



ELECTORAL HUB RECOMMENDATIONS TO INEC

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About the Electoral Hub

The Electoral Hub, an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), is a multidisciplinary strategic think-tank which seeks to provide solutions to improve the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. It is conceptualized to complement the roles and activities of the different institutions, stakeholders and drivers of the electoral process and governance. The Electoral Hub's aim is to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through the provision of data and critical analysis supporting the credibility and integrity of the electoral process. We believe that the integrity of the electoral process is crucial in improving the electoral governance architecture and democracy in Nigeria. We also believe in contextual analysis for solutions rooted in the principles of justice and equity

Our core values are knowledge-exchange, inclusion, justice, equity, transparency and accountability.

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Introduction

As the main electoral management body in Nigeria, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has a key role to play in safeguarding the integrity and credibility of our elections. In recent times, INEC has made significant improvements in its administrative processes to enable it successfully conduct elections in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. These include the introduction of an online results viewing portal and the use of a virtual situation room to monitor the elections and respond to queries. These measures are commendable, and they contributed to the success of the 2020 Edo and Ondo State governorship elections.

To uphold the momentum and ensure even more successes in subsequent elections, there needs to be further improvement. The Electoral Hub, an organ of the Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD), provides recommendations on six areas in which INEC can make improvement: electoral inclusion, results viewing portal, uploading of data and materials online, enforcement of COVID-19 protocols, support to State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs), and engagement with other stakeholders. These recommendations are aimed at increasing the integrity and credibility of our electoral process in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Electoral Inclusion

Nigeria is one of the most populous countries in the world, with a population of over 200 million.¹ Within this population are different groups of people, such as women, youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and internally displaced persons (IDPs), who have been marginalised from the electoral process. While INEC has made efforts to meet the needs of these groups, such efforts have been piecemeal and uncoordinated. To further promote the inclusion and participation of these groups, we recommend the integration of the Gender Division, Disability Unit,

¹ Worldometer, *Nigeria Population*, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/nigeria-population/>

and other INEC divisions aimed at promoting inclusion into a Department of Electoral Inclusion (DEI).²

The DEI will allow for a systematic mechanism to drive policies and carry out interventions to promote inclusion on a holistic level, rather than piecemeal efforts carried out by different units. A major benefit of this department will also be the use of an intersectional approach to drive inclusion of different groups, including those with multiple vulnerabilities. In this way, INEC will better be able to promote inclusion and participation of marginalised groups.

Results Viewing Portal

In our world today, the internet and other technological developments have facilitated accessibility and information sharing. INEC has tapped into this benefit through the introduction of the online results viewing portal, which improved transparency and citizen involvement during the Edo and Ondo State elections in 2020.

However, currently result sheets are only uploaded at the polling unit level. This limits the accessibility of results sheets at other levels, such as wards, local government areas (LGAs), and states. Due to the vast amount of polling units, it would be difficult and time consuming for stakeholders to go through all the data. In order to deepen accountability and transparency as well as promote knowledge and research, we therefore recommend that data on aggregated results should also be uploaded on the website. This will also allow citizens to confirm the results announced at ward, LGA, and state levels.

Uploading of Data and Materials Online

In addition to result sheets, it would also be helpful for INEC to upload other data and materials relating to elections, which are not currently available on its website. An example is the Voters Code of Conduct (VCC), which is meant to guide the conduct of voters during elections in the Covid-19 pandemic. The accessibility of the VCC is particularly important, as it is meant to regulate the behaviour of the electorate. Although the VCC was produced as posters and hand bills that were pasted at polling units during elections, it would be helpful to also

² See *The Imperative for a Department of Electoral Inclusion in INEC*, Electoral Hub Technical Paper 3/2020. Available at: <https://electoralhub.iriadev.org/electoral-hub-paper-on-electoral-inclusion-in-inec-the-imperative-for-a-department-of-electoral-inclusion-in-inec/>

upload an electronic version on INEC’s website. This will widen reach and even help other stakeholders conducting civic and voter education.

Ultimately, the more data and materials are uploaded and shared online, the more transparent the Commission will be. This should, in turn, drive citizen involvement in the electoral process, as well as research and analysis by practitioners.

Enforcement of COVID-19 Protocols

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, INEC made commendable efforts to adapt to this unprecedented situation. Notably, the Commission released its “Policy on Conducting Elections in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic”.³ This document stated that, among others, COVID-19 protocols such as social distancing, wearing of masks, and washing/sanitising of hands would be strictly enforced at polling units. Similarly, the VCC encouraged voters to follow COVID-19 protocols for their safety.

