
The Roles of Stakeholders Relationship in the Electoral Process

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ABSTRACT

The stakeholders of an EMB are those individuals, groups and organizations that have an interest or 'stake' in its operations. They can be classified as either primary stakeholders, who directly affect or are directly affected by the EMB's activities, policies and practices; or as secondary stakeholders, who have a looser connection with the EMB's activities. Genuine and open dialogue with stakeholders can build confidence in the electoral process and trust in the EMB's activities. It is important for an EMB to foster close cooperation with its stakeholders to ensure their support for its policies and programmes and to strengthen their confidence in the EMB's performance. Unless the EMB works hard to create and sustain sound relations with its stakeholders, there are likely to be misunderstandings and suspicions about its activities. This may ultimately generate lack of public confidence and trust in the EMB and the electoral process. This could be mitigated by sharing its publications such as annual reports, election reports, financial reports and newsletters with all stakeholders, and regularly organizing information meetings to which stakeholders are invited.

KEY WORDS: E.M.B, Stakeholders Relationship, Electoral Process

Introduction

An organization's greatest asset is its human resources—permanent, temporary and contracted staff. Unless an EMB safeguards the interests of its staff and responds to their concerns, it may well fail to deliver successful elections. Staff that are not loyal to the EMB and its principles may frustrate the EMB's programmes or be corrupted by suppliers who want to win a tender or by politicians who want to win an election. Unhappy staff may strike, even during elections, and thus derail the electoral process.

According to Kelly, (2012), an EMB cannot assume that its staff will be loyal and automatically share and work hard to implement the EMB's values: it needs to support and generate this loyalty and professionalism. One of the great advantages of a professional EMB is that it can honestly tell its staff that their work, and that of the organization, is intrinsically worthwhile, and can contribute greatly to the welfare of the country. This should be constantly emphasized. The EMB also needs to treat all employees with honesty and fairness; provide competitive salaries and conditions; recognize the need for career opportunities; acknowledge staff achievements; provide a safe working environment; ensure equal opportunities; foster a culture of cooperation, teamwork and trust; train and develop staff to enable them to enhance and diversify their skills; and involve staff in the organization and planning of their work.

The temporary staff employed at election time are, for most voters, the public face of the EMB. In many countries they form a cohort that works each election, and therefore

represent the organization, formally or informally, in their communities, and not just at election time. If they are motivated to project a positive image of the organization, this can help consolidate public trust in and support for election processes over time. This factor needs to be taken into account by countries considering mechanisms that involve less public interaction with staff, such as universal postal voting (Kelly 2007).

Concept of Political Stakeholders

Political parties and candidates are key stakeholders; EMBs must consider their concerns and interests when designing and implementing policies and activities. Unless the EMB enjoys a good relationship with, and the confidence of, political parties, its policies and programmes will attract criticism that will make it difficult for it to enjoy widespread stakeholder support. Where political party nominees are appointed as full members of an EMB, as in Georgia, or as non-voting members, as in Mexico, there is a permanent structure for EMB dialogue with the political parties.

Political parties and candidates are more likely to have confidence in an EMB that maintains an open-door policy to them; treats all political parties and candidates with respect, impartiality and fairness; and considers their opinions and suggestions. It is important that all political parties believe that they are being treated equitably and are offered the same opportunities and information by the EMB. Regular meetings with political parties—possibly more frequently during an electoral period—can provide a framework for reciprocal communication and can promote acceptance of the EMB's timetables, processes and outputs (Lijphart, 1984).

Primary Stakeholders

According to López Pintor, (2000), primary stakeholders include the following groups:

Political parties and candidates; EMB staff; The executive branch of government; Legislatures; Electoral dispute resolution bodies; The judicial system; Election monitors and citizen and international election observers; The media; The electorate: voters and prospective voters; CSOs; and The donor community and electoral assistance agencies.

