



POLICY ASKS FROM ELECTORAL ADHOC STAFF EXPERIENCE SHARING ROUNDTABLE

Background

The Electoral Ad-hoc Staff Experience Sharing Roundtable was held on Friday, 15 September 2023, at De Silver Green Hotel, Abuja, and on Zoom. The Roundtable was organized to commemorate the International Democracy Day by the Electoral Hub, in partnership with the Madiba Foundation for Good Governance and with the support of the MacArthur Foundation through its Organizing for a New Nigeria (ONN) project. It was focused on teaching former ad-hoc staff about the electoral process, providing an opportunity for them to share their experiences, and proposing policy improvements.

The Roundtable brought together crucial electoral duty bearers, including, a representative of the Ministry of Youths and Sports, CSOs, and electoral ad-hoc staff that served in the 2023 general elections and off-cycle elections in Ekiti and Osun States. Specifically, the Roundtable had former INEC National Commissioners, Professor Okechukwu Ibeanu and Hajia Amina Zakari; the Administrative Secretary, FCT INEC Alhaji Musa Usman, who represented the Resident Electoral Commissioner, FCT INEC, Hon. Mahmuda Isah, INEC FCT Heads of Department, Ishaq Garba Aliyu, Antonia Idemudia, and Agness Sam-Akpe; Africa Director, MacArthur Foundation, Dr. Kole Shettima; and Programme Manager, Madiba Foundation, Ozohu Otonoku, as attendees. The Roundtable was Chaired by Hajia Amina Zakari.

The objectives of the Roundtable were:

- To document the rich and diverse experiences of these ad-hoc staff, using their valuable insights as lessons that will enlighten and guide electoral staff management.
- To empower participants through comprehensive training on understanding the intricacies of the electoral process. This is to cultivate a cadre of electoral advocates who are not just informed but passionately committed to safeguarding the integrity of our electoral system.

- To recommend policy improvements regarding the management of ad-hoc staff in our electoral system.

Summary of Discussion

Key activities that formed a part of the Roundtable include a Welcome Remark by the Princess Hamman-Obels, the Director of The Electoral Hub, an Opening Remark by the Chairperson, Hajia Amina Zakari, goodwill messages by Dr Kole Shettiman and Ozohu Otonoku, and reflections on election work led by Professor Okechukwu Ibeanu, general discussions on issues, challenges and recommendations about the Nigerian electoral process, the role of electoral ad-hoc staff and their performance, and group work on ad-hoc staff recruitment and training, deployment and activation of Registration Area Centres (RACs), election day activities, election technology and post-election reverse logistics. Ultimately, the roundtable provided an opportunity for reflections on a wide range of issues affecting ad-hoc staff performance in particular, and the Nigerian electoral process in general with a view of proffering workable recommendations.

Participants at the Roundtable highlighted the crucial role of ad-hoc staff, as key stakeholders in the electoral process, responsible for protecting its integrity and capable of thwarting the process. Specifically, Former INEC National Commissioner, Professor Okechukwu Ibeanu, provided the Lead Reflection on Election Work in Nigeria. The reflection provided insight on the crucial role of electoral staff, particularly ad-hoc staff, in ensuring quality and credible elections, challenges they face and strategies for strengthening their performance. Likening the work of electoral staff to the task of cleaning a cemetery, Prof. Ibeanu noted that what electoral workers do is a very tedious task but the people for whom it is done are seldom appreciative, or even aware, of what is being done. In a second analogy, he likened the role of election officials to that of Janus, a Roman god associated with gates, transitions, beginnings, and endings. From this analogy, he crafted the title of his presentation - The burden of Janus and How Electoral Officials Make and Mar Elections in Nigeria. He noted that electoral staff, like Janus holds the key for access to public office and they could make or mar election in the country. According to him, Electoral officials, like Janus, have both faces, the good one capable making elections and the bad one, capable of marring the credibility of elections. He further pointed out in his lead reflections that for electoral ad-hoc staff to perform optimally and uphold the integrity of electoral credibility, three qualities are required - knowledge, courage and carriage. Additionally, he noted that remuneration, societal pressure, pressure from politicians, understanding of the rules, possible conflict of interest, pressure from superiors,

collaboration with the civil society and personal commitment to honour and integrity are some critical factors that impact the performance of electoral officials.

Reflections on recently concluded elections were also offered, especially by FCT INEC HoDs that were present at the Roundtable. Ishaq Garba Aliyu, the HoD operations highlighted the achievements of the 2023 general elections, underscoring the high level of preparations that went into the process and the logistics and technological challenges encountered. Antonia Idemudia, HoD ICT INEC, pointed out the advancements made in applying technology to various aspects of electoral conduct in Nigeria as well as the limitations of technology. Agness Sam-Akpe, the HoD Voter Education and Publicity also highlighted efforts at voter education deployed by the Commission during the 2023 general elections and challenges with accessibility of local communities.

The Roundtable involved group reflections by various categories of participants of the Roundtable. There were reflections by POs and APOs, SPOs and COs, RAC Techs, Election Observers, and virtual participants. These reflections bordered on issues on recruitment and training of ad-hoc staff, deployment and activation of RACs, election day activities, election technology, and post election reverse logistics. Among other things, group members identified several challenges limiting the effectiveness of each of these areas of electoral conduct and ad-hoc staff management. Among the challenge identified were the recruitment of under-qualified personnel as ad-hoc staff, inadequate training, late activation of RACs, inadequate remuneration of electoral ad-hoc staff, inadequate security, technological failure and challenges stemming from inadequate support infrastructure, and challenge with reverse-logistics. Potential adverse consequences of these challenges create a need for concerted action by concerned stakeholders. The following are some of the specific issues identified during the Roundtable:

- For electoral ad-hoc staff to perform optimally and uphold the integrity of electoral credibility, three qualities are required - knowledge, courage and carriage.
- Societal and familial pressures impact the performance of electoral staff adversely.
- There is a need for Need for electoral officials, especially National Commissioners, to be considered for national honours.
- It is important that possible conflicts of interest be declared ab initio so it is known by electoral staff.
- INEC needs to cultivate a network of progressive civil society to help protect its ad-hoc staff.

- There's need for training of staff. To insulate staff from the electoral process, ad-hoc staff are used all through. The consequence of this, is however, that staff of the commission sometimes lack knowledge of electoral matters.
- Security for officials is very important but sometimes the courage and integrity of electoral staff can help keep it under control.
- It is important that breaches of the process be punished.
- There is also a need to appreciate INEC staff that have done well, through awards of national honour, or a letter of recommendation, or a combination of both.
- The 3 qualities of the ideal electoral staff, knowledge, courage and carriage is a function of numerous factors including the security system in place, capacity building, reward system.
- Remunerations of ad-hoc staff, especially Professors engaged in the electoral process needs to be reviewed.
- There is a need to take care of the welfare of ad-hoc staff.
- When security persons are engaged, without direct contact between the commission and the persons engaged, there tends to be low level of commitment and challenges with holding security persons accountable for security breaches. There is, therefore, a need for INEC to establish a direct link with security persons posted to the various polling units, get their details including account details directly, as well as record of their PU of electoral duty.
- On logistics challenges, the commission should explore the possibility of engaging private logistics companies. Private logistics companies are driven by the profit motive and the persons at the top would not be willing to compromise on the quality of their business. As such, issues of logistics failure can be better addressed.
- On the task of collation officers, the collators of National Assembly Election Results, consisting of the Senate and House of Representatives Elections collate twice as much results as the collation officers of the Presidential Elections do.
- Security is everybody's business. Politicians and even voters have a tendency of fomenting security threats in a bid to manipulate the electoral process. This creates complicates the issue of security and frustrates the Commission's efforts. It is

therefore, necessary for all stakeholders to take steps towards protecting electoral materials and personnel.

Policy Recommendations

Participants in the Roundtable proffered a several recommendations which, if properly implement would improve, not only the performance of electoral ad-hoc staff but also the entire electoral process. These recommendations have been categorized here into: generic recommendations, recommendations for ad-hoc staff recruitment, training, deployment and activation of RACs, election day activities, election technology, and post-election reverse logistics. Specific recommendations under each of the categories listed here are provided below:

AD-HOC STAFF RECRUITMENT

- Deployment of technology via an online application portal for ad-hoc staff application was a good step that should be sustained and built upon.
- Measures should be taken to prevent the replacement of names of trained personnel as ad-hoc staff as this constitute a major bulwark against their optimal performance.
- INEC should ensure that recruited personnel possess the requisite educational qualification. This will address challenges with poor understanding of electoral process and duties by ad-hoc staff.
- Physical screening should be conducted before ad-hoc staff are recruited. This will present a stronger check against the recruitment of unqualified personnel.
- Area of domicile should be considered when recruiting. Attention should be given to the places of residence of recruits and it should be ensured that electoral staff do not live too far from their places of electoral duty.
- Post-training exams should be administered to prospective ad-hoc staffs who have partaken in training.
- Steps should be taken to ensure that those who get recruited to work as ad-hoc staff are in good health.

