officer can add, manage or delete information on nominated candidates and polling officials. The postal ballot module of the system includes searching the postal voters to verify the information with VPIC number input.

On the dashboard, the Returning Officer can, at a glance, view figures relating to registered voters, registered postal voters and candidates registered by them. This makes it easier for them to plan on dispatching postal ballot packages and arranging logistics for the poll day.

In addition to the figures, the Returning Officer can also get access to all the electoral forms required during various stages of the election process.

This system also includes the functionality of sending the postal ballot voter turnout information and postal ballot results to the National Counting Center during the poll day. Along with this, the Returning Officer can also view EVM voter turnout information as and when the Presiding Officer under their jurisdiction sends via SMS Based Result Relaying System.

Another big functionality of this system is the module where the Returning Officer verifies the EVM result information sent through SMS Based Result Relaying System by their Presiding Officer.

With a multi-viewing portal of the system, this acts as the single information channel for the Returning Officers and other related stakeholders during the course of the election.

SMS Based Result Relaying System.

This is a mobile application-based SMS generating system used by the Presiding Officers during the poll day. The Presiding Officer send all required information like sex-segregated voter turnout, age-segregated voter turnout and EVM results of the polling station to the National Counting Center.

This mobile application is linked with the RO dashboard and functions only with a login provided to the registered polling official. The application generates a structured SMS encoded with codes and sends that to the SMS server hosted in the ECB headquarters. The SMS is decoded using multiple scripts and information is saved in the database linked to RO Dashboard. Related information like EVM results is verified by respective Returning Officers using RO Dashboard.

This speeds up the process of result relaying during the poll day and enables the commission to declare a provisional election result on the night of the poll day.

Online Public Systems

Several public online systems are in place to facilitate efficient services:

1. The ECB has in place an online system that enables citizens aspiring to contest LG elections to register for Functional Literacy and Possession of Skill Test (FLT). During the recent elections held for municipality posts, the need for such a system was very much felt necessary since the elections were to be held in a situation in which movements of people were restricted due to the surge in COVID-19. A simple search and registration process in this system was found to enable the aspiring candidates to register their information and choose the test centre of their choice to appear in the FLT. As this system is in place now, the ECB plans to continue using it for the registration of candidates aspiring to contest the LG elections 2021 scheduled to take place towards the end of this year.

2. In the light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the ECB developed a system that enabled the eligible registered voters residing outside their constituencies to get registered for postal ballots. This exercise was made possible with the development of an online registration system through which voters could search for their information and provide input for additional information such as contact details and postal address to confirm their registration for the voting facility.

3. To help voters check and verify their information, an online platform is created and made accessible to the voters on the ECB's official webpage. This system allows voters, wishing to check the accuracy/correctness of his/her information, to check using the combination of VPIC/CID card numbers. This platform ensures transparency.

Application integration

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, for holding elections, the ECB has been successful in integrating its online application with public systems such as Bhutan Vaccine System (BVS) and Zoning System. In doing so, the commission, in addition to existing voter information, was able to gather additional information particularly in lockdown districts or those living in red zones/areas.

This integration played a major role in identifying and putting in place necessary voting options during the COVID-19 situations. Strategies were drawn on how to conduct the elections under pandemic and lockdown situations after analyzing the information gathered. Multiple Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) were also drawn on the collection of postal ballots from lockdown districts and voters living in red zones/areas.

The integration of systems was a major part of the ECB being able to hold free and fair elections during the difficult COVID-19 situations in April and June 2021 and is being applauded for the same.

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