

Promoting Two Way Communication Between INEC and Its Stakeholders

March 4, 2011

Report on a
Roundtable Discussion
at the
Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Centre
Abuja

Canada

Sponsored by the
Canadian High Commission

Promoting Two Way Communication between INEC and Its Stakeholders

Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Centre

March 4, 2011

9:00 am - 12:00 noon

A G E N D A

1. Welcome
Mr. Christian DesRoches
Counselor
High Commission of Canada
 2. Overview
Dr. Judith Burdin Asuni
Academic Associates PeaceWorks
Facilitator
 3. Presentations:
 - Social Media
Amara Nwankpa
Enough is Enough Coalition
 - Websites
Gbenga Sesan
Enough is Enough Coalition
 - Informal Networks
Hajiya Maryam Idris Othman
President, FOMWAN
 - Incident Management Systems
Chuks Ojidoh
Community Life Project
 4. Dialogue/Discussion
 5. Action Points
Dr. Mohammed Kuna
Special Assistant to the Chairman, INEC
 6. Closing
Mrs. Jacqueline Farris
Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation
- Moderator
Dr. Judith Burdin Asuni
Academic Associates PeaceWorks

BACKGROUND

The Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation in partnership with Enough is Enough Coalition organized a Roundtable Discussion at the Yar'Adua Centre, Abuja to promote two way communications between INEC and its stakeholders. Sponsored by the High Commission of Canada, the Roundtable reflected on suggestions as to how they might assist INEC in developing and implementing a successful strategy for promoting two way communication with civil society groups, faith based organizations, international partners, and domestic and foreign observer groups during the forthcoming elections.

The Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation's public policy initiative was established to address principle concerns through the formulation and implementation of sustainable public policy while Enough is Enough Coalition [EiE] represents a coalition of Nigerian youth and youth-led organizations focused on empowering young people to effectively participate in public governance as a means of driving democratic change.

Presentations included social media, websites, informal networks and incident management systems. Dr. Judith Burdin Asuni, Director, Academic Associates PeaceWorks, served as moderator of the discussion.

RATIONALE

1. To create awareness as to how social media can enhance the conduct of transparent elections in the country.
2. To illustrate how civil society organisations can assist in disseminating information to the grass roots level as well as facilitate feedback from the community level to INEC.
3. To assist INEC in its quest to ensure the conduct of a free, fair, and credible general election in Nigeria.

WELCOME

Mr. Christian DesRoches, Counselor, High Commission of Canada, urged the Roundtable to fashion out suggestions that would improve upon the existing relationship between INEC and civil society groups working for the emergence of credible elections in the country.

He expressed optimism that under the leadership of Professor Attahiru Jega as Chairman of INEC, the upcoming elections will be better than those of 2007. He also stated that with the active involvement of civil society groups, achievement of a violence free election will be possible while vote rigging and electoral malpractices can be reduced.

Mr. DesRoches said that the emergence of social media will enhance the electoral

process, stressing that involvement of civil society groups should not stop with elections, but continue after the polls.

PRESENTATIONS

1. Social Media

In his presentation on the use of Social Media in Strategic Communications, Mr. Amara Nwankpa, a member of the board of Enough is Enough Coalition [EiE], volunteer with LightUp Nigeria, and IT professional with Galaxy Backbone, identified social media as a trend that cannot be ignored as it is highly favoured by young Nigerians who are ICT compliant and politically active, adding that over 70 million devices in Nigeria can send and receive SMS messages reaching an estimated 35 million people.

He stated that approximately 44 million Nigerians have access to the Internet – most on their mobile phones, while 2.9 million Nigerians over 18 years of age are on Facebook and more than 60,000 are active on Twitter. He also noted that a single message on Twitter can be accessed all over the world.

Mr. Nwankpa observed that Pastor Chris Oyakilome has the largest following in the country of 1 million Twitter subscribers. Celebrities, opinion leaders and media personalities are among those who use social media, and Twitter has become the medium through which people interact on global and national issues.

He highlighted the merits of social media:

1. Instant crowd sourcing
2. Reports – incidents, results, opinions
3. Pictures – evidence, experience
4. Videos – evidence, experience
5. Feedback
6. Direct Communication – many-to-many interaction

Mr. Nwankpa urged INEC to identify existing social media channels as well as create new ones; resource social media and connect/network accounts established by stakeholders; and promote social media channels that will integrate with stakeholder management processes.

