



KICK CORRUPTION OUT OF UGANDA



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PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY KICK CORRUPTION OUT OF UGANDA (KICK-U) ON THE JANUARY 20TH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Introduction

On the 20th of January 2021 Kick Corruption out of Uganda (KICK-U) observed the Local Government elections in the Districts of Kigezi sub region with all of our observers allowed to observe.

KICK-U observed Polling Day activities in the Districts of Kabale, Kisoro, Kanungu, Rukungiri, Rubanda and Rukiga. KICK-U deployed a total of 30 observers on the 20th of January 2021. They visited a total of 114 polling stations on Election Day and observed the voting process. They also monitored opening, closing and counting procedures at 30 polling stations. In addition, six roving observers were deployed to observe District tally centers. In Kisoro, there was a mix up in the names of the candidates though the issue was resolved and the winner announced.

Overall KICK-U observers reported that the majority of voters who showed up to vote had the opportunity to cast their ballot. However, KICK-U observers noted pockets of violent incidents during the tallying process. As can be recalled, the pre-election environment showed signs of possible outbreak of incidents of violence, harassment and intimidation. The internet shutdown before, during and after the presidential and parliamentary elections further heightened the tensions coming into the local government elections. Much as KICK-U was accredited with all her observers, there was delay in the whole process of accreditation which affected the planning and deployment of the observers. For this, the space for CSOs in the observation process was in many ways affected.

Findings

The general environment on polling day was relatively peaceful at 112 of 114 polling stations visited by our observers. No cases of intimidation and violence were observed at the polling stations KICK-U observed. However, the situation at the tally centres slightly varied as incidents of violence were recorded.

Polling administration

All our observers were stationed at the 30 polling stations by 6:30am but only twelve had polling officials present. While at 15 polling stations, voting commenced between 8-9am, 4 polling stations before 8:00am and 11 polling stations, voting started between 9-10am.

Out of all the 114 polling stations visited, the Biometric Voter Verification Kit (BVVK) was available and functional in 103. Other voting materials which include the ink pad, ballot boxes, register among others were verified and present.

Party agents and accredited observers also present in the observed polling stations.

At 12 of the 30 polling stations, standard operating procedures for the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 were not strictly followed.

Voting Process

In general, the voting process went swiftly at 114 polling stations that KICK-U observers visited during the day.

At all the polling stations, the voting basins had been set up to ensure secrecy and no cases of ballot stuffing were recorded.

The voter turnout was generally low compared to the presidential and parliamentary elections held on 14th of January 2021. And this may not be unconnected with the fact that the voting day for 20th of January was not declared a public holiday and being the middle of the week, most people had gone back to their respective workplaces.

Counting and Declaration of Results

KICK-U observers did not note any issues about the counting of votes since it was done in the open at all the polling stations.

At the polling stations monitored by KICK-U observers, the votes were declared at the polling stations and the declaration forms signed.

KICK-U observers also reported that the situation after the declaration of the results was peaceful outside the polling stations where they had observed and the results were transferred to the District Tally Centers.

Tallying Process

The tallying process in the tally centers of Kanungu, Rubanda, Rukungiri and Kabale were relatively peaceful.

However, in Kisoro District, there was a commotion when Annet Kansime, a candidate for female councilor, was allegedly found stuffing ballots and when her opponent was declared the winner, she rejected the results; which led to a fight between rival supporters. Relatedly, fighting erupted between rival groups at Rukiga district tally center which led to the KICK-U observer abandoning the tally center observation due to security concerns.

There was also a shooting involving polling constables at the Rukiga Tally center which resulted in the death of one person; identified as Constable Abaho Felix.

The tallying process and declaration of the final winners was done and followed through according to the guidelines of the Electoral Commission.

Conclusions

In the lead up to the January 25 and February 3 electoral events, KICK-U issues the following short term recommendations:

The voter education should be given a priority by election stakeholders like the Electoral Commission, civil society organizations, media and other relevant development partners given the high number of invalid votes (3700 votes) in the Kigezi sub-region as reported by the Electoral Commission.

The Electoral Commission should implement the election laws, policies and guidelines especially as they relate to ensuring that adequate materials are deployed to polling stations in a timely manner and the COVID-19 SOPs are fully complied with in the subsequent elections.

Government should coordinate its agencies, especially security forces and the EC that support the electoral process in a manner that operates within the existing legal frameworks. KICK-U calls on citizens to consider increased participation in the civic process towards election of their leaders by ensuring to register and vote in subsequent elections.

KICK-U will continue to observe the forthcoming local government elections scheduled for 25th January and 3rd February 2021 and calls upon all the electorates to participate in the scheduled elections.

KICK-U also has a total of 30 long term observers who have been observing the post-election period since January 16th. Their findings will be incorporated in the final report that will be shared at the end of the elections.



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