Strategic and Operational Planning of Electoral Management Bodies

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How do you plan for the following?

543 elected seats
35 states and union territories
543 constituencies
1.368.430 electronic voting machines
6.1 million police and civil personnel on duty
714 million registered voters
1,055 political parties

Candidates come from 1,055 political parties
Elections are national and local events

Elections should be accessible

Elections are high-pressure events

Elections involve high stakes

Elections are expensive

Elections are periodic events

Elections are public events

Election administration is specialized

Elections seek to balance rights

Elections focus on public good

Elections should be predictable

Elections feed nation-building

The NATURE of ELECTIONS

The electoral process should be a nation building exercise, rather than a divisive one.

Elections must ultimately be able to balance the demands of the public at large with the greater public good.

Elections must exhibit an overriding concern for the greater public good.

Election administrators must be able to balance the demands of the public at large with the greater public good.

Elections is a national stability function quite like preparing for elections (except perhaps preparing for war).

Boundary demarcation, voter registration and many other technical duties of the election authorities, are also specialized tasks.

Elections are periodic events

National elections usually take place at widely spaced intervals. At the time of elections, an enormous short-term staff is required, which then needs to be down-scaled between elections.

Elections are high-pressure events

Once an election date is set, election administration involves meeting a series of deadlines; the political penalty for missed deadlines is high, both for election administrators and for the government.

Elections are expensive

The administration of elections requires the capacity to spend money economically, efficiently and without fraud.

Elections are periodic events

Elections involve high stakes

The credibility of elections is tied to national stability, and the winning and losing of elections is tied to political party power. In many post-conflict situations, elections themselves can precipitate a return to violence.

Elections are public events

Election administration is much more publicly orientated than many other government functions.

Election administration is specialized

There is no other government function quite like preparing for elections (except perhaps preparing for war).

Boundary demarcation, voter registration and many other technical duties of the election authorities, are also specialized tasks.

Elections seek to balance rights

Election administrators must be able to balance the demands of the public at large with the rights of individuals, esp. the marginalized and the disadvantaged.

Elections focus on public good

Elections must exhibit an overriding concern for the greater public good, as opposed to the good of special interests.

Elections should be predictable

The electoral process should be predictable, ruled by law commonly understood and universally applied.

Elections feed nation-building

Elections must ultimately be a nation building exercise, rather than a divisive one.
EMB Planning Cultures?

• “If I see a nail, I look for a hammer”
• “Just do it. Get stuck in”
• “It just takes too much time…”
• “What’s the use? It won’t get done anyway.”
• “We already know what to do…”
• “There is still enough time…”
Strategic planning is not simply developing a multi-year budget. It is about deciding what kind of institution the election authority wants to be and then setting a course on how to achieve becoming that institution.

– Joe Baxter, IFES

Strategic Planning for Election Organisations
Strategic Planning

• This is not operational planning
  – Usually post-elections, driven by reforms*
  – Often extends beyond one electoral cycle

• Aimed at achieving a long term vision

• Often principles based
  – What the organisation stands for
  – Supported by legal framework and mandate
Don’t assume that the client group knows what strategic planning is!
Strategic Planning

Operational Planning

Operational Planning

Operational Planning

Operational Planning

Strategic Planning
Broad Strategy Process

Step 1: Prepare
- Organisational Assessment

Step 2: Gap Analysis
- Core Ideology
- Vision
- Mission

Step 3: Strategic Foundations
- Strategic Issues
- Strategic Goals
- Strategic Objectives

Step 4: Strategic Goals

Step 5: Strategic Objectives

Step 6: Implementation Action Plans
- Strategic Plan

Step 7: Implementation Action Plans
- Strategic Plan
Operational Planning

- Sets out the implementation of the strategic plan against specific objectives
- Spells out the task, timeframe, budget and unit responsible, contingency
- Integrated with the electoral cycle activities
- Often associated with an electoral calendar, working back from election date
- A source of major info sharing with stakeholders
Poor Planning results in...

- Lack of coordination
- Incorrect assumptions
- Insufficient or unrealistic budget
- Underestimation of time required
- Delayed disbursement of funds
- Late procurement of materials and recruitment of staff
- Unclear or complicated procedures
Challenges

• Planning as internal “routine”
• Changing institutional culture
• Building institutional memory and rigour
• Discipline of tracking actions against plans
• Developing staff capacity
  – Exposing staff to “best practice”
  – Developing EMB leadership’s oversight role