



Reflection on the activities and contributions of the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) to the success of Ghana's 2000 elections: lessons for other African countries

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Abstract

Ghana's 2000 elections marked an important milestone in the country's political history. It is a monumental step in the consolidation and deepening of Ghana's democracy. Ghana's electoral success and the peaceful alternation of political power from one democratically elected government to another led by an opposition party have received praise from home and abroad. And this achievement is seen as a model and source of hope for other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Many explanations have been given for this electoral achievement, but most of them despondently downplayed the crucial role of domestic election observers. This paper emphasises the contribution of domestic election observers and argues that the December 2000 elections would certainly not have been easily accepted by the people as free and fair without the lively contributions of the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO). The paper strongly recommends that African countries should emulate the good works of CODEO and make domestic election observation one of the central pillars of the democratisation process.

Introduction

The right of citizens to participate in the governance of their country, directly or through freely elected representatives is an essential part of democracy. Holding of periodic elections where all adults have an equal right to vote is therefore an important means by which citizens demonstrate they have the confidence and ability to govern themselves and shape their futures (Nohlen 1996). Indeed, elections are one of the pillars upon which democratic governance rests, and the engine that powers the processes of political participation and makes government responsible and accountable to the electorate.

Election monitoring is as important as the election itself. It encourages electoral participation and contributes to the evolution of more active civil society involvement in the democratic process. The importance of election monitoring in Africa (and other developing countries) has expanded dramatically since the mid-1980s and 1990s. Indeed, inviting international observers to monitor elections is now routine in Africa (Anglin 1998 and Carothers 1999). However, the presence of international observers is not intended only to ensure fairness, transparency and enhance the integrity of elections. More importantly, international observers have become

major partners of election monitoring in Africa because they have provided various forms of assistance for organising elections in almost all countries. The donor community, therefore, sees the success and credibility of elections in Africa as a return on its investment; an important foundation upon which to build democracy, promote popular participation and good governance (Boafo-Arthur 1997).

The increasing role of international observers in Africa's electoral politics, however, seems to have obscured the significant role played by domestic, non-partisan civil society observer groups in ensuring electoral legitimacy, fairness and popular acceptance of election results. Election monitoring by domestic groups is not a new phenomenon; election officials and political contestants and party activists have long been in the forefront of ensuring fair elections in their countries. But following the political reforms and relative changes in state-society relations in Ghana (and other African countries) in the late 1980s, the politics of domestic election observation and monitoring has assumed a new dimension. Unlike the past, observing domestic elections has now become an art and a practice that burgeoning civil society organisations have embraced as a means of ensuring the relevance of each voter's participation in the decision-making process.

During the period of constitutional rule during the fourth republic in Ghana, the business of domestic election monitoring has grown more sophisticated and now involves new social, economic and political groups as well as electoral commission officials and political party contestants. There is an emerging consensus among both the public, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the private institutions participating in the exercise, that domestic election observation is part of Ghana's political development and is crucial in enhancing the integrity of the electoral process and election outcomes. The assumption is that the involvement of independent domestic election observers in the process helps to authenticate election outcomes. It is the submission of some observers that since elections are the pivot around which democracy and democratisation revolves, it is necessary for their conduct to ultimately help, not only to nurture strong and resilient democratic institutions, but also to enhance democratic consolidation (Elkit 1999; Ellis 2000 and Boafo-Arthur 2001). Apart from this, domestic election observation provides another window of opportunity for individuals and civil society organisations to participate directly in the democratisation exercise, and thereby increase public ownership and acceptability of the election results. In fact, domestic election observation is perceived as an important phase of the civil society capacity building campaign.

This paper seeks to revisit the merits of domestic election observation and the role of civil society organisations in the observation and monitoring process. The experience of the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) that observed the 2000 elections in Ghana is used as a case study to corroborate the importance of domestic election observation in the democratisation process. First, we review the merits of election observation and observation of domestic elections in particular. Second, the background and formation of CODEO is discussed. Third, we examine the activities, experiences and observation strategies of CODEO during the 2000 elections in Ghana. The critical issues that CODEO observers concerned themselves with are also discussed in this section – that is, whether the balloting was free and fair overall, and whether the process worked satisfactorily. We highlight the problems and shortcomings of CODEO operations and domestic election observation in Ghana, not ignoring the implications for strengthening the capacity of indigenous democratic institutions. We conclude on the note that domestic election observation has countless advantages and that all African countries and regional groupings should accept it as a crucial component of the continent's democratisation process.