In addition to these regular meetings, an EMB may be able to improve its relationships with political parties by including their representatives in EMB-sponsored events. Examples of joint activities are familiarization visits to voter registration facilities, participation in voter education and information workshops, joint media interviews or EMB-sponsored public debates between candidates. Equal opportunity to participate should be given to all political parties/blocs and candidates. It is important to involve political parties in consultations about setting an EMB's strategic objectives and evaluations of its performance. As key EMB customers, political parties' and candidates' opinions on the EMB's focus, priorities and service are a useful way to improve electoral management. After each electoral event, it is useful for the EMB to include political parties in general consultations with stakeholders on how to improve the electoral framework, and to consider them in any proposals for electoral reform.

The Executive Branch

According to Makulilo (2009), there are many reasons for an EMB to promote sound relations with the executive branch of government. The treasury or Ministry of Finance is often responsible for the EMB's budget. EMBs under the Governmental Model need to work within the confines of a line ministry, and may need to maintain close relationships with local authorities that implement electoral processes. In many cases, an EMB relies on government ministries (and regional EMBs similarly rely on local authorities) for transport and other electoral logistical support, such as premises for polling stations, and on staff seconded from various government agencies to serve as election officials. Approvals from government purchasing agencies or import licensing agencies may be required for essential procurement. EMBs may be subject to audit by the state audit authority, and may also be required to respond to inquiries from the ombudsperson or the anti-corruption agency. An EMB relies on the police force for security and, in some countries, may rely on the armed forces for security and some transport services during electoral events.

Cooperation and coordination will be enhanced if an EMB strives to keep all relevant government ministries and agencies informed of its activities and to consult with them on a regular basis about the services and support it may require from them. It can be useful for there to be a permanent working group or liaison committee involving the EMB and the government agencies on which the EMB relies for the provision of resources for electoral events (Kelly, 2012). For independent EMBs, a ministry, such as the Interior Ministry or Ministry of Justice, may be its 'liaison' ministry for representations to the cabinet or the legislature. In Canada, the chief electoral officer communicates with the government through a minister appointed for that purpose.

The EMB must maintain good relations with whichever department is responsible for vetting its budget requests and releasing its funding in order to ensure that this department is familiar with the EMB's programmes and the time-critical nature of its funding requirements. For a good relationship, it is important that the treasury or Ministry of Finance has confidence in the EMB's budgeting, accounting, financial control and reporting systems. Arrangements for the EMB chair or members to make courtesy calls on government leaders, which may include the head of state, to create awareness about the EMB's programmes and challenges, such as legislative, financial or logistical constraints, will raise the EMB's profile with its executive branch stakeholders.

The Legislature

EMBs need access to the legislature to ensure that their views are considered in developing electoral legal frameworks and electoral resource allocations, and to obtain feedback on their performance from an important stakeholder. This access can be facilitated by having a formal point of contact in the legislature. In Australia for example, this is a special standing committee of the legislature, while in Namibia it is the speaker of the legislature. In the Solomon Islands, the speaker of the legislature is also the chair of the EMB (McMillan, 2012).

McMillan also noted that the legislature is the body usually responsible for making laws, including electoral laws, and it may also approve the government budget and scrutinize all public accounts, including those of the EMB. In many countries, the EMB is required by law or convention to submit election reports and annual reports to the legislature. Maintaining a good relationship with the legislature lets an EMB put forward its budget proposals and

reports knowing that they will be dealt with by a body that has some understanding of its activities.

Electoral Dispute Resolution Bodies

As opined by Merloe, (1997), an EMB may have to deal with electoral dispute resolution bodies that have powers to deal with issues such as challenges to EMB decisions, disputes between the EMB and other stakeholders, the legality of the content of EMB regulations or challenges to election results. These may be judicial, quasi-judicial or less formal conciliation bodies. Their decisions can greatly affect the activities and public perceptions of the EMB.

General openness with these bodies—including ensuring that they are well informed on all EMB activities and decisions through regular meetings, receive all EMB publications and are invited to inspect EMB operations—can help maintain a good relationship. This needs to be done in a manner that does not, and does not appear to, impinge on the independence of decision-making of either the EMB or the dispute resolution body (Merloe, 1997). This is especially important if the EMB is also mandated to play a role in resolving disputes, which will often be the case (even if only in the sense that complaints might be made to the EMB in the first instance, and then escalated).

