



OPEN SOCIETY INITIATIVE FOR WEST AFRICA

MAKING ELECTIONS COUNT: A GUIDE TO SETTING UP A CIVIL SOCIETY ELECTION SITUATION ROOM

Advocacy Office

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OSIWA

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Making Elections Count:

A Guide to Setting up a Civil Society Election Situation Room

Preface:

The Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) is committed to promoting strong governance institutions, processes and structures that are transparent, accountable and intolerant of impunity. Further to this is our focus on improving the capacity of civil society organisations and increased participation of citizens in decision making process. This Guide falls under the above broad objectives.

Elections are central to the promotion of democracy within the sub-region and this Guide is derived from OSIWA's experience working with partners in engaging election processes in Nigeria, Liberia and Senegal using the Situation Room model. This Guide is aimed at presenting logically the steps and key

points in creating a Situation Room for elections. It offers opportunity for better understanding of the intricacies of engaging elections in the West African sub region..

OSIWA wishes to thank partners, grantees and collaborators whose experiences help to shape the concept of the Situation Room. It is hoped that this Guide will add value to the work of election engagement within Africa and in emerging democracies.

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Introduction:

This Guide is published by OSIWA to share the lessons from efforts to create a new model for civil society engagement with elections in the West Africa region. The “election situation room”, named by analogy with a wartime “situation room” established to ensure coordination between all the armed forces and civilian authorities conducting a war, aims to ensure that civil society efforts to ensure free and fair elections are coordinated and as effective as possible. In fragile or emerging democracies, elections are triggers for, or are in themselves emergencies. Civil society is well placed to diagnose, anticipate, prepare for and seek to ensure effective action to prevent or limit major fraud, or events capable of triggering a descent into violence. But too often, civil society groups involved in monitoring elections find themselves behind the events, limited to reporting on breaches of election rules after the fact, uncoordinated in the event of a crisis, or in the worst cases fighting over resources. The Situation Room model, piloted with some success in three highly contentious elections in Nigeria, Liberia and Senegal, aims to bring civil society groups together for the period of the election, sharing information and resources, anticipating problems, and responding rapidly when they occur.

The role of civil society in ensuring the success of election is partly shaped by the environment in which they are operating and by the traditional nature of their intervention, which is usually observation and reporting after the fact. Traditional election observation has contributed to the improved quality of election by providing opportunity for peer review and learning; putting the election process under the spotlight, thereby reducing the chances of impunity; and providing evidence-based documentation of elections.

However, these modes of intervention have limitations. Election observation documents events in the election and presents a report at the end of the elections with recommendations on how to improve the electoral process. It is not designed to react to real time challenges of the election process. The Situation Room model, by contrast, provides a platform for rapid response; it is designed to ensure that beyond observation, civil society is able to play a greater role in crisis management, early warning and constructive engagement of the process to ensure a credible election.

This Guide aims to:

- Describe the situation room model and its structures
- Give suggestions on how to engage the election process most effectively
- Highlight likely challenges for civil society in seeking to replicate it
- Share examples from Nigeria, Liberia and Senegal, where this model has been piloted

This Guide is illustrative, not prescriptive, and is open for adaptation to suit local needs.

The Guide is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides background on how the situation room model evolved. Chapter 2 presents an introduction to the concept of Election Situation Room. It outlines what should be the aim of the Situation Room and the structure the Situation Room should have. Chapter 3 deals with what needs to be done in starting up an Election Situation Room; Chapter 4 discusses engaging the election process; and Chapter 5, what needs to be done after the election.

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Chapter 1: How the Situation Room model evolved

The Situation Room model of election engagement has been implemented in three countries in 2011 and early 2012, namely Nigeria, Liberia and Senegal. The model was pioneered in Nigeria, in response to a realisation of the need to enhance civil society coordination and ensure constructive and proactive engagement of the election process. The success of this engagement in Nigeria informed the replication of this model in Liberia and Senegal.

Nigeria

The Situation Room model was implemented in Nigeria, with the support - of OSIWA, leveraging its ability as a funder to bring together many civil society groups under one umbrella. A broad coalition of civil society groups collaborated during the April 2011 general elections (legislative and presidential, national and state-level), hosted by the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), to provide a more effective response to the threat of fraud and violence.

