

THE
CARTER CENTER



**The Carter Center
International Election Observation Mission to Côte d'Ivoire
Report #2**

**Observation of Identification and Voter Registration
May 8, 2009**

Framework of the Mission

A transparent and democratic election is an essential part of the peace and reconciliation process in Cote d'Ivoire as outlined in the 2007 Ouagadougou Political Accord and its complementary accords.

Following an invitation from the Ivorian authorities, The Carter Center launched an international election observation mission in November 2008. The objective of the mission is twofold: to help reinforce confidence in the electoral process and to support free, fair, and transparent elections in Cote d'Ivoire. The Center's election observation is conducted in a non-partisan and professional manner, in conformity with Cote d'Ivoire's national laws and the international standards described in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

Observation Methodology

In November 2008, the Center deployed three teams of international observers to assess the identification and voter registration process. A report published on Dec. 22, 2008 summarizing the findings of the first phase of deployment was distributed to national authorities, political parties, to representatives of the international community, and posted on the Center's Web site www.cartercenter.org.

Three teams of observers were re-deployed from Feb. 15 to March 30, 2009, principally to rural areas, including:

Lakota, Gagnoa, Soubré, San Pedro
Duékoué, Guiglo, Toulepleu, Danané, Man, Biankouma, Touba, Odienné
Daloa, Séguéla
Agboville, Akoupé
Aboisso, Abengourou, Agnibilekrou, Tanda, Bondoukou, Bouna
Yamoussoukro, Bouaké

Work was often interrupted for two or three days as teams and equipment were redeployed from one collection center to the next.

Some collection centers were “relocated” or opened in a single location with only one technical team rather than as initially planned at several locations in various villages.

In some cases, administrative restructuring created new sub-regions and administrative departments *after* the division of electoral constituencies by the CEI. The allocation of human and material resources had to be adjusted to fit this restructuring, adding to the delayed opening of certain centers.

In some villages, the opening of the collection center was delayed at the request of local authorities because most eligible people did not have the required documentation to register.

Carter Center observers reported that in a limited number of villages, mainly in the west of Cote d’Ivoire, village chiefs opposed the opening

At the launch of operations in certain administrative departments, an inadequate number of INS and ONI staff was recruited. This situation delayed deployment of several teams to field sites as they waited for their full team complement to be appointed.

The reduced number of INS supervisors was particularly problematic during the sub-prefectural deployment because the INS computer had to be reconfigured for the opening of each collection center.

In most of the areas visited, late salary payment for agents resulted in repeated work stoppages and even the confiscation of the equipment and material by the staff. At times

The agents at the collection centers generally proved to be informed about the official procedures for the identification and registration process. Nonetheless, as mentioned in the Center's first report, there continued to be a certain lack of standardization for verifying the validity of documents. This observation concerns two aspects of the verification of documents:

First, agents needed to confirm that the monetary value of the official stamp and the date the document was created corresponded.

Second, they had to check the consistency of all dates on the document (e.g. the year of the register, the date the birth was registered, and the date of birth) and match the birth certificate's number with the date the birth was registered.

It appears that the lack of standardization was due to the fact that some agents received complementary instructions from their superiors while others did not. The understanding of the procedures also varied depending on the initial training of the agents. As a result, it was difficult for the Center's observers to determine if any irregular admission or rejection of certain citizens was intentional or not. That said, some limited cases of irregular rejections and registration were observed. Additionally, some petitioners who received documentation through the mobile court proceedings of 2008 were pressed by collection center teams to produce an official copy of their birth certificate although the mobile court-issued document was supposed to be valid to register.

Collection centers were not always established at the predetermined location planned by the CEI. Sometimes they were set up inside a private residence, such as that of the village chief or an inhabitant in the village. These changes were justified for various reasons:

The predetermined location was considered inappropriate because it was too small or derelict, or because the initial location was inside a school where classes were being held. The village chief provided equipment such as generators to the technical teams and in doing so asked that the set up take place wherever the generator happened to be located. Local individuals offered the use of a site that already had electricity installed, thus avoiding the need to a generator and fuel.

The local CEI was not always informed in good time of these changes. When informed of such changes, some local commissioners objected, arguing that the collection center location (which would also serve as the polling station in the future) must be a public space rather than a private one. This principle was ignored at times because the technical team lacked the means to carry out the proceedings without the assistance of certain local actors who agreed to provide this sort of assistance. Some agents remarked to observers, "How can you go against the will of someone who provides his own generator and fuel, who also provides meals for the team and a place to sleep, and all without asking for any monetary compensation?"