It is of critical importance that an EMB is professional and cooperative in any investigations of electoral disputes by these bodies. It will be difficult to maintain a good relationship if the EMB obstructs a dispute resolution body's access to relevant electoral materials or sites, if it lobbies to limit the powers of such bodies, or if its presentation of evidence on disputes is not professional.

Judicial Bodies

According to Mozaffar (2002), many components of the judicial system may interact with EMB activities. EMBs may need the cooperation of the police and prosecuting authorities in investigating alleged electoral offences, and to appear before the criminal justice or administrative court systems for any resulting court action. The EMB, its members or its staff may be subject to judicial investigation or civil litigation, and EMB administrative policies and practices may be subject to challenges in tribunals. As with relationships with electoral dispute resolution bodies, it is extremely important that the EMB is professional, accessible and cooperative in its dealings with the wider judicial system.

Election Monitors/Certification Teams and Citizen and International Election Observers

It is important for an EMB to create and sustain a good relationship with election monitors, certification teams (where appointed) and observers. Election monitors (who have the power to intervene and rectify any shortcomings in the electoral process), certification teams (which play an agreed role in assessing and validating (or not) an election process, especially in a post-conflict environment), and citizen and international election observers (who do not have the power to intervene and must only gather information and report) can be critical players in the electoral process. EMBs need to put in place simple accreditation procedures and adopt effective and timely accreditation mechanisms (Neufeld, 1995).

An EMB can organize and/or participate in observer pre-election briefings, held some weeks before voting day, for longer-term observers and observation planning teams. A further round of briefings could be arranged some days before voting day, whenever most citizen and short-term international observers are ready for deployment. It is increasingly common for EMBs

to invite political parties and representatives of civil society to attend observer briefings so that they can brief observers about their impressions of the EMB's preparedness for elections. Observer briefing packs prepared by an EMB can also help observers understand the election's framework and operational processes.

According to López Pintor (2000), observers, as part of their accreditation process, typically have to subscribe to a code of conduct laid down by the EMB (or in legislation), which may require them, or their sponsoring organization, to bring problems in the electoral process to the EMB's attention. Observation missions will normally also seek to define the standards of conduct they expect from their members. Formal sanctions associated with breaches of the code may include withdrawal of accreditation, though this is unlikely to be widely used in practice, because it will usually have an impact only after the event, and may have undesirable diplomatic repercussions.

Traditional Media

The traditional media, both print and electronic, public and private, can be a key ally of an EMB in informing the public about its mandate and operations as well as informing and educating voters about democracy and elections. People who read newspapers, watch television and listen to the radio regularly tend to inform others about what they have read, seen or heard.

An EMB needs a media relations strategy that promotes regular positive contact with the media and ensures that the media have access to accurate electoral information—including on EMB activities. If an EMB does not promote a transparent relationship with the media, there is a greater risk that incorrect information may undermine its credibility.

Elements of implementing a media relations strategy for any EMB according to Norris, Frank, & Martinez, (2014) include:

1. Identifying the relevant media and their coverage;
2. Identifying the key people in the various media who can ensure accurate and prominent reporting of the EMB's activities;
3. being proactive and transparent in releasing information to the media;
4. Ensuring that the information given to the media is clear, concise and easily understandable;
5. Developing a timetable for providing electoral information;
6. Creating a single EMB spokesperson for the media and one point of administrative contact within the EMB for the media; and
7. Setting up a media centre within the EMB.

According to Mozaffar, (2002), some specific activities that will assist an EMB in its relations with the media include:

1. Facilitating training programmes for journalists;
2. Issuing regular media releases on electoral issues;
3. Organizing regular media conferences;
4. Having a readily accessible EMB media liaison officer;

5. Preparing a media information handbook for each electoral event;
6. Conducting media briefings on technical electoral issues; and
7. Making electoral data easily and freely accessible to the media.

Media conferences could be at least weekly during electoral periods, and as needed at other times. It is advisable for an EMB to establish a full-time unit to assume responsibility for media relations and to appoint a person, preferably someone with a solid media background and who is respected in media circles, as its spokesperson.

EMBs may also need to deal with the media on a commercial basis, in relation to electoral advertising, or on a regulatory basis, if an EMB plays a role in regulating political campaigns. Maintaining professionalism and probity in these relationships will help create a positive atmosphere for the media's reporting of electoral activities (Neufeld, 1995).

For a number of reasons, an EMB is likely to have to monitor information that is published by the traditional media. It will need to be aware of stories that might constitute, or point to, breaches of the law or a code of conduct. It may be required to gather data on the extent of campaign publicity by various parties or candidates in order to monitor compliance with campaign expenditure limits. The EMB will also need to take account of publicly expressed criticisms of, or concerns about, the conduct of the election. Appropriate media monitoring techniques will vary from country to country; they could be pursued in-house or through the use of commercial media monitoring services, and could include gathering press clippings, TV and radio recordings, and Internet news alerts.

Social Media

The recent vast increase in the use of social media in many countries poses significant challenges for EMBs. Rather than being published through a limited number of relatively easily monitored nodes (mainly newspapers, radio and television stations), information is conveyed almost instantaneously between social media users, in a way that makes comprehensive monitoring virtually impossible. Material may be published via Internet sites hosted in another country, making the enforcement of laws relating to content difficult if not impossible.

According to Okello, (2006) many EMB stakeholders use social media to gather or share information, and will expect the EMB to be represented there, and to respond rapidly and concisely to questions and emerging issues. Social media users will increasingly be accessing the Internet using mobile rather than fixed devices.

In such an environment, it is not feasible to channel all media communication through a dedicated spokesperson who represents the EMB at press conferences and issues carefully crafted media releases. The EMB will need to be prepared to have a presence in multiple media channels (e.g. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.); to provide information in the restrictive format that such channels permit; and to delegate responsibility for communicating through such channels to staff who can respond very quickly in a tone that is communicative rather than bureaucratic, without having to clear most messages through a chain of command.

The Electorate

An EMB exists primarily to render services to the electorate—not only those who regularly vote, but those who are entitled to vote. Given the many and wide-ranging tasks an EMB

performs on behalf of voters, it needs to keep the electorate informed about its activities and programmes, and seek its views on EMB processes and performance. It is wrong to assume that, since political parties, CSOs, the legislature and the government are the institutions that by and large represent the electorate, an EMB need only deal with these institutions and can ignore individual voters.

An EMB can profit from creating direct channels of communication with the electorate. Potential means include telephone inquiry services; public inquiry desks and suggestions boxes at locations such as markets, shopping precincts or transport hubs; and interactive radio and television programming and ‘town hall’-type meetings featuring EMB members. Publicizing a list of EMB contact persons and their contact details on a regular basis is always a valuable service. In India, the EMB publishes a directory of contact details at the national level on its website within the information published under the Right to Information Act, and senior staff at the state level are appointed as public information officers. According to (OSIWA 2011) during the 2006 general elections in Fiji, the electoral office distributed a voter satisfaction survey at a sample of polling stations to collect impressions and direct feedback from voters on the conduct of the elections. At a number of elections in Australia, the EMB has arranged a survey involving structured interviewing of voters leaving polling stations; it has also commissioned a stakeholder satisfaction survey focused on candidates, political parties, and the media and state electoral offices. More generally, feedback from voters can be obtained through focus groups research and broader surveys of voters.

It is important that an EMB respond quickly and accurately to all questions and comments received from the public. A delayed response, or no response, gives the EMB a public image of an inefficient organization that is not interested in serving the electorate. An EMB may also need to make extra effort to provide electoral services, materials and information to those marginalized through disability, illiteracy or remoteness.

An EMB can use the media to inform and educate the electorate about elections, and undertake its own publicity programmes—such as print and audiovisual information products, and a regularly updated website—to keep voters in touch with its activities. It is helpful to set up a professional unit within the EMB to deal with media relations and voter information.

Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations dealing with a wide range of issues—such as democratic development, women’s empowerment, legal reform, human rights, civic education, governance and rights for people with disabilities—have a stake in an EMB’s activities. Regular consultation with these stakeholders, as is practised in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana and South Africa, directly advises the EMB of their specific needs and provides a forum for discussing and publicizing the EMB’s programmes in their support (OSIWA 2011). EMBs may also build positive relationships with CSOs by using them as partners to implement electoral activities, e.g. training temporary electoral staff, or voter education and information programmes. Some EMBs include civil society representatives; in Timor-Leste, for example, the membership must include three civil society representatives.

The Donor Community and Electoral Assistance Agencies

The key role played by donor agencies in democracy building and electoral assistance around the world makes them an indispensable partner of many EMBs. Donor funding may go directly to an EMB, or through an intermediary, such as a government ministry. There may

be a direct bilateral electoral assistance agreement with a donor, or multiple donors' assistance may be channeled through arrangements such as a UN Trust Fund (as in Nepal in 2008 and in Timor-Leste in the period preceding the 2012 elections) or a UN Basket Fund (as in Kenya, Sudan and Yemen). In all cases, an EMB needs to ensure that all donor requirements—including budgets, project implementation reports and financial reports—and any requests for access to inspect the EMB's activities are met with maximum efficiency and timeliness (Norris, Frank, & Martinez 2014). Donor round tables can be used as a mechanism for an EMB to report on its progress in electoral administration and use of donor funding. Donors may require, and certainly appreciate, an EMB acknowledging donor assistance in its public relations events, publications and media productions.

Secondary Stakeholders

As explained by Orozco-Henríquez (2010), the range of secondary stakeholders of an EMB is likely to be diverse, and includes the following:

1. EMB suppliers;
2. The public at large; and
3. Regional and international networks.

EMB Suppliers

An EMB relies on many suppliers for products such as technology, equipment, vehicles and election materials as well as services such as consulting, cleaning, security and transport. Unless an EMB maintains good working relations with these suppliers, its performance may be adversely affected by, for example, suppliers' not keeping deadlines or supplying substandard products and services.

To maintain good relations with its suppliers, an EMB should ensure transparency, professionalism and efficiency in the invitations for expressions of interest to supply goods and services; share information with suppliers and prospective suppliers on the EMB's values, such as strict adherence to integrity, dignity, professionalism and efficiency; pay suppliers within the deadlines agreed; and arrange suppliers' information forums to discuss their concerns and formulate agreed solutions.

The Public at Large

The general public is also an EMB stakeholder. As an organization promoting democratic values and improved governance, an EMB has the responsibility to be a good corporate citizen. In its activities it needs to consider the community's health and safety, and be environmentally safe. In its external and internal working relationships, an EMB has the responsibility to be a good practice model of the values it represents, such as democratic decision-making processes; respect for the rule of law; non-intimidator practices; honesty and incorruptibility; transparency; accessibility for all societal groups, including those marginalized through disability, illiteracy or remoteness; and promotion of gender balance. An EMB can seek to develop programmes of social responsibility by ploughing back into the community the skills, knowledge and other resources at its disposal.

Regional and International Networks

An EMB has stakeholders that do not form part of its immediate environment but have a bearing on its policies and programmes. The connections between EMBs and the

international community have become stronger as a result of intensified international cooperation in democracy promotion and electoral assistance. The creation of regional and international electoral networks has opened up opportunities for EMBs to meet regularly at conferences and workshops and to undertake study visits and other joint projects. Regional networks present opportunities for partnerships in sharing knowledge and materials and in the processes of peer review and evaluation.

International and regional instruments are a basic yardstick for assessing the quality of elections and have been widely used by election observers. The Global Declaration of Principles and Code of Conduct for International Electoral Observation adopted by the UN and by global and regional organizations in October 2005 is an example. An EMB that seeks to maintain a good reputation needs to align its practices and policies with internationally and regionally recognized principles, and be aware of global trends in electoral management.

