



VOICE GHANA
Voice of People with Disability Ghana

We Empower People with Disabilities to Support Themselves

ELECTION 2012 SITUATION ROOM REPORT

7TH DECEMBER 2012

Introduction:

Voting provides individuals with a voice to influence decisions that affect their lives. However, people with disabilities (PWDs) have often been left out of this process as a result of certain barriers. The most common barriers to election access for PWDs are physical, environmental, attitudinal, legal and cultural. For example, many polling stations are located in facilities that are not accessible to persons who use wheelchairs, crutches and white canes. Voter information and registration materials are also not accessible to persons who are hearing and visually impaired. In some instances, many election officials refuse to allow persons with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities to register or vote due to negative attitudes and cultural stigma.

Several PWDs in the Agortime-Ziofe and Adaklu Constituencies confirmed to us during our baseline survey in February 2012 that the voting process and arrangements for 2008 elections were good, but was not entirely accessible for them. They further intimated that polling stations for the December 2012 should be made more accessible for them. They also said EC officials at the polls should be sensitized about their needs so that they can support them at the polls to cast their votes.

Because of this history of exclusion, we saw the need to create a Situation Room on the Election Day to monitor accessibility status of some polling stations through telephone interactions with PWD voters from constituencies where our current election project was carried out and from some parts of the Volta Region. This enabled us to generate fair knowledge and understanding on the accessibility status of some polling stations in the Volta Region and also engage Presiding Officers to address any emerging issue that may be raised with us by any PWD voter.

Methodology:

We designed a simple questionnaire, which was used as an aide memoir to help our interactions with sixty (60) PWDs at random through phone calls between 7.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. on 7th December 2012. We also had phone interactions with Presiding Officers at polling stations where emerging issues were raised with us. We did this through our contact PWD

voters and the feedback we got from them was that our interventions compelled Presiding Officers to quickly respond to their needs. This however, made it possible for them to vote.

Outcome of our interactions with PWD Voters:

The following is the analysis from the work of our situation room:

Number of PWDs, their Constituencies and Disability/Sex Aggregation

Constituency	Number of PWDs	Sex		Types of Disability		
		M	F	Physically Disabled	Visually Impaired	Hearing Impaired
Akatsi South	2	-	2	2	-	-
Akatsi North	1	1	-	1	-	-
South Dayi	1	1	-	1	-	-
Anlo	1	-	1	1	-	-
Hohoe South	1	-	1	1	-	-
Nkwanta South	6	4	2	5	1	-
Nkwanta North	6	6	-	6	-	-
Ketu North	4	2	2	4	-	-
Ho Central	9	2	7	9	-	-
Agortime – Ziofe	12	9	3	12	1	-
Adaklu	6	3	3	6	-	-
Krachi East	5	4	1	5	-	-
Ho West	6	3	3	6	-	-
Total	60	35	25	58	2	-

It is evidenced from the above table that we interviewed sixty (60) persons with disabilities at random from 13 Constituencies in the Volta Region. Out of this number, thirty-five (35) were male while twenty five (25) were female. The table also confirmed that a total of fifty-eight (58) people we interacted with were persons with physical disability while only two (2) were visually impaired.

Other Background Information Collated

Out of the sixty (60) PWDs interviewed, twenty-two (22) female and thirty-seven (37) male confirmed to us that they have registered to vote. Only one could not register during the Biometric Voter Registration Exercise due to ill-health.

Out of the fifty-nine (59) PWDs who confirmed to us that they were eligible voters, only fifty-six (56) of them have actually voted between 7.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. They consist of thirty-eight (37) male and nineteen (19) female. The remaining three (3) PWDs, who were females, said they were unable to vote as one of them was sick, one was engaged as a Polling Assistant at polling station which was far away from where she registered and one of them said she has no money to travel back to Ashiaman where she registered.

The analysis and discussions hereafter are based on the fifty-six (56) PWDs who have actually voted during the election. Seventeen (17) of them confirmed to us that they joined the queue to vote, while thirty-nine (39) said they did not join any queue but were allowed to vote as soon as they arrived at their polling stations.

With regards to support received from Polling Assistants, forty-one (41) confirmed being supported while fifteen (15) indicated they did not require any support/assistance from the Polling Assistants.

Fifty-three (53) confirmed that the polling stations were on the low level ground, which was good for them. However, three (3) indicated that their polling stations were not on the low level ground as expected but all the same, they were able to manage and cast their votes.

Out of the fifty-six (56) who voted, thirty-six (36) confirmed to us that seats were provided for them and other PWDs and the aged to sit instead of stand in the queue. On the other hand, twenty (20) indicated that there were no seats made available for PWDs or the aged in their polling stations to sit. This could also mean that the queue might not be so long and PWDs as well as the aged and nursing mothers were given opportunity to cast their votes as soon as they arrived at their polling stations.

On the issue of voting screens and ballot boxes within their reach, fifty-one (51) indicated to us that the voting screens and ballot boxes were within their reach but thirty-six (36) of them said they still received support from EC officials to vote. Five (5) said the voting screens and ballot boxes were out of their reach so, they were supported by Polling Assistants to cast their votes.

In response to our questions if there were other PWDs around in their respective polling stations, forty-three (43) said they saw other PWDs also coming to cast their votes. In fact some even confirmed supporting and encouraging their colleagues PWDs to come out and vote, which we think was very helpful. However, thirteen (13) said they did not see any PWDs around in their polling stations.

Emerging issues collated and how they were addressed:

Below are issues that were raised with us and the interventions we made in addressing them:

- Mr. Caleb Niwi from Dambai in the Krachi East Constituency indicated to us that he was asked to join the queue and this discouraged him and he went home. We asked him to go back to the polling station and we interacted with their Presiding Officer to allow him to vote without joining the queue. The Presiding Officer was sorry about this and informed us that it was an oversight. He quickly informed his Polling Assistants to allow PWDs to vote as soon as they arrived.
- Mr. Ania Ndepam from Sibi in the Nkwanta North Constituency was in the queue when we called him on phone, so we spoke to their Presiding Officer and he allowed him to cast his vote immediately. The Presiding Officer also agreed with us to allow and support all PWDs to cast their votes without joining the queue.
- Mr. Yeboah Solomon from Dormabeng in the Krachi East Constituency indicated to us that he did not join the queue but saw some PWDs in the queue. We talked to their Presiding Officer as well to allow PWDs to cast their votes without joining the queue. He agreed and quickly allowed the three (3) PWDs in the queue to cast their votes.
- Mr. Bernard Pompai from Kpelema also in the Krachi East Constituency informed us that PWDs were being asked to join the queue. We drew the attention of their Presiding Officer and he allowed the five (5) PWDs who were in the queue to cast their votes.

- Mr. Nabila K. Paul from Kpassa in the Nkwanta North Constituency said in our phone interactions with him that when he was asked to join the queue; he declined with the explanation that he was not supposed to join the queue as a person with disability. After a while, one of their Polling Assistants allowed him to cast his vote and six (6) other PWDs present were also allowed to cast their votes without joining the queue.

We asked him to go back to the polling station so that we can interact with their Presiding Officer over the issue, which he did. So, we reasoned with the Presiding Officer to allow PWDs to do early voting, which he agreed to.

- Mr. Obirim Wisdom from Pusupu in the Nkwanta South Constituency said he and four (4) other PWDs were asked to join the queue. However, when we interacted with their Presiding Officer, they were allowed to cast their votes.
- Mr. Attah Simon from Sibi in the Nkwanta North Constituency informed us that he and three (3) other PWDs including one visually impaired person were asked to join the queue. Our usual intervention with their Presiding Officer made it possible for them to cast their votes early without joining the queue.
- Ms. Agnes Amegadzie from Shia in the Ho Central Constituency indicated to us that the queue was very long before she got to her polling station so she returned home. We encouraged her to go back to the polling station so that we can talk to their Presiding Officer. She did so, and we were able to interact with their Presiding Officer, and she was given preference to vote early.
- Mr. May Paul Dzramedo from Ho in the Ho Central Constituency said both the screens and ballot boxes were out of his reach, so their Presiding Officer supported him to cast his vote on the floor. The ballot boxes were also lowered for him to put his ballot papers in.

Observation/Conclusion

The creation of the Situation Room to a large extent contributed to increased number of PWDs participating in the election on 7th December 2012. Also, our engagement with EC at Ho and Kpetoe was very beneficial to the process because we did not have any issue emerging from Agortime-Ziofe, and Adaklu Constituencies, where we implemented our election project. However, we cannot also ascertain at this point that things were done in an orderly manner for all PWD voters in the two constituencies until we have the chance to interact with them during our end-of-project survey and evaluation session scheduled for January 2013. But we can see the need to do more engagement with EC offices in other parts of the Volta Region and the country in future elections, so that persons with disabilities will be able to access their electoral rights with no or limited hindrances.

We also saw the need to replicate the Situation Room strategy in our future election work and decentralized the process. By this we mean we will empower some of our self-help group leaders to also create mini-situation rooms that will be linked up with our situation room in Ho, so that together we can reach several PWD voters and support them to also participate fully at the polls.

We will also broaden our future election activities and Situation Room work to cover more persons with visual and hearing impairment and ascertain if voter registration and polling centres have materials like tactile ballot guides, voting booths and ballot boxes that are accessible to all categories of PWDs.

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