

YOUTH COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS, 2017

FOR INFORMATION AND ACTION

MEMO 01-2017

BRIEFING NOTE TO THE CHAIRPERSON, IEBC

SUBJECT: Briefing on the key observations and recommendations by the Youth Committee on Elections, 2017.

BACKGROUND: The Youth Committee on Elections, 2017 was established out of a growing concern from youth and youth-serving organizations about youth involvement in the electoral processes leading to the General Elections, 2017. Different youth-serving organizations designated representatives who formed the steering committee to learn, advocate and strengthen coordination and communication to electoral processes by the IEBC, ORPP and other relevant authorities.

CONSIDERATIONS: Elections lie at the heart of democracy. Adequate participation in electoral processes is therefore an important way to secure youth's inclusion in and contribution to the democratic process. There is strong evidence that the participation of young people in formal, institutional political processes is relatively low when compared to older citizens across the globe. This challenges the representativeness of the political system and leads to the disenfranchisement of young people. The focus on youth therefore, in terms of their engagement in the political arena, is a priority that has a number of teething problems that IEBC should address.

The role of IEBC in promoting youth participation

For decades, ensuring youth turnout on Election Day has been a key focus for electoral management bodies. However, there is a need to implement more sophisticated multi-dimensional approaches to engage with youth.

The tasks of IEBC include determining voter eligibility; receiving and validating the nomination of electoral contestants (including political parties and candidates); conducting the actual polling; counting and tabulating the votes. In addition, IEBC also engage in activities related to voter registration, civic and voter education, and dispute resolution. In this context, IEBC have either a formal or an informal mandate to promote youth participation.

Formally, IEBC have a responsibility to ensure equal opportunities for participation in electoral processes and especially enforcement of laws that have inhibited youth from full participation in the electoral process. Informally, such commitments might bestow on IEBC an implicit role in removing existing barriers to effective youth participation.

IEBC as well as other actors should tailor their programming strategies for increasing youth participation by considering youth as (a) voters, (b) electoral contestants and (c) electoral administrators.

(a) Youth as voters

IEBC should focus its programmes and activities beyond encouraging youth to vote in elections. Civic and voter education programmes should increase young people's commitment to democratic values and principles, their interest in political affairs and awareness of opportunities to engage, and their knowledge of how elections work in practice. This will help build a foundation for responsible, participatory and engaged citizenship and awareness of citizen–state relations, roles and responsibilities.

(b) Youth as electoral contestants

IEBC can contribute to enhanced youth participation in political spheres by supporting youth candidates to contest elections. This is achievable through provision of a level playing field via enactment of youth responsive law that provides for explicit youth affirmative action framework, monitoring compliance with legislation on nomination of candidates by parties and enforcement of laws and regulations.

(b) Youth as electoral administrators

Beyond promoting youth participation as voters and electoral contestants, IEBC should also take a more proactive approach to integrating young persons within their own organizational structures and document the same.

OUR OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Biometric Voter Registration, Verification and Audit:

We observed an increased lethargy among young people to register and a similar trend is slowly picking up. Our analysis points to a correlation between economic factors and political leadership as an issue that needs to be addressed.

Recommendation: IEBC should conduct, monitor and document the reasons for the low turnout to guide post election programmes. IEBC should also keep communicating to the public to make clear the audit process of the voter register by KPMG.

Candidates Nominations: We keenly followed the party primaries which were marred by irregularities. Whereas we appreciate that the political parties are independent institutions that should manage their affairs, we remain concerned that first, the office of the registrar of political party remained silent yet it is the regulator. Secondly, it was disturbing to see that the IEBC political party regulation was enacted into law after parties. Thirdly, we got more anxious that the IEBC checklist and the party nomination rules were not explicit of youth affirmative action except for reduced nomination fees.

Lastly, rules and regulations were silent on vetting of youth representation (ID is the only proof that one is a youth and will represent youth agendas when nominated.

Recommendation: IEBC should have a youth responsive checklist for assessing political party nomination rules that adhere to youth principles. More specifically we recommend that IEBC demand for explicit affirmative action provision while generating party lists, aim to standardize nomination procedures including compelling all parties to have youth leagues that benefit from Affirmative Action Fund, provide mechanism for vetting and confirming youth identity and commitment to youth agendas through National Identity Cards and certificate of confirmation from Youth Leagues or National Youth Council.

In addition, IEBC should ensure it safeguards the nomination list from interference by political operatives and provide proper and robust mechanisms to deal with parties that don't follow the nomination guidelines and their own nomination rules.

It's of absolute importance to state we, IEBC compelled all parties to provide date of birth of their candidates and a profile photo. This was a recommendation made by young people after the 2013 General Election having experienced challenges of accessing disaggregate data on youth which is relevant for programming.

Voter Education: We acknowledge an increased effort to ensure all Kenyans receive adequate education by both IEBC and its strategic partners. Our concern however is that the information is coming in too late and especially in a country experiencing high youth voter apathy.

Recommendation: IEBC should use targeted approach to ensure that all eligible voters receive education on voting and be adopted in the run-up to the elections. We further recommend that voter/ civic education be integrated in education curriculum.

Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership: We wish to laud a mutual partnership we have had with IEBC through the Partnership Directorate since last year. While it has been a learning experience we have also used the platform to voice our concern, demand for accountability and action. However, we have not enjoyed the same engagement with other directorates of IEBC. Two good examples that as a committee we feel we could have added value is in the voter registration process, drafting of IEBC nomination regulations and the Gender and Inclusion Policy.

Recommendation: We recommend that the Commission makes it a policy to consult the youth in all its key processes. More specifically we request a meeting convened for the youth to provide their input to the draft Gender and Inclusion Policy. We also recommend that youth participation be one of the sessions during the 2 days National Conference on Electoral Preparedness convened by IEBC and Kura Yangu Sauti Yangu.

Conclusion

The youth constituency in Kenya is too large to remain on the margins of the democratic process. IEBC must engage more effectively with youth on youth-related issues.