SECURITY RISKS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA: EXPEREINCES AND CHALLENGES

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BACKGROUND

Nigeria is a multi-dimensional society. The manifestation could be seen in the language, culture, tradition, geography, democratic culture, political parties and the people therein. With over 923,768 square km landmass and estimated population of over 160 million people, it could be said that to conduct elections in the country presents one of the burdensome logistically challenged operation apart from war time in Nigeria.

The electoral statistics has it that there are about 70 million registered voters, 36 States and FCT, 774 Local Government Areas (LGAs), 8,776 Wards (RACs), 119, 911 Polling Units and plethora of Voting Points (VPs). With the above scenario and statistics, one should not envy the Nigerian electoral commission. It is important to note therefore that the Nigerian electoral environment is replete with enormity of challenges during every electoral processes or phase that could trigger electoral security related risks. There has always been a risk associated with conduct of elections in Nigeria right from 1964 till date. But in all of these periods, it has not been adjudged to be free, fair and credible by both local and international Observers as was the case in 2011 general elections. It is indeed paradoxical that the 2011 general election adjudged to be good also produced such an orgy of violence, hence the need by the Commission to focus a lot of attention on electoral risks and securing the process towards the general election 2015. It is in that light a concerted effort was made to improve on early warning and mitigating mechanisms.

DILEMMA OF MULTI FACETED COUNTRY

- Lack of trust: manifesting in projects such as Population Census, Voter Registration and any other that has to do with enumeration.
- Fierce infighting among the diverse groups.
- Primitive accumulation of wealth.
- Fierce struggle for power and position.
- Issue of marginalization.
- Minority challenge.

MEASURES TO CONTROL THE DILEMMA

- Federal Character.
- Zoning formula.
- Constitutional framework.

ELECTION SECURITY

Security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. From the provision of basic security to voters at political party rallies and campaigns to ensuring that result forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed by security considerations. In view of the scale of general elections, the number of people involved, election materials that need to be moved, difficulty of the terrain to be traversed, as well as the physical locations that need to be protected, such an operation is complex. It represents logistics and planning challenge that require a wide range of stakeholders, processes, locations, and issues in time and space.

Whether we are talking of electoral staff, voters, or other stakeholders such as candidates, their agents and parties, civil society organizations, domestic and international observer groups and security agencies themselves, security is critical in the protection of electoral personnel, locations and processes; in ensuring that voters exercise their civic duties without fear or hindrance; in creating a level playing field for all political parties and candidates to canvass for support; in protecting domestic and foreign observers in discharging their

duties and obligations, and in maintaining the overall integrity of the democratic and electoral processes.

Significance of Electoral Security:

The significance of electoral security cannot, therefore, be overemphasized. Electoral security is crucial for creating the proper environment for electoral staff to carry out their duties; for voters to freely and safely go to their polling units to vote; for candidates and political parties to organize rallies and campaigns; and for other numerous stakeholders to discharge their responsibilities under the Constitution and the Electoral Act.

CAUSES OF ELECTORAL RISK IN THE NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENT

There are varied causes of electoral risk in the Nigerian context which we have developed as factors that could trigger electoral risks.

- Poor performance of the electoral management body: Public perception of INEC and allegations of bias by the Commission
- Inadequate operational planning: Existence of operational plans and level of implementation of the operational plan
- Inadequate funding, financing and budgeting: Disbursement of funds to INEC for electoral activities and appropriateness of budget lines for the conduct of elections
- Inadequate electoral security arrangements: Existence of training plans for security and level of implementation of security training plans
- Poor training for election officials: Existence of operational planning for training of INEC permanent and ad hoc staff and sufficiency of training materials and manuals for Poll workers training
- Poor Voter Information campaign
- Problematic Voter registration
- Problematic registration of Candidates including Party Primaries
- Conflicts relating to changing power dynamics
- Presence of non-state armed actors: Insurgency and Internally Displaced persons (IDPs).

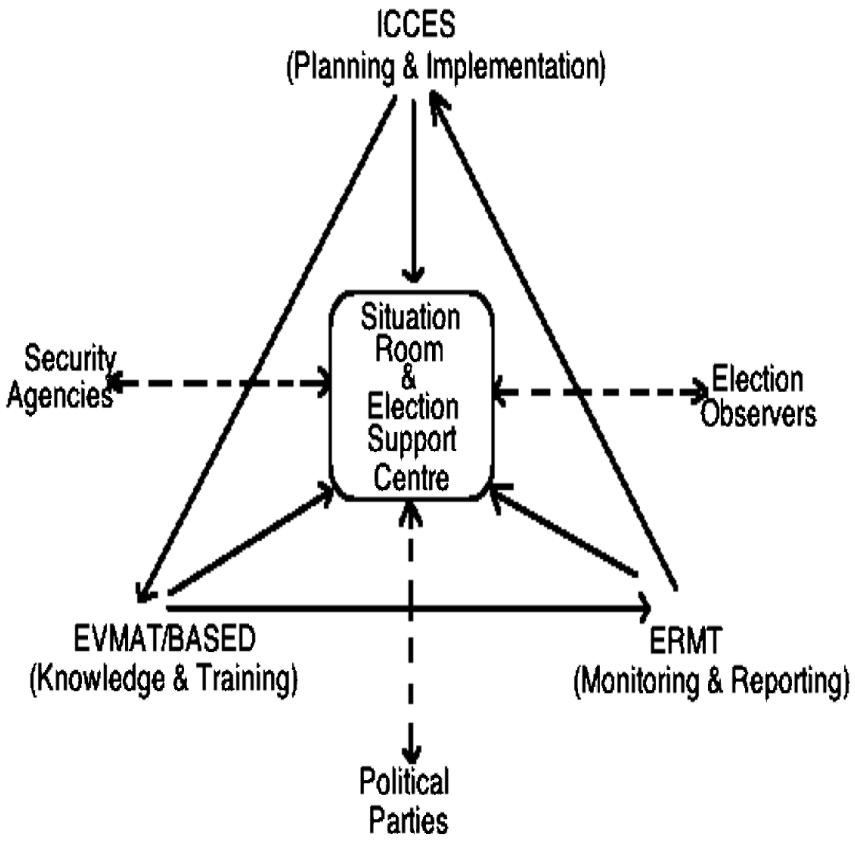
- Environmental hazards: Outbreak of infectious disease; e.g Ebola and report of inclement weather and flooding

