

NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR CIVIC EDUCATION (NICE) TRUST



... *Making Democracy Work – Take Part in Public Life*

NICE'S PREPAREDNESS FOR THE FORTH COMING 2019 TRIPARTITE ELECTIONS

1. Preamble

The National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) Public Trust is an independent institution solely owned by Malawians that provides civic and voter education to Malawians that is relevant, effective, efficient and sustainable in a professional and non-partisan manner. Currently, it is mainly funded by the European (EU) under the European Development Fund (EDF) framework and on a smaller scale by the Government of Malawi. It is being managed through a constitutionally established board and the National Authorizing Office (NAO) in the Ministry of Finance. NICE falls under a larger EU-funded programme called the *Chilungamo* Project.

NICE Trust is one of the major players accredited by the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) to conduct civic and voter education. Just like in previous elections, NICE intends to conduct a variety of awareness and mobilization initiatives in addition to the monitoring of the electoral process for the 2019 Tripartite Elections. The aim is to add value and credibility to the whole electoral process. NICE also intends to conduct mock polling exercises together with MEC so that the electorate is aware of how to mark correctly on the ballot.

2. Background Information: Successes and Challenges

NICE is cognizant of the fact that enormous successes were realised in the 2014 Tripartite Elections and these successes would form the foundation for enhanced successes in the 2019 Elections that were launched by MEC on 20th February 2019. Among them were that NICE Trust:

- i. Made full and effective use of its country-wide structure of offices as well as the volunteer structure to deliver civic and voter education that reached out to many eligible Malawians;
- ii. Contributed to the achievement of a high voter turnout as well as the reduction of null and void votes compared to the previous election in 2009;
- iii. Provided full support to MEC and collaborated with other accredited players in the provision of civic and voter education to the Malawian populace;

Commented [U1]: It would make people believe us more if we put the percentage or numbers

- iv. Collaborated with institutions that are specialised in reaching out to reformatory centres and was able to facilitate outreach to inmates in the country's prisons;
- v. Made full use of existing opportunities to have a wider coverage and outreach through the use of religious institutions, trading centres and markets, local development meetings for communities, lunch hour gatherings in towns and cities, among others;
- vi. Collaborated with institutions that are limited to specific disability groupings, for example, Malawi Union of the Blind (MUB);
- vii. Monitored the electoral process throughout the entire elections period by having stationary as well as roving monitors who proved to be very pivotal in gathering information and data that gave a reasonable amount of credibility to the process at local level;
- viii. Facilitated interparty engagements at both district and constituency levels to promote peaceful co-existence and social cohesion throughout the electoral period using the MEC-established Multi-Party Liaison Committees (MPLCs) which proved to be very instrumental in reducing incidents of political violence in the 2014 Tripartite Elections.

NICE acknowledges that there were challenges related to the 2014 Tripartite Elections but these challenges were not related to civic and voter education but rather management of the elections since most of them were logistical in nature.

3. Voter Awareness and Mobilization

NICE Trust is geared to do all in its power to contribute to the success of the 2019 Tripartite



Elections. A variety of approaches and methodologies is on the cards for use in this regard including:

- i. road shows/village caravans (different types creatively spiced with a “paraphernalia” of events and actors, e.g. convoys of bicycle taxis or motorcycles, etc.) that created a fever for registration;
- ii. village/community meetings the NICE Staff and Volunteers;
- iii. letters to religious institutions (churches and mosques);
- iv. mobile loud-hailing punctuated by whistle-stop shows organised and conducted at district, regional and national levels;
- v. market-day (and trading centre) rallies;
- vi. sports bonanzas;
- vii. short motivational talks in popular video-show rooms in trading centres;
- viii. discussions and leaflet distribution in popular salons, barber shops, bawo and pool venues at trading centres and in urban settlements;

- ix. mini-bus discussions supported by leaflet and sticker distribution on public means of transport;
- x. door-to-door campaign, popularly known in NICE as *ntchemberezandonda* (“army worms”) that has been tried in selected localities;
- xi. cinema or film shows with equipment and in collaboration with staff from the Ministry of Civic Education, Culture and Community Development;
- xii. local music and dance shows that will mainly target the youth most of whom will be first-time-voters (FTVs);
- xiii. Radio and TV jingles.

The trust will make use of its structure of over 8000 volunteers to conduct community-based civic and voter education interventions in order to mobilize people to participate in the forthcoming 2019 tripartite elections. NICE will also utilize its 31 district and 169 community resource centres to stock materials on the 2019 Tripartite Elections.

Using its countrywide structure, NICE intends to target the following ‘difficult-to-reach’ categories of people: remote village dwellers or ones who cannot be easily accessed by road or water-ways, persons with disabilities, immobile groups (such as heavily pregnant women, or the sick), inmates in the country’s prisons, women (or men) in specific cultural or religious communities; young adults in boarding schools, or universities, illiterate rural people, first time voters, and geographically isolated groups. As a key player in elections, NICE will also help in popularising any electoral reforms that may be sanctioned by the state through relevant legislative machinery.

4. Political Debates

NICE Trust will conduct political debates targeting the all 193 constituencies in some wards across Malawi. These debates are aimed at providing a platform for aspiring candidates to outline their manifestoes to the electorate as well as giving an opportunity to the electorate to get clarification on what the candidates promise and also chart a way forward on how to hold these candidates accountable once elected through signing of a social contract in what is called “*Full Fill Your Promise Campaign*’. These debates have also proven to be very effective forums for voter mobilization as well as a tool for conflict management and enhancement of peaceful coexistence.

5. Inclusive Participation in Elections

NICE will take all necessary measures to ensure that all Malawians have the opportunity to exercise their right to participate in the forthcoming elections. Of particular importance, NICE will put in place deliberate civic education programmes to promote the participation of marginalised groups such as women, youths, the elderly and persons with disabilities. To consolidate this

initiative, NICE will review its MoUs with the Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA) and the Malawi Union of the Blind (MUB). NICE will continue supporting MUB to produce adequate civic and voter education materials in Braille. NICE is also exploring ways to support sign-language initiatives on civic and voter education. In this regard, NICE will make all the necessary arrangements to enable these groups to fully participate in the forth coming 2019 tripartite elections as their constitutional right.

6. Support to Peaceful Coexistence and Social Cohesion Initiatives

Elections are by their very nature a fertile breeding ground for conflicts. NICE intends to strengthen the Multi-Party Liaison Committees (MPLCs) for the coming elections which have worked well since their formation in 2000. NICE intends to organize some capacity-building sessions for MPLCs in Malawi while at the same time facilitating the revamping of Constituency Multiparty Liaison Committee. This is the only way to ensure a decentralized approach to non-violent conflict transformation which is more effective since they are closer to the people and are in line with the democratic devolution framework which Malawi is pursuing.

NICE will also continue facilitating the formation of Senior Politicians Associations Against Violence, a strategy that has been tested in the previous elections. It is very effective since these senior politicians have the respect of society as well as political parties hence they become good mediators and facilitators of peaceful coexistence. NICE has already started working with the National Peace Architecture through training and support to District Peace Committees to deal with electoral as well as all other related conflicts at district level.

7. MoUs with Nyika, Bwaila and Blantyre Media Clubs in readiness to the 2019 Tripartite Elections

The objective of this MOU is to promote public access to balanced information on various governance issues including elections and promotion of active citizenship through objective and responsible reporting that should enhance the feeling of nationhood and common good orientation by all Malawians.

8. Support to civic and voter education initiatives that encourage women to participate in political processes/ Support to 50- 50 Campaign

In line with the national gender policy, NICE will have activities that encourage political participation of women in collaboration with Political Parties, UN Women and the Ministry of Gender, Disability and Children Affairs, Centre for Civil Society Strengthening (CCSS) and Action Aid Malawi (AAM) Consortium, etc.

NICE will soon formalise a working relationship with the Centre for Civil Society Strengthening and Action Aid Malawi to support and host women learning incubators in all the 30 NICE district resource centres. The incubator/hub aims to host women candidates (even excite those who have never dreamt of being politicians to consider the noble calling to active political work) and young women (college students pursuing research in these areas will be challenged to use the hub to experiment their ideas as they are also exposed to the dynamics of the industry) will have access to free-Wi-Fi among others.

Apart from providing workspace for women candidates, it will also provide a platform for women/young women to practice general communication and public speaking skills. There will be periodic (two month's space) sessions on topical issues to help build the capacity of women in several relevant areas. All these sessions will be recorded and shared with community radios/public radios.

NICE will also engage in a myriad of initiatives that target women aspirants at local and constituency levels. NICE will engage it's the 360 degrees tested and transformative civic and voter education methodology targeting the entire electoral cycle not just a phase of it underpinned by the "*Walking with the Communities*" approach. Past initiatives to improve women participation and representation in politics have failed largely because of their piecemeal approaches focusing only on a part of the electoral and governance cycle, potentially limiting their impact and sustainability.

In the pre-election phase, activities will primarily focus on empowering women as voters, increasing the number of women candidates, encouraging political parties to be more inclusive and educating the public about their civic and electoral rights, in addition to monitoring violence against women. As the day of elections draws closer, NICE will narrow down its focus to voter education, mobilizing women voters and observers and getting women candidates elected. Post-election activities will mainly establish and strengthen elected women's capacity and influence as policymakers and to advocate, with the support of others, legal reforms such as gender quotas and related measures to improve women's rate of success in future elections.

9. Election Monitoring

NICE will monitor the electoral processes in the three phases namely; pre-poll, polling and post-poll periods. **5006** monitors will be stationed in each of the polling centres across the country. These stationary monitors will be supported by about **500** roving monitors. In ensuring that all eligible voters have meaningfully participated and all electoral processes are being adhered to and that votes are counted in a professional manner, NICE will deploy monitors to all **5006** polling stations that MEC has established in all constituencies and wards.

10. Need for a Voter Apathy Study

Building on previous experiences from the 2004 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections, where the voter turnout was at 63% having reached a historical level of 94% in the 1999 elections, NICE Trust is seriously considering engaging relevant stakeholders and players to undertake a voter apathy study. Apathy has mainly characterised the country's by elections where the turnout has, in some cases, been as low as slightly over 11.4%, to take the example of the Blantyre City Central by elections in May 1997.

Consultations will aim at finding solutions to the issues that will be unearthed so that the country attains a meaningful turnout in all future elections as well as by elections. It should be noted that this country is capable of turning around this worrisome trend judging from the case of the October 1999 by elections in Ntchisi North East where the turnout was at 72.9%. A previous study conducted in 2005 following the 2004 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections indicated that most people were frustrated by unfulfilled promises by their elected representatives in addition to lack of interparty democracy that increased the threats of political violence.

11. Conclusion

Malawians have demonstrated that they want to be involved and engaged in the democratic choice of their leaders through meaningful participation in all previous elections. As NICE, we wish to applaud them for this and further encourage them to participate in all electoral processes as we count down to the 21st May 2019 Tripartite Elections. NICE is confident that the 2019 Elections will be successful through the goodwill of all Malawians as they play their roles with the guidance of MEC, all accredited institutions, religious and traditional leaders and on top of all the media.

Finally, NICE wishes to encourage all eligible citizens to register in order to exercise their noble right to determine the leadership of our great nation.

Viva Malawi, Viva Democracy!



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