

NATIONAL ELECTIONS OBSERVATORY

TRAINER'S GUIDE

For the Training of Voter Registration Officials

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Voter Registration Guidelines for Election Stakeholders in Cameroon

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	4
Introduction	4
Chapter One	6
The Legal and Institutional Framework	6
1.1. Laws Governing Voter Registration In Cameroon	6
1.2. Voter Qualifications (Checklist)	7
1.3. Voter Disqualifications (Checklist)	7
1.4. Procedures for Voter Registration	8
1.5. Stakeholders Involved in Voter Registration	11
Chapter Two	13
Frequently Ignored, Misinterpreted or Violated Provisions of the Law	13
2.1. Concerning Voter Qualifications	13
2.2. Concerning Voter Disqualifications	13
2.3. Concerning Voter Registration Commissions and Procedures	14
2.4. Concerning Sanctions in Case of Violations of the Law	16
Functioning of Voter Registration Commissions	17
3.1. Existing Practices within Voter Registration Commissions	17
3.2. Rationalisation of the Functioning of Revision Commissions	19
3.3. Rationalisation and Harmonisation of Key Voter Registration Procedures	21

3.3.1.	The Introduction of Official Forms	22
3.3.2.	Filing Applications	22
3.3.2.1.	Application for Registration (New Voters)	22
3.3.2.2.	Application for Transfer Registration (Old Voters)	23
3.3.2.3.	Application for Deletion from Previous Register	23
3.3.3.	Receiving Application Files	23
3.3.4.	Examining Application Files	24
3.3.4.1.	Application for Registration (New Voters)	24
3.3.4.2.	Application for Transfer Registration (Old Voters)	24
3.3.5.	Expunging Names from the Voter Register	25
3.3.6.	Channelling Information on Voter Registration	25
3.3.6.1.	Communicating with the General Public	25
3.3.6.2.	Channelling Applications and Petitions	26
3.3.6.3.	Communication Amongst Administrative Authorities, Commissions and Concerned Persons	26

Introduction

The duty to register and therefore vote during an election, though not a legal obligation in Cameroon, is an honour for all citizens. Abstaining from fulfilling this civic duty does not prevent or annul the outcome of the poll from applying to all, voters and non-voters alike. There is an unfortunate consequence to such an omission: surrendering to others the opportunity, which the electoral law gives to every citizen, to choose his/her leaders. By registering, citizens would be able to vote and therefore have a say in what happens to their country. This right of everyone to take part in the government of his/her country through freely chosen representatives is well enshrined in Article 21 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which Cameroon is a signatory, and in Article 2(2) of the Constitution of Cameroon.

A sound voter register, which protects the rights of qualified citizens and minimises the possibility of electoral fraud, is of central importance in organising credible elections. All eligible voters, but only those who are eligible, should be included. The voter registers must be as accurate and defect-free as possible: this is a *sine qua non* for the conduct of a good election. The State is responsible for ensuring that the voter register is credible.

A transparent, efficient, and credible registration process is at the very core of a democratic electoral process. It guarantees that all citizens who are eligible to vote have been afforded the opportunity to register, can verify their names on the register and know at which

location they will vote. The process should be technically proficient, conducted free from the influence of executive authorities, and have the confidence of all stakeholders. If the registration process is fundamentally flawed the entire process is undermined.

The purpose of this guide, *inter alia*, is to assist the National Elections Observatory (NEO) in educating election stakeholders in Cameroon on voter registration techniques, with a view to building public confidence and citizen involvement in the electoral process.

Chapter One

The Legal and Institutional Framework

1.1. Laws Governing Voter Registration In Cameroon

Three laws lay down conditions for the conduct of elections in Cameroon:

- Law N° 92-002 of 14 August 1992 to lay down conditions for the election of Municipal Councillors;
- Law N° 91-020 of 16 December 1991(Modified by law N° 97-13 of 19 March 1997) to lay down conditions governing the election of Members of Parliament;
- Law N° 92-10 of 17 September 1992 (modified by law N° 97-020 of 9 September 1997) to lay down conditions governing the vacancy of and election to the Presidency of the Republic.