Some merits of domestic election observation

Domestic election observation offers a perspective on individual and group participation in politics and government. It concerns civil society's ability to influence how things happen in a polity, through the activities of independent voluntary organisations, and exchanges among various social and political groups and interests. The facilitation of domestic observer activities in one way or another opens up political space for individuals to participate in politics (by choosing their leaders and representatives) through voting. This indirectly protects the right of citizens whose will is sovereign and is supposed to be the basis of the authority of government.

Particularly important in the context of Ghana's elections, is the role civil society organisations (observers) play in reassuring a sceptical public about the importance of the electoral process and the relevance of voter participation. In the case of Ghana, where military adventurers had dominated the political process for over two decades, public experience of politics is limited to military rule, human rights abuses, fraudulent and rigged elections, and state-controlled civil and political organisations. In these situations, basic notions of responsibility and rights need to be restored, and fears of intimidation and the effect of rumours forecasting post-election civil unrest must be overcome.

Stephen Mair observes that, "domestic election monitoring is also an important opportunity for civil society organisations to reorganise themselves into a formidable proactive political force" (Mair 1997). This reorganisation can help them develop and strengthen institutional capacities that add to the sustainability of the democratic experiment under way in Ghana. Election observation programmes help citizens learn the new organisational skills necessary to participate actively and more effectively in the country's political life between elections. Civil society observer groups that have formed election observer networks and coalitions during the election period, may turn into broad-based organisations that can contribute to the development of civil society. This development may have a spillover effect on the country's overall political discourse, the level of citizens' involvement in governance and the extent of public confidence in government.

But, in addition to the grooming of robust and proactive civil society organisations, public awareness of the formation of a domestic observer group, coupled with the mobilising, recruitment, training and deployment activities on election day, improves public confidence and involvement in the process. In addition, public pronouncements, research and reports issued by the monitoring group may help initiate changes that promote fairer, transparent and freer elections.

Generally, domestic election observers may help solve election disputes that emerge at polling sites; their presence at polling stations helps deter rigging, fraud, irregularities, and innocent electoral administrative errors. They serve to discourage intimidation during voting and ensure that vote counting, results tabulations, and other activities, are conducted through an independent body in an orderly manner, so that the results form an unbiased source cross-checking the official results from the electoral commission.

However, non-partisan domestic election observation should not be substituted for election monitoring and poll watching by political parties and candidates vying for political office. Experience from other countries has shown that elections are perceived to be more legitimate when many civic and political organisations participate (Dundas 1994). On the basis of these merits we turn to the experiences and role of civil society organisations as election observers in Ghana's December 2000 elections.

The discussion focuses specifically on the activities and experiences of CODEO, one of the civil society organisations that played a significant role in observing the 2000 elections.

Background to the 2000 election in Ghana

In January 1993 Ghana joined the ranks of Africa's new democracies when an elected and constitutional government was installed. President Jerry John Rawlings and his National Democratic Congress (NDC) party replaced the eleven-year-old quasi-military Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), which was also led by Rawlings. The second elections of December 1996, also won by the NDC, marked the process of consolidating Ghana's democracy.

Indeed, the two multiparty elections helped to sustain political liberalisation in Ghana. The record of human rights has been reasonably good. There is a burgeoning independent media and an increasingly vibrant civil society. Gyimah-Boadi notes that "the 1996 elections, especially, resulted in a stronger opposition presence in Parliament and paved the way for relatively transparent and accountable governance" (Gyimah-Boadi 1994).

Notwithstanding the modest democratic gains recorded since 1993, the prospects for an early consolidation of democracy, both in electoral and functional aspects, remained uncertain. It is against this background that the December 2000 elections assumed a special significance. The presidential election marked the exit of Rawlings from the political scene after serving two terms as specified by the constitution. Moreover, like many other African countries, Ghana had yet to face the challenge of power alternation within a democratic and constitutional framework. In spite of nagging fears, crossing that threshold of peaceful and democratic alternation of power was an important step on the road to consolidating democracy (Gyimah-Boadi 2001).