The Nigerian election was a critical one. The 2007 general elections had been adjudged as Nigeria's worst, dealing nearly irreparable damage to the credibility of Nigeria's electoral process. The appointment of new head of the Independent National Election Commission, however, gave hope that the 2011 vote could be cleaner. There was a sense that this was the last chance for Nigeria to show it could mount a clean election.

Nigeria has a sophisticated civil society community peopled by the best brains and seasoned activists. However, these enormous resources were being

applied in various directions without any proper coordination and synergy. The Election Situation Room brought these groups together; maximised the assets for information gathering and provided a unified platform for analysis and intervention. Each group brought a particular asset to the Situation Room ranging from grassroots outreach, to access to government, internet skills, or access to security structures. By pooling resources together, the Situation Room was able to punch well above its weight. It provided:

- A platform for immediate sharing of information and recommendations among civil society groups and with others..
- Credible, real-time analyses that became some of the most sought-after election information during and after polls.
- Objective insights into the challenges of the election management body, helping to distinguish between unavoidable logistical challenges and possibility of fraud.
- Rapid response to emergencies – especially in the crisis situation that developed after the presidential election, as violence broke out in protest at the result. The Situation Room was a highly effective mechanism for mobilizing intervention from key stakeholders and respected personalities in Nigeria.
- A platform for engaging with official structures in a constructive manner. The Situation Room maintained a cordial relationship with government and the election management body throughout the election period.



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The positive impact of the Situation Room in Nigeria was recognised by a broad spectrum of policy makers and the international community. During the course of elections, the Situation Room had periodic meetings with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to be briefed on activities of INEC and to offer recommendations to the election management body. This relationship was premised on the quality of work the Situation Room was able to do which INEC leadership found invaluable. The international press quoted and reported the activities of the Situation Room, and statements from other governments, including the United States, made use of the information from the Situation Room. The coalition of groups that ran the project have received correspondence from government officials within and outside Nigeria commending the work of the Situation Room and emphasising their reliance on its information.

Liberia

The success of the Nigeria experience informed the establishment of the Situation Room during the Liberian general election later in 2011, dubbed the Election Coordinating Committee (ECC). The legislative and presidential elections were the first to be conducted by National Electoral Commission (NEC) since the end of the civil war. They were a defining moment for the process of democratisation in the country.

The ECC was composed of two pro-democracy and peace building coalitions: the Civil Society Organisations National Committee for Election Monitors (CSO-NEC) and the National Coalition for

Election Monitors (NACEM). It was formed to promote coordination amongst civil society groups working on the elections. It represented a broad coalition of civil society groups working around Liberia. The coordinating committee was made up of veteran activists who brought to the table a deep understanding of the Liberian political landscape and access to government and other stakeholders. The ECC had observers from its member organisations in over 90percent of the polling stations around the country, and established productive relationships with other groups, in order to supplement information from the field and boost the authenticity of its information. It provided periodic analysis, early warning and rapid response to emergencies. In the crisis that followed the presidential elections, the ECC was instrumental in rallying elder statesmen, international organisations and the diplomatic community to provide a space for dialogue. It was constantly updating the public on its perceptions about the elections, which helped in providing a clearer picture of events that differed from the politically tainted assessments coming from political parties. It provided a credible platform for civil society to play a stabilizing role in what was arguably one of the most disturbing political moments since the end of the civil war. The immediate nature of the ECC response was invaluable.

Senegal

In February 2012, OSIWA supported a project to establish a Situation Room for the Senegalese presidential elections. The Situation Room was an observatory for pre-election, election and post-election events with special focus on electoral violence. The

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specific objectives of the ‘Situation Room’ were to collect relevant information and to be able to alert appropriate authorities to respond rapidly as needed. The Situation Room was set up in collaboration with the Réseau des Observateurs Citoyens (RESOCIT), bringing together the Collectif des Organisations de la Société Civile pour les Elections (COSCE) and the Gorée Institute. COSCE was the main coordinator of national election observation, with a total of 1500 observers funded by USAID (1000), OSIWA (500), and 50 journalists (received support from USAID), while the Gorée Institute also had 50 observers funded by European Union and 140 violence monitors funded jointly by OSIWA and IFES. Some 220 monitors of political/electoral corruption were also part of the Situation Room.