The registration of voters and the management of voter registers are dealt with in each of these laws, which can be said to be complementary. The laws define eligibility conditions for voters, lay down procedures for the registration of voters and the revision/updating of electoral rolls and assigns specific duties to various stakeholders in the process.

Because the proper registration of voters and the efficient management of the voter registers are prerequisites for free, fair and credible elections, it is important for all those who are involved in the management of these activities to be conversant with the provisions of the law concerning them. Highlights of these provisions are presented below under the following sub-heads:

- Voter qualifications (Checklist);
- Voter disqualifications (checklist);
- Procedures for voter registration;
- Stakeholders and their duties in the registration process.

1.2. Voter Qualifications (Checklist)

To be eligible to vote and thus to enter the register of voters, a person must possess the following qualifications:

- Be of Cameroonian nationality or a naturalised Cameroonian;
- Be at least 20 years of age or would have attained that age before registers are closed;
- Possess a place of abode or be resident in the given administrative unit for at least 6 (six) months. Otherwise, be listed on the income tax assessment roll of the said unit for the 5 (fifth) consecutive year and apply for registration showing proof of having been removed from the electoral roll of the place of “normal” residence.

It should also be noted that members of the armed forces and persons of similar status are to be registered wherever their units or homeport is established without having to fulfil residence conditions.

1.3. Voter Disqualifications (Checklist)

A person may not be registered to vote if:

- S/he has been convicted of a felony, even by default;
- S/he has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment, without suspension, of more than 3 (three) months;

- S/he has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment, accompanied by suspension of sentence or probation, of more than 6 (six) months;
- S/he is subject of a warrant of arrest;
- S/he is an un-discharged bankrupt who has been so adjudged either by a Cameroonian Court or a foreign judgement enforceable in Cameroon;
- S/he is insane or of unsound mind;
- S/he has been convicted within the last 10 (ten) years of any offence against the security of the state and has not been rehabilitated or granted amnesty.

1.4. Procedures for Voter Registration

Voter registration in Cameroon takes place throughout the year, from 01 January to 31 December. It is suspended in an election year as soon as elections are officially called by a decree of the Head of State. It resumes the day immediately after the poll.

Procedures for the registration of voters as laid down by the law are quite straightforward and may be summarised as follows:

- Any citizen who possesses the qualifications laid down by law and whose name does not yet feature in the register of voters may apply for registration to the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head;
- A receipt shall be issued to her/him for the application, which shall be entered in a special register and examined by the Revision Commission¹;

¹ The Revision Commission takes care of both the revision and recompilation of voter register

- After examining applications from citizens, the Revision Commission shall:
 - a) Record in the register of electors who have satisfied the requirements laid down by the law;
 - b) Expunge the names of:
 - Deceased persons;
 - Persons whose names have been ordered to be struck off the register by the competent authority;
 - Persons who no longer meet conditions laid down by the law;
 - Persons who are found by the commission to have been wrongly registered;
- The Commissions shall register, at their request, persons who were previously registered in another register of voters on condition that such persons present an application for their names to be struck off the previous register or present an attestation showing that the names have already been struck off;
- Where the name of a person appears in more than one register of voters, the commission shall, through the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head, invite such a person to indicate the register on which s/he wishes to be maintained. If the person fails to choose within 8 (eight) days of his/her notification by the administrative authority, the Commission shall maintain the name on the register of the administrative unit in which the person has been resident for the past 6 (six) months or

more and shall have the name expunged from the other register(s);

- An elector whose name has been automatically expunged from a register of voters by the Commission or whose application for registration has been challenged shall be notified by the administrative authority and given an opportunity to submit his/her comments;
- The decision of the Revision Commission shall be notified within 3 (three) days to the parties concerned, which may thereafter appeal against such a decision before the Divisional Supervisory Commission within 5 (five) days of notification;
- The list containing the additions and deletions from the electoral register shall be filed with the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head at the end of the exercise and made available to the public and interested parties for consultation. A copy of such a list and of the Revision Commission's report shall be forwarded by the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head to the Senior Divisional Officer, with comments where necessary;
- If the Senior Divisional Officer discovers irregularities that violate the electoral law, s/he shall refer the work of the Revision Commission to the Divisional Supervisory Commission, which shall give its ruling within 10 (ten) days and prescribe, where necessary, the time limit within which corrections should be made;
- The decision of the Supervisory Commission may be appealed against before the Court of Appeal, which shall rule in chambers within 5 (five) days of its being seized.

