



Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO)

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Final CODEO Report on the Limited Biometric Voter Registration Exercise Conducted by the Electoral Commission of Ghana (April 28 to May 8, 2016)

Introduction

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) observed the limited voter registration exercise undertaken across the country by the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana from April 28, 2016 to May 8, 2016. CODEO Observers, a total of 250, were deployed to all 216 District, Municipal and Metropolitan Assemblies (M/M/DAs) in the country. In the course of the 10-day period, CODEO issued two preliminary statements. CODEO is pleased to release a consolidated and final report on its observation of the 2016 limited voter registration exercise. CODEO's observation of the registration exercise was made possible with the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

CODEO Deployment Strategy

CODEO observed the entire 10-day period dedicated by the EC for the exercise, with observers armed with observer checklists and critical incident forms developed by the CODEO Secretariat. In six out of those ten days¹, CODEO observers randomly selected one registration center each day at which they stationed themselves from morning till close of the day, and moved on to the next center the following day. For the other four days of the exercise (that is the 3rd and 4th days of both phases), the observers roamed from one registration center to the other in the course of each day, which enabled them to cover more centers than had been possible during the other six days.

The observation was targeted at the actual conduct of the limited registration exercise, the processes involved, and the activities of key stakeholders including EC registration officials, political party agents, registration applicants, security agents and the public. Observers also closely followed issues such as compliance with registration rules and procedures, functioning of biometric registration equipment, incidence of violence, availability of registration materials, and security at registration centers, among others. CODEO observers visited a total of 1,344 registration centers for both phases of the exercise (*See Annex A Table 1 for the regional breakdown of the total number of centers visited by CODEO Observers during the period*). Observer reports from the registration centers were sent to the CODEO Secretariat for collation and analysis.

Highlights of CODEO's Findings

The findings below are based on analyses of data received from CODEO observers covering the six (6) days that they were stationed at 1,344 registration centers from morning to close of the exercise. The analysis is also based on valid data received from the observers.

- ***Accessibility of Centers***

Almost all (98%) registration centers visited by CODEO observers were found to be easy to reach; 9 out of 10 registration centers were found to be accessible to persons with disabilities; but an insignificant 7% were inaccessible to persons with disabilities. About 87% of registration centers

¹ That is the first two days and the last day for each of the two phases of the exercise

visited had posters directing people to the venue of the exercise, while 13% of centers did not have any directional posters or signs to the registration center.

- ***Presence of Party Agents***

An agent from one or more political parties was present at nearly all (99.9%) registration centers; 92% of centers had agents from only two political parties, with 91% of them being agents from the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Only 8% of registration centers had agents from 3 or more political parties. The Progressive Peoples Party (PPP) had the third largest number of agents present in 5% of the centers observed. Less than 1% (0.4%) of registration centers had only one political party agent present at the time CODEO observers were at the Center.

- ***Functioning/Malfunctioning of Registration Equipment***

Nearly all (98%) of the centers observed had the full complement of the biometric registration kit at the start of the registration on the day the CODEO observers visited. However, CODEO observers reported that some 149 centers, representing about 11%, encountered faulty registration equipment at the time they were stationed there. Equipment mostly affected in such instances included printers, fingerprint scanners, and laptops. While some of the equipment that broke down in the course of the exercise were quickly resolved by registration officials, it took a great amount of time for the EC's technicians to resolve others. In such situations, the registration process was affected:

- very often, registration in the affected center had to be suspended for at least several minutes, and in many cases, several hours;
- some registration centers were even forced to close till the following day for the equipment to be fixed;
- the Western and Brong Ahafo Regions recorded the highest number of cases of equipment malfunctioning (22 cases each), followed by the Northern Region (20), Ashanti (16), Central (15), Eastern (14), Volta (13), Greater Accra (11), Upper East (10) and Upper West (6).

- ***Availability of Registration Materials***

CODEO observers reported of the general availability of registration materials at centers at the start of the exercise each day. Approximately all centers (99.8%) had Form IAs (which is used to fill out information on registration applicants) at the time of opening of the center while 98% of centers had Form 1Cs (which captures voter information and is used by registration officials to print out voter identity cards). Challenge Forms (used to contest the registration of a person believed to be ineligible for registration) was also available in 98% of registration centers at the start of the exercise. CODEO observers, however, reported of instances of registration centers running out of these registration materials in the course of day. Observers recorded a total 25 cases of such shortages. In such situations, the registration exercise was suspended while registration officials waited for or went away to obtain additional materials. Some applicants had to go home and return the following day to be registered. The most common registration materials that ran out in the course of the exercise were Form 1Cs, Guarantee Forms (used in support of voter registration in the absence of any of the applicable identity cards), and Challenge Forms.

