Introduction

The Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) has over the years participated actively in election monitoring, electoral justice, training and capacity building for ad-hoc and professional personnel responsible for the conduct of elections in Nigeria. That intervention has been quite successful and acclaimed to be very effective. With the persistent and worrisome degree of electioneering violence, election irregularities and attendant criminality, the need for NBA’s direct involvement in finding sustainable solution to pre-election challenges such as voter education and mobilization became quite necessary and irresistible. Consequently the Voters Education and Mobilization Committee (the Committee) was established by the NBA. The Committee was inaugurated at the NBA National Office in Abuja, FCT, on the 26th day of November 2014 by the NBA President, Augustine Alegeh, SAN with the following terms of reference:

- To ensure the proper education and sensitization of the public on election matters.
- To ensure the proper mobilization and encouragement of voters to vote at the elections.
- To organize workshops, seminars and programs to promote electoral awareness.
- To champion campaigns against election rigging, thuggery and the use of violence during elections.
- To partner with INEC, political parties and other relevant agencies so as to promote increased political and electoral awareness.
- To take all other steps as may be required to give effect to the above objectives.
Before discussing the efforts of the NBA in *voter education* and the role of the Committee in that regard, it is necessary to first examine the *concept of voter education*, the *concept of mass mobilization* and the *concept of political mobilization*.

**The Concepts of Voter Education and Mass Mobilization**

The term *voter education* is generally used to describe the dissemination of information, materials and programmes designed to inform voters about the specifics and mechanics of the voting process for a particular election. Voter education involves providing information on who is eligible to vote; where and how to register; how electors can check the voter lists or register to ensure they have been duly included; what type of elections are being held; where, when and how to vote; who the candidates are; and how to file complaints.\(^1\) Effective voter education assists the election umpire in its task of ensuring a free, fair, efficient and cost-effective election. It also assists the law enforcement agencies by awakening the consciousness of voters about the benefits of a peaceful election and the need for all to prevent and avoid violence. Indeed voter education protects democracy. It “provides the background attitudes, behavioural, and knowledge amongst citizens that stimulate and consolidate democracy”\(^2\).

In every election, voter and civic education\(^3\) are necessary to ensure that all constituents—men and women alike—understand their rights, their political system, the contests they are being asked to decide, and how and where to vote. *Civic education* is aimed at conveying knowledge of a country’s political system and context. It might include information on the system of government; the nature and powers of the offices to be filled in an election; the principal economic, social and political issues facing the nation; the value of democracy; equal rights of women and men; and the importance of peace and national reconciliation. For an election to be successful and democratic, voters must understand their rights and responsibilities, and must be sufficiently knowledgeable and well informed to cast ballots that are legally valid and to participate meaningfully in the voting process. Voter and civic education are even more critical in post-conflict countries and polarized societies and environments, where political situations may be volatile and where elections may have an unprecedented impact on the countries’, societies or environments’ future.
The term **mass mobilization** (also known as **social mobilization** or **popular mobilization**) refers to **mobilization of civilian population** as part of **contentious politics**. Mass mobilization is often used by **grassroots-based social movements**, including **revolutionary movements**, but can also become a tool of **elites** and the **state** itself. The process usually takes the form of large public **gatherings** such as **mass meetings**, marches, **parades**, **processions** and **demonstrations**. Those gatherings usually are part of a **protest action**.⁴

On the other hand, **voters’ mobilization** is a process that engages and motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for effective democracy and political development objective through face-to-face dialogue. Members of institutions, community networks, civic and religious groups and others work in a coordinated way to reach the citizens for dialogue with planned voter education messages. In other words, social mobilization seeks to facilitate political awareness and change through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts.

Governments can utilize mass mobilization to provide national support for the causes they are working for. Many governments attempt to mobilize the population to participate in elections and other voting events. In particular, it is important for political parties in any country to be able to mobilize voters in order to gain support for their party, which affects voter turnout in general⁵.

**The Concept of Political Mobilization**

Political mobilization has been defined as “the process whereby political actors encourage people to participate in some form of political action”⁶. In its concrete manifestations this process can take on many different shapes, including similarity with mass mobilization, with similar political objectives as well. What political mobilizers typically do is to persuade people to vote, petition, protest, rally, or join a political party, trade union or a politically active civic organization.⁷ They try to persuade potential adherents to take part in public actions in order to defend their collective cause.

