



MEDIA DIALOGUE

AN UPDATE ON THE PHOTOGRAPHIC VOTERS IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM (PVRIS)

**Strategies, Achievements, Challenges and
Way forward.**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Voter Registration is the fundamental basis of any credible elections as it affects the franchise of citizen of a country in democracy. It is critical to the integrity of elections in countries where democracy is valued. Defective voters' registers mean poorly conducted elections and consequently, undemocratically elected leadership in the Country.

The legal basis for conducting voter registration in Uganda is: -

Article 59(1) of the Constitution of Uganda (1995) states that:

"It is a **duty** of every citizen of Uganda of eighteen years of age or above to register as a voter for public elections and referendum".

According to section 19(1) of the Electoral Commission Act (1997), a person aged at least 18 years and he/she is citizen of Uganda may register as a voter in a parish where he/she originates from or resides. Thus, a Voters' roll for each polling station in a parish has been compiled and only persons whose names appear on the roll are entitled to vote at an election (Section 19(12) Electoral Commission Act 1997).

2.0 THE VOTERS' REGISTER

One of the tasks of the Electoral Commission is to compile and maintain an accurate Voters' Register to be used to conduct free and fair elections (Article 61(e) of the Uganda Constitution, 1995). There are 3 types of voters' registers, namely:

- . Voter registers for residents in each village governed by the Local Government Act (1997) and includes non-citizens of Uganda but who are resident in a village.
- . Voter registers for Special Interest Groups that is, Women, Youth, Workers, Uganda Peoples Defense Force (UPDF) and Persons with Disabilities.
- . National Voters' registers which is used in elections by universal adult suffrage.

2.1 BRIEF ON THE HISTORY OF THE VOTERS REGISTER

Table 1: Voter Population as per General Elections and Referendum since 1993

. Constituent Assembly Elections (1993)	-	7,186,164
. Presidential and Parliamentary Elections (1996)	-	8,495,422
. Local Council Elections (1997/98)	-	9,129,131
. Referendum (2000)	-	9,609,703
. Presidential Elections March (2001)	-	10,775,836
. Parliamentary Elections June (2001)	-	10,570,412
. Local Government elections (2002)	-	8,123,412

As reflected in the above table, Voter Population has not been stable since referendum 1993 due to various reasons.

In order to understand the change in Voter population, one needs to study the history of the Voters register.

The first National Voters' Register (NVR) was compiled in 1993 for elections of Constituent Assembly delegates. Hand-written Voters' registers, compiled at parish level were used for polling. The voters' particulars including Names, Age and Sex were hand-written in register books provided by the Commission.

On polling day, voters were required to present their certificates of registration to the polling officials. Voter identification was done by both candidate agents and RC I officials.

After CA elections, it was deemed important to computerize the CA hand-written voters' register for future elections. The computerization process of the register started in January 1994 and it was completed in 1996. The computerised register was afterwards updated for purposes of the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in 1996 to include eligible voters who had not earlier on registered and also to allow interested voters make transfers. Voters' Cards were issued to all registered voters for identification purposes on polling day. Voter's particulars were hand-written in the voter's cards by the issuing officer based at a polling station. Voter card issuing exercise was conducted concurrently with the voters' register display exercise.

After Presidential and Parliamentary elections 1996, the computerised voters' register was updated and displayed for use in the Local Government elections, 1997/98. It was decided to use personalized voter's cards in the Local Council Elections 1997/98 where voter's particulars were machine printed before the card was laminated.

However, after the Local Government elections, a lot of criticism and complaints against the accuracy and reliability of the voters' register were raised by the public.

As a remedy, the Commission decided to change the method of updating the register. The update exercise that was initially done at polling stations was conducted in village meetings in preparation for the Referendum, 2000.

But even after the referendum, the degree of accuracy and credibility of the voters' register was not satisfactory.

In order to address the problems and enhance confidence in the electoral process; the Commission designed and developed a project, called the Photographic Voter Registration and Identification System (PVRIS). PVRIS project was designed primarily to enable EC compile an **accurate, reliable and credible** voters' register devoid of **ghost voters** and **multiple registration**. The Commission also decided to provide a reliable and proper voter identification document to eliminate impersonation.

Soon after the completion of Parliamentary Elections (2001), the PVRIS project was embarked on. The project was implemented in August and September 2001 in which voters were registered afresh and their photographs were taken using digital Cameras.

Currently about 8.2 million voters are registered. To date the photograph bearing Register has been used during the 2002 election of Kampala City Mayor and all the by elections that have followed.

3.0 THE NATIONAL VOTERS REGISTER UNDER THE PHOTOGRAPHIC VOTER REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION SYSTEM (PVRIS)

In the Electoral Commission, Voter Registration Department is tasked with among others, updating the National Voters' Registers on a continuous basis as per section 18 (1) of the Electoral Commission Act (1997). The exercise of conducting Continuous Voter Registration under PVRIS is on going in all districts, at the District headquarters, since April 2003.

