GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND OPERATIONAL TASKS IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN VOTER REGISTRATION

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CONTEXT

- The use of technology in elections is as old as the history of elections themselves.
- ICT has over the last few decades, changed the way elections are conducted across the globe.
- The increase in the use of election technology has also increased the challenges, including errors of judgment, on what technology to use, where, when, how and why.

"Some of the poorest countries in the world have chosen some of the most expensive electoral processes and technology…"

A Statement by the UN SG Ban Ki-moon to the General Assembly, August 2009

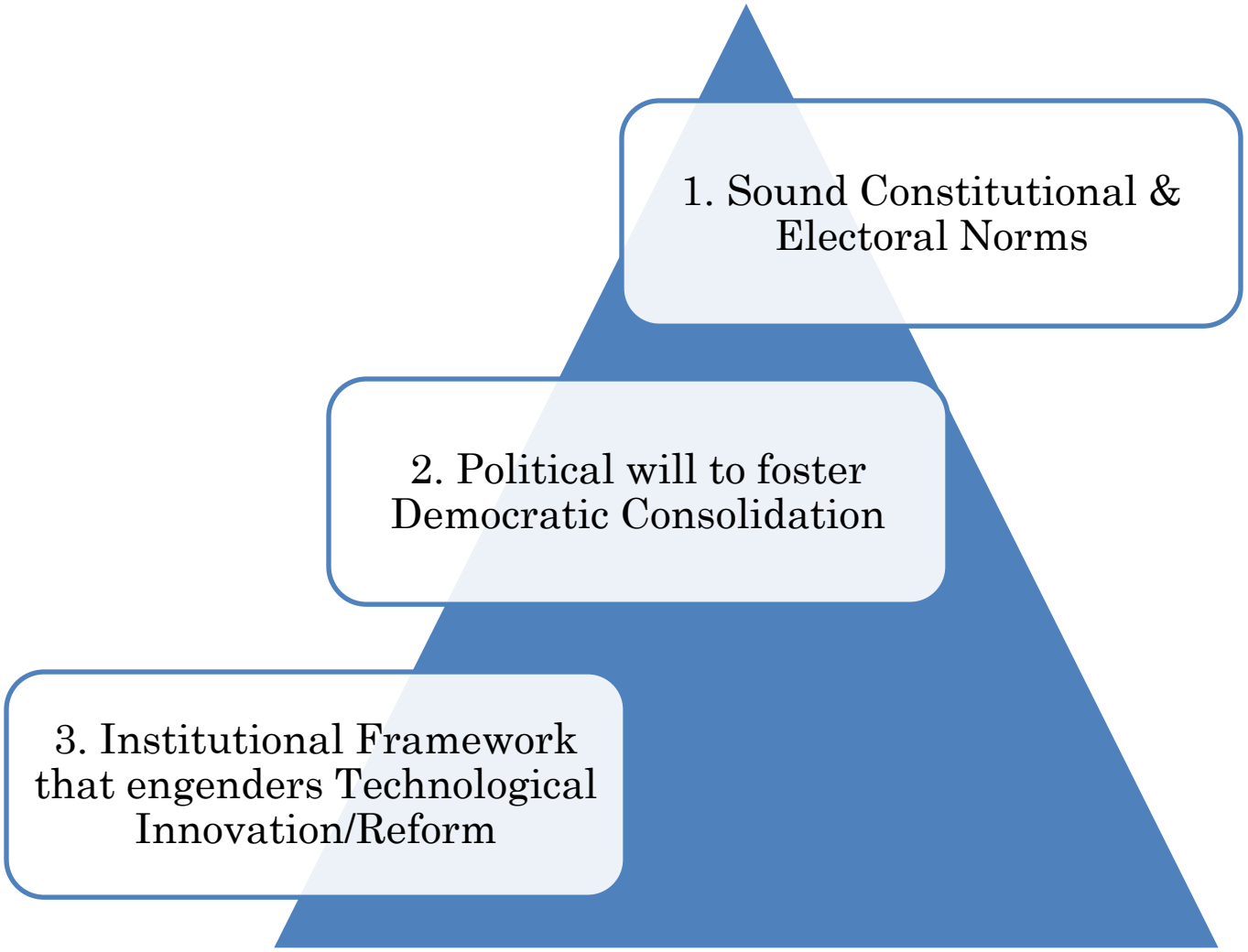
Challenges facing the use of technology in election

- While in some contexts technology has contributed to enhanced trust and confidence in elections, in others it has failed to solve existing challenges and even created new ones

- **Why?**

  - Lack of sound legal and institutional frameworks
  - Lack of political will to use the right technology for the right situation
  - Bad planning & management of elections

Remedies for effective use of technology in elections



TECHNOLOGY IN VOTER REGISTRATION

- **Voter Registration** - as the most contentious, costly and logistically complicated aspect of Election Management - represents the specific domain where the impact of ICT is felt the most and where its application has had the most serious ramification in relation to the quality, credibility, sustainability of elections across the globe.

