

# **COMMUNICATION POLICY/STRATEGY FOR INEC**

## **THE POLICY**

The communication policy provides guidance on standards for the Commission. In tandem with the times, the policy is IT-based and driven. The policy intends that:

- Both the Permanent and Ad-Hoc staff of the Commission are aware of it and abide by it:
- Any breaches of the policy are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner
- In dealing with the media, the Commission and its staff should be conscious of the fact that they are always seen as the Commission's representatives and should therefore avoid making comments or participating in photo opportunities that may damage the long term reputation of INEC.

## **Policy Objectives**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that communications across the Commission are well co-ordinated, effectively managed and responsive to the diverse information needs of the public.

The communication objectives for INEC are informed by the nature of the institution and its functions. More specific objectives are elaborated for each stakeholder group under the section on “Public Communication Framework for INEC.”

In the implementation of this Communication Strategy, the Commission will work towards the achievement of these broad objectives, namely:

- To provide the public: timely, accurate, clear, objectives and complete information about Commission’s policies, programs services and initiatives.
- To ensure that INEC is visible, accessible and accountable to the public.
- To employ a variety of ways and means to communicate, and provide information in multiple formats and channels to accommodate the needs of all stakeholders.
- To deliver prompt, courteous and responsive service that is sensitive to the needs and concerns of the public.
- To provide the electorate with information about all aspects and stages of the electoral process
- To ensure that the electorate have a proper understanding of basic issues in all aspects and stages of the electoral process, including timeframes, timelines, appropriate procedures, complaints and redress mechanisms, etc.
- To encourage and mobilize qualified Nigerian citizens to participate in the electoral process, including voter registration and elections.
- To enhance the ability of the citizenry to make informed choices during

elections

- To encourage the citizenry to shun electoral vices, malpractices and violence
- To ensure that law enforcement and security agencies are properly informed about their roles and are coordinated in maintaining peace and orderliness before, during and after elections
- To ensure that all groups and sectors of the society, including women, the youth, persons with disabilities, Nigerians in the Diaspora, among others, are able to participate effectively in the entire electoral process, including exercising their rights to vote and be voted for
- To enhance INEC's transparency, credibility and integrity as well as to strengthen public trust and confidence in the institution.

### **General Principles**

- Information technology and communications facilities must be used sensibly, professionally, lawfully, and consistently with respect for colleagues and in accordance with this policy and other relevant rules and procedures.
- All information relating to the Commission's stakeholders and its operations is confidential. Paper-based and electronic information shall be used with utmost care.
- Downloading, uploading, posting, copying, possessing, processing and distributing material from the internet and otherwise any reproductive materials shall be guided by copyright laws as well as intellectual property rights.
- The use of E-mail, Commission's blog or internal message boards as a means of communication shall be done with caution as they may be produced in court in the same way as other written statements. Accordingly, all messages sent on email systems or via the internet should demonstrate the same professionalism as that which would be taken when writing a letter or sending a fax.

### **Internal Communication Within INEC**

Effective internal communication is the foundation upon which every organization is based. Internal communication is critical for the effective organization and coordination of the management and staff of any organization, especially in an organization like INEC with such a large number of permanent staff and an even larger number of ad hoc staff during periods of elections. Effective internal communication is also necessary for building greater cohesion within the organization and fostering a sense of belonging among all members.

Effective internal communication also helps everyone to have a common

understanding of the organization's philosophy and vision. With good internal communication systems and processes, staff will be better integrated into the work of the organization and more properly motivated.

Systems and mechanisms for internal communication also need to be put in place to ensure that those responsible for any form of external communication are fully informed and have a common understanding of INEC's Vision, its Mission Statement, its values, principles and organizational philosophy, as well as the plans, projects, programmes and activities that are being implemented in all areas within the organization's mandate. The coordinating unit for external communication must be able to access information from the relevant department, directorate or official in real time to be able to respond to queries, whether from the media or other stakeholders, in a timely fashion.