The strategic leadership was composed of a small group of politically non-partisan personalities from Senegalese civil society organizations, who understood the electoral process and had the strong and credible voices needed to engage high-level government authorities in the electoral process. Their role consisted in analyzing the information gathered from the ground and trying to mobilize appropriate responses from relevant state authorities, the electoral management body, political leaders, and others. Both the election management body and the President-elect, MackySall, visited the Situation Room and commended the work of the group.



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Chapter 2: The basics

What is a Civil Society Election Situation Room?

The Civil Society Election Situation Room is designed as a platform for information sharing amongst civil society groups working on elections to enhance collaboration, proactive advocacy and rapid response to crises associated with an electoral process. It is complementary to traditional election observation. A coordinating platform of civil society representatives meets periodically during the period of an election or set of elections to analyse information coming from the field, provide early warnings of problems, and immediate recommendations to ensure the credibility and success of the electoral process. Perhaps the most important characteristic of the Situation Room is the ability to provide rapid civil society response to election-related emergencies, and not just commentary on them after the fact.

The election Situation Room model allows organisations within the platform to continue with their different election work. Each group brings information and networks from the field, which form the bases of the Situation Room analysis and advocacy. The diverse composition of its membership combines varied information sources, analysis, networking and outreach skills, to ensure an objective and balanced output, and enhance the quality and authority of a civil society voice.

What is an Election Situation Room?

1. It is a coordination platform for civil society groups working on a particular election.
2. It combines election observation with real time analysis and engagement.
3. It has a rapid response mechanism for emergencies.

Aims of the election Situation Room

The election Situation Room has the following aims and objectives:

1. Improving the electoral process/ensuring the votes count: The overall objective of the Situation Room is to improve the quality of the electoral process and ensure that votes count. The Situation Room is focused on helping government and the election

management body deliver free, fair and credible elections. In crisis situation, the question the Situation Room asks is this: What can be done - both in advance and when things start going wrong - to ensure that the process is kept credible and reflects the will of the people?

2. Collaboration amongst civil society groups: Given the enormous challenges that elections pose, it is important that civil society groups work together. Coalitions often need to invest time and attention to establishing effective cooperation. The Situation Room aims to provide a collaborative platform that allows for individual identities. It is a hybrid coalition, which both allows groups to pursue their own election work, and assumes joint effort to engage government. It aims to provide a melting pot of ideas and capabilities.
3. Advance planning: The Situation Room is a forum for advance planning and scenario building. It aims to provide a platform for civil society groups to strategise and plan on election engagement. Through its diverse membership, the Situation Room is able to provide early warning of potential problems, thereby giving government and civil society opportunity and background information to prepare for eventualities.
4. Evidence-based analysis: The Situation Room is a forum for evidence-based analysis. It aims to utilize the resources/information from the field through its members to provide analysis that will aid the election process. With the network of observers available to its members, the Situation Room's objective is to utilize these information assets, ensure credibility of information available to it, provide recommendations, options and analysis based on the information, and mobilise networks to ensure that there is an effective policy or operational response based on these options.
5. Rapid response: The greatest attribute of the Situation Room is the capacity for rapid response to emergencies that affect the election process. As expectations of elections have grown in Africa, outrage when incumbents are perceived to be trying to fix the results has also increased. This is in many ways a positive development, but the

outcome can be expensive in the lives of citizens and the safety and security of those caught up in post-election violence. Preventing the problems that provoke violence through proactive and real time engagement saves society from the cost of violence and the reactive responses, which in emerging democracies can often do little to improve the situation.

6. Constructive engagement of other actors: The Situation Room aims to be a credible platform for engagement of the election management body, government, media, general public and other stakeholders on the elections. Given its structure and resources, it brings to the table an appreciable capital based on the credibility of its members. Its diverse composition enables a balanced approach that ensures objectivity.

