



EISA PRE-ELECTION ASSESMENT TO THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT



ACCRA, 09-13 November 2020

The Republic of Ghana will hold its eighth presidential and parliamentary elections on 07 December 2020. This abridged report gives an analysis of the pre-election environment following consultations with stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

In line with its mission of promoting credible elections, citizen participation and strengthening political institutions for sustainable democracy in Africa, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) deployed a Pre-election Assessment Mission (PAM) to the **Republic of Ghana** from 09 November to 17 November 2020.

The mission was conducted by Goré Justin Doua- Programme Manager, Elections and Political Processes Department and Lenny Taabu-Programme Assistant, Elections and Political Processes Department.

The objective of the mission was to assess the state of preparedness of the Electoral Commission (EC Ghana), political parties, national Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the media, international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders, for the forthcoming elections and ascertain whether the political context is conducive for the conduct of credible and fair elections by making an overall assessment of the fairness of the process.

Political Context of the 2020 election

The 2020 presidential and legislative election is scheduled to take place on 07 December 2020, where citizens will elect a president and 275 members of parliament. The Electoral Commission has approved 12 candidates to contest the President position, but the election is expected to be a two-horse race between the NDC (National Democratic Congress) and the NPP (New Patriotic Party). The incumbent President Nana Akuffo-Addo of the NPP is running for his own succession for the second and final term of office and on the NDC side, John Dramani Mahama will be contesting after losing the 2016 election. This will be the third time in a row where the two will be pitted against each other.

The election will also take place at a time when the country is mourning the death of former President Jerry Rawlings, an iconic figure who died on 12 November in the capital, Accra, at the age of 73. President Rawlings, who was a member of the NDC party, is credited with ushering in multi-party democracy in Ghana and boosting the country's economic profile through investments and tough struggle against corruption and waste of national resources.

Covid-19 Pandemic

Despite the challenges that have been posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the mission noted that the electoral commission has put in place health and safety measures in preparing for the upcoming election. The voter registration process was conducted at the height of the pandemic and the mission was informed that electoral commission staff were wearing adequate health personal protective gear. In addition to mandatory wearing of a mask and adequate social distancing, the commission also provided handwashing stations and hand sanitisers for the public at every polling station. The mission commends the electoral commission for introducing a **Covid ambassador** at every polling station for the upcoming election. This

ambassador will be tasked with ensuring that all safety protocols are adhered to by the public and will be in addition to the polling staff present at every station.

The Electoral System

The mission noted the existence of laws and frameworks that govern the elections. Ghana has both a majoritarian and first past the post system. The President is elected for a four-year term by a two round majoritarian system. The winner is the candidate who obtains the majority percentage of the votes. If any candidate fails to meet the more than 50% threshold required valid votes, then a run-off should be held within 21 days.

The Electoral Management

The Ghana Electoral Commission (EC) is widely known to deliver credible uncontested election results for seven times that the republic has held elections. It is comprised of a chair, two deputy chairs and four others appointed by the President in consultation with the Council of State and its functions and directions are not subject to control by any person or authority.

The 2020 election will be conducted by a new chair of the commission Mrs. Jean Mensa who was appointed in 2018. This followed the dismissal of former Electoral Commission Chairperson Charlotte Osei, alongside her two deputies on grounds of abuse of office and financial malpractices

There has also been divided opinion on the dismissal of the former chairperson and questions arising on the neutrality of the Electoral Commission and allegations of a plot to rig the upcoming elections in favour of the incumbent.

Key Findings of the mission from the Pre-election phase

Voter Registration

A complete voter registration exercise was conducted by the Electoral Commission from June 30 2020 to 06 August 2020 in which a total of 17,027,655 voters were registered.

In addition to the finger verification used in the previous register that was last updated in 2012, the electoral commission registered voters through an updated biometric system that will now require facial recognition. This was in an effort to rectify the previous system.

The commission, on 25 November, published the special voters' list of individuals who will be allowed to vote on 01 December. This list comprises names of registered voters from the security agencies, media and staff of the electoral commission who are expected to be on duty on election day.

The mission noted concerns among some stakeholders of missing names of voters from the register that was published for verification. The NDC, in particular, raised concerns of an incomplete register with the name of its contending vice president missing as an example. The electoral commission acknowledged that the process of exhibiting the register is so that issues such as these may be dealt with.

Concerns on the failure of the biometric identification system introduced by the EC during the registration process was also raised by a section of the stakeholders. Measures have been put in place by the electoral commission, including the use of manual verification, in case such an incident occurs.

Security Concerns

During a by-election held in January 2019 in Ayawaso West Wuogon constituency, vigilante groups that were linked to political parties were involved in several clashes with state security. The same incidents were recorded during the voter registration in 2020 in the Eastern Volta region, a stronghold of the NDC. The NDC expressed concerns that the ruling party may be using vigilante groups to create insecurity in the area so that NDC voters will not turn out on voting day.

