

A CDD-Ghana/IBIS Partnership

DISTRICT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN GHANA, 2002: OBSERVERS' REPORT

A CDD-Ghana Publication

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- ▶ Rural Action Initiative Network (RAIN) in the Greater Accra Region
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Section I

INTRODUCTION

As part of its continuing commitment to democratic consolidation in Ghana, the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) in partnership with IBIS, a Danish non-governmental organization (NGO) and six local organizations in seven regions of Ghana, embarked on a project to deploy observers for the 2002 local government elections. The local partners were the Center for the Development of People (CEDEP) in the Upper West Region; BEWDA, Upper East Region; Northern Ghana Network for Development and Gariba Development Associates, Northern Region; Rural Action Initiative Network (RAIN), Greater Accra Region; and Municipal Action Foundation (MAF) in the Volta Region.

In modern democracies, the mandate to rule is sought through an electoral process, which may take various forms. Good democratic practice requires that elections be conducted creditably for outcomes to win broad acceptance and legitimacy. The electoral process should, therefore, be transparent, free, fair and peaceful. This can be achieved when elections take place in an environment where nothing hinders or promotes illegally and unfairly the chances of any candidate. In other words, the elimination of all forms of electoral malpractices and irregularities enhances broad acceptability of electoral outcomes and, subsequently, post-election peace.

The presence of observers (both local and international) at elections has become an acceptable practice especially in developing countries like Ghana where allegations of electoral fraud and irregularities are often leveled by losing candidates and parties. A number of reasons underline the importance of election observation. First, election observation by independent, nonpartisan and credible groups raises confidence in the entire electoral process; it reduces the fear of manipulations at the polling station and makes results credible and more acceptable to all parties

involved. By so doing, it reduces tendencies towards post-election violence. Consequently, election observation adds value to the process and helps in consolidating democracy. Recognizing these values, the Ghana's Electoral Commission has welcomed observers to all elections since the Fourth Republic.

Constitutional requirement for grassroots participation in governance through political decentralization is an important aspect of Ghana's democracy. Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution requires nonpartisan local government elections every four years for the 110 District Assemblies and Unit Committees. The District Assembly elections in 2002 were the third in the Fourth Republic.

A preliminary statement on the elections was issued by CDD-Ghana at a press conference held on 26 July 2002. Dr. Baffour Agyeman-Duah, Associate Executive Director of the Center outlined preparations towards the elections and gave two main reasons why the Center considered this an important exercise. First, the local government elections were the first after our historic 2000 elections and the smooth transfer of power from one elected government to another. Second, they were the first under the NPP administration, which has expressed the desire to seek a revision of the "non-partisan" nature of the elections. The conduct and extent of participation, therefore, could provide some insights for the debate on whether local government elections should remain nonpartisan (*see Appendix 1 for full text*)

Section II

THE ELECTIONS

Candidates and Election Dates

Mr. David Kanga, Deputy Commissioner, Electoral Commission, announced on the eve of the elections the number of candidates contesting the District Assembly elections. Initially, a total of 14,141 candidates comprising 13,160 males and 981 females registered to contest but the number dropped by 62 to 14,079 due to factors such as, withdrawals, deaths and disqualifications. Of those who dropped, 54 were voluntary withdrawals, 4 deaths and 4 disqualifications; only the Northern Region suffered no withdrawal. The Upper East and Upper West regions recorded ten voluntary withdrawals each, followed by Brong Ahafo eight; Volta and Greater Accra seven each; and Central and Ashanti six each. The four deaths were recorded in Western (1), Upper East (2) and Upper West (1); the four disqualifications occurred one each in Central, Ashanti, Eastern and Greater Accra.¹ Female representation was strongest in the Volta Region where they constituted 9.7% of the 1,338 candidates, followed by the Upper West where 8% of the 437 candidates were females. Fewer females contested in the Western Region with 5.4% of the 1,477 contestants. Overall, 7.1% of the total 13,590 candidates represented women (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Electoral Areas, Candidates and Gender Composition

Region	Electoral Areas	Number of Candidates	Male Candidates	Female Candidates	% of Female Candidates
Western	452	1,477	1,397	80	5.4
Central	498	1,549	1,432	117	7.6
Ashanti	840	2,737	2,523	214	7.8
Eastern	691	2,018	1,882	136	6.7
Brong Ahafo	582	1,649	1,549	100	6.1
Northern	300	818	771	47	5.7
Upper East	270	725	683	42	5.8
Upper West	198	437	402	35	8
Volta	517	1,338	1,208	130	9.7
Greater Accra	236	842	778	64	7.6
TOTAL	4,584	13,590	12,625	965	7.1%

Compiled from figures given by EC, *Daily Graphic*, 31 July 2002.

