

PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT TRUST- KENYA

**USE OF MOBILE TECHNOLOGY DURING THE RECENT GENERAL
ELECTIONS IN KENYA**

Kenya is in the eastern part of Africa and borders Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania. It is also the gateway to the Central African countries of Rwanda, Burundi and the democratic Republic of Congo.

Kenya is a haven of peace in a region of turmoil as can discerned in the numerous media report of strife in all the above-mentioned neighboring countries.

The recent Presidential and parliamentary Elections were the most closely contested in the history of Kenya. Campaign fevers reached a crescendo hitherto not witnessed and it was a “no holds barred” affair. All sorts of tricks were used to woo voters and it was a scenario pregnant with intrigue and propaganda.

Mobile Technology was the tool of choice to entice a public hungry in order to make informed choices.

This presentation seeks to shed light on the use positive and negative aspects of the use of Mobile Technology.

THE PRELUDE

On 23rd. October 2007, the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) received the Parliamentary Speaker's writs calling for the election of Members of Parliament (MPs) in the 210 parliamentary constituencies. That followed the dissolution of Parliament by the President of the Republic of Kenya. The Constitution provides that once Parliament is dissolved election must be held also in respect if the office of the President. The local authorities were also dissolved and fresh council and municipal elections called. In brief, three elections were to be held as follows

- Presidential Elections
- Parliamentary Elections
- Local Government or Civic Elections.

The Parliamentary ballot papers were to be printed in Britain while the Presidential and Civic Elections ballot papers were to be printed in South Africa.

The Registered voters were as follows:

Male 7,541,382

Female 6,707,142

As regards the ages, the registered voters were as follows:

Age between 18-40 years 60.8%

Rest 39.2 %.

In the light of the above, The ECK and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) spearheaded by the UNDP embarked on a voter education programme.

The ECK also printed a number of guidelines to enhance a smooth conclusion of this delicate undertaking. The Guidelines included:

- ❖ Guidelines to Election Security Officers (Police)
- ❖ Returning Officer Guide
- ❖ Presiding Officers Guide
- ❖ Guidelines for polling and counting clerks
- ❖ Media Guidelines
- ❖ Guidelines for Election Peace Committees.
- ❖ Guidelines for Candidates and Party Agents.
- ❖ Guidelines for Election Observers.
- ❖ A handbook for the voter.
- ❖ Election manual.
- ❖ Electoral code of conduct
- ❖ A voters handbook.

Needless to say the ECK invested heavily towards the conclusion of a free and fair election.

The ECK thereafter accredited Election Observers including:

- Kenya Domestic Elections Observers Forum
- The EU Observer Mission
- The African Union Observer Mission.

The Kenya domestic observers –since the introduction of the multiparty election system, Kenya has held three general elections and the referendum of the year 2005, on the proposed constitution all these have been observed by established domestic national observers, which are mainly funded through national basket fund.

Apart from the domestic observers, there had been other observers from the world organization and specific countries. These election observers/monitors were trained and contracted by the respected organization. They were given manuals, report forms budgets and other identities.

THE ELECTION

The period of election approached the electoral commission have availed themselves readily, they have employed clerks, presiding officers and returning officers. The clerks were trained equipped and transported in time with their facilities. Some violence were reported in the night before the polling day in some parts of the country.

There had been reported dalliance in some polling stations due to mismanagements in the programming officers of the ECK. There were reports of violence on the polling day. Especially in western, Rift valley, Nyanza and Nairobi provinces which were perceived to be opposition strongholds. Results for three constituencies were nullified. Among them were: **Wajir west, Kamukunji, and Kilgoris** constituencies.

ELECTION RESULTS

Everything went according to the book in the voting exercise. There were however undue delays in the announcement of results countrywide. This was not helped by undiplomatic utterances from the part of some ECK officials. The problem was exacerbated by independent results reports by the media and political parties. This has resulted mistrust among parties and party agents, the ECK Officers. Some politicians started fighting against the ECK officers. There had been misunderstanding between the ECK officials, like the chairman reporting thing some of his returning officers have switched off the mobile phone and things are cooked in the field, he is not aware of what is happening in some constituencies. These have raised a very big tension in the whole nation and many Kenyans lost hope of getting fruitful result from the election. After a long struggle the ECK chairperson announced the result and declared his Excellency Mwai Kibaki the winner followed by Hon. Raila Odinga. Within a very short period president, Kibaki was sworn in as the president of the republic of Kenya by the chief justice in the state house.

VIOLENCE AFTER ELECTION

All hell broke loose immediately after the announcement of Election results by the ECK.. Claiming that they were cheated of victory by PNU party supporters of ODM caused mayhem through the length and breadth of the Nation.. In these conflicts, all Kenyans were affected in one way or the other. The most seriously affected areas were parts of the Rift Valley Province, Nyanza, Coast, Western, Central and Nairobi Provinces. This also resulted in displacement of communities along Ethnic lines.

THE RECONCILIATION AND POWER SHARING PROTOCOL

Former UN Secretary General Koffi Annan headed a group of eminent persons to spearhead a reconciliation agreement that led to a power sharing Grand coalition government.

Kenya is now largely peaceful though it is not out of the woods yet.

THE USE OF MOBILE TECHNOLOGY IN ALL THE ABOVE

The various players in the Kenya electoral process used Mobile technology. Some were more adept at this and sophisticated than others.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties used the Short Text messaging Service (SMS) very effectively during and after the campaign period. Supporters have photos of their candidates as screen savers of their handsets. They were also sharing updates and party propaganda through the SMS. The submissions of results to their party headquarters were done using this system. This was not independently qualified.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Civil Society Organizations used the SMS to monitor campaign events and whether the Electoral Code of Conduct was violated by the various players
Private sector organization utilized their expertise to champion peaceful elections.

In the post election scenario, Political parties used mobile technology to mobilize supporters countrywide in to take mass action in protest over the “fraudulent” election results. There were also a lot of false messages on impending invasion by rival supporters. All this fueled the already simmering tension across the land.

On the other hand Civil society Organizations used the Technology to attempt to pacify the deteriorating situation and the slide to anarchy.

A consortium of CSO’s set up an Election violence Response Initiative.

