

ICT and Elections

THEMATIC WORKSHOP

Information Technology and Elections Management Informed Decisions for Sustainable Outcomes



Voter Registration and Boundary Delimitation Processes in Liberia 2010 - 2011

Planning, Technology and Implementation



Preparation and Planning

- Liberia's first post-civil war presidential and legislative election was held in October 2005 by the National Elections Commission of Liberia with heavy assistance from UN. Voter registration for this election was conducted between April and May 2005. Registration to vote is a voluntary act for Liberian citizens; eligibility criteria include age (18 years or older) and proof of identity. About 1.35 million voters (around 90% of the estimated eligible population) were registered during the one-month registration exercise.
- Since 2005 international assistance has been significantly decreased and NEC has independently conducted 10 successful by-elections between 2005 and 2011 with little (mainly financial) assistance using Voter Roll from 2005.



Preparation and Planning

- Since the 2005 election there has not been any updating of the Registration Roll, and in the face of changing demographics of the voter population the Registration Roll has been rendered obsolete in 2010 for upcoming 2011 national elections. In addition, with the necessity for drawing of new electoral districts, NEC had to ensure that the Registration Roll for each of the electoral district contained only the names of the voters who were eligible to vote in each respective electoral district. Estimated voters in the country was 2.1 million (based on projections made on 2008 National Census exercise) as of 2010 as opposed to 1.3 million registered voters in 2005. The NEC was therefore required to engage in the conduct of a new voter registration exercise for the 2011 elections.



Preparation and Planning

- In preparation for 2010 Voter Registration process followed by 2011 National Elections, Donors have established Electoral Basket Fund held by UNDP with projected small Electoral Technical Assistance Team. US Government through USAID also awarded contract to IFES for provision of assistance to the NEC along with establishment of Technical Assistance Team in areas defined as critical by the NEC. UNDP and IFES have worked closely together to make sure harmonized work division was established and joint Technical Assistance Team to the NEC was created. Shared long-term objective of both UNDP and IFES projects is to enhance the overall capacity of the NEC and ensure total independence of the NEC from external assistance for next round of elections.



Preparation and Planning

- Major difference during the planning for 2011 Voter Registration process as opposed to 2005 process was the availability of 2008 Census information providing primary source for more clear geographical definitions as well much more accurate planning population projections.
- The primary objective of the NEC was to prepare and manage a credible and transparent voter registration process which met international standards for democratic elections, so that every eligible Liberian, who applied for registration, was included in the register of voters for the 2011 elections.
- NEC had to make sure that all registered voters on Election Day would find their names in Registration Roll in their respective Polling Places. To achieve this, primary focus was made on proper geographical allocation of voters and Polling Places and conduct simultaneous VR process in VR Centers which would later become Polling Centers.



Preparation and Planning

- In order to achieve this objective, proper geographical information was absolutely required, which did not exist back in 2005 due to lack of Census and years of civil war that has damaged majority of countries institutions and institutional memory.
- As in many other developing countries, Liberia does not possess proper address data linked to population. Thus census was based on division of the country by the lowest geographical unit (in Liberian context - “amalgamated areas” which, in most cases, are clearly defined, commonly agreed and familiar to the general population) where Enumeration Areas for Census were established. Emphasis of the NEC was made in collecting this geographical information with population data to use both for the Boundary Delimitation and Voter Registration processes. This has harmonized two major Electoral processes and ensured that future boundary delimitation for possible upcoming Local Elections can be conducted using the current VR.



Preparation and Planning

- Using lowest level geographical units where voters would register would guarantee that those units generally would fit neatly into and that would not cut across localities or legislative constituencies. Population Data for those lowest geographical units were conglomerates of Census figures by Enumeration Area (EA) and/or Census figures by Locality. If voters were registered in their correct geographical unit then they would automatically be registered in the correct constituency. Therefore if voters were registered according to lowest geographical unit then the voters roll produced for the 2011 elections could be used again, following a normal updating and reallocation process, for the local elections.



