



Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO)

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CODEO Final Statement on the 2016 Voter Register Exhibition Exercise (July 18-August 7, 2016)

Introduction and Summary of Findings

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) observed the just-concluded voter register exhibition exercise. The 21-day nation-wide exercise, organized by the Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana, from Monday, July 18 to Sunday, August 7, 2016, was part of the preparations towards the compilation of a certified/final register of voters to be used for the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections. The deployment of CODEO observers was in line with the Coalition's comprehensive observation program for the 2016 elections. CODEO-trained observers visited and observed various exhibition centers in constituencies throughout the country. Each observer was assigned to one constituency with a mandate to observe the exercise in 12 randomly-selected exhibition centers. CODEO observers observed an average of 12 out of the 21 days dedicated for the exercise, per constituency, spending a full day at each of the selected centers, after which they moved on to observe at the next center (*see table 1 below for observation dates*)¹. This enabled CODEO to cover as many exhibition centers as possible in each constituency.

Table 1: Dates CODEO observers observed the voter registration exercise

Month	Dates
July	18th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 25th, 26th, 28th, 30th
August	1st, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7 th

At the end of the exercise on Sunday, August 7, CODEO observers were able to visit and observe a total of 2,888 exhibition centers fairly spread over all ten regions of the country. CODEO observers used SMS technology to send periodic reports each day to the CODEO Secretariat. CODEO issued an interim observation statement on Friday, July 29, 2016 (i.e. day 12 of the exercise). Based on reports received from a total of 262 observers at the end of the exercise, CODEO makes the following key findings:

- CODEO noted a generally-smooth exhibition exercise. Consistent with past exhibition exercises, there was minimal presence of party agents and unauthorized persons at the centers and very few reported violent incidents, and disruptions.

¹ July 18th was observed by only observers in Greater Accra Region. The remaining dates were observed by all observers in all 10 regions of the country.

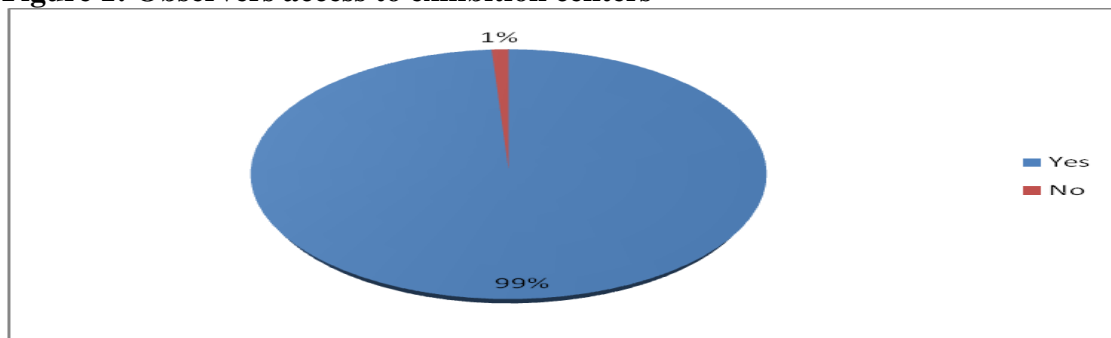
- Public response to the exercise was similarly low, and there were very few cases of objections being raised against names on the voter register.
- There were very few problems with the biometric verification equipment; only 8% of exhibition centers visited encountered malfunctioning biometric verification devices.
- However, some registered voters could not be verified by the biometric verification devices in about 6% of centers observed.
- About 25 exhibition centers did not open on the days CODEO observers visited those centers, while another 20 exhibition centers closed before the officially stipulated closing time of 6:00PM. Four (4) exhibition centers were suspended at some point in time in the course of the exercise.

