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MONITORING OF ELECTORAL COMMISSION'S LIMITED VOTER REGISTRATION EXERCISE, 2023



Monitoring of Electoral Commission's Limited Voter Registration Exercise, 2023



Good Governance Africa

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A BRIEF PROFILE OF GGA-WARO

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Established in the year 2015, the GGA-West African Regional Office exists to promote good governance practices in Anglophone West Africa excepting Nigeria. The Regional Office uses results from scientific based research in a number of development topics to advocate for policy reforms, to train development actors, and to mobilise civil support for changes in governance and promotion of societal development.

Focus areas of intervention by the Office include; Natural Resource Conservation, Protection & Utilization; Peace & Security in the West African Sub-region; Trade, Regional & Local Governance and; Accountable & Inclusive Governance.

Membership

- The Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC)
- Ghana CSOs Platform for the Monitoring of the SDGs
- The Ghana Urbanisation Think Tank (GUTT)

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisations
EC	Electoral Commission
GGA-WARO	Good Governance Africa – West Africa Regional Office
LGE	Local Government Elections
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NPP	New Patriotic Party



Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Electoral Commission (EC) of Ghana is constitutionally mandated to continuously register all eligible Ghanaian citizens aged 18-years and above who had not previously registered for the purposes of participating in voting exercises. In line with this mandate, the Commission conducted the 2023 limited Voter Registration Exercise from Tuesday, 12th September through to Monday, 2nd October, 2023 across all its 268 district offices nationwide. All key stakeholders including political parties, civil society organisations (CSOs), government agencies etc. participated in the process. Good Governance Africa – West Africa Regional Office (GGA-WARO) as part of its preparatory activities leading up to the 2023 Local Government Elections (LGE) in December, also participated in the process, monitoring the limited voter registration exercise in selected centres across the country. The monitoring exercise comprised 2-days (19th – 20th September, 2023) of field-level monitoring and observation of the processes in four (4) selected locations in Ghana (Table 1) – with a focus on assessing issues around transparency, inclusiveness and efficiency of the process. The team also observed the registration exercise via media reportage (both print and social media).

Table 1: Regions, districts and towns/locations

SN	Study Regions	Study Districts	Location
1.	Greater Accra	Ada West	Sege
		Ablekuma North	Odorkor, Accra
2.	Eastern	Suhum Municipal	Suhum
3.	Central	Agona West Municipal	Agona Swedru

This report provides a synthesis of all the information and evidences gathered from the monitoring exercise.

¹Tasked with coordinating good governance research, and advocacy in English-speaking West African nations namely; Ghana, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia. The Centre focuses on using empirical research findings to engage stakeholders in the development architecture of the sub-region in promoting responsible, effective, transparent, and accountable governance in key sectors of the economies of its region.

1.2 Objectives of The Registration Exercise

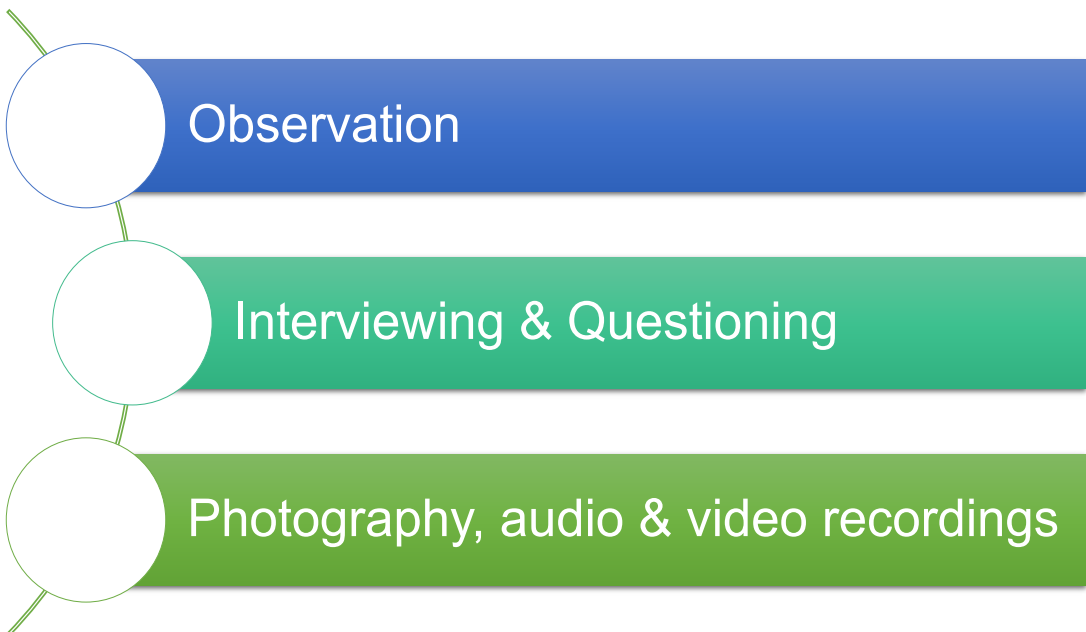
The general objective of the monitoring exercise was to have first-hand, on-field evidence on the Electoral Commission's limited voter registration exercise. Specifically, the exercise set-out to achieve the following:

1. Assess the overall level of participation in the exercise - disaggregated by the different groups (sex, age, disability...).
2. Observe the level of participation of political parties, their strategies and arrangements.
3. Measure the efficiency of the Electoral Commission's registration system and the effectiveness of its personnel.
4. Measure the level of accessibility and transparency of the registration process.
5. Identify possible challenges in the limited registration process.

1.3 Methodology

Observation, questioning, and interview techniques were employed in the monitoring exercise across the four municipalities/districts. Photographs, audio and video records were also gathered to validate and strengthen the evidences. The monitoring exercise was rolled out as the per the flow in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Monitoring approach



1.3.2 Monitoring limitation

The key limitation had to do with the limited number of days (2-days per location) allocated for the monitoring exercise. Some of the specific issues comprise the following:

- 1. Limited scope:** observing only 2 days might have provided a very narrow view of the entire registration process and the team may not have captured the variations and challenges faced throughout the entire duration. The team in some instances, however, had data beyond the 2-days of monitoring.
- 2. Sampling bias:** observing a limited timeframe could introduce sampling bias. The experiences and issues faced by voters and officials on those specific days might not be representative of the overall process. Certain issues or irregularities could be missed, leading to a skewed perception of the registration exercise.
- 3. Inadequate understanding of trends:** voter registration processes can be dynamic, with trends evolving over the duration of the exercise. Observing only 2 days might not allow for a comprehensive understanding of these trends. For example, there might be changes in voter turnout, demographic patterns, or challenges faced by election officials, which could be missed in such a limited timeframe.
- 4. Insufficient data for analysis:** a limited dataset from only 2 days might not provide enough data points for robust analysis. Statistical analyses and trend predictions often require a significant amount of data over an extended period. Drawing meaningful conclusions or identifying patterns with such a small dataset could lead to unreliable results.
- 5. Missed Irregularities:** Irregularities or issues within the registration process might not become apparent within just 2 days. Some problems, such as voter suppression, logistical challenges, or political interference, might emerge later in the process and could be completely missed during a brief observation period.

Despite these challenges, the team in some instances, had all the data for the entire registration period. Complementing the on-field process with evidence from media reportage (mainstream and social media) helped to address the highlighted limitations.



A police officer at the entrance of the registration room where details were captured. He is in charge of seeing to it that there is peace and togetherness

Findings from the Monitoring Exercise

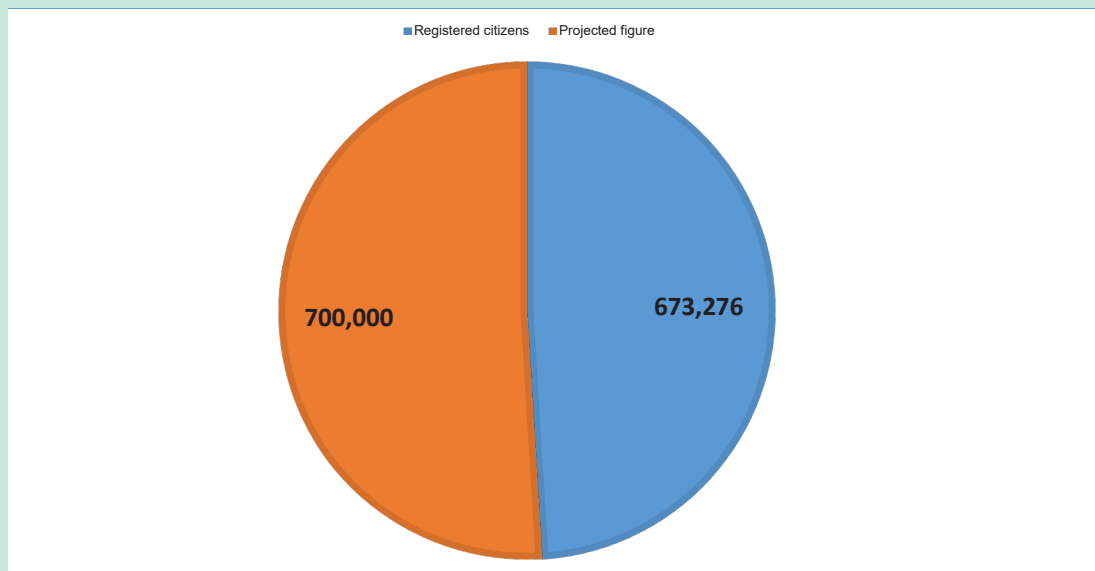
2.0 Findings From The Monitoring Exercise

The evidence from the monitoring exercise is synthesised by objective and subsequently by municipality/district.

2.1 Statistics From The Exercise

Figure 2 provides data comparing the EC's projected figures against achieved numbers. In all, 673,276 eligible citizens had been registered prior to the final day of registration. The result represents a 96.2% achievement in relation to the projected figures.

Figure 2: Projected vs. registered citizens



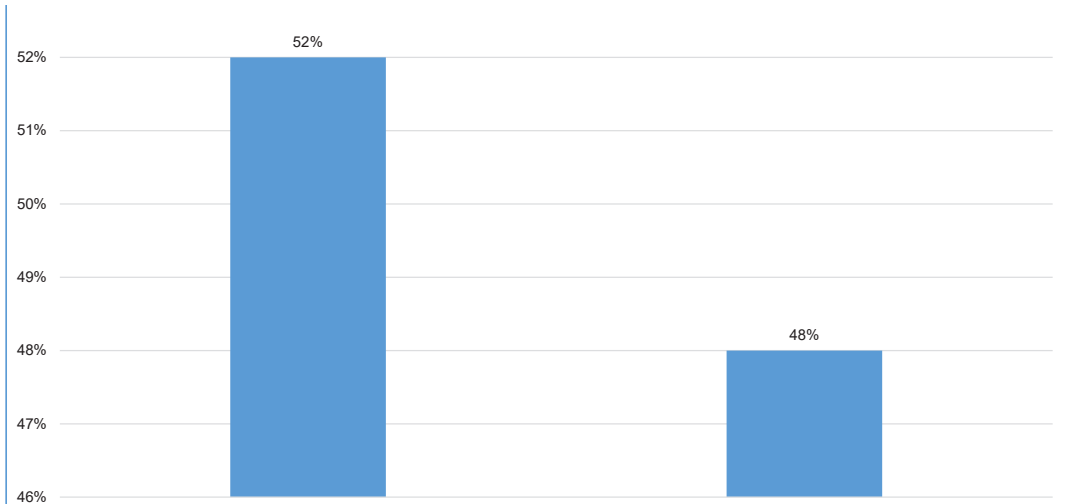
Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, October, 2023

Note: The registered figure does not include the final day of registration

Gender Distribution:

The gender disaggregation of the preliminary registration data shows an almost equal split between males and females (Figure 3). Males accounted for 52% of the registrants, while females constituted 48%. This nearly equal representation indicates a significant engagement from both genders in the registration process and suggests a positive trend towards gender balance in civic participation. Both genders displayed active interest and engagement in the voter registration process.

²This figure does not include that of the final day of registration. The electoral commission is yet to make this figure public

Figure 3: Gender disaggregation of the limited voter registration exercise

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana, October, 2023

2.2. Level of Participation

The limited registration exercise experienced relatively high turnout across the various centres. Overall, the exercise achieved a robust level of participation, marked by proactive measures to facilitate registration for all, especially focusing on inclusivity for vulnerable groups. The active involvement of citizens, even amidst challenging circumstances like final exams, highlights the significance placed on the electoral process and civic engagement in these areas.

The exercise in Agona West, Ablekuma North Municipal, Ada-West District, and Suhum Municipality witnessed high levels of participation and enthusiasm among citizens. In Agona West, a significant number of people, including those from distant communities, gathered early each day, with 231 registrations recorded on Day 1 and 140 on Day 2 of the monitoring exercise (Table 2). This location also saw cooperation between political parties, with special attention given to applicants from remote areas. In Suhum Municipality, participants from various villages actively engaged in the registration process, with females outnumbering males. By close of day 1, a total of 281 people were registered, demonstrating a consistent influx of participants throughout the day. Special protocols were in place for persons living with disabilities, ensuring their registration process was smooth.

Table 2: No. people registered over the 2-day period

District	Day 1 Registrants			Day 2 Registrants		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Agona West (Swedru)	123	108	231	80	60	140
Suhum Municipal	127	154	281			

Source:Field monitoring exercise, September, 2023

In Ablekuma North Municipal and Ada-West District, long queues formed daily, highlighting the eagerness of the participants. Vulnerable groups like persons living with disabilities, pregnant women, and nursing mothers were given priority and not allowed to join the regular queues, ensuring accessibility for all. Additionally, the presence of Senior High School students, even during their final examinations, emphasised the strong interest and awareness of civic responsibility among young voters. The daily voter registration data for Ablekuma North (covering 9-days of registration) demonstrates fluctuations in registration numbers over the nine days. While some days saw higher participation, others recorded lower figures (Table 3).

Table 3: Daily registration for Ablekuma North

Day	Male	Female	Total
1	8	7	15
2	68	42	110
3	65	55	120
4	90	86	176
5	91	107	198
6	167	119	286
7	142	83	255
8	141	131	272
9	114	110	224

Source:Field monitoring exercise, September, 2023

The data from the Ada West District's 16-day voter registration period demonstrates a consistent and gradually increasing voter participation. Both male and female citizens actively engaged in the process, with occasional peaks in registrations, notably on Days 11, 12, and 13. Female participation, in particular, remained robust throughout, occasionally surpassing male registrations on specific days. The overall trend showcases a balanced gender participation, indicating successful outreach and public awareness efforts. The district's sustained interest in voter registration underscores a vibrant civic engagement and a commitment to an inclusive democratic process.

Table 4: Daily registration for Ada West

S/N	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	26	16	42
2	20	35	57
3	44	77	122
4	56	73	130
5	64	94	160
6	62	60	124
7	84	86	174
8	55	44	101
9	49	60	110
10	47	49	96
11	94	107	201
12	118	104	222
13	147	134	281
14	133	90	223
15	82	58	141
16	42	29	72
Total	1123	1116	2256

Source: Field monitoring exercise, September, 2023

2.3 Participation of Political Parties

The two main political parties (New Patriotic Party – NPP and the National Democratic Congress – NDC) were very active in the limited registration process. In all, the political parties assisted the Electoral Commission (EC) in addressing logistical challenges, ensuring the inclusion of citizens, and maintaining the integrity of the registration process. Their collaborative efforts with the EC contributed to a smooth and efficient limited voter registration exercise in these areas.

In the Swedru Municipality, political parties played a significant role in facilitating the participation of eligible voters. The registration exercise at the district office of the Electoral Commission posed challenges for the respective registrants living far from the capital. However, political parties, particularly the NDC and NPP, provided alternatives in addressing these challenges. They actively assisted in conveying registrants from distant communities, providing accommodation, food, and water during the registration period. Similar trends were observed in the other Municipalities and districts – where the various political parties, again, organised transportation for participants, utilising buses and pick-up vans to bring groups of individuals to the registration centers and back to their respective locations. Additionally, parties provided food and water for their participants, enhancing the overall experience. Party agents, while ensuring participants followed protocols and maintained the queue formation, remained vigilant outside the gates to prevent confusion and bias. There were no reported instances of inducement, indicating a fair and transparent engagement by the political parties.

2.3.1 General Challenges/Issues Raised By Political Parties

The main challenge with the process from the perspectives of the political parties had to do with transporting prospective registrants from far areas to the district EC offices. Party officials expressed concerns about the challenge of arranging transportation for applicants to return home once they had completed the registration process. This difficulty arose largely because individuals could not wait for others to finish before being transported in a single vehicle.

- Party officials in some areas e.g., the Ada-West District had difficulty in providing lunch for applicants some of whom are nursing mothers who had come from remote areas.
- NDC party officials had challenges with EC Officials in the first two days of the exercise in the Ada West District in relation to the reconciling of figures from online and offline registration.

2.4 Efficiency of the EC system/personnel (challenges faced by officials)

In all, the EC personnel demonstrated professionalism and competence in handling the registration process, utilising adequate equipment and experienced staff. However, challenges such as network issues, overwhelming numbers, and political pressures, especially queue manipulation attempts, disrupted the efficiency of the process.

Despite these challenges, the EC managed to maintain order and ensured the overall integrity of the limited voter registration exercise.

Specifically, in the Agona West District, the Electoral Commission (EC) exhibited a mix of efficiency and challenges during the limited voter registration period. The EC office had three registration kits, two of which were deployed and functioning well, while the third served as a backup. The personnel were punctual and professional on both days of observation. However, network glitches on day 2 of the observation caused delays and restlessness among applicants, especially those who had spent the night near the registration center. Tensions escalated due to concerns about incomplete registrations and potential overnight stays away from home. The situation worsened due to political party members attempting to manipulate the queue, leading to a scuffle between some students and security personnel. Despite these challenges, the EC officials managed to restore calm with the help of police reinforcement. The personnel refrained from discussing their challenges, but it was apparent that the sheer volume of applicants, coupled with political pressures, posed significant hurdles. At times, the registration process was halted until political disputes were resolved.

Scene of a scuffle between a student and a uniformed police officer.



In Ablekuma North and Ada West, the EC deployed experienced personnel, including interviewers and guarantor officials, utilising efficient biometric equipments. The online registration platform proved effective in real-time identification of multiple registrations, ensuring the integrity of the process. In the Suhum Municipality, the registration process commenced early, with the EC officials implementing various protocols effectively. Police presence contributed to the smooth operation of the registration rooms.



Officials of the EC registering eligible persons under the watchful eyes of party agents.



political vans picking up its members back to their destination after their registration process.



Participants observing protocols in the afternoon, this brought about peace and stability at the registration center

Other Key Issues/Areas Observed



Other key issues/areas observed

- 1. Accessibility:** the EC offices were generally not accessible to a lot of the prospective registrants with a lot of them having to be transported from remote areas by the political parties.
- 2. Transparency:** the registration process was generally transparent - this conclusion is based on the delivery of clear instructions, visible registration procedures, and the utilisation of standardised forms and materials.
- 3. Inclusivity:** there was no discrimination whatsoever and eligible persons were allowed to register. There was no systematic exclusion of eligible persons based on discriminatory criteria. However, there were isolated incidents where eligible persons could not go through the exercise because their guarantors had emergencies to attend to.
- 4. Special arrangements:** provision was made for the elderly, people living with disability, and nursing mothers, with priority seating and expedited processes.
- 5. Forms of validation** - most applicants did not have the Ghana cards or passports and therefore relied on the guarantor system of validation. The guarantor form system is largely susceptible to exploitation as party officials readily endorse numerous forms, anticipating applicants who are unfamiliar with the endorsers. This situation arises because applicants cannot afford to bring their own guarantors to the center.
- 6. Online registration** - the online registration adopted for the first time by the EC proved efficient in identifying double registration and possibly reduced the workload of having to clean the register, given the limited time constraint before the District Level Elections in December.
- 7. Low level of awareness creation about the exercise** - though the overall participation in the registration process was high, the interactions with some of the participants and party officials indicated that the EC had not done enough of awareness creation – in relation to the ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’. This might have contributed to the increased numbers in double registration. Some individuals who were caught registering multiple times, either through the system or police intervention, revealed that they genuinely did not know that those who had registered in 2016 and 2020 were not permitted/eligible to register again.

8. Offline registration - due to frequent interruptions in internet connectivity, cases of double registration (multiple registration) could not be detected instantly, and this may have also contributed to the cases of multiple registration.

9. Limited knowledge in polling stations locations - Certain applicants were unfamiliar with the names of polling stations near their vicinity, especially since many of them were first-time registrants. Some individuals brought pieces of paper from home with the names of their designated polling stations.



Participants observing the protocols by joining various queues through standing and also sitting under canopy

Although EC officials offered assistance in locating the nearest polling station, this situation could potentially contribute to voter apathy in the upcoming District Level Elections and national elections. Prospective voters might hesitate to search for a distant polling center, particularly in an election that has consistently seen low voter turnout over the years.

10. EC challenge process in city and rural districts - in the Ablekuma North Municipal, party officials frequently challenged applicants, primarily citing underage concerns every 30 minutes. Although these applicants were allowed to complete the process,

their cards were withheld until a review was conducted to confirm their eligibility. Conversely, in Ada West, all 14 challenges were handled by EC Officials. Party Observers and officials from different electoral areas and traditional communities appeared to reach a consensus, refraining from challenging minors, as they viewed each other as part of a larger community or family.

11. Instances of Ghanaians residing abroad who came to register were noted.

12. **Unqualified non-residential applicants** - people who may not be qualified on grounds of not being residents or ordinary residents are likely to have gone through the process as observers for party admit that, it is impossible for them to identify everybody from their respective electoral areas and their districts.



Exterior of the Agona West Electoral Commission Office.

³These 2-documents are the primary documents for registration and validation



Challenges with the Limited Registration Process

4.0 Challenges with the Limited Registration Process

Despite the successful roll-out of the limited voter registration exercise, few challenges were identified across the various registration centres:

- 1. Power outages:** interruptions due to frequent power outages halted the registration process in some areas (especially in rural districts), causing delays and disruptions.
- 2. Misunderstandings about eligibility:** some individuals, particularly underage applicants, were misinformed about the eligibility criteria, leading to confusion and disturbances when ineligible applicants attempted to register.
- 3. Queue management issues:** problems with organizing queues effectively led to occasional disruptions and misunderstandings, causing delays and disturbances for registrants.
- 4. Political party involvement:** while political party participation was beneficial, it also posed challenges, including attempts at queue manipulation and disputes, which disrupted the registration process.
- 5. Weather interruptions:** unpredictable weather, such as rain showers, caused discomfort and disruptions, compelling registrants to seek shelter, leading to further delays.
- 6. Guarantor form challenges:** the guarantor form system was susceptible to abuse, with party officials endorsing forms for applicants who did not know the endorsers, causing disruptions in some instances.
- 7. Network glitches:** network issues on certain days slowed down the registration process, creating restlessness and frustration among applicants.
- 8. Disruptions due to political disputes:** Political disputes occasionally halted the registration process, with officials waiting for resolutions before continuing, causing delays.



Conclusions

5.0 Conclusions



In summary, the limited voter registration exercise in Ghana, as observed across various municipalities/districts, showcased commendable accessibility, transparency, and active participation from both registrants and political parties. Challenges such as power outages, queue management issues, and misunderstandings about eligibility criteria were encountered but were largely managed effectively. The involvement of political parties, while beneficial, also posed challenges related to queue manipulation. The exercise highlighted the importance of robust public education, efficient queue management, and strict enforcement of eligibility criteria. Recommendations include improved training for personnel, enhanced public awareness campaigns, and the establishment of efficient online platforms for registration status checks. Despite the challenges, the process demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity and fairness, setting a foundation for future electoral exercises.



Lessons Learned

6.0 Lessons Learned

The evidence from the monitoring exercise across the 4-municipalities/districts brought to the fore a number of key lessons that could strengthen future processes. These comprise the following:

- **Educational awareness:** insufficient awareness about registration guidelines led to misunderstandings and potential double registrations. Enhanced educational efforts are necessary to inform citizens about the eligibility criteria and the registration process.
- **Efficient resource management:** adequate resources, including functional machines and personnel, are crucial for a smooth registration process. Ensuring a stable power supply and addressing technical issues promptly can prevent disruptions.
- **Inclusivity:** Efforts to include vulnerable groups, such as PwDs, pregnant women, and nursing mothers, in the registration process should be continued. Ensuring accessibility for all citizens is essential for a fair and inclusive democratic process.
- **Party involvement:** Political party participation can be both beneficial and challenging. While their involvement can facilitate the process, it also poses the risk of queue manipulation and disputes. Proper regulations and monitoring mechanisms are essential to prevent disruptions caused by party officials.



Recommendations

7.0 Recommendations

Based on the evidence and the lessons learned from monitoring the limited voter registration exercise, a number of key recommendations are provided to guide the conduct of future exercises. Implementing these recommendations could significantly improve the efficiency, transparency, and inclusivity of future voter registration exercises in Ghana.

- 1. Need for enhanced public education** - strengthen public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the registration process, eligibility criteria, and the importance of accurate information. Clear, accessible, and widespread information can help minimise misunderstandings.
- 2. Regular training for personnel** - conduct regular training sessions for Electoral Commission staff and volunteers involved in the registration process. This training should cover protocol adherence, conflict resolution, and dealing with vulnerable groups.
- 3. Need for continuous improvement in infrastructure** - invest in backup solutions to prevent disruptions due to power outages. Well-equipped registration centers with adequate lighting, seating arrangements, and shelter provisions can enhance the overall experience for applicants.
- 4. Strict enforcement of eligibility** - Implement rigorous verification processes to ensure that only eligible applicants are registered. Strict enforcement of age and residency requirements can prevent unauthorised registrations.
- 5. Need for improvement in the data validation process** - there is the need for the introduction of a robust system for data validation and cross-checking to identify and rectify potential duplicates or inaccuracies in the voter roll.



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