



Statement on Promoting Long Term Elections Observation in the Region with a focus on Voter Registration

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Competitive and periodic elections are central to democracy and constitute a critical index of popular empowerment. They provide a mechanism of orderly political succession in a democracy, and very significantly too, serve to confer legitimacy on those who govern. Therefore, election observers can make a significant contribution in this process. Election observation increasingly looks at the entire electoral process over a longer period of time, rather than at election-day proceedings only considering that elections are composed of a number of integrated building blocks, with different stakeholders interacting and influencing each other. Electoral components and stakeholders do not stand alone. They are interdependent, and therefore the breakdown of one aspect can negatively impact on every other and consequently on the credibility of the election itself.

Over the years, election observation in the region has largely taken a focus only on Election Day processes and activities. The short-term observation methodology has been generally viewed as inadequate, lacking in-depth analysis of significant issues surrounding an election both before and after the announcement of initial election results. This in effect has undermined the credibility and confidence in observation reports. Most of the observation bodies in Africa have struggled to operationalize the concept of long term observation which at best has remained informal and limited in scope thus reducing its effectiveness. These problems can be tackled within a framework of institutionalized observation in which a universally acceptable mechanism that is bilaterally agreed upon is employed. It is against this backdrop that the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), The Elections Observation Group (ELOG) and The East and Horn Africa Election Observers Network (E-HORN) joined efforts and organized a conference geared towards the promotion of long term election observation in the region with a focus on voter registration. The conference took place on 4th and 5th August, 2014 at the Ole Sereni Hotel in Nairobi.

Participation was drawn from representatives of civil society organizations involved in election observation in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan and Sudan, regional observer networks such as SADC-ESN and East and Horn of Africa (E-HORN); the election management body in Kenya (IEBC) and developmental partners; who exchanged knowledge and experiences that contributed to improving the integrity of elections through long term election observation activities and recommended as follows:

Recommendations to civil society and citizen election observers

1. To commit and adhere to the declaration of global principles for non-partisan election observation and monitoring by citizen organizations and conduct for non-partisan citizen election observers and monitors.
2. To critically appraise the voter registration process architecture throughout the electoral cycle and develop advocacy strategies to address the gaps.
3. To organize quarterly meetings on a round robin with domestic network groups liaising with E-HORN secretariat to serve as hosts of the meeting.
4. To formulate realistic follow-up mechanisms on observation recommendations balancing technical and political interventions.
5. To enhance cooperation between regional and citizen election observers in knowledge exchange, pooling resources and sharing of tools and skills.
6. To develop online platforms for advocacy lobbying and sharing of information resources.
7. To develop principles to assess the political parties' structure and support countries in the region with nascent political systems.
8. To map out key stakeholders within their countries and in the region to facilitate a more strategic stakeholder engagement.
9. To prepare timely and comprehensive observation reports and share them with key electoral actors to inform future interventions on the electoral process.
10. To analyze the legal framework on voter registration and identify gaps, overlaps and contradictions.
11. To build capacity to monitor modern election technology around the electoral process
12. Civic education providers to ensure that voter education is a sustained engagement throughout the electoral cycle to help promote civic skills and knowledge amongst the citizenry.
13. To embrace the principles of professionalism, neutrality and objectivity in their operations to earn them credibility and facilitate good relations with the electoral management bodies and other key stakeholders.
14. To formulate direct strategies of engaging with the development partners like organizing systematic and regular forums with the development partners and producing periodic publications-newsletters on electoral processes to be shared with the partners.
15. To sustain the life of the network in the region by formulating mechanism that optimizes the finite resources within the member organization.