Some of the many countries that practice Nigeria’s form of democracy have long-standing and mobilization strategies and substantial voter education programmes that run not only at the time of elections, but also throughout the year⁸. In some other countries, voter education activities are conducted primarily by civil society organisations and similar professional bodies⁹.
The NBA acknowledges the fact that efforts have been made by some Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), other local NGOs and the Independent National Electoral Commission to engage in voter education programmes. However there is so much yet to be done in a vast country like Nigeria with its peculiar general education and environmental challenges.

**Voter Education Mission and Vision**

The NBA *mission* in this regard therefore is *to target the voters in every nook and cranny and prepare them for effective and beneficial engagement in the voting process prior to election, during and immediately after the election*. The rationale for establishing the Voters Education and Mobilization Committee is the need to sensitise the voters and the general public on the exercise of their franchise, to ensure that politicians and electoral officers are held accountable to the citizens, and to guarantee that each citizen’s vote counts. Simply put, the primary task of the Committee is to continuously educate citizens of Nigeria including voters on their rights, obligations and duties before, during and after the elections. The *vision* is a *country with a culture and atmosphere of peaceful, free, and fair electioneering campaigns and elections*.

The Committee accomplished its task prior to, during and after the 2015 General Election by

1. Using the NBA’s network of nationwide Branches and bar leaders as the primary platform for the voter and civic education and mobilization initiative.
2. Engaging all eligible Nigerians on the need to register as voters.
3. Engaging the voters to be guided by electoral guidelines and rules before, during and after the elections.
4. Drawing voters’ attention to the need to go out in large numbers to vote during elections.
5. Educating voters on their rights and obligations and duties before, during and after elections.
6. Educating the voters to vote for candidates of their choice based on objective parameters.
7. Championing campaigns against election malpractices and violence during political campaigns, elections and after announcement of the results of elections.
8. Working cooperatively with the Independent National Electoral Commission, political parties and other relevant agencies and the mass media organisations to promote and advance political and electoral awareness and democratic consciousness.
9. Organising workshops, seminars and other programmes and events as expedient to promote electoral awareness, prevent electoral malpractices and advance democracy.

Modalities and Resources
The Committee planned to directly organise national voter education and mobilisation workshops and seminars; issue guidelines and give general directives to NBA Branches on their expected role, to ensure that all are focused on the vision and objective of the leadership of the NBA. Branches of the NBA nationwide were encouraged to organise similar events and carry out the Committee’s campaigns and mobilisation in their respective areas.

Resources available to the Committee and NBA Branches included the rich and well organised materials on the website of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), especially the Voter Education section. Indeed it should be emphasised here that publicity of the website as a precious source of voter education and mobilisation materials and information cannot be excessive.

National Workshop
The first National Workshop was held in Abuja on 14 January 2015. The keynote address by Bishop Mathew Hassan Kuka of Sokoto Diocese focused on the question of Nigerians’ readiness for the 2015 elections, including the readiness of all stakeholders – the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), security agencies, political parties, voters etc. Thereafter, there were three panels of five discussants each on

1. Voting Process and Electoral Offences
2. Preventing Election Rigging
3. Security and Logistics

Each panel had a main paper, reactions by panellists and further contributions before the general audience input.

Activities by NBA Branches
The following Branch activities were carried out by NBA branches:

1. 30 January 2015 – Auchi. Ekpoma and Igarra branches had a joint workshop.
2. 30 January 2015 – Warri Branch had a Road Show and street mobilization event in Warri.
3. 31 January 2015 – Port Harcourt Branch Workshop
4. 31 January 2015 – Isiokpo Branch Town Hall Discussion and Voter Sensitization.
5. 1 February 2015 Benin Branch Town Hall and briefing by candidates for National Assembly and Edo State House of Assembly. Also briefing by Edo State INEC Resident Commissioner.
6. 3 February 2015 – Gwagwalada FCT Branch had a Workshop
7. 5 February 2015 – Dutse Branch Round Table Discussion
8. 9 February 2015 – Port Harcourt Branch Road show and street mobilization event in Port Harcourt.
9. 9 February, 2015 – Kano Branch had a Workshop
10. 9 February, 2015 - Ekiti State Branches had a Workshop
11. 15 February 2015 - Sapele Town Hall Discussion and Voter Sensitization
13. 5 March 2015 – Ikorodu Branch, Road Show and street mobilization event in Ikorodu.
14. 20th and 22nd March 2015 – Orji River Branch, Enugu - Voter education and mobilization in market places, churches and motor parks in Oji River Local Government area, talks, distribution of posters, handbills and other voter education materials
16. NBA Nsukka and Obollo Afor also organised voter education and mobilization activities between the 10th and 25th of March 2015.