Main Findings

- *Access to, Opening, and Set-Up of Exhibition Centers*

Almost all (99%) CODEO observers reported being granted access to exhibition centers during the entire period of the exercise. In about 30 exhibition centers, however, CODEO observers reported being denied access by EC Exhibition Officials despite having official accreditation badges from the EC (*see figure 1 below*). This represented about 1% of all centers observed with the Upper West and Brong Ahafo Regions recording the highest number of such cases of 7 and 5 respectively. They were followed by the Eastern and Northern Regions (4 cases each). The Western Region had none of such cases while the Central and Volta Regions had 1 case each.

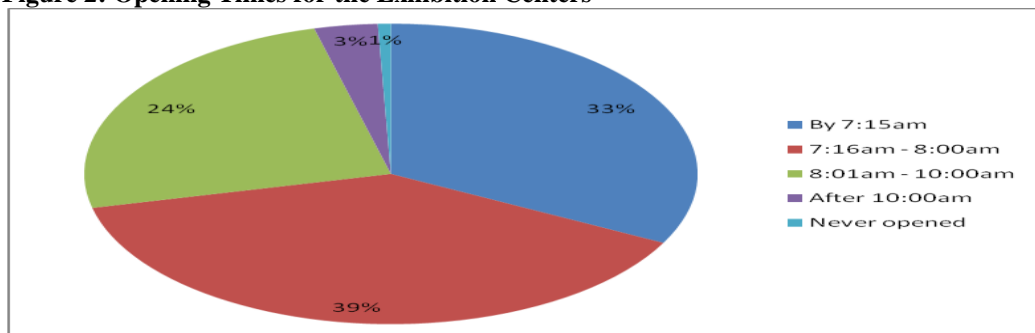
Figure 1: Observers access to exhibition centers



CODEO Observers found 88% of exhibition centers to be accessible to persons with disabilities and the elderly, while 12% of exhibition centers were not.

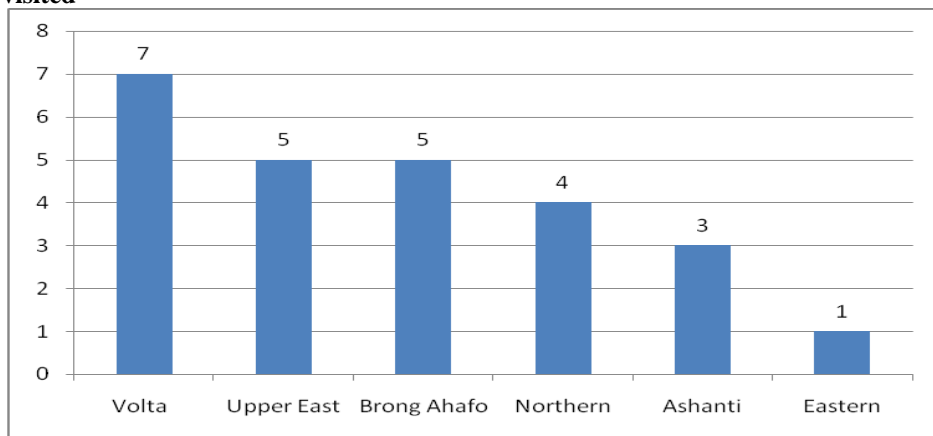
The Electoral Commission indicated that centers were to open at 7:00A.M. Overall, about 72% of exhibition centers were opened by 8:00A.M. Of the exhibition centers visited, observers indicated that only about one-third of them were opened by 7:15A.M, while 39% of centers opened between 7:16A.M.and 8:00AM; 24% of centers opened after 8:00AM (*see figure 2 below*). CODEO observers reported that about 20 exhibition centers closed before the daily official closing time of 6:00PM. In about 4 centers observed by CODEO, the exhibition centers suspended at some point during the day.

Figure 2: Opening Times for the Exhibition Centers



CODEO Observers reported that in 25 exhibition centers (representing nearly 1%), exhibition officials never showed up and thus the centers were not opened on those dates they (observers) were visiting.

