



# **Electoral Training and Education: The Case of the Electoral Institute in Nigeria**

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# Electoral Training and Education: The Case of the Electoral Institute in Nigeria

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Case Study

**Maurice Iwu**

## 1. The Electoral Institute's beginnings (2003–2005)

### 2005 planning retreat

The Electoral Institute (TEI) was founded on 23 June 2005 following the formal approval of a proposal presented at a meeting of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria. A strategic INEC planning retreat to discuss the 2004–2007 period provided the venue for valuable insights from INEC field staff; the Institute's establishment was then envisaged and its development spearheaded by Professor Maurice Iwu, then-National Commissioner of INEC. The operation of electoral training centres as a function of national electoral management bodies (EMBs) in Latin America and Asia provided the inspiration for establishing an equivalent institute in Nigeria. The Institute's core objectives were to enhance the development of INEC's workforce, as well as its capacity-building, research, documentation and voter education efforts. The overarching rationale was to create an institutional framework to consolidate Nigeria's transition to electoral democracy after years of prolonged military rule (see Box 2).

### The country and the electoral context

The restoration of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 presented a precious opportunity for reclaiming and rebuilding democratic values, as well as for laying out a road map for democratic practices which had been decimated or discontinued during many years of military rule. Between 1966 and 1999 the outward features of democratic rule (if not the actual substance) receded or advanced at the sole discretion of the military regime. As a result, democratic institutions lost credibility and legitimacy among Nigeria's people.

The absence of durable, dependable democratic institutions in Nigeria is perhaps best exemplified by the procession of EMBs that were installed and dissolved between 1979 and 1999. Among them were the Federal Electoral Commission installed for the 1979 general elections, followed by the National Electoral Commission in 1984 and the National Electoral

Commission of Nigeria in 1993. Finally, the Independent National Electoral Commission was established in 1998 (INEC n.d.).

The establishment of INEC in 1998 and the Nigerian general elections in 1999 and 2003 offered fundamental challenges to what was understood as electoral governance at the time. For many analysts and observers of Nigeria's 1999 and 2003 elections, particularly outsiders with foreign qualifications, the frame of reference was the electoral best practices with which they were most familiar, practices that the Nigerian EMB and other actors were encouraged to follow. However, such recommendations neglected full consideration of the realities on the ground, in particular the lack of a critical mass of trained personnel and institutional capacity in the country to achieve the standards being advocated.

### The working group and consultations

The Institute was established in 2005 in recognition of the above-mentioned lack of trained personnel. A committee was set up to provide the conceptual framework and operational details of the Institute. This was followed by discussions within various departments of the INEC to ensure buy-in and minimal friction with its existing structures. The creation of the Institute was also discussed with both the Senate and House of Representatives committees that were charged with the oversight of INEC. These consultations emphasized the point that prolonged military interruption of democratic governance in Nigeria had resulted in the weakening, or in many cases the absence, of requisite institutional capacity to deliver robust electoral democracy. While elections had been successfully conducted in 1999 and 2003, much of the administration of those elections lacked professionalism. In other words, the institutional framework for administering elections in the country was found to be weak and almost ad hoc. The situation made the administration of the electoral process sclerotic and susceptible to errors.

Before the establishment of the Institute, INEC had often sponsored its staff to take part in training programmes that lacked a direct relationship to the statutory functions of the Commission. Training had neglected the soft skills needed for stakeholder relations, as well as INEC's internal management. Similarly, there was a lack of research concerning the various problems that the EMB and its external stakeholders faced. One difficulty was how voter education initiatives were considerably hampered by reliance on donor funding, as well as hurried time frames preceding elections.

### The Electoral Institute's functions

On the basis of early experiences there was a need for a focus on election capacity, research and voter education initiatives, and the streamlining of operational procedures (with corresponding manuals for training personnel). These priorities were identified by the INEC Chairperson and approved in June 2005, and they were mirrored in the departmental structure from INEC's inception (Research and Documentation, Voter Education, Training). Under the latter two strands of its work, the Institute has been engaged in the training of security personnel on electoral duties, as well as youth engagement and gender and disability rights training. As part of preparations for the 2019 general elections, the Institute initiated a partnership between INEC and the Albino Foundation as a means of involving people with albinism in Nigeria's electoral process.

The Electoral Institute was conceived as an initiative in the realms of human resources and, no less so, thought leadership. The structural arrangement of the Institute was designed to facilitate this with a relatively free hand. By having its own board of supervisors as well as a separate Chief Operating Officer, the Institute was conceived as a flexible and responsive offshoot of INEC which would be able to operate in the finest traditions of a research institute, being removed from any of the bureaucratic encumbrances of the EMB.