Structure of the Situation Room

The Election Situation Room has the following structure:

1. A Coordination Committee: This is the decision-making body of the Situation Room. It should comprise representatives of the various NGOs who have come together to be part of the Situation Room. Representatives of these groups should be senior-level staff who have authority to make commitments on behalf of their various groups. The

Functions of the Secretariat include:

- Putting out information for meetings
- Collation of information from the field
- Interface with election observers
- Documentation

Coordination mechanism could also be the main platform for analysis. The Committee may be capable of breaking into smaller thematic groups for more nimble burden-sharing. In some instances the Committee can also invite other experts to help enrich its deliberation processes.

2. Secretariat: The Situation Room will need a temporary secretariat. For practical reasons, a secretariat may be hosted by one of the coordinating groups. The work of the secretariat is to provide the necessary administrative support to the Situation Room. It is advisable that staff are hired for such specific roles. However in circumstances where this is not possible, participating groups can agree on a formula for seconding their existing staff to perform such functions. The primary factor here is that such staff must be dedicated to the Situation Room operations full-time.
3. Access to election information: Information from the field is the main foundation of the activities of the Situation Room. Hence, it is imperative that the Situation Room should have access to credible information from the field. Election observers need not necessarily be deployed by the election Situation Room itself, but individual member organisations should agree to provide access to their election observers to help the information gathering. The Situation Room can also work out an arrangement with non-members who have access to information from the fields.

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Chapter 3: Getting Started

1. Start early:

Just as in the planning of elections, establishing a Situation Room requires an early start. You need to build consensus around decisions on your engagement, budget, possible partners, and challenges. You need to plan and anticipate what crises might occur. By starting early, you will be better able to develop a solid network, identify your strengths and weaknesses, build the networks and identify the assets you need; also identify gaps that need addressing and begin to raise awareness on your presence and what you are about. That way you achieve early visibility.

What an early start permits:

Allows you ample time to plan properly.

Provides space and time for a relationship to develop between partners.

Allows you time to identify organisational challenges and fix them before the election.

Helps you in developing a proper pre-election analysis to strengthen your election engagement.

Helps you build a solid network and visibility

2. Appoint a facilitator – an individual or a host organisation.

There must be somebody or an organisation driving the process, otherwise there may be a lack of direction and loss of credibility. The facilitators of the process must also have convening authority and acceptability within the civil society community. The initiative for a Situation Room can come from any group, but when it comes to deciding who should host the platform; it must be a group that has capacity and credibility to drive such a process.

Example 1:

In Nigeria, the Situation Room did not start early, though there was already a virtual platform (email group) for engagement amongst civil society. During the election, it became clear that the Situation Room did not have as wide a network of information sources around the country as would have been desirable. This particular problem affected the ability of the Situation Room to test an Independent National Electoral Commission initiative on crisis reporting and result verification intended to help verify information and results coming from the field via returning officers. Had the Situation Room started earlier, it would have been able to identify and address this problem before the election.

3 Build a broad membership:

You cannot run a Situation Room without building a coalition or collaborating with a broad range of NGOs and civic actors. No matter how good an organisation is, it cannot take sole charge. The essence of the Situation Room is its collaborative model that allows for balance between diverse opinions. A Situation Room cannot be successful if a bunch of friends sit together and try to analyse the election. In fact, participants do not need to agree with each other. The important thing to keep in mind is that members' primary commitment is to make the election a success.

What a broad membership does for you:

It ensures objectivity

Allows for greater access to information

Enriches the debate and analysis

Improves credibility

Gives access to a much wider range of constituencies

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Its membership should be broadly composed, transcending ideological, sectarian status, gender, ethnic, racial, political and other identities. As much as possible, it should have a geographical spread enough to capture substantially the diverse interests and perceptions. The Situation Room need not be a coalition in the traditional sense, but it must include partners and contributors from a broad spectrum.

4. identify credible partners:

While it is important to have a broad group of civil society groups, it is equally important to ensure that partners/members are committed to ensuring the success of the election; are genuine NGOs and bring some particular value to the table. In the case of NGOs with questionable reputation or a reputation for not working well with others, such groups should be avoided. Organisations that are politically partisan should also be avoided to protect the integrity

The following groups were part of the Situation Room in Nigeria: Action Aid Nigeria, Alliance for Credible Election (ACE), Centre for Democracy and Development, Centre for Democratic Development Research and Training, African Centre for Leadership Strategy and Development (Centre LSD), CLEEN Foundation, Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Community Emergency Response Initiative (CERI), Community Life Project (CLP), Empowering Women for Excellence Initiative (EWEI), Enough is Enough, Forward Africa, Human Development and Care Centre, Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, JDPC/Caritas Nigeria, Next Generation Youth Initiative, Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Women Environment Programme, Women's Right to Education Program (WREP) and the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), chosen as host organisation, because of their convening power and experience in policy and legislative advocacy.

of the Situation Room. It is necessary that political infiltration be prevented. It is important to target groups with expertise, integrity and skills.

Example 2:

In identifying partners and members of the Situation Room during the 2011 elections in Nigeria, effort was made to ensure that membership had a geographical spread and was limited to organisations that had a credible record and expertise in particular areas. Such expertise complemented the work of the Situation Room. They were organisations focused on human rights, women's rights, anti-corruption, new media, faith-based projects; policy advocacy, and grassroots activism. Each brought a particular perspective to the work of the Situation Room..

5. Build relationships with the authorities responsible for election management:

This is very important. The focus of the Situation Room is to ensure that the elections are credible, not just to criticise the process. Hence, the Situation Room needs to cultivate a constructive relationship with the election management body and the government structures that have a role in election management, especially the security forces. Members of the Situation Room should be able to reach out to government or the police to flag an incident or provide early warning, and have the credibility to ensure that such a call is taken seriously.



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Example 3:

In Nigeria, the Situation Room was having meetings with the election management body on the eve of each stage of the election to review the level of preparedness and to get civil society perspectives on the election. This provided an opportunity for very frank exchanges. Members of the technical team of the election management body were sometimes part of the Situation Room deliberations helping to clarify points or bringing necessary information to help the analysis of the Situation Room. Criticisms of the elections were made firmly, but constructively.

6. Build relationships with political parties, and other institutions or individuals with the capacity to influence the process:

For the Situation Room to be successful, it needs to have the capacity to trigger a policy shift from officials or political actors. There could be instances where government or election management body may not be receptive in spite of the efforts from the Situation Room to reach out, or where the efforts of the election management body are being ignored by the politicians. In this kind of situation, the Situation Room can use interlocutors, such as respected retired politicians, faith leaders, or other leading figures to reach those who are blocking efforts to resolve a crisis. Alternatively, efforts can be made to reach out directly to individuals within political parties with the authority to influence party responses to problems with an election. In other circumstances, international observer missions or important development partners can be urged to put pressure on politicians or officials to change their attitude.

Example 4:

In Liberia during the 2011 general election, the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) refused to accept the result of the elections and there was fear of a breakdown of law and order. The leadership of the party was not very receptive of civil society engagement. The Situation Room reached out to elder statesmen, ECOWAS representatives and other members of the international community, to urge the leadership of the party to reconsider their stand.

7. Put effort into a communications strategy:

The Situation Room should have the capacity to reach a good percentage of the general public and a strategy for doing so. A communication strategy should identify partners in the media, and should involve the media in the planning phase of the Situation Room to help them understand exactly what the Situation Room is all about and also to create interest in its activities. Whilst engaging the mainstream media, it is also necessary to have a clear plan on how to use the online media to push out and receive information. Web portals, blogs, twitter and other social networks should be included in such plan. It is not just about creating such accounts, but also making arrangements on how information will be fed to them, as it is received by the Situation Room – and for creating rapid approval process to ensure that the information sent out is verified, and not just rumour.

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Chapter 4: Engaging the election process

In engaging the election process, there are three things to keep in mind: observe, analyse and respond. It sums up what you do in an election process.

