
LOOKING TOWARDS THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Let me first express my appreciation for being here to share with you some of the Commission's efforts at building a professional Electoral Management Body capable of delivering free, fair and credible elections in 2015 and beyond. I am particularly pleased that this all-important meeting is attended by Civil Society Organizations under the auspices of the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC). Discussions about 2015 in a sense began shortly after the 2011 General Elections. Indeed the Commission itself in more ways than one, began preparations in the recognition that the end of one electoral circle (2011) announces the beginning of another (2015). This is as it should be. It was against this background that we began a systematic process of repositioning the Commission towards the institutionalization of our core structures and processes in order to move it in a phased, systematic manner, away from ad-hoc or knee-jerk reactions to issues towards more organized and planned responses in the management of the electoral process.

Let me also specifically commend Civil Society Organizations for supporting the Commission in providing timely, and in many cases, useful information on our projects and processes since its inauguration in 2010. The intervention of CSOs in areas such as voter and civic education; knowledge sharing workshops on the electoral process and the Commission's operations (e.g. the Registration and Election Review Committee, review of the Electoral Legal Framework and numerous other stakeholder meetings on the electoral and political processes) as well as the provision of real-time information that helped the Commission intervene to resolve challenges

during the Voter Registration Exercise and all elections since April 2011. The Civil Society Situation Room and all partnering CSOs have no doubt contributed immensely to the Commission's operations. Such contributions and similar others will be key in the run-up to the 2015 General Elections and I urge all of you to be relentless in your collective efforts towards making the electoral process ever more credible.

I am indeed happy to share with you some of the most important strides we have made since April 2011 towards qualitatively improving our people's electoral experience. While important strides towards the institutionalization of our core processes have been made, a significant amount of work still remains. We are however hopeful that we will complete our plans in good time for the 2015 General Elections.

I wish to however draw the attention of all stakeholders in the political and electoral processes to the fact that while the sole responsibility for the conduct of elections lays squarely on the shoulders of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), it is also to be clearly understood that we all have our part to play in making elections freer and more credible. We can deploy all the structures, processes, personnel and technology towards credible elections; we will still need the collective support of all stakeholders – political parties, civil society organizations, security agencies, professional bodies, and the general public to enable our systems and personnel operate maximally.

What follows is a discussion of some of the key structures, processes and systems we have either already deployed or will deploy in the run-up to the 2015

General Elections. Before addressing these however, a brief context maybe required to understand them.

THE ROAD FROM 2011

Quiet a significant part of the audience here is either aware or may indeed have participated in some of the reviews the Commission had embarked upon since the 2011 General Elections. The review of both the registration exercise as well as the elections in 2011 were not only necessary, but were integral aspects of the Commission's overall plan to reposition itself for the conduct of freer and more credible elections. Such a repositioning was hinged on the need to critically assess our immediate past operations in order to isolate critical success factors, understand weaknesses, assess challenges and, on the basis of our own experiences and best practices across the world, reinforce successes and proffer remedies to such challenges. As you are by now no doubt aware, the process of critical self-assessment has since been concluded and the implementation of all the key recommendations of the Reviews virtually completed.

In more specific terms, the restructuring of the Commission and the implementation of its New Structure is now complete with nine (9) Departments, ten (10) Directorates and four Autonomous Units at Headquarters; State Offices now have six (6) Departments and two (2) Autonomous Units, while Local Government Offices have two (2) or three (3) Units depending on the number of registered voters in each Local Government Area. Similarly, the Commission has concluded and launched its Strategic Plan 2012-2016, which was unveiled to the public just two weeks ago. The Strategic Plan as well as its accompanying Action Plan charts the course of what the Commission has done or will do from now until 2016. This

includes the 2015 General Election in addition to three governorship elections in Anambra, Ekiti, and Osun States. Although many of you here have both documents, I would like to crave your indulgence to highlight the five (5) strategic directions in the Plan that will be guiding the Commission's activities henceforth.

The Strategic Plan maps out in detail what the Commission needs to do in order to institutionalize its key operations and processes. This institutionalization is central in redefining and repositioning the Commission as one of the best Election Management Bodies in the world responsive to the aspirations of Nigerians. In moving the Commission towards this vision, the Plan identified five (5) strategic directions. These include:

- a) Providing electoral operations, systems and infrastructure to support delivery of free, fair and credible elections (this includes for example the review of the electoral legal framework; developing a comprehensive register of voters; improving the deployment and utilization of ICT in the electoral process; embarking on constituency delimitation; establishing an election complaints & dispute resolution mechanism; improving electoral processes, procedures and systems; and developing the infrastructure for free, fair and credible elections)
- b) Improving voter education, training and research (including formulating and implementing voter education programmes; developing policies to ensure the participation of out of country voting (OCV) and voting by other marginalised groups; and improving voter education, training and research)
- c) Registering political parties and monitoring their operations (including registering political parties; monitoring the nomination of candidates; monitoring political party finances; tracking campaign finances of candidates and political parties as well as monitoring media access by candidates and parties)
- d) Interacting nationally and internationally with relevant stakeholders (including establishing a mechanism for regular consultation with stakeholders; publishing a newsletter/electoral magazine/daily bulletins and periodic workshops/ seminars; engaging election observers; engaging the media; institutionalising ICCES through an MOU and Operational Manual as well as regular interaction with stakeholders)
- e) Re-organizing and repositioning INEC for sustained conduct of free, fair and credible elections (enhancing institutional capacity for managing election operations smoothly, effectively and efficiently; improving capacity,

communication, co-ordination, training and data management; improving the work environment and enhanced team work among the staff of the Commission; improve human resource management to meet current and future challenges; budget and manage the financial resources of INEC effectively and efficiently; Implant the new strategy; Implement the new strategy and Evaluate the strategy.

Each of these objectives details clear core tasks/activities; specifies resources required for implementation, assigns timelines and schedules as well as identifies lead/collaborating departments or units responsible for each activity. Across the five strategic directions, implementation has already commenced in earnest. Thus the Commission has concluded its part in the reform of the legal framework, is consulting with stakeholders on the reform, began the constituency delimitation exercise, reorganized the Voter Education Department to take on, in a more systematic manner some key concerns identified in our review processes. At this juncture, it would be pertinent to highlight some of these activities in greater detail.

ELECTION SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

A significant recommendation arising from the Reviews the Commission had undertaken since 2011 drew attention to the need to address critical areas related to election day processes: election day logistics, election staff management, political party and candidate management, as well as election day training. These four directly affect core electoral operations and in particular on processes taking place on Election Day. For the past several months, we have been working round the clock to build an ICT supported infrastructure that could enhance the Commission's control over Election Day processes. Such an infrastructure identified core business processes that needed to be fast-tracked. The overall objective is to ensure:

- (a) Timely deployment and retrieval of personnel and materials
- (b) Effective quality and quantity control of personnel and materials and

(c) Adequate safety of personnel and materials.

The first phase in designing these processes that identifies the specific tasks, how they are to be executed, and who is responsible for them is virtually complete. Other phases which are due to be completed before mid 2014 include drawing up and testing the manuals for each of these processes.

In all, the election management infrastructure is supported by an Election Management System (EMS) as well as an Election Project Plan. While EMS helps in supporting the planning, execution monitoring and output assessment of all activities connected with Election Day, EPP creates the entire Plan for the Election that specifies the resources required, where and in what quantities they will be needed, when they will be deployed and whose responsibility it is to do so. As we speak, the EMS is virtually complete; the EPP will be completed in the next 8-10 weeks.

On the whole, these systems are supported and in many respects driven by ICT, and have at their core inventory management, enterprise resource planning, business process mapping systems and so on.

PERMANENT VOTERS' CARDS (PVC)

One of the most significant innovations introduced in the electoral process as we move towards 2015 is the permanent voters' card (PVC) that has a microchip with the bio-data of each voter. The PVC is a machine-readable card to be given to each registered voter and which will be read on presentation to our officials by Card Readers at each Polling Unit. While each card has information unique only to a specific voter, voters will be required to authenticate that information by scanning their fingerprints on the Card Readers. Thus, the PVC is easily electronically verifiable using networked smartcard readers that will be deployed to each PU. But

there are other benefits of the smartcard reader: these include equipment and material checklists, notification of when accreditation starts, total number of people accredited at a PU and vote collation. Already 20m PVCs have been delivered, and the rest will be delivered according to a set agreement by mid 2014. Since we recognize that distribution has always been a challenge, we have taken appropriate steps to develop a distribution plan for the cards to ensure that registrants get their cards on time.

With this arrangement, quiet a number of the irregularities and challenges noticed by observers and our own officials during voting would be addressed.

INEC CITIZEN CONTACT CENTRE (ICCC)

The INEC Citizen Contact Centre (ICCC) is structured as a modified version of the Situation Room that is meant to serve as a channel of continuous communication and exchange of information principally with voters, but also with other stakeholders in the electoral process. It would operate on a typical work-hour basis (from Monday to Friday, between 9am – 5pm), while during elections the ICCC could be escalated for around the clock operations. It would primarily utilize new social media technologies as well as traditional mediums such as the radio, to reach out to voters with specific information on the electoral process, voting procedures, voters' rights, voter registration and so on. In addition, the Centre will provide voters and other stakeholders in the electoral process with incident reporting tools and channels, and will give the Commission an opportunity to track, monitor and supervise the electoral process, and especially Election Day events, in real time.