The establishment of the Institute represented a commitment to reform the electoral process beyond simply adding value to the existing systems by means of piecemeal recommendations. Calls for the electoral process to adhere to international standards were likely to yield insufficient or short-lived outcomes if fundamentals within the electoral administration were not addressed first. By establishing the Institute, INEC has increased its capacity to identify and address major problems related to the electoral process on a more sustainable basis. The documentation process carried out at the Institute has been greatly assisted by the institutional memory of the Commission. This is an important task given the frequent turnover of leadership at INEC.

### The Electoral Institute's beginnings—findings and lessons

1. The establishment of the Institute was facilitated by its association with a larger reform effort by institutions across the country to consolidate Nigeria's transition to electoral democracy.
2. By learning about how electoral training centres operated in other countries' respective EMBs, INEC was able to make an informed decision on the conceptual framework and operational details of the Institute.
3. With the establishment of the Institute, a piecemeal approach to staff training, research and voter education was replaced by a better coordinated and united approach. The Institute therefore stands to establish a professional electoral service that provides qualified personnel to meet the needs of INEC and wider electoral service delivery in Nigeria.

## 2. The first years of operations (2006–2007)

### Management

The Institute had a governing board that was initially co-chaired by two national commissioners with academic backgrounds, Dr Ishmael J. Igbani and Dr Mohammed A. Jumare. The first Coordinator of the Institute was Dr Jimoh Agboola, who came with 25 years of experience in election management, staff training and voter education at the time. Following his retirement from public service, Dr Agboola was succeeded a year later, in 2006, by Steve Osemeke. The other management staff and support personnel were drawn from existing INEC departments, mainly from the operations, information and ICT departments, with minimal changes to their existing job descriptions.

### Initial professional development and training activities

The conceptual design of the Institute deliberately placed it on a footing that relates more to academia than to the bureaucratic framework of a typical government body, to better achieve its core objectives: the Institute was initially established with a collaborative link to respected universities with relevant faculties and credentials, with a view to meeting the standard of academic and professional training EMB personnel should receive. In collaboration with the University of Nigeria Nsukka, the University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University, the Institute introduced diploma and postgraduate diploma programmes in electoral administration not long after it came into existence. During a relatively short period of time, approximately 400 EMB staff completed their studies (ECI/IIIDEM/International IDEA 2017: 38).

The Institute has in the course of delivering its assigned functions also taken up some allied tasks that have enhanced its profile while strengthening its intellectual base. In its first year, the Institute commenced publication of an academic journal titled *The Nigerian*

*Election Journal*. It also initiated an annual Institute's lecture series which has become a vital platform for the review of INEC's policies and major activities.

As mentioned, the establishment of the Institute in 2005 came at the same time as various other reforms and planning processes aimed at consolidating and improving the newly democratic electoral process. The key consideration for reforms is how resilient they are and the extent to which they address systemic weaknesses that stand out as logically necessary prior to longer-term, meaningful progress. The Institute played a pivotal role in ensuring that the enabling background information, modelling and scenario analyses were piloted before full-scale adoption of such reforms.

In 2006, for example, in collaboration with INEC's Operations Department and Information and Communication Department, the Institute facilitated the introduction of new technology in INEC's election management by first piloting three different types of electronic voting machines. Although there was legislative opposition to the full deployment of an electronic voting system in the 2007 general elections, the Commission successfully introduced the use of an editable and robust electronic voters' register, an authentication device (card reader) and the electronic transmission of results from base stations in each of the 774 local government areas of the country to a central control centre in Abuja.

Another major INEC accomplishment that the Institute supported was the design and introduction of an alternative dispute resolution mechanism that reduced the acrimony associated with the primary selection of candidates within political parties. The signing of a memorandum of understanding with the National Youth Service Corps in 2006, which brought young Nigerians in their one-year national youth service to centre stage as critical players in the conduct of elections, sought to tackle what was until then one of the intractable challenges during the conduct of general elections, namely the recruitment of suitably non-partisan ad hoc staff to manage the polling units.

#### Wider stakeholder collaboration

Other stakeholders include government agencies, the legislature, the judiciary, political parties, the media, security agencies, civil society organizations, development partners, donor agencies, election observer groups (domestic and international), service providers and the individual citizens who require information or assistance from the Institute.