INEC' RISK PREPAREDNESS FRAMEWORK

After considering the factors and the paradox of 2011 general elections, the Commission therefore developed an electoral risk architectural framework to deal with the mischief associated with adjudged free and fair elections. The framework has three basic components;

a) Planning and Implementation (ICCES)
b) Knowledge and Training (EVMAT/BaSED)
c) Monitoring and Reporting (ERM Tool)

INEC' Risk Preparedness Framework



- During elections, all these feed regular information into the Situation Room at the Headquarters and Election Support Centres at State Offices. These are high-level bodies of INEC run by Commissioners and Directors to ensure rapid intervention when cases are reported.

- The Situation Room and Election Support Centres are also in constant touch with Security Agencies, Election Observers and Political Parties

1. Planning & Implementation

- The role of the Interagency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) remains central to the electoral risk management for the 2015 general elections and beyond. The main role is
- designed to increase the level of consultation, coordination, harmonization and managed decentralization of election security/risk management.
- Coordinate the design of a comprehensive election security management system for INEC.

- Develop locally focused plans for providing security before, during and after elections.
- Harmonize the training, deployment and actions of security personnel on election duties.
- Assess existing security threats across the country that have implications for elections and produce a red, amber and green electoral security map for the country, which will be regularly updated.

2. Knowledge & Training

- The INEC Electoral Institute (TEI) has as a major part of its mandate, the production of knowledge and training on election security.
- Three principal modules are being developed by the Institute to support INEC's Election Risk Preparedness:

i. Election Violence Mitigation and Advocacy Training (EVMAT): For CSOs and other Stakeholders interested in working to mitigate election violence.
ii. Basic Security in Election Duty (BaSED): For INEC field officers.
iii. Joint Training for Security Officials on Election Duties: For ICCESS.

- In addition, the Electoral Institute has a project to:
- Develop standardized methodology for accessing and predicting electoral risk.
- Review reports and researches on violence to synthesize their findings and recommend policy actions for relevant agencies.
- Establish a repository of information on electoral risk in the form of an electronic database.

3. Monitoring & Reporting

INEC has entered into a tripartite collaboration with the International IDEA and the African Union (AU) to use the Election Risk Management (ERM) Tool developed by the International IDEA.

The tool is designed to achieve the following purposes:

1. Enhance INEC's capacity to understand risk factors, analyze risk data and take action to prevent or mitigate election related insecurity.
2. It assists in identifying possible triggers for election related violence at different stages of the electoral cycle and helps INEC to devise appropriate measures to avert it.
3. It is customizable and intended for use by election management bodies and security agencies.

Apart from the framework, the Commission also introduced other far reaching mechanisms such as;

- Establishment of Inter Party Advisory Committee (IPAC).
- Continuous Stakeholders Engagement.
- Strengthening Electoral Dispute Resolution Mechanism.

- Introduction of Electoral Management System (EMS) and Electoral Project Plan.
- A Communication Policy.
- Establishment of National Interagency Committee on Voter Education (NICVEP).
- Establishment of Registration and Election Review Committee (RERC)
- Technical Committee on the Review of Electoral Districts and Constituencies (TCRED & C).
- The National Peace Accord Meeting.

CHALLENGES

- Inadequate legal framework:
  - Number of Registered Voters as against Total number of Accredited Voters in determining the need to run for supplementary elections.
  - What happens if the party candidate died when the election is on-going?
  - The role of the judiciary in determining the voting outcome.
  - The powers of the Collation Officers in determining the outcomes of elections.
- Deployment of Military during elections.
- Financial autonomy viz a vis Independent nature of the EMB.
- Timing of the ERM tool application and the depth of buy –in.
- Sustainability challenge.
- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E).
- Issue of Migration, Internal and External

CONCLUSION

As with any programme, there are several lessons learned, but overall, the implementation of the ERM Tool in Nigeria should be considered successful, given the constraints of time and learning curve.

The general outcome of the election particularly the acceptance of defeat by the incumbent President bore enormous testimony to all the efforts put by the Commission to give the country an electoral process and election worthy of emulation by the majority of the citizenry and the international community.

The actions and disposition of the Security agencies during and after the elections is worthy of mention as the Commonwealth Observers group noted in their report. This could largely be to the level of trainings and high level collaboration that existed between the Commission and the agencies.

Finally, it is our belief that Int. IDEA and other International agencies will still look towards supporting the Commission, especially on the continued implementation of the ERM tool as we march towards consolidating the gains of 2015 Nigerian elections in 2019. This is more so, as we expect that the implementation of the tool in mitigating or preventing risk will be more realistic so as not to be seen as a panacea but an important component to an overall risk management strategy.

Note: The Risk Maps developed are as embedded in the Comprehensive Report distributed during the conference.

Thank you.