Thus, the ICCC will target all Nigerians relying on different social media platforms to reach out to and provide feedback mechanisms. The use of the new social media and in particular the ICCC provides a vehicle for the unprecedented

mobilisation of an emergent and active generation of youths in the political process. The ICCC would ensure continuous, timely and accurate access to voter and civic education information through the new social media platforms as well as information on the continuous voter registration; provide efficient, prompt, and effective incident reporting mechanism on all aspects of the electoral process in real time; create an environment conducive for holding free and fair elections, with a focus on maximum participation of citizens, including providing avenues for promoting the participation of women and other marginalized groups; create a common support platform for stakeholders in discharging electoral duties and serve as space for citizens' participation in the electoral governance.

I am happy to announce that the Centre has been established and will begin operations in the next few weeks.

VOTER AND CIVIC EDUCATION

One of the key elements responsible for enhancing voter participation in the electoral process is the provision of timely and sustained voter and civic education programmes. Towards this, the Commission has outlined a series of activities in the Strategic Plan to address voter and civic education on a more sustained, long-term and collaborative basis. To begin with, the Commission has since instituted an Integrated Voter Education Programme in the secondary schools and tertiary institutions across the country. At the secondary school level, the Commission has lead and encouraged the formation of voter education clubs. Additionally, there is an on-going radio programme on voters and civic education in collaboration with FRCN airing across the country.

As we move towards 2015, the Commission will soon begin a comprehensive and targeted voter and civic education for specific groups such as traditional institutions, religious groups & faith based institutions, labour unions, professional groups, youth associations and similar other groups across the country. Similarly, plans for state and local government level voter and civic education programmes by Resident Electoral Commissioners (RECs) for all stakeholders in the 36 States & FCT are nearing completion. In addition, billboards, short message service (SMS) and other media will also be used in sensitizing voters.

Finally, in recognition of the key role voter and civic education plays in ensuring participation in the electoral process, the Commission plans in the next few months to convene a meeting of key stakeholders on voter and civic education to explore ways to broaden the participation such stakeholders in voter education.

CONTINUOUS VOTER REGISTRATION EXERCISE

Let me right away that while we had planned the Continuous Voter Registration Exercise to begin in first part of the second quarter of this year, certain logistic reasons had prevented us from doing so. However, the planning and logistic arrangements for the CVR have been concluded and will commence before the end of this quarter. It will begin with the display of the current voters' register in both print and electronic forms. Persons wishing to be added, changed or moved will be required to fill a disclaimer form and will then be issued with a queue ticket indicating the time, date and bio-data captured on DDCs. The CVR will take place at ward levels where two DDCs will be stationed with our officials. One of the DDCs together with the printed register for that ward will be used to check whether a prospective

registrant is already on our database, while the other will be used to register those that are not. Clear guidelines will be issued shortly before the exercise commences.

CONSTITUENCY DELIMITATION

The Commission has also begun the process of the delimitation of constituencies as required by law. The Delimitation Exercise has a phased action plan spread across four main stages beginning with what we call pre-delimitation planning (that includes: sensitization of key stakeholders, consultation with the three (3) arms of government, organizing a national retreat on constituency delimitation, constitution of a Constituency Delimitation Committee (CDC), establishment of work-plan by CDC, enlightenment on the Electoral Constituency Review and so on). This stage is followed by delineation and mapping (that involves the development of delimitation database, generation of provisional maps and reports, approval of provisional maps and report). The third and fourth stages are public presentation and feedback and report presentation, approval and gazetting.

CONCLUSION

In looking towards 2015, a tremendous amount of work has been going on within the Commission, some of which I have briefly highlighted. Most of the work focuses on repositioning our core business processes in a way that will enable us address some of the most obvious challenges we have faced in April 2011 and since. In this attempt to reposition our processes, we have given emphasis to a combination of developing ICT support and the training of our personnel to begin to imbibe in a more organized and sustained way the value of planned activity in contrast to ad-hoc reactions to events. To this extent, we are approaching a clear threshold where activities/tasks, timelines, and escalation paths assigned and identified such that

responsibilities of who will do what, when, how and where for Election Day are clearly mapped out. Our plan is that this clear mapping will be complete in latest by the end of fourth to quarter of this year to the end of the first quarter of 2014.

For our plans to be successful, we need the cooperation and active engagement of all stakeholders in the political and electoral processes to play their respective parts. As for Civil Society Organizations, a focus on voter and civic education is indispensable in our continued search for an educated, engaged electorate. Similarly, the contributions of the Civil Society Situation Room in both the Registration and Elections in 2011 have been immense, and as we move towards the Continuous Voter Registration up to the 2015 General Elections, I hope that the same level of contributions if not more can be brought to bear on the processes. The Commission remains committed to its cardinal objective of conducting free, fair, and credible elections in Nigeria and of bequeathing a professional Electoral Management Body that Nigerians can be proud of.

Thank you.