Maintaining Relationships with Stakeholders

According to Pastor (1999), it is important for an EMB to foster close cooperation with its stakeholders to ensure their support for its policies and programmes and to strengthen their confidence in the EMB's performance. While some EMBs have at times sought to distance themselves from participants in the electoral process in the belief that their 'independence' calls for such an approach that has typically not proven to be productive. Unless the EMB works hard to create and sustain sound relations with its stakeholders, there are likely to be misunderstandings and suspicions about its activities. This may ultimately generate lack of public confidence and trust in the EMB and the electoral process.

Legal frameworks in countries such as Indonesia obligate the EMB to communicate with stakeholders. Even without such legal requirements, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has published formal commitments on how it will deal with stakeholders.

Like any business, an EMB needs to undertake consultative activities that will help it 'know its market'—that is, what the EMB's stakeholders (its customers) expect of it. But consultation alone is not sufficient. An EMB needs to develop an operational culture that makes it responsive to the expectations and needs of its stakeholders. This will generate support for and goodwill toward the EMB's policies and practices, and enhance its credibility. For example, an EMB may organize an election that, technically speaking, is of very high integrity and flawless in implementation, but if stakeholders are not involved and kept 'in the loop' about the process, their suspicion and distrust may lead to the rejection of the election results.

According to (McMillan 2012), the combined power, influence and interest of a stakeholder can be referred to as its stakeholder value to an EMB's policies and practices. Stakeholder value is the basis on which an EMB can develop an appropriate strategy for promoting sound relationships with each stakeholder. For example, political parties in general are a high-interest/high-power stakeholder in elections (though in a particular country parties can vary greatly in size, salience and influence). If a significant political party rejects an election result because it mistrusts the way in which an EMB conducted an election, the EMB may come under attack. Thus EMBs must take their relationships with political parties very seriously. The EMB may be less focused on its relationships with low-interest/low-power stakeholders that have only a peripheral interest in its activities.

An EMB's strategy for dealing with each individual stakeholder will also be guided by each stakeholder's attitude toward the EMB. For example, if a stakeholder supports the EMB's

policies and practices, the EMB may find it useful to involve it in as many of its activities as possible. This would not be appropriate where stakeholder involvement could damage an EMB's independence of action. If a stakeholder is marginal, and has little influence on EMB policies, the EMB needs to monitor it and keep it informed of the EMB's activities, but may not need to invest too much effort in involving it. Where an EMB identifies a wholly unsupportive stakeholder, it will need to analyse that stakeholder's potential intentions and reactions to EMB activities and develop a strategy for including the stakeholder, and an appropriate defence strategy, should this be unsuccessful.

An EMB can take a number of basic actions to maintain good relationships with its stakeholders, including (McMillan 2012):

- maintaining open, two-way communication with stakeholders;
- being sensitive to stakeholder needs and concerns;
- seriously considering stakeholder views when making decisions;
- treating stakeholders equitably, so that none are unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged by EMB activities;
- acting transparently, with meetings open to scrutiny and follow-up;
- maintaining the highest standards of ethics, respect for human rights, impartiality and care in its relationships with stakeholders; and
- Equitably resolving any conflicts between the needs of EMB members and staff and those of other stakeholders.

A relatively low-cost way in which an EMB can foster its stakeholders' awareness of its activities and gain their loyalty is through a sustained effort of promoting open communication and dialogue. This could be by sharing its publications such as annual reports, election reports, financial reports and newsletters with all stakeholders, and regularly organizing information meetings to which stakeholders are invited.

An EMB can also adopt a formal policy on transparency, which can reflect the rights of stakeholders and emphasize to EMB staff the importance attached to this objective (a value that is not necessarily recognized in all public service institutions), as well as clarify how it is to be achieved. A key element of such a policy can be the practice of preparing and issuing formal statements of reasons in support of major decisions. The need to prepare such statements can improve the quality of an EMB's decision-making by helping to sharpen thinking on complex or sensitive questions; their publication can facilitate stakeholders' understanding—and more ready acceptance—of the reasoning underlying difficult decisions.