**Mass Media Campaign**

Mass media campaigns the NBA was involved in include Radio and TV phone-in programmes, radio jingles, posters and handbills. The NBA sought and concluded partnership and collaboration arrangements with some radio and television stations. Efforts to partner with the mobile telecommunications companies did not yield expected results. That is an area we should again make efforts to engage in future voter education and mobilization efforts.
Issues and Challenges

1. Permanent Voter’s Cards (PVCs) – We observed the challenges in the production, distribution and collection of the PVCs very early and we raised it with advice to INEC and the general public to avoid disenfranchisement of eligible voters.

2. Card Readers – The NBA was the first to emphasise the importance of the Card Reader. We cried out for the need to ensure that INEC staff and ad hoc staff were properly trained on how to handle them. We screamed that all eligible voters should be properly educated on its use and its strategic value in the voting process. Indeed it was a major discussion issue during the 14 January 2015 Workshop. The paper presented by Professor Abubakar Momoh at the Workshop was very useful in this regard and it also focused the attention of the general public on the importance of the Card Reader, a major revolutionary improvement by INEC in Nigerian voting process.

3. Whether voters should remain at the polling stations after voting to witness counting of votes. The NBA kick-started the national debate on this as part of efforts to discuss and proactively resolve issues that threatened peaceful conduct of voting and counting of votes.

Conclusion

The results of our voter education and mobilization efforts during 2015 general elections and our role as observers during the elections shows clearly the need for continuous and ongoing voter education and mobilization, even when there are no elections. Every day, more citizens become eligible voters as they attain the voting age. There is therefore the need to sustain a continuous voter education exercise.

In sustaining and building on the gains of the 2015 General Elections, it is important that newly qualified or new eligible voters become conscious of their newly attained responsibility and what it takes to carry out that responsibility freely, without fear of intimidation and with full consciousness of the need to have zero tolerance for violence while engaging in the process.

In the same efforts to sustain the gains, the governments at federal, state and local government levels should as a matter of urgency and importance consider the reintroduction of civic education and civics curriculum in primary and secondary schools. There should be citizenship and leadership training for youths while Citizenship and Leadership Clubs should be established.
in both secondary and tertiary institutions nationwide. This will go a long way in establishing the foundation for national patriotism by all and sundry. It will enable us achieve our desire to ensuring that though tribe and tongue, political affiliations and religious beliefs may differ, in brotherhood and sisterhood we shall all as Nigerians continue to stand.

As the NBA Voter Education and Mobilization Committee stated in its report to the NBA National Executive Committee meeting in Sokoto on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of June 2015, “The 2015 General Elections has come and gone, but the impact of Voter Education and Mobilization Campaign cannot be underestimated. It has showcased NBA as a non-partisan organization. It further facilitated and changed the consciousness of the electorate to believe that their votes count” Indeed we can proudly say that our efforts contributed in no small way in minimizing electoral violence.

Thank you all for your attention.

REFERENCES

3 Civic education is aimed at conveying knowledge of a country’s political system and context. Civic education might include information on the system of government; the nature and powers of the offices to be filled in an election; the principal economic, social and political issues facing the nation; the value of democracy; the equal rights of women and men; and the importance of peace and national reconciliation
4 http://www.unicef.org/cbcs/index_42347.html (accessed on Saturday 15 August 2015)
6 Peter Vermeersch, “Theories of ethnic mobilization: overview and recent trends” CRPD Working Paper No. 3 September 2011
8 E.G. Australia and Canada
9 Some European countries and India. In the USA, voter education and mobilization is carried out by different entities including state level election authorities, media outlets, and civil society organizations, special interest groups, professional associations, unions and political parties.