



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ELECTIONS

ECONEC – ECF/SADC JOINT DECLARATION ON THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ELECTIONS IN THE ECOWAS AND SADC REGIONS

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions (ECONEC-RESAO) in collaboration with the Electoral Commissions Forum of Southern Africa Development Countries (ECF/SADC) with the support of the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), managers of the Component 1 of European Union Support for Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) held an International Conference, *on Opportunities and Challenges in the Use of Technology in Elections: Experiences from West and Southern Africa* at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria from 9 to 11 April 2018.

The Conference reviewed, assessed and shared experiences on the basis of lessons learnt by Election Management Bodies (EMBs) in the ECOWAS and SADC countries and others on the introduction, trend, impact and potentials of the use of election technologies in the last three decades.

The Conference was attended by Chairpersons, Vice Chairpersons and Members of Election Management Bodies of the ECOWAS and SADC countries, Representatives of the Ministries and Agencies in charge of elections in some ECOWAS member states, as well as the Chairman of the Election Commission of Jordan and of the Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission of Kenya, who gave the Keynote Address. Also in attendance were the EU Ambassador to Nigeria and ECOWAS, members of the Diplomatic Corps in Nigeria and representatives of the ECOWAS and African Union Commission. Other participants include election and election technology experts, staff of INEC, ECONEC and ECF-SADC Secretariat, leaders and representatives of political parties and Civil Society Organisations, the media, EU-SDGN project implementing partners and development partners, including the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and other stakeholders.

With the support of:



European Union





OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ELECTIONS

Participants at the Conference:

ACKNOWLEDGE the benefits of the use of technology to boost public confidence in the electoral process and for the protection of the sanctity and integrity of the ballot in ensuring that leaders in the ECOWAS and ECF-SADC regions now obtain their mandate and legitimacy solely through the ballot box, based on the rule of law and will of the people;

SALUTE the courage, determination and resilience of citizens and managers of elections in the ECOWAS and SADC regions in promoting and defending democracy through the deployment of ICT in elections to enhance the credibility, integrity and transparency of the electoral process to the extent that power now alternates between the ruling and opposition parties through largely peaceful electoral and democratic transition processes;

RECOGNISE the role of international and regional organisations, development partners, governments and state institutions, political parties, traditional and religious leaders, Civil Society Organisations, the Media and the citizenry in facilitating and supporting the use of technology in the conduct of credible electoral processes and peaceful transitions, thereby deepening democracy and good governance and promoting national and regional peace, stability and development in the ECOWAS and SADC regions;

NOTE the progressive adherence of ECOWAS and ECF-SADC members States to the various international, continental and regional protocols and principles, including the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, furthering the enhancement of electoral processes and the deepening of democratic culture in both regions;

TOOK a critical and holistic look at the adoption, deployment and use of technology in elections over the last three decades. Having reviewed the impact of such deployment and drawing appropriate lessons with a view to strengthening the sanctity, integrity and credibility of current and future elections and consolidating democracy and good governance in the ECOWAS and ECF-SADC regions, **hereby declare as follows:**

1. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions bear the burden discharging the sacred national duty of organising and conducting free, fair, credible and transparent elections, bearing in mind that the outcome of a well conducted and generally acceptable election is the basis of good governance, peace, stability and development. On the other hand, a badly conducted election

With the support of:





OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ELECTIONS

with disputed outcome is always a trigger for conflict, sometimes resulting in civil war with negative consequences, not only on the affected state, but on neighbouring states in particular and the region and the continent in general.

2. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are aware that sustaining the usage of technology in elections is an expensive undertaking. This requires the mobilisation of adequate resources, which sometimes may be beyond the capacity of the state to bear as a sovereign responsibility. Therefore, the Private Sector, which requires a stable and peaceful political and socio-economic environment to operate and thrive, should contribute to meeting the cost of elections;
3. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are willing to take advantage of the opportunities offered by technological innovations to improve the credibility of the electoral processes and to enhance the sanctity of the ballot and integrity of electoral outcomes. In doing so, EMBs should view the application of technological innovations in the electoral process as a facilitator, rather than a “magic bullet” for the delivery of good and credible elections by utilising simple, appropriate, cost-effective and sustainable technologies. The deployment of such technological equipment and applications should be secured in law, protected against intrusion and accompanied by appropriate training of electoral officials and effective civic and voter education to engender trust, confidence and ownership by all stakeholders;
4. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are conscious of the numerous challenges associated with the adoption, deployment and usage of electoral technology, including the deficit of infrastructure and expertise, cost, choice and effectiveness of technology, as well as the twin issues of communication platforms and the security of sensitive election data in a world characterised by cyber warfare and election interference through the use of technology on a global scale by State and non-State actors;
5. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions recognize that while the use of technology is a welcome innovation in the electoral process, elections are governed by law. Consequently, efforts must be made to address the gaps between the technological innovations and the responses of the legal framework to these innovations by enacting clear and unambiguous provisions in the electoral guidelines and regulations which permit their deployment in good time before elections. In enacting such “fit for purpose” provisions and regulations, EMBs must take into consideration such obligations under international and regional protocols and best practices governing elections;

With the support of:



European Union





OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ELECTIONS

6. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are committed to strengthen capacity development and training of their electoral officials to promote efficiency, effectiveness and performance in the use of electoral technology in the delivery of free, fair, credible, transparent and peaceful elections and provision of better electoral services to the people. Efforts should be made towards the establishment of an African Technical Institute to drive home-grown research and innovation in electoral technology;
7. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are committed to deploying appropriate technology to pool election resources, materials and experts for common use across both regions, based on the principle of mutual assistance, burden sharing and comparative advantage;
8. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions will continue to expedite action on the use of technology to provide access to information and promote political inclusivity and full participation and representation of women, youth, People Living with Disabilities and all other marginalised groups, including IDPs and the Diaspora in political process; and
9. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions are fully cognisant that for technology to be an enabler in promoting electoral trust and integrity, it must be simple, accurate, verifiable, secure, transparent and understood by all stakeholders. While care must be taken that the use of technology is not over-regulated in terms of legal provisions, such usage must be well-grounded in law as technology cannot operate in a vacuum or with itself.
10. EMBs of ECONEC and ECF-SADC regions pledge to further collaboration and to use the Abuja Conference as a turning point in a collective effort to deepen the deployment of technology for credible elections and building of stable democracies in Africa.

Adopted in Abuja, Nigeria on Wednesday, 11 April 2018


Professor Mahmood Yakubu
INEC Chairman & ECONEC President
ECF-SADC


Monica Frassoni
ECES President


Adv. Notemba Tjipuenta
Chairperson,

With the support of:

