



Communiqué

Issued at the end of

Dissemination Meeting on the Study of State Electoral Independent Commissions (SIECs)

The Centre for Democracy & Development (CDD) convened a meeting at the Rockview Hotel, Abuja in June 2013. The aim of the meeting was to share with relevant stakeholders the findings from the research carried out on State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) in Nigeria. The study which was carried out with support from the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), was conducted in six (6) States of the Federation (namely: Bauchi, Imo, Lagos, Kaduna, Plateau and Edo States). The purpose was to understand existing practices of SIECs, and identify challenges and critical reform options needed to ensure transparent, accountable and credible elections at the local government level.

The meeting brought together over 100 participants across the country. Prominent amongst the participants were five (5) SIEC Chairpersons from Imo, Kebbi, Plateau, Bauchi and Kaduna States; representatives of SIECs chairpersons from Lagos and Edo States; Representatives of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE), Forum of State Independent Electoral Commissions (FOSIECOM), and Nigeria Governors' Forum; university scholars; legal practitioners; persons living with disability, women and youth groups, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Conscious of the momentum that the move to scrap SIECs has gathered in the last few months, the meeting provided a platform to hold compelling and constructive discussions and deliberations on the basis of the revelations emanating from the CDD research publication: **The State Independent Electoral Commissions in Nigeria: A Study of Bauchi, Edo, Imo, Kaduna, Lagos and Plateau States.**

The presentation, review and discussions of the research findings identified several challenges confronting SIECs in the conduct of credible local government elections in Nigeria.

The participants

Noted the challenge of the ineffective legal framework in terms of the status, tenure and autonomy of the Commissions in the delivery of its constitutional mandate;

Recognised that persistent problem of the lack of funds and financial autonomy that has made it difficult for the SIECs to carry out their mandate correctly;

Are convinced that the modes of appointments of SIECs chairpersons and commissioners have contributed to the persistent electoral malpractices associated with elections into local governments;

Revealed that poor quality and number of staff have significant adverse effects on the effective operation of SIECs;

Advocate for a level playing field for all political parties in the 36 states of the federation and FCT for the promotion of genuine democratic culture at all levels;

Further observed that SIECs suffer from poor and negative perception from the citizenry.

Noted that the uncontrolled use of money in politics alongside prevalent poverty impedes genuine democracy particularly at the local level;

Recognised the very high level of control by state governors and their arbitrary interventions in the operations of SIECs as a fundamental challenge that must be addressed;

Identified one-party dominance, lack of internal democracy in political parties and the bandwagon effects by the citizens as challenges

Way forward

Participants resolved to:

Advocate that that the institutional challenges confronting SIECs are not irresolvable; for over a decade, the conduct of credible election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was entangled by related challenges that were resolved through informed, collaborative and collective efforts of stakeholders in the country;

Encourage, as a first step, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders to mobilise for support, develop a strategy, and constructively engage the National Assembly to counter the move to scrap State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs);

Urge that the existing laws guiding SIECs operations should be reviewed and standardised; particularly, as it relates to tenure and security of office of its Chairpersons and Commissioners;

Call on the government to initiate a process that would facilitate a review of the present statutory funding arrangement of SIECs thereby making its funding to be on a first line charge in the consolidated fund account;

Advocate for a merit-based system for the appointment of SIECs' Chairpersons and Commissioners complemented by conscious efforts in ensuring that appointed persons are non-partisan and credible individuals;

Recommend that SIECs staff should be professionals and its ad-hoc staff selected for election purpose should be neutral and non-partisan;

Enjoin SIECS, governments and stakeholders to prioritise continuing capacity building and

to the credible conduct of elections and efficient functioning of SIECs;

Recognised the negative role played by some political parties' and their loyalists in promoting electoral violence and insecurity.

training for SIECs staff; particularly the mid and senior level staff;

Agree that there is a need for a code of conduct for SIECs staff; particularly over election matters;

Advise SIECs to imbibe ICT culture and be technically equipped to meet electoral challenges

Urge the SIECs individually or through FOSEICON to design media strategy on constructively engaging the media to correct the poor public perception about them on the basis of improved performance;

Further urge the SIECs to continuously engage with INEC, political parties, CSOs and other stakeholders as a means of devising sustainable methods of tackling its challenges;

Charged SIECs to improve its capacity and be more sensitised on security and logistical challenges hindering its capacity to effectively and efficiently deliver on its mandate.

Resolve to engage the Nigeria Governors' Forum, Senate and House of Representatives' Committees on constitution amendment, including the State Houses of Assembly, on strengthening SIECS;

Call for a collaborative platform amongst CSOs, SIECs, INEC and other stakeholders so as to bring forward practicable and workable electoral management strategy.

Sign



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Centre for Democracy and Development with support from OSIWA