2. Websites

Mr. Gbenga Sesan serves as Director of Paradigm Initiative Nigeria (PIN). PIN is a social enterprise that works to connect under-served young Nigerians with information and communication technology (ICT) opportunities, with specific focus on the ill effects of unemployment and cybercrime.

PIN works with individuals, communities, government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector institutions and international organizations. It has executed projects which include; Ajegunle.org; Internet Safety, Security and Privacy Initiative for Nigeria and Techie. Mr. Sesan is also a volunteer member of Enough is Enough Coalition Nigeria.

Mr. Sesan highlighted problems associated with elections in Nigeria, suggesting that past elections had a history of manipulation resulting in the rejection of results by opposition parties. He noted that voters are disconnected from the process of elections due to a lack of information at every stage. In addition, he observed that elections in Nigeria had not portrayed a true reflection of the aggregate of citizens of the country and further noted that election results are too often altered after leaving the polling stations, thereby eroding the confidence of the citizenry in the election umpire.

To reinstate voter confidence in the system, Mr. Sesan advocated that voters be connected to the process of voting by spicing it with fun, something particularly appealing to youth. He advised that those saddled with responsibility for collating results from polling units be properly monitored by both the authority as well as independent election monitoring bodies in the country.

Speaking further, Mr. Sesan suggested that collated election results be transmitted to a central location immediately after voting to avoid manipulation pending further analyses of data and additional information about the process; e.g. violence reports.

He also recommended that citizens be empowered to monitor elections:

1. By allowing monitoring organizations to draw conclusions regarding legitimacy and accuracy of elections;
2. By providing untrained citizens with a medium on which to share objective (numerical) and subjective election experiences;
3. By potentially turning the 87,297,789 registered Nigerian voters with mobile phones, 43,982,200 with internet access and 2,985,680 on Facebook into informal election observers.

In order to achieve this, Mr. Sesan advocated the establishment of a citizen reporting system via web and mobile applications where users record information from their polling units a number of times during the day and transmit same to a centralized database via SMS which aggregates citizen data including electoral irregularities in an online database for further analysis.

The PIN Executive Director also introduced ReVoDa Technology, whereby citizens are encouraged to register their phones with a polling unit code so as to identify them with a name to lend credibility to data transmitted to the data base.

3. Informal Networks

Hajia Maryam Idris Othman, National President of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) made the presentation on informal networks and the role they can play in disseminating information and receiving concerns of voters at the local level. FOMWAN is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 1985 as a civil society umbrella body for Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria. The national association is comprised of chapters in 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory with 600 local government branches throughout the federation and more than 2,000 affiliate groups.

Government at all levels engages FOMWAN in order to reach out to Muslim women from the ward to national level. The organization is presently partnering with civil society groups in the areas of education, health, and election monitoring and has earned respect from non-Muslim religious groups at local, national and international levels. These groups have invited FOMWAN to participate in community activities, interfaith dialogue and peace building.

In her presentation, Hajia Maryam defined informal networks as those not officially recognized but used to achieve certain aims and objectives in society and often used as a mechanism to propel the growth of small businesses by increasing the free flow of information. She stated that informal networks are highly effective as they complement structures, plans and processes of formal organizations and provide accelerated responses to unanticipated events while enabling problem solving through collaboration across boundaries.

She further stated that informal networks are built and sustained on mutual agreement, trust, shared values, beliefs, hopes and aspirations and provide effective and lasting results.

She reiterated that messages delivered through informal networks are presented in a familiar format, through familiar media and are easily noted and utilized by grassroots organisations, mosques and churches and therefore easily assimilated and utilized by the larger society. Messages are free of charge, familiar and trustworthy.

The FOMWAN president said that faith based organizations were willing to collaborate with INEC if the work addresses the needs and rights of their constituencies. She advised INEC to utilize the volume of information gathered over time by a number of CSOs in the country as well as allow faith based organizations to ask questions and provide honest feedback to the commission.

She urged INEC to engage in frequent interaction in diverse locations with a sincerity of purpose, make themselves accessible to communications borne from sincere opinion and

tolerate extra channels of communication, especially by those who do not want to be identified directly.

4. Incident Management Systems

Mr. Chuks Ojidoh, Deputy Project Director, Community Life Project (CLP), has worked with informal networks, national broad based grassroots groups and faith-based organisations such as FOMWAN to conduct non-partisan grassroots civic and voter education forums in 36 states and the FCT, including 156 LGAs in the six geo-political zones of the country.

Mr. Ojidoh demonstrated the Reclaimnaija.net website, a citizens reporting platform, which CLP is coordinating. The platform:

- Is a mechanism for grassroots citizens to channel their concerns and have their voice heard on issues of electoral transparency and governance;
- Uses an Ushahidi platform, a crisis mapping web engine developed during the Kenyan election crisis which collates information sent through text messages, emails, tweets and direct reporting;
- Has introduced phone calls in dominant local languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, pidgin) for the benefit of those who don't know how to send SMS messages;
- Operates interactively to engage citizens, the media and agencies and provides real time feedback and response;
- Was effectively used in collating citizens reports on the voter registration exercise;
- Has the capacity to host data and reports from diverse stakeholders and is already collaborating and sharing with other CSOs as well as with INEC.

The Deputy Project Director noted that when elections are riddled with violence and fraud, public confidence in elected officers is eroded, thereby affecting the country's growth and development. He urged that elections be seen to be free, fair and credible. To this end, Mr Ojidoh said there was need for effective social mobilization, grassroots voter education and collaboration between civil society organizations, political parties and electoral bodies. He therefore advised that the media, police, military and para-military agencies be duty bound to support INEC to enable it to achieve electoral transparency.

Mr. Ojidoh further stressed the need for an incident management system arising from the experience of the just concluded voter registration exercise, fraught with numerous complaints, as this would provide an effective channel of communication between INEC and relevant stakeholders in the election process.

To achieve this, he said there was need for INEC to develop a simple, user friendly and reliable system that could integrate both traditional and new media by harnessing

existing social and informal networks for effective crowd sourcing, incident verification and feedback.

DIALOGUE/DISCUSSION

INEC was very receptive to engaging social media and informal networks in their effort to ensure free, fair and credible elections. Dr. Kuna acknowledged the need for INEC to create a platform for disseminating and managing an information system that is able to relate with those at the local level. He said the Commission would be proactive in enhancing the credibility of the election by using social media as a platform to enable it to interact with large numbers of people during the election, answer questions and provide information, as well as monitor its officers.

Participants urged INEC to create a common platform where information could be gathered, analyzed and disseminated to stakeholders utilizing LinkServe and blogs. They further urged INEC to be proactive in information management in order to enable INEC to achieve its objectives. They advised INEC to explore new media concepts that could be used to address challenges faced by the commission in order to enhance and deepen the success of the electoral process.

Discussants suggested that INEC organize meetings with IT consultants on incident management systems in order to create a synergy for the success of the electoral process. It was also agreed that INEC should lay the ground work for the use of social media to advance the success of the election process. The forum said social media could be used by the Commission to calm tensions that may result from the outcome of election results.

It was agreed that INEC has an official responsibility to provide information in order to keep citizens abreast of Commission activities and should host regular briefings of stakeholders.

Discussion also centered on weaknesses of the recently concluded voter registration exercise. Participants noted the inability of INEC to provide adequate registration centers for potential voters, lack of sufficient registration materials, multiple and under aged registration, as well voters registering far from their residence. Discussants suggested that INEC display the certified voter register to the public in view of the short time to the election. INEC's lack of capacity in ICT matters was noted by those familiar with the Commission's present level of competence.

The following measures were also recommended:

- That voters be taught to use their cell phones to send text messages regarding activities at their polling units as everyone has a duty to make this election work;
- That INEC make use of social media to provide up to date information about the election process before voting, during the voting process and post election by sending location specific messages to voters about progress of the elections.

- That INEC should set up a platform to enable it to monitor large numbers of voters during the election.
- That civil society organisations partner with the media to enable it to see itself as a stakeholder in the process, adding that local media should develop an attitudinal change for the success of the electoral process.
- That security operatives be employed to solve crowd management issues at polling units.

ACTION POINTS

At the conclusion of the dialogue, Dr. Mohammed Kuna, Special Assistant to the Chairman, INEC, drew up action points. Dr. Kuna is a PhD holder in Sociology and was a lecturer at the Uthman Dan Fodio University, Sokoto until his recent appointment.

He agreed that INEC should establish a situation room where reports are received and acted upon, adding that as a result of the voter registration exercise, INEC has identified potential problem areas in the coming election.

He noted that there might be challenges to creating an interface between a bureaucratic system and an anti bureaucratic information system but said that INEC will need to grapple with the challenge in the coming elections.

