



# NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR CIVIC EDUCATION (NICE) PUBLIC TRUST

*Making Democracy Work – Take Part in Public Life*

## Press Statement

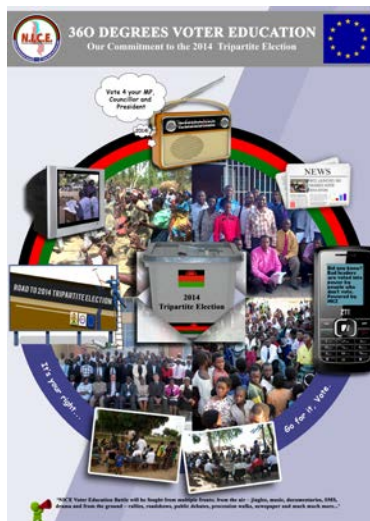
The National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) Public Trust is an independent and autonomous institution registered under the Trust Incorporation Act. The Trust is solely owned by Malawians with a mandate to provide civic and voter education to Malawians that is relevant, effective, efficient and sustainable in a professional and non-partisan manner.

In line with its civic and voter education mandate, NICE is one of the key institutions that has been accredited by the Malawi Electoral Commission to conduct civic and voter education in the run up to the May 2014 Tripartite Elections. MEC started the 5th Phase of the voter registration process which took place in Mangochi Municipal Council, Mangochi District, Ntcheu District and in Dedza South, Dedza North and Dedza East Constituencies from 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2013 to 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2013 and the 6<sup>th</sup> Phase which took place from October 15<sup>th</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup> in the remaining parts of Dedza, Dowa, some parts of Mchinji, Chitipa and Lilongwe City.

Prior to voter registration, NICE conducted intensive civic education in order to mobilise eligible voters and also empower them with the necessary information for the registration exercise.

This preliminary report highlights the key achievements, lessons learnt, challenges encountered and provides recommendations for improvement.

## 1. Overview of Activities Undertaken and Outputs



As one of the MEC accredited organisations, NICE monitored the entire 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Phase voter registration process. District, Regional and National staff, volunteers and resources were deployed for civic education and mobilisation and monitors were assigned in all the registration centres in these districts. Before and during the registration process, NICE conducted a number of voter education activities which were consistent with NICE’s multipronged strategy aimed at comprehensive voter mobilisation called the “360 degrees” it portrays mobilisation as a war which has to be tackled in a *blitzkrieg* fashion that is

attacking through the air ( i.e. through TV, Radio, SMS etc.) on land through rallies, print media, road shows, sports bonanzas , interactive drama, branding of rocks in our mountains along the main roads with registration messages , hot spot interaction ( drinking joints ) voter education on wheels approach ( minibus discussions ) a critical pool and army of 8000 NICE volunteers who marched village to village , street to street , market to market church to church , mosque to mosque reaching out to all hard to reach areas of Malawi . Apart from the air the 360 degrees strategy is also targeting the water ways where voters are mobilised through boats, canoes and ships like Ilala reaching out to isolated island such as Likoma, Chizumulu and some small island in Mangochi, Nkhotakota and Karonga. This unique method epitomises a critical stage in the 360 degrees civic and voter education strategy. Messages were also sent through public, private and community radio stations and had broad coverage. NICE also Conducted joint mobilisation campaigns with Ministry of Information using public address systems , loud hailers , road shows and film shows which really proved to be crowd pullers and quite effective in the mobilisation of people to go and register. The cinema or film show activity is popularly dubbed “**Nocturnal Civic and Voter Education Approach**” because the film shows were conducted at night.

In terms of observation of the registration process, in Phase 5, NICE monitored the process in all the **527 registration centres** using a total of **670 stationed monitors and 54 roving monitors (Supervisors)** in all the districts that the registration exercise took place.

In Phase 6, NICE monitored the process in **626 registration centres** using a total of **810 stationed monitors and 76 roving monitors (Supervisors)** in all the districts that the registration exercise took place.

