

Ghana's Voters Register- IEA Brokers some key consensus
Communique issued at the end of a national debate on Ghana's Voters Register
organised by the IEA on Tuesday 20th October, 2015 in Accra

Preamble

As part of its commitment to promote good governance and entrenched multiparty democracy for sustainable national development in Ghana, The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA-Ghana) organized a National Debate on Tuesday, 20th October 2015 in its conference hall. The Debate was under the theme: "Towards a Credible and Peaceful 2016 Elections: A Review of the State of Ghana's Voters Register and the Way Forward". It brought together over 100 participants from Parliament, Civil Society, Political Parties, Development Partners, Traditional Authorities, Statesmen and Media.

The 2012 Election Petition at the Supreme Court recommended an overhaul of Ghana's electoral system. Justice Atuguba, Presiding Judge of the Election Petition, stated as follows: "this petition has exposed the need for certain electoral reforms". In the lead up to next year's elections, discussion on Ghana's Voters Register has taken centre stage, with wide public concerns expressed over its credibility.

Even though it is generally agreed that the Register is flawed, there is disagreement on the magnitude of the irregularities in the Register and the approach to addressing the problem. While some have argued for purging the existing Register, others have called for compilation of a new Register.

The IEA recognizes that if this issue is not resolved in a timely manner, the nation will be further polarized, and the peace of Ghana will be threatened. It is against this background that the Debate was organized to provide an objective, non-partisan platform for a discussion of the issues in order to find common ground.

Two presentations were delivered as follows:

Towards a Credible Election 2016 – Compiling a New Voters Register by Prof Mike Oquaye (Former Deputy Speaker of Parliament)

Towards a Credible Election 2016 – Purging Ghana’s Current Voters Register by Dr. Ransford Gyampo (Senior Lecturer, Political Science Department, University of Ghana)

Issues Raised

The current Register is bloated with illegal entries (minors, foreign nationals, doctored photographs, etc.).

The need for empirical evidence to prove allegations of bloating.

The capacity and credibility of the Electoral Commission to undertake effective audit of the Register.

The specific methodology to be used for auditing the Register. How will the Register be audited? What principles will guide this process? How effective will the methodology be?

The empirical soundness or reliability of the source data for a new Register. How does one prove to be a citizen of Ghana? What form of identification is authentic and acceptable?

Cost implications of cleaning the existing Voters Register. How will it be funded?

Cost implications of compiling a new Voters Register. How will it be funded?

Political parties and citizenry have not taken full advantage of existing processes to ensure periodic reviews of the Register.

Ghana currently does not have a codified body of electoral laws to deal with electoral offences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It was agreed that there are irregularities with the current Voters Register. All stakeholders must work towards a consensus position on addressing these irregularities. The two main schools of thought on how to resolve the problem of illegal entries in the Register are not mutually exclusive.

This is because purging the Register will ultimately result in a new Register, while compiling a new Register will rely on some existing data from the old Register. What is critical is that the final output of this exercise must be a Voters Register with an acceptable margin of error.

2. The Electoral Commission should demonstrate proactiveness and leadership on this important national issue. It should engage the services of a competent, credible and external organization to conduct independent investigations into allegations of bloating.

Though Article 46 of the National Constitution protects the EC from direction or control, it is nevertheless accountable to the citizens because it is a public organization which draws its funds from the Consolidated Fund. It must therefore ensure full transparency and accountability in its work.

3. It was agreed that there was the absence of a single codified body on laws dealing with electoral offences in Ghana.

The incidence of electoral fraud is rife in Ghana because of this deficiency in its legal regime. Ghana should emulate the example of Kenya by codifying a set of electoral laws which adequately deter electoral fraud. Having adequate electoral laws will ensure that elections are conducted without repeated incidents of illegal registration, ballot box snatching, etc.

4. The cost implications of auditing the existing Voters Register or compiling a new Register should not take away from steps to provide a credible and acceptable Register for the 2016 elections.

This is because the cost of managing a national crisis resulting from a flawed electoral process will be potentially higher than that of having an acceptable Register.

5. Ghana should renew its efforts towards an authentic national identification system for all citizens. This is crucial going forward as it will feed into the process of providing a robust and credible Voters Register.

Signed

Mrs. Jean Mensa

(Executive Director, IEA)