



PUBLIC ADVOCACY WORKSHOPS ON ELECTORAL REFORMS IN LAGOS AND KANO STATES, NIGERIA

COMMUNIQUÉ

The YMonitor Accountability Programme of The Future Project, launched a campaign on electoral reforms in Nigeria in partnership with the American Corner Ikeja, Nigeria Global Affairs Council (NIGAC), African Focus for Youth Development (AFFYD) and Enactus. The programme was supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (US). As part of the campaign, The Future Project and its partners organised two advocacy workshops in Lagos and Kano states respectively. It aimed to educate and empower young activists and the general public on best electoral practices and strategies for reforming Nigeria's electoral systems.

With the theme "Better Elections, Deepened Democracy", the Lagos edition of the advocacy workshops was held on Thursday 17th February 2022, with about 60 participants who have keen interest in good governance. The Kano edition was held on Saturday 26th February 2022. There were 70 participants drawn from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the media, community members, Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development, Corps members, and students.

The public advocacy workshop on electoral reforms aimed to dive deeper into the probable strategies and solutions necessary for a restructuring of the electoral system and a push for greater citizen participation in Nigerian elections. It served as an interactive platform for influential voices in the civic space and active citizens to evaluate the current state of the Nigerian electoral system while affording them an avenue to ask critical questions and get corresponding answers.

The Lagos edition of the advocacy workshop had three sessions. The first session was facilitated by Joachim MacEbong, Senior Analyst at SBM intelligence, the second session was facilitated by Abosede George-Ogan, the founder of Women in Leadership Network (WILAN) and the third session was facilitated by the Executive Director, Enough is Enough (EiE), Yemi Adamolekun. Likewise, the Kano workshop had three sessions where the first session was facilitated by the Kano State Resident Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Professor Riskuwa Shehu, the second session was facilitated by Her Lordship, Salma Ahmad of Kano Magistrate court while the third session was facilitated by the Executive Director, Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education, Dr. Ibrahim Zikirullahi.

Topics of discussion during the sessions include; Strengthening Nigeria's Democracy through Inclusion, Overcoming the Crisis of Confidence in Nigeria's Electoral System and Effective Strategies and Systems for Electoral Reforms in Nigeria. Participants were divided into groups during the breakout session to deliberate on issues they consider germane to Electoral Reforms in Nigeria and strategies to curb the challenges identified.

OBSERVATIONS

The workshop participants observed that:

1. The lack of inclusion and representation of certain groups, mainly youth, women and persons with disabilities, has hindered Nigeria from achieving the full benefits of democracy almost 22 years later.
2. There is a lack of adequate and effective institutions and feedback systems that monitor and evaluate the electoral process of the country across all levels.
3. Persistent low voter turnout, as experienced in the recent elections are due to the lack of confidence in the electoral system.
4. While the affairs of a country ought to be run by officials elected by a more significant majority of its citizenry, many electorates are passive and nonchalant about the process thus allowing only a few to decide the fate of the greater population.
5. When only a few people vote during elections, the elected officials do not represent the beliefs and values of the general population.
6. Lack of confidence in the electoral system and abysmal participation in the political process can be likened to political depression where a citizen feels helpless and can barely influence important events in their country.
7. In today's Nigeria, periodic elections are laden with public distrust due to the notion that the election umpire is after all not independent enough to conduct a free, fair and credible elections due to past antecedents.
8. For elections in Nigeria to continually enjoy credibility and serve the purpose of enthroning the people's will, a lot depends on the extent to which universal suffrage is upheld.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The workshop recommended that:

1. The citizenry should be educated about election petitions, while the government should allow it to work.
2. There should be unified advocacy for inclusion by the excluded groups, including women, youths and persons with disabilities.
3. The Government, through the National Orientation Agency, should ensure access to information in a simplified manner for better citizens' engagement.
4. Civil Society Organisations should intensify efforts on voter education and public sensitisation on the seven political candidates each citizen has the right to elect.
5. The government needs to continually improve the electoral system and enable it to be free and fair.
6. There is need for true independence of INEC and other electoral bodies to boost confidence in the electoral system.
7. Peer-to-peer advocacy should be encouraged to raise the number of actual voters during elections.

8. The National Orientation Agency should develop publicity materials and content that show why every vote counts.
9. Civil Society Organisations should conduct an advocacy visit to the National Assembly on the 35% gender inclusion affirmative action.
10. Civil Society Organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations should move beyond periodic assessment to cataloguing the developments within the electoral system in Nigeria and make the same available to the people at all times.

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Partners:



Lagos Public Advocacy Workshop



Kano Public Advocacy Workshop