Building confidence in the electoral process in 2000 was therefore of prime importance in ensuring successful, free, fair and peaceful elections. The capacity of the electoral commission continued to improve and it continued to gain credibility in the eyes of the public. However, other issues still dogged the credibility of the electoral process, and general public mistrust of the process persisted. The issue of the bloated voters' register remained a concern and the demand for photo ID cards for all voters was controversial.

Confidence in the electoral process had to be built and a credible electoral process, one whose outcomes would win broad acceptance and legitimacy, was needed to foster a smooth transition. The involvement of international election observers was not enough to generate confidence in the electoral process. For this reason the role of domestic election observers was crucial. As a third election under the constitution, its success was important for the consolidation of democracy and sustaining the country's economic and social development into the new millennium.

History of CODEO

The need for additional confidence-building measures for the success of the elections motivated several civic organisations and religious bodies to volunteer to observe the elections. They offered to assist in observing the elections, and to help ensure that the process was truly free, fair and transparent.

In this context, the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), in collaboration with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), initiated the formation of a coalition of civil society and religious bodies with the sole purpose of observing the December 2000 general election.

Representatives of the groups met several times under the auspices of CDD and FNF in order to set up a broad-based coalition for the sharing of ideas, experience and resources. It should be noted that most of these groups had come together under the name of the Network

of Domestic Election Observers (NEDEO) for the same purpose in the 1996 elections. The group adopted the name Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) at its second meeting on 29 May 2000.¹

Its primary objective was to assist Ghana's electoral commission in ensuring free, fair and transparent elections by training and deploying observers at as many polling stations as possible throughout the country for the forthcoming elections.

The organisational structure of CODEO

Structurally, CODEO was a simple three-hierarchy organisation – the advisory board, the sub-committees and the secretariat.

The advisory board comprised nine members. All executive functions and responsibilities were assigned to it. Its duties included reviewing the activities of three standing committees and acting as liaison between CODEO and the electoral commission, political parties and the general public.

Sub-committees

Three CODEO sub-committees assisted the board, including:

- a recruitment, training and deployment committee that created an inventory of the number of potential observers from member organisations at the national, regional, and district levels, that compiled a data base with names and contact information for all potential observers, identified training needs, helped to develop training materials and assisted with the deployment planning;
- a logistics and resource committee that identified the material needs of CODEO, helped in the provision of logistics for observers and assisted in the payment of *per diems* to observers on election day; and
- a drafting and reporting committee disseminated information from the secretariat and the advisory board to the media and the general public.

The secretariat

Supporting the work of CODEO was the secretariat managed by CDD. This coordinated the local observer groups.

CODEO relations with the electoral commission

CODEO enjoyed the full cooperation and support of Ghana's electoral commission (EC).² EC officials participated in all training sessions. The organisation provided samples of election materials for demonstration and simulation exercises. It also provided official accreditation and photo identification cards to trained and certified observers, thus making it possible for CODEO observers to have access to the polling stations on election day.

Membership of CODEO

Membership of CODEO was open to all credible civil and religious organisations. Participating organisations included:

- Federation of Muslim Councils (FMC);
- Council of Independent Churches (CIC);
- Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission (AMM);
- Ghana Committee on Human and People's Rights (GCHPR);
- Ghana Bar Association (GBA);

- Civil Servants Association (CSA);
- Trades Union Congress, Ghana (TUC, GH);
- Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT);
- Ghana Journalists Association (GJA);
- Ghana Registered Midwives Association (GRMA);
- Ghana Registered Nurses Association (GRNA);
- International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA-Ghana);
- National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS);
- Ghana Legal Literacy and Resource Foundation (GLLRF);
- Non-Violence International;
- International P.E.N.;
- Ghana National Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
- Mankind's Advancement Upliftment and Development (MAUD);
- Center for the Development of People (CEDEP);
- International Prisons Watch (IPW);
- Health Watch International; and
- Institute of Democratic Studies (IDS).

Election observation activities

Selection and training of election observers

The main challenge of CODEO's work involved the training of election observers at national, regional and district levels. Member organisations helped in the selection of trainees, who were required to meet the following criteria:

- be a Ghanaian citizen of 18 years and above;
- have the ability to read and write the English language;
- not be an activist of any political party;
- not be a office bearer for any political party;
- have her or his credibility and neutrality vouched for by the selecting organisation; and
- be prepared to sign an undertaking to abide by the electoral rules.