The opening of satellite training centres in Oghara, Delta State, and Keffi, Nasarawa State, was made possible through close collaboration with state governments. These satellite training centres allowed the Institute to start decentralizing operations and broadening opportunities for Commission personnel across the country to be properly trained on voter registration, polling and counting, as well as the tabulation of the vote. The respective state governments donated space and buildings to house the centres, and it was envisaged that equivalents could be established in all political regions of the country. Unfortunately, both satellite training centres suffered teething difficulties before being able to open, and neither one of them has begun operating yet.

The Institute benefited immensely from the support of development partners in various aspects of its institution-building and election management during the first years of operations. Prominent among these partners are the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United States Agency for International Development, the United Kingdom Department for International Development and the Canadian International Development Agency. Assistance from these agencies variously included sponsorship of specialized training overseas, curriculum development and facilitation of voter education.

### The Institute's first years of operations—findings and lessons

1. The Institute was made operational in a short period of time by transferring INEC staff from departments that focused on training, education and ICT with minimal changes to existing contracts and job descriptions.
2. Through close collaboration with some of Nigeria's most respected universities, the Institute was able to offer diplomas in electoral administration—which had not existed previously—to INEC employees. This effort to focus on the professional development of staff also helped facilitate the Institute's academic profile internally and externally.
3. The Institute's research function provided the Commission with an outlet for reform initiatives that needed piloting ahead of full-scale adoption. Although many of these initiatives were directly related to the work of other INEC directorates, the Institute provided much-needed capacity and skills.

## 3. Development and expansion (2008–2019)

### Reforming the Institute's structure and mandate

On 12 May 2012 the INEC board, led by Professor Attahiru Jega as Chair, approved the restructuring of the Institute in order to widen the Institute's focus and mandate and to improve its operational efficiency. This decision was part of a broader effort to reform INEC as a whole (INEC 2012a). In approving the changes (INEC 2012b), the Commission defined the responsibilities of the Institute's governing board and clarified the relationship between it and INEC. The Institute as a unit of INEC would be headed by a Director General rather than a Coordinator, who would report to the governing board rather than to the Secretary of INEC. The new semi-autonomous board comprised seven members, four of whom (including the chairperson) would be appointed from within INEC. The three external members would be appointed by the Commission based on their (a) regional origins in Nigeria's various political regions; (b) experience in electoral management; and (c) academic backgrounds in social sciences, the humanities and related disciplines. At least one of the appointees would be a woman.

Regarding the broadening of the Institute's mandate, advisory and technical support, especially electoral training, could now be provided beyond the technical and operational needs of INEC, meaning that other stakeholders in Nigeria, such as security sector agencies, the judiciary, political parties, the media and civil society organizations, would also have access. Furthermore, the Institute could render technical assistance and electoral support to agencies, departments and organizations seeking support in other countries in Africa, especially West Africa. An additional goal was that the Institute would serve as an electoral knowledge hub in the West Africa region. The expectation was to achieve electoral professionalism and the required skills and competencies in electoral service delivery with nuanced ethical conduct rooted in international best practices (INEC 2012b).

The Institute has provided peer-to-peer technical training and support to Gambia, Kenya and other countries in Africa and specifically via INEC's ICT staff. In 2015, the Institute also organized international conferences on emerging electoral jurisprudence in Africa. The conferences opened up a new vista on electoral jurisprudence and electoral victory across many African countries.



### Funding and financing

The Institute is financially supported by the INEC budget, which in turn is approved by the National Assembly. The annual running cost of the Institute in 2018 amounted to NGN 396 million (approximately USD 1 million). This is a 10 per cent increase compared with 2017. In general terms the Institute has received increased funding of between 10 and 30 per cent since it opened in 2005. The Institute also receives funds through technical assistance projects backed by international organizations such as, but not limited to, IFES, International IDEA, the National Democratic Institute, the African Union, the Ford Foundation, the UNDP and the European Centre for Electoral Support, as well as by national and international donors.

### Training curricula

In November 2013 the Institute started working on the implementation of the Electoral Training Study Cycle (ETSC), which was designed to raise the capacity of all 16,000 INEC staff across the country. The ETSC was a response to the disadvantages of traditional training modules, whereby trainees were identified through training needs assessments, which were regarded as not being cost-effective. As a first step, the Institute developed a training-of-trainers curriculum on electoral processes and procedures and certified 45 INEC headquarters master trainers in late 2013. It is important to note that the master trainers are also semi-certified and workshop-certified in the BRIDGE curriculum (see Box 1; also BRIDGE n.d.a). They have also received training and certification from the Centre for Management Development. Between 2014 and 2016, master trainers trained and certified 74 state training officers and assistant training officers through a cascade model. Since April 2017, the Institute has also facilitated the certification of local government training officers throughout the 774 local government areas (Umar Idris 2017). Phase 2 of the ETSC started in August 2019; the Institute is on track to train nearly 8,800 election officials at headquarters, state and local government area levels (95 per cent complete as of October 2019).

