



KICK CORRUPTION OUT OF UGANDA



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PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY KICK CORRUPTION OUT OF UGANDA (KICK-U) ON THE JANUARY 25th AND 3rd FEBRUARY 2021 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Introduction

On January 14th 2021, Uganda went to the polls where citizens of Uganda voted for the President and the members of Parliament for their different constituencies. This was followed by elections of the Local Council Five Chairpersons and their Councillors on 20th January 2021 across the nation. The context of these elections was set in the pre-election environment which was rife with infractions relating to gagging of the campaign space of opposition candidates, flagrant human right abuses, violence, harassment and intimidation of opposition candidates and or their supporters. Characteristically, Ugandans were handed an internet shutdown before, during and after the presidential and parliamentary elections which further heightened the tensions. All of these further provided a shaky path towards the Local Government elections. It should also be noted that there was an inexplicable delay with accreditation of observers which significantly affected the planning and deployment of the observers by CSOs and international partners who signified interest to undertake election observation missions.

KICK-U released a press statement (http://www.kick-u.org/news/press-statement-issued-kick-corruption-out-uganda-kick-u-january-20th-local-governmenton_January_24th_2021) and (<http://apearnews.com/s2018/2021/01/23/kick-u-attributes-high-numbers-of-invalid-votes-to-low-civic-education/>) which highlighted its observation findings on the 20th January 2021 elections and also provided some short term recommendations ahead of the subsequent Local Council elections. Beyond today's statement, KICK-U at a later date will produce a final report with a compendium of recommendations to be shared with the general public based on the 2021 Election Observation Mission of KICK-U. The final report will include the assessment of KICK-U of the conduct of the January 14 Presidential and Parliamentary election day.

On 25th January, KICK-U observed Municipality Chairpersons and their Councillors elections in the Municipalities of Kabale, Kisoro and Rukungiri Districts. And on 3rd February, KICK-U again deployed observers who observed the elections of the Sub county/Town Municipal Divisions Chairpersons and their Councillors. Nine observers were deployed for the Municipal elections on January 25th and 19 observers were

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**FACILITATING THE EMPOWEREMENT OF COMMUNITIES IN ORDER TO MAKE THEM ACT INDEPENDENTLY,
PARTICIPATING IN SOCIETY PROCESSES AND ADVOCATE FOR THEIR OWN INTERESTS**

deployed on 3rd February 2021 in the six Districts of the Kigezi Sub region of Kabale, Kisoro, Kanungu, Rukungiri, Rubanda and Rukiga. Overall, KICK-U deployed a total of 28 observers. These observers visited a total of 72 polling stations, 30 and 42 polling stations were visited on 25th January and 3rd February respectively. Observers witnessed the polling processes -opening, voting, closing and counting procedures - throughout the day. Overall, KICK-U observation shows that the majority of voters who presented themselves at the polling stations where KICK-U observed were given the opportunity to cast their ballot.

Findings

The general environment on polling day both on January 25 and February 3 was relatively peaceful at 70 of 72 polling stations visited by KICK-U observers. At 2 polling stations in Kisoro District, the environment was not peaceful during the 3rd February elections as cases of voter intimidation and violence were observed.

Polling administration

All KICK-U observers across the 9 polling stations on 25th January 2021 were at the polling stations by 6:30am but only 3 had polling officials present. Out of the 9 polling stations where observers were stationed in the morning, only one polling station started voting before 8:00am and at 8 polling stations, voting commenced between 9-10m. While for the 3rd February elections, out of the 19 polling stations where our observers arrived before 6:30am, only 5 polling stations had polling officials present. Out of the 19 polling stations visited on 3rd February, only 2 polling stations started voting before 8:00am and at 17 polling stations, voting commenced between 9-10am.

Out of all the 72 polling stations visited, the Biometric Voter Verification Kit (BVVK) was available and functional through the period observed at 69 polling stations on 3rd February 2021. All the other voting materials which include the ink pad, ballot boxes and voter register among others were available. Party agents for the candidates were equally no denied access as they observed the election day proceedings. There were peculiar instances observed at Bugyeyo Catholic Church and Nyarutembe Polling stations in Nyabwishenya Sub County where the candidates for the councillorship positions were unopposed and as such, there were no ballot boxes and papers provided at the stations.

Voting Process

Out of the 72 polling stations visited for the voting exercise, 18 polling stations did not follow the COVID 19 regulations (SOPS) like handwashing, sanitizing, wearing face masks and physical distancing in queues. This has an implication on the health of the electorates that participated in the exercise and grossly endangers all who took part in the elections within such locations.

At 48 polling stations out of 72 where observation was made, the polling stations were devoid of campaigning materials at the entrance which also compromised the electoral commission guidelines. There were 9 reported cases of vote buying and inducement

around the polling stations and at 16 polling stations, there was a heavy presence of security personnel which sometimes left voters in fear and suspicion of their presence in the 3rd February Elections. At all the polling stations, the voting basins had been set up to ensure secrecy and no cases of ballot stuffing were recorded.

Compared to the 14th January and 20th January 2021 elections, there was still a low voter turnout. This was likely attributed to the fact that the voting days were not observed as public holidays.

Counting and Declaration of Results

KICK-U observers did not record any **serious irregularity** during the counting of votes on January 25 and February 3. Votes counting was done in the open at all the polling stations KICK-U observed, the votes were declared at the polling stations and declaration forms signed. KICK-U observers also reported that the situation after the declaration of the results was peaceful outside the polling stations where they had observed and the results were transferred to the District Tally Centers.

Tallying Process

The tallying process in the tally centres of Kanungu, Rubanda, Rukungiri, Kisoro, Rukiga and Kabale were relatively peaceful for both elections of 25th January and 3rd February. The tallying process and declaration of the final winners was done and followed through according to the guidelines of the Electoral Commission.

Recommendations

KICK-U wishes to continue to emphasise that voter and civic education should be given a priority by all electoral stakeholders like the Electoral Commission, civil society organizations, political parties, the media and other relevant development partners.

Election security is essential but must be done without the air of intimidation as is the case currently. Such heavy deployment is capable of creating fear and discouraging citizens participation. KICK-U recommends that rapid response teams should be stationed out of sight with only the basic unarmed security within the station is needed. Government should coordinate its agencies that support the electoral process to operate within the existing legal frameworks.

KICK-U calls on citizens to consider active participation in the civic process towards election of their leaders by ensuring to register and vote in future elections. KICK-U is also calling on the Electoral Commission to always follow the electoral legal framework, policies and guidelines especially as it relates to adequate provision of electoral materials and timely deployment of both materials and personnel to the polling stations.

KICK-U strongly recommends community leaders to remain vigilant, uphold values of peace and patriotism in their members at all times including during civic duties like election.

Conclusions

Though the elections of 25th January and 3rd February 2021 elections were generally peaceful, they were certainly not without infractions and do have room to be improved upon. KICK-U has deployed observers who are already monitoring and reporting on the post-election environment across the 6 districts of Kigezi Sub region and shall be making available its findings routinely to the public and stakeholders.



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