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Political Campaign Finance Monitoring in Ghana

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Introduction

Finance plays a critical role in politics and democracy. It enables political parties to function effectively on all fronts – from acquiring and maintaining offices to engaging in electoral activities such as communicating their policies and programmes to the electorates through mediums such as mainstream media, social media commercials, campaign rallies, billboards, and posters, among others. There is a consensus among political parties that financing is crucial for a resilient, equitable, and sustainable political and democratic process. However, the indispensability of money in politics, and its impact on multiparty democracy, has long been a matter of debate among politicians, civil society, and anti-corruption organizations worldwide.

In recent times, there have been concerns that monetization in politics can potentially influence and corrupt the democratic process through abuse of state resources, excessive spending, and vote buying, which ultimately silences the voice of legitimate opponents. The need to regulate the flow and use of money in politics is, therefore, not generally contested. The question, however, is, how do we monitor the use of money in political campaigns?

This publication discusses a model that civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ghana can adopt for monitoring campaign finance, as well as legal frameworks and regulations governing campaign financing in Ghana.

Legal Frameworks and Regulations for Campaign Financing

Party funding or campaign financing regulations exist in many countries across the world. In Ghana, the legal framework and regulations that guide campaign financing include the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption, and Article 55 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana.

The United Nations Convention Against Corruption (2005) states that "*Each State Party shall consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures to enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties.*"

Similarly, Article 10 of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption requires each State Party to adopt "*legislative and other measures*" to *"(a) proscribe the use of funds acquired through illegal and corrupt practices to finance political parties*; and *(b) incorporate the principle of transparency into funding of political parties."*

Again, Article 55 (14) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana mandates political parties to *(a) declare to the public their revenues and assets and the sources of those revenues and assets;* and *(b) to publish to the public annually their audited accounts.* Furthermore, the Political Parties Act 2000 (Act 574) provides the legal framework for the funding of political parties and campaign financing in Ghana.

These legal frameworks and regulations governing campaign financing are necessary to promote accountability, transparency, and fairness in the electoral process. However, enforcement of these regulations has been a challenge in Ghana, as sources of funding for political parties continue to be obscure, with most parties unwilling to publish their audited financial statements as required by law. This can lead to corruption, abuse of state resources, and undue influence, making it difficult for CSOs and the citizenry to hold political leaders accountable.

Many CSOs across the world have recognized these difficulties and have developed methods to independently monitor campaign financing, as political finance regulations, often appear inadequate. Effective campaign finance monitoring would enable CSOs to deploy tested models to identify the source of funding for political parties/candidates and obtain information on vote buying, and abuse of state resources. This evidence will empower them to champion legal and electoral reforms, strengthen enforcement of existing campaign financing regulations, and combat corruption.

Campaign Financing Monitoring Method

One formalized approach that has been established to track campaign spending is the Parallel Expense Tracking (PET). It was developed by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), in collaboration with its partner CSOs across the globe, and provides a robust way to monitor or track campaign financing. It has been implemented successfully in various countries including Nigeria (2019), Tunisia (2014), Serbia (2012), and Afghanistan (2010).

How Does It Work?

The PET operates by estimating the expenditure made on political campaigns. This means that it calculates any spending that is related to the electoral process, including campaign rallies, TV, radio or online advertising, billboards, flyers, posters, refreshments, transportation, etc.

The methodology involves independently collecting estimated data on the electoral spending by political parties or candidates on the ground, rather than solely relying on financial reports submitted to oversight institutions, for example, the Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC). In simple terms, PET involves multiplying observed campaign activities (e.g. campaign rallies, TV, radio or online advertising, billboards, flyers, posters, refreshments, transportation etc) by the estimated costs for such activities.

This is estimated mathematically as follows: **Estimated Spending = Monitored number of activities*unit cost.**

This data can then be compared with the financial reports submitted to the EC by the political parties, to identify any discrepancies.

In recent years, many countries across the world require their political parties or candidates to submit reports about their finances; however, the credibility of these reports has been questioned.

By adopting the PET, CSOs can determine the level of compliance of political parties to national regulations on campaign finance, and to estimate the amount candidates spend and the purposes of their expenditures.

Criticisms of the Parallel Expense Tracking

Parallel Expense Tracking has faced several criticisms due to its limitations in revealing the secrecy surrounding sources of campaign financing. This methodology often fails to reveal the source of funding for political parties. Also, critics say that implementing this method, particularly for larger countries, presents significant challenges as it is extremely difficult to gather comprehensive data from all parts of the country. Despite these criticisms, PET remains a valuable tool for monitoring campaign financing, having been used in the past to monitor elections in many countries in Africa, Europe and Asia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, monitoring campaign financing is crucial to combating corruption, undue influence, and ensuring accountability, transparency, and integrity of our electoral processes. Moving forward, CSOs and other stakeholders in democratic governance should consider implementing the Parallel Expense Tracking model, along with other complementary tools to ensure accountability and transparency in campaign financing in Ghana, to ensure the strengthening of our democratic process and to uphold the integrity of our elections.

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