



ROUND TABLE ON THE RESULTS OF MAY 5, 2002 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS OUAGADOUGOU, 20-22 NOVEMBER 2002

RECOMMENDATIONS and NOTES

1. To the electoral administration

The following recommendations were adopted:

To undertake three comparative studies of the electoral administration and its branches: one being an in-depth analysis of the process at the national level (an internal review), the second being a comparative survey between the Burkinabé and other processes (national-international), and the third study should focus on the evolution of the electoral code.

Establishing electoral lists, with the necessary rigor.

In order to do so, here are some necessary prerequisites:

The CENI, Independent National Electoral Commission, must with the assistance of the administration secure sufficient human and material resources, including vehicles.

Nomadic populations should be considered in the zones where they reside at the time when the census is elaborated.

Mobile registration centers must be established in order to include the nomadic populations. The regulations of CENI must be revisited to clearly consider the relationships between CENI and its chapters, and between the chapters themselves.

Bearing in mind the forthcoming elections, the CENI should now initiate the identification of its needs.

The participants considered the future role of MATD (Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization) in the electoral process, and wondered if it should not be trained to deepen and assimilate the virtues of impartiality and professionalism. If so, what role should it be given nowadays? The MATD should therefore integrate the virtues of impartiality and acquire professionalism through :

- training and sensitization of its human resources;
- working in collaboration with CENI to define the objective characteristics of the electoral registry;
- trains and sensitizes the administration and its deconcentrated structures about civic education;
- takes stock of the causes underlying the fact that it no longer enjoys people's confidence.

2. To political parties

political parties should be encouraged to voice their opinions on political, economic, and social issues;

political parties should be encouraged to get involved now, through training sessions, in their conscience awareness raising role;

political parties should reflect on the relevance of limiting the number of political parties, without infringing the norms of democracy;

It is therefore recommended that:

CGD gives concrete assistance to political parties, in terms of training their delegates, in collaboration with OIE (Independent Electoral Observatory);

For any person to be a candidate in a given region, he/she must have a constituency (namely some kind of roots, background or support) in it;

The political parties' social programmes be codified and translated into local languages;

Political parties endeavor to move towards fusions and alliances so as to reinforce their operational capacities;

3. To the media and CSI (High Information Council)

It was proposed that, the form of some programs should be modified to make them more dynamic. More time should be given to debate programs in French. As a result it was highly recommended that requirements should be set for private media willing to cover elections;

It was proposed that the State provides the necessary resources from its budget to ensure observance of the principles of equal access, plurality, and balance between private and public media.

It was proposed that more time be given to radio programs, and that they be spaced out instead of broadcasting them all at a time and at length;

It was proposed that special reporting teams be made responsible for the media coverage of the elections.

4. To ONEL, National Electoral Observatory and OIE Independent Electoral Observatory, in the matter of electoral observation

ONEL should transform itself or else disappear out of the electoral landscape. If it wants to continue to exist, it should become more autonomous. Considering the difficult relationships and tensions it has had with CENI as well as its own lack of performance in the field as a result of its material destitution, it needs more means if it intends to continue existing.

OIE should continue to work on electoral campaigns, but also include the behaviors of the administration and electors in its observation missions

Its reports should be made available for anyone interested in consulting them.

5. About experiences in terms of voters' education

It was recommended that:

- CGD should initiate training activities and write press articles on the civic education of citizens;
- the awareness raising campaigns initiated by CGD and other NGOs be extended to the entire country;
- political parties should play their role in terms of voters' education

6. Computerizing the electoral register

There was unanimity about the importance of computerized electoral registers in order to enhance transparent and fair elections. The computerized register is a mean to strengthen the reliability of the electoral operations. It is used in several countries of the sub-region.

Civil society organizations and political parties deplored that the computerization process started in 1998 was not used in the 2000 municipal elections. To most people, the main reasons for that were political parties did not accept it, and also, it was difficult to use. CENI noted that if the 1995 computerized register was not used for the 2000 municipal elections, it however served to establish the manual lists of those elections.

The slowness of computerizing the electoral register was underscored. This was agreed by everyone well before the May 2002 elections. It is therefore necessary to start the process of computerizing the electoral register with further delay. CENI then observed that this computerization is one of its major concerns, and it has already elaborate Terms of Reference for the cost and conditions of computerizing the national electoral register. Everyone wished that the possible 2003 local elections be organized using a computerized register which should be supplemented by a manual register would still be needed because 50% of the potential electors will be new ones. Though highly advisable, the computerization of the electoral register cannot become a sine qua non condition for participation in future elections. It is important to start the computerization process and later on to improve and update as necessary .