## 2. Key Achievements/Successes

NICE noted the following positive developments during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> phases of the registration process:

1. Most registration centres were characterised by peacefulness, orderliness and calmness which is a conducive environment for the conduct of any electoral process.
2. MEC managed to identify and mobilise accredited CSOs and FBOs to design key messages for the voter registration and disseminate them in the most expedient manner.
3. MECs determination and efforts to reach even too hard to reach areas in phase 6 should be commended , for example Muona centres in Misuku and Bale in Chitipa Wenya where materials for registration used to be ferried by helicopter this time around there was no that opportunity hence people carried the registration materials to the centres on their heads and walked for about 4 hrs to reach the destination but registration continued as planned and this was a good development.

4. There were also reports from NICE monitors that a satisfactory number of individuals from **JEHOVAHS' WITNESS CHURCH** took part in this registration process. This is a section of people who are difficult and hard to reach to with governance matters including elections. This was reported mainly from Mangochi , Ntcheu , Dedza , Mchinji , Lilongwe City , Dowa and Chitipa. This has mainly been attributed to the intensive civic and voter education undertaken by NICE, MEC and other service providers.
5. MEC should also be commended for supplying generators to most centres under phase five which tremendously resolved the challenge of using solar panels that caused chaos under phase 5 where most of the districts for the first three days had cloudy conditions and solar panels became ineffective which negatively affected the registration process.
6. Many eligible Malawians turned up in large numbers to register for the Tripartite Elections in all the districts under phases 5 and 6.
7. The prolongation of the voter registration and increasing the number of staff in some centres that needed more clerks/registration teams was a good gesture and helped to accommodate some Malawians who would have otherwise been disenfranchised if the centres had closed strictly on the planned dates on 11<sup>th</sup>October as planned under phase 5.
8. Disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, pregnant women, people with disabilities and prisoners were treated accordingly, and majority of them have registered. It is believed that for some, it was their first time to register. This was attributed to MEC for training that had been provided to clerks as well as to NICE which partnered with organisations that deal with disadvantaged groups in order to help in mobilising the people living with disabilities.

### 3. Key Lessons Learnt

The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Phases of the registration, just like the previous phases, have been a learning process for NICE and other stakeholders, including Malawi Electoral Commission. Some of the key lessons learnt by NICE are listed below:

1. There is need for a very objective assessment on the capacity of the voter registration clerks, as some proved to be too slow, in the previous phases and have continued to be so in these two phases. This resulted in sending back of eligible voters to return the following day. There was need to train thoroughly the Clerks, and instil in them a sense of discipline and ownership of the exercise in order to ensure that they discharge their duties professionally and with the required speed.
2. The voter mobilisation campaign using various civic and voter education methodologies, which was generally conducted by NICE, MEC and a few accredited CSOs, was very effective to the extent that too many people were mobilised -surpassing the capacity that the registration centres could handle.

3. NICE and other partners need to work hard to retain the registered numbers at polling since others might have registered in order to have the voter's card as an ID, in the absence of a national ID card.
4. The print and electronic media has provided wide and diverse coverage on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Phases which has assisted in the mobilisation campaign. Their continued discussion of decentralisation and tripartite elections has also served well to prepare registrants on the importance of the current exercise.
5. Projections of prospective registrants in cities like Lilongwe proved to be difficult since they tend to fluctuate from time to time due to rapid urbanisation rate where people are getting into the city on daily basis looking for opportunities and transfer since it is the centre of most government and other economic activities.

## 6. Major Challenges

While we acknowledge that the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Phases of the registration were a success, there were also some challenges encountered in different centres, which generally are just a spill over from the previous phases. Out of these, the notable challenges are as follows;

