

***Political sustainability of electoral
administration***

***Joint EC-UNDP Thematic Workshop on
Sustainability in Electoral Administration***

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Elections and credibility

- Elections – about choosing members of public office and representation – political race
- Success of the elections: credibility and acceptance of results (winners and losers)
- Electoral administration: legitimacy of process
EMB, in charge of oversight and implementation, must be credible

Elections and sustainability

- Elections as periodic events – need to ensure credibility of elections throughout time. *One good elections is not enough.*
- Need to ensure that all components of the electoral systems, including the electoral administration, are sustainable and that credibility of the electoral processes *can be guaranteed through time.*
- The electoral system will be sustainable if the needs of all stakeholders in the electoral processes are addressed, both in the present and in the future.

Elections and sustainability (2)

- Sustainability – generally associated with costs, but it is a much wider concept:
 - *financial*
 - *operational*
 - *technical*
 - *institutional*
 - *political* (overall level of trust and credibility of the process through time)

Credibility and political sustainability

- Elections are politically sustainable when the credibility of the electoral practice and institutions are guaranteed through time.
- In other words, political sustainability is achieved when, through time, elections are perceived as legitimate and their results are consistently accepted by all electoral stakeholders.
- *Matter of trust and confidence*

Political sustainability of the electoral administration

- Political sustainability refers to a number of elements which need to be taken as a whole: external (political will, choice of electoral system, legal and regulatory framework, political party systems and structures), and internal to the electoral administration.
- The political sustainability of the electoral administration refers to its capacity to achieve *and maintain through time* the trust of stakeholders.

Sustained trust on electoral administration (1)

- Trust of the electoral authorities depend on how they are perceived (through time) by stakeholders, both in their political and their administrative roles. *Dynamic dimension*
- Elections, to be credible through time, must be organized **professionally** by an **impartial** body in an **independent, transparent** and **cost-efficient** manner.
- EMB must ensure that (a) the elections are perceived as genuine, where the integrity of results is respected – *political role* and (b) the process is available to all and is well run – *administrative role*.

Sustained trust on electoral administration (2)

- Credibility of the electoral authorities, *despite the model chosen*, depends on how they are perceived in terms of being the “honest broker” of the electoral process and an efficient provider of services (complementarity of political credibility and professional service).
- Non-professional, inefficient electoral administration is as damaging to the elections’ credibility as lack of independence and impartiality.

Illustration: “independent EMBs” (1)

To ensure impartiality: “independent EMBs”

Two separate concepts linked to “independence”:

- The institutional (structural) independence of the EMB, where the EMB is a separate structure from other government agencies - this aspect of independence is often referred to as “**autonomy**”
- Independent behavior and functioning of the EMBs, free from undue influences: government, political parties, pressure groups.

Illustration: “independent EMBs” (2)

- *All models of EMBs* require that its functioning be independent of pressures from any party and of the government.
- If the EMB does not have this confidence of independence, there is no political credibility.
- Whatever the model, the independence of action of the EMB will depend on a number of elements, beyond the legal and regulatory framework.

Political sustainability of EMBs: bottom line

- Sustained credibility of EMBs, starts from:
 - choice of model
 - legal and regulatory framework
- However, it goes beyond legal framework
 - political will
 - attitudes and behaviors
 - EMB policies and procedures

EMB, not an “island”, so its political sustainability is part of a larger framework, that requires a dynamic and flexible approach, sharing responsibilities with

other stakeholders