

Country: Fiji

Theme: Role of Information and Communication Technology for Voter Education & Feedback

Title of The Best Practice / Case Study: Launch of 545 Call Center and text platform for the 2014 Fijian General Election

Area of Coverage: The 545 text platform was hosted by Vodafone Fiji Limited and Digicel which was available for use by all mobile users in Fiji; Vodafone, Digicel, Inkk Mobile and Telecom Fiji Limited. A Call Center was also outsourced to Vodafone Fiji Limited. This service was available for mobile users who had registered to vote in the 2014 General Election.

Period of implementation: The 545 Call Center was operational from 29 July -17 September 2014 while the 545 text platform was available from 28 June to 17 September 2014.

Background: The SMS platform and Call Center service provided by the Fijian Elections Office was not a charged service for the voters. It was introduced to provide a free and easily accessible mechanism to the voters to access information about their polling station through the text platform and the 545 Call Center allowed common voter queries to be addressed in a timely manner. Given the high number of active mobile users in Fiji, this service was provided by all mobile network providers for the ease of reaching to people in all parts of the country. For instance, one of the leading mobile operators in Fiji; Vodafone Fiji Limited currently has over 600,000 active subscribers registered to its network.

Brief Description of Best Practice: The Fijian Elections Office (FEO) is an independent electoral management body formally established in March 2014 under the Electoral Decree, 2014. The FEO's role is to deliver credible elections in line with international best practices. The 2014 General Election was conducted after a lapse of eight years under a new electoral system; Open List Proportional Representation. The FEO organised and conducted the Fijian General Election for the new 50 member parliament under the 2013 Constitution. The Multi-national Observer Group (MOG) held that the 2014 General Election in Fiji was credible and broadly represented the will of the Fijian people. The 2014 General Election also saw the lowest number of invalid votes in Fijia's history -0.75%. The low number of invalid votes amongst those voting demonstrated the strength of the new electoral system, which gave every registered voter a single vote in a multi-member national constituency. Fiji recorded an impressive 84.6% voter turnout during the 2014 General Election. During the 2014 General Election, the FEO engaged numerous mediums of Information and Communications Technology in the management of its historic election. One of the best practices in voter education was the mobile phone platform that was used for the provision of Call Center and text platform service. The idea to engage the mobile service providers and use their mobile platform for dissemination of information was a very effective medium due to the high number of mobile phone users in Fiji. The 545 text platform was designed to

assist voters in locating their polling venue that they were assigned to go to vote on Election Day. Closer to the Election, the FEO included more details such as the exact polling station number. The Call Center was also an effective medium for communicating with the voters and responding to their queries. The Call Center was operated by 16 Vodafone Fiji Limited staff from 7am to 9pm daily.

Challenges : Network coverage in the outer islands and rural areas was a disadvantage for voters living in those areas. SWOT Analysis Strengths Mobile phones are now widely used for communication by all age groups Weaknesses, Poor mobile network coverage Opportunities. The use of mobile phones is one of the preferred mediums for communicating key information to voters. Network coverage is also improving Technological advancements are progressively taking place which open more opportunities for communicating with voters. Threats Purchasing a mobile phone can be expensive for below average families.

Outcome: A total of 88,789 calls were received by the Call Center staff from 29 July -22 September 2014. The top 10 types and number of queries received are outlined below. Type of Query Number of Calls Polling Station Details 30,831 FEO Office Location 31,771 FEO Vacancy inquiry 1,486 Voter Card Loss 753 Voter Card Info 284 Voters Registration 274 How to vote? 186 Number check 179 Website queries 166 Counting enquiries 117 The total number of SMS received on Election Day was 116,311 while the total number of SMS received from 28 June to 17 September was 701,180 for all networks.