Dr. Kuna acknowledged the need for INEC to create a platform for disseminating and managing an information system that is able to relate with those at the local level.

He said the Commission would be proactive to enhance the credibility of the election by using social media as a platform to enable it to monitor large numbers of people during the election, as well as monitor its officers involved in the process and promised to facilitate discussions in this regard to enhance the process.

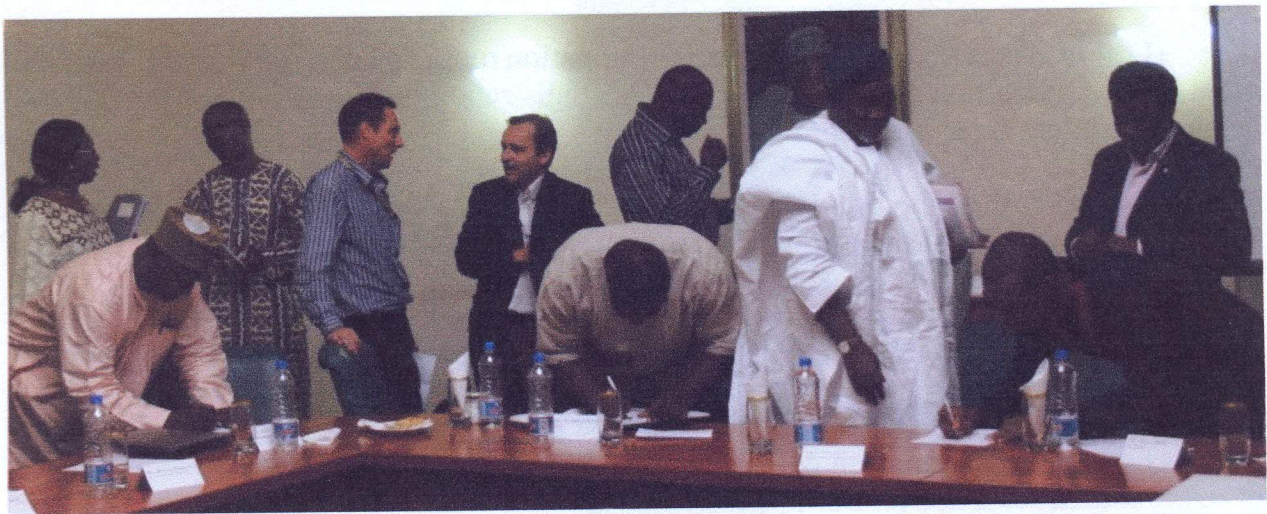
Finally, Dr. Kuna told participants that INEC has taken steps to checkmate multiple voting by introducing a system of streaming voters at polling units and that the Commission was prepared for the conduct of a free, fair and transparent general election.

CLOSING

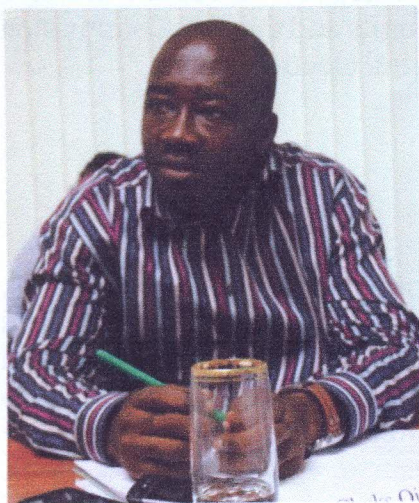
The Director General, Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Centre, Mrs. Jacqueline Farris, commended the High Commission of Canada for sponsoring the Roundtable and thanked participants for honouring the invitation to attend the programme. She offered to serve as a facilitator for future discussions and to make the Yar'Adua Centre available in order to support civil society's work toward credible, free and fair elections in the country.



Mr. Gbenga Sesan, Hajia Maryam Idris Othman, Mr. Amara Nwankpa, Dr. Judith Burdin Asuni, Mr. Christian DesRoches and Dr. Mohammed Kuna



Participants including Mr. Jens-Peter Drybak, DFID; Mr. Carlo Binda, NDI and Alhaji Habu Daura, Police Service Commission



Mr. Chuks Ojidoh, CLP



Mrs. Jacqueline Farris, Mr. Amara Nwankpa and Dr. Judith Burdin Asuni, Facilitators

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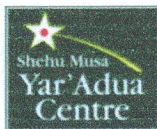
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