ELECTION SITUATION ROOM

DATA FLOW AND DATA TEAMS

The situation room will be collecting and processing data from across the country in large volumes. Raw data is collected via SMS, web forms, Facebook, Twitter and the Ushahidi mobile applications. There is an expectation that most data will come in via SMS as it is the common service on any mobile phone and does not require internet connection. There is need to discuss with mobile network operators during initial stages of set up for possibility to triangulate messages by geographical location.

This will ensure that messages are clearly identified by location of sender to be easily placed on the interactive map. SMS is likely to be prone to repetition, typing errors and incomplete messages due to the nature of having 160 characters per sms. SMS may also be prone to more abuse by malicious senders. There is need therefore to ensure that there is a dedicated team of data officers that will verify and validate sms messages before they go live.

It is important that the taskforce defines reporting categories within which data is filtered and represented on the web platform. These could be e.g. Voter Resources, Violence or General Polling station reports. Data team officers must be trained to understand what each of the categories represent so that data is placed in the right category. Often, some reports might be relevant to more than one category; there might be need to decide if they are captured under both categories or go into one.

A two tier role is required for data validation where a team leader of each data team is assigned to constantly review the relevance, translation and categorization of reports. If there is a likelihood that data or reports will come in different languages, it is necessary to identify and recruit data officers that are conversant with diverse languages such that they can translate reports.

There is also an expectation of considerable amount of traffic from social media platforms and in particular Facebook. There is need for a media monitoring team that seeks to consolidate reports from social media platforms like Facebook and twitter onto the platform. The challenge with these is that there is need for further verification on location apart from authenticity. Calling trusted sources or utilizing social media platforms to verify with people on the ground is key. The Geolocation team specifically resolves data that is not affiliated to a geographical location. The GPS location reported has to be that of the place the incident occurred. In the case of positive reports, from the location of the reporter or the place they refer to.

Experience from previous deployments has shown that there has been a back log of messages during the day especially when data team members have gone to vote or have essentially become

tired. It is necessary to have a team in place that stands by to step in; in such cases. Consideration could be made to have some data team volunteers that work remotely which can be called upon to assist working online from their locations. This is at the discretion of the implementing organization. A proper plan or log must be made on when data team officers get a chance to cast their vote in turns so that not everyone goes at once lest the system is clogged with unattended messages.

Whilst the ICT Manager works on ensuring that the system is up and running, there is need to have data officers that can constantly work closely with the IT manager to resolve some technical glitches, test the platform and debug. This also applies to verifying and checking on the system on both the back and the front end. Remote data team might be more relevant for this task.

Ushahidi recommends 8 teams within the pool of Data officers as below:

1. Media Monitoring

This team will be in charge of monitoring citizen reports via different social media streams, i.e. Twitter, Facebook and blogs. They will, in turn, create reports from these social media streams.

2. Translation

The translation team will be in charge of translating reports (including those created out of tweets/SMSes) from local languages to English. The primary local language we will focus on is Kiswahili. The Translation team will work very closely with the Media Monitoring and SMS teams.

3. SMS

This team will handle all incoming SMS messages into the platform, including determination of origin i.e. location. They will be in charge of report creation from SMS.

4. Geolocation

This team will be in charge of reviewing all reports for geolocation. They will review the work of the Media Monitoring and SMS teams. They will search for locations and map reports.

5. Verification

This team is in charge of information triangulation and verification of reports. They will work very close with our Emergency Desk and partners. They will work to ensure that feedback and response occurs for critical and urgent items. They will also work to confirm and corroborate reports using other reports and mainstream media.

6. Reports

This team is in charge of report approval and editing. No other team, except this one, will approve reports. They will determine which reports are fit to appear on the map (by approving). They will also be in charge of ensuring reports previously created by SMS and Media Monitoring team are properly categorized.

7. Analysis and Research

This team will be in charge of analyzing information(sense making) received in the platform, and providing situation room reports in the form of data visualization, pdfs etc. They will use many different tools and methodologies to help show the data in valuable ways which can be used by partners, citizens and more. They will work very closely with Project coordinators and communications officers.

8. Tech Team

This team will work closely with the IT manager and be in charge of maintenance of the Ushahidi platform and the mobile platforms for the duration of election monitoring.

Setting up the Situation Room

1. Data center, Experts room, Press briefing room, Public room (with screens showing data coming in to media and public that is interested)

2. Assign contact person between Expert team and Data team

3. Issue press releases every 4 to 6 hours on key reporting indicators that will vary during the day.

Morning: Focus is on how many polling stations opened on time, what percentage of these have had smooth voting, what percentage had enough resources and where incidences were reported and what action has been taken. In the afternoon, focus on the morning indicators and checking where voting has been disrupted along the day and where this has occurred and follow up on action. In the evening focus is how voting progressed through the day; a focus on overall incidences and examples where voting closed in good time.

4. Establish a standby team on call to changeover with tired data officers

5. In case technology fails; have an excel sheet database of all observers. Data officers to call observers and populate system with most critical or priority information on indicators manually.

6. Do a sample of observers to be called and ensure that they all have basic phones for calling and enough airtime.