

The EU's successful support to democratic governance so far is based on an integrated approach designed to increase the political relevance and leverage of the EU and to take a leading role in the coordination of democracy support to Nigeria by the international community. It has also contributed to enhanced political engagement with, and dialogue between key stakeholders across the legislature, electoral bodies, political parties and civil society. The EU created and chairs a coordination architecture consisting of EU Heads of Mission (HoMs) and other "likeminded" HoMs and an "election core-group" comprising of international development partners in Nigeria. The EU also played a leading role in supporting the National Peace Committee (NPC) chaired by a former Head of State. The NPC played a critical role in preventing electoral related violence in the pre- and post-2015 and 2019 general elections. This engagement was crucial in facilitating a historic transfer of power between the two main political parties in 2015 (for the first time since 1999). The EU is currently supporting the NPC to include more youth and women as members. The deployment of EU Election Observation Missions (EoM) at each general election since 1999 has further solidified the EU's role and engagement in the process, and serves as a reference point for future cooperation with recommendations guiding long-term support to electoral stakeholders.

The action will contribute to progress on a number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and consequent fulfilment of economic and social rights, and gender equality, in line with Nigeria's international human rights commitments. Moreover, the action contributes to the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III), and particularly its thematic areas of engagement 1) Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women; AND 2) Promoting equal participation and leadership.

## 2.2 Problem Analysis

The objective of the action is to address a number of specific problems identified in the course of several years of engagement of the EU in this field in Nigeria.

The integrity of the electoral system is one of the major issues facing democratic governance in Nigeria. Turbulent pre electoral periods and elections have been a source of political crisis, and controversies surrounding elections and electoral outcomes have remained a serious threat to the legitimacy and stability of democracy. The 2019 General Election was significant as it was the sixth successive elections since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999.

The 2019 elections were conducted in the context of progressive improvements in Nigeria's electoral administration and legal framework following the flawed elections in 2007. The 2019 elections contested by 91 political parties and 73 presidential candidates presented enormous challenges. Another challenge was the increase in the number of registered voters by 14.28 million, resulting in a total voting population of 84.04 million. It led to the postponement of the election by a week from 16 to 23 February 2019, just five hours before polling units were due to open, underscoring severe shortcomings on the part of INEC and key electoral stakeholders.

Apart from the key issues of operational and logistical shortcomings, other issues include inadequate training of ad-hoc staff and the security agencies; lack of clarification of the roles and responsibilities of security personnel on election duties, and in some cases, collusion with political agents; limited scope and latitude of information dissemination by INEC; and ineffective strategies to persuade political parties to recruit women, youth and persons with disabilities for executive and elective posts. The disenfranchisement of internally displaced persons from voting in all the elections is also a major concern. International observer groups identified late distribution of materials, late opening of polls, technical hitches with the Smart Card Readers and violence as major flaws. There were also weaknesses in the polling, counting and collation processes, coupled with a high volume of pre-election petitions that were left pending until after the elections due to lack of time limits for filing and adjudicating such cases, compromising the right to timely remedy. There were also problems around over crowded polling units. Although an attempt was made to address this by creating voting points and voting point settlements, this had implications on the transparency of results collation and transmission.

In addition to these difficulties, Nigerian elections have been marred with violence and manipulation, leading to distortion in their outcomes and public discontent about their quality and credibility. The reason for this phenomenon has been the deficient internal democracy in the political parties and their insufficient commitment to democracy and accountability, both within their own structures and in the manner they engage with the electoral process. The situation is further exacerbated by Nigeria's lack of legislated quota for women in decision-making structures such as the National Assembly (NASS) and the country's use of the First-Past-The-Post electoral system, which tends to be less conducive to the participation and representation of women, youth and other marginalised groups in politics.