Pre-election Voter Awareness Campaign

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Tool summary

A Pre-Election Voter Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) is aimed at sensitizing voters about the importance of participating in the electoral process as a way to ensure a responsive, accountable and democratically elected government. In a democracy, a free and fair vote is the fundamental tool through which citizens can express their political preferences and developmental wishes. However, in representative forms of democracies, merely casting the vote may not be adequate to hold the elected officials and the executive accountable or to foster a responsive and transparent government. Therefore, providing voters with information on the electoral process, political parties and their manifestos, poll antecedents of the candidates etc. are necessary to educate them prior to the polling day is critical to enable them cast an enlightened and informed vote. A PEVAC aims to precisely do that i.e. to provide such critical information and in doing so, create better-informed, more motivated citizenry and, ultimately, a more responsive, transparent and accountable government.

What is it?

A Pre-Election Voter Awareness Campaign is aimed at making people aware of: the importance of their participation in the electoral processes either as voters or candidates; the modes of participation; the procedure to become eligible for voting and to actually cast their vote; the ways to assess the poll-worthiness of a candidate. The goal of a Pre-Election Voter Awareness Campaign is to create an environment for free and fair elections, and to encourage in particular, the participation of marginalized groups such as women, the minorities, special ethnic communities and the poor..

Such a campaign was pioneered in five states in India in 2006 by the [Society for Participatory Research in Asia](#) and its partners. It was hailed as a success owing to reports of a substantial increase in the overall participation of voters, and women and members of the lower castes, in particular. Similar awareness campaigns have been undertaken in other countries such as for e.g. the Republic of Georgia, a fledgling democracies such as the Republic of Georgia, where the main focus was on increasing citizens' understanding of electoral standards and procedures, and on promoting active participation of voters.

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A PEVAC can be conducted by any community or civil society organization, by adapting the methodology to the local socio-political context with the following as objectives at its core:

- Ensure access to information to help people make an informed choice.
- Increase awareness of the election process and of voter rights.
- Help ensure that the issues of citizen concern are part of the campaign agenda.
- Promotion of candidates who will be responsive and accountable.
- Provide particular support to promote the participation of women and marginalized groups.
- Create an environment conducive to for holding free and fair elections, with a focus on maximum participation of citizens.
- Act as a watchdog of electoral practices, to ensure there is no electoral manipulation, corruption, or violence.
- Create a support common platform of CSOs (can be a multi-stake holder group, with involvement of media, academia, government, and NGO representative) in discharging their roles for awareness generation for voters and potential candidates.

In democracies, there are various levels of governments such as local, provincial/regional and national, voted to power, often in separate elections. Since issues and challenges at these levels are different from one another, PEVAC also needs to be specifically designed for each level. Prior to initiating plans for the conduct of a PEVAC, it is advisable to analyze the local political and cultural context and to plan a campaign that is practical and will appeal to a large segment of the population. If, for example, the area has a low literacy rate, then it is important to use more of audio-visual techniques and less of print media for disseminating electoral information. A deeper knowledge of the local context will also help assess the extent of electoral malpractices such as proxy-voting, vote-buying, booth-capturing, dummy-candidates, existing forms of political patronage, etc. which, in turn will be useful to design the PEVAC more effectively.

How is it done?

PEVAC methodology consists broadly of three components viz. planning, implementation, and evaluation. The various steps involved in each of these components are described below.

1. Campaign planning

- Dialogue process: This refers to an initial dialogue with residents of the area to be covered under the campaign and is helpful in: building rapport with the residents; gain knowledge of the community along with the views,

concerns and priorities of the people; getting a grasp of the issues and causes on which a PEVAC should focus; Identifying groups whose concerns need to be prioritized; building trust with the communities; and developing links with local CSOs, the government, and the media. Depending on the type/level of election, the dialogue must be initiated at the grass-roots, anytime between three months to a year before the launch of actual campaign activities.

- <u>Understanding the community</u> - A more systematic and rigorous study of the area is required in order to deepen the knowledge about the community, gained during the initial dialogue process. Both primary and secondary data available from local government offices and CSOs can be collected for this purpose. A detailed study will help gather information about demographic features, the socio-economic structure in terms of caste, religion, class and gender divide, migration patterns, etc., political and administrative structure, cultural traditions, literacy level, leadership abilities and patterns, and other critical issues. The study must also generate data on the presence and the nature of work of local CSOs and general characteristics of the area.

- <u>Needs assessment</u> - This is a crucial step that gives the campaign a direction, since it helps highlight the differences between the prevailing conditions and the expected outcomes of the campaign. It involves the community and other stakeholders in identifying and defining the needs that the campaign is expected to address. After assessing the needs, the campaign team will in a position to decide on how to address those needs, by whom and when. During this stage, involvement of the community and other stakeholders must be sustained as this helps ensure their participation in: identifying the roles and responsibilities of citizens; highlighting the need for a just and ethical leadership; and encouraging people to take the initiative and actively participate in any democratic process.

- <u>Determining measurable objectives</u> - Once the needs are assessed, the next step is to set measurable objectives and to determine the indicators that are measurable, attainable, and verifiable. Setting clear and specific objectives are necessary to assess the effectiveness of the campaign. For example, if one of the objectives is to reduce unfair or corrupt practices, then the indicators could include: an increase in voter turnout; a decrease in the number of dummy-candidates and instances of proxy-voting; enhanced participation and leadership of women and marginalized groups in the community; decrease in the incidence of violence; and a more open, environment free of intimidation or coercion during the election.

- Resource analysis - An analysis of the available resources and existing field realities that might help or hinder the process of PEVAC is a critical part of the planning process. This includes analysis of both the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization, as well as the external opportunities and threats. Such an analysis is necessary to ground the campaign in reality prevent being over-ambitious about the outcomes.

- Strategies for implementation - Strategies must address the involvement of the government, community-based and non-governmental organizations, the role and the types of communication (print and/or electronic), and the use of other tools for disseminating information.

2. Campaign implementation

- Campaign execution- The campaign execution process aims to concretize the plans and strategies by formulating a clear outline of campaign activities, types and content of communications, the time frames, the organizational structure, partnerships and sharing of responsibility, and budget estimates. Depending upon the context, some of the public communication strategies might include:
  - Slogan writing on the walls in public places that attract peoples' attention
  - Posters
  - Bicycle rally using public address system for beaming audio messages and even songs specially composed on election themes.
  - A public march or procession conveying the message through banners and placards in local languages
  - Skits and street plays in public squares
  - Puppet shows and other traditional local forms of popular media
  - Small and focused group discussions
  - Setting up local community-based information centers manned by trained volunteers.
  - Distribution of pamphlets and audio cassettes and CDs
  - Using television, community radio, video shows.

- Monitoring and follow-up - Once the campaign is under way, there must be continued monitoring and coordination of all the various components. This will not only provide information on the progress of the campaign but also indicate quick changes in the strategies in order to deal with unforeseen situations if any. Monitoring and coordination requires constant communication with all the participating stakeholders, and a mechanism to help quickly adapt to any new/unforeseen developments.

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3. Campaign evaluation

- Components of evaluation- The campaign evaluation must aim to
    - Assess the campaign's effectiveness in terms of the pre-defined objectives and indicators.
    - Assess its strengths and weaknesses to guide the future campaigns and decisions such as whether or to what extent the campaign could be scaled up etc.
    - Identify the challenges faced and the lessons learned
    - Document the campaign activities and impacts for future use and for consultation by other groups.

- Methodology for evaluation- Several reviews may be required to assess the short, medium and long-term impacts of the campaign. Impact assessment would invariably involve participation of the community members and other stakeholders through interviews, small group discussions, informal meetings, participant and non-participant observations etc. Depending on the size of the geographical area, even household sample surveys using questionnaires can be thought of. Exit interview with voters in the vicinity of polling booths is another useful way of ascertaining the campaign impacts.

