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Administration Agencies Through Training**

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AGENCIES THROUGH TRAINING***

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*The views expressed in this paper are strictly the author's and, should in no way, be regarded as those of the U.N.

Introduction

Designing a training programme in electoral administration is not a simple, straight-forward task. To begin with, it is not exactly clear what is meant by electoral administration. As a matter of fact, it will come as a surprise to people in certain parts of the world that so much attention is being paid in Africa to how to establish a core area which goes under that name - an area in which sustained academic and professional activities would be undertaken.

The realities in Africa, however, point to the need to devote time and resources to the electioneering process as well as the effective management of the process. In the past thirty years, many countries in the region have agonized over the legitimacy of governments, and specifically, the constitutional mandate of key functionaries. A number of these countries have alternated between one-party rule and military dictatorship.

While a few countries have successfully organized free and fair elections, the experience in many others has been largely disappointing. Where voter intimidation or bribery did not appear effective in overturning the will of the people, ruling (and at times, opposition) parties have resorted to other desperate tactics such as the corruption of the voter registration process, stuffing of ballot boxes, falsification of results, and kidnapping of polling agents and/or officials. "Election engineering" or "rigging" (as these nefarious practice is called) succeeds best where the perpetrators act in collusion with the polling officials, the watch-dog bodies, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary.

Assuming that the emerging "field" of electoral administration is concerned with the measures calculated to promote free and fair elections while reducing the odds in favour of systematic rigging, it will still be difficult to determine which of the electoral administration objectives are achievable through training and by any other means. The reasons for this difficulty are not far to seek. The challenges facing electoral administrators vary from one place to another. In some circumstances, the constraints on free and fair elections are purely statutory. In other words, to preempt electioneering dirty tricks, one has to look at the law, and particularly, how it opens the door to abuses.

On some occasions, the decisive factor in the conduct of elections is the prevailing "civic" or political culture. If a culture promotes a general disposition towards electoral manipulations, the administrators will be hard put establishing a formula for success.

This paper proceeds from the assumption that the organization and management capacity of electoral agencies is the critical variable. It is this capacity which can be deployed to outline and implement a military-style strategy aimed at making happen "those things which the administrators want to see happen and forestalling everything to the contrary".

The paper begins with an overview of the nature and scope of electoral administration. It then proceeds to identify problems in electoral administration which are likely to respond to training interventions. The third part of the paper focuses attention on the structure, objectives, methodology, and evaluation of training in electoral administration. The conclusions and recommendations are presented in the fourth section.

I. THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

Little, if anything, is known about the 'field' now designated electoral administration. While this obscurity constitutes a major obstacle to progress in efforts at extending the frontiers of knowledge in the area, it (the obscurity) provides a rare freedom and opportunity to carry out an inquiry into the subject-matter without being constrained by traditional biases and methodologies.

It is true that substantial amount of work has been carried out focusing on the behavioral aspects of the electoral process. Thus, a voluminous body of literature exists dealing with topics such as the variables explaining voter turn-out at elections, as well as voters' opinions on candidates, issues, and party labels.^{1/} Research studies have also preceded the release of published material on personal influence and the role of various communication media in opinion formation.^{2/} Studies on community power structures have identified factors in the choice of leaders at the "grass-roots" and national levels.^{3/}

The behavioral perspective no doubt represents a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the dynamics of politics, particularly, in the "mature" systems of the West. Its limitation becomes obvious when its underlying hypotheses and research methodologies are replicated in the new states of Africa. In this latter group of societies, deep-seated cultural and historical factors make it impossible for the political systems to "behave" in exactly the same way as their western counterparts. Thus, the assumptions underpinning the workings of the latter simply break down when applied to the former.

