

A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF REGIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN AND AMONG EMBS TO ENHANCE CREDIBILITY

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INTRODUCTION

- ▶ 1) Since the early 1990s, an increasing number of African countries have embraced democratic governance including the holding of regular competitive multiparty elections.
- ▶ 2) In holding elections, various countries have adopted different systems, processes and procedures for the conduct of elections. In this context, the history of elections in Africa has been chequered: with some countries showing good progress and others regressing and/or facing challenges of elections which fall short of regional and international standards.
- ▶ 3) During the same period, Africa has seen the emergence of continental and regional electoral networks and association: Association of African Electoral Authorities (AAEA), ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC), East African Community Electoral Commissions' Forum (EAC-ECF) and the Electoral Commission's Forum of SADC (ECF-SADC).
- ▶ 4) The main objective of these bodies is to foster cooperation and capacity building among EMBs in the spirit of South-South cooperation leading global cooperation

WHY REGIONAL ELECTORAL NETWORKS/FORUMS/ASSOCIATIONS IN AFRICA?

- Regional cooperation (just like global cooperation) in the electoral field present a useful opportunity for the sharing knowledge, experiences and good practices which engender enhanced credibility, quality and sustainability of the electoral process.
- Inter-EMB cooperation, through resource pooling and sharing in particular, engenders improved professionalism and efficiency in the conduct of elections.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The last few decades have seen an increased number of regional electoral networks, both at EMB and civil society levels. This phenomenon presents us **AN OPPORTUNITY FOR** improved collaboration and synergy in the electoral field: such as the pooling and sharing of resources (financial, material and human) and supporting joint EMB capacity building and training, peer learning and peer support including election study and observation missions. Most of these initiatives have taken place under the auspices of the African Union and the various Regional Economic Communities, mainly the EAC, ECOWAS SADC.

In this context, we have seen in the last few years the enactment of robust legal instruments (by these regional bodies) to improve the credibility and quality of elections: African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007); the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), the SADC Declaration on Democratic Elections (2004); and the EAC Principles on Election Observation and Evaluation (2012).

CHALLENGES INCLUDE THE NEED TO:

- ▶ Strengthen regional networks through improved funding (through own funding), improved mechanisms to foster functional independence and operational efficiency and improved stakeholder engagement including active participation of all member EMBs and addressing the concerns of some governments which are not keen to implement reform measures recommended by regional electoral networks;
- ▶ Improve the long-term independence of these networks; streamline memberships to these networks to avoid overlapping/multiple memberships which, in some instances, lead to duplication of efforts and even confusion;
- ▶ Encourage ratification of key regional instruments specifically the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION – BASED ON THE ELECTORAL CYCLE APPROACH AND SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION:

- ▶ Priority Areas for Regional Cooperation – based on the Electoral Cycle Approach and South-South Cooperation:
 - ▶ 1) Promote capacity building and professional development of member EMBs;
 - ▶ 2) Foster research and advocacy on best electoral practices, including:
 - ▶ a. Improved legal framework for elections (possible standardization/harmonization?)
 - ▶ b. Cost of elections and fostering a culture among African countries to fund own elections
 - ▶ c. Use of technology
 - ▶ d. Gender and inclusive participation
 - ▶ e. Election violence and electoral justice

PRIORITY AREAS FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION CONT.

- ▶ 3) Support election-related fact finding, evaluation observation and technical missions and other-related peer support activities;
- ▶ 4) Foster mechanisms for regional election logistics support and resource pooling and sharing
- ▶ 5) Provide technical assistance and advisory support to and among EMBs
- ▶ 6) Promote culture of electoral democracy in the region
- ▶ 7) Strengthen peer review mechanisms and networking capacity including collaboration with other stakeholders – using the “Situation Room” approach.
- ▶ 8) Foster a culture of voluntarism
- ▶ 9) Promote fund raising including funding by member EMBs
- ▶ 10) Elections should be about inclusive and sustainable development

ASANTE SANA!