- ***Compliance with Registration Rules and Procedures***

CODEO observers reported that most registration officials adequately performed their functions according to the rules and regulations of the registration exercise. CODEO observers, however, captured some instances where EC officials violated registration rules. These included registering people with unacceptable forms of identity (as per the provisions of C.I. 91) such as birth certificates and National Health Insurance Cards, and registering people without the presence of their guarantors. CODEO observers reported of centers where registration officials kept piles of already signed guarantee forms and used them to support the registration of people who showed up for registration.

- ***Presence of Unauthorized Persons at Registration Centers***

CODEO observers reported the presence of unauthorized persons² in 162 registration centers, representing approximately 12% of the total number visited. Such unauthorized persons, comprising political party activists and sympathizers mainly from the NDC and the NPP, party officials/executives, assembly members, community elders, parliamentary aspirants, District Chief Executives, community members, and ‘machomen’, among others, who hovered around registration centers. According to CODEO observers, these people often interfered with the registration process and engaged in unlawful acts including attempting to get people (some of whom appeared ineligible) to be registered or to physically prevent people they suspected to be unqualified from going through the registration process. In other instances, they harassed registration officials and party agents. At some centers, such people turned themselves into ‘instant guarantors’, guaranteeing the registration of any persons who came to the center, especially those with whom they shared political affinity. A number of the chaotic and violent incidents that took place at registration centers were caused by the presence of such unauthorized persons some of who did not seem to fully understand the registration rules and procedures.

- ***Incidence of Violence, Chaos, Harassment and Intimidation***

About 8% of registration centers experienced some form of physical violence, confusion and chaos. Such incidents involved accredited party agents, party activists, local party executives and parliamentary candidates disrupting the registration process, and forcing some registration centers to close down till the following day. In other instances, the registration process was suspended for hours or several minutes. Personnel from the Ghana Police had to intervene in a number of instances to restore order and enable the resumption of the registration process. The factors that triggered the reported instances of chaos, violence and harassment included suspicion of ineligibility of applicants, resort to the challenge procedure, and misunderstanding of the registration rules and procedures, among others. Greater Accra, Brong Ahafo, Ashanti and Western Regions recorded high incidence of registration-related violence and chaos while the Upper West and Upper East Regions recorded minimal cases of such incidents.

- ***Security at Registration Centers and Monitoring of Exercise by EC Officials***

CODEO observers reported seeing uniformed security personnel at some registration centers. Most centers did not, however, have stationed security personnel. The security agents were however quick to intervene and provided security for the exercise whenever the need arose. CODEO observers also reported finding monitors from the EC visiting 77% of the registration centers observed.

- ***Registration of Suspected Unqualified Persons***

Reports from observers indicate several instances of registration of suspected unqualified persons such as minors, foreigners, and people who were not from the community. Observers reported of 139 centers where they observed the registration of persons believed to be unqualified. The five regions that recorded the highest number of such cases were Northern (30 cases), Ashanti (23 cases), Volta (22 cases), Brong Ahafo (18 cases), and Western Region (17 cases). In many of these cases, suspected unqualified persons were brought to registration centers for registration by political party activists, often of the NDC and the NPP, some of whom also served as guarantors of same persons. These instances of registration typically generated controversy and heated exchanges among the party agents from opposing sides. CODEO observers reported that party agents challenged many of such instances of registration through the appropriate means (i.e. by filling a challenge form), but others went unchallenged.

² That is persons who did not have authorization from the EC granting them access to the registration centers and who were also not in queue waiting to be registered.

CODEO observers also reported a number of instances where NDC and NPP party agents took newly-issued ID cards from newly-registered persons and wrote down their details including telephone numbers while at the registration centers. Some registration officials were able to halt such activities but others did not.