It was commonly agreed that political parties should create an association to work for the computerization of the electoral registry. This aims at avoiding the mistakes that resulted in political parties mistrusting the computerized register during the 1995 municipal elections. However, the conditions for the creation of this association are still to be determined. The association could take the form of a continued dialogue, not over the technical aspects of the operation, but on the measures that secure transparency.

If the computerization can greatly contribute to transparent elections, it is neither the absolute response nor a cure-all for all the problems. It is only a tool in the service of elections. Its contribution to the quality of elections depends on numerous factors involving the reliability of the system of identifying electors. For that reason, it is highly advisable that the documents used for registering electors be limited to those that can help identify the elector, especially those documents bearing photographs. The problem of the access of electors to these documents is real, but it can be solved if there is a genuine political will.

For the possible additional censuses for the purpose of the announced computerization of the national electoral register, it will be convenient to look for the necessary means (civil society organization training census takers for them to do quality job, acquiring appropriate software to

have deterring finger prints, so as to limit multiple registrations, etc.). Additional measures should be taken to support the computerization.

7. Cost of elections and electoral campaigns

The high cost of electoral operation was mentioned repeatedly. While they acknowledge that democracy has a price that we must agree to pay, the participants also underlined the need to rationalize electoral costs.

The increase trend of these costs also concerned many. However, we must relativize this trend, considering numerous factors (the number of polling stations has doubled, in previous elections the input of the administration was not taken into consideration, the inclusion of CENI's budget, etc.). This situation is therefore largely the outcome of some choices made by the electoral code; which choices have considerably increased the costs.

Many participants noted the risk for Burkinabé democracy to have its electoral process too largely depend on external financing. This can compromise the sustainability of the democratic process. Therefore, it is necessary to seriously envisage autonomous financing modes and to reduce the large dependence on external financing progressively. In this respect, propositions were made with a view to reducing the costs of electoral operations (harmonizing the timing of the various elections), ensuring foreseeing resources (fractioning the annual budget), or collecting financial resources (setting up communal funds for elections), or else resorting to civism.

It was commonly agreed that the problem of elections has more to do with funding than with costs. Indeed, the elections must be seen as normal aspects of sovereignty, classic administrative activities, and not punctual operations. They must be programmed and planned by the state.

Participants noted the fact that the state pays the public subsidy to political parties with delay and in a fractioned manner. It was also identified that there is a need for reflection in order to regulate the funding of electoral campaigns, like in some neighboring countries (ceiling of electoral expenses). Indeed, the considerable distortions of the financial resources should not affect the transparency of the process and the freedom of citizens.

8. The experience of the single ballot

The single ballot revealed several advantages, which minimize its real or supposed disadvantages. However, it will be convenient not to exaggerate the cost advantage it might have. Its advantages that need to be more considered are those related to its contribution to more transparent elections.

9. Individual/independent candidacy

The legal exclusion of individual/independent candidacies from participation in the election is a consolidation of the preponderance of political parties in electoral systems.

Many participants expressed reservations about individual/independent candidacies, especially when those candidates come from civil society organizations. Numerous reasons were put forward :

- the role of civil society organizations is not to conquer nor exercise political power; this role is reserved to the political parties;
- such a politicized role may cause damage to their image, credibility, and impartiality;
- civil society organizations may create political parties if they wish ;
- there are practical organization difficulties in implementing a legislative or local electoral process with individual/independent candidates.

We must therefore avoid the risks of confusions by keeping to the strict and classic distinction between political parties and civil society organizations.

However many participants think that the electoral law should allow individual/independent candidacies for local elections.

10. The impact of the new electoral system

The new electoral system has contributed to enable numerous political parties enter Parliament, and hence to the reinforcement of the democratic process in Burkina. Various studies reveal that the results of opposition political parties in the May 2002 legislatives would have been lower with the former electoral mode.

Parliament is more balanced, and the high dominance of the ruling party has been reduced.

Though we must not exaggerate them, there are real medium and long-term risks for the national political landscape to split up.

Indeed, we must let the new electoral system to prove itself.