The training programmes began with a three-day 'training-of-trainers' national workshop for 50 participants in Kumasi, on 29 September 2000. Member organisations of CODEO nominated five participants from each of the ten regions in the country. At the end of the training workshop, the trainers were tasked with organising regional training workshops in all the regions.

Following the national workshop, ten training workshops were conducted in the regions. Forty-five participants were drawn from five selected districts in each region to attend these workshops. These two-day regional workshops were organised simultaneously between 20 and 31 October 2000. In all, 450 observers were trained at the regional levels.

The last phase of the recruitment and training occurred at the district level. Fifty districts were selected. The district workshops were held simultaneously between 12 and 27 November 2000. In each district, 100 observers were trained, so that at the end of the process a total of 5000 observers had been prepared. In addition, CODEO, in collaboration with Radio Unvers (of the University of Ghana) trained 50 university students from the University of Ghana as CODEO observers. The curriculum covered the following:

- the legal framework for elections;
- qualification of an observer;
- rights, duties and obligations of an observer;

- what and how to observe on election day;
- code of conduct for observers; and
- completion of observers' checklist.

Questions, discussions and simulation exercises constituted a major component of the training programme. Officials of the electoral commission, the National Commission on Civic Education, the Ghana Bar Association and the CODECO secretariat assisted in the training at all levels. At the end of each training session observers were asked to sign an 'Oath of Objectivity and Neutrality' to indicate their willingness to be impartial and neutral in the observation process. Two basic materials were published and provided to observers at each workshop. These were an election observation manual and a handbook on information for observers.

Publicity

All activities carried out by CODECO in pursuit of its tasks were highly publicised. A press statement was issued to inform the public immediately after the coalition was formed in May 2000. Two further press conferences held, one on the eve of the 7 December general election and the other on the eve of the 28 December presidential election, announced to the public CODECO's programmes and readiness for election observation and sought public support for its activities. Two press statements were released, as CODECO preliminary statements on the conduct of the elections, a day after each of the elections.

Deployment of observers

All 5500 trained CODECO observers were deployed in 137 constituencies, representing about 25% of the polling stations, in all the ten regions for the 7 December 2000 general election. For the presidential election on 28 December, in addition to the 137 constituencies observed, two observers were deployed at each of the 200 constituency collating centres to observe the collating process. On election day, each observer wore a distinct CODECO-embossed white T-shirt and was given a checklist and an incident report form on which to record polling day activities.

Checklist, observation kits and observer findings

Reports on the elections included analysis of checklists and reports received by means of telephone calls, fax messages and written statements from observers.

Preliminary statements

Preliminary reports on the 7 and 28 December elections were issued by CODECO on 8 and 29 December 2000, respectively. The statements noted the very calm and peaceful manner in which the elections were conducted on the polling day, the preparedness of the electoral commission, the non-partisan and professional conduct of the electoral officials, the diligence and vigilance of party agents, and the transparent and free nature of the process. The Commonwealth Observer Group made a similar observation on the elections (Commonwealth Secretariat 2001). The statements endorsed the outcome of the elections, as did the other observer groups and the general public. The preliminary reports also expressed concern over reports of electoral malpractices, especially in the presidential elections, and incidents of intimidation, harassment and violence in certain parts of the country.

Observers' views on the elections

This section presents observers' views on each question (i.e. variables in the

checklist/reports) in percentages. Of the 5500 checklists distributed for the 7 December election, 5155 (93.7%) were returned and these form the basis for this analysis.

CODEO observers were interested in two critical issues: Was the balloting free and fair overall and did the process work satisfactorily? Nearly all the observers reported affirmatively – 99.6% reported the balloting was free and fair while 99.8% found the process to be satisfactory. The tools used for observation and/or the foci of observation were as follows:

Start time

CODEO observers noted that the average start time of polling was close to the scheduled start time of 7am (7:7 am). Less than two per cent of observers reported that voting began after 8 am.

Electoral officers and party agents

Observers also noted that on average, four electoral officers (instead of the stipulated five) and six party agents were present at the start of voting.

Voting materials

All election materials (voters' register, ballot boxes, ballot papers, ink, pad, string and seal) were almost always present. The material missing at polling stations was quite often string: 16.6% of the observers reported not seeing it. Insufficient supply of voting materials, notably ballot papers and indelible ink, was also recorded by five per cent of the observers.