1. Though applause is given for the prolongation of registration in the centres that failed to operate fully during Phase 5, mention should be made that it was reported that MEC did not adequately and timely inform all relevant stakeholders and affected communities.
2. Failure to consider the fact that the population growth in places like Lilongwe City keep on growing every other day due to rapid urbanisation . The reliance on the 2010 population projections has proved to be a problem because as it has been observed, all the centres in Lilongwe City had more people than perhaps MEC had projected and expected and the registration clerks were overwhelmed. This has left many potential registrants frustrated since they stayed for long hours and a very big number of prospective registrants were sent back in most centres.
3. Abrupt changes in the registration calendar especially in phase 6, for example in Mchinji the original plan was to have registration in three constituencies but it was abruptly changed to two constituencies and only gave a notice of three to two days , in Chitipa registration has been postponed twice , while NICE and other partners had already done the mobilization, this has serious consequences such as loss of credibility among the citizens , loss of resources and has a potential of scaring away would be registrants . The same case is also true with Karonga which was supposed to start in phase 7 has been postponed to phase 8 and formal communication on this change came just three days before and this caused a lot of confusion among both the voters and the service providers
4. Where a constituency is shared between and among district councils there are problems of ward identification and potential confusion of which candidate to vote for. For

instance in Lilongwe City Council some wards are under a constituency of Dowa district council.

5. Most centres during phase 5 and 6 were over whelmed with students from secondary schools who had opened school and they could come at a centre in huge number , for example over 200 students at Chitipa Community Hall Centre came at once to register and this really overwhelmed the capacity of the registration staff and also scared away other would be registrants
6. Most camera men deployed to Chitipa and parts of the other districts where registration was taking place under phase 6 were those who were on standby hence lacked experience on how to use the equipment. This delayed the registration process and most pictures were blurred, this put off most registrants as the pictures were not a replica of how they really look like. Poor quality of photographs in some centres due to faulty printers and ribbons resulting to registration officials to move to other centres to process photographs or using one printer where there were too printers thereby frustrating registrants as this resulted to unnecessary delays.
7. People from a different constituency coming to register in a constituency where they have a preferred candidate. A case in question is people from Dedza Central East Constituency attempting to register in Dedza Central Constituency and when they were sent back there were complaints that the centre is turning away registrants.
8. Poor cloudy conditions due to climate change affected the work of the electronic equipment for about (2) two of the 14 days (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> October) meaning that the registration was disturbed in some parts as solar panels could not sufficiently charge the batteries being used.
9. Additionally, most eligible registrants went to the centres late in the afternoon hours or during the last hours of the registration when centres were closing to register when it was almost closing time and this led to congestion around the closing times.
10. Lack of a rapid response system by the district councils and MEC, hence not only very small things like porches or printing paper, but also critical requests for equipment like cameras and printers could not be addressed in good time. In many centers, it took days for the requests to be addressed.
11. Other centres took only photographs of the eligible voters for registration of the following day, this added extra work for the new day and bubbling was not completed till the following day. Monitoring visits in some centres revealed that registration clerks were busy reconciling data for the previous day and others for last two days.
12. Most centres had limited staff and they resorted to engaging monitors to assist, a thing which is not acceptable. In isolated cases, some of the clerks were old retired teachers and their efficiency was compromised.
13. Apart from NICE, very few CSOs monitors were available in most centres. The CSO monitors present in some centres reported erratically. This might be due to financial constraints, since most of the accredited CSOs have not yet received any funding.
14. Most political parties despite being the major stakeholders in the electoral processes did not do enough to embark on robust mobilisation campaigns to woo their supports to go and register, apart from the Presidential candidates of selected parties who made

efforts to mobilise their voters. The rest of the mobilisation was left to MEC, NICE and a few accredited CSOs.

15. Most of the monitors who were deployed to the centres by political parties lacked knowledge, objectivity, motivation and skills about the registration processes as such their presence did not add any value since they were either, mostly found outside the registration room or busy chatting and had no reporting forms or writing materials to document the proceedings, and in some centres they were being used to assist in bubbling.
16. Cases of underage students attempting to register were observed in many centres. In Ntcheu a case was reported where underage students from Kings Foundation Pvt School were ferried to a centre to register while in Dedza at Kanama Centre and Dzenza Primary School, underage students attempted to register and when they were sent away, politicians reacted giving a suspicious impression on their motive.
17. Foreigners were attempting to register in Ntcheu, Dedza and Lilongwe, these were aided by Malawians and some even produced a 1999 voter registration certificate, this shows that they were able to beat the electoral system in 1999. In a related development there were cases reported in Dedza of people claiming to be Malawians from Ntchisi, Kasungu and Dowa but working in farms in Mozambique wanting to register.
18. A case was reported in Mchinji where a Quality Control Manager was a senior active political party official and this posed a challenge to the integrity of the exercise. In a related development, it was also reported in Mchinji that an aspiring MP candidate organised a meeting for supervisors but when the DEST was alerted, the meeting was abandoned.
19. Generally, there are more registrants in Lilongwe City who for one reason or another did not register in their expected centres which will mean that the obligation to vote for their local councillor as stipulated will not materialise unless the deliberate window for transfers is not frustrated.