The following measures will therefore be implemented to enhance internal communication:

- There will be frameworks for the regular horizontal sharing of information between and among key departments, directorates or units, including the unit in charge of public affairs or external communication in various areas. The various mechanisms put in place should include a committee comprising the heads or members from some operational organs of the commission which meets at regular intervals for briefings. As a matter of policy, the Public Affairs unit will be represented in the Committee and other committees that are involved in key aspects of the Commission's operations. However, having regard to the fact that INEC has offices spread across the country, the Commission will also take advantage of ICT and adopt other mechanisms as may be appropriate from time to time, including using intranets, sections of its websites where access is restricted to only INEC staff and officials, electronic bulletins; listservs, e-groups or discussion lists; etc. These channels should also aid INEC in a two-way vertical sharing of information from its national headquarters to its Local Government offices and vice versa.
- INEC's website will play a critical role in the Commission's public communication as it will be a vital avenue for putting out information to the public. Although the ICT Department will be responsible for the technical activities of uploading materials on the website, there will be a Web Team established with representatives from all departments, directorates and units of INEC. Web Team members shall be responsible for sourcing necessary information from the respective departments, directorates or units and making such available to the ICT Department for packaging and uploading onto the website.
- As much information as possible will be shared through these processes, but in particular, the following items of information will be emphasized:

- i. Proposed programmes, projects and activities of the various departments and directorates.
- ii. New developments and innovations being introduced into any aspect of the electoral process, including voter registration and polling activities, especially where voter education or other appropriate publicity and public education would be required.
- iii. Any assessments, reviews, evaluations, research studies or other similar activities carried out on either ongoing or concluded programmes, projects or activities of INEC. Such assessments, reviews, evaluations or research studies may be produced by internal staff and/or external consultants or agencies. These shall demonstrate successes and achievements or provide new insights into different levels of performance.

A mechanism will be created to give officials in the Publicity unit or any other unit unimpeded access to all heads of departments and directorates, including staff of the Chairman's Office for the purposes of providing information or clarification on specific issues or matters touching on the Commission's image arising in the media or within the general public. This will enhance the Commission's ability to respond speedily whenever emergency intervention is required.

In any organizational re-structuring or staff redeployment, trained communication experts in the publicity unit at any of the offices of the Commission will not be redeployed without proper and adequate replacements. As much as possible, only professionals or personnel that have received appropriate training will be put in charge of handling media relations and Voter Education programmes, whether at the National Headquarters or at state levels.

The Information and Publicity Committee (IPC) shall establish an editorial committee to review materials proposed for publication, including editing and proof-reading, before they are published, whether electronically or in print. The role of this body includes the following:

- To ensure high quality editorial content and production;
- To ensure consistency in the Commission's messages to the public;
- To ensure consistency between the Commission's messages and its positions or policies on any issues;
- To ensure proper tracking and recording of INEC publications and communication materials;
- To ensure consistency in style and format of materials published in the name of INEC;
- To ensure consistency and appropriateness in the manner in which INEC's name, logo and colours are used in its publications and materials;
- To ensure proper authorization for the use of INEC's name, logo and colours; among other things.

Internal communication should be guided by a number of principles and policies. Internal communication should also conform to certain practices, including the following:

- Minutes of meetings should be routinely taken at every meeting as a record of discussions and decisions or agreements at the meeting. Such minutes should be routinely distributed to all participants who were at the meeting as early as possible. The minutes should also be forwarded to the Senior Management Committee (SMC) or the Supervisory Standing Committee, as may be relevant.
- Internal communication by email, as well as external communication, should be done only from an official email account with an official address, which should be an email account set up on the organization's domain and assigned by the relevant authorities in INEC to every staff member and management. Email use should also be in compliance with two relevant internal policies, namely the *INEC Information Security and Acceptable Use Policy* and the *INEC E-mail Usage Policy*. In the implementation of this policy, INEC Management should designate a deadline for full and complete transition from the current situation by which time, unofficial email accounts would no longer be acceptable for internal or external communication to conduct official business.
- E-mail communication, whether internal or external, should as much as possible be copied to other staff members who may have an interest in the issue, for their information. In this way, staff members would be fully aware of conversations or communication that are taking place even when they are not participating in the conversations.