Voting lines

The observers noted the general non-violent and peaceful atmosphere on election day. Of the 5155 observers, 98.3% reported that voting lines were orderly, even though nearly 8.4% of observers reported the absence of security officials at polling stations. Most of the security personnel present were seen to be neutral, helpful and non-partisan.

Secrecy of voting

Secrecy of voting was ensured; as 99.6% of observers recorded that the polling booths were carefully screened off.

Voter identification

Only about two per cent of observers noted that eligible voters were improperly identified. Seemingly, therefore, 98.5% believed that all eligible voters were able to exercise their franchise through proper identification at the polling station.

Voting irregularities

Voting irregularities were minimal. Less than five per cent of observers reported voting irregularities at the polling stations. Upper East region recorded the highest (8.8%) incidence of voting irregularities, followed by Central region (8.2%).

End of voting

Observers noted that voting ended at most polling stations at the appropriate time, with the overwhelming majority (98%) reporting that voting ended at 5 pm. Interestingly, 96.8% reported that there were no voters in the queue when polls closed. Just less than one per cent reported that voting went on after the close of polls at 5 pm.

Complaints and challenges

An overwhelming majority of observers (99.7%) reported that ballot boxes were completely emptied before counting started. Observers also reported virtually no complaints and challenges at polling stations. Less than four per cent reported complaints and challenges at the counting of votes. Observers from Central (8%) and Volta (4.3%) regions respectively reported most complaints.

Signing of electoral forms

An overwhelming percentage of observers (99.5%) reported that election officials and party agents signed the electoral forms and that results were openly announced immediately after the count.

28 December 2000: Observing the presidential election

As already indicated, in the presidential election, in addition to deploying 5500 observers in 137 constituencies in all the regions, CODEO introduced some modifications to its operations. Observers were deployed in all the 200 constituency collating centres to observe the process of tallying the results from the polling stations. Hence, the analysis of the 28 December election is in two phases: the polling stations and the constituency centre observations.

A total number of 5062 observers' checklists were analysed. Observers responded affirmatively to the two critical issues: Was the balloting free and fair and did the process work satisfactorily? Almost all observers (99%) saw the elections as free and fair and also thought that the process worked satisfactorily. This response is supported by the observations that follow.

Start time

A clear majority of observers (90.2%) reported that voting started on time at 7 am. Just less than one per cent reported that voting started after 8 am.

Electoral officers and party agents

Observers (75.2%) reported that four electoral officers were present when voting started. Eighty-five per cent (85%) reported the presence of four party agents.

Voting materials

Observers (100%) also noted the availability of all voting materials (ballot boxes, voters register, ballot papers, ink, pad, and seal) at the start of voting, except for string that was only seen by 17% of observers.

Voting lines

As with the 7 December election, observers noted the general non-violent and peaceful atmosphere on election day. Virtually all (99.7%) observers reported that voting lines were orderly. The absence of security personnel at polling stations was reported by 10% of observers. In Upper West region, 29.6% of polling stations were without security personnel, and in Northern and Ashanti regions the figures were 22.9% and 17.8% respectively.

Secrecy of voting

Observers recorded secrecy of voting with all of them (100%) noting that polling booths were carefully screened off to guarantee privacy.

Voter identification

Unlike the 7 December election, a smaller percentage of observers (0.4%) reported that eligible voters were not properly identified. This is an indication that 99.6% believed that all eligible voters were able to cast their vote through proper identification at the polling station.

Voting irregularities

Less than three per cent of observers reported incidences of voting irregularities at polling stations, with Volta (5.7%) and Greater Accra (5.7%) regions emerging as the areas with high numbers of cases of irregularities. Upper East region, on the other hand, recorded the least number of cases (0.3%) of irregularities.

End of voting

A majority of observers (99.8%) reported that voting ended at 5 pm exactly. Less than one per cent reported voting went on after 5 pm.

Complaints and Challenges

Just one per cent of observers reported incidences of complaints and challenges at polling stations during the counting of votes. Greater Accra region recorded the highest (3.7%) number of cases of complaints and challenges. This was followed by Volta region (1.7%) and Central region (1.6%).

Signing of Electoral Forms

Most observers (99.4%) reported that the election officers and party agents signed all the electoral forms. However, there were reported cases (1%) of unsigned electoral forms. Again, Volta region emerged as the highest with 4.4% of cases.

