

# IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ELECTION MANAGEMENT IN ZANZIBAR

A conference of Commonwealth Chief Election Officers, organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat in  
co-operation with the Election Commission of India  
The Ashok Hotel, New Delhi 24-26 February 2005

---

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ELECTION MANAGEMENT

Mr Khamis A. Ame  
Director of Elections, Zanzibar

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and are not the official position of his organization, they are offered as a contribution to debate and should be not taken to represent the views of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. The history of elections in Zanzibar dates back in 1957, when the first election was held while Zanzibar was under the sultanate rule under the protection of the British Government. Four elections were held during the time, the last of which gave passage to the Zanzibar Independence in 1963. The British withdrew its rule and the monarchy remained. Some sort of violence, intimidation and dissatisfaction marred all the four elections.
- 1.2. A month after the British withdrawal the monarchy was deposed and all the political parties were abolished, except the one that engineered the coup. Zanzibar merged with Tanganyika in April 1964 to form the United Republic of Tanzania. Under the Union Charter, Zanzibar has an internal Government with a constitution and parliament that is called the House of Representatives.

## **2.0 THE ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODY**

- 2.1. The Zanzibar Election Management Body has undergone various transformations. Firstly, the change of the political system from one party rule to multi-party system led to transformation of the EMB by dissociating it from the House of Representatives where the Speaker of the House was the Chairman of the EMB and Secretary of the House was Secretary of the EMB. Although the body had transformed in structure, the presence of faces that were associated with the ruling party brought remarks that the body could not conduct its businesses fairly. The Zanzibar Government addressed these criticisms by changing the top leadership of the Commission. Despite these changes, there were still dissatisfactions from the political stakeholders, which were levelled on the election law and the conduct of Commission business. An introduction of residence clause that required a voter to live in a residence for five years in order to vote or other wise had to return to his/her previous constituency was complained on as it was seen a move to ward off opposition support that mainly migrated from one island to another. The recording of the voter's number in the ballot paper counterfoil with a serial number that matched the ballot paper was interpreted as a move to scare voters who hold senior government positions to vote opposition.
- 2.2. These situations in the EMB and outside did not provide good environment for the conduct of elections. The main Zanzibar opposition party, which accused the EMB of playing with election results to favour the incumbency, opposed the 1995 General elections results and its elected members of the House of Representatives boycotted the House sessions. The Commonwealth Secretariat was

welcomed to broker peace agreement between the two opposing sides that led to peace accord, which was only partially implemented.

- 2.3. The General Elections that followed, the 2000 General Election was held under the environment of mistrust between members of opposing parties and the election clauses that were being disputed still were not amended. The election, although went well in 34 constituencies, there was a total logistical failures in 16 other constituencies with election materials failing to reach the voting stations on time and in required numbers. The decision to annul the elections in 16 constituencies and suspend vote counting in the remaining 34 constituencies, for security reasons, brought more complaints and the Main Opposition party boycotted the elections. The trend of events brought another stalemate and a violent clash between security organs and the main opposition party supporters. Leaders from the government and the two political parties saw sense by engaging in dialogue that helped resolve the differences. The second Peace Accord or Muafaka came into existence. The Muafaka was intended to create an atmosphere where political pluralism and competition could thrive. Among the issues that the Muafaka engaged in was the change of the structure of the EMB and its Secretariat. The clauses in the election Laws were also made that involved the following: -
- i. Reduction in time of residence in a constituency that one would be required to stay in order to vote from 5 to 3 years.
  - ii. A voter's number (or a sign that could indicate a voter) is not to be inserted in a ballot paper counterfoil.
  - iii. Inclusion of clauses that allow establishing a permanent voters register.
  - iv. Amendments to the clause on the appointment of election personnel that gave power to the commission to select election staffs according to the qualification it determined.

### **3.0 TRUST AND CONFIDENCE: THE POLITICAL PARTIES**

- 3.1. The Zanzibar Electoral Commission that has been transformed has established six consultative committees with members from Political Parties, Government, NGOs and the EMB itself. The Commissioner chairs each committee, and a member of the secretariat becomes a secretary to the committee. These committees were formed in order to promote participation of various stakeholders in the EMB activities by providing advises, expert opinions and promote inclusiveness in the conduct of election activities.
- 3.2. Apart from political parties being involved in various election committees, any major decision before being made by the Commission all political parties are engaged in discussions and a common opinion form the basis for EMB decision. Political parties have been involved

on discussions on: setting dates for election activities, the choice of technology to be employed in establishing PVR.

- 3.3. Political parties have been involved in monitoring registration of voters and voting exercise by fielding observers who are accredited by the commission. It is believed that the involvement of political parties by the commission in various stages of planning and execution of election activities has helped to promote the trust between the political parties and the commission, and has also promoted transparency.

