

Strategic and Sustainable Solution to the Voter Registration in Lesotho

Under the Africa Elections Fund project of UNDP funded by German Cooperation, On December 21, 2023 at Avani Maseru an international Round-Table Conference was held between the IEC and Ministry of Home Affairs with the participation of the International experts in Voter Registration.

The objective of the conference was to convene key stakeholders, international and national experts, and professionals in the field of Voter Registration to engage in a comprehensive discussion on the challenges faced in developing and maintaining the accurate Voter Roll in Lesotho. The conference aimed to place the main stakeholders around the table and discuss the challenges and strategic solutions to Voter Registration process in Lesotho.

The conference was inaugurated by the Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP Lesotho Mr. Taye Amssalu, who acknowledged substantial challenges to the continuous registration process in Lesotho. Stressing the importance of frank and honest discussions during the workshop, he underlined that only open dialogue could lead to the identification of strategic solutions. He expressed hope for a conducive environment during the workshop, fostering not only immediate solutions but also future regular cooperation. Special emphasis was placed on the vital cooperation between the Home Affairs Ministry and the IEC. Drawing on international best practices, the Deputy Resident Representative emphasized that a sustainable solution to voter registration challenges hinged on effective collaboration between these two institutions.



High level participation from both IEC with the Chairman of the Commission as well as the Commissioner attending together with IEC department directors headed by the Director of Elections as well as the Deputy

Principal Secretary (DPS) and Director for National Identity and Civil Registration Department (DNICR) were present.

Following the Key-note speech IEC Director of Elections took floor to explain the challenges IEC faces in terms of voter registration and the reasons behind its inability to ensure accurate voters list with the current legal framework and the information they get from the other relevant agencies. The main Challenges identified were the legal requirement to register voters based on several different



identification documents and in some cases without a document at all, which results in absence of the unique identifier for the voter. Challenges with getting the accurate details of the deceased persons to be removed from the voters roll and expressed IEC's preference in choosing a Civil Registry option for the future of voter registration and its readiness to closely cooperate with the Home Affairs Ministry on developing accurate voter register.

IEC IT team continued the presentation of the IEC challenges explaining the current voter

registration process through the Mobile Registration Devices which were purchased off the shelf and the Voter Registration Management System which was outsourced and IEC does not possess the source key to the software making annual payments for its maintenance and service. While listing the major problems of accuracy, three main reasons were listed: Duplicated, Misplaced and Deceased electors. The current voter registration number was presented at 1,388,207 Voters as per September 2023. Very low turnout of 2022 Parliamentary elections and 2023 Local Government elections respectively 33.62% and 26.05 % was explained by the admittedly inflated voter register.

Following the IEC presentation Ministry of Home Affairs made presentation through its DPS and DNICR. In their Presentation Home Affairs identified challenges to accurate and complete civil registration as following:

1. Outdated Legal Framework, some of the legal documents dating as far back as 1973.
2. Funding problem
3. Low (70%) death registrations.
4. Need for digitization of the older documentation.
5. Need for improved cyber security.

Home Affairs also presented the achievements of registering 95% of the targeted citizens, with total number approaching 1,4 Million. Biometric data capturing 10 fingerprints and the picture of the registered citizen. Also, creating generic interface available for all to check the data of the citizens when needed as well as the charge free ID issuance process and continuous data update possibility for the citizens.

Panel Discussions

In their Panel Presentations, international experts delivered speeches addressing the challenges identified by the IEC and Home Affairs presenters during the previous sessions.



Isaack Otieno Chief Election Advisor of UNDP Malawi, National Elections Commission Board Member Floyd Saylor and International Voter Registration Expert and former Chief Election Advisor of UNDP Gambia Dr. John Maphephe, and Shalva Tskhakaya Chief Technical Advisor of UNDP Lesotho delivered speeches on international standards of Voter Registration, and recommendations based on the challenges identified by the key-note speakers.

Round-Table Discussions

During the final session of the conference, participants were asked to work in the round table groups to identify main findings and highlights of the Conference as well as immediate future steps for ensuring strategic and sustainable solution to the voter registration in Lesotho.

Main findings of the groups were:

1. Memorandum of Understanding to be executed between IEC and all key stakeholders.
2. Collaboration platforms should be created with stakeholders for regular coordination of the Voter Registration activities.
3. Consultations on reviewing Legal Framework should be initiated, especially on Voter ID requirements, technology standards, cyber security standards.
4. Unique Challenges of Basotho and its culture should be taken into consideration.
5. Trust and Confidence should be built among the main stakeholders of the process.
6. IEC needs to build Capacity for managing the voter registration software independently.
7. Strong Civic Education efforts should be part of the continuous voter registration process.

