

THE
CARTER CENTER

mountain districts (Darchula, Dolakha, Rasuwa, Sankhuwasabha, Sindhupalchok, Solukhumbu and Taplejung). The field teams directly observed the voter registration process in 28 districts and undertook research by telephone in 12 districts. LTO teams⁹ collected findings about voter awareness and participation, voter registration management, and political party participation, and also conducted direct observation at 52 voter registration places. In April 2011, the Carter Center released its first interim statement on the voter registration process.

During the time at the district and VDC level, LTOs gathered both qualitative and quantitative information about the voter registration process through interviews and direct observation. In addition to data collected from ECN officials regarding enumeration and registration turnout figures, observers conducted interviews with at least 10 cit

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Estimated Max. No. of Registrants	Registration Target Mid- July 2011
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3. VOTER ELIGIBILITY

eligible citizens. Moreover, the ECN should also ensure that all registration staff are made aware of changes in policy so that policies can be applied uniformly and fairly.

4. CONTINUOUS REGISTRATION

Individuals who were not able to register during th

of an internal communications infrastructure, i.e., networking of computers for the real-time transfer

d. Voter Participation

Based on interviews conducted by Carter Center observers,²⁷ the majority of citizens said that they had either registered or intended to register to vote. Of 100 persons interviewed at random, 81 had either registered to vote or planned to register in the coming days; 15 persons interviewed were deemed ineligible because they did not possess citizenship certificates; and four persons were deemed eligible, but did not intend to register. Among the 15 individuals who did not possess citizenship certificates, nine expressed an intention to obtain them soon in order to register to vote. Of the remaining six who did not plan to obtain them four were young females who did not “have the time” or didn’t see it as a priority, one was a young mother who could not make the trip to the district headquarters with her young baby, and one was an elderly woman who was unable to make the three-hour trip on foot to the district headquarters. Of the four individuals who were deemed eligible but did not intend to register, three said the registration place was too far and one man said he was busy with religious rituals and did not have time.

7. POLITICAL PARTY AND CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION

Similar to the bridging phase, the Carter Center has found political party participation during the nationwide phase of the voter registration process to be very weak. It is understood that political parties are holding internal meetings to raise awareness within their ranks about the voter registration process; however, there are few examples of political parties conducting public activities or supporting registration. Among 100 persons interviewed by observers, only four said that they had heard about the voter registration process via a political party interaction. Observers reported the presence of party cadres at a small number of registration places although it was unclear whether these individuals were deployed by the party or had come to the registration place at their own initiative. Party cadres interviewed generally stated they were present to help registration staff, not to observe the process.²⁸

In all districts visited, DEOs have conducted meetings with political parties, civil society organizations and journalists to keep them informed about the voter registration process. As a means of promoting greater political and civic participation in the process, the ECN has been working to establish Local Coordination Committees (LCC) at the district and VDC levels composed of election officials, government officials, political parties, civil society organizations, and respected local individuals. Observers found LCCs had been formed in some districts visited and, in several locations participants regarded them as positive mechanisms to support the voter registration process. For example, in one VDC, the LCC was found to be dividing up voter education responsibilities among committee participants. However, in many districts visited, the LCC appeared to struggle to engage the broad range of stakeholders hoped for, and some participants were unclear on its intended role.

8. EXHIBITIONS & CHALLENGES

After the aggregation and cleaning of voter registration data, a provisional voters’ list is expected to be compiled and presented for an exhibitions and challenges period. In its first interim report, the Carter Center noted that the ECN did not have plans or procedures for an exhibitions and challenges period and recommended that the Commission ensure a plan is defined for implementation following the end of the voter registration exercise. As field data collection may soon draw to a close, the ECN should develop a plan that includes a detailed timeline and procedures for the distribution of a provisional voters’ list to political parties for review, posting of the list in accessible locations for public scrutiny, filing of claims and objections related to registrants and registrant details, adjudicating related claims and objections, correcting or recapturing of voter details, and responding

²⁷ Not based on a scientific sample. Interview findings are strictly illustrative and cannot be generalized or considered representative of the country as a whole.

²⁸ In Myagdi, observers found party cadres helping to manage queues and find enumeration forms at registration places while, in Surkhet, party cadres present at a registration place were not seemingly directed by the party to observe the process and objected to the term “agents,” describing their role at the registration place as “facilitative” and “supportive.”

to challenges. The Carter Center encourages the EC

VI. Conclusion & Recommendations

The Carter Center commends the positive efforts undertaken by the ECN thus far to ensure that all Nepalis who wish to register to vote are provided with the opportunity to do so. Since the outset of the voter registration process, the Commission has faced many challenges – political, legal, and administrative – but has continually demonstrated flexibility and good will as the registration process has gone forward. The Center recognizes the hard work and dedication of all ECN officials it has encountered and congratulates the ECN on its successful registration of nearly eight million Nepali citizens. The Carter Center encourages the Commission to build on its positive efforts to date and to take further steps to promote greater fairness, access and opportunity for all Nepalis who wish to register.

The following recommendations to strengthen the process are offered in the spirit of cooperation and respect, and with the hope they will provide useful discussion points for future action:

The Election Commission of Nepal should:

Extend its ongoing voter registration exercise as necessary to ensure voter registration is conducted in all locations as planned. It appears the ECN will not be able to complete field-level registration in all locations as planned due to delays and party obstructions, both ceased and ongoing. The ECN should make provisions to conduct registration in all municipalities and VDCs to ensure that all individuals are provided with an opportunity to register in their home locations. This includes the re-opening of voter registration places wherever possible in locations that were affected by obstructions in previous phases.

Conduct a “missed” voter registration exercise to reach individuals who have missed registration to date. The Carter Center commends the ECN for affording an increased opportunity for citizens to register via out-of-district registration, but believes that greater efforts are required to reach citizens who have thus far not registered for whatever reason. It is understood that the ECN is

sustain its high-level dialogue to bring an end to ongoing Madhesi party obstructions in several Tarai districts where registration efforts have been sidetracked or halted and to prevent further obstructions.

Continue lobbying the government to make effective arrangements to issue citizenship certificates to all eligible citizens. The Carter Center encourages the ECN to sustain its advocacy efforts to encourage the MoHA to abide by the February 2011 Supreme Court decision which mandated that the government make effective arrangements for the issuance of citizenship certificates to all eligible Nepali citizens. The Center has found that the citizenship certificate issue is a nationwide issue, not limited to any one region or to a particular ethnicity or gender. Positively, individuals are increasingly applying for citizenship certificates. However, it is difficult to assess the extent to which these individually-initiated efforts are sufficient to resolve the issue. The Center is particularly concerned that individuals who are living in remote areas, or who are elderly, infirm, or otherwise marginalized, may be left out of the voter registration process unless additional state-initiated efforts such as mobile distribution teams are undertaken.

Establish continuous registration locations outside district headquarters to provide increased access to potential voters. Across districts visited, observers have reported that there has been a modest increase in the number of citizens who are registering via continuous registration. While the increase in turnout is positive, at the rates reported by DEO staff continuous registration alone appears to be insufficient to allow the ECN to reach its mid-July 2011 target and, in the longer term, the estimated number of possible registrants. In addition to conducting a “missed” registration exercise, the Center believes that the establishment of continuous registration locations in municipalities and clusters of VDCs outside the district headquarters would afford appropriate access and opportunity for potential voters.