How to Deal With Difficult Stakeholders

Noted by Mozaffar (2002), not all stakeholders will be favourably disposed toward EMBs. Some may be difficult for reasons that are legitimate, such as an EMB's failure to treat them with fairness, respect and impartiality. Others may simply be difficult for reasons such as personality clashes, past misunderstandings or the seeking of political advantage. It is common for some candidates and political parties to threaten to boycott or withdraw from elections citing EMB incompetence or partisanship, or to blame an EMB when they lose an election. This may occur because the EMB has not fulfilled its mandate to be fair and impartial, because of actions by bodies beyond the control of the EMB, or due to lack of public support for these political parties or candidates.

When attempts at inclusion fail, an EMB may need to decide whether it is wise to deal directly or indirectly with a difficult stakeholder, or whether to be on the offensive or defensive in dealing with it. If a small political party with little following announces that it is boycotting an election, the EMB may decide to restate its position publicly and monitor the situation. If a large and influential party decides to boycott an election, the EMB may need to seek mediation by a third party. There may be an advantage to approaching the courts for a binding determination if the differences between an EMB and a stakeholder involve an interpretation of the law Mozaffar, (2002).

According to Okello (2006), liaison structures, such as working groups with civil society or suppliers, committees of the legislature or political party liaison committees, may be useful in reducing or resolving differences between an EMB and its stakeholders. When a large majority in the liaison group supports the EMB's views, the dissenting views of a difficult stakeholder may be muted or stifled. Yet when a large majority in the liaison group supports the difficult stakeholder, the EMB can recognize that it is dealing not with a difficult stakeholder but with common perceptions of its performance—in which case it may need to reconsider its policies and decisions.

Where differences between the EMB and a difficult stakeholder are nearly irreconcilable, an EMB can resort to a strategy of defending itself against attack. Media releases and appearances by the EMB's spokesperson on news and other programmes, and other publicity opportunities such as the EMB's website, can be used to clarify the EMB's position so that the public understands its side of the story. The EMB may seek to publicize areas of agreement, rather than emphasizing areas of difference, to demonstrate that it can work with a difficult stakeholder. In such a situation, it is especially important for the EMB to express itself in a neutral, factual, detached, dignified and conciliatory way: any perception that it is becoming a player rather than an umpire will be to its long-term (and possibly short-term) detriment (Okello 2006).

By ensuring that it is irreproachable in all its conduct by maintaining a high level of transparency, impartiality, dignity, integrity, professionalism, service and efficiency in all of its dealings with stakeholders, an EMB can construct a good defense against detractors.

Conclusion

1. An EMB's stakeholders are those groups that affect or are affected by its actions, and to which it is accountable. Primary stakeholders include institutions such as legislatures, political parties, the executive branch of government, EMB staff, voters, the media, the electorate, CSOs, various components of judicial systems, election observers and donors. Secondary, more loosely affiliated, stakeholders include suppliers and the general public.
2. EMB-initiated communication and consultation with stakeholders may be on issues such as strategic plans, election timetables and processes, electoral reforms, and voter education and information needs. Transparency, professionalism and reliability in an EMB's regular communications with stakeholders promote confidence in it and the electoral process.
3. Despite an EMB's best efforts, it may have to deal with difficult stakeholders. EMBs need to decide whether to deal with these directly (e.g. through liaison committees with a wide membership of stakeholders) or indirectly, using other institutions such as the courts for arguments over legislative interpretations.

Recommendations

1. EMBs should seek to deal with stakeholders in a way that is inclusive, transparent, appropriate, accessible, respectful and supportive. An EMB needs to treat all stakeholders fairly and to maintain regular two-way communication and consultation with them. Methods may include meetings to consult or discuss policy, media briefings, including stakeholders in EMB activities and training, and the wide distribution of EMB reports.
2. An EMB's culture needs to be responsibly sensitive to stakeholder needs and expectations. Relationships with stakeholders require active management by the EMB to promote goodwill and credibility. The attention that an EMB pays to a particular stakeholder will vary depending on its importance and power.
3. An EMB may need to take defensive action to protect its reputation, using the media and other publicity opportunities to explain its side of any difference with stakeholders. An EMB's best defense is a high standard of professionalism, integrity, transparency, impartiality and service in all its conduct.

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