## Recommendations

The following are recommendations made by NICE based on its registration observation exercise which MEC and other electoral stakeholders can consider as the registration continues in other areas:

1. In Lilongwe City, all the centres should be reopened for an extension since there is overwhelming evidence that most people failed to register due to slow pace of the process and faulty equipment as manifested by long queues during the last day and a substantial number of people who got frustrated and returned back.
2. MEC should consider changing the operational times for the registration period to run from 7.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. to allow for longer working time and also give an opportunity to the working class to be able to access the centres even after knocking off

from work since some of them were unable to register during weekends and their job could not allow them to register during the mid-week.

3. There is need for district councils and MEC to establish a rapid response team to deal with all the emergency issues from the centers. The team should have adequate resources to respond timely to emerging issues.
4. MEC should consider outsourcing the photography services to ensure professional work is done since it is clear that some of those being used are amateurs.
5. MEC should provide better management to ensure serious-minded staff members are recruited at district level as some exhibited signs of disinterest with the exercise or lacked appreciation of the value of participation in a democracy.
6. MEC needs to carefully plan the payment modalities of registration staff allowances or honoraria to avoid cases where they start work without knowing when exactly they will be paid and they need clear contracts.
7. MEC has to consider putting more clerks/registration teams in centres which have a big catchment area in order to meet the number of registrants ;
8. MEC need to come up with a final comprehensive schedule for the registration process which will not be changed anyhow , where the changes are inevitable MEC should give ample notice to all stake holders so that they reposition themselves to respond to that change
9. MEC to continue providing generators to remote centres which do not have electricity, to ensure undisrupted registration process.
10. Need for MEC to harmonize the school calendar with the staggered registration to avoid disfranchising students in boarding schools or find a way of having them registered when they are back from holidays
11. MEC to improve the timing of the movement between the phases: The teams complained bitterly about the odd hours that they are moved between the phases to their new centres and proposed that they be transported during day not always at night when the bad roads pose a danger to them and the equipment that they carry with them.
12. There is need for district councils and MEC to establish a rapid response team to deal with all the emergency issues from the centers. The team should have adequate resources to respond timely to emerging issues.
13. Continuous Mobilisation: There is need for continuous sensitization of the people not only to register but also on how to take care of their voter registration cards (telling them the do's and Don'ts) for them to be able to use it on 20th May 2014; and also to sensitize the general public including political parties on the general conduct in the period prior to the polling day.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Phases of the registration exercise were carried out in a proper manner. Despite some challenges met, the overall outcome of registration process was good. This outcome can mainly be attributed to an intensive awareness and mobilisation campaign that was mounted by MEC, NICE, the media and other accredited CSOs that participated in this processes in the five Districts. The presence of NICE monitors and other CSOs greatly contributed to mobilisation and the success of the exercise.

Considering that there are 9 phases of the registration process, NICE wishes to appeal to MEC, all political parties, accredited CSOs and development partners to remain focused and committed to the process by taking lessons from the first phase and factoring them in subsequent phases so that there are notable improvements. NICE is furthermore calling on all accredited CSOs and the media to collaborate with its structures in the provision of timely, quality, professional and non-partisan civic education for the subsequent registration phases.

Furthermore NICE strongly appeals to MEC on the need to reconsider extending the registration period for Lilongwe City where a huge number of prospective registrants were prevented from registering due to reasons advanced above.

Finally, NICE wishes to encourage all citizens who are eligible for voting to go and register when the registration phase is in their areas so that they can take part in democracy and good governance through choosing leaders of their choice.

***For more information or for full report with actual statistics, please visit NICE Regional Office (Centre) or contact NICE secretariat through the following contacts details.***

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