

ELECTORAL GOVERNANCE



BULLETIN ONE | 15th February, 2019

The governance of elections is a crucial part of the democratic process. Electoral bodies, such as INEC, play a critical role in reassuring citizens of the integrity of the electoral process. For this reason, electoral bodies must be seen as independent arbiters that ensure that the will of the people is freely and peaceably expressed and that the results announced are credible and recognisable. This role is performed at the three key stages of an election process: pre-Election Day, Election Day and post-Election.

Nigeria has had 5 elections since 1999 and is currently embarking on its 6th election. In successive elections, INEC had bullishly announced its readiness to conduct free, fair and credible elections. However, to varying degrees, each election has been characterised by weak project management (leading to lateness in the procurement of necessary election material), weak logistics management (leading to the late arrival or, in some cases, non-arrival of sensitive election materials), poor contingency planning, inadequate voter education, and reactive (rather than proactive) public communication. The process of voter registration remains challenging and the Continuous Voter Registration introduced by INEC has not really been continuous in the proper sense of the word. Citizens have frequently reported difficulties in registering to vote, with reports of non-availability of INEC staff, lack of electric power and malfunctioning registration equipment. The process of obtaining Permanent Voters Cards has also been problematic, although the usual Nigerian attitude of leaving things to the last moment and expecting an extension was also clearly evident. As at January 2019, INEC announced that more than 8 million PVCs have still not been collected. INEC may wish to continue and probably intensify the use of sending SMS texts to PVC owners and through same medium citizens can track where their PVCs can be located. There has been challenge of registered voters who are unable to find their PVCs in the designated local governments and wards they registered.

For the 2019 elections, there are indications that contingency planning has improved. We have been impressed that INEC has been able to tackle challenges with burnt materials, burnt equipment and dispatch technical staff within 48 hours of incidents occurring. We look forward to improved logistics management which should manifest in both material and personnel arriving on time at polling units throughout the country.

The large number of Presidential candidates on the 2019 ballot presents a challenge for INEC, particularly given that voter accreditation and voting will end at 2pm, rather than the usual 6pm. INEC also plans to announce results within 48 hours of the end of voting. Accrediting a potential 84 million voters, enabling them to vote before 2pm and announcing results within 48 hours of the end of voting will require improved project and logistics management capability. The task of counting and collating the results properly and credibly from nearly 120,000 polling unit to the ward and local government levels, to the state level and then to national level requires organisation and precision. Any likely delays in the announcement of results is likely to heighten tensions and should be clearly communicated well in advance.

Generally, government communication in Nigeria tends to be reactive, rather than proactive. Citizens should be made aware before-hand what exactly they should do to ensure that their votes are not spoiled. Given the large number of Presidential candidates, it was important to inform voters early that they could use any finger to vote, so long as the mark that they place does not straddle more than one option, in order not to spoil their vote. INEC's processes for ensuring that every eligible voter is able to cast their vote, including the use of Incidence Forms, where necessary, should also be clearly communicated. The process for dispute resolution should also be clearly communicated, not just to the contenders but also to their party agents and supporters, in order to tackle misinformation and mischief.

The fact that mobile phones will not be allowed inside the polling booths should also be clearly communicated so that citizens can make arrangements for where to leave their phones when they go to vote, without losing the benefit of being able to capture and report possible election offences at polling units with their phones. The INEC website says that the phone numbers for reporting electoral offences will be communicated before election day. We look forward to the publication of these numbers.

These and other aspects of the INEC voting guidelines are examples of sustained voter education that should have taken place much earlier in the election process. INEC has done well to provide a lot of information on its website. However, many Nigerians, particularly in rural areas, do not have access to the internet and the Press and community based organisations should do more to support INEC's voter education efforts in the national interest.



Centre for Democracy & Development
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit, research training, advocacy and capacity building organization

Address

16, A7 Street Mount Pleasant Estate
(CITEC), Jabi Airport Road, Abuja.

Phone No

+23492902304

Email

cddabv@cddwestafrica.org

Website

www.cddwestafrica.org