



*“Raising Trust in Electoral Technology; Innovation Aided by Traditional Approaches”*

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Enhancing the Transparency of the Electoral Processes”*

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*“Election management systems between tradition and innovation”*

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*Ladies and gentlemen, friends. Good morning.*

I am truly honored to stand in front of such a great group of friends, colleagues and electoral leaders from around the world. I, and IFES, thank the AWEB leadership and all of you for this opportunity.

I have carefully listened to all the excellent presentations of the past two days and will try to speak in extension of these.

I am a self-declared technology geek. In my 20 something years of traveling for elections worldwide, I have led, assisted and observed major technology projects being implemented. I have been a proud participant in successes and I have suffered in failures. It has been a sobering journey and I would like to share a few thoughts with you on why I think **traditional thinking and approaches are fundamental to a successful and gradual implementation of electoral technologies** – this all in our overarching shared pursuit of more effective and more trusted electoral processes and outcomes.

For decades, many have **hoped that technology would offer a revolution in how elections are conducted**. Replacing traditional paper-based approaches, it was believed, would present a dramatic **improvement in voter identification, faster and easier voting and results, higher accuracy, increased transparency, integrity and public trust, and lowered cost**.

Unfortunately, **I believe this promise has yet to be fulfilled. Electoral technologies have proven vulnerable to failure and security breaches, distrust by both contestants and voters, inflated cost and, to legal challenge**.

**Misperception and suspicion of electoral technology have often proven as damaging as its actual weaknesses** - a fact well exploited by losing candidates, particularly in closely contested, high stakes elections.

**Electoral management bodies are under enormous pressure to implement new technologies**; by politicians, by civil society, by vendors, and by the misperception that progress, or being modern, equates to using cutting edge technology wherever possible. **Electoral leaders must resist these pressures and let good judgement and common sense prevail**.

We, at IFES, sincerely believe that **electoral technologies can indeed significantly improve the quality of the electoral process, if wisely used to augment traditional approaches**, not as an immediate and wholesale replacement of such.

We believe that both traditional **paper-based systems and electronic systems have significant weaknesses and advantages**. Used together, they mutually reinforce each other, **leveraging the significant symbiosis between the old and the new**.

An EMB should be **proud to implement, for example, paper balloting and a well observed manual count, combined with electronic result transmission and tabulation. Even better if, for example, hand-signed results forms and tabulation reports are made available online immediately for public scrutiny and extensive parallel vote tabulation efforts.**

**One fundamental problem is that the discussion, decision and implementation of new technology sucks out too much oxygen of many EMBs who have limited time and resources.** Not only do many struggle to establish appropriate procedures and training for the new technologies, they also unfortunately neglect to maintain their traditional mechanisms. The compounding nature of these two factors create immense risks for their election.

I believe the last 10 years have been sobering when it comes to the opportunities and risks associated with electoral technologies. Now, more than ever, we believe modernization has to be approached carefully. **All options available have to be considered; not just a careful examination of all existing technologies, but also the option to create homegrown solutions that perform better in the national context - and, importantly, examine the pros and cons of adopting or strengthening existing and more manual approaches.** Many consolidated high-tech democracies have recently reviewed their technology ambitions and decided on staying with or even returning to more traditional approaches, most notably on paper balloting. Examples include Norway, Australia, Germany, Denmark and others.

What we, at IFES, advocate for is simple: **solid, patient management and excellent leadership when considering modernization - and the role that technology will play within this.**

When introducing new technology, well-proven traditional aspects must receive particular attention. It took centuries to develop the processes and procedures that make the paper-based system transparent and trustworthy. Developing similar processes and procedures for new technologies is much more challenging, but we often neglect its importance. **Aspects of traditional approaches that deserve attention include:**

- **a comprehensive legal and procedural framework;**
- **inclusive and consultative system design and implementation;**
- **transparent and auditable paper and digital evidence;**
- **training and accountability; and,**
- **building trust through public information and interaction.**

We believe **electoral leaders must demand a broader, more open, careful deliberation of technology choices. Electoral leaders can insist that such an important decision must be subject to a comprehensive well-resourced feasibility study.**

Feasibility studies can be structured in many ways. We, at IFES, have strived to capture the best practices from around the world in our **published methodology for feasibility studies.**

Key features of this approach include:

- Initiating the study with a formal well-published basis for the effort, for example, in a **Terms-of-Reference** promulgated by the EMB;
- Convening a well-resourced **Feasibility Study Committee** with broad membership, including external technology experts, civic society and academia – working in a transparent and consultative manner to build trust around the entire process and the final recommendation;
- At the outset of the study to **assess the system already in place**, and the actual cost of this, having a strong baseline to work from; answering the question “**what problem are we trying to solve with new technology**”, and through this establishing clear objectives for the study;
- Identification of all **potential methodologies and technologies, followed by analysis of all factors affecting the choice**: functionality, security, total cost of ownership, required legal framework, EMB capacity development, training, voter education requirement, and so forth;
- **Well managed and ethical vendor involvement**, where all vendors have equal opportunity to make their case. This can include a vendor fair where external stakeholders, such as contestants, are also invited to see and feel the technologies available and, again, built trust around the process; and,
- Towards the end of the study, **comprehensive pilot tests** of two or more methodologies in unofficial elections, scrutinizing all aspects of a proposed methodology in real life.

In closing, knowing how much information you have been bombarded with these past days, I hope that you may remember these **three key points** from my presentation:

- Electoral **technology is not a panacea**, but choose such wisely, and combine it with sound proven traditional approaches, you can have a potent solution;
- **Resist pressure** from the outside, especially from vendors and contestants, and the notion of having to be “modern”; and,
- Control the process by tempering it within a mandated, deliberate, transparent and participatory **feasibility study**.

While much is still to become clear, the situation in Kenya reminds us all in this room what heavy responsibility is placed on our shoulders and what immense risks we manage for the peoples we serve. Our thoughts are with our dear colleagues in Kenya as they face this tremendous challenge and we must do everything we can to assist them in the coming months.

Thank you for your immense patience with me.

IFES and I hope that we can be of assistance to many of you in the years to come.