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Voter Registration and the Voters' Roll in the SADC Region

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Outline of the Presentation

- Background to Voter Registration
- Voter Registration: Main characteristics
- Voter Registration: Challenges
- Voters' Roll: Main Characteristics
- Voters' Roll: Issues
- The Solution: More and better technologies?
- Some Lessons



Background to Voter Registration

Voter VR is one of the most contentious aspects of an electoral process:

- It determines who can vote or not
- Ultimately, VR may determine who wins
- Genuine logistical and administrative constraints may be perceived as politically motivated
- In conflict and post-conflict contexts, decisions about the inclusion and exclusion of potential voters may determine the legitimacy of the process
- This can ultimately lead to the failure of the whole democratic transition
- Some issues on VR are highly political (i.e. registration of IDPs)



Voter Registration: Main characteristics 1

- Census data versus projected population by national statistical services
- National Identity Documents not available
- Eligibility criteria (i.e. citizenship, residence, non-conviction)



Voter Registration: Main characteristics 2

- Continuous, permanent and supplementary or election based
- Use of national register of births and deaths or recent census data
- Internal migration
- Continuous Registration (apathy with continuous registration)
- Targeted VR – When an election is announced
- Stationary registration *versus* mobile registration



Voter Registration: Main characteristics 3

- High death rate and under-reported deaths (i.e. AIDS)
- Youthful population turning 18 years
- Proof of residence (i.e. rural areas)
- Role of traditional authorities
- Record of deaths can also be unreliable and deaths underreported
- Long distances to registration points
- Insufficient supply of registration materials e.g. cameras, films e.g. Malawi 1999



Voter Registration: Challenges

- Multiple registrants
- Inadequate data capturing and analysis
- Limited ICT capacity, hardware, software and technical support
- Large migrant populations with insufficient documents or incoming exiles or IDPs (i.e. DRC and Angola)
- Porous borders (i.e. DRC)
- Intimidation of potential registrants (i.e. Zimbabwe)
- Voter registration methods are often unsustainable and expensive to replicate or to service
- Voters cards issued late or even on voting day (i.e. Lesotho)



Voters' Roll: Main Characteristics

- Voters' roll is also known as voting list, electoral register or voter register
- Inspection and verification of voters' roll
- Effecting voters' transfers
- Previously registered voters to confirm their data (i.e. residence)
- Cleaning, computerisation and consolidation of the roll
- Ongoing updating details on the roll
- Current trends are for voters to only appear in one voting list for one voting station



Voters' Roll: Issues

- Incomplete details on voters' roll
- Late inspection
- Problematic accessibility of the roll for political parties
- Voters' roll too expensive
- Inaccuracy of the roll
- Unavailability of roll in some stations on election day
- Updating of voters roll is not effected
- Auditing of voters' roll by Political parties and CSOs often not provided for.



The Solution: More and better technologies?

- VR is usually very expensive, requiring use of huge human resources and technology.
- Limited supply of trained personnel with IT expertise
- Lack of the necessary funds and limited time
- Supplier-driven voter registration models with heavy doses of IT and special material from external suppliers
- Sustainability issues are not considered fully.
- Most of the proposed technology and methodologies are often entirely replaced in the next election cycle



Drawing Lessons

- Given the strong political dimension of VR, the exercise must be inclusive, transparent and fair
- Sufficient time for the inspection of the roll in order to effect changes
- Accessibility of the process to all potential voters
- Copies of roll available to parties
- Preference for low cost & low tech VR exercise registration
- Sustainability issues must be considered fully, and technology and methodologies must be relevant in the next election cycle
- Independent audit of voters' roll.