- There is therefore a need for **policy dialogue** on the impact of ICT on Voter Registration and other related electoral components.

TECHNOLOGY IN VOTER REGISTRATION

- There is no single solution that can be universally, easily and effectively be applied everywhere.

- Different countries & different situations require different solutions.

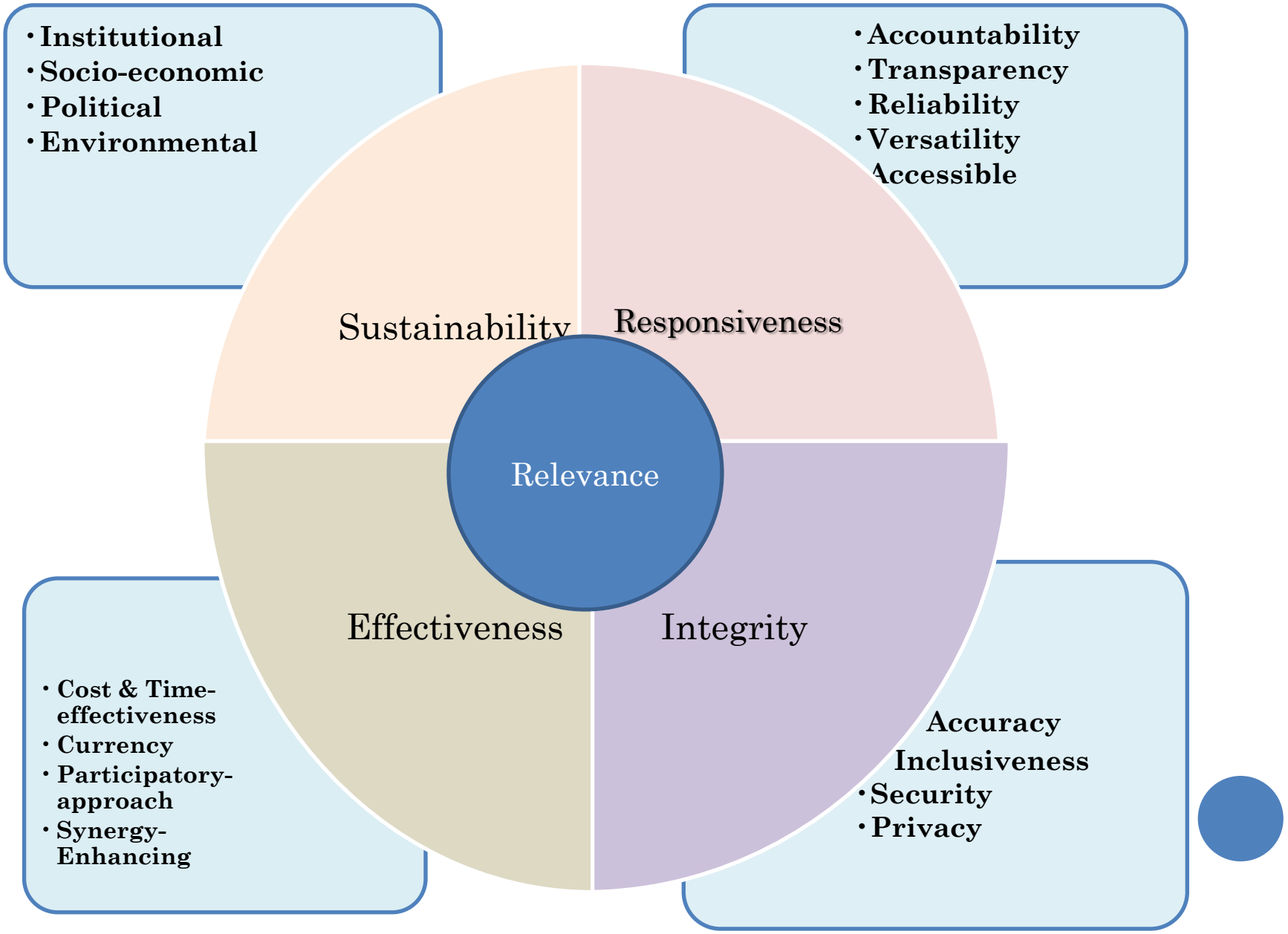
- Therefore, there should be respect for each country's sovereign will and right, in accordance with the will of its people, to freely choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems, and even electoral (voter registration) systems.