The law also provides that the following persons may be registered outside stipulated revision periods without having to fulfil the residence requirement:

- a) Public servants and employees who have either been transferred or placed on retirement after the closing of registration as well as members of their families living with them;
- b) Servicemen demobilised after the closing date for registration.

Such persons must however apply to the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head for registration, providing the relevant supporting documents.

- Finally, the Cameroon Penal Code prescribes sanctions to be meted out to persons who register to vote under false identities or who present forged documents to justify their possession of the voter qualifications listed above, or who withhold information that would otherwise disqualify them.

1.5. Stakeholders Involved in Voter Registration

The proper and timely registration of voters and revision of voter registers requires the participation of various election stakeholders who must each perform his/her role effectively for the exercise to be successful:

- **Public administrations and political parties** must designate their representatives within the various commissions

and submit their names to the competent administrative authority within the stipulated time limit;

- **The Senior Divisional Officer (SDO)** must set the various commissions in time and in accordance with the provisions of the law;
- The two commissions concerned with voter registration (**Revision Commission and Divisional Supervisory Commission²**) must effectively play their respective roles of revising/updating voter registers and hearing complaints arising from the exercise;
- **The Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head** must effectively serve as a link between the Revision Commission and the public and as the authority that draws up the electoral rolls at the end of the voter registration exercise;
- **Qualified citizens** must come up and apply to be registered instead of waiting for the commission or administrative authority to come to them;
- Authorized **members of the public** (qualified and registered voters) should come forward and provide the administrative authorities and commission members with useful information that would help produce reliable and credible voter registers such as names of deceased or convicted voters, multiple registrations etc.

² The Divisional Supervisory Commissions are responsible for ensuring the proper conduct of pre-election operations and elections.

Chapter Two

Frequently Ignored, Misinterpreted or Violated Provisions of the Law

Election stakeholders in Cameroon have not always mastered and respected all the legal and regulatory provisions that govern voter registration. Some of the frequently ignored, misinterpreted or violated provisions of the law are highlighted below with the view to drawing stakeholders' attention to them.

2.1. Concerning Voter Qualifications

- The condition of residence has often been the source of misunderstanding and even of disputes among stakeholders. In particular, the provision that citizens with a place of abode within a given administrative unit may register and vote in that unit has been the subject of considerable controversy as it is said to pave the way to multiple registration;
- The law provides that a copy of the citizen's birth certificate is to be used to determine the age of the applicant seeking registration. Somehow, however, the focus has shifted from the birth certificate to the national identity card which also indicates the holder's age but is more difficult to obtain;
- Some stakeholders also tend to ignore the fact that the law makes provision for registration outside the "normal" period, under certain conditions and for specific cases as listed above.

2.2. Concerning Voter Disqualifications

- Applicants' criminal records are hardly ever taken into consideration when voter registration is done, whereas the law

disqualifies citizens who have been convicted for various types of felonies;

- Besides, it is not always easy to determine at what point a person can be said to be of unsound mind.

2.3. Concerning Voter Registration Commissions and Procedures

- The popular view seems to be that people who wish to register to vote stay in their homes and the Revision Commission Members come to them. Indeed, the law requires that citizens who possess the stipulated qualifications apply to the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head who forwards such applications to the Commission for examination;
- The law also provides for the setting up of several Revision Commissions within the same administrative unit, where necessary. This would be one way of making the commissions more accessible to the public. However, administrative officials responsible for setting up Revision Commissions do not frequently take advantage of this provision;
- As part of procedures for voter registration, the law requires that the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head notify members of the public of various decisions made by the Revision Commission. In practice, the administrative authority makes few such notifications. Similarly, these authorities do not always ensure that existing voter registers are made available;
- The law requires that political parties submit the names of their representatives within the Revision and Supervisory Commissions at least 2 (two) days before the start of registration each year