The electoral process is an example of how the emerging political systems of Africa depart from the "clock-work" arrangement that is closely identified with, and taken for granted in, the mature polities of Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. In contrast to these countries where free and fair elections are routinely conducted, elections in Africa - where political competition is legally permitted - almost invariably threaten the stability, if not the survival, of nation-states. The explanation for this lies in the perverted behaviour of political parties, election candidates, electoral officers, polling agents, or over-zealous government officials and law enforcement personnel.

While the relatively normal behaviour of the "mature" political systems is adequately covered by the behavioral scholars, the African states' "deviation" from the norm has received scant research attention. Outside the classical contribution of W.J.M. Mackenzie (whose Free Elections uncovers the tricks of "election engineering")^{4/} and Ahmadu Kurfi's practical, step-by-step guide to rig-proof and hitch-free elections,^{5/} there is little to fall back on in the search for a didactic approach to electoral administration.

Tasks of Electoral Administration

The paucity of material on electoral administration notwithstanding, it is possible to identify tasks of an administrative and managerial nature which form part of the electoral process. Prominent among these tasks are those of:

- (i) design, implementation, and review of an appropriate organizational structure (including defining functional and hierarchical, headquarters and territorial relationships);
- (ii) recruitment, training, mobilization and deployment of personnel;
- (iii) budgeting for human, material and financial resources;
- (iv) procurement and inventory management;
- (v) enactment, promulgation and enforcement of principal electoral law and subsidiary legislation (administrative instructions and regulations);
- (vi) Delimitation of electoral districts/constituencies;
- (vii) compilation of voters' register;
- (viii) electoral logistics and operations management (including establishment and equipment of polling stations and booths, procurement and custody of ballot papers and boxes, fixing of dates of election, liaison with political parties and other interested groups to ensure smooth conduct of elections, acceptance and registration of nominations, supervision of activities at polling and counting centres, declaration and transmission of results; and preparation for election petitions).

Organizational Structure

The viability of an enterprise depends largely on the strength of the organization that is established to achieve its objectives. As defined by some scholars, a formal organization is:

"a planned system of co-operative effort in which each participant has a recognized role to play and duties or tasks to perform".6/

While electoral administration is not synonymous with the administration of business enterprises, it relies in much the same way as the latter on a sound organization with clearly refined mission statements and a network of mutually reinforcing relationships.

The structure of electoral agencies is almost invariably set out by law. The law generally specifies the composition, powers, and tenure of each agency's policy and management organs. The day-to-day administration of the agency is under the control and supervision of a senior administrator variously designated Secretary, Chief Electoral or Administrative Officer, or Chairman, Electoral Commission. He/she is assisted by heads of professional department such as Legal, Administration and Finance, Operations and Logistics, Public Relations/Information, and Data Processing/Computing Departments.

Apart from the core staff recruited to implement the departments' regular programme of activities, short-term consultants and project personnel are needed to plan and conduct elections. These super-numerary employees include:

- (i) electoral officers and assistants
- (ii) supervisory presiding and presiding officers (that supervise and co-ordinate activities at polling stations and polling booths);
- (iii) the returning officers and assistants (in charge of counting of votes and compilation of results);
- (iv) law enforcement personnel and polling orderlies (on secondment/posting from the police force);
- (v) polling and counting clerks;
- (vi) ancillary staff (drivers, messengers, etc.).

Recruitment and Training of Staff

All categories of staff on the payroll of an electoral agency must be capable of, and disposed towards, working with persons selected by political parties and watch-dog organizations (e.g. polling and counting agents) to monitor the conduct of elections. Conscious efforts should accordingly be made to screen the electoral personnel and make sure that they are not associated in any way with the rival political parties. Before they are finally recruited, they should be exposed to stress interviews and psychological aptitude tests.

As soon as they are recruited, the different categories of staff should be made to undergo intensive training covering the technical, managerial and public relations aspects of their jobs.