#### **4.0 THE CHALLENGE OF TECHNOLOGY**

- 4.1. The Zanzibar constitution and the Election Law require the Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC) to establish and maintain a permanent voters' register. In establishing the register, the Commission had to familiarise itself with the available technology that could fit the Zanzibar scenario. Confronted with gross suspicion culminating from past election experiences, the 'data entry' method was high on the agenda on the choice of technology. It was agreed that the technology to be used not to involve the use of keyboard in data entry. The ZEC had therefore conducted study visits to EMBs in neighbouring countries that use 'non-keyboard' method of data entry, which included Kenya, Malawi and Lesotho.
- 4.2. The preparation for the permanent voters register was a major challenge to ZEC. It therefore sought advice by hiring a consultant, Mr. David Mathieson who was an IT Director from Electoral Reform International Services, UK. The major task of the consultant was firstly to assess the needs and capacity for the work, and later was involved in laying out proposal on technical aspects of the project and a detailed plan. In order to have the grasp of what the PVR entails, ZEC had conducted visits to several countries to study the technology used, planning needed and anticipated problems.
- 4.3. The first plan was to use the registration of by-elections in 17 Pemba constituencies to capture all the information for the permanent voters register (PVR) and later to register voters in the remaining 33 constituencies. The registration of Pemba 17 constituencies was arranged to serve two purposes, firstly to prepare normal registers of voters for the by-elections and the use of registration forms that take advantage of Optical Mark Reading (OMR) Technology to register voters for Permanent Voters Register. Although, the registration exercise for the Pemba by-elections was termed a success in that it served the purpose of the elections concerned, there were setbacks in the preparation of the permanent voters register which were due to the following:

- a. The pressure from political parties to see that PVR is established at the earliest and the limited time to process the order that resulted in delay in receiving OMR forms, which had affected the quality of training and the registration.
  - b. ZEC had to use local printed forms in the first three days of registration for registration, while waiting for the arrival of the OMR forms, which had affected the manner in which registration information was transferred from the locally developed form to the OMR form.
  - c. The shading in the OMR forms was affected by lack of practicing the activities using the actual forms.
  - d. Proper method in storage of OMR forms was not used, because its knowledge was lacking.
- 4.4. Test scanning of the OMR forms filled in the registration for by-elections had given un-satisfactory results. The analysis of OMR forms, that were read by scanners indicated wide spread errors in reading the forms. Generally, 75,122 forms that constituted 76.6% of the forms read, had errors in at least one of its field, and other 18,049 forms that composed 18.4% of forms read had errors in more than three fields. Another serious problem was the presence of four constituencies, which are Mgogoni, Wingwi, Tumbe and Chake Chake that indicated only about 2% of their OMR forms to be correct.
- 4.5. In light of what happened in the scanning, the Commission decided that the completion of OMR forms in the registration of the 17 constituencies was not of the quality that could form basis for PVR. Therefore, the registration had to called again together with that of the other 33 Zanzibar constituencies. The decision was communicated, discussed and later agreed by political parties. The government had also approved the decision. It was further agreed that the registration in the 17 constituencies would serve as example and provide lessons in the preparation and development of permanent voters register.
- 4.6. Having experienced the problems in establishing the PVR before, the challenge was to find means of alleviating those problems so that they do not happen again. ZEC had also examined other alternative solutions in setting up the PVR. In the course of implementing the PVR project, ZEC had regular contact with the National Electoral Commission of Tanzania (NEC) that was also doing the similar project. ZEC had attached its IT Manager to a meeting that set NEC PVR specifications that involved the South African based Company Waymark. ZEC also invited the Waymark to demonstrate to ZEC the PVR solution they are able to offer. After the demonstration and discussion the Commission selected a task force that looked and compared the two solutions, the old that was tested in during the by-

elections and the new that was presented by Waymark, and report back to ZEC. The ZEC was satisfied that the new solution was better, and agreed that it be implemented by ZEC. Among the advantages of the new solution are:

- a. Original form's image is stored in the computer and can be made available online.
- b. Higher security features are used in the system, which involves using biometric information that increases the security of the system.
- c. The Problem of interfacing two systems, which are scanning system and database software system, is removed because the same company builds both systems.
- d. The technical support for ZEC would be readily available, because NEC would be using the similar system and with more scanners.
- e. The scanners to be used are reliable because they have been tested in Nigeria with bigger system and more than 60 million people.
- f. Fingerprint matching feature is part of the new system, which would make possible to check for double registration.
- g. Exchange of information between the two PVR, ZEC and NEC is simplified.
- h. Voters' cards are made from higher security paper; therefore they are more secure and cannot be easily imitated.
- i. Project support is readily available from building the system, development until the PVR is ready.

4.7. The major challenges facing ZEC in the use of registration technology is the maintenance cost of the system. With the introduction of PVR system, the running cost of the organization is bound to increase that means the annual budget will go up. Therefore the ZEC would need to convince the government to increase its annual budget for it to cope with the new roles.