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بنیاد انتخابات آزاد و عادلانه افغانستان

Free & fair Election Foundation
of Afghanistan

Summary

The second phase of voter registration (VR) began on 5 November 2008 in 10 Provinces. Based on its action plan, FEFA managed to observe the voter registration process in all 10 provinces selected by the IEC for this phase (Kabul, Balkh, Baghlan, Jowzjan, Kunduz, Samangan, Herat, Badghis, Faryab and Paktia). The IEC opened 326 voter registration centers in these provinces, with 1928 stations. Prior to the deployment of the observer teams, 10 provincial master trainers received two days of extensive training at FEFA headquarters. After receiving training they were sent to their respective provinces where they conducted one day training for 298 observers.

The training provided the observers with skills which included observation methodology, practical exercises on using the checklists, reporting system and timeline, etc. In total 298 observers, 101 of who were female, received training and were deployed in 10 provinces managing to cover 197 registration centers, or slightly more than 60% of the total.

According to the reporting methodology, the observer teams, through provincial officials, reported to FEFA HQ on weekly basis and their findings were verified and at the end of every week regularly shared with the Independent Election Commission (IEC), with specific recommendations for improvement of the process.

Procedural violations

Multiple Registrations

Multiple registrations by the eligible people during the VR process was a prominent violation. Such violation was seen in at least 40% of all registration centers were observed by FEFA. According to the observation reports from Kabul, Heart, Paktia, Badghis, Kunduz, Baghlan, and Faryab provinces in many of such cases applicants succeeded to get more than one Voter Card. However, very few cases they were identified and prevented by IEC staff.

FEFA found cases in Badghis province where IEC personnel distributed voting cards to applicants without being registered. The most serious case was the distribution of around 500 voting card to a single individual.

In addition, FEFA observed in Kunduz province where IEC personnel provided an unknown number of voting card of women, which does not need photo, and stored the cards with themselves.

Lack of Attention towards ID and Age Verification

According to the observation reports there was ignorance of VR procedure regarding some cases such as ID checking especially in women's registration centers however FEFA's observers reported at least 100 cases from Faryab, Jowzjan, Kunduz, Baghlan and Herat provinces.

Underage registrati

The other type of violation which was indicated in registration centers was registration of underage people. FEFA was able to verify such violations in 95% of the centers it observed.

Employing Male Staff in Female VR Centers

Another kind of procedural violation reported by FEFA's observers is recruiting of male staff in female registration centers, such cases were seen in at least 20% of registration centers have been observed by FEFA. This problem has been observed in the capital and some district of Paktia, Kuhistan district of Faryab, Ghur Maatch and Murghab districts of Badghis.

Also, in at least 20% of VR female center where male were serving in Paktia, it was observed that IEC handed over a number of women voting cards to the male members of the respective women's families.

Temporary Disappearance of Staff

FEFA further found cases where center personnel were recruited from public servants that mostly were unable to attend full time to their jobs, especially schools teachers where the annual exams unexpectedly clashed with the process so that they could not attend the VR centers which has caused centers to be closed temporarily. In some cases the closures have been up to 6 hours. In this respect FEFA was able to verify at least 20 cases as such identified mostly in Baghlan, Kunduz, Faryab, Jowzjan, and Mazar provinces.

Lack of Staff Impartiality

Lack of impartiality has been one of the problems and a few cases have been observed in the second phase of the process.

Some of the high ranked officials in some VR centers have had political involvement. In the first week of the second phase FEFA has observed that the head of the VR center in Setara High School in Maimana City of Faryab is actively the Chair of Women's Affairs of Junbish Mili Islami Party. When the IEC officials were asked, they verified the political involvement in this case, and that the lack of awareness was due to a promotion. Also, FEFA observers have indicated of few similar cases in Paktia province.

A few verbal complaints have been received that the provincial official of the IEC in Paktia province has been involved with the Mahaz Mili Party and the claim is that his brother is currently the representative of the party in Paktia.

In addition to the claims on the official and staff of IEC having political involvement, real cases have been seen during observation that questions the impartiality of the staff. For example, on the 01/12/2008 in the 13 district of Kabul City, Dasht-e-Barchi area, VR center number [051] was authorized by the IEC provincial office to move to Kakur of Qalia Qazi area, but due to unknown reasons the head of the local area delayed the move until the end of the phase. By the cause of this problem most of the eligible people in Kakur village couldn't register especially women.