Benefits

- Enhances voters' awareness about the electoral process and lay the foundation for increased citizen participation in governance over the long-term.
- Increases voter turn out in general and from amongst women and marginalized groups in particular
- Helps make informed choices.
- Encourages persons with integrity, and who are concerned with public causes to participate as candidates.
- Increases the transparency and accountability of the election process.
- Reduces the scope for unfair or corrupt electoral practices.
- Convey the felt needs of constituencies and communities to political parties and the candidates and thereby contributes to well-informed policies and plans

Challenges and lessons

PRIA's experience with PEVAC has generated several lessons:

- PEVAC should not be conceived as a one-time effort. Capacity-building of citizens and communities, and leadership development through increased awareness and understanding have to be seen as a process of continuum, requiring regular and sustained efforts.
- The following factors are considered to be crucial to ensure long-term effects of PEVAC:
  - o Set attainable objectives both qualitative and quantitative, so that the results are visible and tangible and that there is a base on which to build a future campaign.
  - o Sustain the community links and partnerships that were established during the campaign in order to ensure continuity in future actions and the possibility of follow-up activities.
  - o Post-election follow-up efforts should be timely and highly action-oriented.
  - o Establish a continuous outreach mechanism to reach out to increasing number of people.
  - o Since the level of interest and involvement of people are subject to fluctuation, higher during events and waning when elections are over, ensure there is a sustained process of communication through local or district resource centers etc.
- Voter preferences are determined by multiple factors such as ethnic identity of the candidates, popularity of a given political party, money-driven canvassing by candidates, influential persons /leaders in the family/community etc. These factors may reduce visibility of PEVAC or weaken its impact. Therefore, such campaigns have to be sustained over longer periods and better-targeted.
- Since campaigns such as PEVAC are likely to be perceived as threats to the prospects of self-serving and unscrupulous political elements, they may resort to coercive and violent means of obstructing PEVAC. This could be tackled to some extent through media coverage and exposure of such threats, seeking police protection and engaging with the electoral authorities from the very outset.

Key resources

Pre-election Voter Awareness Campaign, a paper presentation by PRIA at the Workshop on Good Practices in Strengthening Local Governance in India organized by Local Government Initiative South Asia, of Swiss Development Cooperation on 24th and 25th August 2009, New Delhi
http://www.swiss-cooperation.admin.ch/india/en/Home/News/News_Detail?itemID=181934

☞   Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), an international centre promoting learning, participation and democratic governance, has implemented PEVACs in several states in India. This paper gives a concise introduction to PEVAC

Sharma, Sanjeev. *Impact Evaluation of Pre Election Voter's Awareness Campaign (PEVAC) and Analysis of Emerging Trends in Voting Behaviour after 73rd and 74th Amendment Act Period* in Participatory Democracy and Governance at the Grassroots Institutions Level in Himachal Pradesh
http://www.himalayanstudies.com/publication_report46.html

☞   The report is based on a collaborative research conducted by the Institute of Integrated Himalayan Study (UGC Centre of Excellence) and PRIA which along with its partner NGOs conducted a PEVAC to make the voters aware of the elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Urban Local Self bodies which took place during December 2005. Copies can be ordered from the above link.

Mohapatra, B. *Governance and the Poor: Delhi Assembly Elections 2008, India Development Foundation, January 2009*
http://www.idfresearch.org/pdf/governance-and-the-poor.pdf

☞   This paper describes India Development Foundation's efforts to engage the poor in the pre-election phase through participatory surveys on eliciting their views, needs and perceptions as well as assessing their awareness of the electoral issues.

PEVAC video
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNja4WqOUJM

☞   This is a six minute video on PEVAC for Panchayat elections available on You Tube

Kumar, Y. *Monitoring and Evaluation of Advocacy Campaigns: Opportunities and Challenges,* a paper presented at the Asia Workshop on Next Generation Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation on 9-11 November 2005, PRIA, New Delhi, India
http://74.125.153.132/search?q=cache%3AVr45BtFLeCUJ%3Awww.intrac.org%2Fdocs.php%2F2100%2FMonitoring%2520and%2520Evaluation%2520of%2520Advocacy%2520Campaigns.pdf+preelection+voter+awareness+campaign&hl=en&gl=in
☞　　This paper describes the impact evaluation methodology for PEVACs

Project Vote Smart, USA
http://www.votesmart.org/npat_about.php
☞　　Project Vote Smart is a U.S. based non-partisan, non-profit organization engaged in educating voters on various aspects of electoral process and particularly on generating information on candidates' poll antecedents and their positions on various topical issues.