5. Supervisory and Monitoring Mechanism

The National Commission for the Supervision of Identification (CNSI) was in charge of supervision and monitoring of identification with the support of the Local Commission for the Supervision of Identification (CLSI) and the additional support of other agents hired for this purpose. Altogether it seems that the CLSI and their agents were able to operate at the communal level and/or in the central towns of the sub-prefecture despite supervision being visibly weaker in rural areas. The level of supervision decreased in rural towns as the

operation continued, mainly due to the inability to guarantee that the agents would indeed be paid for their work. According to observers, petitioners presented only a very limited number of complaints to CLSI agents.

6. Presence of Observers and Political Party Representatives

Few Ivorian civil society organizations were involved in the observation of the identification and voter registration operation. Two factors appear to explain the low number of organizations playing a role at this stage in the electoral process: first, the lack of financial means necessary to observe the process in a professional manner over the long term (compared to shorter term observation of election day), and second, some organizations with the means to deploy observers were unable to obtain the necessary authorization from the CEI despite their multiple requests since the beginning of the operation.

Several political parties deployed party witnesses to collection centers throughout the country, including rural areas, to observe the operations and to encourage their members and supporters to participate in the identification and voter registration. They also helped people to acquire the documentation they needed to register, and in some cases paid for the cost of doing so. At the same time, it also appeared that political parties were engaged in informal surveillance to block those individuals they deemed ineligible for registration for whatever reason.

7. Other Related Factors

Several other factors affected the registration process, including:

- The acquisition of documents required for registration
- The need for photocopies of documents
- Accessibility of the collection centers
- Public awareness of the identification and voter registration process

As collection centers opened in rural areas, a significant number of petitioners were unable to register because:

- The documents they provided were often in such poor condition (worn, illegible, etc) that they could not be accepted in the registration process. Thus, petitioners needed to request new copies of official documents from local government authorities.
- There is still a portion of the Ivorian population that has never been registered officially, particularly in the most remote, rural areas that were never visited by the mobile courts.

Petitioners also had to contend with several bureaucratic and other hurdles, often not of their own making:

- Congestion at local government offices overwhelmed by the high number of requests for documents.
- The long distance from many villages to the government office responsible for generating the required papers.
- The late redeployment of mobile courts in th

Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), even described the level of fraud as “massive.” However, the Center has not seen evidence to support these claims. Carter Center observers did learn of a limited number of proven cases of fraud that were subject to legal proceedings. Instances of fraud involving false civil registry documents revealed the existence of forgery networks that were subsequently shut down and those involved were condemned. There were also some cases of fraud involving petitioners of foreign origin (usually involving nationals of ECOWAS countries) who also faced legal proceedings.

It is important to remember that the official procedures call for the application of several security measures and cross-checks to rule out irregular registrations and other errors prior to the publication of a provisional voter roll. Once the list is published, there will be an additional period for public verification and requests for corrections.

Conclusions

The shortcomings noted by The Carter Center in the first phase of observer deployment included financial constraints and delays in disbursement, logistical deficiencies, and coordination and communication problems between the various actors in the operation. These problems persisted during the second phase of Carter Center observation and appear to have worsened as the operation reached rural areas. Inadequate or poor planning, last-minute decisions, and changes in the face of mounting logistical problems further undermined the efficient delivery of the operation.

The lack of material means available to the local CEI constituted a weakness in the administration of the identification and voter registration operation. In such circumstances, it was often difficult for the local CEI to establish their authority and ensure an adequate follow-up of an important phase of the electoral process.

The pace of operations in rural areas equally suffered because of the added burden posed to rural residents seeking the necessary documents to get registered (e.g. the distance needed to travel to reach the government office or the local court where such documents are obtained as well as the unavailability of photocopy machines). It seemed that rural residents were slow to respond or unprepared for the arrival of the technical teams because of the very limited public awareness campaign in rural areas that explained the conditions required to participate. Additionally, a number of rejections at the collection centers were due to worn or illegible identity documents.

Except for a few incidents, the voter registration process was carried out in a peaceful atmosphere throughout the rural areas. It is important to underline that the population itself assisted the operation, not only providing food and shelter to the technical teams but also

Keeping in mind the verification procedures that must be applied at the next stage of the process, the Center's observations do not call into question the credibility and integrity of voter registration operation at this stage.

The Center will continue to observe the follow up stages of the registration process, including the official procedures that will cross-check the data from collection centers and eliminate invalid or multiple registrations. As noted above, a parallel system of departmental data coordination and transmission to the central level was to have operated but this important process was never implemented. These and other delays experienced thus far should be taken into consideration if the CEI is to establish a credible voter register and a realistic electoral