Several candidates also contested unopposed in the various regions. Eastern Region recorded the highest number of uncontested seats (33), that is, 23% of total seats, while Ashanti recorded the least (3.1%). In all, a total of 323 were elected unopposed throughout the regions (see Table 2).

Table 2: Unopposed Candidates

REGION	CONTESTED UNOPPOSED	PERCENTAGE
Western	18	5.6
Central	12	3.7
Ashanti	21	3.1
Eastern	33	23.5
Brong Ahafo	38	10.2
Northern	44	6.5
Upper East	27	11.8
Upper West	44	13.6
Volta	76	13.6
Greater Accra	10	8.4
TOTAL	323	100

Only 5,619 of the 15,386 Unit Committees in Ghana qualified for the elections because they recorded more than 10 contestants each. Another 1,945 units recorded the maximum number of 10 candidates each required for the units. This implies that all the candidates stood unopposed. Interestingly, 5,893 units recorded between one and nine contestants (which is lower than the required number of 10 contestants) while 1,929 units, had no contestants. Elections in these Units could therefore not be held, that is, a total of 7,822 units could not elect members to form the Unit Committees.

This was not the first time the Electoral Commission recorded “no contest” in several Units during the local government elections. In 1993 more than 3,000 units did not have enough candidates to run. In effect, many of the Units and/or Area Committees have not been functioning

because they have not been constituted. Seemingly, interest in competitive and participatory politics at the community levels is very thin. The problem could be attributed to logistical/financial constraints as well as the lack of incentives including remunerations for members of these local committees.

As required by the Act establishing the Local Government Elections in Ghana, the EC mounted a common campaign platform for all the contestants nationwide to introduce themselves to the electorate between July 8 and 20, 2002. Elections in the Dagbon area of the Northern region were however suspended due to the State of Emergency in that area following the Yendi Crisis.²

Postponement of Election Dates

A major set back was the postponement of the elections on two occasions. First, the entire elections were postponed nationwide from the originally scheduled date of 30 July to 6 August. The Electoral Commission announced on Monday, 5 August 2002 another postponement in thirty-one districts because of their inability to print the Unit Committee ballot papers on time. The Commission listed the affected districts as follows: all districts in the Eastern Region; Awutu-Efutu-Senya; Upper Denkyira, Mfantsiman and Assin districts in the Central Region; Juabeso Bia, Bibiani-Anhwaseo-Bekwai, Wassa Amenfi, Mpohor Wassa East, Sefwi Wiawso and Aowin Suaman districts in the Western Region; Ayawaso, Ablekuma, Okaikoi, Tema and Ga in the Greater Accra Region; and the Nanumba districts in the Northern Region. Elections in these districts were re-scheduled for Tuesday, 13 August 2002".³

Voting Procedures

The EC had also outlined modalities for voting at the local government elections. A voter is expected to vote for one candidate for the electoral area, and ten candidates at the unit committee level. Dr. Afari Gyan, the EC Chairman also stated that, "the result of any polling station where the

number of votes cast would exceed the number of registered voters would be cancelled.”⁴

Procedures for the voting process were as follows; agents of the candidates were allowed at polling stations to observe the voting; Presiding Officers would inspect the ballot papers in the presence of the agents and enter the total number; the boxes would be shown to all present to make sure they were truly empty and placed in the open for voting to commence.

Voting was scheduled to started at 07:00 a.m and end at 5:00 p.m. However, voters who are in queue a by 5:00 p.m would be allowed to vote. Counting would start immediately after the last vote was cast. Before counting, the Presiding Officers would open the ballot box in the presence of agents and other officials, sort out ballots cast in favor of each candidate, count them to the hearing of those present and record it on the result form once everybody is satisfied.

After counting had taken place, the Presiding Officers would publicly announce the results. According to the electoral laws, once the results of a polling station have been certified in this way, the ballot papers are not counted again anywhere.

Section III

OBSERVING THE ELECTIONS

Training of Observers

Two Trainer of Trainers (TOTs) workshops were held in Ho and Tamale for the local partner organizations from Greater Accra, Volta, Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions. The trainees went back to train other observers at the District level.

Besides the partnership with IBIS, the Center on its own also trained and deployed observers in two districts – Kumasi Metro (Ashanti Region) and Winneba (Central Region). The Center also conducted informal focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews relating to the political and social dynamics of the elections.