However, reports of the elections that have been conducted so far showed that there was lax enforcement of COVID-19 protocols.⁴ Indeed, observers noted that even some INEC staff did not comply with these protocols. Currently, there seems to be a second wave of COVID-19 in Nigeria, and while a vaccine has been developed, it is evident that the virus will still be with us for a while. In order to ensure public safety and prevent a further spike in cases, it is important that these COVID-19 protocols are strictly enforced during subsequent elections, such as the upcoming 2021 Anambra State governorship election.

To promote enforcement, we recommend that INEC should train its staff adequately to comply with these protocols and ensure that voters also comply. INEC should also engage with security agencies to ensure that these protocols are strictly complied with. Another suggestion is to appoint COVID-19 ambassadors who will be stationed at polling units and ensure that voters wear masks, wash their hands, and maintain social distancing. COVID-19 ambassadors were used

³ INEC, *Policy on Conducting Elections in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Available at: <https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/INEC-POLICY-ON-CONDUCTING-ELECTIONS-IN-COVID19.pdf>

⁴ See *Deepening Democracy: Lessons from Edo State 2020 Governorship Election*, Electoral Hub Technical Paper 1/2020. Available at: <https://electoralhub.iriadev.org/lessons-from-edo-state-governorship-election/>; *Deepening Democracy: Lessons from Ondo State 2020 Governorship Election*, Electoral Hub Technical Paper 2/2020. Available at: <https://electoralhub.iriadev.org/electoral-hub-technical-paper-on-lessons-and-result-analysis-of-the-ondo-state-governorship-election/>

during Ghana’s 2020 general elections, and this seems to have been an effective method of ensuring compliance. Nigeria can learn from this by using COVID-19 ambassadors during its own elections.

Support to SIECs

There are 36 State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) in Nigeria – one for each state. These Commissions are responsible for conducting local government elections, and are members of the Forum of State Independent Electoral Commissions (FOSIECON). However, SIECs have been neglected by virtually all stakeholders, as there is little engagement with them or even knowledge of their activities. This has resulted in the poor quality of local government elections, as noted by the Electoral Hub in a recent paper.⁵

To address this problem, we recommend that INEC should deepen engagement with SIECs by having regular meetings with them, providing them with technical assistance (such as secondment of INEC staff, training of SIEC staff and equipment support), inviting them to INEC retreats and meetings, and going on advocacy visits to their offices. This is especially pertinent because local government elections conducted by SIECs are closest to the grassroots, and thus have a large impact on citizens’ views about elections and democratic institutions in general. If INEC is able to provide support to SIECs and thus improve their efficiency, there will be benefits for our electoral process as a whole.

Engagement with Other Stakeholders

Finally, it is important for INEC to further deepen engagement with other stakeholders. Electoral processes and systems are complex, and it will take the collective effort of different stakeholders to improve electoral integrity and credibility. INEC, therefore, needs a good relationship with key stakeholders, such as the National Assembly, ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), political parties, the media, civil society organisations, youth/women/disabled persons’ organisations, community/religious leaders, and security agencies. Although INEC currently engages with these stakeholders, we recommend that the frequency and quality of engagement be deepened. There should be monthly as opposed to quarterly engagements to enable quick responses and solutions to

⁵ *Deepening Democracy: A Reflection on the 2020 Local Government Elections in Nigeria*, Electoral Hub Technical Paper 4/2021

problems. Given the COVID-19 situation, these engagements can be conducted via online platforms like Zoom, Telegram, and WhatsApp.

In terms of the quality of engagement, it is important to make stakeholders understand the role that each of them has in safeguarding electoral integrity and credibility, and also to emphasise the need for them to play their part. This level of engagement will deepen collaborations, help to reduce the pressure on INEC, and ultimately lead to more effective results.

Conclusion

Elections are critical to the success of any representative democracy. This means that the principles of credibility, integrity, transparency, participation, and inclusion must be upheld strongly. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the principle of public

health and safety must also be factored into elections. In order to build on the gains of the Edo and Ondo State governorship elections, we recommend that INEC should make improvements in six key areas: electoral inclusion, results viewing portal, uploading of data and materials online, enforcement of COVID-19 protocols, support to SIECs, and engagement with other stakeholders. We are confident that improvements in these key areas will lead to an improvement in the integrity and credibility of the Nigerian electoral process.



**INITIATIVE FOR RESEARCH,
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