Preparation and Planning

Following guiding principles were established to ensure the success of the VR process:

- The Voter Registration process was designed to ensure that all eligible voters, who present themselves for registration, were included on the Register of Voters that will be used on Election Day.
- Furthermore, the process was designed to ensure that voter's names were included on the voters roll for the constituency that they were eligible to vote for and on the Register of Voters for the polling center where they would actually vote on polling day.
- Therefore voters should have been only able to register in the voter registration centers in the constituency for which they were eligible to vote.



Preparation and Planning

- A key element to fulfill above guiding principles was considered the proper distribution and selection of voter registration centers. Such distribution had to provide eligible voters with reasonable opportunity to register and at the same time would be done in a way that ensured that eligible voters registered at the correct location.
- Based on above assumptions and principles, NEC with assistance from IFES has developed the Voter Registration Operational Plan involving all departments of the Commission. The Operations Plan guided the rest of the VR process. Detailed timelines for the Process was also established and made public.
- Concept for the distribution of Voter Registration Centers was also prepared along with the Operational Plan and necessary training was conducted for the NEC Magistrate Offices to identify required number and location of VR centers in appropriate geographical units.



Selection of Technology

- During the planning period implementation technology has also been considered. NEC has decided to use proven OMR technology based on several factors, including the previous knowledge of the technology by both NEC HQ and VR staff in the field, sustainability factor as well as overall budgetary considerations. It was also noted that since the NEC Liberia does collect photos of voters in the centralized database, it makes usage of centralized Face Recognition Software usage possible on later stage to pilot the biometrical checking and identify possible multiple registrants. This project was later successfully implemented by the NEC with the help of external IT Company.
- The major difference between 2005 and 2011 registration processes was the usage of digital camera kits replacing obsolete Polaroid cameras. Serious improvement has been also made to the software and databases.



Selection of Technology

Main reasons for selection of the OMR technology were:

- Previous successful experience of the NEC with OMR technology. NEC HQ and field staff as well as general public had a good knowledge of the system making training of the Registration staff easier and reduce the risk of human factor errors during the process. Thus increased ownership factor and possibility to build capacity during the process that is familiar to all stakeholders.
- Sustainability of the familiar and comparatively technologically low end system. Thus easier engagement of all involved parties and voters in a familiar and commonly understood process.
- Cost effectiveness of the process keeping it within approximately the same overall cost within the same amount per registered voter as during previous exercise (under 5.00 USD per registered voter).
- Possible built-in biometrical (facial recognition software) checking process since the NEC has collected photos of registered voters in VR database.



Implementation of the VR Process

- IFES through USAID funds have provided procurement of all necessary IT equipment and necessary software and multiple donors through UNDP have provided procurement of all necessary field materials for the Voter Registration Process.
- Finalization of all logistical preparations, timely procurement of VR materials and timely establishment of the fully equipped centralized VR Data Center along with processing software has allowed the NEC to follow timelines closely and start the process in due time.
- Between January 10 and February 09 2011 1,798,930 voters were registered in 1783 VR Centers across the country. 49% Females and 51% of Males were reported based on statistics of the registration with average age of registrants standing at 35 year.



Implementation of the VR Process

- Processing of the Data on OMR scanners at the NEC HQ in Monrovia has been finished within planned timelines and preliminary register of voters have been distributed for nationwide VR Exhibition Process. Final lists were printed for Polling Places as well as distributed widely to all registered Political Parties.



Implementation of the VR Process

- Liberia in 2011 had three elections days in a row: National Elections in August 23, General Elections for President, Senate and House of Representatives on October 11 followed by Presidential Run-off Elections on November 08, 2011. The best test for the Voter Lists is the Election Day. In 2011 Voter Lists thus have been tested for accuracy three times (besides the Exhibition of the Lists) and have been proved to be highly accurate. The absolute majority of Voters have found their names on the list on Election Day. This has been reiterated in various post-election reports of observer groups, both International and Domestic.