Budgeting and Financial Administration

Free and fair elections cost money. Apart from the salaries and allowances of the regular and project personnel, large sums of money will have to be earmarked for the procurement of election material (registration cards, ballot papers and boxes) and for the purchase and maintenance of computing and communications equipment. The construction of polling booths and the maintenance of a transport fleet are additional expenditure items which must not be overlooked at the budgeting stage.

Administering or managing the finances of an electoral agency is, therefore, a substantive, though frequently neglected, task. It entails anticipating the agency's varied requirements in the human, material and cash resource fields, approaching the government for grants and subventions, and collecting revenue from miscellaneous sources (e.g. nomination fees and deposits payable by candidates). In view of the fact that resources are limited, the agency further has to guard against squandermania, and integrate value-for-money with compliance auditing.

Procurement and Inventory Management

It is not enough to make financial provisions for the material required for the smooth conduct of elections (e.g. voter registration cards, candidates' nomination papers, ballot boxes, ballot papers, and indelible ink). Steps have to be taken to procure the items in the right quantities and supply them for use at the right time and place. How many times have an otherwise

peaceful election being de-railed by (artificially created) shortage of election material.

Enforcement of Electoral Law

The principal electoral law is a major factor in the conduct of elections - one that determines whether or not the process will free and fair. A typical electoral law stipulates the procedure for the registration of voters and compilation of the electoral register, conduct of elections and handling of election petitions. It specifies the role of political parties, and candidates for elections. Above all, it defines the main electoral offenses and the penalties for the infringement of provisions.

The electoral administration agencies have a vital role to play in ensuring that the principal electoral law does not open the door to abuses and is not in conflict with the constitution. To guard against any aggrieved party blaming its defeat at the polls on the "collusion" of the agency or any of its officials, the public enlightenment department of the agency should arrange workshops aimed at educating rival political parties about the basic provisions of the electoral law. Ignorance of the law, as they say, provides no immunity, but when such ignorance costs a party the much desired victory, it is the impartiality of the electoral agency that is loudly called into question. For instance, the 1958, 1977, and 1982 electoral laws in Nigeria did not require the electorate to present their registration cards before casting their votes. However, some unscrupulous politicians created the impression that without these cards, the voters would be turned back at polling stations. This not only encouraged

frantic trading in voter registration cards, but dissuaded otherwise keen supporters of certain political parties from showing up at polling stations.

Delimitation of Electoral Districts

In some countries, the delimitation of electoral districts is a task assigned to an independent delimitation body. In others, the electoral agency is charged with the same responsibility. Regardless of which institution performs the task of drawing the electoral boundaries, steps need to be taken to ward off the charges of "gerry-mandering" - an act of enhancing the electoral chances of one political party over others through arbitrary establishment of constituencies or grouping of electoral districts.

Compilation of Voters' Register

The electoral law almost invariably stipulates that before elections are conducted, the electoral agency should compile and/or up-date the register of voters. This register must be completed in such a way that each voter who presents him/herself on polling day would be easily identified. Consequently, the electoral roll should provide adequate information on the name, sex, address, and possibly, date of birth of voters. Since it was not unknown for dead or yet-to-be-born persons to have cast their votes, the agency must institute measures aimed at forestalling electoral malpractices. Apart from the use of "ghost" voters, party activists (or hooligans) have in some countries purchased large quantities of voter registration cards, and employed all means at

their disposal to ensure that only their supporters cast their ballot.

Electoral Logistics and Operations Management

In addition to the preparatory work referred to in the preceding paragraphs, electoral administration entails mapping out a plan of action on the same scale as a war strategy. The military analogy is not far-fetched. In the African context, an electoral contest is synonymous with going to war. The enemy is whoever stands between a political party and power. The weapons range from dis-information, through intimidation and coercion, to sophisticated military hardware. Local traditional rulers, local government functionaries, and law enforcement and security personnel have been enlisted in this invisible army.