The District Registrars are charged with recruitment of Registration officials to register eligible voters at the parish headquarters by obtaining and recording information in respect of their Names, Age and Sex. The voters' particulars are hand-written in register books provided by the Commission. After registration, each applicant was issued with certificate of registration as proof of registration.

Those to be registered or transferred to other voting locations are advised to carry an introduction letter from the Village Chairperson of the village they wish to be registered in to confirm that you are either residents or you originate from that parish.

Other arrangements have been made by the Commission to register voters using a special registration unit based at headquarters and in the Districts, whenever a group of more than 20 officials write to the EC regarding voter registration. Under this arrangement, 12 and 44 personnel from editorial and marketing divisions of New Vision PPC, respectively, were registered recently among others.

4.0 ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite the financial constraints and constant pressure of work faced by the Commission in its bid to provide an accurate photograph bearing voters register, it has been able to undertake the following;

- a) The Commission acquired modern equipment, which includes digital cameras and their accessories used to collect both bio/text data and image data in the field.
- b) The Commission conducted the Photographic Voter Registration and Identification System (PVRIS) registration exercise in August/September 2001 in which about 8.2

million people were registered as voters.

- c) The Commission has used an accurate photo-bearing voters' register using the PVRIS data, which has been used in all by-elections since November 2002.
- d) The Commission has about 1.3 million photograph bearing voters' cards from 12 districts that have been edited and sorted and are ready for issuance.

5.0 CHALLENGES FACING PVRIS

In an effort to produce an accurate and reliable register, there are some inevitable problems encountered and some of these arise from actual negligence and inefficiency in the system of registration, registration officials and the applicants.

- . **Low Response**

Reports from the continuous registration exercise since it was embarked on by the Commission show low response. (46,282 new voters and 1509 transfers since April 2003 to date)

- . **Multiple Registrations**

Since the Commission has not displayed the photograph bearing register countrywide, some voters are skeptical about their registration status and as such have attempted to register more than once.

- . **Failure to provide adequate information**

In areas where the photograph bearing register has been use, the electorate has not provided sufficient information on the underage, the dead, those that left the area during display. As such these have remained on the Voters register.

- . **Misplacement of voters' particulars**

The register still has some misplacement of particulars, such as sex, names and villages. This is mainly as a result of capturing wrong information during registration or during data becomes difficult.

- . **Poor remuneration and inadequate funding**

Inadequate funding has led to poor remuneration that attracts low caliber election officials, leading to inaccurate data. This is the same reason why a National wide display has not been conducted.

• **Manipulation of the register**

Voters are reluctant to check their particulars during display of the register has at times been manipulated by dishonest display officers and/or tribunals that have intentionally declared some voters as either dead or left area whereas the situation may not be so.

6.0 WAY FORWARD

In order to address these challenges, the Commission has taken several actions;

A) Voter Registration

i) Publicity:

Stepped up publicity in the following ways;

- Utilising free airtime that may be available on local FM radio stations with wide listener-ship in various districts.

- Using Local Councils, Religious Leaders and other Opinion Leaders to encourage their residents/members to register as voters.

- Using Parish Chiefs to periodically notify EC District office of residents who come of age and/or are not registered.
- Putting simple and clear posters outside the District Registrars offices and at other public places around the respective townships to create awareness of the exercise.

- Many districts have public address systems that District Registrars use to inform and/or remind residents about the exercise as they move about the district on other duties.

ii) Group Strategy:

- a) This involves visiting areas where there is a concentration of potential applicants especially teen-agers. These areas include secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Collaboration with school authorities helps to identify eligible voters as they come of voting age.

- b) Using District Offices of Civil Society organisations like those of PWDs, Women Councils, Youth Councils and Students Associations. All these organisations have been advised, to mobilise their members who are not registered to turn up for the exercise. Other organisations like churches and mosques have been requested to periodically make announcements to the faithful about the exercise.

- c) Use of the social calendar especially market days to reach a wider

population has also been explored.

- d) Get the mainstream media as partners for example this Media Dialogue.

B) Display Exercise

Conducting a national wide display exercise that is also well attended by the population can be the solution to most of the errors on the register. In order to achieve this, the electorate should be well informed about their role in the display exercise and the importance of a credible, accurate and reliable register in delivering free and fair elections.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Compilation of a credible, accurate and reliable Voters' register is a challenging task that requires collective responsibility of **all Ugandans**, proper planning and adequate resources. We should, therefore, work towards a system that will ensure that the registers include all eligible voters and exclude all persons who do not qualify to vote. This system should always cater for enough time for processing field returns accurately and efficiently and it should also allow adequate time for issuance of Voters' Cards.