



REINFORCING CREDIBILITY AND ACCEPTANCE OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

The Role of Electoral Stakeholders and Electoral Administrations

Enhancing credibility of
elections: the role of media
and what EMBs can do

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The Role of the Media: Four perspectives



*First of two Presidential debates, Open Jirga, Afghanistan
February 2014 reaching more than 6 million Afghans (RTA/BBC)*

The EMB's

- essential to an informed electorate and platform for public debate;
- balanced, unsensationalist coverage;
- useful monitor of electoral behaviour.
- legitimate source of accountability of EMBs.

The Journalist's

- Freedom to ask and publish what they like when they like how they like and make the election interesting;
- An increasingly risky, difficult, poorly paid profession with rise in killing, intimidation and attacks on journalists – elections especially dangerous;

Some Media Owners' (private and government)?

- It's my media – it needs to make money/deliver loyalty and votes;

The Public's

- How can I know who stands for what? How can I ask questions? What information can I trust? Who is telling the truth?

Some trends affecting media and elections



Citizens queuing to get into Mayoral “Sanglap” Debates, Khulna, Bangladesh. 85% said it was helpful for selecting the best candidate to vote for. 23 million audience.

- Major liberation of communication space, booming media and social media, widespread access to mobile telephony;
- Unprecedented opportunities for public engagement and voice
- Cooption, factionalisation and some hate media
- Killing, intimidation and attacks on journalists
- Poor journalistic pay and brown envelope journalism
- Weak advertising markets and business models – but elections are big media business
- Frustration among Electoral Management Bodies on how to engage with media

What Electoral Management Bodies and Electoral Support bodies can do: Some Suggested Tactical Steps



With the presidential election days away, Sierra Leone's radio debate show Tok Bot Salone, gave the floor to young people to discuss what's at stake for them at the polls.

- Appoint professional level staff who understand how media operates (news cycles etc.) and the positive and negative power of social media;
- Proactive rather than defensive engagement with media;
- Provide training for media on election procedures – a solid technical understanding of how the process works and what happens at each stage as part of broader media training strategy.
- Consider media training for EMBs themselves, and practice hostile media questioning;
- Work out who needs most support – often rural/vernacular rather than urban/elite media.
- Some EMBs have regular fora with media to provide background briefings on election planning – can help stop misunderstandings/diminish uncertainties.
- Coherence: Everyone wants media to behave in certain ways – there can be competing guidelines from EMBs, professional bodies, regulators, unions etc.

What Electoral Management Bodies and Electoral Support bodies can do: Some Suggested Strategic Steps



Annastasia Mashindana, business woman, asking questions at Oloitoktok, Kenya about lack of water and sanitation, at recording of Sema Kenya ("Speak Kenya")

- Integrate media issues into electoral cycle approach
- Scoping studies of role/ownership/dynamics of media years not months before next election;
- Develop a context rooted media support and engagement strategy based on this and encourage donors to take it seriously;
- Codes of conduct - but developed by, not for, the media, and they don't always work;
- Media monitoring by non governmental entities (civil society, professional and/or international) which will have credibility with both media and public; post facto media monitoring of limited use.
- More work needed to tackle hate media - most credible sanction on media wrongdoing is often public embarrassment. Act on behalf of public, not government.
- Protect safety of journalists and highlight attacks on them.
- Put pressure on public service/state broadcaster to serve interest of public, not government – an increasingly important role.

Support media freedom: media is only credible if it is independent from all actors. The more it is controlled, the less It is credible.