As a neutral body, the electoral agency must ensure that it is not drawn into the fray. This does not mean it should not have its own war strategy backed by thoroughly researched battle plans. An Electoral Logistics and Operations Plan (ELOP) is the agency's response to the treacherous situation in which it operates. This plan must not only anticipate the moves of all parties and groups, but should incorporate the measures to counteract these moves. In specific terms, it should proceed on the assumption that each contestant is determined to win at all costs. It should, therefore, seek to minimize the costs and risks to the entire society.

The electoral logistics and operations plan should also define, as meticulously as possible, the agency's course of action with regard to:

- (i) the establishment and equipment of polling stations and booths;
- (ii) procurement and custody of ballot papers and boxes;
- (iii) dates and hours of voting;
- (iv) liaison with political parties, the press, and "watch-dog" organizations;
- (v) supervision of activities at polling and counting centres;
- (vi) the routing, transportation, and security of ballot boxes and papers;
- (vii) declaration and transmission of results; and
- (viii) preparation for election petitions.

II. ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION CONSTRAINTS AND TRAINING IMPLICATIONS

In normal circumstances, the tasks of electoral administration described in the preceding section should not be too complicated to carry out. However, the environment in which such tasks are carried out poses difficult problems for the administrator. In contrast to the developed (or politically mature) states where the procedure for the election or selection of rulers is clearly defined and generally upheld, a number of factors militate against the conduct of free elections in Africa. With the exception of a few countries (e.g. Botswana, The Gambia, and possibly, Ghana,

Benin and Zambia) the oracle may have to be consulted to know whether elections would take place, and if so, whether in a free and peaceful atmosphere.

Contrary to popular assumption, it is not simply "sit-tight" rulers who constitute the obstacle to free elections. In fact, autocracy may be a less lethal threat to democratic government than say, political illiteracy - or at least, general lack of knowledge of, and consensus on, how representative government is established and sustained. Thus, commenting on Nigeria, where incumbent rulers are the first to be accused of frustrating the will of the people, Ahmadu Kurfi, former Chief Administrator/Electoral Officer of the then Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) had this to say on the impact of illiteracy on the conduct of elections:

"The Nigerian election participants - voters, polling officials, politicians, etc. - are not generally well conversant with the mechanics of the conduct and management of elections, despite opinions to the contrary."^{7/}

It is also not true that only the "ruling parties" rig elections. According to Kurfi,

"virtually all parties, candidates (and) agents indulge in ... fraud in collusion with some election officials."^{8/}

If anyone has any doubt about Kurfi's claim, a recent pronouncement of a presidential aspirant in Nigeria is even more revealing. According to Chief Arthur Nzeribe, President Ibrahim Babangida was right to have nullified the results of the

presidential primaries which took place in Nigeria in September 1992, because, according to Chief Nzeribe,

"... everybody rigged, everybody played games ... I wasn't quarrelling with what Shehu (Yar'Adua) was doing on the ground, because I was doing the same thing. I beat him in places, and the places where I beat him is because (sic.) I rigged better than he did. I spent more money than he did. It was as simple as that."^{9/}

The money factor is particularly significant in Africa where economic adversity and cultural decay have jointly promoted mercenary tendencies in virtually all walks of life. Conscience, duty, and honesty have become tradeable commodities. Justice and fairplay are frequently up for sale. Even a candidate may not take the dedication and integrity of his/her agents for granted as a rival may not hesitate to tempt them with money to switch their allegiance at critical moments - such as when boxes are being stuffed or the votes are being miscounted.^{10/}

Another factor which tends to de-rail the electoral process is violence. It may start when a candidate attempts to rig elections "far away from home", i.e. in a rival candidate's support base. This is one possible explanation for the widespread disturbances and riots in parts of the former Western Nigeria where, in 1963/64, the National Democratic Party (NNDP) sought to stamp out the influence of the former ruling party, the Action Group (AG). As the NNDP tried various tricks (including sending men "pregnant" with ballot papers to deliver their burdens at polling booths, and preventing AG candidates from handing in their nomination papers within the legally stipulated period) the AG supporters responded with ferocious attacks on persons and property. History repeated

itself in 1983 when the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) turned a few marginal districts into free-fire zones. The systematic devaluation of the ballot box was indeed a fore-runner to the collapse of civil society and wanton destruction of life and property in countries such as Liberia, and Somalia.