- The Commission should create a database of ad-hoc staff to reduce turnover. This will reduce challenges with training and recruitment.
- Insurance policy for ad-hoc staff should be in place to allay security concerns and encourage qualified personnel to apply for electoral duties.

AD-HOC STAFF TRAINING

- Invitation of prospective ad-hoc staff for training should be sent out on time.
- The use of video and audio instruction materials is highly recommended to improve ad-hoc staff understanding of the election process, their roles, responsibilities and duties.
- The pre- and post-screening test with a recommended pass rate should be administered to ensure that recruits for ad-hoc staff duty are persons with adequate understanding of their duties and responsibilities.
- Ad-hoc staff trainings should include lessons on the use of calculators and spreadsheets.
- There should be strict adherence to house-keeping rules during training. Issues of late-coming, rowdiness, etc. should be discouraged.
- The number of days for ad-hoc staff training should be increased to a minimum of five working days.
- Trainings should emphasize practical lessons on the electoral process over theoretical lectures. Ad-hoc staff reported that there is a disproportionate emphasis on theory during trainings.
- The Commission should collaborate with the National Universities Commission (NUC) as a step towards strengthening the training process.
- APOs handling BVAS should be given actual training on how to handle the BVAS.
- More training centres should be provided encourage more participation in ad-hoc staff training.

- Efforts should be exerted to check external influence on the recruitment process of ad-hoc staff. Complete automation via the deployment of technology should be given serious consideration going forward.

DEPLOYMENT AND ACTIVATION OF RACS

- RACs should be opened early and adequate security should be provided to ensure the protection of sensitive and non-sensitive electoral materials.
- RACs should be made habitable. Adequate facilities including lighting, mattresses, convenience, etc. should be provided at RACs.
- Lateness of collation officers to RAC centres constitutes a problem, which often result in delays in the distribution of electoral materials.

ELECTION DAY ACTIVITIES

- The Commission should collaborate with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and other relevant ministries, departments and agencies to ensure adequate publicity about the electoral process.
- Adequate provisions for logistics should be provided. This should include logistics considerations that mainstream the needs of physically challenged, including disabled, pregnant women, new mothers, aged, amongst others.
- Communication barriers were experienced in several PUs, creating a need for at least, one person who understand the local language to be recruited as an ad-hoc staff.
- Ad-hoc staff should perceive their duties as a collective assignment, work collectively to ensure a successful process.
- Sensitization campaigns should be given priority attention as voters that displayed a good level of awareness on the electoral process were lauded by electoral ad-hoc staff to have provide necessary support and cooperation to ensure seamless electoral conduct.

- Consideration should be given to the recruitment of more SPOs as SPOs were observed to be overwhelmed by the number of PUs they needed to handle.
- The stipend paid to SPOs for transportation should be increased or transportation fare be paid to vehicle operators to convey SPOs across their areas of electoral duty. PU conducts impact SPOs work and if transportation fare is not adequate, SPOs cannot function optimally.
- SPO Allowances should be disbursed on time to ensure effective supervision of the PUs under their control.

ELECTION TECHNOLOGY

- RAC Techs should be deployed on time to ensure timely arrival at their places of electoral assignment and optimal performance of their duties.
- Backend issues that could impede technological use should be addressed ad-hoc staff are not thought to be compromised.

POST-ELECTION REVERSE LOGISTICS

- INEC should introduce strict Monitoring and Evaluation procedure to ensure that electoral staff with roles in reverse logistics, including Presiding Officers, perform their duties optimally.
- More vehicles should be provided to address transportation challenges experienced by ad-hoc staff.
- The Commission should explore the possibility of engaging private logistics companies. Private logistics companies are driven by the profit motive and the persons at the top would not be willing to compromise on the quality of their business. As such, issues of logistics failure can be better addressed.

NYSC

- NYSC should develop and implement comprehensive training programs for corps members who serve as ad-hoc staff, covering electoral processes, responsibilities, and practical skills.

- NYSC should establish and maintain a database of NYSC members willing to participate in electoral activities as ad-hoc staff. This database should include relevant skills and qualifications.
- NYSC should conduct pre-application and pre-deployment screenings. Conduct thorough screenings of NYSC members to ensure they meet the required qualifications, are in good health, and possess the necessary skills for their assigned roles.