#### Box 1. Active learning and BRIDGE

The Institute's capacity to deliver professional development courses based on active learning was developed during late 2011 and early 2012 as a result of the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) programme. During this time, approximately 100 INEC and State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) staff took part in BRIDGE national training-of-facilitators workshops on various electoral topics using the BRIDGE adult learning methodology. Several INEC and SIEC staff who completed these workshops were later involved in several other BRIDGE workshops on, for example, pre-election activity, legal standards, gender and elections, voter and civic education, electoral contestants, media and elections, electoral training and operational planning. Currently, the Institute has access to over 30 locally accredited BRIDGE facilitators. Many of the facilitators are working for INEC or the Institute; others are based in Nigeria.

BRIDGE is a modular professional development programme developed by five organizations in the democracy and governance field: the Australian Electoral Commission, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), IFES, the UNDP and the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division.

In 2015–2016 Professor Abubaker Momoh, then-Director General of the Electoral Institute and Director of Training, together with Dr Sa'ad Umar Idris and an expert team

composed of 23 consultants and INEC staff, produced a comprehensive training curriculum. This included a curriculum plan and a course description of 79 regular and customized courses as well as a facilitator's guide. The curriculum was developed based on a training policy prepared by the Institute's Training division in 2012, with the twin objectives of (a) equipping the Institute with the intellectual, administrative and technical resources required to fulfil its mandate; and (b) providing INEC, other EMBs and stakeholders in Africa with capacity, knowledge and competencies required in the management of elections. Participants who successfully complete a course receive a foundation, executive or advanced certificate. In 2017 Professor Momoh, who was the driving force behind the project, passed away as a result of ill health. The Commission, through a competitive recruitment exercise, appointed Dr Umar Idris as Director General of the Institute. His leadership is expected to drive the Institute forward in implementing the Institute curriculum and expanding the possibilities of e-learning platforms and e-library projects.

### Activities ahead of the 2019 general elections

Ahead of the 2019 general elections the Institute keyed into INEC's Sustainable Capacity Building (SCB) programme. The SCB included several objectives, such as analysing the number and quality of INEC staff nationwide, determining the knowledge gaps that existed among the staff and determining the training required by staff to improve their capacity to deliver elections. Between August and October 2018, the Institute's training division, together with IFES, updated and printed the '2019 Manual for Election Officials' and the corresponding 'Electoral Trainers' Guide' based on the new rules and procedures introduced by INEC (IFES 2019). From October 2018 until February 2019 the Institute delivered a range of training activities in line with the SCB together with other INEC directorates and partners that were designed to improve the skills of polling station officials in terms of performing polling and counting duties during election day. A cascade module was introduced that included the following:

1. The Institute headquarters trainers trained state training officers and assistant state training officers, who in turn trained local government training officers (LGTOs) in each of their 774 respective jurisdictions, as well as security personnel in 109 locations (facilitated by the Institute and the INEC Security Directorate).
2. In late January 2019, the Institute coordinated the training of 157,500 presiding officers and 646,791 assistant presiding officers (with the help of LGTOs across the country).
3. The Institute also provided job training for 15,750 supervisory presiding officers, 10,101 collation officers, 493 returning officers and 18,499 heads of service and registration area centre managers (Agoha 2019). The Institute, together with its partners, was also involved in organizing several BRIDGE workshops for INEC heads of department, administrative secretaries and representatives from the media (see BRIDGE n.d.b, n.d.c, n.d.d).

The Institute also provided training to domestic civil society organizations engaged in election observation (with INEC's Voter Education and Publicity Directorate), political parties (with INEC's Party Monitoring Directorate) and, as mentioned, security sector agencies. The Institute was fully involved in the development and implementation of the 'Security Training Facilitators Guide'. It is important to note that the security training started fully during the 2015 general elections and has also been deployed between national elections in Anambra, Edo, Ekiti and Osun states. There are currently plans by security sector agencies to permanently adopt the guide as part of their own training.

### Research and policy ahead of the 2019 general elections

The Institute's research and documentation division, composed of 14 staff, contributed to INEC policy decisions ahead of the 2019 general elections by organizing round tables and policy dialogues, and by commissioning studies. Issues of vote-buying, voter turnaround time in the voting process, the impact of mass media on voter education and the application of ICT, such as smart card readers, were subject to scrutiny, allowing INEC to make informed policy decisions. Among the measures taken in response to these issues were the introduction of adjustments for people with disabilities, such as the provision of magnifying glasses and ballot papers written in Braille, and the incorporation of disabilities in voting centre data collection.