- ***End of the Registration Exercise***

On the last day of the two phases of the registration exercise (i.e. 2nd and 8th May), CODEO observers were asked to give an indication of the number of people in queue as at the time of closing of the exercise. This was to enable CODEO obtain an idea of the number of people who showed up at the registration centers to register but could not do so at the time of ending the exercise. Of the total 448 centers visited on the last day of the two different phases of the exercise (i.e. 224 centers for each phase), CODEO observers reported that 8 of them had about 51 or more people in queue at the time of closing the centers, 32 of them had between 11 and 50 persons in queue at the time of closing, and 53 of them had 10 or less people in queue as at the time of ending the exercise.

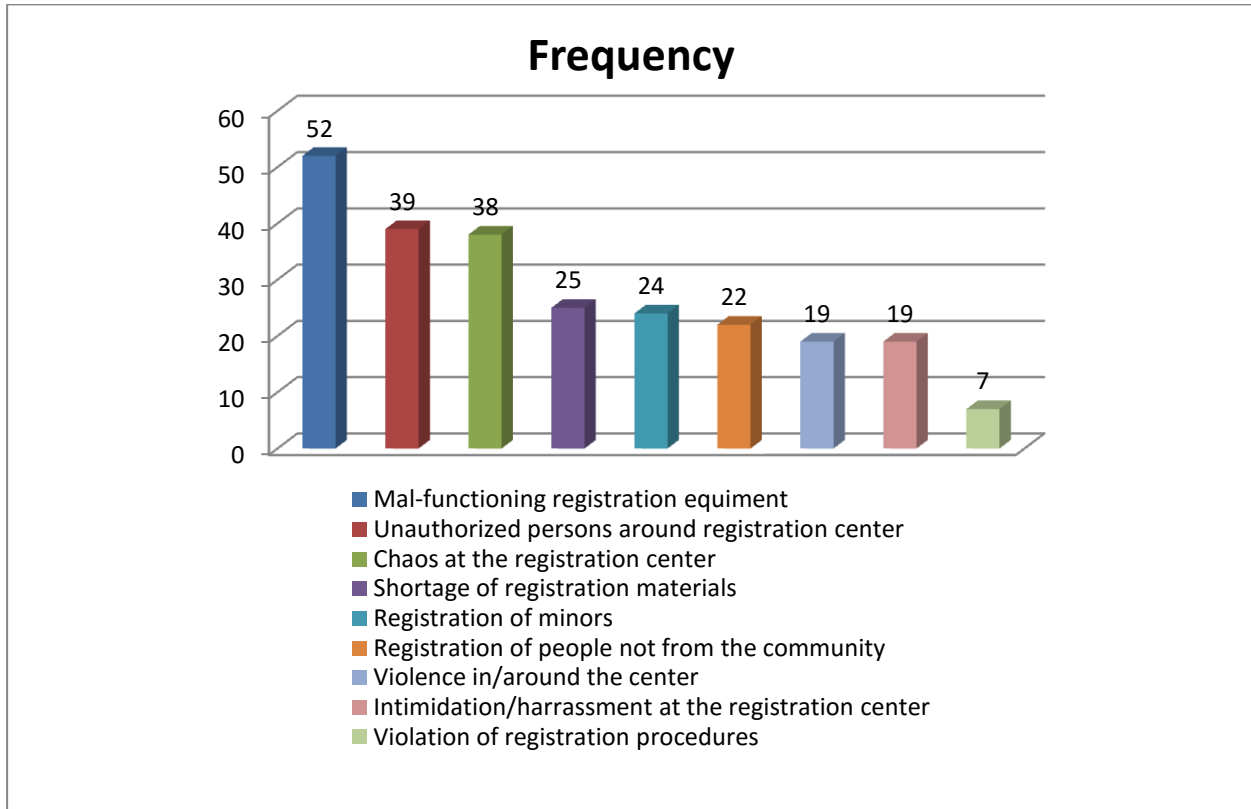
Critical Incidents

In addition to the findings on the registration process highlighted above from the 6 days of stationery observation, CODEO observers also filed in reports of critical incidents covering all 10 days of the exercise (including the 4 days they undertook roaming observation). For CODEO, a critical incident is defined as an infraction of the registration process which has direct implications for the credibility and integrity of an electoral process, including the registration exercise. A total of 312 such critical incidents were sent in by CODEO observers. These incidents, some of them noted above, included:

- malfunctioning of registration kits,
- shortage of registration materials,
- violation of registration procedures by EC officials,
- registration of suspected minors,
- registration of suspected foreigners,
- chaos and confusion at registration centers,
- violence, intimidation and harassment around registration centers, and
- the presence of unauthorized persons at registration centers, among others.

