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Elections Cameroon (ElecCam) and the Adoption of Information and Communication Tools (ICTs) to Improve Electoral Governance in the Electoral Process in Cameroon

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to explore the main ICT initiatives adopted by Elections Cameroon (ElecCam) as a measure to improve electoral governance in the electoral process in Cameroon. Since becoming the elections management body in Cameroon, Elections Cameroon has adopted some ICT initiatives. These include the computerisation of the electoral register, the putting in place of a website, www.elecCam.cm, and the introduction of biometric voter registration in. Using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), it is argued that the adoption of ICT is to improve the electoral process, reduce multiple registrations, and share electoral information as a measure of transparency. The adoption of ICTs by Elections Cameroon has reduced multiple registrations and has made information readily available to eligible voters especially to those in the diaspora. Some short comings nonetheless, can be identified with the ICT attempts: firstly, from the perspective of the website, it is not linked to social media network platforms like facebook, YouTube and twitter, its regional, divisional and council branches do not have websites, social media sites, and secondly, its biometric technology is still limited to voter registration, and cases of multiple voter registration and voting still occur. Thus, to build a more transparent, impartial and credible electoral process in the pursuit of ICT efforts, it is recommended that the website should be linked to social media networks. While ElecCam's branches at the regional, divisional and council levels should build websites which should be linked to social media platforms, and ElecCam's biometric technology should be extended to voting and vote counting. The putting in place of an independent election management organ can help in this direction.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), ElecCam, electoral process, social media, Computerisation, and biometrics technology

1. Introduction

The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has spread into all areas of human efforts (Tepi, 2012:01). Consequently, it has been argued that ICT initiatives can improve governance, improve service delivery, and empower the denizens through access to information (Nwakanma and Nwaokonkwo, 2012:128). Information and Communication Technologies deals with internet and non-internet applications. Non-internet applications entails the usage of devices like telephones, fax, text messages, biometric identification, polling station technology, television and radio stations for better delivery of services (Sindeu, 2013). From this point, it should be noted that the adoption of ICTs in the electoral process in countries like the U.S, South Africa, and Nigeria for example have raised the credibility bar in the electoral process of these countries. (Nkohkwo and Islam, 2013:130-253). It is thus from such strides that, Elections Cameroon has since its creation been making some efforts to adopt information and communication technologies as a step towards the improvement of electoral governance in Cameroon.

Following the rebirth of plural politics in Cameroon in the 1990s, Cameroon's electoral trajectory has witnessed electoral violence resulting from electoral anomalies. Some of these electoral problems include multiple voting, under aged registration and voting, falsification of election results, compilation of fictitious names on voters' lists, and the inflation of election figures (Acha, 2011). Electoral irregularities are responsible for high voter apathy among eligible voters in Cameroon. Voter apathy has therefore been one of the issues Elections Cameroon had to contain when it took over the management of election operations in Cameroon. As the elections management body in Cameroon, it was imperative on Elections Cameroon to adopt strategies to stir the interest of eligible voters. From this standpoint, one of the methods adopted by Elections Cameroon to improve electoral governance has been the use of Information and Communication Technologies in the electoral process in Cameroon. This has entailed the computerisation of electoral registers, the possession of a website by Elections Cameroon, and biometric registration of voters.

This paper presents some ICT initiatives that Elections Cameroon has adopted in the electoral process to improve on electoral governance in Cameroon.

2. Theoretical Consideration: The Technology Acceptance Model (Tam)

This paper which looks at some of the Information and Communication Technologies initiatives which have been adopted by Elections Cameroon in the electoral process uses the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) of Fred Davis (Shroff, Deneen, & Eugenia, 2011.) as its instrument of analysis. The T.A.M looks at the extent to which actors or stake holders at all levels are ready to accept the use of technological innovations. The main argument underlying the Technology Acceptance Model theory is therefore premised on the reality that when individual actors are confronted with a new technology, a number of factors usually tend to influence their behaviour whether to accept the technology or not to accept the technology. Factors that determine the acceptance or rejection of a technological innovation may be interpreted from perceived usefulness or perceived ease of use of the technological innovation. Perceived usefulness in this context refers to a situation in which an individual uses a particular technology because he or she believes that such a technology will improve performance, while perceived ease of use means an individual adopts a particular technology because it is easy to use.

It is therefore clear that the intentions to check multiple voter registration, to improve the electoral process, some of the perceived anomalies are responsible for Election Cameroon's adoption of ICTs in the electoral process. The adoption of ICTs by Elections Cameroon includes the computerisation of electoral registers, the building of a website, and biometric voter registration.

3. Elec'am's Use of Information and Communication Technologies in the Cameroon Electoral Process

The electoral process in Cameroon can be divided into three phases: the pre-election phase, the election phase, and the post-election phase. The pre-election phase entails voter registration, drawing up and publication of the voters' register, printing and distribution of voters' cards, publication of candidatures, elections campaign, preparations for the polls and pre-electoral litigations. The election phase includes voting and all election operations on polling day, and finally, the post-election phase deals with the tallying of results, post-election litigations and proclamation of results (Electoral Code, 2012). Elections Cameroon has adopted some ICT initiatives in the electoral process, namely, the computerisation of the electoral register, the possession of a website, and biometric voter registration.

3.1. The Computerisation of the Electoral Register

Following Law No.2012/001 of 19 April 2012 relating to the Electoral Code and making Elec'am responsible for the organisation, management and supervision of all election operations in Cameroon, Elec'am had an urgent preoccupation. Elec'am had to revise the electoral registers it took over from the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (MINATD)¹. Elections Cameroon had to computerise the electoral register for the upcoming polls. Some factors motivated Elections Cameroon to computerise the electoral registers, and the most outstanding factor was that Elec'am wanted to reassure the voters that it can organise transparent, reliable and credible elections. Elections

Cameroon hoped to improve Cameroon's electoral process by adopting information and communication technologies.

Elec'am adopted two types of elections management software to revise the electoral registers: *the Computerised and Cartographic System for the Management of Elections*, abbreviated as *SIGCE*, and *the Diaspora Software*. The software were developed and put to use at all Elec'am's Divisional branches and data input and processing centres nationwide². These centres collected and processed electoral data from the council branches. The data were forwarded to the regional delegations where they were processed and transmitted to the Elec'am headquarter for centralisation. At this level, the data were finally merged and processed at the National Data Processing and Production Center. The remarkable achievements recorded by this software were:

- It registered and issued voter cards to 7,497 279 eligible voters.
- It reduced multiple entries on electoral registers.

3.2. The Establishment of an Electoral Website

Election Cameroon's use of ICT to improve electoral governance in the electoral process saw the creation of a website, www.elec'am.cm. This website was created for various reasons:

- A revision of the electoral law permitted the Cameroonian Diaspora the right to vote in the Presidential election. As such Elections Cameroon considered the building of a website as an indispensable tool to communicate electoral information to Cameroonian voters abroad and handy to other voters within the country.
- More so, the globalisation drive which has been defined as the shrinking of the world into a global village (Amungwa, 2010: P. 95) promoted by new discoveries in information and communication technologies is another causal factor which made Elections Cameroon to see the need for a website to bring election stake holders closer to the activities of Elec'am.

3.2.1. Online Sensitisation of Election Stakeholders on the Electoral Process

The electoral phases are published on the website of Elec'am: the pre-election, the election and the post-election phases. The *Pre-election phase* comprises activities like registration of voters, drawing up and publication of the voters' register, printing and distribution of voters' cards, publication of candidatures, elections campaign, preparations for the

¹ Prior to 2010 elections were organised and managed by MINATD

² Divisional branches of Elections Cameroon in Divisional headquarters.

polls and pre-election litigations. The *Election phase* entails voting and all activities that are carried out on polling day, and finally, the *Post-election phase* entails the centralisation of results, post-election litigations and proclamation of results.

3.2.2. Online Posting of the Voter Register

On this platform, voters who have been registered on the electoral registers at the various council branches or diplomatic services can verify their electoral data online to see whether their bio-data were correctly entered. This online form gives electors the opportunity to fill in their personal information such as: name of their council area, national identity card number, name of region, name of division, name of polling centre, date of birth and their names before they can check their personal electoral information. This online form which is illustrated in *Figure 1* gives voters who have duly registered on the electoral register the opportunity to check their personal electoral data, and in circumstances where mistakes are identified they can easily be channelled to the various council branches of Elections Cameroon where they registered for necessary corrections to be affected.