The research and documentation division was also responsible for deploying INEC's Electoral Violence Mitigation and Advocacy Tool in 12 states during the 2019 general elections. The tool was able to map out areas where electoral violence was more likely to occur. Risk alerts were discussed through an inter-agency forum and acted upon through various mitigation and prevention efforts. The Electoral Risk Management Tool, first used during the 2015 general elections with the support of International IDEA, was also deployed as part of the newly created Election Monitoring and Support Centre: essentially, a combination of all the monitoring tools in use since the 2015 general elections and later, but better coordinated under one common platform.

### Development and expansion—findings and lessons

1. Although the Institute was conceived as a flexible academic body, it is constrained by excessive bureaucracy and civil service norms: for example, the Institute staff are often reassigned to other duties. This dampens the Institute's ability to act as a model of organizational development, training and research in a global context.
2. The Institute's performance continues to be tied to the management, organizational strength and funding of INEC, and by extension to the general political environment in the country. Although the Institute has had a semi-autonomous board since 2012, it still depends on INEC for staff and administration requirements. This is a constraint as the Institute is unable to recruit staff such as educators/trainers, academics and archivists in line with the specifications of its mandate.
3. Notwithstanding the above achievements, the Institute's funding—which comes primarily from INEC—has been inadequate, which has led to a lack of appropriate infrastructure. To perform optimally and lead change, a training and research institute requires adequate facilities and technical resources.
4. The Institute needs further restructuring, as its current design does not fully accommodate its various functions. This applies in particular to training and research activities, which are crucial in building the necessary capacity to solve the myriad problems confronting INEC in the conduct of credible, free and fair elections.

Despite the challenges mentioned above, the Commission is equipped to take the Institute forward, given the enormous goodwill the Institute enjoys across the world. In addition, the Institute's leadership has the will and commitment to reposition the Institute and fully achieve its mandate. Although the Institute has existed for a relatively short time, it is now difficult to think of INEC without it.

## Box 2. Factsheet: The Electoral Institute (TEI) of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

The Institute, a semi-autonomous unit under INEC with its own governing board, was established by INEC on 23 June 2005 and reformed on 12 May 2012.

The Institute's mission is to serve as a foremost centre for training of electoral personnel and an institute committed to electoral research and documentation in and around Africa. The Institute's vision is to become renowned as a competitive and exceptional regional institution and as a model in electoral training and research in regional and global contexts. The Institute's core values include professionalism, excellence, dedication, integrity, team spirit, transparency and accountability. The main objectives of the Institute include electoral training, voter and civic education, electoral research, documentation and archiving, and any other function that may be assigned by INEC.

The Institute consists of three divisions (Training, Research and Documentation, and International Liaison and Outreach). The Institute's personnel include the Director General (head of the Institute), the Administrative Secretary, the Deputy Director and Assistant Directors, with a total staff of 40. There are also officers on sabbatical and in internship programmes.

The Institute's main beneficiaries include permanent INEC staff (16,000 individuals), ad hoc INEC staff (650,000-850,000 individuals), state independent election commissions, security agencies (police and civil defence), political parties and independent candidates, civil society organizations, government agencies, the legislature, the judiciary, the media, development partners, donor agencies, election observer groups (domestic and international), service providers and individual citizens.

For more information about the Institute visit the INEC website <<https://www.inecnigeria.org/>>, or contact the Institute directly via email <[iccc@inec.gov.ng](mailto:iccc@inec.gov.ng)>.

*Sources:* INEC website <<https://www.inecnigeria.org/>>, accessed 3 October 2019; Agoha 2019.

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## About the author

**Maurice M. Iwu** (MPharm, PhD, DLitt.) was the Chairperson of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and Chief Electoral Officer of Nigeria during 2005–2010. He joined INEC in 2003 as National Commissioner.

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## About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and enabler of sustainable development. We do this by supporting the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable and deliver sustainable development to all.

### What do we do?

In our work we focus on three main impact areas: electoral processes; constitution-building processes; and political participation and representation. The themes of gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and sustainable development are mainstreamed across all our areas of work.

International IDEA provides analyses of global and regional democratic trends; produces comparative knowledge on democratic practices; offers technical assistance and capacity-building on reform to actors engaged in democratic processes; and convenes dialogue on issues relevant to the public debate on democracy and democracy building.

### Where do we work?

Our headquarters are located in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

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