The training programs were very interactive and covered the legal framework of District Assembly and Unit Committee Elections, rights and responsibilities of elections observers, observing pre-election and election day activities, code of conduct for observers and reporting observations using the checklist and incident report forms. The observers were trained to apply ethics and methods consistent with international standards and practice in election observations.

The primary objectives of the monitoring exercise were to:

- ☛ Assist the Electoral Commission in ensuring free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections by deploying observers at selected polling stations in seven out of the ten regions of the country.
- ☛ To assess the level of public interest and participation in the elections and the strengths and weaknesses in the local government electoral system with a view to making recommendations for future elections.

The exercise was based on the conviction that District Assemblies and Unit Committees provide the best opportunities for ordinary Ghanaians

to participate in the process of governance and thereby help shape the fortunes of their own communities.

Deployment of Observers

Three hundred and eight observers (308) were deployed in seven (7) (out of the 10) regions; These are Volta, Greater Accra, Ashanti, Central, Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions.

Section IV

FINDINGS

The findings are based on the analysis of the election observation reports submitted by the observers. It also makes recommendations for the improvement of future elections.

Observers' Views on the Election

The analysis below is based on three hundred and eight (308) checklists received from the observers. Overall, the observation centered on three critical issues. These are: the free and fairness of the elections; the conduct of Electoral Officers; and adequacy or otherwise of security measures provided.

On the issue of free and fair, the observers were to rank the process as free and fair, partially free and fair or not free and fair. Majority (85.1%) of the Observers reported that the elections were transparent, free and fair with another 14.3% describing it as only partially free and fair. One observer (0.5%) said the election was not free and fair (See Table 4 below).

Table 4: Were the Elections Free and Fair

DETAILS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes, Free and Fair	262	85.1
Partially Free and Fair	44	14.3
Not Free and Fair	6	.5
TOTAL	308	100

Assessing the conduct of the Electoral Officers, 85% of the observers affirmed that the electoral officers conducted themselves satisfactorily while 15% said the officials did not conduct themselves satisfactorily (See Table 5).

Table 5: Conduct of Electoral Officers

DETAILS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Satisfactory	262	85.1
Not Satisfactory	46	14.9
TOTAL	308	100

On the adequacy or otherwise of security arrangements, 71.8% reported that security measures put in place was adequate. But a significant 28.2% of the observers disagreed and said the security arrangements were inadequate. The analysis suggests that security arrangements were relatively relaxed at some polling stations.

Before Polling: A majority (86%) of the Observers noted that, voting materials were available at the polling stations whilst the remaining 14% said not all the voting materials were made available at the start of the polls. Table 6 below illustrates the availability of voting materials as at 07:00 a.m. (start of poll).

Table 6: Were all Voting Materials Available?

DETAILS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	267	86.0
No	41	14.0
TOTAL	308	100

Polling Agents: Observers reported that 83.1% of all candidates' agents were present with the remaining 16.9% reporting either late or not reporting at all. An overwhelming majority (98.1%) of the observers indicated that the ballot boxes were seen to be empty before voting commenced. The remaining could not ascertain whether the boxes were empty because they could not reach their designated polling station before voting commenced. Another 94.5% confirmed that the boxes were locked after being shown to be empty before voting started.

During Polling: Observers reported an unimpressive 66.9% for the average start time of 7:00a.m. They further indicated that 31.5% of the polling stations monitored started after the scheduled time (7:00 a.m.).

Security During Polling: 92.5% of the observers reported in the affirmative that order was maintained throughout the voting process. Another 96.1% indicated that the ballot box was in sight during the whole period while 93.2% said all voters voted in secrecy.

When Polling Closed: 93.8% of the observers reported that polling stations closed on scheduled at 5:00 p.m. Other observers ranged the closing time between 4:58 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. Perhaps those polling stations, which closed after 5:00 p.m., still had some voters in the queue who had the right to vote as the law requires.

Vote Counting: An overwhelming majority of observers (86.7%) confirmed that vote counting was conducted in public and in the full view of candidates, party agents and observers.

The Results: Of the 308 Observers who returned the checklist, 81.5% said the results were declared publicly at the polling station.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The following recommendations are made towards enhancing future Local Government and Unit Committee elections.

Quality of Electoral Officers: Even though majority (85.1%) of the Observers ranked the performance of the EC officials as satisfactory, there were reports of non-performance by a significant number (14.9%). Since the credibility and integrity of the electoral process could be marred by the EC officials, the EC should review the training of its officials as well as the caliber of personnel recruited for that purpose.