Gathering information during the election

1. Working with election observers:

Observers are key assets in an election process. It is necessary to make arrangement for deployment of election observers ahead of election; work out and test the chosen means and protocol for information exchange between observers and the Situation Room, and also put in place troubleshooting mechanisms for situations where the established protocols fail. There is also a likelihood that events will not play out as planned, so contingency planning is very necessary. The Situation Room can arrange observers directly or through its partner organisations, but what is important is that in every instance, there is a clear reporting line and a back-up plan. Observers must be instructed on which information is important, so as not to flood the Situation Room with irrelevant information.

2. Develop other information sources:

To ensure that the Situation Room works with the widest possible range of information, it is important to have other information assets outside the observers. Observers may strictly follow their reporting template, which may not be comprehensive enough to cover every incident, or there may not be observers in certain

parts of the country. Such information gaps will have to be filled from other sources, and these should be sought out as soon as possible. Sources may include family, friends or trusted colleagues who live in those areas or have access to information in that area, though there must also be mechanisms to verify credibility, since receipt of partisan information could be damaging. The Situation Room will also need sources within government and the security forces, as well as the election management body. You are not employing spies, but you are maintaining avenues for information gathering. Sometimes, people working for government who are committed to democracy willingly give out information which ordinarily they cannot officially give out. The Situation Room needs to make it safe for whistleblowers to come forward.

Example 5:

During the supplementary gubernatorial election in Imo State Nigeria, held after the general elections were over, the Situation Room released its initial statement condemning the conduct of the elections in certain areas. Staff of the EMB and security agencies then came forward discreetly with information on what was going wrong and urged the Situation Room to go public with it. Such information helped the Situation Room to properly understand context and challenges faced at the election administration level and to properly plan interventions.



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Providing analysis

- 3 Analysis of elections and events around the election must be evidence-based: it is one thing to receive raw information, and another to analyse and put such information to good use. Situation and information analysis is fundamental to the work of the Situation Room. It is on the basis of such analysis that the Situation Room will identify the issues, decide its recommendations, identify what steps to take, who to engage and what other options are available to it. Hence, it is necessary that analyses are objective, based on verifiable evidence and accommodate a broad spectrum of ideas and views. Positions have to be vigorously debated. Where necessary, the Situation Room can invite non-members who can share ideas on specific issues.

Example 6:

During the 2011 elections in Liberia, the Situation Room in Liberia worked with colleagues from Nigeria who shared experiences on how their Situation Room operated and also contributed some comparative data to the situation analysis and response. In particular, colleagues from Nigeria provided comparative information that was used in designing the rapid response framework of the Liberia Situation Room.

Ensuring rapid response and suggesting solutions

- 4 The Situation Room's response to events must be prompt and constructive. This is not just a matter of providing commentaries. Depending on the development, a response might be a press release, a policy brief or the calling of a meeting with stakeholders. What determines the choice is the goal the Situation Room wants to achieve, and which pressure points might be the most relevant. The Situation Room can simultaneously hold advocacy meeting with government or the election management body, while taking the issue to the public through a press release or radio or television interviews. Most times these responses complement each other.
- 5 The Situation Room should plan ahead for likely problems. In engaging the elections process, the following stages of an election require particular attention:
 - (a) Election logistics: In most emerging democracies, this is problematic. There is always a disconnect between planning and actual execution; for example, materials may not arrive on time or there may be other flaws with the logistics

The Situation Room is not about criticising elections, but constructive engagement to make the process better.

ALWAYS PROVIDE ALTERNATIVES TO THE POLICIES YOU CRITICIZE

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arrangements. These gaps can mar the electoral process. It is important for the Situation Room to monitor this closely and to flag gaps wherever they exist. Getting information about the logistic arrangement is not always easy though; you may have to make extra effort to get concrete information.

Example 7:

In Nigeria, inadequate logistical preparation led to the postponement by one week of the legislative elections, which were already underway. That event negatively impacted the image of INEC and the faith of the people in the electoral process. The postponement came as a surprise to Situation Room members. Yet if they had followed INEC's preparations closely rather than taking the Commission's reassurances at face value, the Situation Room itself might have been calling for a postponement. Having caught up, however, the Situation Room rapidly consulted with INEC as events unfolded, and verified that the reasons for the postponement were valid. It issued an immediate statement to reassure the public, while also holding INEC to account for better management in future. Below are some excerpts from that statement:

"The Situation Room would like to draw the attention of all stakeholders to the potential problem this state of affairs has created. Firstly, the fact that in many states of the federation, sensitive materials are in the field; secondly, there are reports that in certain states of the federation that voting actually commenced before INEC announced the postponement. This clearly raises the possibility of electoral fraud through the printing of fake materials now that this material has been viewed by those with ulterior motives with respect to the election. This can create conditions that will negate the hope for free, fair and credible elections. Given what has now happened, it is important that, during the course of today, INEC briefs Nigerians on its plans to secure this sensitive voting material and ensure none of it falls into the wrong hands. Nigerian also need to be reassured that the materials already used can be replaced in time for Monday's voting."

(b) Collation Process: Voting in polling stations during elections is usually uneventful. The major challenge comes in the counting and collation of results. A lot can go wrong. When figures are invented or altered, it destroys the credibility of the whole election. The collation process was contentious both in Nigerian and Liberian elections. In Nigeria, the Situation Room saw collation as the weakest link in the election process. It is important for the Situation Room to be able to closely follow the collation of results at every stage of the process – thus through the night in most cases – and to flag irregularities. Collation of results is a very sensitive aspect of the election process and must be given every possible attention.

(c) Electoral violence: The Situation Room should estimate the chance of election-related violence and should have a contingency plan for how to react to it. The Situation Room should be able to predict possible flash-points during the election, have a framework for documenting violence and mechanism for rapid response targeted at both the general public and government – especially the security forces.

(d) Runoffs: Most run-off elections are contentious and sensitive. It is important for the Situation Room to plan adequately for a second-round scenario and deploy adequate resources to meet likely developments. In Liberia and Senegal, the Presidential elections went into a run-off and in



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Liberia in particular, the Situation Room played an active role in handling the crisis that arose out of a boycott by the main opposition party.

- 6 Provide alternatives: Sometimes government or policy makers do the wrong thing simply because they have not analysed or prepared appropriately. Be prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt and present effective arguments for why things should be done differently. If you spend all your energy condemning, your voice will likely blend in among other government bashing and may impair your ability to make any difference. This is why the composition of Situation Room needs to reflect diverse experiences and skills. It's not enough to identify problems. The Situation Room must have some proposals for how to address them.

Example 8:

- In the 2011 elections in Nigeria, Situation Room members, while engaging the election management body directly on some issues, also wrote opinion pieces for the print media, to put pressure on politicians to behave well, highlighting the election management body's power to cancel a poll result.
- On the issue of the power of the election management body to cancel returns from the field without reference to the court, the Situation Room commissioned legal analysis to support recommendations that the election management body should retain that power.
- Other responses included; press releases, TV appearances, periodic meetings with INEC and other stakeholders and public advocacy

Providing timely and reliable information to the media

- 1 Information dissemination: Situation Room analysis and media releases have to be widely distributed to broad range of audiences. You want the information to reach both policy makers and the general public. While you may want policy-makers to take a particular decision, you also want the general public to have a proper understanding of the issue, so that they can also put pressure on government. In some instances your advocacy may just be targeted at the public to help clear up some misconceptions. In this era of information technology, the Situation Room must make good use of the web. It is important that the Situation Room have an up-to-date website, twitter account, blog and broad mailing list, to ensure adequate distribution of information. The blog allows for feedback and in some instances helps to capture additional information from the public.
- 2 Do not say it, if you can't verify it: There is always a tendency to go with the crowd. It is not unusual to hear that a particular situation has occurred in a particular trouble spot and to find that everybody around repeats the rumour as true. Corroborate your information and stick to the facts no matter how politically inconvenient it might be. It is not enough to quote your sources, unless those sources are rock solid. If information you have distributed turns out to be false, it destroys your credibility. So the simple rule is, if you cannot verify it, then don't say it. At the minimum, be sure to have a credible source that can stand by a report.