Training Implications

Not all the weaknesses in the electoral process can be rectified by training. In fact, short of a total cultural revolution, there is little that can be done to promote the cause of free and fair elections in some African countries.

While recognizing the limitations of training in promoting electoral reform, it may still be argued that a well-conceived training programme promises immense benefits. First, it can support on-going efforts at enhancing the general level of political education in each country. At least, training sessions targeted at representatives or officials of political parties may have multiplier effects as the trainees pass down to party supporters the lessons learnt during formal, class-room presentations, and as a result of informal interactions with fellow participants.

The technical and managerial aspects of electioneering are also amenable to didactic interventions. In particular, the process of election planning and management suggests certain common and recurring elements which can be closely examined and "packaged" as training and performance improvement programmes. The next

section focuses on the objectives, type, duration, and methodology of some of the major training programmes in electoral administration.

III. TRAINING IN ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

Training Objectives

Taking into account the preceding analysis of the problems and priorities of electoral administration, we may wish to consider the design and implementation of a training programme in electoral administration with the following objectives:

- (i) the dissemination of knowledge on the electoral law and the electoral process;
- (ii) the development of professional skills and attitudes capable of promoting high standards of performance in the management of the electoral process and an increasingly turbulent environment;
- (iii) the introduction of programme participants to comparative experiences in electoral administration and crisis management;
- (iv) the strengthening of institutions and practices essential to the conduct of free, fair, and peaceful political competition.

Scope and Types of Training

A training programme in electoral administration can only be effective if it is comprehensive in scope while meeting the specific needs of the various target groups. Again, bearing in mind the "ecology" of electoral administration in Africa (as discussed in the preceding sections) it is advisable to develop the following types of programmes:

- (i) Workshop on the Electoral Law and the Electoral Process (for the staff of the electoral agency, and representatives of political parties, the press and watch-dog organizations, as well as for interested party candidates);
- (ii) In-house Seminar on Electoral Administration and Management (for the chief executive of electoral agency and the principal staff);
- (iii) Workshop on Election Planning, Logistics, and Operations Management (for those directly concerned with the planning and management of elections);
- (iv) Training Courses for Miscellaneous Election Personnel (Electoral, Presiding and Returning Officers; Polling and Counting Clerks; Polling Orderlies).

Structure, Content and Duration of Training Programmes

It is premature to list all the topics that ought to be covered by each training programme. What we can do in the meantime is to provide a general idea of the issues which need to be addressed by each programme.

Workshop on the Electoral Law and Electoral Process

As indicated earlier, this workshop is designed for the staff of the electoral administration agency, representatives of rival political parties, the press and watch-dog organizations. Candidates who wish to enhance their personal knowledge of the electoral law and the electoral process may also be allowed to participate.

The workshops should, as far as possible be organized at different locations to enable many persons to participate. Each workshop should be so structured that formal class-room presentations are followed by syndicate group discussions, and practical case studies.

Among the topics which should be closely examined at the one-week workshop are:

- The current electoral law and subsidiary legislation and annexes (if any);
- Administrative instructions and regulations issued by electoral agency;

- The do's and don'ts for political parties and election candidates;
- Procedure for the registration of voters;
- Procedure for the nomination of candidates and filing of nomination papers (including how to complete, authenticate, sign and stamp nomination papers);
- Overcoming obstacles to the filing of nomination papers;
- Techniques of rigging and how to pre-empt them;
- Free elections and national prestige and development: role of the individual citizen.

