



PRESS RELEASE



Educating the Public on Voting on Policy issues: Reducing Vote Buying in Election 2016

Introduction

The Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) in collaboration with the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) embarked on a pre-election project to monitor incidents and/or allegations of vote buying. The project, funded by STAR Ghana, also sought to educate and sensitize electorates in 16 selected constituencies in eight regions (Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Central, Eastern, Northern, Upper East, Volta, and Western) to focus on policy issues to inform voting choices ahead of the December 7, 2016 elections.

As part of the exercise, CDD-Ghana/CODEO's field educators and monitors, who are resident in the constituencies, visited communities in the selected constituencies to engage with voters. The field civic/voter educators precede their education programs with questions to test the level of citizen understanding and appreciation of the issues of vote buying. Field monitors follow campaign activities and report on potential cases of vote buying or inducement.

This preliminary report covers September and October. It is based on findings from observation filed by 32 CDD-Ghana/CODEO constituency educators and monitors (16 each) on potential cases of vote buying and/inducement in the 16 constituencies.

Main findings/Observations

- Most electorates do not understand the concept of vote buying and are not aware that 'vote buying or selling' constitutes election fraud and it is punishable by law.
- The few electorates who understood the concept of vote buying did not know that vote buying is a corrupt practice and that it is punishable by law.
- Some electorates were willing to take money or other gifts from politicians but said they would never allow that to influence their votes.
- Some electorates are influenced by vote buying because of poverty; a few of the electorate said vote buying was a good practice since it had the potential to solve short-term financial problems.
- Most of the youth at the education programs said that they would take anything politicians offered them and are ready to sell their votes to any politician who is ready to buy their votes.
- Some electorates believe vote buying is a norm and view it as an open competitive market where the highest bidder (a politician who offers highest gift) always wins.

Recommendations

Based on these preliminary findings, it appears the issue of vote buying is real in Ghana's electoral politics. This is worrying, and thus requires a holistic and sustainable approach to dealing with it. CDD-Ghana/CODEO therefore makes the following preliminary recommendations.

CDD-Ghana/CODEO:

- urges all political parties to desist from using financial and other incentives to induce votes
- implores the law enforcement agencies to institute special investigation mechanisms to tackle the issue of vote buying;
- calls on all election stakeholders, including the media, civil society organizations, and well-meaning Ghanaians to join the anti-vote buying campaign to condemn the practice and help sensitize the public about the negative consequences of the act on governance, democracy and on national development;
- implores the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) to initiate a special anti-vote buying campaign, especially during elections, as part of its civic education responsibilities.

Conclusion

Vote buying is illegal in Ghana and there are several laws (including electoral laws) that directly and indirectly address vote buying. These laws collectively make it illegal to attempt to buy or induce votes. The Political Parties Law 2000, ACT 574, and The Representation of the People's Law, 1992, PNDC Law 284 also make engaging in, and buying and selling of votes in any way **PUNISHABLE BY LAW**. Indeed, The Electoral Commission's voter education brochure "What You Should Know" states clearly vote buying or selling as an electoral offence.

CDD-Ghana and CODEO will continue to conduct education, sensitization programs and observe/monitor cases of vote buying and inducement in selected constituencies ahead of the December 7 polls. A full report capturing findings/observations and policy recommendations will be published after the elections. CDD-Ghana/CODEO monitoring and education exercise on vote buying is made possible with the generous support of the UKaid, DANIDA, and EUROPEAN UNION through STAR Ghana.

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For further information on the project, contact:

Nana Kwabena Aborampah Mensah, Senior Staff, CODEO
Secretariat

+233 (0) 24 4185085 / (0) 20 9013585

Secretariat: +233 (0)244 350 266/ 0277 744 777

Email: info@codeoghana.org or info@cddgh.org: Website:

www.codeoghana.org or www.cddgh.org



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