The Northern Region recorded the highest number of critical incidents (a total of 69) and the Central Region recorded the lowest number of reported critical incidents (*See Annex B, Table 2 for the regional breakdown of the number of critical incidents reported by CODEO observers*).Of the recorded incidents submitted by CODEO observers, malfunctioning of registration kits/equipment was major, while the least recorded incident was violation of registration procedures. (*See the chart below for the major critical incidents reported by CODEO*).

Chart 1: The Major Critical Incidents Reported by CODEO Observers



Recommendations

Based on the above observations, and in view of upcoming exercises to be mounted by the EC, including the cleaning up of the voter register, towards the 2016 elections, CODEO makes the following recommendations:

1. Towards the Upcoming Voter Register Exhibition Exercise

To the EC:

- The EC should investigate instances where applicants were registered in the absence of the officially stipulated form of identification or where individuals had vouched for unqualified persons. The EC, in collaboration with the Ghana Police Service, should apply sanctions against persons found to have committed such offences to serve as strong warning to those who intend to undermine future electoral processes.
- The EC should subject the biometric devices and other related equipment to a thorough check to ensure that they are in perfect condition to perform efficiently in future exercises.
- The EC should substantially improve on the quality of its planning for future activities to ensure that the supply of both registration centers and materials adequately match estimated target of persons eligible for registration.
- The EC should liaise with the security agencies to counter the activities of unauthorized persons at registration/exhibition centers, and not only that but at polling stations and other election centers as we move towards Election Day.

To Political Parties

- Political parties should take appropriate steps to improve the training they give (if any) to their agents to ensure that they do not undermine the upcoming exhibition of the voter register and voting on election-day.

2. Towards Future Voter Registration Exercises

To the EC:

- The EC should take another look at its ‘guarantor’ provision in C.I 91, since the definition of who is qualified to guarantee/vouch for a registrant is highly vague. Indeed, apart from being a registered voter, so-called guarantors are not required to establish their relationship with the registrant.

3. Towards the 2016 Elections

To the EC:

- The Electoral Commission should take the necessary steps to provide an opportunity for eligible persons (who were in the queue to register but did not get the chance to register on the last day of the exercise) to be registered and exercise their franchise in the 2016 elections. We take note of the EC’s indication to roll out the ‘*Continuous Registration*’ process, and we urge the Commission to quickly put this mechanism out to allow those who were unable to register do so and vote in the 2016 elections

To the Security Services

- The Police Service should help end impunity on the part of perpetrators of violence and all who committed electoral offences by prosecuting them for such offences.

To Civil Society Organizations

- CODEO urges civil society organizations to step up their election support activities, particularly, civic education and independent election watchdog exercises.

Conclusion

CODEO will continue to observe the pre-election environment, including the exhibition of the voter register process, and will regularly issue its findings to relevant stakeholders and the public as part of its comprehensive 2016 election observation project. CODEO’s 2016 election observation, which broadly seeks to collaborate with the EC and complement efforts by all other stakeholders in ensuring credible, free, fair and peaceful 2016 elections, is made possible with the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

CODEO commends all its volunteers who made themselves available for the limited voter registration exercise, and also acknowledge the EC for accrediting its observers.

Signed:



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Dated: Friday, June 10, 2016

Annex A Table 1

Regional Breakdown of CODEO observers deployed during the registration exercise

Region	Total Number of Registration Centers Visited by CODEO Observers for both Phases of the Exercise
Western	133
Central	126
Greater Accra	102
Volta	161
Eastern	159
Ashanti	205
Brong Ahafo	160
Northern	156
Upper East	78
Upper West	64
Total	1,344

Annex B Table 2

Table 2: Number of Critical Incidents recorded by CODEO Observers from the various regions

Region	Number of Critical Incidents Recorded by CODEO Observers
Western	50
Central	4
Greater Accra	27
Volta	38
Eastern	14
Ashanti	33
Brong Ahafo	30
Northern	69
Upper East	37
Upper West	11
Total	313