



# ***European Commission United Nations Development Programme International IDEA***

## ***Thematic Seminar Use of ICTs in Electoral Processes***

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# ***UN Policy towards the Introduction/Use of ICTs in Electoral Processes***

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- What is the role of the UN Electoral Assistance Division?**
- What is the impact of ICTs in Electoral Processes?**
- What are the policies of the UN towards the introduction/use of ICTs in electoral processes?**
- What next?**

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- ❑ The Focal Point for Electoral Assistance in the UN system is the **USG for Political Affairs**, mandated by General Assembly resolution 46/137 (March 1992).
- ❑ The Focal Point for Electoral Assistance should, among other tasks ensure consistency and coherence in the provision of UN electoral assistance.
- ❑ The Electoral Assistance Division (EAD) supports the Focal Point to fulfill his mandate in all areas covered by GA resolution 46/137:
  - ❑ Review requests for electoral assistance and ensure consistency
  - ❑ Maintain a roster of electoral experts
  - ❑ Identify and maintain electoral best practices and policies
  - ❑ Serve as the institutional memory of the UN in the electoral field.

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- ❑ Over the last years, we have witnessed an increased interest in the introduction/use of ICTs in various aspects of the electoral processes.
- ❑ Often such interest has been justified by the fact that technology can boost effectiveness of those managing the process, increase transparency and therefore confidence in the process among stakeholders.
- ❑ Most obvious areas where ICTs have increasingly been used include voter registration and data transmission (counting, aggregation and tabulation of results).

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- This trend has been reflected also in the nature of electoral assistance activities carried out by the UN. As recognized in subsequent reports of the UN Secretary-General on electoral activities of the Organization, the complexity of requests for assistance, including for technological innovation has increased.
  
- Subsequently, this area has become also very relevant for the conduct of EAD Needs Assessment Missions, which usually are deployed following requests for assistance from Member States.

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- ❑ Issues related to the introduction/use of technology in elections have been underlined in the last reports of the UN Secretary-General.
- ❑ In his report released in 2007 (A/62/293), the Secretary-General pointed out that

***“ Electoral assistance is becoming more complex. Some Member States are considering the introduction of electronic voter registration, voting and results aggregation systems in their electoral processes. It is essential that such new systems match available national capacity, thus allowing for sustainability over time. The United Nations must continue to enhance its own advisory and technical capacity in order to assist Member States in these issues”.***

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- ❑ The latest report of the Secretary-General (A/64/304) goes even further in noting concerns on these issues. It outlines that elections are expensive, no matter which electoral system is used. It also notes however that *“some of the poorest countries in the world have chosen some of the most expensive electoral processes and technology”*.
- ❑ While recognizing that the choice of electoral system is a sovereign right of States, the Secretary-General expressed concern *“about techniques and systems that might cause a State, in the conduct of its own election, to be financially dependent on donors, or technologically dependent on specific vendors for extended periods”*.

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- The report concludes by recommending that

***“sustainability and cost-effectiveness must become a more central consideration in the design and provision of electoral assistance, whether by the United Nations or by other bodies.”***

- Finally, in the report, the Secretary-General calls ***“upon Member States and donors to continue to consider carefully the cost of elections in light of other pressing developmental needs, including the Millenium Development Goals.”***

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- ❑ The SG report presents therefore clearly main policy concerns of the UN in this field. In addition, EAD is also conducting other activities that may assist in better defining the policy of the Organization in this area.
  
- ❑ Among other initiatives, EAD has promoted the establishment of an Informal Working Group on Technology, to foster coordination among various organizations that are conducting studies on the use of ICTs in different aspects of the electoral process, with the aim to possibly identify best practices, share experiences and promote dialogue.

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## **❑ What is sustainability?**

- ❑ At the core of the concept, it involves having long-term capacity to be able to conduct a certain process successfully in a repeated manner (know-how, equipment and material, finances)**
  
- ❑ It also indicates the ability to conduct processes relying less and less on external resources, capacities.**
  
- ❑ It involves not only resources but also ability to maintain appropriate levels of institutional credibility and legitimacy that respond to the expectations of various stakeholders.**

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- How do we translate sustainability when making technological choices?
- Appropriate planning:** includes assessment of various options on technological front (low-tech vs. high-tech) on the basis of existing conditions, infrastructure, capacity, equipment.
- Assessment** should give appropriate consideration to legal and operational feasibility of proposed systems, including their timeliness with respect to overall electoral calendar. Operational complexity of proposed systems should also be taken into account as it may put strains on available human resources.
- Political implications** of technical choices should not be underestimated as they will also have an impact on sustainability over the long run.

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## **❑ Food for thought:**

- ❑ Why increased reliance on high tech in many democracies in transition and/or post-conflict scenarios?**
- ❑ Do technological innovations really foster credibility of electoral processes?**
- ❑ Is it possible to rely on technology when political will/commitment is uncertain or unfavourable?**
- ❑ What is the role of vendors?**
- ❑ Need to re-focus the debate on technology: how do we achieve this?**

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