Some stakeholders consulted by the mission indicated that instead of the government arresting the perpetrators of the violence, these actors were incorporated into the mainstream security apparatus including the police and military and might be unleashed during the elections. Some stakeholders also expressed concerns that the same vigilantes are now being used by politicians as personal security, and fears that their incorporation into the forces has emboldened such actions in the forthcoming elections. Besides, there have been no visible concerted efforts in place to ensure the occurrences of 2019 are not repeated.

That said, Ghana has a history of peaceful elections on the African continent.

Women and people with disability participation in the electoral process

While Ghana has made considerable efforts to ensure participation of women in the electoral process, the mission notes the failure of political parties to adopt quota systems and other forms of affirmative action to support the participation of women in the electoral arena.

The NDC party under flagbearer John Mahama, has made a historic move by announcing that his vice-presidential running mate will be Jane Naana Opoku-Agyeman. She will be the first woman vying for this position. Former President Rawlings' widow, Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings, will also be the vying for presidency under the National Democratic Party.

In terms of people with disability, specifically the visually impaired, the mission noted that the electoral commission will provide all the visually impaired registered voters with tactile ballots to assist them in voting at all polling stations. People with disability and pregnant women will be given priority at polling stations and will not be required to queue to vote.

Media environment

The media has often been seen as an integral part of enhancing democracy and the media in Ghana has been very vibrant, with freedom of speech, expression and independence of the media being guaranteed in the constitution.

The rise of the use of social media, especially by youth, has become a central aspect in elections and inadvertently has the propensity to induce political participation. Specifically, a large section of the youth in Ghana is increasingly using social media including WhatsApp,

Instagram, Twitter, Facebook to seek news and information. The mission noted the increasing use of social media by political parties to not only mobilise supporters but also educate citizens. The mission also commends the electoral commission for using its social media platforms, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to disseminate accurate and timely information.

Concerns have, however, been raised about the increasing number of politicians and businessmen affiliated to certain political parties seeking ownership of traditional private media including radio frequencies and TV stations. This raises concerns of radical polarisation of the media environment with partisan outlets feared to be using inflammatory language or misinforming the public.

The mission acknowledges efforts by the electoral commission in ensuring that journalists are well equipped to report on elections by holding trainings with the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) on best practices, the electoral process and how to adequately report on elections on a frequent basis.

On the area of civic and voter education, the electoral commission, and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) have been at the forefront and using all platforms available to educate the public. A section of stakeholders including the NCCE have however expressed concerns over shortage of funding available to reach all sections of the society.

Readiness to conduct elections

The electoral commission assured the mission that despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, it is ready to conduct the election. Procurement of all electoral materials has been finalised and are in the process of being shipped to the country. Recruitment of polling staff had been finalised by the time the mission was exiting the country and training of trainers was scheduled to begin on 13 November 2020. These trainers will then be deployed to train the rest of the polling staff up to the constituency level.

The mission also acknowledges the electoral commission's effort to conduct adequate voter education through the use of the hashtag #LetTheCitizenKnow on social media platforms. It is also worth noting that an opinion poll conducted by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) indicated that, 67 percent of Ghanaians trust the EC and 83 percent believe they are prepared to conduct the upcoming elections.

Citizen election observation

Since the return to constitutional rule in 1992, the Civil Society Organisations have contributed to making the electoral process in Ghana very open, participatory, and peaceful. This has been achieved through their advocacy, civic education, and elections observation programs through which they engage citizens and other key stakeholders. Many citizens observation groups will observe the 2020 elections. For instance, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) met by the mission has deployed 260 civic education officers in the constituencies to sensitise the electorate and is planning to deploy 4,000 observers including 1,500 Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) observers. Another group met by the mission, the Institute for Democratic

Governance (IDEG), will deploy some 1,000 short-term observers across the country. Both CODEO and IDEG will set up situation rooms during elections day. The mission commands this appropriation of the electoral process by citizens.

CONCLUSION

The mission notes that the legal framework for the 2021 general elections guarantees fundamental freedom and is conducive to peaceful, inclusive and competitive elections.

After consulting all key stakeholders and considering the level of preparedness of the electoral commission, the EISA PAM concludes that despite some minor challenges, Ghanaian stakeholders are ready to go to polls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The EISA PAM offers the following recommendations for consideration by Ghanaian stakeholders for a peaceful and participatory electoral process:

To the government

The mission urges the government to reinforce security measures in all the regions with particular attention to the Volta region in order to guarantee the participation of all citizens in the elections

To the Electoral Commission

The mission encourages the EC to strengthen political dialogue within the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) in order to ensure that consensus is reached between the Commission and political parties for a peaceful conduct of the 7 December elections.

To political parties

The mission calls on political parties to resort to dialogue and channel any disputes regarding the electoral process through the appropriate legal channels as per the Ghanaian legal framework in case of disagreement.