Voter Education: The Electoral and other organizations involved in civic education must decentralize voter education. In other words, it is imperative that all aspects of voter education are extended to all parts of the country. It was clear that voter education was very low and poorly managed; this was evident in the low turn out recorded in certain parts of the country. Also, voting announcements should be effective. Apparently, many voters in the districts were unaware of the postponement.

Logistics Supply: It is recommended that the EC finds solutions to the problem of inadequate logistics/election materials on Election Day. This will go a long way to promote the integrity of the election and also allow for timely commencement of polls.

Security: Though not many violent incidents were recorded, it appears security arrangements were relaxed. With 28.2% of the Observers describing the security arrangements as inadequate, there is the need for improvement in the security measures in future elections.

Collaboration with the EC: In some areas, the office of the Electoral Commission did not have prior knowledge of the monitoring training

exercise, especially at the stage when their input was required. For instance, in Salaga (Northern Region), the Electoral Officer refused to participate in the training because there was no official notification from headquarters. In collaborating with Monitoring Bodies, the EC should inform its regional and district officers and encourage their cooperation. Such collaboration will enhance election monitoring

Special Voting: The EC should consider including observers in the group of agencies that are allowed to vote before the actual voting day. That would enable observers to give full attention to their mission on election day.

Observers Identification: Most of the Observers could not secure identification materials to facilitate their work. Observers must in the future be provided with identification cards (ID) to aid their easy identification. This will help reduce suspicion.

Logistics to Observers: Logistics including remuneration in some cases were not adequate thereby making it difficult to attract more qualified personnel to monitor the election.

Despite the constraints and challenges encountered during the observation process, the training sessions were generally successful. The voting day observations were also well conducted and all the selected electoral areas were covered. It is hoped that the recommendation offered would be considered to improve upon future election organization and observation.

End Notes

¹ Daily Graphic, 31 July 2002, p. 1.

² Daily Graphic, August 5, 2002, p.1

³ The Daily Dispatch, August 7, 2002, pp 8

⁴ The Evening News, August 1, 2002, pp5

APPENDIX

Press Briefing on the District Assembly Elections

July 26, 2002 by Dr. Baffour Agyeman-Duah, Associate Executive Director, CDD-Ghana

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Media:

We have invited you here this morning to brief you on our preparations towards observing the up-coming district assembly and unit committee elections. The objectives of this exercise are to:

- Assess the level of public interest and participation in the local government elections;
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses in our local government electoral system with a view to making recommendations for future elections; and
- Prepare local expertise for the monitoring of future elections.

The exercise shall be undertaken in seven out of the ten regions. These are Greater Accra, Volta, Northern, upper East and West, Ashanti and Central Regions. The Center, with support from IBIS, conducted Trainer of Trainers workshops for local partner organizations in the Northern, Upper East, Upper West and Volta Regions who in turn were expected to train other observers in their respective regions of operations. The Center also undertook direct training of observers in Ashanti and Central regions for the exercise.

Our observers were trained to observe pre-election activities like mounting of platforms and the entire campaign process as well as activities and events on the day of polling. The observers have been trained to apply ethics and methods consistent with international standards and practice in election observation.

For us at CDD, the upcoming elections are important for several reasons. It is the first local government elections after our historic 2000 elections and the smooth transfer of power from one elected government to the other. Second, it is the first local government elections under the NPP administration, which has expressed that desire to seek a revision of “non-partisan” nature of the elections.

The outcome of this election may perhaps provide some insight into the debate about whether or not we should follow our presidential and parliamentary elections to make the district assembly and local government unit committee elections partisan. We therefore call on all Ghanaians to take keen interest and participate actively in the elections. For, it is a measure of how far we have moved towards democratic consolidation in Ghana.

We wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the immense cooperation we have received so far from officials of the Electoral Commission, especially the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and the Regional Directors. We believe they shall continue to assist our observers, and us especially on polling day. We also take this opportunity to congratulate all candidates, especially the women for their courage and commitment towards strengthening our system of local governance. The Media also needs commendation for their focus and reportage on the process leading to the elections and also for their support for women candidates, particularly, the Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times.

We appeal to the nation's security agencies to approach their national duty with professionalism and utmost respect for the Constitution. They should be non-partisan in the political process, respect the electoral process and seek the protection of all Ghanaians and most importantly the Constitution.

On behalf of the Governing Board of the Center, I wish to take this opportunity to express gratitude and appreciation for the enthusiasm and dedication of the large number of Ghanaians who volunteered for the observation exercise. We are confident that on the Election Day our observers will display to the maximum the discipline, objectivity, neutrality, knowledge and skills that they have acquired in the workshops. We also want to acknowledge the support and assistance of IBIS towards this exercise.

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen.