

Facilitating crowdsourcing and citizen participation in local elections through digital tools

Research shows that:

Crowdsourcing is one of the most appropriate, accessible, and affordable methods for election monitoring

The widespread use of mobile phones in developing democracies has contributed to crowdsourcing

Citizen participation through crowdsourcing detects election irregularities and increases transparency and monitoring credibility

Digital technology increases citizen participation

Research shows that the widespread nature of digital technologies, especially mobile phones in developing democracies, has contributed to crowdsourcing and facilitates citizen participation in election monitoring. How? Digital technology tools allow citizens to participate in local and global movements and coordinate citizen participation in election monitoring by sharing positive and negative electoral incidents. Meaning that, in virtual spaces, citizens can meet and discuss the ongoing election and share how they think the process can be improved. Citizens hence become more engaged, and a free and fair election is ensured. The use of digital tools to facilitate crowdsourcing and citizen participation thereby applies to Article 21(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948: "everyone has the right to take part in the governance of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives."

Crowdsourcing: an affordable and democratic way to monitor elections

Crowdsourcing provides one of the most affordable means to monitor elections and access active political and democratic processes. However, to increase citizen participation, crowdsourcing activities have to be decentralized and allow for more people on the ground in various locations to ease information verification and access better reporting. Therefore, election management authorities, election monitoring organizations, and political parties that wish to promote a democratic society should promote crowdsourcing in local election monitoring. Crowdsourcing favors citizen participation that increases election credibility, information reliability, real-time and space reporting, and enhances transparency. These are indispensable values in any democratic society, and they all come cheaper with technology.

The shift to social media: an opportunity that needs to be utilized

Election monitoring agencies should seize available opportunities by devising more attractive campaigns and systems to communicate and report on election matters instantly. By doing so, citizen's trust in election monitoring agencies increases. Furthermore, citizens get more active and engaged when they feel democratically included. The 2014 local election in Tanzania is one example where citizens became more active and engaged by using the most common digital tool - the mobile phone. More specifically, the use of social media applications contributed to increased participation. As social, digital communication tools are emerging as the preferred option, phone calling and SMS are becoming inefficient. This shift to social media is an opportunity that needs to be utilized by election monitoring agencies. Election monitoring organizations should therefore focus on the most accessible aspects of digital tools and ensure that citizens are aware of how the technology can be used.

To access the full paper, see:

Shayo, Deodatus Patrick. (2021). "Citizen Participation in Local Government Elections in the Age of Crowdsourcing: Explorations and Considerations in Tanzania." The Program on Governance and Local Development Working Paper No. 47, University of Gothenburg. Available At: <http://gld.gu.se/media/2223/gld-working-paper47.pdf>

About GLD

The Program on Governance and Local Development (GLD) is a research program based at the University of Gothenburg, originally founded in 2013 at Yale University by Program Director, Professor Ellen Lust. GLD focuses on the local factors driving governance and development. The program is dedicated to international collaboration and scientifically rigorous, policy-relevant research in an effort to promote human welfare globally. Program findings are made available to the international and domestic communities through academic publications, policy briefs, public presentations, and social media, as well as on-the-ground workshops in cooperation with local partners.



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