Case studies

PRIA PEVAC in 5 Indian States

PRIA and its partners undertook a PEVAC in 5 states of India where Panchayat (rural local government) elections were held in 2005. In each state, multi level platforms of 300 to 500 civil society organizations were involved, making citizens aware about the importance of their participation both as voters and candidates in local elections. Using folk arts, posters, pamphlets, print and electronic media, and linkages with governments, this campaign covered almost 30 million electors in 5 Northern Indian states. The campaign was effective in the sense that polling percentages in intervened areas were almost 80 percent or more while a significantly large number of people from marginalized sections of society including women and the lower castes contested and won elections in local governments.

Source:
http://www.odi.org.uk/events/2008/latin_america_series/080911/manoj-rai.ppt#256
http://infochangeindia.org/200511035470/Governance/Features/CSOs-make-a-difference-in-UP-panchayat-elections.html
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PEVAC in Rajasthan, India

PRIA conducted PEVAC in Rajasthan, between January and February 2000, with their partner organization 'Unnati' (which means 'development' in Hindi). The PEVAC was focused on women and the weaker sections as well as other citizens in general. The campaign wanted to help to make them aware of their duties and responsibilities, citizens' rights, how to vote and how to choose good leaders, so that when they got elected, they could do better work for the village and for the society as a whole. The campaign used traditional forms of communication like puppet shows, folk theatre, song, dance, music, procession, etc. that are forms of communication related to folk culture and scripts are based on local dialect and village realities.

Source: http://www.planotes.org/documents/plan_03912.pdf

PEVAC by PACS programme partners in Uttar Pradesh, India

The PEVAC by PACS Programme partners conducted in association with other development networks and organizations involved over 300 large and small civil society organizations (CSOs), covering 48 of the 70 districts in the state of Uttar Pradesh. A s part of PEVAC: over 60,000 copies of seven educational publications on Panchayat elections were printed and distributed; over 2,000 workshops were held at the block level to discuss how participation of women, dalits and youth could be increased;nearly 30,000 village-level meetings were held to ensure greater and more meaningful participation of voters; a variety of awareness-building campaigns were undertaken by various CSOs ;regular interaction with many media representatives and government officials was maintained; a telephone helpline was started to guide candidates and alert authorities about malpractices.

Read more at: http://www.empowerpoor.org/print.asp?report=147

Assisting elections in Georgia – a UNDP project for fair electoral processes and active civil participation
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A UNDP project in the Republic of Georgia in 2007-08 was aimed at fostering an atmosphere, both socially and legally, that is more conducive to free and fair elections while increasing citizen participation in the presidential election campaign amidst an atmosphere of tension and unrest.

Read more at:
http://aceproject.org/today/feature-articles/assisting-elections-in-georgia-2013-undp-project

Get-out-the-vote campaign in Kosovo

USAID supported an effort to organize a coalition of 74 local organizations throughout Kosovo in a get-out-the-vote campaign. Albanian and Serbian Kosovar organizations worked in their localities, motivating voters to use their right to vote and distributing materials printed in Serbian and Albanian. Using the slogan, "Don't Complain, Vote!".

Read more at: http://www.usaid.gov/stories/kosovo/cs_kosovo_voterturnout.html

Additional case study resources

Association for Democratic Reforms: National Election Watch Campaign, India
http://adrindia.org/files/release%20on%20helpline%20&%20sms.pdf
http://www.livemint.com/2009/04/12212411/Campaigns-urge-youth-to-wake-u.html

PEVAC by Mahila Margadarshi, India
http://www.mahilamargadarshi.org/projects.html#pevac

Voter awareness campaigns by Bihar Lok Adhikar Manch and Human Help Foundation, India
http://jaibihar.com/voter-awareness-will-push-politicians-to-act-experts-say/6106/

Nicaragua: Creative Produces 'Get Out the Vote' Campaign in Run-up to Historic Elections
http://www.caii.com/CAIIStaff/Dashboard_GIROAdminCAIIStaff/Dashboard_CAIIAdminDatabase/CAIIAdminSupplemental.aspx?SurveyID=2511&SectionID=530

Ugood pre-election monitoring and evaluation opinion and observation report On Pakistan general election February 2008
http://www.ugood.org/reports/Pakistan%20Pre-Election%202008%20Report%20by%20UGOOD.pdf