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- 2 Don't make bad situations worse: Be sensitive! You can make your point without inflaming the situation. The easiest way to achieve this is to focus on solutions and not the problem. Statements can and should be framed in polite, sensitive and clear language

Example 9:

In reporting about political violence that killed five people a sensitive statement might read:

We note, with regret, the death of five voters in xyz district. We call on the police to urgently investigate this matter and also to ensure that there is no repeat of such violence. We condemn the response of the police...

An insensitive statement could read

Five law-abiding people have been gruesomely hacked down in what can only be described as a barbaric, senseless political killing. The police have again showed gross incompetence...

The latter statement may forever destroy your ability to work with the police or inflame the situation even further.

Maintaining confidentiality where needed

There are instances where confidentiality is necessary. Not every activity of the Situation Room should be publicized. If, for instance, there is a volatile security situation which the Situation Room is covertly trying to address, perhaps by talking to influential figures who might intervene, you don't want to advertise that. This in no way suggests that the Situation Room should be run as a secret club, but discretion must be exercised

regarding the kind of information that can be shared. In instances where whistleblowers in a sensitive position are providing information to the Situation Room, it is very important to protect their identity - not just to protect their safety but also to ensure a steady stream of reliable information.

Safety first

Safety First: Every necessary step must be taken to ensure that individuals are not put in harm's way. Security must be factored into a Situation Room engagement plan. Such a plan should identify possible security risks and take steps to address them. Where necessary and helpful, the Situation Room may have to work with the police. In determining a location for the Situation Room, it is important to consider security challenges. A Situation Room should be located in a safe and stable neighbourhood.

Election-related engagement comes with some level of risk. If your life is in danger you need to walk away. You can always pick up the fight from another place. Do not play the hero or mindlessly court danger! It could endanger others, as well as yourself.

Notes:

Chapter 5: Post-Election

- 1 Reporting: At the end of the election, it is important to prepare a report which takes a holistic look at the election process with clear recommendations on how to improve the system. This report will naturally draw from the various press releases and statements of the Situation Room. However, it has to be more comprehensive than that. It will also state clearly how the Situation Room wishes to help resolvesome of the identified challenges in the system.
- 2 Documenting the Situation Room experience: This is highly desirable. It helps to maintain the institutional memory of the Situation Room when gaps between elections can be long and memory unreliable. It gives an opportunity for peer learning and experience-sharing with groups who may want to see how the Situation Room functioned and the peculiar experience of a particular location. It is important that the process of documentation starts from the beginning of the Situation Room's foundation to ensure that key events are adequately captured.
- 3 Maintaining the Situation Room platform beyond elections: What happens after elections? Should the election Situation Room pack up and go? The answer is no. There will be more elections and issues identified in the Situation Room recommendations that need follow-up. The Situation Room platform can serve as a rallying point for civil society engagement on elections and other related matters. Efforts must be made to keep Situation Room alive beyond elections. Some of the issues that can be engaged using the Situation Room platform include:
 - Legislative Processes on key issues affecting good governance: Engaging the legislative process in between elections requires collaboration and information-sharing amongst civil society groups. The Situation Room model provides a good platform for such an engagement. It will provide opportunities for proper information-gathering, unified voice for civil society and a proper forum for analysis of the legislative process, key issues and recommendations needed to ensure good governance.
 - Anti-corruption campaign: Corruption is a major challenge to development in emerging democracies. Most times governments are reluctant to do the right thing and government officials are often the promoters of corruption. Engaging such a system will require evidence-based advocacy, coordination and information-sharing amongst civil society groups.
 - Budgeting processes: A lot goes wrong during the budgeting processes in developing countries. Priorities are mixed up and resources are channelled to questionable projects. Project cost estimates are bloated. Civil society groups working in this area are confronted with the challenge of tracking the budget process and collating information related to the

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budget for evidence-based engagement and critique. A Situation Room engagement model provides a useful platform for information-gathering and sharing, and also a credible analytical platform for identifying alternatives and challenges.

Elections do not have much meaning unless they lead to good governance and development. That's why the vigilance and engagement of the Election Situation Room needs to go beyond the election process. The Situation Room can be used, for example, to ensure implementation of government policies and laws, such as the Freedom of Information Law. The platform should be used to ensure that governance is targeted at improving the lot of the people and, by extension, consolidating democracy.



Notes:



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