Figure 1: Online Verification form of Voters on Elecam's Website

Source: www.elecam.com

In line with the above, other online information are summarised in the Table below:

1.	The dates and venue of the revision of the electoral registrar
2.	The date and place of the distribution of voters cards
3.	Names of legalized political parties and candidates contesting for elections
4.	Presidential decrees convening electorates to the polls
5.	Exhibition of the various ELECAM Branches nationwide and their focal points abroad
6.	The display of the various parliamentary and municipal electoral constituencies
7.	online publication of voters registration statistics
8.	online information to encourage women to participate in all facets of the electoral process

Table 1: Summary of Online Information on Elecam's Electoral Site

Source: Compiled From www.elecam.cm

3.3. Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) and the Adoption of Biometric Technology in the Electoral Process in Cameroon

The ICT initiative to adopt in the electoral process in Cameroon was biometric technology. Biometrics can be defined as any technology that measures and analyses unique individual human body characteristics like Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA), fingerprints, eye retinas and irises, voice patterns, facial patterns and hand measurements (Das, 2006). This technology was implanted in the Cameroon electoral process in 2012 and according to Holtved (2011, p. 04), biometrics is often introduced in any electoral system for two reasons: to contain multiple voter registration, and to identify voters in polling stations on polling day. The main peculiarity in Cameroon's biometric is based on the realism that it is limited to voter registration. From this, it should be noted that its introduction was motivated by a number of factors, amongst which were:

- The appointment of members of the Electoral Board by the President of the Republic of Cameroon, H.E. Paul Biya on December 2008 dampened the hopes of other stake holders in the electoral process in Cameroon about the integrity and impartiality of these personalities to ensure free electoral operations (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011. P. 03). This pessimism in part can be explained by the fact that most of those appointed were sympathisers

and/or militants of the governing Cameroon People Democratic Movement (CPDM) Party as elaborated by Peter. W. Vakunta thus:

11 of its 18 members are members of the CPDM Central Committee and have held various posts of responsibility at the party before their appointment to Elecam. This thinly veiled attempt to hijack Elecam is seen by many sounded-minded Cameroonians and international election monitors as the death knell of free and fair elections in Cameroon. ELECAM is both a player and referee at the same time in this game of the ballot (Vakunta, 2012.Pg 92).

From this precedent, it was partly due to this lack of confidence on electoral board members that biometric technology was introduced in electoral operations in 2012. This attempt was purported to demonstrate that Elecam was willing to put in place acceptable electoral reforms in the electoral process.

Elections Cameroon was determined to reduce multiple voter registration and to clean up the electoral registers. This exercise was to check electoral fraud which manifests itself in the form of multiple registrations as outlined by the Chairperson of the Electoral Board, Dr. FonkamAzu'u Samuel in the following discourse:

...the biometric registration is a way of combatting fraud by ensuring that there is no double registration. This can only succeed if everything is linked to a central server. That explains why after registration using biometric system, there is a period of verification to ensure that nobody has succeeded to register more than once (Kendemeh, 2012).

-Other stake holders like political parties in the opposition, the civil society, and foreign partners like Britain, France, the U.S, Commonwealth and the Francophonie also exerted some pressure on the Cameroon government and Elections Cameroon to introduce biometrics in the Cameroon electoral process.

3.4. The Nature of Elecam's Biometric Technology

Elecam's biometrics has been limited to the registration of voters. The first phase of this exercise began in council areas found in regional capitals before being extended to other council areas. This Biometric according to Section 3 of Decision No 0549/ELECAM/DGE/ of 27th of September 2012 is and/or was comprised of:

i. Enrolment kits, each comprising of impermeable valise made up of a micro-computer, a camera, a fingerprint scanner, and an enrolment receipt printer;

- Election data processing techniques, composed of Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IFIS) essential to the quest for duplicates; and
- Voter card and electoral register printing systems.
- Since the biometric exercise in Cameroon is limited to voter registration, its achievement has been in the identification and cancelation of multiple voter registration.

4. Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is clear that since the putting in place of Elections Cameroon as the elections management body in Cameroon, it has adopted three ICT initiatives. These strategies were intended to improve electoral governance in Cameroon.

Cameroon's biometric technology is still at its infancy stage. It is still limited to voter registration. To make the electoral process more credible and transparent, it is highly recommended that its biometric technology should be extended to voting and vote counting which can be possible with the putting in place of an independent election management body.

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