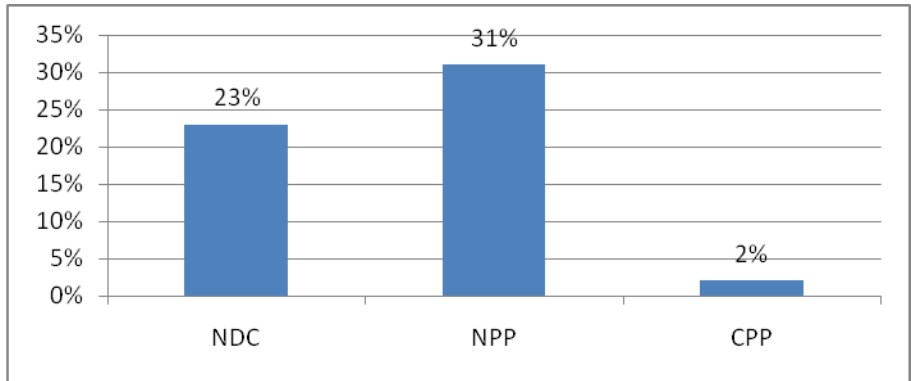
Figure 3. Regional Breakdown of the number of centers that did not open on the days CODEO observers visited



- *Presence of Party agents and uniformed Security Personnel*

CODEO Observers reported not seeing political party agents in most exhibition centers observed. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) had the highest number of agents present at 31% of the centers observed by CODEO, followed by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) which had party agents in 23% of centers observed. Agents of the Convention People’s Party (CPP) were seen in just about 2% of exhibition centers observed while other political parties were seen in less than 1% of exhibition centers visited by observers. CODEO observers reported that at centers where party agents were seen, those agents did not station themselves throughout the day, but dashed in and out of the centers. Observers reported seeing uniformed security personnel in just about 3% of exhibition centers observed.

Figure 4. Political parties mainly present at exhibition centers



- *Biometric Verification and Performance of Equipment*

CODEO Observers reported seeing biometric verification devices (BVDs) in nearly all (99%) exhibition centers observed. The BVDs, however, could not function properly in about 6% of exhibition centers observed. Where the equipment functioned properly, some registered voters who showed up at some centers (8%) could not be verified biometrically (i.e. biometric verification failed).

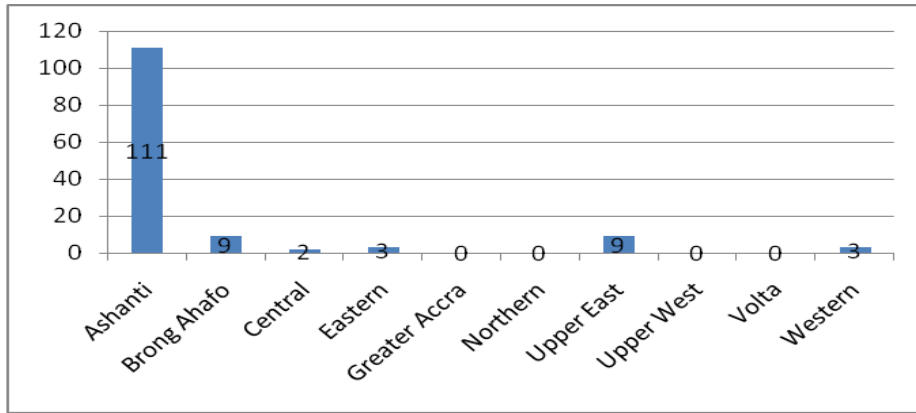
- *Cleaning the Voters Register and the Public Response to the exercise*

CODEO observers indicated that the response of the public to the exercise was generally slow and low, with registered voters trickling in from time to time. In 95% of the centers observed, daily turn-out was less than 50 persons. Similarly, observers reported seeing few requests for inclusion of names by voters with voter ID cards as well as few requests for objections to names on the register. Observers witnessed requests for correction of names only in 4% of the centers observed, while requests for the removal of names of dead persons were observed in 6% of centers observed. Observers also witnessed objections being made against names in the register on the bases of age and or nationality. The table below provides a breakdown of the number of objections made and observed on the days CODEO observers visited the exhibition centers during the 12 days of observation.

