ETWA Analytical Perspective on Using Technology in Election

The idea of using technology in election is dependent on two major purposes. The first purpose is to accelerate the operational process of an election. The second purpose is to strengthen transparency in election. But it is not certain that the idea of using technology can hold desired results in anytime and place. Relocation and using technology during elections in a country is in need of necessary capacity and potential for (using, transferring, keeping and fixing) aims. Here the purpose of capacity includes professional capabilities of electoral bodies' staff in transmission, keeping and fixing these tools. While, the purpose from potential is existing of the favorable objective condition (Availability of Energy Resources, Professional Human Resources, Security Situation, Transportation and etc.) in a country for effective use of technology.

Recently the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has announced that it would use technological equipment for voter's registration and on Election Day in next polls. This decision of IEC has been warmly received by government. But the civil society, political elites outside government and international community have been extremely prudent about the announcement. This raises many questions and the electoral body should respond it before moving forward. Few of them are as follow:

1. How does IEC view embedding technology in a country's electoral system (As a process or an even?)
2. Does the stated equipment to be used for voter's registration not a similar program (duplication) with distribution of electronic identity cards?
3. Can IEC manage concerns relating to the technology to be used for registration of voters and on Election Day?
4. Is there adequate potential for sustainable and fruitful use of this equipment in the country?
5. Can the technology IEC speak off prevent fraud in any case?

1. **Is Embedding Technology in a Country's Electoral System (A process or an Even?)**

Since safe and effective integration/embedding technology in an electoral system of a country requires pass through multiple stages, which should be dealt with as a process no an event. As the first step is the identification of desirable reform and choosing necessary equipment.

There is a need to necessary precision because in this stage the objective situation of the country, lessons learned, experience of other countries as well as quality of the technology come under assessment and then the most required equipment is being selected. Similarly, the other stages include luring support of donor countries, purchasing and training staff and finally the public awareness program relating to introduction of technology are steps of a major process requiring certain activities, scheduling and eventually a regular planning.

But IEC has so far been unable to introduce a regular plan to indicate safe and effective integration of technology in the electoral system. Now, there are concerns that if necessary precision is not take into account in embedding of this technology, it would not only endanger its safety and effectiveness, but lead to wasting financial resources and damaging election's credibility than ever before.

2. **Does the Stated Technology to Be Used for Voter's Registration not a Similar Program (Repeat) With Distribution of Electronic Identity Cards?**

Recently the ratification of the population census law by Afghan government and the announcement for distribution of electronic identity cards has raised optimism about this process among the people. One reason of this optimism among people is the preparation of voter's list through distribution of electronic identity cards. It is while the IEC without considering importance of the distribution of computerized identity cards which can assist in preparing voter's list and settling other problems is willing to conduct a similar expensive program.

First, even if both programs are launched with a time difference of two years, it technically and financially seems illogical and would be seen as a duplication of

the same program. In this case, attracting technical and financial support of donors will be a tough task. Similarly, if the election commission willing to begin registration process of voters before the distribution of computerized identity cards, this will be a good opportunity and pretext for politicians who oppose electronic card's distribution and this will finally stop this process.

3. Can IEC Manage Concerns Relating to Technology To Be Used for Registration of Voters and on Election Day?

A major concern about the use of technology for registration of voters (Biometric) largely depends on two factors throughout the country. The first factor is the existing insecurity and another factor is the absence of credible identity cards (Tazkira). Both factors can yield negative impacts over the level of participation of people in future elections, especially women. In a technological system, every eligible individual is required to have a valid document before going to a registration center, where the key purpose from technology is to take fingerprints of individuals. Thus, the inconspicuous participation of some classes and tribes during voter's registration process can raise questions about the nationwide process, which will give a pretext for some politicians to delaying elections. Given the time constraints of voting day (9 Hours) and concerns over absence of electricity or other needed energy resources in districts and rural areas, the dilapidated ways and link roads between provinces and districts can further increase the possibility of damaging of these equipment during transmission. This as a serious technical challenge can pave the ground to further irregularities at polling stations on voting day.

4. Is there adequate Potential for Sustainable and Fruitful Use of This Equipment in The Country?

Along with security problems and absence of electricity, especially in rural areas and lack of individuals with technical capacities in rural parts is a key challenge, which can lower potential to executing technologic programs. Of course, managing these problems require financial resources as recruiting individuals from cities to districts depends on further consumption of financial resources which can surge the expenditure of a national program.

In addition, absence of a proper place at IEC's provincial offices for keeping these tools is also a challenge, which can decline its durability and make continued use of the stated equipment during several elections impossible.

6. Can the Technology IEC Speak Off Prevent Fraud in Any Case?

ETWA's observations from the program, which had been carried out by SmartMatech Company over introduction of electronic voting system in Dec. 2015, indicates that it could not provide a certain procedure for prevention of fraud. It accelerates the voting process only. Whenever, employees of the election commission are not impartial, this electronic equipment alone cannot avoid registration of underage individuals and multiple times' vote by one person in the same election. Usage of this technology in registration of voters and on Election Day is entirely dependent on the performance of IEC staff. Despite this, the technology being used in voter's registration is far more in need of protection and control comparing to those of used for casting votes. If, there is a strong well within the government for distribution of electronic identity cards, than there is no need for any other tools over registration of voters.

Suggestions:

How does IEC Views integrating technology use in election as (A Process or an Event)?

Embedding of technology in an electoral system of a country should takes place as a process not an event. All stages of this process such as (Identification of Favorable Site, Selection of Technology, Purchasing, Transferring, Training and public awareness) processes should be carried very precisely. Thus, the election commission must give assurance about the positive consequences of technology use during an electoral process. As effective use of technology during elections depend on the impartiality of election workers, the IEC should provide and enforce an effective control mechanism for guaranteeing impartiality of its staff while using these electronic tools.

In order to provide the needed potential and capacity for using these tools, the election body should facilitate and implement certain capacity building programs in relation to usage, transfer, protection of relevant equipment, particularly in provincial offices.

Given the existing objective situation of the country, identifying desired reform and selecting technology before and after Election Day should be such considered to strengthen the participation of vulnerable groups, including women. In order the technology to provide favorable consequences during elections, there is a need for technical and financial support of donors for both IEC and capacity building of election observation organizations as well.