



**THE PHOTOGRAPHIC VOTERS' REGISTER**  
**Registration, Special Interest Groups and Display Exercise**

Presented by

**Electoral Commission, Uganda**

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## **ABBREVIATIONS/DEFINITIONS**

<b>CA</b>	Constituent Assembly
<b>EC</b>	Electoral Commission, Uganda
<b>LC</b>	Local Council
<b>NOTU</b>	National Organisation of Trade Union
<b>NUDIPU</b>	National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda
<b>NVR</b>	National Voters Register
<b>PVRIS</b>	Photographic Voter Registration and Identification System
<b>PWD</b>	People with Disabilities
<b>SIG</b>	Special Interest Group
<b>UPDF</b>	Uganda Peoples Defense Forces

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Voter Registration is a fundamental basis of any credible election as it affects the franchise of citizens 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 a Country.

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

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

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

According to section 19(1) of the Electoral Commission Act (1997), a person aged at least 18 years and he/she is a 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 who are resident in a village.
- . Voter registers for Special Interest Groups that is, Women, Youth, Workers, Uganda Peoples Defence Force (UPDF) and Persons with Disabilities.
- . National Voters' register which is used in elections by universal adult suffrage.

## 2.1 BRIEF 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 Constituent Assembly (CA) elections of 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 (CA) 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 of 1996, the computerised voters' register was updated and displayed for use in the Local Government elections, 1997/98. It was decided to use personalised 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, all the by-elections and new elections that have followed.

### **3.0 VOTER REGISTRATION 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 the responsibility of registering eligible voters at the parish headquarters by obtaining and recording information in respect of their Names, Age and Sex and taking their photographs. The voters' particulars are also written in register books as a back up measure. After registration, each applicant is issued with certificate of registration as proof of

registration.

At the same **time transferring of voters'** particulars to places where they now want to vote from is on going.

Those to be registered are advised to carry an introduction letter from the Village Chairperson of the village they wish to be registered in, to confirm that they are either residents or originate from that parish. Original registration certificate should be carried for those wishing to transfer their particulars to other voting locations.

Arrangements have been made by the Commission to register voters using a mobile registration unit based at headquarters and in the Districts. Whenever a group of more than 20 applicants officially write to the Electoral Commission, this mobile unit is dispatched. Under this arrangement, several organisations including Government Ministries, Universities and Media Houses have had their members registered.

In the same way, I wish to appeal to you all, that if you are not a registered voter (**your picture was not taken for purposes of voting**), please make use of this facility.

#### **4.0 SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS' REGISTERS**

There exists another set of registers, not PVRIS, known as Special Interest Groups' registers. These by their very nature cannot be permanent since they are merely a recording of members of Electoral Colleges whose membership is drawn from individuals holding particular offices and therefore changes with change in office bearers.

Many of people are eligible but unaware that they belong to these Electoral College registers, for instance if any LCI & II Executive member, belongs to the Electoral College that elects the District Woman Representative to Parliament.

All persons residing in Uganda certainly belong on the Village Residents' register. This particular register is unique given the fact that even non-citizens are eligible.

The Youth, PWDs and Workers registers are derived from the respective organs for the specific interest group. These are Youth Councils, NUDIPU and National Workers' Organisations (NOTU) respectively.

The UPDF register is derived from the Army Council an organ whose composition is stipulated under the Army Act.

The importance of understanding the composition and function of these SIG registers cannot be

over-emphasised. These registers are as important as the National Voters' Register since they are used in conduct of elections of Members of Parliament representing the various SIGs. Their composition is often transient and prone to being misunderstood and/or manipulated. Furthermore, this is the only situation where a person's name may legally appear twice on the register (**Chairperson of the village/Parish women council also Sec. For Women Affairs at LCI/II**) and consequently will vote twice! A situation if not handled carefully may result into breach of peace.

These registers, too, have to be authenticated during a display exercise prior to an election.

## **5.0 DISPLAY EXERCISE**

Elections are a process and not an event. Possibly 95% of election activities are completed prior to polling day. Unfortunately often-time all these activities are overlooked and instead emphasis is placed on polling day activities.

One important activity that is often overlooked is the Display of the voters' register prior to polling day. This is the period when registered voters are expected to check on their particulars to confirm them, point out any persons who are on the register erroneously and also raise objections about persons who may have been wrongfully excluded from the register. The register is displayed for **21 days** at every polling station. A parish tribunal is constituted to authenticate the proposed objections and the returns transmitted to the Commission from which a final (Polling day) register is processed.

It is, therefore, unfortunate that even the biggest stakeholders, the candidates, have ignored this activity. It is during polling day that lamentations of persons missing on the register and/or ghosts are reported to the Commission. By then it is too late. Needless to mention, the register is the central pillar in the conduct of free and fair elections and leaders.

## **6.0 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.

### **1. Low Response**

Reports from the continuous registration exercise since it was embarked on by the Commission show low response.

(87,804 new voters and 3,796 transfers from April 2003 to date).

As has already been mentioned, there is a very poor response to the display exercise with the attendant problems manifesting on polling day.

2. **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. This is a criminal undertaking that has led to arrest and prosecution of some voters.

3. **Failure to Provide Adequate Information**

In areas where the photograph bearing register has been used, 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.

4. **Misplacement of voters' particulars**

The register still has some misplacement of particulars, such as sex, names and villages. This is mainly resulted from unintentionally capturing wrong information during registration or during data capture.

5. **Poor Remuneration and Inadequate Funding**

Inadequate funding has led to poor remuneration which attracts low caliber election officials, leading to inaccurate data.

The inadequate funding is the reason why nation wide display has not been conducted to date.

6. **Manipulation of the Register**

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

7. **Missing Particulars on the Register**

The missing particulars include the voter's image or the text data or both.

In the first instance the image may be missing due to poor photography, the diskette carrying the image being lost or non-availability of the locator number that enables the

processor to merge the image to the text data

The case of missing text data is due to misplacement of the original registration forms either in the field or at the Commission headquarters.

Where both the text and the image are missing is usually due to the materials never having reached the Commission.

## **7.0 WAY FORWARD**

In order to address these challenges, the Commission has taken several actions. Principle among them is to increase awareness and/or understanding of the factors affecting the accuracy, reliability and credibility of any of the voters' registers.

### **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 become 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 institutions 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 Stakeholders involved as partners especially when the Electoral Commission organises a workshop at which venue a voter registration booth is set-up. This arrangement has led to registration of a number of new voters.
  
- e) Taking advantage of National/ International functions like International Labour day, International Trade Fair, Agricultural Shows etc. to bring the Commission and its work closer to the people and also set up a registration/ information desk

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

Compilation of a credible, accurate and reliable Voters' register is a challenging task that requires collective responsibility of **all Ugandans**. It requires 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.

**I THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS YOU**