Constituency centre

Of the 200 constituency collating centres observed by CODEO, 91 form the basis of this analysis. The overwhelming majority of observers (97.4%) thought the process worked satisfactorily. Of the less than three per cent who thought otherwise, Volta region recorded the highest level of dissatisfaction (5.9%), followed by Northern (4.8%) and Greater Accra regions (4.5%). This overwhelming affirmation by the observers is based on observations in the following areas:

- *Sealed ballot boxes:* Observers noted that almost all the ballot boxes brought to the centres were sealed. Only 2.6% reported that ballot boxes were brought in unsealed. The regions with the highest incidence of unsealed ballot boxes were Upper East (9.1%) and Central (6.3%).
- *Electoral officers and party agents:* In all the collating centres electoral officers and party agents were said to be present. CODEO observers (35.4%) reported that an average of four electoral officers and four party agents were present during the tallying of results.
- *Security presence:* The majority of observers (94.3%) reported the presence of security personnel at the collating centres. Of the 5.2% reported cases of absence of security personnel, Volta region had the highest incidence (17.6%) followed by the Upper West (12.5%) and Upper East (9.1%) regions.
- *Recount of ballots:* An overwhelming percentage of observers (95.8%) reported no recount of ballots at the collating centres. Incidences of recounting were reported from the collating centres in Greater Accra and Ashanti regions (9.1% apiece), and from Volta region (5.9%).

- *Signing of tabulated sheets by party agents and election officers:* Observers (10.9%) reported non-signing of tabulated sheets. A sizable percentage of observers (37.5%) in Upper West reported the non-signing of tabulated sheets there, followed by Volta (29.4%) and Northern regions (23.8%). Observers reported that in most cases, it was New Patriotic Party agents who refused to sign the tabulated sheets, citing alleged irregularities and rigging at certain polling stations.

Notable incidents of concern

In spite of the fact that the elections were conducted in a free, fair and peaceful environment there were some isolated incidents which should be of concern to all those interested in a stable democratic development in Ghana. These included:

- Observers reported seeing several voters who clearly appeared to be under-age. Almost all parts of the country experienced this. CODEO views with grave concern the incidence of under-age voters in the country's electoral process.
- The inability of the EC to supply adequate voting materials on time to all polling stations was also a source of worry. In some parts of the country, CODEO observers reported late start of voting and a shortage of ballot papers that took some time for the EC to replenish.
- The transfer of vote (i.e. the decision to change ones venue of voting) seems to have posed some problems. CODEO observers reported several incidences of transfer voters who could not find their names and were unable to vote.
- Observers also reported some cases of impersonation, which may have prevented eligible voters from exercising their franchise. An example is the incident in the Nanton constituency in the Northern region. A voter discovered that someone had voted earlier in her name. The voter was not allowed to vote, and, but for the timely intervention by the chief, a scuffle would have occurred among party agents who disagreed on whether or not she be allowed to vote.
- There were also cases where proper identification was not provided. Apart from the required standard identification prescribed by the EC, CODEO observers recorded several uses of 'irregular' means of identification, such as chits (i.e. a piece of note given by an electoral officer granting the bearer permission to vote) used by voters to exercise their franchise. In some cases such voters were allowed to vote and in others they were not.
- Our observers also recorded multiple voting at some polling stations.
- Uncertainty about the accuracy of Ghana's population figures, as supplied by the Statistical Service Department and which should have matched and confirmed the EC's voter registrations figures, was also a problem (Smith 2001).

Inherent weaknesses and constraints of domestic election observation

- *Quality of polling officials:* Even though CODEO recognised the immense role played by polling officials, there were serious concerns over the conduct of some of them, with some reports of non-performance. This led to some observers assisting them and in some instances acting as presiding officers and polling assistants. CODEO recommends that uniform and adequate training be given to the officials of the EC.
- *Electoral and voter education:* CODEO also recommends that the EC educate the electoral officers and party agents thoroughly on the standards for rejecting ballot papers. This issue became a source of contention during the vote count at several polling stations. The EC must also step up its voter education on election procedure and regulations. CODEO believes this will help reduce incidence of spoilt and rejected ballots.