Women's Participation

Women's participation in the process was low in most of the provinces with a slightly higher number in the cities in the North. However, in rural areas due to security challenges and inaccessibility of the VR centers for women, their participation was not as high as it was in the cities. These problems were mainly identified in Baghlan, Kunduz, Faryab, Paktia and Badghis. However, the problem has been more prominent in Paktia and Badghis provinces. In addition to security problems, VR centers being far away, cultural issues and male staff working in female centers have been the main causes of the low turn out of female participation in these provinces.

Opening of centers

At least 90% of the VR centers which observed by FEFA were not opened in due time and almost none of the centers observed by FEFA opened before 08:30am and were closed before 4:00pm.

Security

Based on FEFA observers' reports, despite the security measures taken by police on the ground, some sporadic security incidents took place, which to some extent, had negative impacts on the process at least at a local level. For instance, in Nawai Baghlan district on 14 Nov 2008 a suicide bomb attack caused the center there to postpone its activities for one day.

Similarly, in Guzara district of Herat province a suicide attack occurred. Though this incident took place relatively far away from the centers it caused the centers to suspend the registration process for a day.

Further, a suicide bomb incident on 27 November 2008 at Charrahi-e-Masood caused registration stations positioned at Abdul Hadi Dawi High school in Kabul to suspend the process at least for an hour.

In addition, FEFA identified some problems with people's accessibility to the VR centers. In Pul-e Khumri some registration centers due to security reasons were not accessible for the applicants from Dand-e-Ghuri district. The local people repeatedly

approached the IEC provincial officials with a written application and necessary guarantee of security demanding to move the centers to their areas. However, the IEC was not able to relocate the centers to areas concerned because of what they said “potential security threats” in Dand-e-Ghuri district. In this district almost %50 of eligible people mostly women deprived of being registered.

Also, in Paktia, Faryab, Badghis and Baghlan provinces other problems were reported by FEFA observers and these are that the IEC has not been able to move the VR centers normally from one area to the other, especially in women’s area where they have been affected because of the security situation. In some areas the lack of guarantee of security by community elders has caused these problems.

The presence of a rebel commander in the mountainous area of Dar-e-Kayan of Baghlan province has resulted in IEC staff being unable to go to the area and continue the process. This rebel commander’s brother is already in detention with the government, and he is perceived to take retaliation for his brother arrest that may include taking government officials hostage.

On 25 November 2008 due to the presence of a Taliban local commander named Abdul Hakim in the neighborhood of Gulchin, center of Qades district in Badghis province, caused fear among the people, who refrained from approaching the mentioned center for almost a week.

Recommendations

- FEFA has observed a high number of underage or under 17 year-olds registering during the second phase of voter registration. If this violation continues to happen in the third and fourth phases, it will cause a serious problem on the Election Day. Although underage people are not legally allowed to register and their participation is totally illegal, it could impact negatively upon the free will of the voters in the election. FEFA believes that if the IEC takes necessary action to prevent these violations from happening in the coming phases of the voter registration it could guarantee the free will of the people in the coming election.
- Multiple registrations have been another sort of violation, and this type of violation constitutes the highest number of violations in this phase. If these sorts of violations are not prevented in the third and fourth phases it could undermine the transparency and fairness of the election. So, FEFA supports any sort of actions by IEC that will help prevent these violations from happening in the coming phases of voter registration.
- Although the IEC has announced through media that it is looking into using a technology program to review the registration list and avoid the repeat of this violation, FEFA expects that the IEC should release more information about the

above program to public and civil society organizations in order to answer their concerns.

- Another violation that has been observed is employing male staff in female centers and specific actions needed to be taken to avoid it in the next phases. FEFA believes if this problem continues in the third and fourth phases it will have a negative impact on women's participation as has been observed previously.
- FEFA's observation has indicated that the security situation like other problems impacted on the level of people's participation, especially women, and also affected the IEC work program. With current security threats existing in the provinces where the third and fourth phases will take place, security organizations need to take serious action to enable the IEC to run the process correctly and successfully and especially provide a secure environment for women to participate.
- Two of the higher number violations occurring in the first and second phases of the VR process were that of people registering getting more than one card and registration of under age people. Also FEFA observers have observed specific and documentary 5 evidences. Issuing registration cards in dozens in some areas is committed by IEC staff.

FEFA believes that if the perpetrators are handed to the proper and legal authorities and the violations are publicly released through the media, it will have a positive effect and could prevent similar violations in future phases. Finally FEFA encourages the IEC to take appropriate legal actions against the offenders including making the cases public to prevent such violations in the future.

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