Some criteria for decision-making

- Apart from the country's history, laws, culture, politics, religion, etc. which shape political and electoral choices, the following specific criteria are important when deciding on technology choice:

1. The level of citizens' trust & confidence in the politico-administrative system of their country
2. The independence and professional capacity of the EMB
3. The resource endowment of the country
4. The peculiarity of challenges and needs facing the country at a particular moment

Guiding Principles on the Use of ICT in VR



When the principles clash!

- There are instances when these principles do clash and there is a need for decision makers and stakeholders to decide which principle and value should take precedence in a given context and setting:

- **Integrity** (Security) vs. **Sustainability** (socially relevant and economically sustainable)

- **Transparency** vs. **Privacy**

When the principles clash!

- When deciding on which principle to uphold on the choice of new technology, asking the following questions may provide useful guidance:
  - *What are the most pressing priorities and needs of the country?*
  - *What can the country and the EMB afford - this should not be driven by the donor country, vendors or by unscrupulous politicians?*
  - *What is expedient in the local context: socio-economically, politically, and environmentally?*

Making choice of technology – some tips

- *Always "Begin with the End in Mind":*
  - *What is the key objective of the technology being introduced: what does it have to address, where, when, how and why;*
  - *Can the country afford this type of technology today, tomorrow, and beyond;*
  - *How can we plan and implement this technology for relevance, responsiveness, flexibility, inclusiveness and sustainability;*
  - *Is there support for this type of technology within the EMB (staff are trained to implement it) and beyond;*
  - *Can the new technology advance EMB performance in areas such as financial and HR management, voter education & public relations, etc;*
  - *Have we adequately consulted all electoral stakeholders for their buy-in and support for the new technology;*
  - *Can this technology be shared with other government and private agencies as a cost-recovery measure;*
  - *Is the technology compatible with and can it be shared cross-nationally as a "resource pooling" measure?*

Some Operational Consideration

- Have an understanding of the nature of the challenge you face in the management of elections & which solution (technology) is best suited to address such a challenge
- Once a particular need or challenge has been identified, national actors should undertake a strategic analysis of the challenge it faces and, using a multi-stakeholder approach, move to embrace particular solutions including technological ones.
- The adoption of election technology should be based on a procurement plan that subscribes to integrity, effectiveness and sustainability. Such a plan, depending on the scale and scope of what is to be procured, should include clearly-defined objectives, timeframes, roles and responsibilities.

Some Operational considerations

- New election technology may require reform of the law to ensure that elections compliant with the provisions of the law. This means the earlier the decision to introduce new technology is made, the better in order to ensure legal certainty and minimize disruptions to the electoral process.

- Election technology requires continuous staff training, testing (and re-testing) of equipment, appropriate transport, warehousing

CONCLUSION

- The use of technology in elections is bound to increase with time and there is need for increased expertise in the planning and management of election technology.

- African countries in particularly should invest more resources to explore what technology exists out there and how to harness and domesticate it to suit local conditions, thereby continuously adding value to the quality of their elections.

- There is a need to use a holistic approach to the application of technology in the management of elections: *from the EMB institutional re-engineering (strategic planning and organizational development) to its operational responsibilities such as boundary delimitation; voter registration; voter and civic education; staff training; campaign monitoring; balloting; vote count and results announcement; and even stakeholder liaison and public outreach*.

Conclusion

- There is a need to enhance EMB capacities to synergize with other national institutions and also cross-nationally in the use of technology – this can be an invaluable cost recovery measure.
- The adoption of new technological solutions should be guided by procurement strategy that is based on integrity, effectiveness and sustainability.
- Transparent and timely procurement of election technology is critical for mitigating any risks associated with delays, non-performances or rushed processes leading to undesirable election outcomes.