- *NCCE and voter education:* CODEO recommends to the NCCE, which is the main agency for educating citizens, that it intensifies its voter education programmes.
- *Voters' register:* CODEO recommends that the EC take steps to 'clean' the voters' register.
- *Citizen identity cards:* CODEO believes that the problems of voter registration and voting by unqualified persons, namely non-citizens and the under-aged, would be alleviated if citizens' identity cards were introduced. The holding of these by those aged six years and older, with a picture, date and place of birth, would facilitate easy identification for election purposes.
- *Transfer of vote:* There is also the need for the EC to streamline the voter transfer facility so as not to disenfranchise prospective voters.
- *Logistics and supply:* CODEO recommends that the EC find a lasting solution to the problem of supply of election materials on election day. Timely provision of adequate materials is important to ensure electoral integrity. Moreover, the EC must ensure that adequate arrangements are put in place for the counting of votes in areas where the lighting is poor. The conveyance of ballot boxes from the polling stations to the constituency collating centres must be improved.
- *End of voting:* Consideration should be given to ending polling at 4 pm instead of 5 pm in order to leave more time for vote counting before nightfall.

Some operational constraints and observations

CODEO operations were constrained by a number of factors. The late signing of the project contract agreement affected the planned implementation of programmes. More effective cooperation with other monitoring teams would have enhanced the effectiveness of the monitoring process. It is also observed that dependency on external funding is a matter that requires serious examination; local funding of the domestic election observer groups would enhance local ownership. It is believed that given adequate lead-time and resources, many more election observers could have been trained and deployed at more polling stations. An increase in the number of polling stations covered by civil society monitors would certainly enhance electoral integrity and confidence in the collated observers' report.

Conclusion: lessons for other African countries

CODEO, being an independent and non-partisan civic body, contributed substantially to the success of the 7 and 28 December 2000 national elections. The cooperation of 22 civic organisations and religious bodies for the common purpose of ensuring successful elections was an important outcome of the project. The training and experience of 5500 non-partisan domestic observers contributed to public confidence and involvement in the electoral process. The presence of CODEO observers at polling stations helped to instil confidence in the process. Furthermore, the participation of local observers enhanced transparency of the process and helped increase the acceptability of the outcome of the elections. In short, CODEO offered the opportunity for civil society organisations to organise themselves into a formidable proactive political force in support of democracy in Ghana (Smith 2001)

The experiences of CODEO have testified to the fact that successful election management should not be left to public institutions like the electoral commission and the National Commission for Civic Education alone. Modern election management requires a strong collaborative partnership of governmental institutions, the private sector, civil society organisations, local NGOs and not-for-profit organisations. Contesting political parties must mobilise their supporters and resources to enhance the integrity of the election results. Also, more non-

partisan civil society organisations should be encouraged to join CODEO in observing future elections.

Like most contemporary scholars (Ayee 2001 and Boafo-Arthur 2001, and Debrah 2001), we opine that the sustenance of democracy everywhere, like national development, has been and will continue to be the tireless efforts of indigenous people themselves. Donor agencies and foreigners cannot build our democracy and its concomitant democratic structures for us. It is up to us Africans to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and strengthen democracy, and the first step in that direction is ensuring free, fair and transparent elections, through effective domestic observation of the polls.

Finally, continental and regional organisations like the African Union, the Economic Community of West Africa States, the East African Economic Community, the Southern African Development Community and other such groupings, should consider putting together a team of experts from the relevant member countries. These would always be on standby to provide support to countries that may lack the internal capacity for domestic election observation projects. Africanising election observation could help minimise election fraud and maybe avert the political peril that has engulfed Sierra Leone, Madagascar and Zimbabwe, among other countries, in recent times.

For the democratic process to succeed, participation of citizens must be encouraged, and domestic election observation and monitoring is one way of achieving this goal. More importantly, election conflicts are likely to be minimised or prevented where civil society organisations and the mass of the people have the opportunity to participate in the electoral process through voting and election observation. There is no doubt in our minds that an increased public participation in observing the polls could provide a window of opportunity for firstly, the prevention of electoral frauds and secondly, the amicable resolution of any post-election conflict that could dislodge the democratic process and possibly throw countries into a state of anarchy.

Endnotes

- 1 CODEO was formerly known as NEDEO, Network of Domestic Election Observers, which was reformed and given a new name. CODEO had the highest membership and covered more constituencies and polling stations across the country than any other observer groups during the December 2000 elections. The European Union provided financial support for all CODEO activities.
- 2 CODEO received enormous technical support from the National Electoral Commission. The relationship that existed between the two organisations during the election period could at best be described as a successful case of collaborative partnership.

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