(i.e. 29 December). In practice, very few political parties do this. As a result, the various commissions are not set up in time;

- Administrative authorities have been observed to delay the establishment of commissions to await the appointment by political parties of their representatives, whereas the law recommends the replacement of unavailable representatives;
- The law also provides for work to continue within Revision Commissions in the absence of a majority of their members. This provision that allows even one member to pursue the work of the commission is often forgotten by political parties who tend to contest the validity of work done in the absence of their representatives;
- The law also requires that citizens who are re-registering to vote provide proof of the fact that their names have been struck off previous lists or apply for the names to be struck off. In practice, these are provisions that are hardly ever implemented;
- The law requires that, in establishing voters' rolls/registers, the administrative authority assign each registered voter a registration number in the serial order of the register. This provision poses problems of implementation as some stakeholders insist to have the number assigned at the moment when citizens apply for registration, whereas the administrative authority says the number is assigned only after the application has been examined and accepted by the commission;
- Besides, the law provides that, upon reception of an application for registration, the administrative authority should issue a receipt

of the said application to the applicant. This provision is not widely respected.

2.4. Concerning Sanctions in Case of Violations of the Law

- The sanctions provided for by the law to be meted out to persons who register on a false identity or who provide forged documents or incomplete/false information when they apply for registration are hardly ever taken. This tends to encourage dishonesty and impunity. Persons who use the same means to disqualify others and have their names removed from voter registers are also punishable but this rarely occurs.

Chapter Three

Functioning of Voter Registration Commissions

Existing laws and regulations do not spell out the manner in which voter registration commissions should function in order to ensure their efficiency. The initiative of organizing the work of these commissions is thus left in the hands of local administrative authorities and commission officials. The result of such a situation is that practice tends to differ from one administrative unit to the next and from one moment to another. This leaves many citizens who wish to register or to have their names transferred from one register to another confused and discouraged. It is therefore of utmost necessity for commissions to organize their work in a rational manner and to inform the public of the operational strategies they have adopted. Let us first examine the various operational strategies so far used by commissions.

3.1. Existing Practices within Voter Registration Commissions

- Commission members rely entirely on the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head to invite them to meetings and tell them what to do. There is hardly any distinction between the local administration and the commission;
- Commissions can only be reached through the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head who may thus choose what to bring or not to bring before them;
- No timeframes are set for commissions to meet and most of the time members meet to be simply briefed on work that has already

been completed. No systematic examination of applications by commissions takes place;

- Commission members go to the field to meet prospective voters when the means for such field trips are available. Field trips are thus perceived as the principal strategy for voter registration;
- Field trips are conducted on a timetable fixed by the administrative authority and commission chairperson without necessary prior consultation with members/leaders of communities to be visited. The frequent unavailability of the people due to lack of information on field visits or more pressing community activities, accounts for the relatively low output of such field trips;
- As an alternative strategy, village and quarter heads are sometimes entrusted with the task of collecting the names and credentials of prospective voters and handing these over to the administrative authority/commission;
- In some cases, local party leaders collect the names and credentials of their party members and supporters and hand these to the administrative authority/commission to be entered in the voter register;
- Pre-registration of voters is done in temporary registers (exercise books, loose sheets, etc.). Only later are the names transferred to what may be more or less permanent registers;
- Tools and other materials (like forms and registers) used by the administration/commission to conduct the registration of voters are not always available. When they do exist, they are locally improvised and correspond to no set of generally accepted norms;

- Commissions rarely prepare reports on the revision work undertaken by their members as prescribed by law. Thus the administrative authority does not always receive from the commission the approved lists of registered voters and information that should guide him/her in the preparation of final voter rolls;
- The final voter rolls are usually drawn up by the administrative authority without any further reference to the Revision Commission/representatives of political parties as prescribed by law;
- Political party representation in the various commissions is more nominal than real and appointed representatives are frequently not available for various reasons, particularly the lack of means to undertake field trips.