### **Public Communication Framework for INEC**

The Public Communication Framework for INEC identifies the following key stakeholder groups and constituencies that INEC will need to communicate with in a targeted manner:

1. Voters/Electorate
2. Political Parties
3. The Media
4. Civil Society Groups / Professional Associations / Trade Unions
5. Development Partners
6. Presidency
7. Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)
8. National Assembly
9. Judiciary
10. Domestic Observers
11. International Observers

12. Diplomatic Community
13. Law Enforcement/Security Agencies
14. State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs)
15. Youth groups
16. Women groups
17. Persons With Disabilities (PWDs)
18. Nigerians in the Diaspora
19. Traditional and Religious Institutions
20. Vendors, Contractors and Service Providers
21. Educational Institutions

The public communication framework outlines INEC's specific objectives in its communication with each of the stakeholder groups or constituencies, the nature of messages and information to be communicated to each stakeholder group or constituency, the communication tools or channels to be deployed, including conventional media as well as ICTs and social media platforms, and feedback mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of INEC's communication and keeping its audiences engaged.

### **ICCC**

A facility that will play a major role in INEC's public communication with some of its critical stakeholders is its Citizen Contact Centre (ICCC), which will be domiciled in the Voter Education and Publicity department to be headed by an Officer not below the rank of Assistant Director.

The ICCC is designed as a modified Situation Room and a channel for continuous communication and exchange of information principally with voters, but also with other stakeholders in the electoral process. It will operate during official working hours from Monday to Friday, between 9am and 5pm. However, during elections, the operations of the ICCC will be escalated to 24 hours.

The ICCC will primarily utilize new communication technologies and social media platforms as well as create linkages between radio and new media to reach out to voters who will then be provided incident reporting tools and channels. The ICCC will target all Nigerian citizens and utilize different social media platforms to reach out to them and create feedback mechanisms. The use of social media within the framework of the ICCC will provide a vehicle for the unprecedented mobilisation of an emergent and active generation of youths in the political process at very little cost.

### **Spokespersons for INEC**

Various officials of INEC will exercise different levels of responsibilities for public communication as spokesperson for INEC, in accordance with the following

principles and guidelines.

The Chairman of the Commission is its Chief Spokesperson and may speak on behalf of the Commission on any issue affecting the Commission as a whole or the operations of the Commission in any part of the country. The Chairman will have overall and primary responsibility for making announcements regarding arrangements, preparations, issues arising from and the outcome of federal elections.

Any National Electoral Commissioner or any other staff designated may represent the Commission, as the circumstances may warrant or dictate, except that the Chairman cannot delegate his or her responsibility to announce the results of the presidential elections and declare a winner, which is a responsibility exclusively conferred on him or her by Law. The delegation of this function will be particularly applicable to non-electoral matters.

Where emergency intervention is required, for instance, where INEC is presented in negative light on an issue of significant importance, or false or misleading information is making the rounds which could significantly undermine the credibility or integrity of the Commission or where there is a significant challenge to INEC's capacity, impartiality, integrity, independence or its ability in any other way to organize free, fair and credible elections, the Chairman should wherever possible, speak to the issue, unless this is not feasible or practicable or for some other reason, not advisable, in which case, some other officer of the Commission with sufficient seniority may be delegated to respond on his or her behalf.

The Commission may delegate to the Resident Electoral Commissioner of a State or the Federal Capital Territory the power to make announcements regarding arrangements, preparations, issues arising from and the outcome of State elections or elections in the Federal Capital Territory and for communicating with the public on related matters in the State or any part of the State, including local government Areas or Councils.

Routine public communication by INEC should, however, be the responsibility of the Director, Voter Education, Publicity and Gender (VPG). The Director, VPG may delegate this function to other key officials under his/her department as circumstances may warrant.