



Encouraging a **FAIR VOTE**

The Role of the International Community in
Helping to Strengthen Electoral Commissions

Rapporteur's Report Private Sessions

by **Monica Treviño Gonzalez**

Centre for Developing-Area Studies
Centre d'études sur les régions en développement
adm.cdass@mcmgill.ca
514 398-3507



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DEVELOPING-AREA
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Private Sessions, March 14 and 15, 2008
Rapporteur's Report

The private sessions were held under the Chatham House Rule. The following is therefore intended to reflect the consensus of the participants and to focus on the concrete proposals emerging from the discussions.

The goal of these meetings was to identify practical, concrete and assessable proposals that would integrate policy-makers, academic expertise and the actors involved in elections processes, with the objective of facilitating fair elections.

The discussions were structured around the identification of:

- The relevant actors (governments, donors, EMBs, citizens, political parties and civil society actors);
- The most effective areas of effort (sharing information, experiences, and/or resources);
- The most relevant processes (the roles of international regional governmental and non-governmental organisations, sub-regional organisations, associations of election administrators, elections observers and those involved in democratic assistance).

The general consensus was that the notion of certification was too politically sensitive and practically problematic to lead to the required acceptance for this process to function. Therefore, this notion was ultimately set aside and the discussions centred instead on identifying practical ways to improve the quality of elections with the active participation of stakeholders, with EMBs (electoral management bodies) as the entry point.

Three main areas of action were identified, along with general principles, specific mechanisms and potential actors and partners:

- Developing standards for assessment;
- Encouraging stakeholder participation and cooperation; and
- Developing democratic education.

Developing Standards for Assessment

The participants agreed that one of the primary tasks before them was to have a clear definition of what constitutes a “fair vote” and an “effective EMB”. It was clear that this would be a task beyond the scope of the meeting, but that it should be the starting point for elaborating an action plan. To this end, a proposal was made to:

- Develop standards or basic principles of best practice to guide practitioners, policy makers and observers in assessing the quality of EMBs, on the basis of their independence and impartiality;
- Conduct a study to identify a general typology of EMBs and the variables that tend to lead to particular problems, to assist elections organisers and observers in anticipating potential stumbling blocks.

The actors involved in this process would be academic institutions (including but not necessarily limited to CDAS, local universities); EMBs; domestic and international observer organisations (such as but not limited to the Carter Center); local civil society organisations; international donors (such as the Commonwealth, CIDA, USAID, etc.).

The purpose of this collaborative process is to ensure the equal participation of all stakeholders in the definition of the desired outcome, which was considered to be of fundamental importance given that the objections to the notion of certification stemmed from a possible perception of external imposition.

Encouraging Stakeholder Participation

The sharing of experiences and resources on a regional basis was identified as a viable tool for ensuring the cooperation of the actors involved, at the level of the technical personnel of EMBs, as well as fostering the creation of locally-devised and jointly-owned solutions to common problems. Some possible mechanisms:

- Twinning of EMBs/formal partnerships, regional organisations;
- Sharing of material resources (ballot boxes, indelible ink...);
- Regional training, developing a catalogue of best practices.

The relevant actors in such a process would include local EMBs; existing EMB associations (such as the ACE project); regional organisations (such as the African Union, the Organisation of American States, Economic Community of West African States, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe); international donors; academic institutions.

The purpose of this collaboration goes beyond encouraging participation, and involves the creation of a network of mutual support to resolve the needs of different EMBs facing similar problems, with the possibility of helping each other to address not only technical, but also logistical and material issues. It was noted that intermediate-level EMB, in particular, would

benefit from regional forums where they could exchange their experiences and knowledge of best practices, since the tendency is for such meetings to include senior officials only.

Democratic Education

In the spirit of encouraging stakeholder participation, emphasis was placed on the democratic education of citizens, EMB employees and politicians. In addition, it was generally felt that democratic participation could lay the groundwork for a more wide-ranging engagement in the political processes surrounding elections themselves, and the elements of fair elections that lie beyond the direct reach of EMBs. In this vein, some possible mechanisms would be:

- Devising a methodology for developing “democratic audits” with a focus on the participation of citizens, which would be adaptable to particular contexts;
- Developing training programmes for “citizen auditors”, such as summer schools;
- Developing training programmes for EMB employees, such as summer schools and certificate training for election workers, focusing on voter registration, observation, tabulation, etc.;
- Assembling training materials, existing documents on past experiences and making them available, perhaps electronically.

The central actors in this dimension of the proposed interventions would be academic institutions, especially for conducting the initial research and perhaps also to centralise the “library” of existing documentation. However, the active collaboration of local stakeholders (EMBs, civil society organisations, local educational institutions) would be necessary to ensure joint ownership. Similarly, the collaboration of regional and international organisations and donors would be needed to ensure that existing knowledge is not lost, and to contribute to the resources needed.

Final Considerations

The participants agreed to use the outcomes of this conference as the basis for the development of a more detailed programme of action and the creation of formal partnerships between them in the near future, with the aim of putting their recommendations into action as soon as possible.

It was also agreed that a follow-up conference should be organised, including a broader sample of stakeholders, in particular those identified as key in these proceedings: EMB employees and local civil society and citizenship organisations.

List of Participants, Private Sessions, *Encouraging a Free Vote* Conference

1. **Ms Tihana Bartulac Blanc.** National Endowment for Democracy.
2. **Dr. Horacio Boneo.** Consultant with United Nations and many international organizations.
3. **Ms Julie Broadbent.** Commonwealth Secretariat.
4. **Dr. Jesús Cantú Escalante.** Tecnológico de Monterrey.
5. **Dr. Somadoda Fikeni.** Chief Operations Officer, National Heritage Council of South Africa.
6. **Reverend Dr. Bongani Finca.** Provincial Electoral Officer, Province of the Eastern Cape, Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa.
7. **Mr. Ronald Gould.** Formerly of Elections Canada and member of many elections monitoring commissions.
8. **Mr. Christian Hennemeyer.** Regional Director for Africa, International Foundation for Electoral Systems.
9. **Mr. Craig Jenness.** Director of the Electoral Assistance Division, Department of Political Affairs, United Nations.
10. **Mr. Edward P. Joseph.** Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies
11. **Dr. Edward McMahon.** University of Vermont.
12. **Dr. Aristide Nononsi.** Associate Director, Centre for Developing-Area Studies, McGill University.
13. **Mr. Sylvain Nouwatin.** President, *Tribunal de première instance de première classe* of Porto-Novo, Benin and frequent member of the Autonomous National Electoral Commission (CENA).
14. **Dr. Philip Oxhorn.** Director, Centre for Developing-Area Studies, McGill University.
15. **Ms. Patricia Peña.** Canadian International Development Agency.
16. **Dr David Pottie.** Carter Center.
17. **Ms Eunice Akweley Roberts.** Electoral Commission of Ghana.