SECURITY AGENCIES

- Security agencies should deploy personnel to polling stations and other electoral locations well in advance of election day to deter potential threats and ensure a secure environment.
- Specialized training should be provided to security personnel on their roles and responsibilities during elections, emphasizing the importance of neutrality, crowd control, and conflict resolution. Sensitize them to the electoral process and the significance of their role in upholding democracy.
- Security agencies should foster seamless inter-agency coordination and cooperation, amongst all security agencies involved in election security, including the police, military, and paramilitary forces, to ensure a unified approach to security management.
- Security agencies should engage with local communities to build trust and gather intelligence on potential security threats. Encourage collaboration between security agencies and community leaders to maintain peace and order during elections.
- Clear rules of engagement should be developed and communicated to security personnel engaged in electoral duty. Here, an emphasize the importance of non-lethal methods for crowd control and handling election-related disputes.
- Effective communication channels should be established between security agencies, electoral authorities, and the public.
- Comprehensive security risk assessments should be conducted prior to elections to identify potential flashpoints and vulnerabilities. Develop contingency plans for addressing security challenges.

- Security personnel on election duty should pay special attention to the protection of vulnerable groups, including women, minorities, and persons with disabilities, to ensure their safety and access to polling stations.
- Security persons should collaborate with electoral authorities to secure sensitive materials such as ballot papers, result sheets, and electronic voting machines. Monitor the transportation of these materials to prevent tampering.
- Mechanisms should be established for independent oversight of security agencies' conduct during elections. Hold security personnel accountable for any misconduct or violations of electoral laws.
- Security agencies should work closely with the media to provide accurate information on security arrangements and incidents, fostering transparency and public confidence.
- They should conduct post-election evaluations to review security strategies and identify areas for improvement in future elections.
- Security agencies respect the human rights of citizens and adhere to international standards during their operations. Investigate and address any allegations of human rights abuses promptly.
- Security agencies should utilize technology for real-time monitoring of election security, including the use of surveillance cameras and communication tools to coordinate security responses.
- Security agencies should adequately allocate resources, including personnel and equipment, to support security operations during elections.
- Security agencies should invest in continuous training and capacity building for security personnel to enhance their skills in election security management.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- There should be an upward review of remuneration of electoral staff as a step towards encouraging them to uphold the integrity and credibility of the electoral process.
- Electoral officials, especially National Commissioners, should be considered for national honours.

- All electoral staff, including ad-hoc staff, should be required to declare any conflict of interest before deployment to PU.
- Electoral staff, including ad-hoc staff are should be courageous enough to uphold the integrity of electoral process despite pressures from they may encounter.
- All breaches on the credibility of the electoral process, either by electoral ad-hoc staff, politicians or electorates should be punished.
- INEC should cultivate a network of progressive civil society to help protect its ad-hoc staff.
- The Commission Should prioritize the welfare of ad-hoc staff.
- On the task of collation officers, the collators of National Assembly Election Results, consisting of the Senate and House of Representatives Elections collate twice as much results as the collation officers of the Presidential Elections do.
- INEC should establish a direct link with security persons posted to the various polling units, get their details including account details directly, as well as record of their PU of electoral duty.
- Security should be treated as a collective responsibility. Voters, ad-hoc staff, security agencies, civil society actors, and all other stakeholders in the electoral process should take steps towards protecting electoral materials and personnel.

Conclusion

We conclude by calling on participants and all stakeholders in the Nigerian electoral process to recognize the pivotal role, and responsibility, of ad-hoc staffs in upholding the integrity and credibility of the Nigerian electoral process. The International Democracy Day should serve as a reminder that the dedication and commitment of all stakeholders, especially electoral ad-hoc staff, is integral to the success of our democracy.

It is our hope that insights gathered from the Roundtable will serve as a catalyst for improvements in ad-hoc staff conduct and the management of ad-hoc staff during elections. We, therefore, call on all stakeholders, especially INEC, to implement the recommended policy improvements as a step towards ensuring that future elections benefit from the lessons shared during the Roundtable.

About The Electoral Hub

The Electoral Hub, an affiliate 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. The Electoral Hub aims to strengthen electoral governance and accountability in Nigeria through research, documentation, electoral education, policy and legal influencing and impact advocacy. We believe that the integrity of the electoral process is crucial in improving electoral governance and sustaining democracy in Nigeria. We also believe in solutions rooted in the principles of justice and equity.

IRIAD-The Electoral Hub

...promoting electoral knowledge, accountability and integrity

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