In-house Seminar on Electoral Administration

This is a top management seminar which seeks to sensitize the participants (chief electoral officer, heads of department, and other principal staff) to the problems and priorities in the conduct of elections. It is expected to last between 1 and 2 days. The topics to discuss include:

- (i) Loopholes in the electoral law (if any);
- (ii) The configuration of political forces and trends in their behaviour and/or pronouncements;
- (iii) Budgeting for various categories of elections;

- (iv) Miscellaneous policy and managerial issues;
- (v) Assessment of the capacity and "combat-readiness" of the various departments of the electoral agency.

Workshop on Election Planning and Management

In contrast to the top management seminar which concentrates on policy issues, the workshop on election planning, logistics, and operations management is expected to be organized between 3 and 6 months before the conduct of each specific election. The participants at the workshops are expected to be precisely those senior managers who would be responsible for the successful conduct of the election. The topics will include:

- Planning the electoral process (anticipating everything that could possibly go wrong, and mapping out a strategy of how to make it go right);
- Logistics (sequencing and co-ordination of activities; transportation and routing plan; modelling of inventory and supply lines; war games or application of simulation and game theoretical techniques);
- Management (establishment of task forces to monitor decisions and impact of decisions).

A duration of 1 to 2 weeks is about right for a workshop of this nature.

Training Courses for Other Electoral Personnel

In addition to the seminars and workshops listed above, it is necessary to design tailor-made programmes for the following categories of staff:

- (a) Electoral officers and assistants;
- (b) Presiding officers and assistants;
- (c) Returning officers;
- (d) Polling clerks;
- (e) Counting clerks;
- (f) Polling orderlies.

Each training course should focus on the schedule of duties of each cadre of staff, and on how to carry out the duties without compromising the interest of the agency or involving it in prolonged litigations. The legal and political consequences of each decision taken by any employee should be clearly highlighted. Previous cases and court rulings should be part of the background (reading) material at every training course.

Methodology

While the formal lecture method is useful in imparting general knowledge, the practical lessons which participants are expected to imbibe on these training programmes can best be transmitted through a combination of the didactic and andragogic techniques. To this extent, it is necessary to make extensive use of case studies, group discussions, and audio-visual devices.

Some of the training programmes (especially the workshops on electoral law and electoral process; planning, logistics and operations management, and the training courses for election personnel) will benefit immensely from the introduction of simulation and gaming models.

It is also necessary to stress the need to select the instructional staff with great care. While not under-rating the contribution of theory to practice (as a matter of fact, each training programme will be the better for it if given a theoretical focus) the role of experienced electoral administrators should be underscored. Apart from Ahmadu Kurfi who has written a book on the subject and whose vast experience will be an asset to the programme in electoral administration, administrators with a good track record in the conduct of elections are to be found in countries such as Botswana, The Gambia, Benin Republic, Zambia, Ghana, Mauritius, and Congo Brazzaville. AAPAM should compile a list of such persons and, apart from recruiting them as resource persons on electoral training programmes, encourage them to produce instructional material on the subject (of electoral administration).

Evaluation of Training Programmes

Evaluating the training programmes in electoral administration should not pose serious problems. The conclusion of an election provides an invaluable opportunity for the programme participants and some of the resource persons to carry out a critical assessment of the impact of the training programmes.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

As an initial effort, we cannot cover the subject of electoral administration as effectively as it (the subject) deserves. More or less the same thing can be said of the training implications of electoral administration.

However, if this modest beginning is built upon through a sustained programme of research and publications, we are likely to move closer towards finding a solution to the problems of electoral administration. Without prejudice to what subsequent research endeavours will reveal, it suggested that we focus attention on the environmental factors which distort or frustrate the efforts towards free and fair elections. How to respond to these factors should also be accorded priority attention.

From the point of view of training, the responses will appear to lie partly in sensitizing the entire public to the demands and obligations of representative government, and partly in strengthening the institutional capacity and "combat-readiness" of electoral administration agencies.

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