The conclusion to be drawn from the various points highlighted above is that existing practices of voter registration need to be re-examined, streamlined and harmonized.

3.2. Rationalisation of the Functioning of Revision Commissions

Rationalizing the functioning of Revision Commissions does not necessarily require the amendment of existing legislation on voter registration even if the proper definition of stakeholders' respective functions would be very helpful. While awaiting legislative reforms, the following measures could render voter registration commissions more functional:

- Commission chairpersons and members need to be sensitised about their duties as laid down by the law and endeavour to

assume these duties as partners of the local administration rather than as part and parcel of it;

- In this respect, the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) should avoid appointing Sub-Divisional Officers as Revision Commission chairpersons as these same administrative officials are those to whom Revision Commissions address their reports and cannot be expected to scrutinize reports they have themselves prepared. Besides, Sub-Divisional Officers shoulder so many other responsibilities that they cannot afford enough time to devote to commission duties;
- Because mobile Revision Commissions tend to be costly to run and produce questionable results, it seems more reasonable to shift the focus from one commission that is expected to cover all the areas of the administrative unit to several commissions that cover smaller areas they can control without having to cover long distances. Provision exists in the law for the generalisation of this measure;
- The setting up of several Revision Commissions within the same administrative unit, in such a manner that each important village or quarter has its own commission, would also be one way of rendering legitimate the use of village and quarter heads as voter registration officials who are recognized by the law and master the areas in which they are called to intervene;
- With a smaller area to cover, each Revision Commission can have a permanent address to which citizens who wish to register can go. It would even be more feasible for such a commission to

conduct a door-to-door voter registration campaign without having to travel long distances;

- The Sub-Divisional Officer could thus visit and hold regular evaluation meetings with the various commissions under his charge. At the end, the administrative official would be better placed to scrutinize the Revision Commission's report before forwarding it to the Senior Divisional Officer (SDO);
- Political party participation in the work of the various localized commissions is likely to be enhanced by the setting-up of several revision Commissions since this will reduce prohibitive transport costs.

3.3. Rationalisation and Harmonisation of Key Voter Registration Procedures

For purposes of clarity, simplicity and consistency, it is necessary to rationalise and harmonise key voter registration procedures as they are laid down in the law. The idea is not in effect to modify existing procedures or to introduce new ones. What is intended is to render the procedures laid down by the law more explicit and more practical so as to ensure their consistent and effective implementation.

The rationalisation and harmonisation of key voter registration procedures can be conducted along the following lines:

- The introduction of forms to clarify and hasten certain transactions;
- The facilitation of various application processes (filing applications);
- Receiving applications;
- Examining applications;

- Expunging names from the voter register;
- The establishment of effective communication channels among the various stakeholders.

3.3.1. The Introduction of Official Forms

Official forms (see samples attached) can be introduced for use in the following voter registration transactions:

- ☞ Application for Registration;
- ☞ Application for Transfer Registration;
- ☞ Discharge (Receipt) of Application;
- ☞ Certification of Residence.
- ☞ Certification of Deletion from Previous Register;
- ☞ Application for Deletion from Previous Register;
- ☞ Declaration of Identity;

Similarly, the administrative authority will need to introduce a standard format for the following administrative documents:

- ☞ Register of Voters;
- ☞ Electoral Rolls for Polling Stations;
- ☞ Register of Applications;
- ☞ Register of Complaints and Petitions.

3.3.2. Filing Applications

3.3.2.1. Application for Registration (New Voters)

- Fill the application form;
- Attach the following supporting documents:
 - Copy of National Identity Card, Birth Certificate, Age Declaration or (in exceptional cases) a Declaration of Identity;

- Certificate of Residence or relevant document waiving residence requirement.
- Submit application at Sub-Divisional/District Office or any authorised office and obtain a receipt.

3.3.2.2. Application for Transfer Registration (Old Voters)

- Fill the application form;
- Attach the following supporting documents:
 - Certificate of or Application for Deletion from Previous Register;
 - Voter Card;
 - Certificate of Residence, Certificate of Demobilisation or Transfer/Retirement Decision (State/Corporate employees).
- Submit application at Sub-Divisional/District Office or any authorised office and obtain a receipt.