Table 1. Number of Objections Made at Centers Observed by CODEO observers

Basis for Objection	Number of Persons Objected to
Minor	137
Deceased	527
Foreigner	23

Figure 5: Number of names on the register objected to on the basis of being minor



- *Compliance to registration rules, EC Supervision of the Exercise and Presence of Unauthorized Persons*

CODEO observers reported that most exhibition officials complied with the applicable rules with regards to the exhibition exercise. In about 80% of exhibition centers observed, officials provided instructions to registered voters on how to verify registration details and to make claims and objections, among others. Observers reported seeing EC Supervisors in only 33% of the centers observed. Finally, CODEO observers came across the presence of unauthorised persons in just about 4% of exhibition centers observed.

CODEO's Overall Perspective on the Findings

Based on CODEO's findings from the just concluded voter register exhibition, CODEO makes the following general comments and observations:

- CODEO is concerned about the general public apathy towards voter register exhibition exercises in the country. CODEO believes that the real possible implications of failing to confirm one's registration details may be lost on many registered voters, hence their failure to check registration details during such exercises. CODEO believes that it is in the interest of voters and, indeed, all stakeholders to have registered voters turn up to verify their registration details as it will help improve election-day planning, reduce tension and avoid needless controversies.
- CODEO is concerned about the performance of some biometric verification devices, even if there were few instances of malfunctioning, given the minimal pressure that was brought to bear on them in the course of the exercise, as compared to possible pressure on election day.
- CODEO is also equally worried and disappointed about the minimal interest and presence of political parties at exhibition centers, considering the fact that political parties in the country have been the key stakeholders consistently raising doubts about the credibility of voters register. Their participation in the exhibition exercise is in stark contrast to other exercises like voter registration and voting where the two major political parties (the NDC and the NPP), for instance, present stationed agents in not less than 90% of centers or polling stations as recorded in CODEO's findings during the 2016 limited voter registration exercise.

- CODEO is also concerned about the level of civic/voter education in the country, ahead of the December polls.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, CODEO makes the following recommendations:

- The Electoral Commission should, as a matter of necessity, identify all malfunctioning equipment and ascertain the reasons for the malfunctioning to help address possible equipment failure on election day. The Electoral Commission should clearly identify, outline and or publicise the modalities for dealing with the potential cases of biometric verification failures to reduce possible tension associated with turning eligible voters away on election day because of verification failures.
- The Electoral Commission should undertake an accessibility audit of all polling stations to be used in the December 7 polls and take steps to address challenges associated with siting of polling stations to help improve accessibility to persons with disabilities and the elderly, among others.
- The Electoral Commission should improve its guidelines to, and training of, temporary officials regarding accreditation and access to exhibition centers/polling stations to avoid situations where duly accredited observers are turned away by such officials. The EC should also ensure that its officials stick to guidelines and regulations governing the conduct of such exercises, in particular time for opening and closing of centers.
- CODEO reiterates its call on the EC and the NCCE to deepen collaborative efforts in support of civic and voter education.
- Finally, political parties must recognize the role of exhibition exercises and the responsibility they have in ensuring a credible voter register, and improve their participation in future exhibition exercises.

Commendation

CODEO commends the Electoral Commission for carrying out a generally-smooth exercise with very few issues. The Coalition is of the belief that the EC will take the necessary steps to address all out-standing issues in relation to the compilation of the final register and the smooth functioning of equipment. This will bring the country closer to achieving peaceful and successful conduct during the 2016 elections.

Conclusion

CODEO assures all stakeholders that it will continue to observe the pre-election environment and will duly share its findings with the general public. CODEO's observation of these exercises is made possible with the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Arhin', with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

**Albert Arhin,
National Coordinator, CODEO**

Dated: Wednesday, 17th August, 2016.