3.3.2.3. Application for Deletion from Previous Register

- Fill the application form;
- Submit it at the Sub-Divisional/District office and obtain a Certificate of Deletion; Or
- Attach the application form to your transfer registration form if you are already in your new place of residence.

3.3.3. Receiving Application Files

- Make sure the appropriate form has been properly filled by the authorised person;
- Cross-check relevant supporting documents to make sure that they are complete and authentic;
- Register the application in the appropriate official register;

- Issue a receipt to the applicant on which the relevant reference number and date appear.

3.3.4. Examining Application Files

3.3.4.1. Application for Registration (New Voters)

- Establish the true identity of the applicant;
- Cross-check applicant's identity and record to make sure that all voter qualifications are met and that no disqualifications apply;
- Take the decision to register or not to register on the basis of evidence presented;
- Request administrative authority to notify the applicant in case of decision not to register;
- Report any case of violation of criminal law (fake/forged documents, false identity etc) to the criminal prosecuting official;
- Include findings, decisions etc in a report to be submitted to the Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head.

3.3.4.2. Application for Transfer Registration (Old Voters)

- Establish the true identity card of the applicant;
- Cross-check authenticity of previous registration against supporting documents and Checklists of Voter Qualifications/Disqualifications;
- Where an application for deletion from a previous register is presented, forward same to Sub-Divisional Officer or District Head for onward transmittal to competent authority;
- Get the applicant notified by the administrative authority should the commission decide not to register him/her;

- Report any case of violation of criminal law to the competent prosecuting officer;
- Include findings and decisions in a report to be submitted to the Sub-Divisional Officer or District head.

3.3.5. Expunging Names from the Voter Register

- Consult reliable and authoritative sources (Civil Status Registry, Court Registry and Community leaders) to help determine deceased voters and those affected by one or other of the electoral disqualifications;
- Go through existing voter register to identify persons to be struck off. Notify those (living) voters whose names are to be struck off;
- Request the administrative authority to invite voters whose names appear in more than one voter register to choose where they wish to be maintained;
- Include findings and decisions in the report to be submitted to the Sub-Divisional Officer.

3.3.6. Channelling Information on Voter Registration

3.3.6.1. Communicating with the General Public

- Circular letters, announcements etc intended for the general public should always be prepared in several copies for posting and distribution through strategic channels;
- Use the following communication channels to ensure broad information:
 - National Radio and Television;
 - Local/Community Radio Stations;

- Notice Boards;
 - Local political party structures;
 - Local Newspapers;
 - Village and Quarter Heads;
 - Religious leaders and congregations;
 - Concerned NGOs, Community Based Organisations, Women Organisations, Youth Groups etc.;
 - Community leaders;
 - Town criers etc;
 - Routine market days.
- Make sure announcements are made well in advance of events in order to ensure proper propagation;
 - Send reminders as deadlines draw near.

3.3.6.2. Channelling Applications and Petitions

- Submit applications and petitions at Sub-Divisional Office/District Office as stipulated by law;
- Through consensus, Sub-Divisional Officers and District Heads should officially designate addresses closer to the people (village/quarter levels) where applications and petitions may be introduced;
- Make sure your application or petition is registered and obtain a receipt for it

3.3.6.3. Communication Amongst Administrative Authorities, Commissions and Concerned Persons

- Sub-Divisional Officers and District Heads should endeavour to communicate with commissions in writing for purposes of clarity and record keeping;

- Commission Chairpersons should also, in writing, request the Administrative Authority, whenever it becomes necessary to notify citizens of the fate of their applications or registration;
- Notification of citizens should also be done in writing and the letters sent through reliable sources such as village and quarter heads and, where possible, post offices;
- Commissions should also endeavour to report in writing to Sub-Divisional Officers (District Heads) as laid down by the law;
- To enhance group dynamics amongst commissions members, the following measures could be taken:
 - Establish a fixed venues for meetings;
 - Meeting at regular intervals;
 - Share useful information;
 - Elect a secretary to keep records;
 - Abide strictly by the provisions of the Law etc.